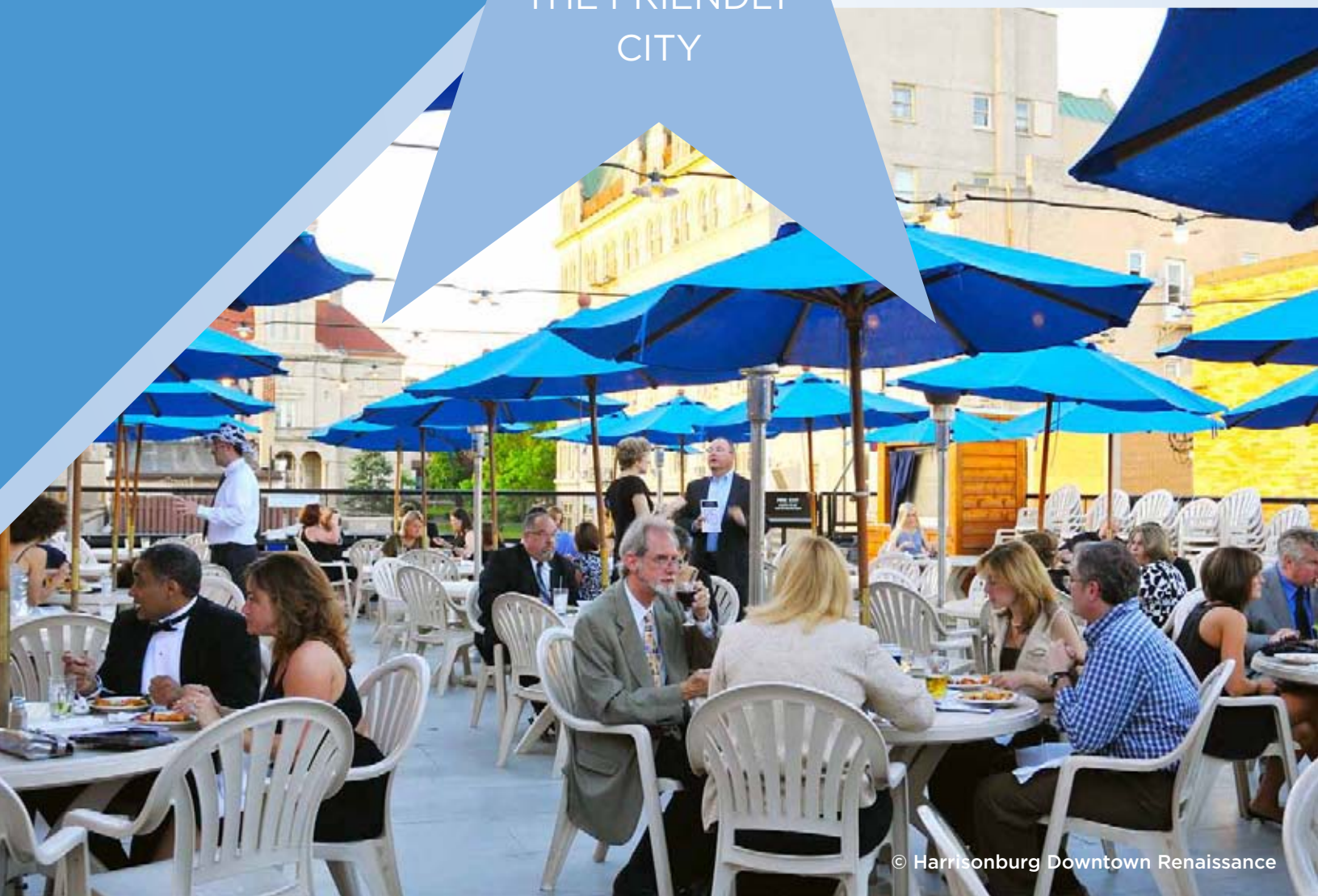




**HARRISONBURG,
VIRGINIA**

THE FRIENDLY
CITY





© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance



A decade ago, downtown Harrisonburg had lost its luster, becoming a dim, tarnished version of its once-vibrant self. Thanks to the commitment of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance and its many partners, the town's commercial core is once again bustling and vibrant, with a strong and growing arts scene (above), a lively culinary district (opposite page), and innovative financial incentives to attract new tech and other startup companies.

