



2015 GREAT  
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 AMERICAN  
 MAIN  
 STREET  
 AWARDS

BY L I N D A S . G L I S S O N



aluting the achievements and importance of downtown revitalization through its 2015 **Great American Main Street Awards® (GAMSA)**, the National Main Street Center honored three communities at the Opening Plenary of the National Main Streets Conference in Atlanta for their dramatic and innovative efforts to rebuild the pride, the spirit, and the economic vitality of their commercial districts.

Each year, the National Main Street Center recognizes the best and the brightest—Main Street communities that serve as an inspiration and model for comprehensive, preservation-based commercial district revitalization throughout the nation. Each of these Main Street programs proves that incremental progress and persistence pay off, generating economic vitality, a unique sense of place, and a greater commitment to community by all.

*and a greater commitment to community by all.*



## 2015 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

“This year’s GAMSA winners, though diverse in size and geography, show that Main Streets are hotbeds for innovation and creativity,” said Patrice Frey, president and CEO of the National Main Street Center. “We see this great convergence of old and new in these places. Historic commercial buildings are being repurposed to house the

arts, high-tech businesses, and entrepreneurs, bringing new jobs and energy to the district. Main Streets are as relevant as ever.”

Selected by a national jury composed of former award winners, community development professionals, and representatives of governmental agencies involved in community revitalization and historic preservation based on these **selection criteria**, the 2015 award winners offer outstanding examples

of the power of the Main Street Four Point Approach®, which has attracted \$61.7 billion in public and private investments, added 528,557 new jobs, and generated 251,838 building rehabs over the past three decades. The National Main Street Center is pleased to recognize the 2015 Great American Main Street Award® (GAMSA) winners: Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Montclair Center, New Jersey; and Rawlins, Wyoming. Here are their stories:

# OLD TOWN CAPE, INC., CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI

Cape Girardeau, Missouri, is a picturesque riverfront community with a strong preservation ethic and a deep commitment to revitalizing its historic downtown. With 31 properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places and 11 National Register districts, Cape Girardeau has more listings than any other city in Missouri with a population of less than 100,000. The city also has 18 local landmarks, as well as a landmark district, and is a Certified Local Government with an active historic preservation commission.



Today, the downtown is a dynamic, vibrant district boasting 300 locally owned businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues, many housed in buildings dating back to the Civil War. But not so long ago, this lively regional hub was losing its grip on customers and businesses.

“It was depressing,” recalls one resident, “lots of empty buildings, lots of empty storefronts.”

“The downtown merchants were doing a remarkable job of fighting the decentralization of retail, but they weren’t getting new businesses,” says Dr. Steven Hoffman, a board member of the local Main Street organization, **Old Town Cape, Inc. (OTC)**. “Eventually there would be nothing left.”

# 2015 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS



## VISION QUEST

Founded in 1999 when the vacancy rate was nearly 40 percent, Old Town Cape immediately set to work building partnerships to create a vision for downtown's future. Working with the City and the local Chamber of Commerce, Old Town Cape convened a Downtown Development Team to draft a Downtown Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2009.

"The number one goal of the plan," says Marla Mills, executive director of Old Town Cape, "was to establish a Community Improvement District." That goal was accomplished in the spring of 2014, with the formation of the district, followed by passage of a supporting tax in September 2014.

With its partners, Old Town Cape continually works to build a business-friendly environment. Recently, OTC and the Chamber of Commerce amended a zoning ordinance that had restricted development of restaurants and the redevelopment of properties. The amendment



*(Top) Representatives of Old Town Cape accept their 2015 Great American Main Street Award at the Opening Plenary of the National Main Streets Conference in Atlanta.*

*(Above) An amendment to the zoning ordinance that restricted the development of restaurants and the redevelopment of properties led to the opening of Katy O'Ferrell's, an upscale Irish pub. The building owner expressed his commitment to historic preservation by choosing to revitalize this nationally registered historic building.*



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led to the opening of Katy O’Ferrell’s, an upscale Irish pub, and a craft brew pub, both located in historic buildings.

Old Town Cape’s Business Development Matrix, created by the Economic Restructuring Committee, is another important planning tool. “It provides prospective developers and business owners with a vision, optimal business mix, and supportive data for planning,” says Mills.



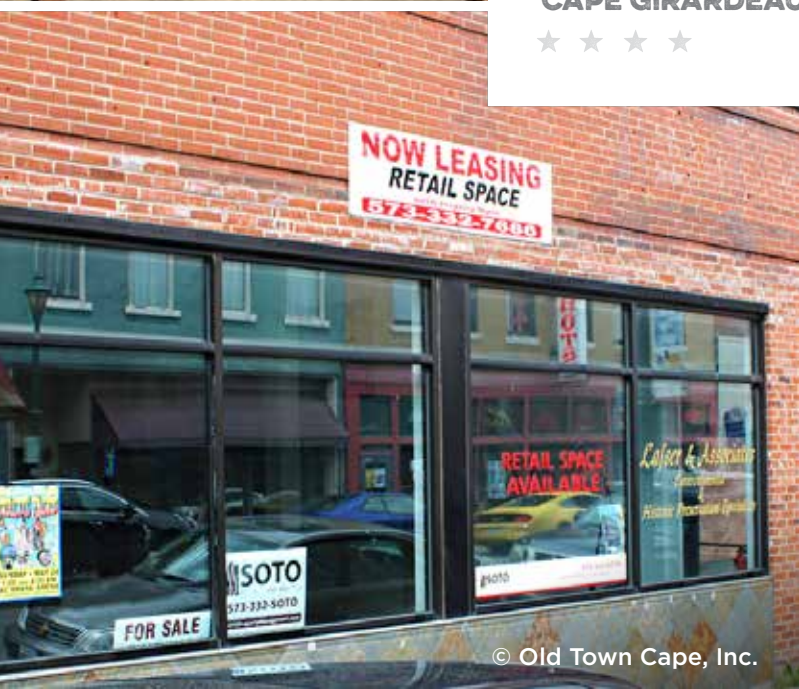
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**“THERE HAS BEEN A DEFINITE NEW TREND OF BOTH COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN OUR DOWNTOWN. OLD TOWN CAPE HAS BEEN THE CATALYST FOR THIS STRONG MOMENTUM AND TOTAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT.”**

**HARRY REDIGER, MAYOR,  
CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI**



The Economic Restructuring Committee’s work is bolstered by OTC’s other committees, exhibiting the importance of working in all four points of the Main Street Approach. “Our Organization Committee hosts quarterly meetings to give business and property owners networking, training, and information,” says Mills. “And the Promotion Committee ... hosts a Commercial Open House that showcases available spaces downtown.”



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*All of Old Town Cape’s committees work together to promote business development. The Promotion Committee, for example, assists the work of the Economic Restructuring Committee by hosting a Commercial Open House that showcases available spaces downtown.*

“The Main Street Approach—the four points—gives us a structure and a way to focus,” Mills emphasizes.

