

Connecticut Main Street Center **2003 Awards for Excellence in Downtown Revitalization**

Best Private / Public Partnership:

The Rockville Downtown Association – *Overnight Parking Pilot Program*

Just a few steps away from “Main Street”, the surrounding neighborhoods may have problems unique to themselves. Unsolved, they may pose barriers to re-growing a healthy downtown. Such is the case for Downtown Rockville. The Six Street Committee Area Block Watch extended its interest beyond traditional block watch security issues, in the residential ring around the downtown, to address the impact the town-wide ban on overnight parking posed for the neighborhood. Enlisting the support and partnership of the Rockville Downtown Association (RDA), they brought the issue to the Town of Vernon for consideration. Together, the three pleaded their case before the Vernon Traffic Authority, which then established a task force that included the Chief of Police, the Town Administrator and the Director of Public Works.

Armed with survey results, gathered by the Six Street Block Watch, the task force identified three streets where overnight parking is designated areas would be effective and safe yet still provide unobstructed access for emergency vehicles. With the full support of the Block Watch, and the RDA, who testified for the proposal, the Town Council passed a resolution amending the Town’s parking regulations and specific criteria were adopted related to on-street overnight parking.

The RDA took the lead in designing information flyers and the Town of Vernon covered the cost of all marketing materials and necessary signage. The Police Department will keep track of user-ship and, at the end of the year, all partnering agencies will review the situation.

This creative solution to a small but important civic problem brought together a variety of partners who, working for a common goal, produced a worthy program and strengthened the relationships of those working for the revitalization of historic downtown Rockville. ***Congratulations RDA & the Six Street Block Watch!***

Most Creative Fundraising Effort:

Portland P.R.I.D.E. – *P.R.I.D.E. Auction 2002*

In the words of Portland P.R.I.D.E.: “an auction is not a particularly ‘creative’ event, but we have turned an ordinary fundraiser into a community event – and therein lies the creativity”.

PRIDE holds their annual auction in early October at St. Clements Castle, a former estate on a bluff overlooking the beautiful Connecticut River, and a place that most people do not have an opportunity to visit. In fact, St. Clements donates the room and provides the food at cost. In all respects, the event has the look and feel of a professional auction and is considered by the community to be a formal night out. Major

donors and town officials are recognized and the variety of auction items is wide enough so that every attendee feels there is something to bid on.

A sell-out every year, the 2002 event produced net income of \$13,596.83 for the revitalization of downtown Portland. Strong as both a fundraiser and a community builder, the PRIDE Auction is supported by many businesses and volunteers and has succeeded in spreading the word about Portland's Main Street initiative throughout the community. ***Congratulations Portland PRIDE!***

Best Public Improvement Project:

First Town Downtown – Route 159 / Palisado Avenue Railroad Bridge Beautification

An important gateway that connects an historic residential district with the traditional downtown, the project site was recommended by First Town Downtown (FTDT) Design Committee member Roberta Ball, a professional landscape designer, who donated her expertise and services to the project.

This decades-old eyesore area around the Amtrak bridge had a significant amount of debris, old tires, railroad ties and garbage. It was a physically challenging site because of slope and size. After the FTDT Board approved the project, partners were identified: the Rotary Club who rents the use of the bridge from Amtrak, the Town of Windsor's support was needed, specifically the Public Works staff, who felt that this was a worthy project that would have a significant public health benefit, and the Town Manager who facilitated a matching grant program, available annually to civic organizations to beautify targeted areas.

Roberta researched plant species that would be appropriate for an urban environment, survive being watered only by mother nature, and assist with erosion control. She also secured the assistance of a local horticultural distribution center, which discounted all products and donated 5 trees. A Call-for-Volunteers was placed in area newspapers, which yielded terrific results! Town Staff, Rotary Club members, downtown business and property owners, and FTDT board and committee volunteers joined Town Public Works staff and Town Police.

A relatively inexpensive project that makes a big visual impact, the Route 159 / Palisade Avenue Beautification Project has corrected a decades-long eyesore, addressed erosion and public safety issues and improved an important gateway to Downtown Windsor, while educating the public about Windsor's Main Street program and leveraging the power of volunteers. ***Congratulations First Town Downtown!***

Best Design or Business Incentive Program:

Upper Albany Main Street – Upper Albany Micro Business Incubator

Meetings of the Upper Albany Main Street Economic Restructuring Committee revealed that the commercial district was comprised of no less than 135 micro businesses that

were in need of various services but that the owners were unable to leave their businesses to attend training sessions. It became apparent that the delivery of training and technology needs had to be given on-site, at the businesses.

Born of a collaboration between the City of Hartford, the Upper Albany Business Network, the Upper Albany Main Street Program, Metro Hartford Alliance, and the University of Hartford, the Micro Business Incubator program was designed to determine business needs and appropriate delivery systems in order to upgrade micro businesses in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, and make them viable and more successful.

The Upper Albany Micro Business Incubator Program has become the delivery system to support and nurture these fragile and vital enterprises that make up the commercial district. The ten participating businesses receive customized training from 30 University of Hartford - Barney School of Business students in financial literacy, standard business practices and computer applications. The ultimate goal is to create new jobs and attract new customers for the businesses. This Micro Business Incubator program is a unique and proactive example of reinvigorating urban environments as its best. It has made great connections between the business community, the University and the Upper Albany Main Street program. ***Congratulations Upper Albany Main Street and University of Hartford!***

****An Award of Merit in this category will be given to:***

The Rockville Downtown Association – The RDA Façade Improvement Grant Program

The RDA Façade Improvement Grant program is designed to improve the visual attributes of downtown buildings, improve quality of business and downtown image, and to provide façade and sign improvements that are sensitive to placement on historic buildings or within an historic district. The program promotes the use of the free design and technical services offered via the RDA's Design Committee, RDA staff and in-house library.

Business owners participating give this program high marks AND have become increasingly active within the Main Street organization. The Design Committee's program outreach volunteers are becoming effective advocates for this program and have been learning how to work effectively with merchants. Additionally, the installation of new signs within the downtown has served as a visual reinforcement that improvements are being made in the downtown.

At a recent Planning & Zoning Commission meeting, it was publicly stated that: "The RDA has set such a fine example of working with downtown businesses on what good signage and design should look like...the rest of the Town should follow suit". ***Congratulations RDA Design Committee!***

Premier Special Event:

First Town Downtown – *Discover Windsor Trails Day*

When Windsor volunteer Marty McMahon rode his bike in the Hartford Parks Bike Tour, an idea was born. What if Windsor had its own bike tour? It could start in Windsor Center, take people through great neighborhoods, past historic homes and structures, into Northwest Park, through Windsor's corporate and industrial park, and finish on the banks of the Farmington River where everyone could gather together, rest, listen to music and enjoy a meal at Bart's Hotdog Stand. It would be family friendly...there could be activities for seniors too!

Planning for the Discover Windsor Bike Tour (as it was known then) began with identifying the many interesting and unique historical places and neighborhoods that should be included, leading riders through the entire town geographically. The goal was to create a 10-mile and a 25-mile loop. After many car trips through town (driving slowly down streets at 15mph, getting strange looks from residents and even a traffic stop by a Windsor Police Officer), the tours were established. The route was put together on a "Turn Sheet" for riders to follow, which also included descriptions of important sites along the route.

Since its inception in 1998, the tour has attracted over 1,500 bikers – 50% from outside Windsor! And additional activities have enhanced the event and brought even more participants (as well as a new name: The Discover Windsor Trails Day): Northwest Park has sponsored and organized canoeing and kayaking on the Farmington River; the Town's Senior Center sponsors a walk along the Windsor Center River Trail, The Annual Checkers Challenge, sponsored by FTDT and the Windsor Public Library takes place on the green; the Youth Services Bureau provides teenage volunteers throughout the day who do face painting, crafts and general assistance and the Windsor High School Jazz Ensemble performs, to the delight of the crowd. Additionally, Windsor's Healthy People has added their annual Kids Safety Fair, which attracts families for a variety of safety-oriented activities and the Windsor Police, Ambulance and Fire Departments volunteer for the day, introducing themselves and providing riders and other event-goers with safety information.

A perfect signature event for the downtown and the town as a whole, the Discover Windsor Trails Day connects fun with history and provides participants with a leisurely way to get an intimate knowledge of the community. ***Congratulations First Town Downtown!***

Merchant Service Award:

from The Rockville Downtown Association – *Dan Waskiewicz, Crystal Blueprint & Stationery*

In the words of the Awards Jury: "Dan Waskiewicz just seems to be everywhere!" Consider the following:

- ◆ Dan spearheaded the very creation of the RDA and remains an active leader in the organization as the First President, Board Member and current Economic

Restructuring Chair. Dan also represents the RDA in the community by attending monthly Town Economic Development Commission meetings as well as miscellaneous Town Commission meetings

- ◆ Dan has attended numerous Connecticut Main Street Center training sessions. Just weeks ago, he rearranged his store layout after a visit with National Main Street Center Consultant, Scott Day
- ◆ Dan has been a major contributor to the RDA membership program since its inception. Additionally, he donates approximately \$1,000 per year in office supplies and copying services and gives the RDA discounts and allows his business to act as a clearinghouse of information on the activities surrounding the revitalization of downtown Rockville.
- ◆ After a ten-year hiatus, Dan restored Thursday evening shopping hours AND has persuaded other merchants to do likewise. Only two hold-outs remain. Dan vows: "I'll keep at them until 'they get it'."
- ◆ Dan has been in business in his current location for 28 years. In 2002, Dan began some serious physical improvements at his shop: uncovering original transom windows, installing new awnings, adding exterior planters and has now begun restoration of the original tin ceiling in the front window wells.
- ◆ Understanding the need to diversify the Downtown retail environment, Dan accepted the proposal of an active RDA member to lease an adjacent storefront to allow him to open a niche ice cream shop. He then assisted the new entrepreneur with physical improvements to the interior space.

Is it any wonder that Dan Waskiewicz, of Crystal Blueprint & Stationery in Downtown Rockville, has been selected to receive the Connecticut Main Street Merchant Service Award. ***Congratulations, Dan!***

Connecticut Main Street Manager of the Year:

Katie Breen, Executive Director of First Town Downtown

Katie Breen has just completed her third year as the Executive Director of Windsor's First Town Downtown. During her tenure, the profile of the program has been raised, many new and existing businesses have sought her advice and FTDT's support, the working relationship with the Town has become stronger and Board members are more committed to and better educated about the Main Street program. Katie has spent many hours volunteering at a variety of events in Windsor. Her commitment to Windsor Center was underscored this year when she and her partners completed a two-year renovation on the Center's old firehouse into a new business.

A former Windsor "Shad Derby Queen", Katie is adept at wearing a variety of hats and has developed a strong, working relationship with Town staff and elected officials. FTDT and the Town Office of Economic Development are working together on a comprehensive Market Analysis for Downtown, as they market a vacant building so that its developers design a space that will enhance the goals of FTDT and the Town. A recent partnership with the Rotary Club will help to complete the beautification project near the railroad bridge. This project has the overwhelming support of the Mayor and the Public Works Department.

Katie is proactive in taking advantage of all training opportunities offered by Connecticut and National Main Street Centers. She has served as a mentor to new managers and it is a testament to Katie's hard work and enthusiasm for the Main Street program that many FTDT board and committee members have attended CMSC seminars, workshops and training sessions, in addition to their FTDT volunteer requirements.

In addition to Katie's professional responsibilities, her love of Windsor is evident through her own volunteer efforts at other events in town, such as SummerWind and Revolutionary Windsor. First Town Downtown is fortunate to have a Program Manager who is enthusiastic, well educated, action oriented and community minded.

Outstanding Main Street Volunteers of the Year:

This award honors one special individual that has invested considerable personal time and energy to each local Main Street program. This may be any member of the community not currently serving on the Board of Directors, including a merchant, businessperson, or other outstanding citizen.

Outstanding Main Street Board Members of the Year:

Due to the enormous commitment of Main Street Board Members, **one board member from each local Main Street Community is recognized.** This individual must have served at least one year as a Board Member, and committed much time and energy to Downtown revitalization.