Saluting the achievements and importance of downtown revitalization through its 2014 Great American Main Street Awards (GAMSA), the National Main Street Center honored three communities on May 18th at the Opening Session of the National Main Streets Conference 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 whose impassioned commitment, creative strategies, and inspiring successes serve as national models for comprehensive, preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

“Each of this year’s winners has proven that incremental progress, strong public-private partnerships, and persistence are essential to create economic vitality and a unique sense of place,” said Patrice Frey, President and CEO of the National Main Street Center. “They have shown impressive resilience and resolve in their work to preserve their rich history, boost local businesses, and create vibrant, exciting Main Streets where people want to work, live, and play.”

Selected by a national jury composed of former award winners, community development professionals, and representatives of government agencies involved in economic development and historic preservation based on these selection criteria, this year’s award winners offer outstanding examples of the power of the Main Street Four-Point Approach®, which has attracted $59.6 billion in public and private investments, added 502,728 new jobs, and generated 246,158 building rehabs over the past three decades. The National Main Street Center is honored to recognize the 2014 Great American Main Streets: Virginia’s Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, Georgia’s Milledgeville Main Street, and Iowa’s Woodbine Main Street. Here are their stories:

For the first time this year, the National Main Street Center introduced a new awards category—“Ones to Watch.” Two communities were selected because of their work on creative projects that have put them on the cusp of a major transformation. Read about this year’s winners and see why they offer inspiration for both newly formed and long-established Main Street programs on page 65.
HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

THE FRIENDLY CITY
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.’
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 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
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 Mountains2Main Street Passport, which promotes the downtowns of all three Main Street communities to tourists who visit Shenandoah National Park.
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...
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.
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.

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.
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
courage 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 employs 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.*
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.”
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...
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.

© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance
MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA

“FIRST LADY OF GEORGIA”
Milledgeville, Georgia, has a unique and distinct history. The fourth capital city, after Savannah, Augusta, and Louisville, Milledgeville served as the antebellum capital of the state from 1804 to 1868. Named after Governor John Milledge, the city was carved out of the frontier wilderness and modeled after Savannah and Washington, D.C. In 1868, however, the capital was moved to Atlanta, a city emerging as a symbol of the New South, much as Milledgeville symbolized the Old South.

The wealth and power that gravitated to Milledgeville during the early and mid-1800s led to construction of elegant mansions, with large porticoes, balconies, and fanlighted doorways in the Federal style, and the beautiful Old Capitol Building, with pointed arched windows and battlements that marked it as America’s first Gothic Revival public building. Despite significant damage during the Civil War, the building survived and now sits in all its restored glory at the center of the Georgia Military College campus.
Milledgeville is a “history buff’s paradise,” says Carlee Schulte, Executive Director of Milledgeville Main Street/Downtown Development Authority (DDA). “The buildings have been beautifully restored and the historic core is the pride of the city.”

Ten years ago, that wasn’t the case. “The look was very different then,” says Schulte. “We had a lot of blighted buildings. Many needed paint and other improvements.”

The Main Street program was created in 1988 and worked with the Downtown Development Authority to invest in downtown improvements. In 2003, the City of Milledgeville, responding to increased activity in the commercial district, decided “it was important to invest in the success of downtown,” says Schulte, “and began working on the first of four phases of streetscape projects…. Two million dollars have been spent on the projects thus far.”

In 2007, the Main Street program became a city department. “What we have done since then is to try and reinvent ourselves,” says Mayor Richard A. Bentley. “We’ve been able to dedicate tax money to our downtown because we know how important it is.”

Mayor Bentley credits Milledgeville Main Street with downtown’s resurgence: “The program’s use of the Main Street four points has provided our city with a vibrant core that attracts the local community and visitors alike while staying true to the historic context of the city.”

Today, Milledgeville is a history buff’s paradise, with beautifully restored buildings in its historic core. Ten years ago, that wasn’t the case; the downtown had a lot of blighted buildings that needed paint and other improvements.
TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT

“Over the past 10 years our 50/50 façade matching grant [which offers up to $1,500 per applicant] has really transformed the downtown,” says Schulte.

Of all the rehabs that have taken place, the two projects most often credited with jumpstarting downtown’s revitalization are the Campus Theatre and Baldwin Lofts.

In 2008, Georgia College purchased and rehабbed a downtown landmark, the Art Deco Campus Theatre, which opened in 1935 and served as a traditional performance hall for nearly half a century before closing in 1983. When it opened, says Kyle Cullers of Georgia College, “it was one of the premier theatres of the time. It was important to us to take care of our facilities, especially our historic facilities, so we wanted to be sure that we kept the architectural integrity of the building. We did a full restoration of the exterior; the façade we took back to its original glory. We were able to reuse the interior of the space while saving the exterior.”
Frank Pendergast, the owner of The Brick, was one of the first entrepreneurs to take a risk and open a restaurant downtown. The Brick has become a downtown icon and led Pendergast to tackle other major projects.
Totaling $6.9 million, the renovation created a black-box theatre, office space, and a bookstore in the building. “This creative project transformed a historic but dilapidated 75-year-old icon that had been closed for 25 years into a revitalized, vibrant facility that serves as a high-foot-traffic academic space,” says Schulte.

The project has been recognized throughout the state for its excellence in design and its impact on the revitalization of the community, winning the 2010 Best Commercial Redevelopment Activity from the Georgia Downtown Authority, the 2011 Georgia Trust Excellence in Rehabilitation Award, and the 2010 University System of Georgia Public/Private Ventures Award.

Making an equally strong impact on the downtown is the Baldwin Lofts project. Frank Pendergast, a local developer, was one of the first entrepreneurs to take a risk and open a restaurant downtown “when no one else would,” says Schulte.

The Brick has become a downtown icon and led Pendergast to tackle another major project. Constructed in 1903 and originally named the Horne Building after the mayor at that time, the property survived fire, tornadoes and a massive slip cover put up by Belk Department Store when it purchased the building in 1946.

“This project had to be exceptionally creative,” says Schulte. “The building was too large for any one entity” until Pendergast considered the need for residential options downtown.

The Baldwin Lofts, Pendergast’s second major project, converted a large 1903 building that had survived fire, tornadoes, and a massive slip cover put up by Belk Department Store in 1946 into an apartment and retail complex. The $4 million project has added 15 apartments and 2 retail spaces to the downtown. (Before, below left; After, below right.)
The building had an addition on the back that made it a perfect space to be converted into residential lofts. “We took out 30 feet of the roof and 30 feet of the first floor,” says Pendergast. That allowed him to create an internal courtyard for residents and basement apartments. The $4 million project, which has added 15 apartments and two retail spaces to the downtown, received the 2013 Award of Excellence Gold Medal from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Downtown Association. It’s also winning the approval of downtown residents. “For me, it was a really great opportunity,” says Baldwin Lofts resident Tatum O’Keefe. “It’s just a hop, skip, and a jump to class. Not only that, but everything we need is here.”

Margaret Smith, another Baldwin Lofts resident, agrees: “When you have a city like Milledgeville that has so much history, I think it’s a shame to knock it all down. It’s a waste of something that could be really cool.”

Preserving that “really cool” past has become easier with the success of these two projects.

“There are currently three large renovation projects that will provide at least 10 commercial spaces and 20 residential lofts within the next year and a half,” says Schulte. “These rehabilitations will pour another $2 million into the district.”

Over the last three years, 24 buildings have been renovated, totaling more than $55 million in public and private investment downtown. Milledgeville Main Street has also taken advantage of state incentives by utilizing the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund and the Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund, which provide below-market rate financing to fund capital projects.

But Milledgeville Main Street’s most creative initiative—and the one that clearly shows the love of townsfolk for their downtown—is the BOOST program, a community-driven financial incentive.
“GETTING YOUR BOOST ON”

BOOST “is a grassroots program,” says Donna Collins, Vice Chair of the Milledgeville Main Street/DDA Board and downtown business owner. “It’s people helping people. We have donors who give $100 twice a year. That money goes into a pool and business owners can apply for grants, which do not have to be repaid.”

