



PADUCAH, kentucky

“WE WANT YOU!”

That’s the call Paducah, Kentucky, sent out to artists around the world as it launched its Artist Relocation Program 10 years ago.

Back in the 1980s, Paducah’s Lower-Town district was a drug-infested, dangerous eyesore – 20 square blocks dotted with potentially beautiful but dilapidated historic buildings, a district no one wanted to drive through. As the new century dawned, however, so did a new vision for this small Kentucky city on the banks of the Ohio River.

Paducah has reinvented itself as a “creative community.” Using the arts as a revitalization strategy by offering lucrative financial incentives, Paducah has attracted more than 70 artists who’ve restored homes and opened galleries in LowerTown, the downtown’s residential neighborhood. Meanwhile, the downtown itself has gained 234 new businesses and 1,000 new jobs.

PADUCAH’S RENAISSANCE

When Paducah Main Street was born in 1989, nothing had been done in the downtown area for more than 40 years. The district was both dirty and dangerous, with the highest vacancy rate and, worse, the highest crime rate in the region. Yet a



strong core of neighborhood residents and downtown property owners believed the downtown could be an economically viable part of the city. While downtown buildings had fallen into disrepair because of absentee or negligent landlords, they were still standing! The city’s earlier disinterest meant that most of downtown’s historic buildings had survived the “tear it down and build a mall” mentality of the 1960s and ’70s.

Paducah Main Street focused on developing and marketing the downtown as a whole. To retain and build a compatible business mix, the Main Street program created a targeted recruitment program and a strong package of incentives, many centered on the downtown’s historic real estate. City-owned historic buildings can be purchased for as little as \$1 by qualifying investors; and a façade loan program funded by the city and administered by Paducah Main Street encourages property owners to restore their buildings to their original design. Funds are awarded on a matching basis at 0 percent interest for five years and must be used to restore the façade of a historic property in the delineated historic zone.

Targeted incentives are used to recruit desirable businesses downtown. When Hooper’s, a local sporting goods retailer, outgrew its store, Paducah Main Street set out to bring the business downtown. Hooper’s needed a large retail space and the downtown needed an anchor store to attract shoppers to the area. Of the buildings offered, Hooper’s settled on a 12,000-square-foot building, with a half-block historic façade. The building needed a complete rehab, but with the right incentives, Hooper’s owners were up for the challenge. Incentives included the building conferment, façade loans, a partially forgivable upgrade loan, matching marketing funds, and marketing initiatives for the retailer.

While recruiting new businesses is essential to a thriving downtown, maintaining existing businesses is equally vital.

Paducah, Ky., has seen more than a hundred building rehabilitations since the Main Street program started in 1989.

With that in mind, Paducah Main Street launched a membership-participation incentive program in which members can offer their services at a discount to other members and to new businesses that contribute to the success of the downtown.

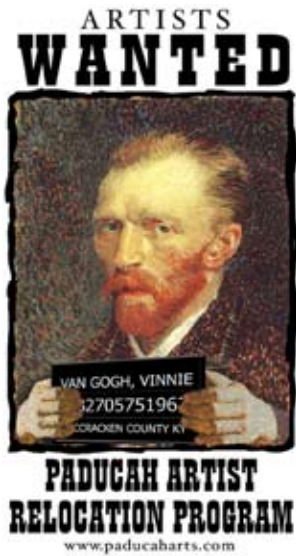
Two Main Street members teamed up with Paducah Main Street for this initiative: Porter Paints gives other members a 50 percent discount on purchases, while Hannan Supply offers 50 percent discounts on electrical equipment.

Along with preserving downtown’s historic buildings, Paducah Main Street knew that it needed to create an inviting atmosphere for shoppers, workers, residents, and visitors. To this end, work started on developing attractive walks, seasonal landscaping, alluring window displays, and public art. With no available funding, Paducah Main Street turned to private sources and sponsorships as well as innovative fund-raising initiatives to finance these projects.