It has also given the program credibility with its partners. “Old Town Cape is our ‘go-to’ partner for projects and leadership in the area it serves,” says John E. Mehner, president and CEO of the Cape Girardeau Chamber of Commerce, adding that the organization has “excelled in building relationships with existing businesses, which is crucial to business retention and expansion efforts.”

The city is equally enthusiastic in its praise, from members of the city council to the mayor. “From my perspective as a member of city council, I can clearly see how Old Town Cape’s commitment to preservation [and economic redevelopment] has helped make it our most important downtown booster,” says Dr. Wayne H. Bowen.

Mayor Harry Rediger agrees: “There has been a definite new trend of both commercial and residential development in

our downtown. Old Town Cape has been the catalyst for this strong momentum and total community support.”



## COME & CONNECT

“Everyone wants to own a small business but it’s very difficult. You have to build a team and my team includes Old Town Cape,” says Bridgett Kielhofner, owner of Philanthropy, a downtown clothing boutique.

Encompassing 131 blocks, Cape Girardeau’s downtown offers a wide range of businesses, from niche retail and local restaurants to a creative corridor anchored by local media and two business incubators.

**Codefi** is a privately developed, community-supported co-working space and technology incubator where creative, entrepreneurial people can come and connect. Farther down the street is the Creative Labs and Industries Incubator, a student-run facility that connects Southeast Missouri State University to the downtown and also works to encourage and support new businesses.



*Old Town Cape’s Organization Committee holds quarterly Connections Meetings for downtown businesses. These meetings give business owners the tools they need to capitalize on events and promotions, as well as offering them an opportunity to voice their opinions.*

© Old Town Cape, Inc.



*Codefi is one of two downtown business incubators. A privately developed, community-supported, membership-based group, Codefi provides a technology incubator and creative co-working space where innovative, entrepreneurial people can come and connect. Members can work together or privately, collaborate on projects, share resources, and attend training and learning activities.*

“One of the toughest decisions an entrepreneur faces,” explains Dr. James Stapleton, founder and co-entrepreneur of Codefi, “is where to establish themselves and their families and where to locate their enterprises.... When I arrived in Cape Girardeau nine years ago, it was not apparent to me that the community could attract or retain these innovative people.”

Stapleton credits the Main Street program, “from the national organization on down to our local folks for being the spearhead to make Cape Girardeau a place where people ... who aren’t from here want to spend a long time.”

*Over a year we've had 27 new businesses come in, resulting in 58 new jobs."*

“One of the great things a downtown organization can do,” says Stapleton, “is just connect us.”

Indeed, that is one of the cornerstones of Old Town Cape’s mission. “My strategy is mostly just to help individual businesses that want to locate downtown get the resources they need,” says Mills.

Evidence points to that success. “Over a year,” says Mills, “we’ve had 27 new

businesses come in, resulting in 58 new jobs.” Since 2009, 107 net new jobs have been created, and the vacancy rate has been cut nearly in half, from 40 percent in some areas of downtown to 22 percent.

The new confidence in the business climate has led to growing pride in the downtown. “When you buy things that you can’t get just anywhere,” says Hoffman, “I think that adds a richness and a texture to our lives.”



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*Ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of Ophelia, a trendy women’s boutique. Old Town Cape worked closely with the owner, who owns a store in another community, to find the right location for a second store in downtown Cape.*





 **DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS ON THE RISE**

Old Town Cape currently has almost 5,000 residents, totaling 12.5 percent of the city’s population. Over the past three years, the area’s population has increased by 7.2 percent and is expected to grow another 3 percent in the next five years.

OTC has worked diligently to expand housing in the district. “We know that to support and sustain the growing vibrancy of Old Town Cape, we need people living down here ... people who can shop the shops, people who will be here 24 hours a day,” says Mills.

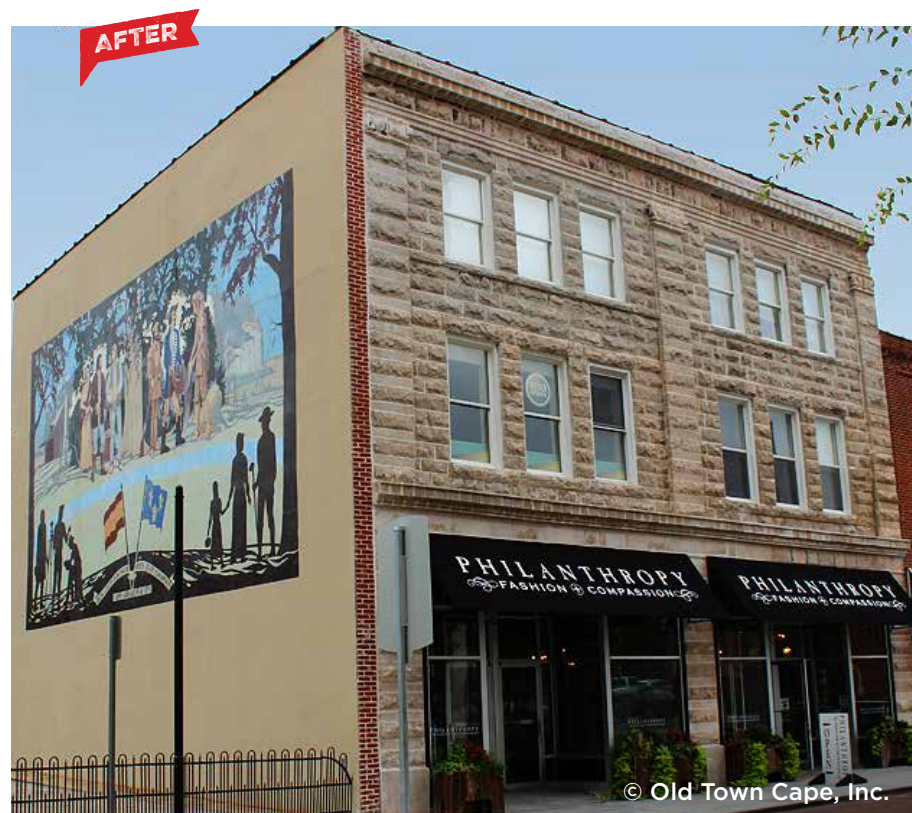
One of the major steps toward increasing market-rate housing downtown was the development of **Vasterling Suites**, a project that used historic tax credits to convert a former hotel into 24 apartments and a commercial storefront.

“Vasterling Suites was a great project for us,” says Mills. “We worked with the new owners before they bought the property.”

There weren’t a lot of places to live where you could “just walk to the mom-and-pop shops,” recalls Cara Naeger, co-owner of Clemco Properties. “We were excited when we saw this shell that we could do something with.”

Something indeed! Vasterling Suites won the state’s “Best Large Scale Project” in 2014, and the developers were so pleased that they are now looking for another project.

*Demand for downtown housing in Cape Girardeau is steadily rising. An important step in fulfilling that demand was the conversion of a former hotel into an apartment complex, Vasterling Suites. Using state and federal tax credits, the owners rehabbed the building and created a commercial storefront and 24 market-rate apartments, all of which were quickly snapped up.*



In addition to Vasterling Suites, recent housing developments include more market-rate housing, upscale college living, and Schultz Senior Apartments, affordable senior housing in a rehabbed historic high school.