BOOST grants, which range from $100 to $1,000, are awarded quarterly to selected businesses and can be used for marketing, advertising, making interior or exterior renovations, and purchasing equipment, among other things. “These grants assist businesses with small but essential expenses that can often make a big difference when starting or growing a business,” says Schulte.

“We needed signage. We needed a security system. We needed ways to help us save money so we applied for the BOOST grant,” says Tommy Cook, owner of Need a Nerd, a startup business in downtown Milledgeville. “It was great. Everyone runs...
in the door, holds up a check with balloons, and shouts ‘you’ve been BOOSTed!’”

“People feel really good about making donations and helping others,” says Collins.

Since it was rolled out in the fall of 2013, the BOOST program has awarded $6,000 in grants and is on track to give out $8,000 in 2014. The program, which has garnered a lot of media attention on the local, regional, and national levels, is sending the strong message that Milledgeville welcomes and recognizes the investment entrepreneurs make in the downtown.

Milledgeville Main Street oversees the program, but it’s the donors who decide which businesses will get the money. “This partnership has given the locals and the business owners and employees a new sense of pride,” says Schulte. “I think it’s going to pick up momentum and people are really going to be interested in it, as far as applying and being involved. It’s time to get your BOOST on!”

Over the past three years, Milledgeville has seen a growth of 91 net new jobs, along with 27 new and 3 business
expansions. The financing tools Milledgeville has developed on its own, as well as the incentives it has accessed through its partnership with the state, ensure that the community will continue on its path of economic growth.

MILLEDGEVILLE’S BIGGEST DAY
Beautifully preserved buildings, businesses that range from trendy boutiques to a jewelry store celebrating 127 years downtown, more than a dozen dining options from upscale elegance to down-home barbecue, and a late-night scene that offers live entertainment and late-night drink specials give locals and visitors plenty of reasons to come downtown. But there are some special days as well, from a moonlight dinner on the lawn of Georgia Military College and the annual JazzFest on the campus of Georgia College to “Milledgeville’s Biggest Day”—the annual Deep Roots Festival.

An award-winning music and cultural event, the Deep Roots Festival was launched as a reboot of Fest-O’Ville, an event held on the Georgia College campus. As attendance and revenue for the campus event declined, Milledgeville Main Street decided to take a few years off and develop a new festival concept.

First named the Sweetwater Festival when it was started in 2004, the event took on the name Deep Roots in 2009. According to Pendergast, the chair of the festival, Deep Roots refers not only to the
canopies of trees that line Milledgeville’s streets but also to the deep ties townsfolk have to their past and to each other.

Milledgeville Main Street serves as the host and organizational hub for the one-day event, which is held on a Saturday in October. The festival features performances by up-and-coming musical acts, an artist and crafts market, activities for kids, a classic car show, and a barbecue contest.

The event, says Schulte, “has a knack for discovering up-and-coming artists such as Grace Potter, the John Butler Trio Band, and Stokeswood, as well as old favorites like the Dirty Guv’nahs and Chris Thomas King before they hit it big.”

The festival also pulls the community together, involving the work of more than 100 volunteers throughout the year and 50 who work on the day of the event, which grows larger each year. In 2004, the festival attracted about 5,000 attendees; by 2010, that number had tripled to 15,000. The crafts market has grown in the same proportion, the number of vendors tripling from 25 in 2004 to 70 in 2011.

Along with the fun it provides community residents and out-of-town visitors, the event’s biggest impact is financial. In 2013, says Schulte, “this-one day festival had a $1.1 million impact on the local economy.” Many business owners say the Deep Roots Festival is the busiest day of their year, with some reporting an increase of 250 percent in sales, compared to their regular Saturdays.

