

## Mainstreet makeover: Portland businesses receive design grants



By Holly Setter

Distinctive Occassions and Glass Box Guy sit side by side on Kent Street, and both have taken advantage of the design services offered by Portland Main Street in the past.

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By Holly Setter

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PORTLAND, Mich. -

Three building owners will get the chance to see what their properties in downtown Portland could be, thanks to a [Portland Main Street](#) grant.

Portland Main Street Manager and DDA Director Patrick Reagan recently announced that Bernie Pelc, John Wooden and Ed Bishop have been awarded the design services grant.

Pelc owns the building that houses PCMI West, located at 136 and 140 Kent Street.

Wooden owns 123 and 125 Kent Street, currently occupied by Around the Block Quilt Shop and Donna Marie's Studio of Dance.

The law offices of Duff, Chadwick and Associates recently moved into the building owned by Ed Bishop, located at 108 and 110 Kent Street.

With the grant, the property owners will get to sit down with Kelly Larson, Main Street architect for the State Historic Preservation Office, to discuss what could be done to improve the facade of their buildings.

Each will receive a schematic drawing of the potential improvements, a preliminary cost estimate and paint samples.

"Each year as a Main Street community, we get three design services grants to award," Reagan said. "The services are normally worth between \$2,500 and \$5,000, depending on the building, but they are free to us and free to the businesses.

"The program is a great opportunity to show the owner how good their building can be; to fire up their imagination."

Wooden, who applied for services to spruce up 123 and 125 Kent Street, said it was the historic preservation aspect of the grant that really attracted him.

"We resurfaced our building in 1993 when we purchased it, and at the time it was one of the best looking buildings downtown," Wooden said. "It's looking kind of sad and tired right now, and what we did before was a modernization, not trying to make the building historically correct. We want to restore that and make Portland a nicer place to shop."

Reagan said modernization like what Wooden did is not uncommon.

"In the 1960s, '70s and even into the '80s, people were using vinyl 'slipcovers' to update their buildings," he said. "But those don't reflect the character of the building and they often look out of place. Downtown Portland is on the National Register of Historic Places, so focusing on historic preservation is important."

The design services winners will meet with Larson sometime in mid-March to begin their planning sessions.

Reagan said one of the key advantages to utilizing the services is showing the owners just how affordable the facade improvements can be.

"We want them to say 'Wow, that's how my building can look? And that's all it will cost?'" he said. He also said that [Portland Main Street](#) has awarded nine of the 15 design services grants allotted to it, and buildings downtown already are showing off the results.

"A lot of work has been done in Portland by the DDA, by the city," he said. "You can see that."

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