The downtown has a “walkability index” of 80, says Mills, “so almost every task can be accomplished on foot.... our residents enjoy a friendly corner grocery store, restaurants, retail shops, and a locally owned hardware store and pharmacy.”

Living downtown offers other amenities as well, such as a nine-block streetscape project that provided significant street and sidewalk improvements, a Commercial Improvement District that will create increased security and beautification for the area, and a public arts program.

One of the downtown’s major successes, The Cape Riverfront Market, started by OTC’s Promotion Committee, has become a Saturday morning destination where people can buy local produce, enjoy entertainment, and take part in healthy lifestyle activities, many provided for children through the Marketeer’s Club.

“Living downtown is a culture within itself,” extols one merchant and resident. “The Riverfront, the nightlife, and the restaurants are all part of the excitement.... We oftentimes eat, sleep, and breathe downtown. We could easily not have to leave for days at a time.”

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*Downtown living offers lots of amenities, from a nine-block streetscape improvement project, public arts program, and a Commercial Improvement District that will provide increased security to the Cape Riverfront Market. Started by OTC’s Promotion Committee, the market (above) is a Saturday morning destination where people gather to buy produce and enjoy entertainment.*



© Old Town Cape, Inc.

*Through the joint efforts of OTC, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and local leaders and business owners, Cape Girardeau has drawn exciting national events downtown. From the Great Race (above), the nation's premier old car rally, which awarded the town its Hospitality Award in 2013, to the Corvette Caravan (left) and the Motorcycle Cannonball Endurance Run, which drew people from all over the nation, the downtown offers a picturesque venue and Midwestern hospitality to thousands of visitors.*



## MAKING MEMORIES FOR ALL

While residents may not want to leave, visitors want to come.

“Thanks to the cooperation between our Promotion Committee, the Convention and Visitors bureau, local leaders, and small businesses, we’ve drawn national events to our district,” says Mills.

In 2013, Downtown Cape served as the finish line for one leg of The Great Race’s cross-country journey. The nation’s premier

old car rally, The Great Race brought more than 5,000 people downtown to greet racers and enjoy a welcome party that earned Cape Girardeau national publicity as the winner of The Great Race’s Hospitality Award for 2013.

In 2014, Cape Girardeau’s downtown again played host to national events—The Corvette Caravan and the Motorcycle Cannonball Endurance Run—which attracted visitors from all 50 states and 12 countries, along with thousands of regional spectators.



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© Old Town Cape, Inc.

*Old Town Cape and its partners work just as hard to attract their local audience as they do out-of-town visitors. A public art policy adopted by the City Council led to a year-long display of seven sculptures, such as “The Quill,” (left) by regional artists. This type of downtown placemaking combines with local events like Tunes of Twilight, a free 12-week concert series (above); First Friday with the Arts; and the annual holiday Parade of Lights to keep residents coming downtown.*

The picturesque beauty of this riverfront town and its work to preserve and revitalize downtown also resulted in another major coup as Old Town Cape played a major role in bringing the filming of the hit movie, *Gone Girl*, to town. “Six weeks of filming brought stars such as Ben Affleck, Rosamund Pike, and Neil Patrick Harris to our Main Street area where much of the filming took place,” says Mills, adding that filming sites continue to attract tourists.

**Public art** is another major attraction for residents and visitors alike. “As part of the Public Art Committee, the Design Committee helped draft a public art policy,” says Mills. Adopted by the City Council, it led to a year-long public art exhibit that placed seven temporary sculptures by regional artists along the Broadway Corridor.

Old Town Cape realizes that promoting the community as a tourist destination requires a lot of planning and support work. “Pedestrian kiosks, vehicular and parking signage, and a new downtown guide make it easy to navigate downtown,” says Mills.

Lodging is equally important. In addition to two bed-and-breakfasts, some residents are beginning to offer “Vacation Rental by Owner” opportunities.

Old Town Cape does not focus on tourists to the exclusion of its local audience, however. From Tunes at Twilight, a free 12-week concert series to the River Tales Classic Car Show, a 37-year-old institution; First Friday with the Arts, hosted by local art galleries; and the Parade of Lights, an annual holiday event — there’s always something for residents to see and do.



© CC image courtesy of OzinOH



And even when a special event is not on the schedule, local restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues offer a vibrant nightlife. “Almost any night of the week, one of our local musicians can be found performing somewhere downtown,” says Mills.

Cape Girardeau “is a place that’s fun for the whole family,” says Laurie Everett, resident and downtown merchant.

“Whether you are an arts enthusiast looking to create memories with your family... in the market for a weekend getaway or ... just want to step back in time but still have the amenities of present day, Downtown Cape Girardeau is your place.”

© Hartle Management Agency



 “YOU CAN’T JUST BUILD IT, YOU HAVE TO KEEP IT”

Cape Girardeau’s preservation ethic is plainly visible throughout the community, and Old Town Cape has played a significant role in not only revitalizing but preserving the downtown.

*Old Town Cape has made a strong commitment to using historic preservation as a foundation for the downtown’s economic success. Two dozen buildings have been rehabbed, many according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, including the 1924 Spanish Revival Southeast Missourian Building (top) and the 1915 Louis J. Schultz School, the city’s first high school, now a senior housing development (left).*



“WE ARE A  
**MAGICAL CITY  
 ON THE RIVER**  
 THAT IS A GREAT  
 PLACE TO VISIT,  
 AND PEOPLE ARE  
 AWARE OF THAT  
 BECAUSE OF OLD  
 TOWN CAPE.”

— Laurie Everett, Owner, Annie Laurie's Antiques.



“Old Town Cape has taken the lead in initiating efforts to maintain and revitalize our city’s cultural heritage,” says Dr. Wayne Bowen, chair of Southeast Missouri State University’s Department of History and City Council member. “The organization’s commitment to preservation as a solid foundation for the city’s future economic success has resulted in a downtown that is dynamic, vibrant, and historic.”

Two dozen historic buildings have been rehabbed, many with the use of state and federal historic tax credits. In addition to

*Cape Girardeau offers many incentives, including a façade loan program, to encourage the preservation and sensitive rehabilitation of historic downtown buildings. Design standards are also embedded in the City’s zoning classification for the downtown, and the local Historic Preservation Commission creates awareness about the need to preserve historic buildings such as the one above by issuing a “Most Endangered Buildings” list.*

Vasterling Suites, which brought much-needed housing downtown, Old Town Cape worked with the City and Chamber to use CDBG funds for the 1868 Julius Vasterling Building, which now houses first-floor retail, with housing above. This project, says Mills, “joins a long list of properties rehabilitated according to the **Secretary of the Interior’s Standards**, including an 1896 clothing store on Main Street, the Southeast Missourian Building, and the former Cape Girardeau high school, now a senior housing development.”



© Old Town Cape, Inc.