The event also helps fund Milledgeville Main Street. The majority of the event’s revenue goes to the 50/50 Façade Matching Grant program. “Over the past few years, revenue from the festival has provided more than $10,000 to downtown businesses for their improvements,” said Schulte in an interview.
“Development in Milledgeville’s downtown in the past two years is representative of a community where unique ideas are embraced; and economic growth and prosperity, within the context of historic preservation, is nurtured,”

BILLY PEPPERS, EDFP
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
with Milledgeville Living Magazine. The rest of the money goes back into the festival reserves for the next year’s event.

Like many of Milledgeville Main Street’s initiatives, the Deep Roots Festival has won numerous awards—receiving more than 30 Kaleidoscope Awards from the Southeast Festival and Events Association since its inception—and garnered major media attention for the community.

But while Deep Roots is Milledgeville’s biggest day, it’s not the only activity that brings people downtown for fun and entertainment. Now in its fourth year, the Main Street First Friday event has been growing in popularity. Each month has a different theme. Among the most exciting is an annual beach bash.

Milledgeville may be located more than two hours from an actual beach, says Schulte, “but we haven’t let that stop us from providing a fun family event that allows our patrons to kick off their flip-flops and get sandy!” Sixty tons of sand from a local sand distributor are dumped in a closed parking lot and kiddie pools are filled with water, sand buckets, shovels, and beach balls.

First Friday events have included Chili Eating Contests, School Spirit Nights, Car Shows, and 80s Costume Contests, to name a few. Not only is First Friday great fun for the people who attend; it’s also a revenue producer for the businesses that stay open and provide their own tie-in promotions for the crowds.

Events like the Downtown Beach Bash (below), which drops 60 tons of sand in a closed parking lot with kiddie pools, beach balls, and sand buckets, and the Back to School Blow Out cheerleading competition (opposite page) bring hundreds of young people and adults downtown to enjoy the fun.
The Milledgeville Marketplace Farmers Market is another major venue for outdoor activity downtown. Now in its fifth year, the market brings live entertainment and artwork, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables downtown every Tuesday afternoon from April to October. On average, says Schulte, “the market brings 18 vendors and more than 500 customers downtown each Tuesday.”

To provide a more inviting location for the market, Milledgeville Main Street applied for and received a $42,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, while the city kicked in an additional $61,000 to build a pavilion for the market. The pavilion, which opened this spring, provides electricity, outdoor fans, beautiful landscaping, and much-needed shelter from the hot Georgia sun, says Schulte.

**TRANSFORMING IDEAS INTO ACTION**

The efforts of Milledgeville Main Street give community residents and visitors plenty of reasons to explore the city’s historic core. With support from the city and other public and private partners, Main Street has preserved the history of downtown buildings, created events to draw participants from surrounding areas, found funding to build a pavilion for the farmers market and created unique financial incentive programs to attract a unique mix of thriving businesses.

“We have a really fun downtown atmosphere,” says Jon Joiner, owner of Milledgeville’s Amici Café. “Everyone is working together. I’m starting to see some empty buildings now getting bought and other businesses, restaurants, and loft apartments, so it’s pretty cool.”
The vibrant business climate created by Milledgeville Main Street is convincing many graduates of the nearby colleges to choose the town as the place where they can build their future. “I’m an alum of Georgia College,” says Lindsey Smith, co-owner of The 42nd Floor. “I didn’t think when I graduated that I would ever come back to Milledgeville. But when you’re removed from it, you see that there is just so much potential here.”

That potential will keep Milledgeville Main Street driving forward. Main Street and the city have every intention of continuing preservation efforts in downtown Milledgeville. Business recruitment is another high priority.

“The vision of Milledgeville Main Street is to continue the growth of downtown and expand our reach to some of the outer blocks in the district,” says Schulte. “In the next few years, we plan to grow our current programs, explore new options for parking, and continue commercial recruitment to full capacity. I believe the future plans for a Main Street community must be a work that is ever evolving.”

Watch the Milledgeville Main Street GAMSA video.

