



March 19, 2010

## Reagan: 'Main Street' gives business a voice

*By Patrick Reagan*

Two weeks ago, I wrote in this column how the Main Street Four Point Approach has proven successful at the national, state, and local levels when it is embraced by the community. At each level, business creation, job creation, and reinvestment have been extremely successful.

And while all of that is great, what impact does the Main Street program hold for the local business owner?

The answer is this: the Main Street program gives business owners a voice in the revitalization process and opportunities to take advantage of low-cost community promotions, as well as trainings and information that can directly help business owners succeed.

The Main Street program is an active approach that directly involves district businesses in all aspects of downtown revitalization. In earlier incarnations of downtown revitalization, the local government would work with developers and would work to revitalize the downtown with little participation from business owners.

For example, "urban renewal" gave local units of government the funding and the ability to potentially demolish downtown historic buildings so that developers could build new structures that - they theorized - would lead to new reinvestment in the downtown area.

The existing business owners were rarely consulted, and the city and developers would construct as they saw fit. In the end, urban renewal projects ended with mostly negative results to the downtown areas - urban blight continued, and the community's identity was forever changed.

With the Main Street approach, business owners are not only actively involved in revitalization efforts, they are crucial to the program's mission and eventual success.

These individuals work to hold various promotions, festivals, and training sessions offered within their community, all with the intent of bringing people back downtown and to help keep it a vital, vibrant center of our community.

But what does a Main Street business get for their participation? Plenty.

Because of the efforts of Main Street volunteers and the cooperative nature of the Main Street Approach, business owners in the district are given opportunities to promote their business, often at a much reduced rate.

For example, during Portland's annual HolidayFest, businesses can promote cooperatively in newspaper ads, flyers, and on our Web site and Facebook pages for a considerably lower cost than promoting on their own.

Another great example is the annual Portland Pay Day promotion that takes place every summer. Businesses are given almost constant promotion for a relatively low participation fee. In 2009, over \$57,000 was collectively spent at participating businesses through this promotion, thus keeping money in Portland.

The Portland Main Street program also provides various promotional opportunities that are zero cost to participating businesses. For example, our recent monthly newsletters -- which are sent out with City utility bills to over 2,200 homes and businesses -- have featured highlights of various Main Street district businesses, including their contact information, customer favorites, and products or services that they are known for throughout the community.

In 2009, the Economic Revitalization Committee brought in a series of speakers from the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center. Topics of this series focused on business marketing, finding financing for businesses, and business-plan creation - each of which is critical to developing a successful business. This committee looks to bring in even more speakers in 2010 to help businesses.

All of these services and programs have one fundamental thing in common: they depend on engaged business owners, building owners, and the greater community to be successful. The Main Street Approach is the epitome of the phrase, "A hand up, not a hand out" with regard to the downtown business community. We encourage you get involved and to volunteer in your downtown today.

The goal of the Portland Main Street program is to actively revitalize Portland's vibrant, charming, and unique downtown into a gathering place-one that uses broad-based community support to (1) provide opportunities to entrepreneurs; (2) sustain a strong economic foundation for the region; and (3) safeguard history, tradition, and a sense of community for residents and visitors.

For more information on how you can be part of this mission, visit the Portland Main Street Web site at [www.portlandmainstreet.org](http://www.portlandmainstreet.org) or call the Portland Main Street offices at (517) 647-5027.

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