*This night view of Broadway Street exemplifies the historic beauty and modern amenities downtown Cape offers. Completed in 2012, the Broadway Streetscape Project overhauled nine blocks of this major downtown corridor, providing street and sidewalk improvements. The project created a promenade along one side of the street, along with new greenery, street furniture, and updated lighting.*

Incentives for building preservation include a façade loan program, which was started in 2011 and includes design assistance. Design standards are also embedded in the City’s Commercial Building District (CBD) zoning classification to preserve the historic look and feel of the downtown, and the local Historic Preservation Commission issues an annual “Most Endangered Buildings” list to educate the community and promote preservation.

Also contributing to the community’s preservation ethic is Southeast Missouri State University, which is one of only nine schools with a four-year undergraduate degree program in Historic Preservation. An important stakeholder in Old Town Cape, the university recently completed a \$25 million rehab of its 1906 Academic Hall and is planning to house an arts incubator in an early 20th-century commercial building downtown.

# WATCH THE OLD TOWN CAPE GAMSА VIDEO:



Investment in Cape Girardeau’s downtown is impressive. Since 2004 public reinvestment has amounted to \$9,426,070, along with \$55,353,470 in private investment, totaling \$64,779,540.

“Old Town Cape is evidence of the greatness that can be achieved with dedication and support from all facets of the community and state,” says Gayla Roten, state director, Missouri Main Street Connection, Inc. Their work is “not about

quantity,” she stresses, “it’s about *quality*, and they walk the walk.... [Winning a Great American Main Street Award] will not be the end for Old Town Cape, but just the beginning.”

[Click here to watch the Old Town Cape GAMSА video.](#)





*Located only 13 miles from New York City (above), Montclair, N.J., has long been a popular bedroom suburb. Today, however, it has transformed its downtown into a regional business center and a popular arts, entertainment, and dining district that attracts thousands of visitors every weekend (left).*

Craig Cornell, owner of Diamond Cycle, a long-time downtown business, remembers Montclair Center in the 1990s. “Back then,” he says, this area was a little rough, a lot of crime, piles of trash. You would rarely see people walking around at night.”

“The ground-floor vacancy rate was 50 percent when our program started in 2002,” says Luther Flurry, executive director of the Montclair Center BID. Today it has dropped to 12 percent for traditional retail and 1 percent for office space and housing.

And therein lies much of the story of Montclair Center’s success. Once a magnet for creative professional residents, Montclair is now attracting their employers.

## FROM BEDROOM SUBURB TO BUSINESS CENTER

“Montclair Center is increasingly a hub for the creative economy,” says Flurry, “whether it is an investment company that funds design-driven startups or the software company that developed the engine most iPhone apps use.”

Once companies experience Montclair Center, he adds, “they don’t want to leave. Both Audible and Diapers.com were

## MONTCLAIR CENTER BID, MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

Known for its historic charm and natural beauty, Montclair, New

Jersey, has long been a popular suburban community. Located only 13 miles from one of the world’s great metropolises, New York City, Montclair attracted a diverse, and often upscale, population to its neighborhoods, but most of those residents spent their days and dollars elsewhere, commuting to the Big Apple and nearby New Jersey cities, such as Newark, Paterson, and Jersey City.

The downtown was left behind, suffering years of neglect that left much of the commercial district’s historic architecture decaying behind low-maintenance façades put up from the ’60s to the ’80s.

founded in Montclair and had employees reverse commuting from New York City. Both companies worked hard to stay in Montclair after they outgrew our office market.”

Second-floor office space was unmeasured but primarily down-market and vacant when the Montclair Center BID was started, says Flurry. “We have created an attractive streetscape and worked to build cachet around our brand.”

As a result, office lease prices are at a premium over new construction elsewhere in northern New Jersey, the vacancy rate is under 3 percent, and the downtown has absorbed more than 80,000 square feet of office space, primarily through adaptive use of historic buildings.

One of the most distinctive and successful of these projects is **Hillside Square**, which converted a historic church into 22,000 square feet of office space. Originally built in 1926 as the First Church of Christ Scientist, the congregation over time began to lose members and could no longer maintain the building. “We approached the board,” says Bob Silver, founder and CEO of the Bravitas Group which owns and renovated the building, “and said, why don’t you stay

*Montclair Center BID Director Luther Flurry (right center) and members of the community accept their 2015 Great American Main Street Award from NMSC President Patrice Frey (left center) at the Opening Plenary of the National Main Streets Conference in Atlanta.*

*We have created an attractive streetscape and worked to build cachet around our brand.*





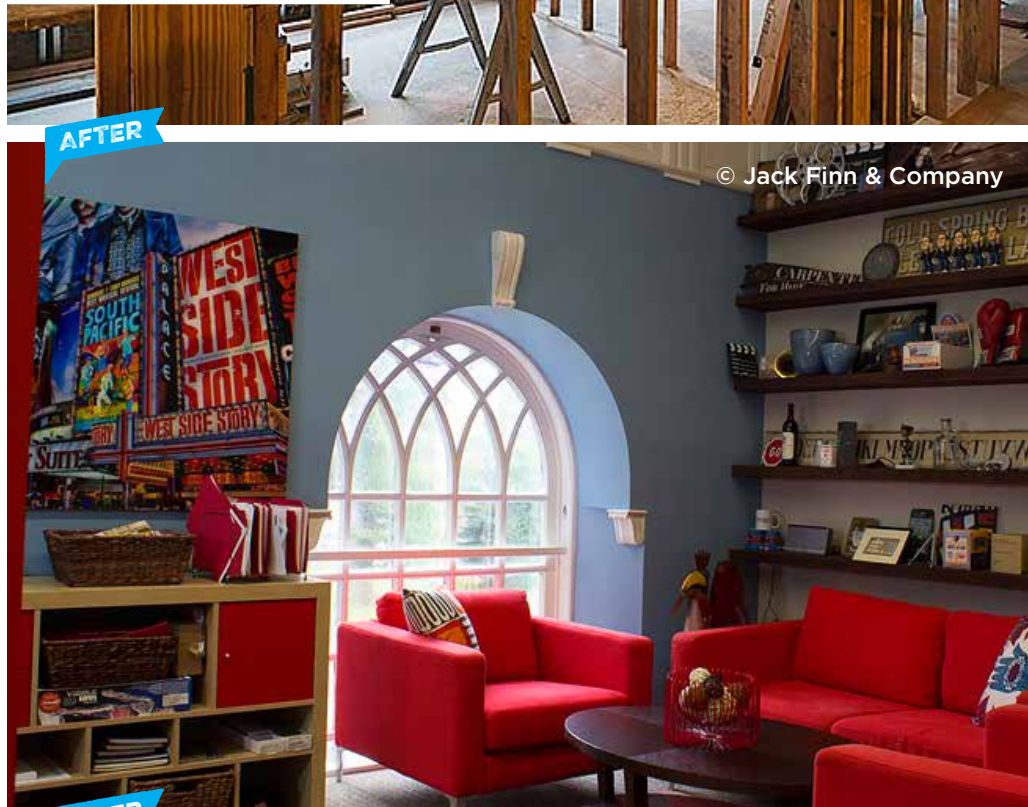
BEFORE



AFTER



*“If you have creative office space available, you are going to attract a creative business class,” says Bob Silver, founder and CEO of the Bravitas Group, which developed the award-winning Hillside Square, one of Montclair’s most distinctive and successful adaptive-use projects. Bravitas converted a historic church (bottom) into 22,000 square feet of office space. The First Church of Christ Science, which had owned the building since its construction in 1926, had been losing members over the years and could no longer afford to maintain the property. Silver’s group built a new sanctuary for the church (middle) so they could remain in the building and converted the rest into boutique office space. Fully rented before it opened in 2013, Hillside Square has attracted creative employers from as far away as Cambridge, Massachusetts, as well as New York City and neighboring New Jersey towns.*