The Milledgeville Marketplace Farmers Market is another major venue for outdoor activity. Now in its fifth year, the market brings live entertainment and artwork, as well as local produce, downtown every Tuesday afternoon from April to October. Before the market pavilion (left) was built, the area was a closed-down skate park. Now, it’s a pleasant market with beautiful landscaping and much-needed shelter from the hot Georgia sun.
The Milledgeville Marketplace Farmers Market is another major venue for outdoor activity. Now in its fifth year, the market brings live entertainment and artwork, as well as local produce, downtown every Tuesday afternoon from April to October. Before the market pavilion (left) was built, the area was a closed-down skate park. Now, it's a pleasant market with beautiful landscaping and much-needed shelter from the hot Georgia sun.

Preservation-sensitive rehabs, streetscape improvements, and banner programs make Milledgeville’s downtown vibrant and inviting.

BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 1988
CITY POPULATION: 19,401

BUSINESS MIX
RETAIL: 15
RESTAURANTS: 12
SERVICE BUSINESSES: 38
OFFICES: 3
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: 6

394
NET NEW JOBS

154
NET NEW BUSINESSES

89
BUILDING REHABS

4
NEW BUILDINGS

22
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

50%
VACANCY RATE WHEN PROGRAM STARTED

8%
CURRENT VACANCY RATE
WOODBINE, IOWA

AMERICANA
ALIVE
AND WELL
A small town of less than 2,000 people, Woodbine, Iowa, is a slice of Americana. “Where else can you shop for antiques, fill a prescription, stare into a glass-blower’s furnace, check grain prices, look at upholstery swatches for your Model T, and slake your thirst at the new brewery, all in less than 52 steps?” extols Deb Sprecker, Program Director of Woodbine Main Street.

This iconic Midwest town features brick streets, flags on porches, no stop lights, and a friendly, funky Main Street district. It is also a major stop on the historic Lincoln Highway, a transcontinental roadway that runs from New York City to the West Coast.

Woodbine’s section of the highway, the longest remaining portion in Iowa, was bricked in 1921. As far back as the 1990s, city leaders valued the charming brick streets enough to embark on a multimillion dollar, phased restoration of the highway. In January 2013, the restoration, now in its third and final phase, received an enormous boost when the Woodbine Lincoln Highway and Brick Street Historic Districts were listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Woodbine joined the Main Street Iowa family in 2008. When Woodbine became a Main Street town, says Main Street Board President Roger Kenkel, “downtown was hurting. Some businesses were closing.” “The condition of Main Street had deteriorated and we knew it,” adds board member Bob Stephany.

Since it joined Main Street Iowa, Woodbine has never looked back. Its Main Street success is a story of resilience and resolve, of a community willing to take a hard look at the hand it’s been dealt, then dig in to make something better out of it.

**COMMITTED, CONVINCED, AND CREATING CHANGE**

Woodbine Main Street, the City of Woodbine, and the Woodbine Community Betterment & Development Corporation have joined together to implement the Main Street Four Point Approach®. City officials, including the mayor, city administrator, and city clerk, and educators serve on the Main Street board.

To celebrate the completion of a 23-building façade rehab project, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad came to town for a ribbon cutting. The community restaged a 1911 Chautauqua Parade, complete with vintage vehicles from ascending decades and a large John Deere tractor bringing up the rear.
and four-point committees, while Woodbine Betterment works in tandem with Main Street and the city to recruit businesses, renovate commercial space, and share the management of upper-story housing.

Action plans laid out by the Main Street committees have produced dramatic building improvements from “paint and polish” projects to substantial building renovations.

One of the major tools Woodbine has leveraged to revitalize its commercial district, says Main Street Iowa State Coordinator Michael Wagler, “has been the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG).”

This 1928 canopy gas station, rehabbed in 2010 (bottom), features an architectural eyebrow roofline and houses the Main Street office and a community meeting room in the garage bays. By retaining many service station elements, such as the garage doors which were left in the raised position, and the auto lift as the pedestal for a glass conference table, the building is not only functional but faithful to its original appearance.
The City of Woodbine was awarded a $500,000 Downtown Revitalization Community Development Block Grant as part of a $900,000 Façade Master Plan to renovate 23 buildings in the Main Street District. Completed in January 2012 through a partnership of individual business owners, the City of Woodbine, and Woodbine Main Street, these rehabs have had a significant economic impact on the downtown, as underscored by the restoration of the Odd Fellows Building.

