



# Main Street Messenger

2015 volume three



## Two New Main Street Iowa Communities Announced



*Congratulations Centerville!*



*Congratulations Grundy Center!*

The 2015 Iowa Downtown Summit, with downtowners from across the state in attendance, was the setting for Governor Terry Branstad to announce Iowa's newest Main Street Iowa communities. Centerville and Grundy Center join the ranks, bringing the total number of designated Main Street communities in Iowa to 53.

"Iowa's historic main streets are the heart and soul of our communities," said Governor Branstad. "We will continue to do whatever we can to keep Iowa's downtowns strong and vibrant for business owners, workers, residents and visitors. I am pleased to welcome each of these communities into the Main Street family and wish them much success in the future."

Becoming a designated Main Street Iowa community is no easy task. Community representatives must attend rigorous training sessions to become eligible to apply. They must demonstrate support from local organizations, businesses, and lawmakers; funding and in-kind support secured and documented; strategic plans outlining short- and long-term goals in place. Most importantly, community officials, business owners and volunteers must agree to work together with common goals of 1) revitalizing Iowa's historic buildings and unique commercial business districts, and 2) improving the local economy by adopting and following the National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach to historic commercial district revitalization.

"In their applications and presentations, the selected communities demonstrated strong partnerships, a high level of volunteerism and a commitment to the revitalization of their downtown districts. We are confident that these cities will thrive and grow for many years to come," said Debi Durham, director of the Iowa Economic Development Authority, the agency that houses the Main Street Iowa program.

While it may be challenging to become a Main Street community, designated communities reap many benefits. During the first three years of the program, each community receives approximately 40 days of on-site training and technical assistance from Main Street Iowa, National Main Street Center staff and private consultants, as well as 30 days of training for volunteers and local staff -- valuing the state's investment at \$120,000. Main Street communities receive continuing training and technical assistance valued at \$10,000+ annually.

"I know how well the Main Street Iowa program can work since I was a founding member of the Osceola Main Street program," said Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds. "The process was not easy, nor was it quick, but it certainly showed results."

Over the years, by working together with the state, Main Street Iowa communities have realized the benefits of more than 2.7 million hours of volunteer time invested into improving their city centers, a significantly increased job and business base, and over \$1.4 billion in private investment to purchase, construct and rehabilitate downtown property. The Iowa Economic

# OPEN 4 BUSINESS STATE CONTEST

Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) hosted the Main Street Iowa Open 4 Business state contest on Wednesday, August 26, 2015, in Historic Valley Junction - West Des Moines. The event, held in conjunction with the Iowa Downtown Summit, showcased five businesses from across Iowa. This was the first year of the Open 4 Business contest, which was open to businesses located in the 51 Main Street Iowa districts across the state.

Over 75 businesses entered the competition in June and competed at district sites in Czech-Village/New Bohemia-Cedar Rapids, Jefferson, Marshalltown, Mount Pleasant and Waverly for a chance to advance to the state competition.

Debi Durham, IEDA director, served as emcee for the event as businesses made their pitch to a panel of judges for a chance to win \$20,000 to execute their business plan. The five finalists included Jefferson and Nikki Davis, Building Grounds, Woodbine; Ann and Guy Booth and Sarah Booth Fried, The Perfect Blend Gift Shop & Shortbread Company, Mount Vernon; Quinton and Ana McClain, Lion Bridge Brewing Company, Czech Village-New Bohemia, Cedar Rapids; Casey and Naomi Hulteng, Rockadot, LLC, Elkader; and Heather and Richie Akers, The Giving Tree Theater, Marion.

Each district finalist was awarded \$8,000 for business expansion projects and a year of business coaching services from

Action Coach, Andy O'Brien. Building Grounds was selected as the 2015 Winner receiving \$20,000, and The Giving Tree Theater was runner-up winning an additional \$2,000. The grants are administered through IEDA's Iowa Downtown Resource Center and Main Street Iowa.

Entrants submitted an application outlining their business plan and had 15 minutes to pitch their business idea before a live audience. Judges included Nancy Dunkel, State Representative and Main Street Advisory Board member, Sandy Ehrig, Economic Development administrator for the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Rand Fisher, president of the Iowa Area Development Group, Amelia Lobo, director of Credit and Lending at the Iowa Center for Economic Success, and Lisa Shimkat, state director of the Iowa Small Business Development Center.

"This new program builds upon the current revitalization work taking place in our Main Street districts," explained Main Street Iowa State Coordinator Michael Wagler. "The investment these businesses are making continues to build upon the strong local business ethic we see across Iowa, making it a great place to do business."

The program will be available again in 2016. To learn more about the Open 4 Business competition, please contact Robin Bostrom, Business Specialist, [robin.bostrom@iowa.gov](mailto:robin.bostrom@iowa.gov) or by phone at 515.725.3053.