AFTER





*Montclair Center BID offers valuable assistance to downtown business owners, from strong social media promotion on its Facebook page (left top and middle), which currently has 4,100 likes and a reach often approaching 10,000, to a variety of business-targeted events. The Sidewalk Stroll (above) is Montclair Center’s most wide-ranging event, targeting the entire 1.3 miles of the district. Merchants and the BID sponsor “Stroll Stoppers,” such as performances at Montclair Center Stage, a classic car show, and fashion shows, to entice people to walk throughout the district.*

“They saved this historic church,” says Jef Buehler, state coordinator, Main Street New Jersey, “and gave it an office function” that won a New Jersey Future Smart Growth award for the best Creative Adaptive Re-use project in 2013.

“The culture of Montclair,” adds Buehler, “is to adaptively reuse, where possible, and then promote the heck out of it.”

Owning a business in Montclair brings the added perks of assistance from the Montclair Center BID. “With the help of Main Street New Jersey and local professionals,” says Flurry, “we offer frequent business training sessions.... We work closely with landlords and real estate agents to help land or qualify tenants. We work with incoming businesses to help them understand the local climate and anticipate possible speed bumps.”

in your home of 85 years. We’ll build you a new sanctuary and then we’ll turn the rest of it into boutique office space.”

The building has attracted creative economy employers from New York City, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and neighboring New Jersey townships and was fully rented before it opened in April 2013. “If you have creative office space available, you are going to attract a creative business class,” says Silver.



*With 82 places to eat and drink, including 69 fine dining establishments, Montclair Center has earned a reputation as the Food Capital of New Jersey. On a typical weekend, Montclair draws thousands of diners who come from all over the region to sample cuisine from 16 foreign countries, several international regions, and all types of American food.*



All of this takes place, says Flurry without any financial incentives, “just the Main Street Four Point Approach, which has transformed Montclair Center from a blighted downtown to a premium work destination.”

“The Montclair BID was extremely welcoming to us,” says Alex Aranoff, co-owner of Heratij, a clothing and winter sports boutique. “And they benefit because we bring energy. We bring a new life to the town. People are coming to Montclair.”

They are coming not just to work but to live, shop, dine, and just have fun.

## FOOD CAPITAL OF NEW JERSEY

“With 82 places to eat and drink, including 69 fine restaurants, we are the Food Capital of New Jersey,” says Flurry. We “draw thousands of diners from the region on a typical weekend night.” Montclair’s cuisine is as diverse as its population, representing 16 foreign countries, several international regions, and every type of American cooking.

“In terms of diversity, quality, range, and creativity, Montclair Center’s restaurant niche is extremely strong,” says Buehler.

And it benefits all of the downtown by adding life and vibrancy to the street during much of the day and night. Montclair Center “is like New York City on Friday night, Saturday night, when the restaurants are open,” says Diamond Cycle Owner Chris Cornell. “We even stay open until 11:00 or 12:00 at night on a Friday. Fantastic!”

Dining combines with arts and entertainment to give people lots to do in Montclair Center. With 23 businesses scheduling performances, several major arts venues, and semiannual art walks, Montclair has built a reputation as a regional arts destination. From the Wellmont Theater, a 2,200-seat former vaudeville theater that hosts all types of popular music, to the Montclair Art Museum and the Clairidge Theater, an art-house cinema that screens



“FROM BEING CONSIDERED A DANGEROUS, DIRTY, AND DOWNTRODDEN AREA, MONTCLAIR HAS BECOME THE FOOD CAPITAL OF NEW JERSEY, **HAS AN AMAZING ART SCENE,** DIVERSE SHOPPING, ENTERTAINMENT, AND CULTURAL OPTIONS....”



—Jef Buehler, State Coordinator, Main Street New Jersey



*Along with its vibrant restaurant niche, Montclair Center has a strong and growing arts scene. Boasting several major arts venues—the Montclair Art Museum (top), which focuses on American and Native Art and recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary; the Wellmont Theatre (middle), a former vaudeville house that hosts all types of popular music; and the Clairidge Theater (bottom), an art-house cinema that screens films rarely seen elsewhere in Northern New Jersey—as well as live performances at many downtown businesses, Montclair’s arts district has burgeoned into a regional destination.*



© Neil Grabowsky, Montclair Film Festival



© Neil Grabowsky, Montclair Film Festival



© Montclair Center BID



© Montclair Center BID



© Montclair Center BID

films rarely found elsewhere in northern New Jersey, the downtown attracts thousands of visitors from the surrounding region. The 100th birthday of the Montclair Art Museum, for example, recently drew 2,600 guests.

Not surprisingly, Montclair Center is reaping the rewards of its focus on the arts. For the past few years, “we’ve been voted New Jersey’s favorite downtown arts district,” says Flurry. “And by promoting those strengths—the arts—we’re able to piggyback on that image to help boost residents, office, and retail.”



## LIVING LOCAL

“As I was looking for a place to live,” says Chris Francois, co-owner of Heratij, “my primary destination was to look for someplace I can ... skate to work or walk to work with a coffee in hand.”

Reasons to live downtown are many and growing. “With downtown walkability scores generally in the high 90s, Montclair Center is a ‘Walker’s Paradise,’” says Flurry. Commuting options range from walking and biking to public transit. And the South Park Street renovation, an award-winning municipal project completed in 2012, offers a beautiful streetscape, new shops, and event space, with a June-to-October farmer’s market, public art exhibits, and other activities for residents and visitors.

“Fifteen years ago, Montclair Center housing was low to moderate income,” says Flurry. “Times have changed, and development is skewed toward moderate to high income. Our challenge has become maintaining economic diversity. New development must meet strong affordable housing requirements [10 to 20 percent

*The Montclair Center BID sponsors two art walks a year, in May and October. For 15 years, the downtown has showcased art in unusual places, attracting thousands of people for the evening event, which runs from 6-9 p.m. The BID provides a map, which visitors can use to take a self-guided tour of all the displays. “Our goal is to surprise people with art in unexpected places, to introduce art to people who might not normally see it, and to provide and encourage Montclair businesses to provide venues for art not just twice a year, but as often as possible,” says BID Director Luther Flurry. During the May 2015 event, 22 venues hosted art displays.*



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© Arterial Design



© Arterial Design



© Arterial Design

*The Montclair Center BID worked for eight years to build consensus to revamp a blighted downtown street. The South Park Street renovation, an award-winning municipal project completed in 2012, has made a significant impact on occupancy and foot traffic. The first major investment by the city in Montclair Center since the 1970s, South Park Street now offers a beautiful streetscape, new shops, and space for activities such as public art exhibits and a popular farmers market.*

of new housing units] and the parking challenges of downtown infill, but developer and resident interest remains high.”