The owners redeveloped this late 19th-century, Italianate brick building using private funds, historic tax credits, and a number of grants. When the project began, the two-story, flat-roofed building suffered from mortar damage, crumbling interiors, and an ill-conceived façade remodeling. Once a well-known regional department store as well as an Odd Fellows Lodge, the building holds strong memories for many older Woodbine residents, one of whom recalls thinking that the store’s “oak stairway was the biggest, grandest thing ever.”

The finished project added six two-bedroom apartments on the second floor, one apartment on the entry level, a full-service restaurant, and several office/retail spaces to the commercial district. Economically, the project not only has

Two layers of shake shingles and other coverings were peeled away from the Movers & Shakers building (above left) to reveal a beautiful intact storefront (above right). A mural is being painted on the side of the building (above) where the storefront is lit up every weeknight to spotlight tap dancers and karate kids.
brought new jobs and services downtown but has pushed up the value of downtown real estate, its assessed value rising from $18,038 in 2010 to $205,968 in 2011.

Winner of the 2011 Iowa Preservation Award for “Best Commercial Rehab” and the 2011 Main Street Iowa Award for “Best Design–Total Building Rehab,” the Odd Fellows restoration has helped spur other major projects.

The Woodbine Savings Bank project rescued an 1890s National Register building. In 2008, the two-story brick structure, which housed several apartments, faced serious structural issues, so severe that the owners were seriously pondering whether to renovate or raze the building.

Working with Woodbine Main Street, the city, and a local development group, the owners put together a $2.2 million renovation plan. Today, the building houses 11 affordable apartments, three office suites, an outdoor deck, and a communal area. All of the apartments were leased within six months.
Aaron Pryor, owner and manager of the Woodbine Savings Bank Apartments, is optimistic about downtown’s future, thanks to the planning efforts and partnership between the city and Main Street Woodbine: “It’s a lot more vibrant downtown, not just our building, but all the other buildings in town with the new façades and the façade master plan. A lot of people from neighboring towns are somewhat envious of the downtown we’ve created.”

People like Pryor are the town’s best business recruiters. The owner of a local antiques store, for example, convinced an out-of-town shopper to open a dental clinic and rehab two upper-story apartments in a building that had been vacant for 10 years. These and other projects have doubled the number of housing units downtown, from 16 apartments in 2008 to 32 today. And Woodbine’s downtown housing is a hot commodity, rapidly becoming the preferred residential choice for newcomers, retirees, and downtown workers.

The allure of these downtown residences is not just their appearance; it’s also their focus on sustainability.

The Woodbine Savings Bank project rescued an 1890s National Register building that was in such bad condition that the owners seriously considered razing the structure. Today, after a $2.2 million renovation, the building (below) houses affordable apartments, office suites, an outdoor deck, and a communal area.
In 2008, the Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDED) selected Woodbine as one of two Main Street communities to serve as pilots for its Green Streets Initiative. With the help of the city, IDED, and Cenergy, an independent and nationally certified business energy-use rating firm, Woodbine Main Street provided energy audits for the downtown’s buildings. The audits assessed the amount of energy used by each building and suggested measures for improving energy efficiency.

“All 50 businesses had energy audits done,” says Darin Smith of Arch Icon Development, noting that at first there was skepticism because of doubts about the return on investment. These doubts were eventually outweighed by the value of the opportunity to revitalize the downtown. “Once we got going as a community” says Smith, “we couldn’t stop.”

Woodbine’s focus on sustainability guided the design paths for downtown residential projects. The Woodbine Savings Bank Apartments has geothermal HVAC and other efficiencies that have garnered an energy savings of up to 35 percent.
A Sustainability Community Master Plan, commissioned by Woodbine Main Street in cooperation with the city in 2010, is being used to guide development by applying Iowa Green Streets criteria to downtown building improvements and residential development. Woodbine’s focus on green infrastructure has led to projects that have improved livability in this small town:

• Use of native plants and landscaping downtown;
• Geothermal for historic rehabs;
• Rescue of a 1940s historic grain elevator as public art through the use of sustainable materials; and
• Storefront designs that apply energy efficiencies through restoration of inset doorways and transoms and the use of colorful awnings.