Nestled in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley two hours from Richmond and Washington, D.C., Harrisonburg began life in 1779 as the county seat of Rockingham County. Over the next century, Harrisonburg grew into an agricultural powerhouse, becoming a national leader in the poultry trade and the largest producer of wheat and hay in the state. The community's success in these industries led to construction of a wide range of specialized building types, including warehouses, factories, and service stations.

In the 1960s, however, Harrisonburg succumbed to the national trend of declining downtowns, demolishing vacant and older structures and considering the possibility of creating a pedestrian mall. The downtown lost its luster, becoming a tarnished, dim reflection of its once-vibrant self.

But over the past decade, that has all changed. Today, Harrisonburg boasts a lively culinary district, innovative technology zones, and lots of downtown housing to convince young professionals and graduates of the local universities to call the community home.

Who is responsible for this resurgence? Most would say Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), the city's local Main Street program.

PROGRESSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

"If I were to describe downtown 10 or 11 years ago," says Eddie Bumbaugh, Executive Director of HDR, "a couple of things come to mind. One would be somewhat 'ignored.' And you certainly wouldn't use the word 'vibrancy.'"



© Harrisonburg
Downtown
Renaissance

© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

HDR has developed strong partnerships throughout the community. It has worked with the city on “The Next Step Downtown” (above) to create a new streetscape and built a strong town-gown connection with James Madison University (below) that brings students downtown to live, shop, and play.



© JMU Marketing Photography

that worked for them—the Four-Point Main Street Approach®—and began to build partnerships for a successful revitalization effort. The City Council voted unanimously to provide \$80,000 with additional funding from private sources, as well as office space for the newly formed Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance. In 2004, HDR was designated as an official Virginia Main Street community and has been accredited as a National Main Street Program every year since.

“The key point to being a Main Street community,” explains Bumbaugh, “is the model [that] allows the community to have its own priorities and flexibility, [while still having] guidance and resources in terms of what has worked elsewhere.”

Harrisonburg Vice-Mayor Charles Chenault concurs and points to the powerful partnerships the community has built: “One thing that is really

Downtown was here but it didn’t have a lot of life.” Buildings were vacant, façades needed work, and many people thought the area was unsafe.

While several revitalization initiatives were started over the past 30 years, none proved successful due to lack of funding and volunteer support. Then in 2003, Harrisonburg’s leaders discovered a model

important... is that different things work for different communities, and we found our success story—what works for us—and that’s the public-private partnership. We’ve also found that we can’t do without the participation of a group like HDR.”

HDR has worked with groups throughout the community and the region to improve and promote downtown. Among other initiatives, HDR has worked with the city on “The Next Step Downtown” campaign to provide amenities for a new streetscape; collaborated with James Madison University (JMU) to bring students downtown, promote cycling as an alternative mode of transportation, and build a strong town-gown connection. Most recently it partnered with Main

Street and tourism programs in Waynesboro and Luray to create the Mountains2Main Street Passport, a program designed to promote the downtowns of all three Main Street communities to tourists who visit Shenandoah National Park.

Accolades from community partners show the strength and credibility of Harrisonburg’s Main Street program. “I’ve been in Harrisonburg since 2001,” says Suzi Carter, Program Director of Northend Greenway, a project to create a 2.5-mile pathway and park in north Harrisonburg. “HDR is making downtown the cultural hub not only for the city but also for the county. And I think that’s going to grow. I think I believe that so much that I don’t think I would be here if it weren’t for HDR’s involvement in downtown revitalization.”

Regionally, HDR has collaborated with the Main Street and tourism programs in Waynesboro and Luray to create the Mountains2MainStreet Passport, which promotes the downtowns of all three Main Street communities to tourists who visit Shenandoah National Park.