Jefferson and Nikki Davis, Building Grounds, Woodbine



Entrants had 15 minutes to pitch their business idea before a live audience and a panel of judges.



Each district finalist was awarded \$8,000 and a year of business coaching services from Action Coach, Andy O'Brien.

# Main Street Iowa Challenge Grants Announced

## Fourteen Communities Selected for Project Award

The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) awarded \$924,000 in Main Street Iowa Challenge Grants to 14 communities around the state. The grants will benefit local improvement projects such as façade upgrades and restoration, upper floor rehabilitation and remodeled spaces for expanding downtown businesses. The announcement was made during a ceremony held at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden October 12.

“The Main Street Iowa Challenge grants have proven to be catalysts for the revitalization of Iowa’s historic main streets,” said IEDA Director Debi Durham. “These projects represent the on-going commitment the people of our state – both our elected officials and private citizens -- have to the revitalization of our historic downtown districts. Rehabilitated buildings create opportunities for new business in Iowa communities, and new businesses mean new jobs.”

Please refer to the following page for project descriptions.

The grants are administered through IEDA’s Iowa Downtown Resource Center and Main Street Iowa. Funding will be distributed in the form of matching grants to the selected Main Street programs. The estimated total project cost of the 14 projects is over \$8 million.

“Each project must provide at least a dollar-for-dollar cash-match,” explained Main Street Iowa State Coordinator Michael Wagler. “Overall, these projects will leverage eight times the state’s investment into bricks and mortar rehabilitation. These projects will have a significant economic impact within each district.”

The Challenge Grant program is funded through an appropriation from the Iowa Legislature. Since the first appropriation in 2002 through 2014, approximately \$5.9 million in state and federal funds have leveraged over \$37 million of private reinvestment into 110 projects in 43 Main Street Iowa commercial districts across the state.



# Main Street Iowa Challenge Grant Project Descriptions

## **Ames — Sheldon Munn Hotel Storefronts, 301 Main Street \$75,000**

The Sheldon Munn Hotel has anchored the center of downtown Ames for nearly a century. Designed by the architectural firm Proudfoot & Bird, it was built in 1916 as a hotel and community focal point. The main level consists of a series of storefronts, and the upper three floors have been converted into 56 apartments. Extensive exterior remodeling in the 50's and additional remodeling in the 70's has created extensive damage to the concrete frame due to water infiltration. The project will replace all the storefronts and fix the degradation to the structural frame in the basement.

## **Avoca — Avoca Bank Building, 152 South Elm \$75,000**

This highly-visible landmark building in Avoca's Main Street District will undergo façade and commercial space renovation. The facade project will conform to the local Downtown Master Plan and will preserve the remaining historical aspects of the building. Interior renovation of two commercial spaces will occur creating office space and a multi-tenant market space for participants in the Avoca Main Street Market.

## **Bloomfield — Traverse Block Façade, 202 South Madison \$29,500**

This total facade restoration will address an endangered Mesker Bros. metal storefront and the north masonry exterior of the 1893 Traverse Block building listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This building was once a shining example of a Mesker Bros. facade but has experienced significant deterioration and the pediment was removed due to safety and structural concerns. Once the largest, most prominent and intact representation of decorative pressed metal in the Bloomfield Historic District, the Challenge Grant will facilitate its restoration and positively improve the total district aesthetic and business environment.

## **Charles City — Charley Western Depot, 1006 North Grand \$55,000**

For three decades now, the former Charley Western Railroad building at 1006 North Grand has sat deteriorating and unused (other than for storage). This project will not only bring the once stately two-story brick structure back to life, but it will preserve it for many years. The main floor will be remodeled into commercial space, with a long-term tenant already secured. The second floor will be turned into a pair of apartments aimed at serving transitional housing needs for new upper level corporate hires.

## **Conrad — Upper Floors, 103-105 North Main \$75,000**

In December 2014, Conrad lost a property owner that vacated two adjoining buildings in the heart of downtown. Both of the buildings have been underutilized and in dire need of attention. With a lack of housing in Conrad, Shiner Development agreed to take on the project and will start renovation of the 4200 square foot upper story space. They will develop four apartments with a couple of two-bedrooms and two single bedroom units. This expansion will help meet housing needs in Downtown Conrad and spur commercial redevelopment of the lower level.

## **Dubuque — The Smokestack Phase2, 62 East 7th \$75,000**

The Smokestack is a flexible arts and culture venue in the heart of downtown Dubuque. Phase two of the Smokestack rehabilitation will allow public access and use of the second floor and rooftops of a once-derelict building on this historically important site. This renovation will enable the expansion of the existing business into the second floor and rooftops to take advantage of emerging urban entertainment trends and enhance arts, culture, dining and nightlife offerings in Dubuque.

## **Hamilton County — 1527 De Witt, Ellsworth \$59,500**

This project will be phase one of a three-phase approach to revitalize downtown Ellsworth by rehabbing two deteriorating buildings and returning them to historical accuracy. Both buildings will become more structurally sound and energy efficient. This will allow for two new businesses to come into an all but abandoned downtown and create the beginning of a rejuvenated downtown Main Street District. Restoring the windows, tuck pointing bricks, repairing the roofs of both buildings as well as interior rehab and updates, will be the start of what Ellsworth hopes will become a once again thriving downtown.

## **Manning — Child Care Center (Caleris Bldg) 123 Main \$75,000**

A major roadblock to economic growth in Manning is the availability of child care. As a result, potential new hires have turned down job offers and potential residents have located in other communities. The Manning Child Care Center (MCCC), a non-profit entity, provides that necessary service for Manning's growth. MCCC plans to expand within its current building by completing an empty, unfinished area. The expansion significantly increases child care capacity, and it enhances the district's ability to support additional businesses and downtown living.

## **Marion — Cobban-Hervey Building, 1138-1144 7th Avenue \$50,000**

The Cobban-Hervey Building is a late Victorian Italianate style building, constructed in 1872. It originally contained two storefronts, and the second floor served as a popular social hall. Over the years, the façade of the building has been damaged and architectural features have been covered through several updates to the storefronts. The second-story had been split into three unique sections, which sat vacant for many years. The Challenge Grant will restore the front façade and renovate three upper story apartments in the Cobban-Hervey Building.

## **Newton — Hotel Maytag Ballroom, 101-105 N. 2nd Ave East \$75,000**

The Hotel Maytag was built in 1926 by industrialist Fred Maytag. The hotel was the first -- west of the Mississippi -- to have air conditioned rooms, a movie theater, formal dining and a ballroom that served the Newton area. Over the years, the hotel was converted into apartments, and the ballroom was converted into office space. The offices will be removed so the ballroom can be restored as part of a complete \$10,900,000 historic rehabilitation of the entire building. The unique features of the ballroom such as the terrazzo floors, cornices, light well and skylight make it a magnificent space to experience.

# Main Street Iowa Challenge Grant Project Descriptions, continued

## **Oskaloosa — McMillen Bldg, 208 1st Ave East \$75,000**

Oskaloosa Downtown Development, LLC is restoring the McMillen Building (former Swim's) that was nearly destroyed by a fire on May 11, 2015. The fire destroyed the roof system, second floor and foundation wall. It also resulted in extensive water, smoke and mold damage throughout. While the building has been stabilized and cleaned, the proposed project entails reconstruction of the roof system, supporting walls, masonry and reconstruction of the interior to restore retail operation on the first floor and conversion of the second floor into apartments for much-needed housing in downtown Oskaloosa.

## **Ottumwa — 325 East Main \$50,000**

Christner Properties, LLC will rehabilitate the upper floor of 325 E. Main Street in Ottumwa. Significant exterior rehabilitation and first floor renovation have occurred since the building was purchased last year, and plans are in place to rent the lower level to a reputable business to foster downtown growth. Grant funds will help convert the upper-story space into three apartment units and retrofit a rear access to the building.

## **State Center — Evans Building, 120 West Main \$75,000**

This project includes the structural stabilization, masonry restoration and interior rehabilitation of a commercial building and garage within the State Center Historic District. The 1950's storefront facade will be removed and restored to the original 1895 look. The second floor will be rebuilt for an apartment. Plans include a new roof and roof structure, masonry tuck-pointing, floor joist repair, window and door reinstallation, thermal improvements, flooring and other interior repair, restoration and replacement. The foundation and basement will be improved for water and radon abatement.

## **Waterloo — Wonder Bread Building/Single Speed Brewing \$75,000**

This project possesses great potential for both Single Speed Brewing Co. and Main Street Waterloo. Everyone is particularly excited about the role the restoration of the Continental Baking Co. / Wonder Bread Building will play in the continued growth and revitalization of this district. Although the entire project is relatively large in scope, the Challenge Grant will address roof repair and reinforcement to accommodate installation of a solar panel system. This is a critical component to help achieve LEED certification, one of the greater goals of the project.

## See yourself in Ames, see yourself on Main Street!

When downtown business owner Kinsey Meyer came to Ames to attend Iowa State University she never intended to stay. But, fate had other plans for this young entrepreneur who had her eye on a degree and a life in the Pacific Northwest.

"I started working at Miss Meyer's, a consignment clothing boutique, in January of 2013, my fourth year at Iowa State," said Meyer. "A coworker told me Miss Meyer's was hiring, so I went in, introduced myself, met some of the coworkers and got the job."

Little did she know that her part-time position would turn into her life's work. By early 2014, Meyer had her immediate future mapped. She applied for and received a job in Idaho, had an apartment lined up and was ready to relocate.