Montclair Center’s reputation as a “hip downtown with great food, music, and art attracts young residents,” notes Flurry. Their presence on the street creates a vibrant atmosphere, with many shops targeting the 12-35 age group.

Millennials aren’t the only ones who call downtown home. Empty nesters and retirees are moving in as well. Completed in 2007, The Siena, a mixed-income building with 101 residential units in the heart of downtown, is mostly occupied by mature residents.

Historic buildings are also providing housing space, with people living upstairs in iconic buildings like the Wellmont





© The Pinnacle Companies

*Montclair's great food and entertainment has attracted many young residents who create a vibrant presence downtown and a target market for shops that sell merchandise geared toward the 12-35 age group. But Millennials aren't the only ones moving to Montclair Center. New housing opportunities are drawing empty nesters and retirees. The Siena (left), a mixed-income building completed in 2007, is occupied primarily by mature residents.*

Theater. “Pretty much every building in the downtown is a mixed-use building,” says Buehler. “Residential demand is high.”

So high in fact, that Montclair has no need for residential development incentives. The township has negotiated Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements that reduce property taxes in exchange for developer concessions that meet public priorities.

Montclair’s transition to a desirable place to live, says Flurry, “came about through changes in perceived safety, a beautiful historic streetscape, increased downtown amenities, Montclair Center branding, improved public transit, and changing demographics. Most of these are the product of following the Main Street Four Point Approach.”

Main Street has also been key in building partnerships to preserve the downtown’s historic integrity.



## PRESERVING DOWNTOWN: BUILDING BY BUILDING, BLOCK BY BLOCK

“Montclair is avid about historic preservation,” says Flurry. But the downtown’s strong preservation ethic took time to build. In 1994, the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) was formed and the first district it established largely overlapped Montclair Center.

At first, however, “the HPC had trouble getting traction and building business support,” says Flurry. But when the Montclair Center BID was formed, things began to change.

The HPC and the BID joined forces and “presented a united front that gave stakeholders the knowledge and confidence



*Changes in perceived safety of the district and increased downtown amenities are two of the reasons for Montclair Center’s growing desirability as a place to live. The Montclair Center BID began with a “Clean & Safe” agenda that is still an important part of its work. Montclair Center Ambassadors (above left) clean sidewalks, remove graffiti, tend plants, and help with holiday events; they are the constant face of the BID. Pedestrian wayfinding (above right), installed in 2013, reinforces Montclair Center’s reputation as a “Walker’s Paradise.”*



to move forward,” recalls Ira Smith, architect and member of the commission. “The HPC and BID volunteers worked together to form a strategic consensus and we began to make a difference—building by building, block by block.”

The strong partnership forged by the two organizations was crucial to creating an understanding and acceptance of preservation by property owners. “The business community began to appreciate the potential of preservation,” says Flurry, “and the HPC gained an understanding of what landlords considered possible.... Today landlords may grumble about the cost and

oversight of the HPC, but all agree that historic preservation has done wonders for the downtown.”

Since the BID was formed, says Flurry, “we estimate that more than \$220 million has been spent ... on privately funded commercial and residential investment within the district.” In 2013 alone, Montclair Center saw \$2.8 million in private investment, a net gain of 42 new businesses, and creation of 193 new jobs. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings continues to be strong, with rehabbed office space in particularly high demand.



© Montclair Center BID

*The deep commitment and strong partnerships between the Montclair Center BID, the City, and other downtown groups has transformed a once-neglected downtown into a perfect blend of big-city excitement and small-town charm.*

“Our downtown is both a place of beauty and an engine of economic growth,” says Mayor Robert D. Jackson.

It is the perfect blend of “big city excitement mixed with small-town charm,” adds Flurry. “Working together, the community applied love, hard work, determination, and the Main Street Four Point Approach to transform Montclair Center from a downtown with endless vacancies and knee-deep drifts of trash into a charming, vibrant, historic Great American Main Street.”

**[Click here to watch the Montclair Center BID GAMSA Video.](#)**



## WATCH THE MONTCLAIR CENTER BID GAMSA VIDEO:





(LEFT) With sites such as the Wyoming Frontier Prison that bring Wild West history to life, Rawlins has long been a tourist draw. To feature the town's heritage and attract out-of-town visitors, Rawlins DDA/Main Street created a tour of 12 murals painted by local artists. The tour winds throughout downtown and depicts the beauty and history of south-central Wyoming.

(BOTTOM) Rawlins DDA/Main Street Director Pam Thayer (right center) holds GAMSA award plaque presented to representatives of the Wyoming Main Street community during the Opening Plenary of the 2015 National Main Streets Conference in Atlanta.

**RAWLINS DOWNTOWN  
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY/  
MAIN STREET, RAWLINS,  
WYOMING**

Rawlins sprang up on the edge of south Wyoming's Red

Desert as a last-chance stop for water before the long, dusty trek across the frontier. Founded in 1867, the town established itself as a small, comfortable oasis, with a rich history as a stop along the transcontinental railroad as evidenced by its renovated historic train depot.

As did many other small towns, however, Rawlins suffered severe decline in the

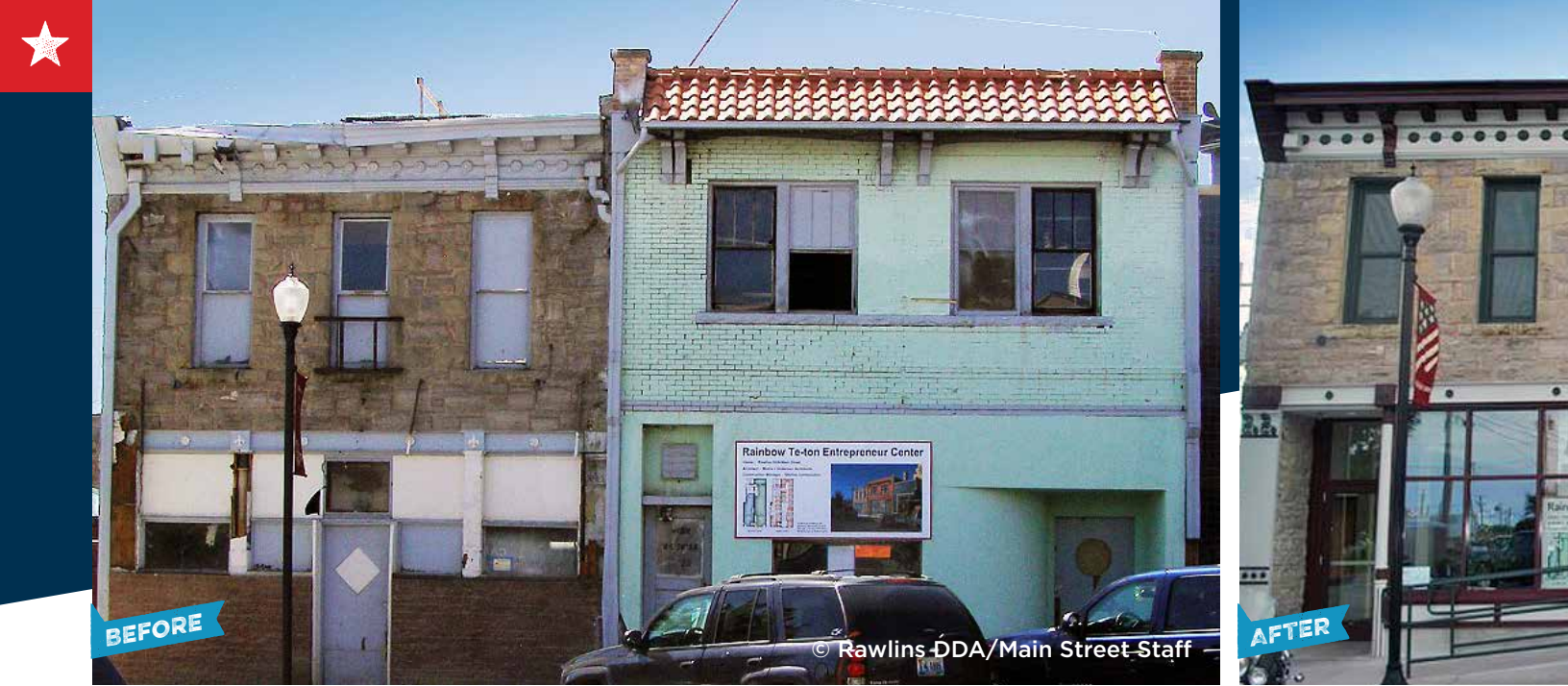
mid-20th century. "During lunch time, the streets used to be like a ghost town," recalls Copper W. France, president of the community's Bank of Commerce.