Waynesboro

Distance to Massanutten Resort

Harrisonburg 14 miles
Waynesboro 30 miles
Luray 29 miles

MOUNTAINS 2 MAIN STREETS
Passport Program

MASSANUTTEN
LURAY
HARRISONBURG
Waynesboro

Your passport to explore the Shenandoah Valley.

mountains2mainstreets.com

Passports Stamped Here

mountains2mainstreets.com

Look for this decal on participating businesses.



While HDR has worked with all types of organizations on all types of projects, its most significant accomplishments have been its partnerships with the city to create opportunities for economic growth and downtown housing.

DOWNTOWN IS COOKIN'

On January 28, 2014, with leadership from HDR, the Harrisonburg City Council passed a resolution creating the state's first Downtown Culinary District. Several factors led to this designation. Throughout most of its history, Harrisonburg has been an agricultural center; many food-related businesses, such as City Exchange,

Wetsel Seed, Cassco Ice, Rocco Feeds, and Shenandoah's Pride, started in Harrisonburg and made a national impact on the food industry. Moreover, with a wealth of farms and agricultural businesses in the community and surrounding county, Harrisonburg became an early leader in the farm-to-table movement.

Today, Harrisonburg draws "foodies" from all over the region and beyond. The downtown boasts more than 30 unique, locally owned restaurants and eateries that offer dining ranging from mainstream to ethnic, casual to upscale, and locally sourced to international ingredients. Complementing these popular eateries are





© Stephen Little

Created in January 2014, Harrisonburg's Downtown Culinary District has begun to draw "foodies" from all over the region. The downtown boasts more than 30 popular eateries, including the Clementine Café (opposite page), the Harrisonburg Farmers Market (above), and many specialty wine and beer shops.

other food-related businesses, including a year-round farmers market, a food co-op, specialty wine and beer shops, food tours, cooking classes, and bed-and-breakfasts for visitors who want to stay a while.

HDR has created an inviting atmosphere for both diners and restaurateurs. Bethel Arefaine of Blue Nile Ethiopian Cuisine praises the community for its openness to new experiences. "The community has welcomed the type of food we serve," says Arefaine, "and has welcomed our family as well. Harrisonburg has taken on ... the

restoration of the buildings and the revitalization of the downtown. The people who have worked toward it have been fantastic."

Equally important to Harrisonburg's food community are the farmers market and food co-op, both of which offer locally sourced foods and nutritional guidance.

"People have a direct connect with the food they are bringing home to prepare, to eat, to enjoy," says Josie Showalter of the Harrisonburg Farmers Market. "They can talk to vendors about how that lettuce was grown or practices they used. The farmers



market is absolutely one of the best places to learn about the community.”