"A month before I graduated I received an email from the company stating that they were undergoing some financial stresses and were filing for bankruptcy," said Meyer. "This meant my position, as well as a few hundred others, was no longer needed."

About this same time the owner of the Ames Main Street Cultural District business where Kinsey worked, was expecting her second child and ready to be a stay-at-home mom. She offered the opportunity to buy the store to her employee with the same last name. After mulling it over for about a month and talking to a banker, Miss Meyer was ready to bite the bullet and become the owner of Miss Meyer's. The store became hers in August of 2014.



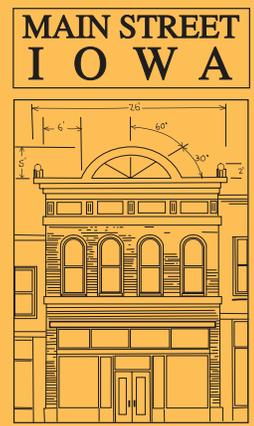
"Taking ownership of Miss Meyer's right out of college really forced me to put my priorities into check," Meyer said. "Owning a business is extremely different than working a typical full-time job. It's a full-time job and then some."

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## Main Street Iowa 30th Anniversary

IBM introduced the first laptop computer, John Mellencamp's "Small Town" rocked the radio and Top Gun filled us with excitement — 1986 brought the world so many lasting things. In Iowa, 1986 introduced a new approach to addressing the revitalization of communities and historic commercial districts. This approach set the stage for many communities across the state to take the future of its downtown districts into their own hands. Thirty years later, the Main Street Approach has remained an impactful strategy for local economic development activities across Iowa.

In 2016, the Iowa Economic Development Authority will celebrate thirty years of Main Street at work. This celebration will include different elements throughout the year to build a stronger awareness of local efforts, encourage travelers to visit Main Street districts, enhance partnerships for revitalization and applaud the work of local Main Street programs. The festivities will be highlighted by our 30th Anniversary Celebration, which will take place on Friday, April 29, 2016. Save the date and prepare to celebrate!



# Successful Tiny Towns

*"We are a community of 1200 people. We can't have a business presence in our downtown, can we?"*

*"We are like any community of 900 people. Our, downtown is boarded up."*

Is it harder? Perhaps, but small town leaders with that mindset are already a step behind. Small towns have an opportunity to capitalize on their size and strengths. Take a drive throughout Iowa and you can easily identify small communities that have worked hard on downtown development. Likewise, you can also take that same drive and see ones where perhaps downtown was/is not a priority. Let's learn from those making an impact...the towns that have positioned themselves to serve the community but also provide a unique, small town experience for visitors. It's important to know what makes small communities different and how to benefit from those differences. Some are strengths...some represent challenges:



*Jim Engle, Director  
Iowa Downtown Resource Center*

1. The pool of economic and human resources is smaller. There is less room for failure. Show something visible quickly. Start small. Don't set goals that are out of context with your community.
2. Small downtown development programs are more reliant on local government, individuals and families and fund raising events... less on businesses.
3. Work in a very small Main Street community is less limited to "Main Street." Organizations have more of a community development slant. You also have greater opportunity to step on the toes of other organizations. Clearly define your mission and cooperation with other organizations.
4. Small successes have much bigger impact in small communities. For example, one façade rehab in a community of 1000 people is more dramatic than one in an urban area.
5. Recognizing the limitation of focusing entirely on the local customer base, many very small towns are willing to seek outside dollars from visitors. Also, niche development may be even more important in small communities. Small towns sometimes lack market demand to support a large amount of retail activity. What is the most common business type in your small town...restaurants, hair salons, taverns (that was the case in my last job in Wisconsin)? Develop a promotional idea that helps them directly.
6. Main Street executive directors/downtown directors typically come from the community or nearby. Myth: they have less to do. Actually, downtown directors in small towns are usually the only community development staff in the community. They get hit with the kitchen sink.
7. Small towns have a greater interest in volunteering. They have great passion for their community. They are more likely to come from all over the community. Take advantage. Reach the entire community with newsletters, email blasts, etc.
8. Small town newspapers and other forms of media are very influential. Recruit them to your side early.
9. Promotional events in the downtown fill a greater social need than in larger towns. Promotions provide much needed entertainment. But, don't let those events get stale.
10. It is perhaps even more important for small communities to agree on and promote their competitive edge. What makes them special? Is it a cluster of restaurants, a water feature, a nearby ethnic settlement, a Sullivan bank or something else? Capitalize on it with effective messaging to the rest of the world.

## **Ames, continued...**

Getting Iowa State University graduates to stay in Ames has been a top priority of the Ames Chamber of Commerce with its "See Yourself in Ames" internship program. With the booming economy in Ames and rapid business expansion, keeping the talent set of new graduates in Ames has become increasingly important.

