

Michigan Main Street draws dozens to Portland



By HOLLY SETTER

Michigan Main Street’s economic restructuring specialist, Dace Koeningsknecht, tells a crowd of about 80 people about some of the perks to being part of the program. Portland hosted the training for the Michigan Main Street on Thursday, which was the largest one yet.

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By HOLLY SETTER
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PORTLAND -

Downtown Development Agency directors, members and other interested parties from across the state piled into the second floor conference room at Portland City Hall on Thursday.

Portland played host to associate level training for the statewide group, using their success in the program as an example of how Main Street could work in their communities.

“The day has gone really well,” said Portland Main Street Manager and DDA Director Patrick Reagan. “It’s great that we have had all of these people come to see what we’ve done with the Main Street program.”

Participants began their day at 8:30 a.m. with sessions on the design element of the Main Street program, and finished discussing the economic restructuring around 4:30 p.m. They were not locked in the conference room all day, however — they also had some time to peruse the streets of downtown Portland.

“I think Portland is a great town,” said Vincent Szymbenki, a representative for the Hamtramck DDA.

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"This was my first trip to the city, and earlier I took a walk down the Riverwalk. That is a first class job." Szybanski said the training sessions themselves were informative and helpful, though he wasn't sure how well the Main Street program would work for his community.

Portland was selected to host the associate training, which is mandatory for communities that are interested in becoming involved in the Main Street program, as a result of the city's "master" status. Communities achieve master status after they have been in the Main Street program for five years. Laura Krizov, manager of Michigan Main Street Stars Division, said Portland was a great example of what Main Street can do for a community for a number of reasons.

"Just look at all the great things they've done in the last six years," she said. "The promotions that they've put together and their economic revitalization committee has a lot of strong projects on the horizon. They're good at reaching out to their existing businesses and I know they're interested in updating their market analysis."

The improvements Main Street has brought to Portland were evident to the out-of-towners.

"What really stood out to me was the contrast between the new and the still undeveloped properties downtown," said Piet Lindhout, design consultant for the city of Brighton. "You can see the progress that they're making, and in a down economy, that's great to see."

City council member and Main Street board chair Joel VanSlambrouck said the attention given to Portland's downtown was definitely part of the appeal to hosting the training.

"Having them come here is definitely a good thing," he said. "They can see the improvements we've made and get the local perspective on how the program works for us."

He added that having roughly 80 people downtown for the day was a perk for local businesses, too, as participants were on their own for lunch and had an hour to peruse the downtown area.

"The sun even came out, so people wanted to walk around," he said. "We were able to network and let them know what we have in Portland."

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