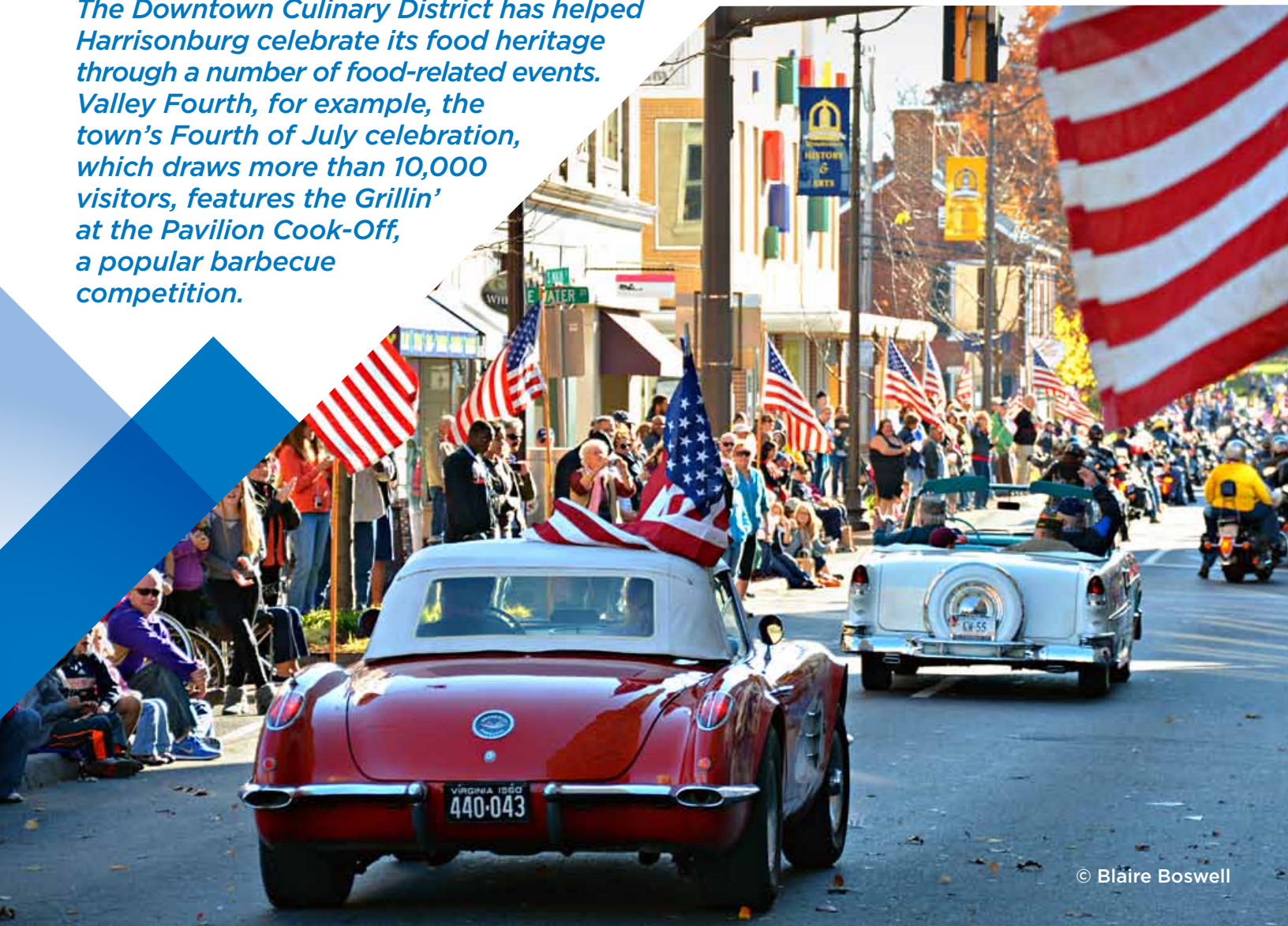
Erin Shehane of the Friendly City Food Co-op echoes this view: “We are excited to have a vibrant local community and really want to become a place where the community can enjoy food and learn about food, health, and nutrition. We work with local dairies, and we have local items in every single aisle of our store.”

The culinary district has helped the town celebrate its vibrant food culture in other ways as well. “With the local food movement, the farmers market, and our Friendly City Food Co-op, we’ve had a huge emergence of food-related events,”

says Nicole Martana, HDR’s Promotions Manager. “Through these events, we’ve been able to balance the year with offerings of music and food—collaborating with our downtown businesses, our local breweries, and our local vineyards.

Harrisonburg’s culinary events, which include the twice yearly Taste of Downtown Week, the Rocktown Beer and Music Festival, Valley Fourth’s Grillin’ at the Pavilion Cook-Off, National Food Day Farm-to-Table Breakfast, Vegan Night Out, and the Chocolate Walk give local restaurateurs, business owners, and food lovers a chance to create and share unique dining experiences.

The Downtown Culinary District has helped Harrisonburg celebrate its food heritage through a number of food-related events. Valley Fourth, for example, the town’s Fourth of July celebration, which draws more than 10,000 visitors, features the Grillin’ at the Pavilion Cook-Off, a popular barbecue competition.





© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance



© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

Culinary events that celebrate the growing vibrancy and diversity of Harrisonburg's food heritage include the Rocktown Beer and Music Festival, launched in 2010. The event, which is the brainchild of a downtown restaurant owner and 30 microbreweries across the country, sells out to a crowd of 3,000 each year. The festival has become a symbol of a larger craft beer culture in Harrisonburg.

HDR was not only instrumental in helping create the Downtown Culinary District; it has also built significant partnerships with downtown restaurants through formation of the Downtown Dining Alliance. “This partnership,” says Bumbaugh, “encourages collaboration among the growing number of locally owned downtown restaurants to promote downtown as a regional dining destination. The impact of the dining alliance is significant. Downtown restaurants annually donate almost \$100,000 through in-kind and cash contributions to charitable causes.”

Harrisonburg is well on its way to culinary fame. In the last year alone, the downtown's food scene was hailed by such publications as the *The Washingtonian*, *USAToday*, *Southern Living*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Virginia Living*, and many other local, regional, and national publications.

While Harrisonburg's celebration of its culinary heritage is bringing national recognition to the downtown, its focus on technology zones and other economic incentives is providing a much-needed boost for business recruitment.



DOWNTOWN BECOMES TECH TOWN

Over the past decade, a strong partnership between the city and HDR’s Economic Development Committee has led to creation of numerous districts and programs to retain and attract businesses. None has been more important than the Downtown Technology Zone, which provides tax incentives for qualifying businesses that locate downtown.

“This is an exciting time here in Harrisonburg ... It’s been very neat to watch downtown turn into a technology zone,” says Brian Shull, the city’s Economic Development Director. “It’s a unique story that we have so many tech firms clustered downtown. That creates synergy, and we’re starting to build a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation that will encourage others to start new businesses.”

“There’s an active and growing tech startup culture here in Harrisonburg,” says Andy Perrine, President of HDR’s Board of Directors. “It was largely inspired by Rosetta Stone [which employees 500 people] coming into town, but having [James Madison University, with its 20,000 students] also creates that atmosphere and now that there are more than 30 independently owned restaurants downtown, lots of music, you know, craft beer, it’s a funky scene that people like to be part of.”

Along with the technology zone, HDR and the city have worked together to create a downtown historic district, a façade enhancement grant program, and an economic revitalization zone, as well as a BizLoan microloan program, Business Resource Guide, Business Recruitment Guide, and web listings of available downtown properties.

The results have been dramatic. Since 2004, 1,200 new jobs have been created, bringing the number of full- and part-time employees in the district to more than 4,500. Private investment in the downtown has exceeded \$54 million, while public investment has topped \$13 million. Other trends that bode well for the future include the downtown’s low vacancy rate of 3.5 percent, a rise in real estate value to more than half a billion dollars, and a

nearly \$2 million increase in tax revenue.

HDR’s role in this economic resurgence has not gone unnoticed. For four years in a row, the program has been named “Best Use of Taxpayer Money” in the local newspaper’s reader survey. “People can see results,” says Perrine. They want “to know that the money they are contributing to the municipality is making a difference.... It’s quite manifest. Harrisonburg has been revitalized.”

“Not only have I seen Harrisonburg through the lens of a state Main Street coordinator, I’ve also seen it as a student, as a volunteer, and even as a Main Street staffer. HDR’s investment and dedication from the local community are astounding.”

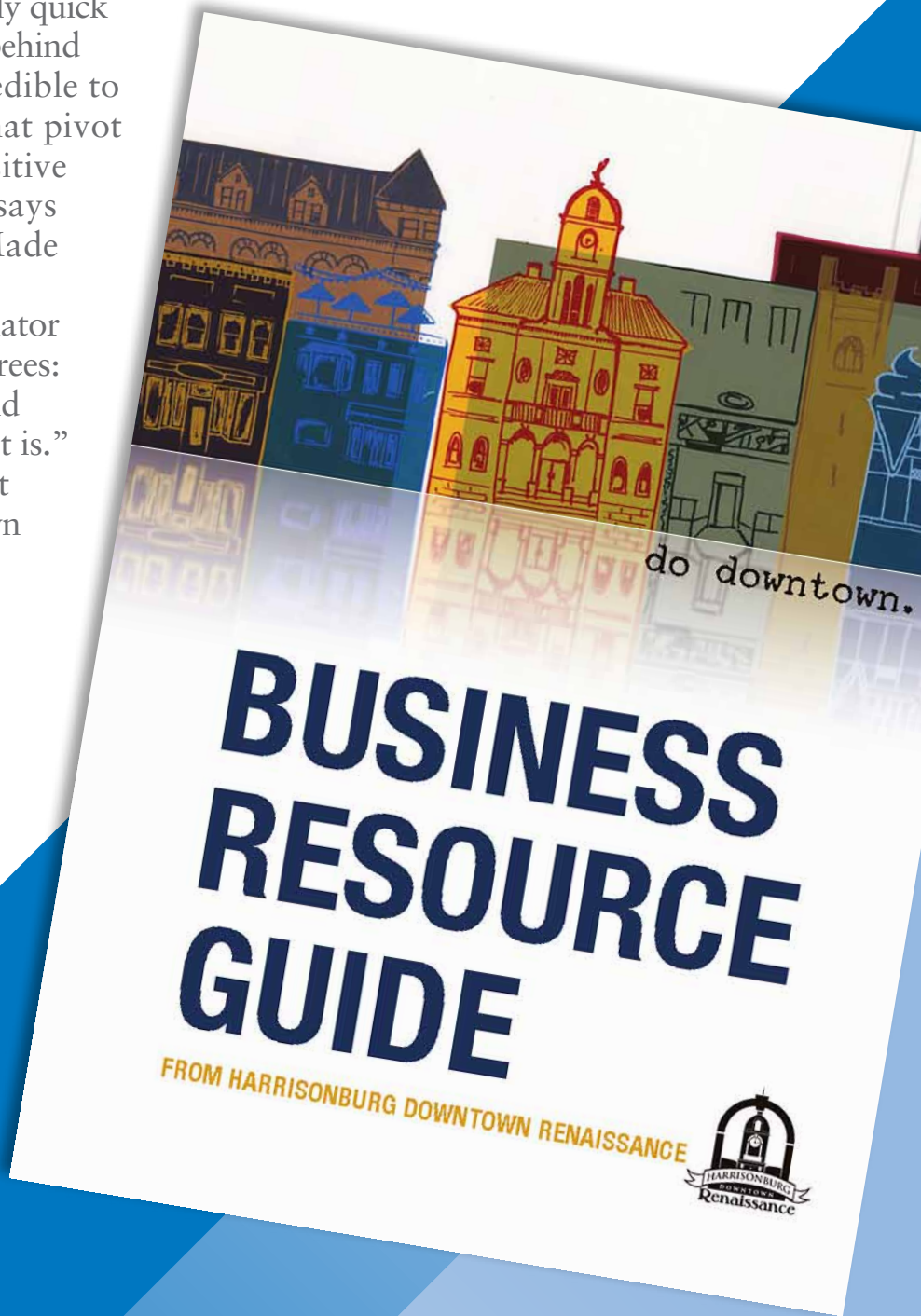
ALEXIS THOMPSON, VIRGINIA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM MANAGER

Business owners have been equally quick to credit HDR as the driving force behind downtown's success. "It's just incredible to see them work so effectively as that pivot point for steering change in a positive direction that has benefited all," says David Miller, co-owner of You Made It!, a downtown pottery studio.

Ariana Witt, Marketing Coordinator of the Friendly City Food Co-op agrees: "HDR is really the spearhead behind this downtown being as vibrant as it is."

Downtown Harrisonburg has not only become a desirable place to own a business and to work; it has also become the cool place to live.

"There are so many times when I can hear music coming from downtown into my apartment," says Witt, "and it's great because I can get up, walk out, and be there in two seconds."



HDR and the City of Harrisonburg have worked together to create many incentives and resources for downtown entrepreneurs. Harrisonburg has a Downtown Technology Zone that provides tax incentives for qualifying businesses, as well as such resources as a Business Recruitment Guide, web listings of available downtown properties, a BizLoan microloan program, and a Business Resource Guide.



LIVING LARGE IN A SMALL TOWN

In 2003, when HDR was launched, downtown housing was sparse, consisting of 150 units, almost all affordable housing. Today, the district has more than 500 units, many of which are upscale or luxury apartments, with approximately 50 more under construction or nearing completion.

Vice-Mayor Charles Chenault points out with pride that “most of the living space downtown has been developed in old warehouse buildings and types of businesses that don’t maybe fit in the downtown anymore. They’ve been just wonderfully repurposed.”

From the beginning, HDR planned to make downtown housing a priority. Downtown living could energize the street, with more people out and about, walking to

shops, restaurants, or just enjoying the fresh air and meeting friends. “By having more people living downtown,” says Bumbaugh, “we could create a strong base for retail shops and restaurants.”

While downtown Harrisonburg had numerous buildings ripe for rehabilitation and adaptive use, Bumbaugh felt certain steps were needed for such projects to be feasible. “We were the only city in the Shenandoah Valley that didn’t have a historic district,” he recalls. “If I had to pick the biggest effort that facilitated increasing the number of housing units downtown, it would be getting listed in the National Register so we could become eligible for federal and state historic tax credits.”



Downtown housing was an early priority of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance. The catalyst for housing projects was the City Exchange, a 1911 50,000-sq.ft. building that has been transformed into a luxury apartment complex with 32 apartments through the use of historic tax credits. (before, opposite page; after, above).

The Harrisonburg Downtown Historic District was placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register in December 2004 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in January 2005.

The catalyst project for downtown housing was the City Exchange. Local developers Andrew Forward and Barry Kelley used historic tax credits to turn this 1911 50,000-square-foot building into a beautiful luxury apartment complex with 32 apartments and a popular farm-to-table restaurant. The apartment complex has been fully rented since day one and any vacancies are quickly snapped up.

Preserving this landmark building was high on Forward and Kelley's agenda. "Tearing the building down meant you'd

lose an opportunity of a lifetime," says Forward. "Today, there is no economically feasible way to build a four-story brick structure of that quality, especially not with those character-defining elements of exposed wood and high ceilings."

Tenants of this and other downtown apartment complexes, such as Livery Lofts, love the atmosphere inside the buildings and out. "I love being downtown. I can walk everywhere," says Caroline McTier, a tenant of Livery Lofts. "I went and looked at several apartments and when I walked into this one, I just fell in love with the high ceilings and the brick wall. I just love how they took such an old space and were able to modernize it but still keep all of the original features so it's still very interesting."



Every year, notes Perrine, “more and more students move to Harrisonburg and decide ‘Wow, not only is it a beautiful place, the Shenandoah Valley, but it also has a little urban thing going on.’ We’re seeing more students sticking around, year after year.”

Downtown’s unique apartment complexes, growing number of restaurants and retail shops, and reputation as a “walker’s paradise” are attracting not only students and young professionals but baby boomers as well. Residents of all ages feel like they have the best of two worlds. Many

say they no longer feel like they are living in a small town because their homes have a chic, urban vibe; at the same time, they are able to walk everywhere they need to go.

“For me, it’s a perfect fit,” says McTier, “because I love being able to go out and experience all the different events they have on the square and I don’t have to worry about driving. I can just walk down the stairs, go out, and enjoy downtown.... There’s always something going on so it’s never dull; it’s never boring. I just think it’s a very fun place to be.”

Downtown Harrisonburg has 500 housing units, which attract residents of all ages. Main Street’s unique apartments have a chic, urban vibe that gives residents the best of two worlds. They feel like they’re living in a metropolitan area, but they can walk anywhere they want to go.



PRIDE IN THE PAST, FAITH IN THE FUTURE

Harrisonburg's preservation ethic has not been limited to downtown housing. Before HDR was formed, says Bumbaugh, Harrisonburg was often criticized as lacking a commitment to preservation. Significant buildings were torn down, others deteriorated, and the town had no organized voice calling for historic preservation.

After HDR was launched, a significant change took place. Buildings that once would have been lost, notes Bumbaugh, have been saved and renovated, and public policy now places value on the community's historic resources. The city's most recent Comprehensive Plan includes an entire section on "historic resources."

Harrisonburg is a city of distinctive charm, with many significant historic buildings. The downtown is dominated by the imposing Romanesque/Renaissance Revival Courthouse, built in the 1890s.





© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

The Livery Lofts (above) is one of the signature historic preservation projects in downtown Harrisonburg. It features 12 upscale apartments, a vintage furniture shop, and a wood-fired pizza restaurant, the Bella Luna (opposite page).

Buildings such as the 1750s Harrison House, built by the city's founder, and the Smith House, one of downtown's oldest remaining homes were rescued from potential demolition. The Smith House now serves as office and gallery space for the town's Valley Arts Council. In 2013, renovation of three additional buildings, representing an investment of more than \$15 million, was either started or completed.

- The West Bruce Street project includes a restaurant, architecture firm, and an online higher education service;

- The Livery project features a pizza restaurant, a vintage furniture shop, and 12 upscale apartments; and
- The Ice House project, with more than 130,000 square feet of space, will house several JMU departments, two restaurants, a brewery, a jewelry shop and museum, a yoga/pilates studio, and 35 upscale apartments.

This pride and commitment to preserving Harrisonburg's past has captured the interest of potential business



© Jenny Velker

owners. Wade Luhn, former co-owner of a business in Staunton, Virginia, is one of the tenants of The Livery. His Bella Luna Wood-Fired Pizza restaurant opened there this past January.

Why did Luhn choose Harrisonburg? Over the past few years, he observed a steady growth of small business startups and a number of building owners and developers committed to rehabbing the downtown's dilapidated historic buildings and warehouses.

"This bodes well for the future economic vibrancy of downtown," says Luhn, "and bolsters interest in economic involvement in Harrisonburg."

Despite its many successes, HDR is not content to rest on its laurels. HDR's vision for the future, says Bumbaugh, includes a new hotel and conference center, an urban park, a greenway through downtown, a new city hall, additional streetscape phases, renovation of the city founder's historic home, a new mixed-use parking deck, additional adaptive-use projects such as the Ice House, and public art projects, collectively representing public and private investment of approximately \$80 million. A new branding strategy is also in the works.



Faith in the future of downtown has spread throughout the community. “The heart of our city is beating vibrantly again,” says local developer Barry Kelley.

Main Street is “sustainable; it’s inclusive; it’s vibrant. People just love being downtown,” says Perrine.

“Our revitalization is real,” adds Bumbaugh. “The Main Street approach works, and our downtown embodies a national model for high standards,” an opinion with which Virginia Main Street Coordinator Alexis Thompson wholeheartedly agrees.

“Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance sets the gold standard as a Virginia Main Street community,” says Thompson.

But perhaps the best praise comes from downtown residents like Ariana Witt. “Now people are saying, ‘Oh, I don’t ever have to leave downtown because it has everything I need,’” says Witt.

With such faith and pride in the downtown by residents, workers, entrepreneurs, city officials, and HDR, downtown Harrisonburg is well on the way to a long and bright future. ★

Downtown Harrisonburg is growing more lively every day, attracting new residents and customers as well as business owners. Many downtowners are looking at Main Street with a new eye, saying “Oh, I don’t ever have to leave downtown because it has everything I need.”

Watch
the Harrisonburg
Downtown
Renaissance
GAMSA
video.





BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 2003
CITY POPULATION: 48,914

BUSINESS MIX

RETAIL: 54
RESTAURANTS: 28
SERVICE BUSINESSES: 90
OFFICES: 130
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: 13

1,200
NET NEW JOBS

64
NET NEW BUSINESSES

167
BUILDING REHABS

6
NEW BUILDINGS

355
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

10%
VACANCY RATE WHEN
PROGRAM STARTED

3.5%
CURRENT VACANCY RATE



*Live music scene in
downtown Harrisonburg.*