Board President Kenkel looks at all of these accomplishments with pride and a bit of awe: “Some of the things that we thought could happen over time, maybe 10 years—the façade rehabs and [other projects]—have happened so quickly.”

But while Woodbine’s ride to Main Street success has been rapid, it hasn’t always been smooth. In September 2013, Woodbine’s downtown faced a disaster that would test the community’s commitment to the district and its businesses.

RESILIENCE AND RESOLVE
On September 26, 2013, two days before Applefest, the community’s biggest annual...
Woodbine is not only a community of great pride but also of fierce resolve as their reaction proved after a devastating fire swept the downtown in September 2013, two days before the town’s biggest event.

event, a devastating fire swept through the downtown. “The wind was strong out of the south and it was spreading,” recalls Main Street Board Member Bill Hutcheson.

Council Member Randy Vandemark was one of the first people on the scene and says, “The first thing I thought of was this fire’s going to be more than our community can handle.”

But Woodbine is a community of fierce pride and strong resolve.

“I remember clearly that Thursday,” says Nicole Eilers of Brick Street Brewing. “Everybody was running down the street. We looked down there and there was the fire.... It was amazing to see the community pull together and show support for the businesses and the families that were affected.”

Roger Eby of Eby Drug can attest to that support firsthand. “Not very long after the fire started down the street,” says Eby, “people from the town showed up here and they were carrying totes and boxes. Even the high school volleyball team came down. The people in this town, in less than an hour, emptied this entire store.”
As the fire roared through downtown, Woodbine residents rushed to the rescue of downtown businesses, emptying stores of merchandise to save their inventory (right). The fire damaged four buildings (opposite page), closing three businesses. While the damage was severe, it could have been much worse, noted one Main Street board member. “It could have been a whole block.”

The fire damaged four buildings, closing three businesses and forcing relocation of services for the senior meal site. “It could have been much more serious,” says Hutcheson. “We lost four storefronts, but it could have been a whole block.”

Twiners, as Woodbine residents are affectionately known, showed their resiliency as scores of volunteers came to the victims’ aid and began to think about rebuilding. “The people here in Woodbine will come together,” says Kimberly Jacobs of Roots and Rumors. “They will rebuild and bring it back, just like they rebuilt Main Street when it was starting to deteriorate.”

But the rebuilding has been thoughtful and focused on preserving the town’s historic assets. Instead of rushing in with a “hurry up and replace” mentality, Woodbine Main Street, Woodbine Betterment & Development, and the city pooled their resources to help owners restore their buildings and restart their businesses. Quick action was taken to stabilize the two-story façade of an 1880s building so it could be restored.

“Our partnership is focused on saving and restoring as many of the historic structures as possible,” says Main Street Director Deb Sprecker. “Without the experience derived from six years as a Main Street community, we might be on a different course.”
“I believe a key to Woodbine’s successes to date has been its ability to inspire and exert a consistent positive attitude. Through this messaging, Woodbine Main Street has been able to inspire community leaders to buy into the process, inspire downtown stakeholders to invest in their built environment, inspire community members to re-envision and experience what their downtown can be, and inspire other communities to take action in their own downtowns.”

MICHAEL WAGLER, STATE COORDINATOR, MAIN STREET IOWA
“Front and center in our mission statement,” she adds, “is to promote historic preservation, champion hometown vitality, and build community partnerships. Historic preservation is ingrained in our community psyche and embedded in our partnerships.”

So is strong resolve and optimism. Two days after the fire, Applefest, the town’s largest event, which attracts up to 15,000 people to this tiny town, went on, offering visitors a warm slice of pie and an even warmer welcome to Woodbine’s craft, flea, farmers, and fine arts markets.

