

In this Issue

- Committees, 1
- Downtown Happenings, 1
- What's New, 1
- Meet Your Neighbors, 2-3
- Portland Named GAMSA Finalist, 3
- HolidayFest Winners, 4
- Branding Portland Main Street, 4

Contact Us

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Committees

- **Design:** Kathy Parsons
- **Economic Revitalization:** Diane Smith
- **Organization & Finance:** Julie Clement
- **Promotions & Marketing:** Nikki Sunstrum
- **Board Chair,** Joel VanSlambrouck

GALA CHRISTMAS
CONCERT
DECEMBER 10

On the Street

Are you ready for the holidays? This is a special time of year . . . don't forget to make time for yourself! Here's what's happening around downtown Portland this month:

- ▷ Dec 10, 7pm Gala Christmas Concert, Portland Playhouse
- ▷ Dec 12, 4-6pm, Community Dinner, Congregational Church
- ▷ Dec 19, 4-6pm, Community Dinner, Congregational Church
- ▷ Dec 21, First day of Hanukkah
- ▷ Dec 22, Winter begins
- ▷ Dec 25, Christmas Day
- ▷ Dec 26, 4-6pm, Community Dinner, Congregational Church
- ▷ Jan 2, 2012, 4-6pm, Community Dinner, Congregational Church

Downtown Happenings

- ▷ Portland Winter Run & Portland Plunge (MLK weekend in January)
- ▷ Feb 11, PCAC Winter Ball & Musician and Artist of the Year Awards

Would you like your downtown event listed here? Contact Main Street Manager Patrick Reagan at 517 647 5027 or ddamainstreet@portland-michigan.org.

What's New?

Great American Main Street Finalists: In November, Portland Main Street received incredible news: we've been selected as a finalist for the Great American Main Street Awards! In the coming weeks, we'll be gathering photos, videos, and letters of support to show that we deserve this prestigious award. For more information, see page 3.

Free Gala Christmas Concert: The public is invited to attend the third Annual Gala Christmas Concert to be held at the Portland Playhouse, 231 Maple Street, Portland, at

7:00pm, on Saturday, December 10, 2011. The Portland Orchestral Society will be hosting the event in coordination with the Portland Civic Players. The Ionia -Maple Valley Community Band will, once again, provide a full evening of traditional holiday music. The doors open at 6:30, and admission is free with voluntary donations accepted (to be shared between the Orchestral Society and the Portland Civic Players). Please contact Mike Judd for additional information: (517) 285-0972

Public Art Continues: The Portland Community Arts Council's Adirondack Chair project, "Sit a Spell," was a great success, and the PCAC has plans well underway for the 2012 projects. They'll be building more chairs and adding canoe-shaped shelves to the mix. If you'd like to help build or would like to paint a chair or shelf unit, call Rush Clement, 517 647-6545.

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Meet Your Neighbors: Ron & Mary Beth Evans

This month's "Meet your Neighbor" is more appropriately labeled "Meet your Neighbors" as we are highlighting two Portland residents – Ron and Mary Beth Evans. Ron and Mary Beth grew up in Portland, opened a business here, moved around the United States, and ultimately came back to Portland. Their story is truly one that can be called "full circle."

Ron, 73, and Mary Beth, 70, are graduates of Portland High School. Mary Beth's father, Joe Meekhof, started the J&J Store at 125 Kent Street – which now holds the Around the Block Quilt Shop and Donna Marie's Studio of Dance – in 1946. The J&J Store was an independent "five-and-dime" that sold a little bit of everything.

In 1961, Mary Beth's father offered Ron – then a student at Olivet College – a job at the store with some practical advice: "He offered me the job by saying, 'Look, if you don't like working here, you go back to school. If I don't like you, you go back to school.'" Ron would not only ultimately like the job but would end up *buying* the store in 1972.

After ten years of business ownership, Ron and Mary Beth sold their downtown Portland store in 1982 and moved to Maui, Hawaii, to be closer to two of their children, who had moved to Hawaii years earlier. "We really had nothing lined up when we moved there," said Mary Beth. "We were sure that having lots of retail experience from the mainland, they would all be lining up to

hire us – but they weren't." So instead of waiting for an employment opportunity, Mary Beth purchased an apparel store near the beach, and successfully operated it for 14 years. During those years, Ron was employed as a purchasing agent for a mechanical contractor and later as a retail store manager for True Value Hardware.

After fourteen years in Hawaii – and a twelve-year stop in California – Ron and Mary Beth were called back to Portland for a funeral in 2008. This visit spurred them to move back to their hometown. "We saw all of the change that had taken place downtown – the Boardwalk, the new facades on the buildings, and the business growth, and we absolutely loved what we saw," said Mary Beth. "We truly believe that God wanted us back in Portland – this is the town we grew up in, the town we loved, and the town where our hearts always were."



After moving back to Portland, the Evanses became involved with the programs at the Portland Area Service Group (PASG) located at 144 Kent Street. Ron's mother had been a founding member of the

organization, and he felt compelled to give back to the community. Ron was voted onto the PASG's Board of Directors in 2009.

"A lot of people call it 'the senior center,' but that isn't really correct," Ron said. "All of our programs are offered to everyone in the community – you don't have to be a certain age to take part." Nor do you have to live directly in Portland to take advantage of the programs. "We receive donations from the area, not just Portland – we welcome everyone from the surrounding townships as well as residents of the City to participate," Ron said.

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310 Kent St.
Portland, MI 48875
517-647-4177

Meet Your Neighbor, continued

The number of programs that the PASG offers is staggering. "We host trips to the casino; we hold Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon meetings; we have a food bank and commodities program; we hold hearing and blood-pressure checking programs; we have a flu-shot program; and we partner with the Ionia County Commission on Aging to host meals during the week for a small donation," Mary said. The PASG also has a community medical closet where community members can obtain wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches when the need arises. All of these services are open to anyone in the area – not just senior citizens. For more information on what the PASG offers community residents, please call Lonese Conroe at (517) 647-4004.

Ron and Mary Beth are also active in the First Congregational Church of Portland. Mary Beth is a Deacon and Ron is a trustee.

"My father always taught me to support our town – we shop in downtown Portland, our doctors are here, and we don't leave very often because it is all right here," Ron said. "We believe that this town is the best place to live, work, and to raise children," added Mary Beth. "In short, we love Portland and couldn't be happier here!"

We would like to thank Ron and Mary Beth for sharing their story. We encourage you to stop on in at the PASG to participate in their programs, which help make a better downtown Portland.

- Submitted by Patrick Reagan, Portland
Main Street Manager & DDA Director

Portland Black Belt Academy Inc.

220 Kent Street
Portland, MI
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Portland Selected as Finalist in Great American Main Street Awards

In November, Portland Main Street learned that we're one of 10 finalists for the Great American Main Street Awards. Ultimately, only five Main Street communities in the United States will be chosen.

Here's what the award is about: "Each year, the National Trust Main Street Center recognizes exceptional Main Street communities whose successes serve as a model for comprehensive commercial district revitalization. These award-winning communities have demonstrated proven success in using the Main Street Four Point Approach® to create economic vitality, a unique sense of place, and a strong commitment to the community by all stakeholders." <<<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/awards/>>>

During December and early January, Portland Main Street volunteers and Manager Patrick Reagan will be collecting data on our Main Street program, collecting photos and letters of support, and creating a video to show the National Trust what we're all about.

Have you watched the downtown's transformation during the past seven years? Do you like what you see? Drop a letter in the mail to Patrick Reagan, and we'll try to include it in our finalist package. Let us know how you think the Main Street program has helped downtown Portland. You can email letters to ddamainstreet@portland-michigan.org, or drop them in the mail, addressed to Patrick Reagan, 259 Kent Street, Portland MI 48875.

Main Street volunteers send their thanks to Patrick for all of his work in compiling our application. Keep your fingers crossed, Portland!

Downtown Portland, MI JERRY'S Restaurant & Pub

Live entertainment
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Watch for Menu Specials
128 Kent Street
Portland, MI 48875
(517) 647-4431

HolidayFest Winners

HolidayFest on the Grand was a tremendous success this year. This downtown event has been a joint effort between Portland Main Street and the Portland Community Arts Council for ten years, and it's become a holiday tradition for Portland residents and visitors.

It wouldn't be HolidayFest without a little friendly competition. This year's Window Decorating Contest winners were as follows:

Judges' Choice

Grand Prize: Rush Hour Studios

2d Place: Cheeky Monkeys

3d Place: Law Offices of Duff, Chadwick & Associates

People's Choice

Grand Prize: Cheeky Monkeys

2d Place: Law Offices of Duff, Chadwick & Associates

3d Place: Hoort Law

After the tree lighting, festival attendees moved into Jerry's Restaurant for the 10th annual Chili Challenge. If you missed this event, you missed some great chili. Winners were as follows:

Judges' Choice

Grand Prize: Cheeky Monkeys' White Chicken Chili

2d Place: Scott Smith

3d Place: Julie Clement

Scott Smith and Chris Teachout tied for the **People's Choice Award**.

Thanks to all of the people who participated and helped. (It's not too early to start planning your own entries for HolidayFest 2012!)

Branding Portland Main Street

Recently, Portland was selected to receive the services of branding expert Cindy Williams. This service from the Michigan Main Street Center is a

benefit of being a Master Level Main Street community. The services are part of the package of services available for selected Main Street communities from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which administers the Main Street Program nationwide.

The branding project requires several volunteers to meet weekly with Williams for approximately six months in an effort to "brand" Portland Main Street. On November 30, Williams held a public visioning session to hear from community members on what they think of when they think of downtown Portland. Williams explained that she starts with a number of exercises, including brainstorming to come up with 50 words to describe the downtown and 50 words to describe Portland's Main Street program.

At the end of the project, Portland Main Street will receive a new logo, art work, tag lines, and hundreds of other tools that will be used to market the downtown and its businesses. Do you have 50 words . . . or even a single word? Leave a message on our Facebook page! We'll keep you posted on our progress.

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Mon-Thu, 2-8pm; Fri, 2-5pm; Sat, 10am-4pm; other hours by appt.

See www.raffaelesmarketplace.com or www.rushhourstudios.com for schedules