"Kinsey's story is a great example of why we work to showcase opportunities to young people interning in Ames and Story County," said Dan Culhane, president and CEO of the Ames Chamber of Commerce. "There are opportunities everywhere, and it is our job to help them be aware that there are meaningful employment and business ownership opportunities right here."

Meyer says the hardest part of owning a business fresh out of college is that it can be a huge anchor. Most college graduates find an entry-level job where they work for a year or two to gain that experience and then move on to something they really enjoy.

"I am extremely lucky that I love what I do, but if I ever just want to pick up and leave, that is not an option," Meyer said. "As a business owner, I work almost every day, if not every day."

Meyer has now lived in Ames for six years, loves the community and sees herself in Ames for many years to come. She volunteers time for the Ames Main Street

Cultural District and is particularly glad that her opportunity came in the historic downtown area.

"We are really lucky to have so many great businesses in a booming downtown area," Meyer said. "I am fortunate to know many of the business owners and to be able to run ideas by them to get opinions. We are all rooting for each other, and I think having that kind of support is great."

Miss Meyer's is located at 432 5th Street in historic downtown Ames, a Main Street Iowa community since 2009.

# Director Spotlight: Steve Frevert — Burlington



Steve Frevert, Main Street executive director for Burlington's Downtown Partners didn't grow up in Iowa but has called Burlington home since 2002, after a journey throughout the Midwest. He and his wife Rhonda greatly enjoyed upper story living in the Lincoln Square neighborhood in Chicago – a theater, music venues, a park, a regional library, shopping and every ethnic restaurant you can imagine were all within an

easy walk. The el station was across the street; it was also the site of German Fest and the weekly farmers market. However, when their twin daughters were born, they needed a place with more room and a more reasonable cost of living. Steve and Rhonda lived in Beloit, Wisconsin (a 2011 Great American Main Street Award winner), and they wanted to get back to living in a small city. Fortunately, Rhonda took a job in Burlington, population 25,663, and they've been there since.

Steve says, "It might sound ridiculous, but I absolutely love my job and consider myself lucky to do what I do. Growing up in the suburbs, I had little exposure to downtowns or historic buildings. However, I lived in a historic house during college, and I caught the bug. It led me to volunteer with a group restoring an 1868 grist mill, chair Beloit's landmarks commission, and later work at the Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio in Oak Park. I'd never heard of Burlington before Rhonda interviewed, but it was love at first sight. The architecture is amazing, and the downtown is quite large for a city its size. Shortly after moving here, I began volunteering for the Downtown Partners Design Committee, and five years later I took this job after being a stay-at-home dad for seven years."

Steve's work history includes managing a record store and later a camera shop, so he experienced firsthand the issues that small, independent retailers face. Coupled with his background in historic preservation, he has a good understanding of downtown. Main Street is his passion and vocation, and it is his home address too.

With his love of old buildings, he came to Main Street through the Design door. He enjoys working on tasks that improve the appearance of downtown, especially facades, signage and streetscape. When he was younger, he had a model railroad layout and his favorite parts were the buildings and scenery. Steve feels that "in a way, now I get to help create a full scale layout! I think that's a big part of why Main Street directors do this – don't we all want to shape our surroundings? It's incredibly satisfying to see a dream become reality."

Burlington has been an Iowa Main Street community since 1986 and while Steve has only been involved for part of these last 29 years of revitalization, the changes during his time are significant. They've greatly increased the number of downtown residences, built a new library, and many landmark buildings have been saved and brought back to life. The appreciation for Burlington's wealth of historic architecture has really grown, though they've still suffered some painful losses. Establishing the railroad quiet zone and getting buildings on the National Register have been key in fostering redevelopment. The façade work resulting from the downtown revitalization grant has really changed people's perceptions. Above all, working hand in hand with the city has been crucial in moving forward.

Some tremendous strides forward set the stage for what is to come, but Steve "wants to see us grow the number of restaurants even more, with lots of sidewalk dining (throw in a few brewpubs and micro-distilleries, too). Strengthening the core of independent retailers will help attract visitors. I love our warehouse district and dream of seeing that area reinvigorated with arts businesses, housing, dining, and shopping, along with some high tech employers. We expect the number of downtown apartments to double in the next several years, which will continue to activate the streets in the evenings. What is my vision? Restored buildings, an attractive riverfront, a great business mix, cultural offerings and a financially-secure Main Street organization respected and supported by the city and the public."

Steve further explains that his love of old buildings spills over into his off time. He chairs Burlington's historic preservation commission and sits on the boards of the Capitol Theater and the Heritage Trust, the local preservation non-profit. Additionally, he coordinates the Preservation Station architectural salvage program for the Heritage Trust. Other than that, he listens to music, plays the guitar, gardens and reads.

Steve was an English major in college, but he never expected he would have a job that involved so much writing! Articles, press releases, grants and social media – "the word count really adds up."

