

## Portland downtown becoming a boom town

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By Holly Setter

Parking spots are hard to come by in downtown Portland as people flock to the local businesses. DDA and Main Street manager Patrick Reagan said that Portland's downtown is growing while others are becoming ghost towns littered with "For Rent" signs.

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By HOLLY SETTER  
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### PORTLAND -

With unemployment soaring and economic concerns making headlines on a nearly daily basis, the city of Portland is standing in a category all its own.

Their downtown is growing.

"The downtown is doing really well and it shouldn't be," said Downtown Development Authority and Portland Main Street Manager Patrick Reagan. "Most downtowns are fighting to keep the businesses they already have."

Reagan said that at a recent Michigan Main Street meeting, he was one of the last to update the other managers.

"They were all going around the table, saying the same thing," he said. "And then I said we were growing. You could have heard their jaws drop."

He said of the nearly 50 storefronts in downtown Portland, only two are currently vacant.

According to Reagan, that is all possible because of the mindset of Portland business owners.

"Portland is a town that has people who own things and are really proud of their community," Reagan

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said. "And they understand that no one is an island. As the downtown businesses work together to draw people in, everyone benefits."

Wanda Urie, owner of Distinctive Occasions, credits the Main Street program for that collaboration between businesses.

"I think the Main Street program has done a lot," she said. "We see the big picture better now than in the past."

She said that when she opened up 15 years ago, she felt alone in the string of downtown businesses. Today, she believes new business owners are welcomed and given the support they need to feel like a part of the business community.

"We're all links in the chain and as we work together we all benefit," Urie said. "New businesses are taken into the fold. We work from the assumption that they will want to participate (in downtown activities)."

The unique position that Portland finds itself in now is setting the city up for more attention on a state level.

Reagan said that the Michigan Main Street program will "have to start looking at Portland" as an ideal application of the program.

Right now, Reagan said, the program usually holds up Oldtown as the standard bearer.

"Visitors judge a community based on it's downtown," Reagan said. "You don't hear people talking about what a great Walmart or Meijers a town has. But if the downtown is busy, they'll talk about how the town's doing well. And they'll want to come back to check out why."

For more information on Portland's Main Street program, go to [www.portlandmainstreet.org](http://www.portlandmainstreet.org).

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