One of the organization’s most successful fund raisers was the “Buy-a-Brick” program. Areas of sidewalk were designated as commemorative walks. Nearly 600 people bought bricks, raising enough money to pave four city blocks with wide brick sidewalks and install garden areas. The sidewalk gardens are maintained by local garden clubs and private citizens, as are most of the commemorative park benches and public art sculptures in the district.

NEW LIFE FOR LOWERTOWN

Launched in August 2000, Paducah’s “Artist Relocation Program” has brought new life to LowerTown, attracting artists to live and work in the beautiful Victorian homes that line the streets of what was once the city’s most affluent neighborhood. Many of the homes have been completely renovated, new infill construction has taken place, and several galleries have opened, dramatically boosting the city’s quality of life.



// Paducah by the Numbers //

Population	26,275
Date revitalization program started	1989
Net number of new jobs	1,000
Net number of new businesses	234
Number of building rehabilitations	119
Number of new buildings	27
Vacancy rate when the program began	70%
Vacancy rate today	14%
Dollar amount of public investment	\$49,700,000
Dollar amount of private investment	\$52,400,000

Website: www.historicpaducah.com



Major events such as the LowerTown Art and Music Festival are attracting more visitors and more investment to Paducah each year. The Art and Music Festival features a wide array of artists' booths, live music and food vendors, reinforcing the image of a strong arts community in Paducah.

“Our neighborhood has moved from a decrepit example of urban blight to a newly restored and revitalized community boasting more than \$3 million in property investment,” says LowerTown resident Gayle Kaler, crediting the Artist Relocation Program for much of the area’s rebirth.

Recognized today as a national model of a vibrant arts district, Paducah boasts nearly \$200 million in yearly tourism income. The

National Quilt Museum alone attracts 5,000 visitors to its workshops, encouraging creative visitor experiences and bringing sales revenue to small businesses in the area. Equally important, new institutions such as the Paducah School of the Arts, located in a rehabbed downtown building, are providing new opportunities for residents and enhancing the community’s image as a strong arts destination.

Riverfront development, funded in part by a Preserve America grant, and major festivals, like the LowerTown Art and Music Festival, Barbeque on the River, and the Paducah Summer Festival, are attracting more visitors and more investment as Paducah’s downtown continues its journey from the crime-ridden place you avoid to the historically hip place you want to be.

FERNDALE, michigan

Ten years ago, before the Ferndale Downtown Development Authority (DDA) got started, this Detroit suburb grappled with a high vacancy rate and hearing people laugh at the “Fashionable Ferndale” moniker. These days, no one is laughing and downtown Ferndale is living by the four Fs by being friendly, fabulous, funky, *and* fashionable. In every respect, the district is hitting the mark – even the organization’s business cards are cool.

A core group of activists weren’t quite ready to call it quits. They formed the Downtown Development Authority in 1980 and change began to skyrocket after its acceptance into Main Street Oakland County in 2001. Creative Class-types were lured to affordable Ferndale and began to reveal the beautiful 1920s architecture hiding underneath the grit and vinyl siding. The narrowing of 9 Mile Road and new streetscape amenities improved pedestrian safety and gave the downtown a fresh, vibrant look. Entrepreneurs caught wind of this activity and enthusiastically contributed to plum-

meting vacancy rates that fell from 30 to 6 percent!

Putting a quirky twist on events helped to win over the general public. The Ferndale DDA is responsible for the “Pimp Your Pot” beautification contest, the region’s largest LGBT festival, dog-friendly shopping events, and the new “Do-It-Yourself” Street Festival.

The community’s commitment to sustainability makes it a model that leaves others green with envy. Downtown bike racks, more street trees, public recycling containers, and a Green Week awareness promotion and plans for LED street lights, rainwater collection, and public transit reflect Ferndale’s forward thinking.

Not to let a national recession slow it down, Ferndale has seen more than \$23 million in reinvestment, and the opening of 40+ new businesses in the last year and a half. Bubbling up from the array of businesses and events and the diverse and creative community, as locals put it, there’s always something happening on “The Nine.”

The narrowing of Nine Mile Road and the addition of new streetscape amenities have improved pedestrian safety and brought new life to downtown Ferndale as shoppers, residents, and visitors enjoy strolling through the district.