To learn more about downtown Burlington contact Steve at 319.208.0056 or [sfrevert@greaterburlington.com](mailto:sfrevert@greaterburlington.com) or [greaterburlington.com/downtown](http://greaterburlington.com/downtown).

## Can We Talk?

Effective communications strategies that educate stakeholders and create relationships are critical to building the foundation for the longevity and sustainability of any organization. As programs gain credibility and individuals and various stakeholder groups become more aware of the initiative and the benefits they derive from having a more viable business district, they will be more receptive to volunteer and contribute financially to the downtown revitalization non-profit. With increasing dependency upon technology, communication strategies must encompass a multi-faceted approach to reach varied audiences with a variety of messages. A comprehensive approach and consistency in use of graphics, messages and frequency will help establish an identifiable brand over time.

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### ***Can We Talk?, continued...***

When discussing a comprehensive communication plan, consider internal and external audiences. Internal refers to those persons or partners directly involved; External strategies are intended to reach beyond the organization to inform, educate, promote and build a positive image of the organization and its mission. Whether the non-profit is new to this approach (i.e. a start-up organization) or has been around for years, they need to remember they are gradually building this foundation. As the communication plan expands, it's important to analyze the effectiveness of the various approaches being used to reach the internal and external audiences and continue to strategize ways to enhance communication plans over time.

Even the youngest of organizations has the beginnings of a communication strategy, even if they don't recognize how the pieces fit into the bigger picture. They should take time as a group to identify those activities and how they fit within those parameters. Then, they can begin formulating a real plan to deliver messages in a more consistent manner and establish a stronger identity and credibility.

A communications strategy is not rocket science. The plan is based upon common-sense practices and basic methods of outreach. Case in point, a couple of years ago in Charles City while conducting an annual program visit during committee and staff discussions, they were individually mentioning several communication-related activities but no one was discussing them from the standpoint of a being part of a bigger communications plan. During group feedback, participants talked about how there were many components of a comprehensive plan in place. As a result, later that year they submitted a nomination for the annual Main Street Iowa Awards in the "Communication" category – and they won! With permission from Mark Wicks, executive director of Community Revitalization (CR) in Charles City, the following was their nomination.

Can we talk? Communication is a big key in the success of the Community Revitalization program in Charles City. Getting the word out about our mission, activities and events, as well as a need for volunteers and opportunities for community involvement – and doing so utilizing a myriad of methods - is vital. So is the need to listen to the public and what it wants, its needs and concerns. Our increased efforts to do both is what we believe sets Charles City apart in this category.

We make a real effort to initiate, fan and sustain that community conversation through a variety of avenues. In addition to a monthly newsletter with program updates and information, done jointly with the Chamber of Commerce to reach more people, Community Revitalization has introduced a new website and utilizes Facebook with regular updates, teasers of upcoming events and photos of the fun during CR events. A new Community Revitalization banner was also purchased and displayed at our events to make it clear what organization is putting it on.

Community Revitalization enjoys a good relationship with the local newspaper and radio station with frequent articles, features, notices and interviews that promote our activities. Director Mark Wicks contributes at least eight City Notes newspaper columns a year as part of a weekly rotation among city officials and department heads. He also created a weekly Community Corner radio program in partnership with KCHA radio, where not only we can talk about CR-related news and activities, but feature

various guest speakers to showcase their organizations or news of community-wide interest.

CR in 2014 approached the Charles Theatre about utilizing two unused display windows to post program posters. This provides us with promotional access to a nightly audience of theater-goers of all ages and from all walks of life. The electronic message boards at both the theater and a local bank also help promote CR events, while bulletin boards and windows throughout town in high-traffic areas are regularly utilized to post program fliers and posters. We have found that to reach people today, it takes a scattered shotgun approach and not just a concentrated shot or two through the newspaper or radio.

Director Wicks keeps the lines of communication open with City officials through frequent phone calls and visits to City Hall each month, as well as attendance and presentations at City Council meetings and workshops numerous times throughout the year. Even when not making an official request of the council, he makes himself available to answer any CR-related questions or to gather information to take back to his committees and board.

Once a month, Wicks and the CR Board Chair are invited to take part in a Joint Entity Meeting, at which representatives from the City, County, School District, Charles City Area Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce and local YMCA share what their organizations are up to and answer any questions the various entities might have. This is actually one of the most informative meetings each month that we are a part of and fosters intra-agency partnerships.

The Community Revitalization staff provides various presentations throughout the year to different groups and organizations such as the Lion's, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs (six times combined in 2014), as well as to the Senior Center Congregate Meals (three times in 2014), local PEO Chapter and the Colwell Ladies Club. We picked up at least three new CR volunteers as a result of those presentations this past year, as well as several donations towards CR-driven projects. Having the staff, especially the director, keep a very visible and approachable profile in the community has been extremely important in helping to reach different aspects of the population and in helping them understand the role of Community Revitalization.