Rawlins DDA/Main Street Director Pam Thayer puts it even more strongly: "In 1997, you could have shot a cannon down Cedar Street and not hit a soul. The vacancy rate at that time was 50, perhaps 60 percent, so I think it was the perfect time to become a Main Street community, to become part of the Wyoming Main Street family."

One of the original communities selected by the Wyoming Main Street Program, Rawlins DDA/Main Street immediately set out to build a better business environment.



**WINNER**



*Using a \$1.8 million state grant, Rawlins DDA/Main Street restored two dilapidated buildings (above left), one of which was in such a state of disrepair it had been nicknamed the “pigeon hotel.” Today the buildings house the Rainbow Te-ton Entrepreneur Center (above right), which serves as a business incubator, a networking site for downtown merchants, and a community meeting space.*

## BUILDING BETTER BUSINESSES

“Rawlins is the perfect place to enjoy your work and grow your business,” says Thayer, and the community’s **Rainbow Te-ton Entrepreneur Center** (RTEC) is the perfect place to help entrepreneurs get started.

RTEC is the outgrowth of Rawlins DDA/Main Street’s first major preservation project, the rehabilitation of the Rainbow Te-ton Buildings, one of which was in such a state of disrepair it had been nicknamed the “pigeon hotel.”

“When they decided to purchase the property and make it into an entrepreneur center, we all came to look at it,” recalls Mary Randolph, who recently retired as the director of Wyoming Main Street. “We walked in and said, ‘they’re crazy.’”

But Rawlins DDA/Main Street had a vision and carried it through, using a \$1.8 million state grant to completely restore the

two buildings and turn them into a multi-dimensional entrepreneur center in the heart of downtown. RTEC is a launching pad for businesses, a networking location for downtown merchants, and a community space that is used for a variety of activities. The center offers “opportunities for new, early stage, or expanding businesses to collaborate and share expenses,” says Thayer. “It houses private, public, educational, and professional agencies that stimulate economic development, share information, and strengthen community partnerships.”

Rawlins DDA/Main Street’s Economic Restructuring Committee oversees RTEC, its tenants, and the GREAT program—Growing Rawlins Entrepreneurial Attitude and Talent. Through partnerships with various agencies and institutions, the GREAT program works to spur entrepreneurship among the town’s youth, as well as providing financial incentives to bring businesses back downtown.



© Rawlins DDA/Main Street Staff



*A community-owned clothing store in downtown Rawlins, the Carbon Mercantile (below and bottom) caters to the needs of local residents. Investing in stores like The Merc gives townsfolk a feeling of pride and ownership of their downtown.*

Main Street's launch of RTEC and the entrepreneurial spirit it has created have had a dramatic impact, adding 28 new businesses and more than 200 jobs to the downtown.

“What Main Street has done in Rawlins is really gotten everybody excited and energized about the community,” says Randolph.

Rekindled pride in the downtown has led to renewed investment. The Carbon Mercantile is a community-owned clothing store designed to cater to the needs of townsfolk. Before The Merc opened, says Angie Kinnaman, one of the co-op's board members, “there was no place in Rawlins where you could buy moderately priced, well-designed clothes.”

“We invested from day one,” say Mary and Jim Penland, owners of Rasmuson Furniture and two of The Merc's more than 400 investors, “and none of us invested with the idea of monetary return. We invested to improve our community.”

Stores like The Merc give people a “buy-in with the downtown,” says Randolph. “They make you want to come down here and shop.”



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*Using the Downtown Master Plan as a blueprint, the City implemented a \$1 million streetscaping plan (above right and top) that expanded parking downtown and added more public benches (above left) and other amenities to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.*

## BLUEPRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Downtown Rawlins is not only growing on the business front; it is taking major steps to stimulate residential development. In 2011, the Rawlins City Council adopted a **Downtown Master Plan**, developed by Rawlins DDA/Main Street. Designed to serve as a blueprint for downtown redevelopment, the plan led to changes in municipal codes and zoning that allowed mixed-use and residential projects to move forward.

Rawlins DDA/Main Street is presently working on three major residential projects. The first is an apartment complex that will fill the second stories of two connected historic buildings with at least 10 apartments. The buildings are fully occupied at street level with retail, restaurants, and other businesses.

“The property owner appreciates all the work our Main Street committees have done to make the project happen,” says Thayer. “She has owned the properties for 10 years and has not been able to rehabilitate the second story of either building.”

The second residential project is a duplex that will be leased as corporate housing, “which is in high demand,” notes Thayer. The third project is a multi-loft development that is just getting started.

Downtown businesses, especially locally owned restaurants and bars, “are excited about all of the residential projects, says Thayer. “A successful, economically vibrant downtown needs mixed-use development. We are on the right path.”

The results bear that out. The vacancy rate is at an all-time low, about 10 percent, says Thayer, down from 45 percent in 2006.



Using the Downtown Master Plan, the City also completed a \$1 million streetscaping plan that not only addressed parking issues and ADA accessibility for downtown housing, but also added two 22-foot Hawk sculptures that serve as a gateway to downtown and complement the historic mural tour, one of the town’s major visitor attractions.