The fire and its aftermath highlight what has been Woodbine’s story all along, says Sprecker. “Twiners take a hard look at what isn’t working, then dig in to make something better out of what they’ve been handed—and have a good time doing it.”

**THE WOODBINE EFFECT**

Woodbine’s accomplishments reflect the town’s pride and willingness to apply creative problem solving. While historic rehabs and building renovations kicked off the program’s early years, the six-block downtown has also

Woodbine’s strong will and optimism were never more apparent than two days after the fire when the community hosted its largest event, Applefest, which attracts up to 15,000 visitors to the tiny town. Visitors were greeted with candy apples, a warm slice of pie, and an even warmer welcome to craft, flea, farmers, and fine arts markets and the annual classic car show!
realized significant net gains in jobs and business starts and expansions: up 39 jobs, representing 23 percent of the current downtown employee base of approximately 200; and 22 business startups and expansions, 43 percent of the total number of storefront businesses. Presently, there is only one vacancy, “a 10-by-20-foot sliver of a storefront,” says Sprecker.

Main Street has also hit key investment milestones from 2010 to 2012, receiving Main Street Iowa Reinvestment Mile Markers of $2 million, $3 million, and $5 million in each of those years.

The story of Woodbine’s achievements is spreading throughout western Iowa, attracting visitors from all over the region. This mobile workshop tour group (above) steps off their bus and is welcomed by a “Spirit Tunnel” formed by Woodbine Community School students and their pep band. Students also put together “Why I Love My Hometown” welcome bags full of information, come-back coupons, and other treats for tour groups (right).

volunteers hosted many regional visitors. One large group arrived in a school bus; others came in pairs or by carload. We welcomed them and told them our story.”

These tours have created what some call the “Woodbine Effect.” People returned home inspired by Woodbine’s success. They began organizing community leaders, researching revitalization approaches and completing Main Street applications, says Sprecker. “Our philosophy—share our story with whoever will listen, whenever we can!”

And Woodbine has an important story to tell other small towns in which Main Street district boundaries can easily blur. “Students, families, businesses, and seniors ‘get it,’” explains Sprecker. “The loss or deterioration of one sector seriously affects the whole. We
never discount the power of simply working together to accomplish our priorities.”

Woodbine’s revitalization comeback, concludes Sprecker, “boils down to a few important components: a fierce pride of place, an attitude that welcomes change; and stubborn, active community members who identify priorities, establish shared goals, and then get to work”

“While many small towns are declining in population, our community has grown,” says Tracy Lee Kelley, a third-grade teacher at the Woodbine Community School. “It has grown not only in size but in visionary leadership fostered by community vitality and volunteerism. This is due to the Main Street program.”

Woodbine is proof that small-town life is alive and well in America and facing the future with eagerness, enthusiasm, and the determination to make their downtown the best that it can be. ★

Linda Glisson is the consulting editor of Main Street Now. She was a staff member of the former National Trust Main Street Center. Before joining the National Trust, she was a senior editor at US News & World Report Books and a free-lance editor for National Geographic Books. She has an associate of arts degree from the American University in Paris and a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the George Washington University.

Commitment to Woodbine Main Street’s revitalization efforts involves “Twiners” of all ages. The program has a strong partnership with the local school. Students learn the art of window washing and take part in a grant-funded event that enables them to engage with business owners and learn about downtown’s historic buildings (below left). Adult volunteers not only contribute their time, talent, and energy; they contribute financially as well, as in this successful fundraiser that auctioned off more than 25 delectable desserts (below).
BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 2008
CITY POPULATION: 1,459

BUSINESS MIX
RETAIL: 10
RESTAURANTS: 3
SERVICE BUSINESSES: 19
OFFICES: 11
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: 5

39
NET NEW JOBS

22
NET NEW BUSINESSES

44
BUILDING REHABS

1
NEW BUILDING

14
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

10
vacant storefronts
VACANCY RATE WHEN PROGRAM STARTED

1
vacant storefront
CURRENT VACANCY RATE