### ***Can We Talk?, continued...***

In each of the above presentation appearances, we make question-and-answer sessions and gathering public input an automatic part. In late 2013 and early 2014, we took that input gathering even further by hosting a pair of community-wide visioning meetings at the public library. The first, facilitated by two members of the Main Street Iowa state staff, drew 86 residents to share their ideas and priorities. The follow-up session attracted two dozen participants to hear what the Community Revitalization (CR) Board had adopted from that visioning list as its goals and priorities. Those were then shared as well with the general public through newspaper and radio stories. In addition, the results were discussed by all CR committees and e-mailed out to everyone from the first session who provided us their e-mail address. Hard copies were also made available through our office to anyone who requested one.

The impact of our efforts can be found in everything we do ... from attendance to our events, to participation in our programs and projects, to simple, every-day man on the street conversations. The name Community Revitalization is more recognized now than it has ever been. People mention hearing us on the radio, reading about us in the paper, seeing our poster or flier. Sometimes it's from word of mouth ... from someone else's conversation about Community Revitalization. People are talking about us, whether verbally or electronically, they are talking. And we are listening as well. Conversation, after all, must be a two-way street. The goals and priorities adopted and being addressed today by CR's Board and committees have come directly from the public's visioning input.

Community Revitalization even improved its communication with staff in 2014, creating the organization's first comprehensive employee handbook to get down in writing what had only been verbalized in the past and to make sure everyone was on the same page in terms of policies and procedures. A weekly staff meeting between CR, the Chamber and the Charles City Area Development Corp. also shares schedules and keeps all three informed and up-to-date.

Moving forward, Community Revitalization plans to increase its Social Media presence through such vehicles as Twitter, Pinterest and SnapChat. It's all about keeping the discussion going, as often and as many ways as possible.

A non-profit needs to tell its story frequently, consistently and effectively in order to engage people both as volunteers and financial supporters. Do not assume people read or absorb the information every time they are exposed to a message. Periodically evaluate how the organization is communicating – whether they are setting up meetings, updating volunteers, conducting a volunteer recruitment campaign or a committee promoting an upcoming event. What kind of image is being portrayed? Are the most professional and effective approaches being used? Remember, building relationships and increasing the awareness and understanding of the organization is critical to the immediate successes and the longevity of the organization.

And last, but by no means least, do not forget – the most powerful mode of communication is one-on-one conversations. “Can we talk?”



## **Maia Fiala Jessen Joins the Iowa Downtown Resource Center Team as New Main Street Iowa Design Specialist**



The Iowa Downtown Resource Center welcomes Maia Fiala Jessen. Maia filled the design specialist position formerly held by Katelyn Rutledge who accepted a job in the private sector. Maia's work will complement that of Tim Reinders' in providing design services.

Fiala Jessen has a M.S. degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon. She also attended the PNW Preservation Field School and holds a B.F.A. with an emphasis on Interior Design from Iowa State University.

Maia has extensive experience with historic preservation projects in the Pacific Northwest, where she was most recently employed as a Heritage Intern for Oregon's State Historic Preservation Office.

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# Is Your Business

## “Ready for the Holidays”?

As you're reading this the fourth quarter will be upon us. I know you really don't want to think about it but you must prepare. Actually your customers really don't want to think about the approaching Christmas season either. Believe it or not you actually have a great deal of control whether this Christmas is a boon or bust to your business. By starting now there are some things you can do to help you get a jump on your competition and bring shoppers through your doors.

The reason you need to start now is that it takes time for a marketing plan to work and you need to create a plan and work it to have a successful holiday season. Consider items like extended holiday shopping hours or additional customer loyalty programs to kick-start your sales.

Every small business needs to be preparing for the increase in customers this holiday season. Word of mouth is still the most effective marketing tool but be aware of social media opportunities. Social media is exploding and you and your business needs to be ready, willing, and able to meet this challenge. If you're not on Facebook for your business, get there soon. If you don't have the time or ability, find someone who can help you. Social media is a great way to identify new customers. If you are taking care of your existing customers they will bring you additional business. Your average customer will recruit three other customers during the time they do business with you. Someone telling someone else about your business is very powerful. And what makes a customer talk about a business? Usually the way they were treated in that business. Here are some ideas that can get you off on the right foot.

Start internally with you and your employees. I know you think you give good or even great customer service over the course of the year but this is the time to step it up a notch. Call customers by name as soon as you know it (it's on their checks and credit/debit cards) better yet train your sales people to introduce themselves and meet people. Point out new items to customers. Ask when they last shopped with you if you don't recognize them. Make them feel at home in your store. Treat them like honored guests. Impress them. If you want to take it up a notch ask friends and family to secret shop your store. One word of caution through, don't do this unless you're ready to implement some of the suggestions.

Don't allow your employees to simply point customers toward products; physically take them over to the area they are looking for and give them information about the products and related products they might want to consider. I'm not talking about high pressure selling techniques or hovering over your customers. I'm talking about being a great resource and sharing your knowledge to assist them. Providing that little extra and a feeling that you took your time to give them that personal attention they deserve so they will remember their shopping experience positively.

Have your very best people person answering your phone. Make sure they demonstrate a smile in their voice each and every time they answer. Consider positioning a mirror next to each phone. If you can see your smile in the mirror before you answer the phone the customer will hear your smile. This can be where sales and relationships begin for a company. Remember, they took the time to find your number and call you they want something.

Invite your best customers in for an exclusive after hour's party to kick off the holidays. Pick their brains about what they bought last year. What items make the best gifts? Are there products they wish you carried that you don't? What price ranges are they looking for? What is their average Christmas budget? These people shop too and they are the start of your word of mouth campaign.

Create subtle in-store displays of gift items. Don't bring out the ornaments and trees just yet but give your high margin gift ideas a prominent place where they will be noticed. Pay special attention to your window displays. These silent sales people can work for or against you. Make your displays an invitation to step inside. They need to become a shopper magnet to boost your bottom line this holiday season.

Traditionally the Christmas buying season starts the day after Thanksgiving but don't forget about Small Business Saturday, November 28th. This is the day set aside for small businesses to shine. In 2014 shoppers supported their neighborhood businesses like never before. An estimated \$14.3 Billion was spent at small independent businesses on that day last year. Don't ever forget that there are also many people who are done by then. If they see a good gift idea that would be perfect for someone it goes in the subconscious memory to be retrieved at shopping time.

The next part of your success is advertising in the right place, with the right products to the right people. You need to know how to reach your best customers. Rather than wasting money by throwing your money all over the place and hoping some of it sticks, define your best customer and seek out the appropriate medium to reach them. Consider joining forces with other stores in your district on shared advertising resulting in more bang for your buck. During October and the first part of November these will not be Christmas related ads. You are planting shopping ideas and hints that will be harvested down the road. Of course, some will buy immediately, some will clip the ad and shop later, and still others will be me... the 3:00 p.m. December 24th shopper.

The last suggestion has to do with customers that enter your store and purchase a gift certificate/gift card. Think about this for just a moment. A customer is in your store and they give you their money. This purchase has no immediate impact on your inventory and they are giving it away to someone else with their personal recommendation to come back to your business and redeem it. Make sure they do not leave without something in their hands. Give them a special gift or some expression of appreciation for being a quality customer and recommending your store to someone else. Confirm in their minds that you are the type of business they want to send their friends and relatives.

Always remember, if you aren't preparing for the best holiday season ever, you might find yourself caught in the middle of the worst one ever.

Two thoughts to leave you with...

**“There is Power in Simple”**

and

**“Negative people have a problem for every solution”**

## New Main Street Design Specialist, continued...

In this capacity, she collaborated with business owners and Main Street staff to produce façade improvement options, completed reconnaissance level surveys and individually researched and prepared a National Register nomination for the Madras Army Air Field North Hangar. Fiala Jessen also served as a preservation consultant for Historic Preservation Northwest, and newspaper essayist / collation assistant for the University of Oregon Libraries. Maia also has abilities and expertise in the field of interior design, marketing and advertising.

The world of Main Street is a perfect fit for Fiala Jessen. When asked why she chose to go into design/Main Street, she responded, "I've always been fascinated by downtowns and commercial architecture. After getting my undergraduate degree in Interior Design and working for a few years, I knew I wanted to combine my design interests and went to grad school to study historic preservation. During my two years at the University of Oregon, I became involved with the Oregon Main Street program (part of the Oregon SHPO). I loved being able to work with business owners and community members across the state while focusing on downtown design issues and am excited to continue this with Main Street Iowa!"

It's been a busy fall for Maia. In September, she married Tyler Jessen, an Iowa native and architect in Des Moines. As a self-proclaimed "preservation nerd", she and her husband were married in an old copper mining town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The ceremony was held in a church built in 1869, and the reception took place at a 150-year old lighthouse.

She was also fortunate to receive a travel fellowship that provided the opportunity to travel to France in September to look at cultural heritage practices. The two-week trip focused on three parts of France (Paris, the Loire Valley and Normandy) and included looking at post-World War II reconstruction, modern building infill, and approaches to interpreting historic structures, sites and monuments (and of course eating lots of croissants!).

That same month, Maia and her husband purchased a 100-year old bungalow in Des Moines, and recently moved into their home. They will spend most of their free time fixing it up. They're also looking forward to exploring Des Moines and the rest of Iowa after living out of the area for the last eight years, and cheering on the Cyclones!

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