**“THE RAWLINS/DDA MAIN STREET IS A GREAT SUCCESS STORY. THE THOUSANDS OF HOURS THAT THOSE FOLKS PUT IN IS ONE OF THOSE PRICELESS THINGS.”**

—Mayor Ken Klouda, Rawlins, Wyoming ★ ★ ★ ★

## EVENTFUL DOWNTOWN

Rawlins has long been a tourist draw, with natural wonders like the Rawlins Uplift that rises a thousand feet and features rock layers millions of years old, and sites that bring Wild West history to life, such as the Wyoming Frontier Prison, the Old Union Pacific Train Depot, and the Carbon County Museum.

To feature the town’s history and draw out-of-town visitors, the Rawlins DDA/ Main Street Design Committee created a tour of 12 murals painted by local artists. The tour winds through the downtown and depicts the history and surrounding beauty of south-central Wyoming.

Meanwhile, the Carbon County Museum is getting a makeover. The museum recently



© Rawlins DDA/Main Street Staff

*The municipal streetscaping project commissioned two 22-foot hawk sculptures that capture the spirit of “Navigation” in Rawlins. They serve as a gateway to downtown and are the first sculptures in the Rawlins Main Street Outdoor Art Gallery, which is under the direction of a Main Street Design subcommittee, Public Art for the Rawlins Community (PARC). The sculptures were funded through Wyoming Main Street Technical Funds.*





© cc image courtesy of Jasperdo on Flickr

*With a storied history as a frontier town and a stop along the first transcontinental railroad, Rawlins has long been a tourist destination. The renovated Old Union Pacific Train Depot (above) is one of several sites that bring the community's Wild West history to life.*

purchased the century-old Ferguson Building and plans to complete a \$5 million renovation in 2016.

But getting tourists to visit is only part of the goal; Rawlins DDA/Main Street works just as hard to attract residents downtown, not only to shop but also to enjoy events. The Marketing and Retail Strategies Committee teams up with other groups to host events that range from art shows, bike rallies, and street dances to outhouse races and the Pong Palloozza.

Part of SummerFest, one of Rawlins' three major festivals, Pong Palloozza, is our "most successful business-driven promotion," says Thayer. The City of Rawlins firetruck drops hundreds of ping-pong balls that have downtown business specials written on them.

The Rawlins DDA/Main Street Organization Committee maintains a volunteer base to fuel downtown events, and therein lies a story in itself. Last year

alone, Rawlins recorded more than 7,000 hours in volunteer time.



## PRIDE & PASSION

Volunteers are the driving force of this program, says Thayer. Since Main Street began in 2006, it has tracked more than 28,000 volunteer hours on projects ranging from the launch of the Rainbow Te-ton Entrepreneur Center and creation of the GREAT program to a public arts project and a promotion schedule brimming with special events.

The Pride & Passion Ball is an example of the community's commitment not only to put in time and effort planning and completing projects but also to raise money to revitalize downtown. This annual fundraiser, organized by program volunteers, brings in more than \$30,000.

"Main Street's success stems from the leadership," says Bank of Commerce





*Founded in 1940 by an amateur historian, the Carbon County Museum features exhibits on the Union Pacific Railroad, frontier life, Native American heritage, and 19th century medicine. The museum is currently undergoing a complete makeover with the purchase and \$5 million planned rehabilitation of the century-old Ferguson Building (above and above right). Restoration of a portion of the façade will be part of the \$1.5 million Façade Easement Project supervised by the Rawlins DDA/Main Street Design Committee.*



© Rawlins DDA/Main Street Staff

*The Outhouse Race (below) is a popular event that attracts residents downtown during Summerfest, one of Rawlins' three major yearly festivals.*

President Copper France, “but it is carried forth by the vast number of volunteers who help make the program successful. The program has brought back the community pride that had withered away.”

“The level of volunteer commitment is amazing,” says Rawlins City Councilman Eddie Archuleta. “It is a ... a great example of the Main Street Four Point Approach in action.”

“People started saying ‘if we work together, look what we can get done,’” says Randolph.

Rawlins DDA/Main Street’s impact can be seen in all facets of downtown life but perhaps nowhere more than in its commitment to maintaining the town’s historic and design integrity.

 **DESIGNING THE FUTURE**

“Design has just made a world of difference,” says Jill Carrico, co-owner of Bi-Rite Sporting Goods.



© Rawlins DDA/Main Street Staff



© Rawlins DDA/Main Street Staff



*Summerfest brings hundreds of people, locals and visitors alike, downtown to enjoy lots of activities and buy merchandise from businesses and vendors. At noon each year, Pong Palloozza (left) kicks off as the Rawlins firetruck drops hundreds of ping-pong balls on which downtown shop owners have written special offers. This promotion gives merchants an excellent opportunity to promote their businesses and get customers into their stores.*

Over the past nine years, 59 rehab projects have been completed, and Rawlins DDA/Main Street is getting ready to launch a **Historic Façade Easement Project** that will target the façades of up to 65 buildings, a total of more than 62,000 square feet, and benefit 80 downtown businesses. The \$1.6 million funding for the two-year program will come from federal and state grants, as well as Rawlins DDA/Main Street and local property owners.

Our façade easement program “will be the first project in the state of this magnitude,” says Thayer. The program will eliminate blight and deterioration that impedes economic development by targeting property that is undeveloped or inappropriately developed. It will also remove material and architectural barriers that restrict the mobility of the elderly or disabled.

“We’re following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. We’re following our design guidelines, so it’s all about the preservation of these buildings,” underscores Thayer.

*Local business owners are showing their pride in downtown Rawlins by improving and beautifying their buildings. Here a local café owner has planted flowers in window boxes to brighten up the streetscape and the sidewalk dining area.*

“The façade program is going to be phenomenal,” says Randolph, a sentiment echoed by other community stakeholders.

“This program is integral to our community’s plan of becoming more visitor friendly while increasing local pride,” says Tina Hill, Historic Site Director of the Wyoming Frontier Prison. “It will provide a much-needed ‘face-lift’ for our community.”

Last year, Rawlins was named “One to Watch,” an award handed out to communities on the verge of a major transformation. Today, this Wyoming community of 9,200 has made the transition to Great American Main Street, and it has strong plans for the future.

Rawlins DDA/Main Street has a “tremendous vision for how our ... Main Street should look,” says France. “With each project comes a new inspiring moment that is helping business owners recognize the value of improving their buildings, enhancing





*Volunteers are the driving force behind the Rawlins Main Street program and no event better exemplifies their commitment than the Pride & Passion Ball. This annual fundraiser, organized by more than 60 Main Street volunteers, brings in over \$30,000 for bricks-and-mortar projects through activities such as this live auction.*



their customer experience, and perpetuating the Rawlins ... Main Street vision.”

“Rawlins DDA/Main Street is innovative, committed, resourceful, and exemplary in its development as a Great American Main Street,” says Archuleta. It is the “epitome of the Main Street ideal.”

Throughout the community, people are excited by the transformation of their downtown. “Things change,” says Mayor Klouda. “And what I see today has a different feel, a different vibe. I really enjoy the way it is.”

[Click here to watch the Rawlins DDA/Main Street GAMSA video.](#)

## WATCH THE RAWLINS DDA/ MAIN STREET GAMSA VIDEO:

