



(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

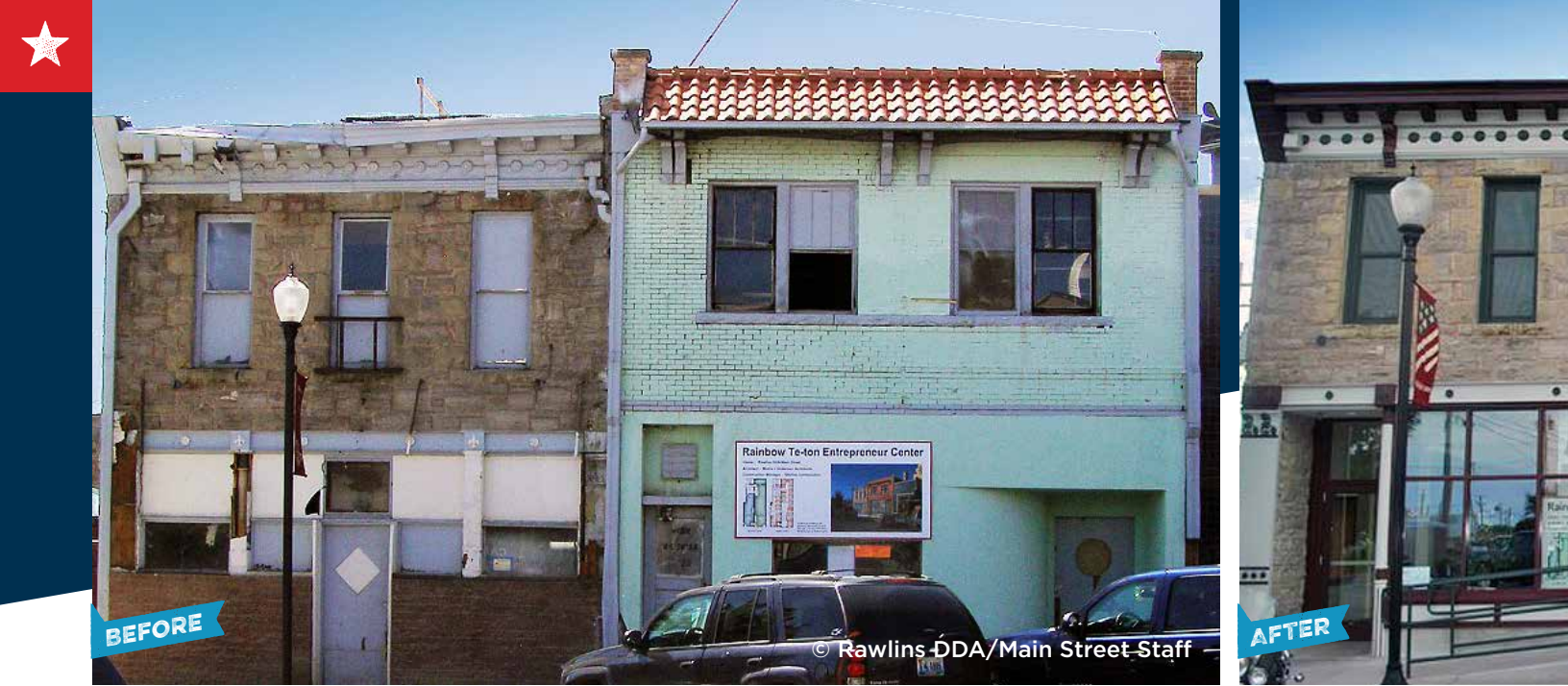
mid-20th century. "During lunch time, the streets used to be like a ghost town," recalls Copper W. France, president of the community's Bank of Commerce.

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.



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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



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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.



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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 Pallooza.

Part of SummerFest, one of Rawlins' three major festivals, Pong Pallooza, 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.

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.



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



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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:

