

Main Street Matters

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REFLECTION ON DOWNTOWN

“Downtown is a Mirror of the Community.” Whatever your downtown experience is, it’s a reflection of the other community investment successes or failures. It can convey whether the citizens and leaders are health-conscious, possess community pride, or value music and the arts. It can convey whether they welcome outsiders, respect historic preservation, or appreciate family activities. Each downtown sends its own crystal-clear message regarding what it values. If you want to see what it says, just look into that mirror.



Kilgore



Levelland



Seguin

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



By Alysia A. Cook, PCED, IOM,
Owner of Opportunity Strategies, LLC

Editor's Note: Alysia A. Cook is owner of Opportunity Strategies LLC, a community and economic development consulting firm based in Austin. She serves on the board of directors of the Texas Downtown Association. You can catch her speaking at the Main Street NOW Conference in Seattle in March.

It's surprising that in 2019, some people still believe that economic development is only manufacturing. Over the years, economic development has truly taken on a more holistic definition. It really includes two pillars: community development and business development. First, a community must undertake the challenging task of making their home a place where people want to come. So, that includes success in areas such as leadership development, workforce development, and the constructing of social and physical infrastructures.

Then once the foundation of those things is laid, the community can really begin to work on the business development side of things which is attracting new investment to town, retaining the jobs that are there, helping locals start new businesses, and creating an appealing setting for tourism to flourish.

Let's take a moment to reflect on how to recognize economic development when we see it. Economic development is anything that creates, retains, or reinvests wealth in a community.

Interestingly, downtowns are where so much of this economic development happens. When a new business opens in downtown, it's an indicator that a business owner found it worthy of their effort to start a venture there. When a downtown property owner decides to renovate or upgrade their facilities, it's an indicator that they found it worthy of their financial reinvestment. When a

resident or tourist chooses that downtown to shop, eat, or do other business, it's an indicator that they found it worthy of their time investment, which results in business retention. With all this investment of money, labor, and time, it is undeniable proof that downtown development is creating, retaining, and reinvesting wealth, and therefore is economic development.

It's no wonder why prospective investors locating manufacturing facilities or distribution centers always ask to see a community's downtown before making their final decision; they know that it's the heartbeat of a community. What downtown looks like and feels like is a barometer of so many elements of that elusive "sense of place." As a board member of the Texas Downtown Association, we say "Downtown is a Mirror of the Community." Whatever your downtown experience is, it's a reflection of the other community investment successes or failures. It can convey whether the citizens and leaders are health-conscious, possess community pride, or value music and the arts. It can convey whether they welcome outsiders, respect historic preservation, or appreciate family activities. Each downtown sends its own crystal-clear message regarding what it values. If you want to see what it says, just look into that mirror.



One factor that seems to be a difference between downtowns that are thriving and those that are struggling is business retention efforts. Business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts aren't just for the economic development professional; they are for the downtown development professional, too.

So what goes into creating a meaningful Downtown BRE? Every Main Street manager or Downtown Director needs to have a visitation schedule that includes every downtown business. They need to visit each merchant, restaurateur, and property owner asking a set of questions that helps them determine which services and tools to offer to help that business. They then bring to bear the resources or connections

that the business needs. They create a file for each business that contains meeting notes, areas of concern or interest, follow up ideas, and the next visitation date.

Main Street managers who want to go the extra mile also create Google Alerts for their businesses, so they receive an email when that business is mentioned on the internet. It's an opportunity to congratulate downtown businesses when they are in the news or receive an award. It's an easy way to keep a pulse on what the world is saying about your downtown.

It's always interesting what you will find on these Downtown BRE visits. Some businesses want access to local, state, or federal programs or elected officials. Others want opportunities to meet and network with their neighbors more. Some may be struggling with financial issues and need banking, accounting, or financial planning help. Others may be interested in succession planning for their business' future. Some may need human resources advice, zoning explanations, permit assistance, merchandising help, soft skills for employees...the list goes on and on. The point is that Main Street managers need to build these relationships before they can identify how best to help their downtown small businesses.

Just like every other relationship in life, the relationships that are established with downtown business owners and property owners are built upon two-way communication channels and genuine interest in them. When Main Street managers work to foster relationships with business owners, the business owners begin to see them as their very own solutions broker. You become their trusted advisor, advocate, and resource.

When the Main Street manager becomes the go-to person in downtown, everyone knows he or she is the person who can get something done, answer a question, or connect them to someone they want to meet. This type of resource provider and community connector is priceless and helps create the most thriving economic development centers.

Take a good honest look at your downtown. What more can be done in 2019 to cultivate a stronger economic development engine there? What relationships need to be created or nurtured? Do you have a robust Downtown BRE? What can you do to create, retain, or reinvest more wealth in your downtown?

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

DORIS NEWMAN,
MINEOLA MAIN STREET MANAGER



1. What is your hometown?

Mineola. I'm an Ohio transplant.

2. What Main Street city do you represent and how long have you been there?

I became Mineola Main Street Manager/Historic Preservation Officer on July 9, 2018.

3. What is your favorite spot in your downtown and why?

There are so many places I love in our downtown, but my favorite is the Select Theater during the holidays. Stepping out of that historic theater to the brick-paved Johnson Street with the Christmas decorations sparkling is just magical.

4. What do you enjoy the most about the Main Street program?

So far, the thing I've found I enjoy most about Main Street is the people. Those include our volunteers, who are like lightning in a jar, and the members of the public who tell us they appreciate what we're doing. Plus, I'm enjoying getting to know my fellow Main Street folks.

5. What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Life's short, eat dessert first!

(cont. on next page)

3 STEPS TO BUILDING A SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT CALENDAR



By Sheila Scarborough and Leslie McLellan, *Tourism Currents*

Editor's Note: Tourism Currents offers online and in-person training in social media and digital destination marketing for tourism and hospitality. Launched in September 2009, the team is led by Sheila Scarborough and Leslie McLellan. Tourism Currents will lead a session on social media content planning at the national 2019 Main Street Now Conference in Seattle.

Do you ever stare at your computer and wonder what to post on social media on any given day? You're certainly not alone!

You hear all the time that instead of winging it, Main Street small businesses and programs need to have some sort of social media planning calendar. Maybe it's even on your "Really Important To Do" list, but for whatever reason, you have never put one together.

This post will get your first calendar up and running in no time.

However, these tips assume that your downtowners ALREADY KNOW who their customers and target markets are, and where they spend time online, including which social media platforms. You've got to have a handle on these two things before you dive in, otherwise you're talking to the wrong people in the wrong places.

Here are the steps to take:

1. Create Different Types of Content for Different People

Some folks are ready to buy your stuff. They already know about you. They trust your products or services, they've already comparison-shopped, and they are confident that what you offer will solve a problem or fill a need.

6. What's your favorite tip for someone in our economic development/downtown revitalization industry?

One thing I've learned in my short time with Main Street is the importance of a business plan to prospective owners.

7. If you could plan a vacation to anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

Anywhere to see the Northern Lights.

8. Who has been the most influential person in your career?

Mercy Rushing, hands down!

9. Who would you switch places with for a day?

I really can't think of anyone who I'd want to switch places with—unless it's a seasoned Main Street manager.

10. What's your favorite inspirational quote?

One of my favorite quotes is "Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you."

11. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

First and foremost, my favorite thing to do when I have time is be with my family. Otherwise, it's always fun to rummage through the many antique and collectible stores in Mineola. When the two of those are combined, it's even better!

Other folks are at the opposite end of the customer journey—they've never even heard of you.

You need a variety of social media content that is compelling to people at different stages of making buying decisions. No one wants to only see "Buy my stuff" posts.

It all boils down to four types of posts for your Main Street:

- **Awareness/Engagement** – Help people find you and learn about you. Examples include a "new in the store" photo on Instagram, or a short behind-the-scenes Facebook Live video about your business. Keep your social media connections aware of and engaged with you.
- **Lead generation** – Turn awareness/engagement into a deeper relationship with those who would be a good fit as customers. The point of these

posts is to get people to your website, and if possible, onto your email or SMS/text notifications list. These types of posts must include a call to action and often use wording like, “Did you know we offer ____?” Ask the Expert/Q&A posts work well, too, followed by “call us” or a link to a specific product page on your website.

- **Sales** – You are straight-out asking for the sale. Examples include sharing customer testimonials, time-sensitive offers, and holiday marketing of deals and specials.
- **Nurturing** (part of customer service) – Pay attention to the people who already love what you offer. For example, a customer checks into your business on Facebook and says nice things—you thank them publicly on the post AND send them a coupon code for a future visit.

Here are social media content examples from a Uvalde pecan retailer:

An Example: Pecan Retailer

- **Awareness/engagement** – “sneak peek” video of baby pecan nuts on the tree. Awww!
- **Lead generation** – “Want to be the first to know about sales AND get our family pecan recipes? Sign up for our email newsletter.”
- **Sales** – “5 lb bags of unshelled Wichitas on sale now. We ship anywhere. Click to buy.”
- **Nurturing current fans** – A visitor posts a nice Instagram photo, you DM them with thanks, plus coupon code.

@TourismCurrents

BONUS TIP – write your posts in a way that gets your readers to interact. Ask leading questions... “Which is your favorite?” “Who wants to do ____?” and “Who has tried this?”

2. Build a “Content Basket” of Social Media Post Ideas

It’s a lot easier to plug content into a calendar if you have a nice stack of ideas to draw from; what we call a “content basket.”

Keep a list by your computer or on it (paper or electronic) to remind you of different posts you can create that will support your marketing goals on each social platform.

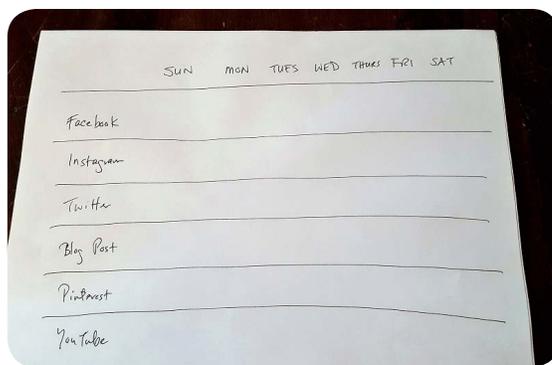
For each goal, have a list of content ideas such as photos, plain text posts, video, live video, audio including podcasts, eBooks, tip sheets, checklists, infographics, how-to guides, contests/giveaways, best types of customer content to share, or coupons/ discounts.

Remember Part 1 above—include different types of content. For example, your list might have a mix of video ideas: short and snappy ones for customer awareness/engagement, plus longer ones that go deeper into the benefits of a product or service and are focused on helping you with lead generation and sales.

3. Build out a Calendar Draft. Start with Next Week.

This is what we call the “plug and chug” phase. You’re taking that basket or list of content ideas and starting to figure out which posts are going to go up on which days.

The simplest way to do this is to write down the days of the week across the top of a piece of paper and where you need to post on social media down the side, then fill in the blanks, like this:



If you like to use Excel, then you can make a spreadsheet that looks something like this:

December 16 - 22, 2018							Type of Post
	SUNDAY 12/16	MONDAY 12/17	TUESDAY 12/18	WEDNESDAY 12/19	THURSDAY 12/20	FRIDAY 12/21	SATURDAY 12/22
Facebook	highlight a partner or special	local history - holiday related	Phone Like Buddy	Ask a question	Last minute gift ideas	Winter Solstice	Want to know more about X - go to website
Instagram	Holiday highlights		How to explore X		Ask a question		Last minute gift ideas
Email		Hours/specials for week between Christmas and New Year's					
Other			Twitter - reason for visiting		Twitter - Did you know		

Your calendar content will be driven by the seasons and holidays, too.

It doesn't matter how you lay out your calendar, or if you do it in a weekly or monthly format. What matters is that you have a plan that supports your goals. Know *what* you are going to post, and *when*. Know *why* you are posting it. That is the path to Main Street social success.

CONGRATS, BETH, WOOHOO!



THC Executive Director Mark Wolfe and THC Commissioner Pete Peterson recently awarded Center City Executive Director Beth Duke the Anice B. Read Award of Excellence in Community Heritage Development, at the Texas Historical Commission's Preservation Awards Ceremony during the 2019 Real Places Conference in Austin. The Anice B. Read Award is named in honor of Anice Read, former Texas Historical Commission member and founder of the Texas Main Street Program. This award recognizes an individual or organization for exemplary work in community revitalization, preservation planning and protection, or heritage tourism which significantly advances the impacts of historic preservation in Texas.

NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK



*By Joy Miller, SPHR, City of Austin
Small Business Program Manager*

Save the date:

National Small Business Week 2019!

May 5 – 11, 2019



While most of us probably only heard of National Small Business Week in recent years, it has been recognized since the Small Business Administration was formed in 1953 and has received a presidential proclamation every year since President Kennedy signed the first one in 1963. The recognition serves to underscore the big impacts small businesses have on our local economies. It's no surprise that the Lone Star state, whose motto is "wide open for business," ranks third in Top States for Small Business Ownership, bested only by California and Florida.

This year, National Small Business Week will be celebrated May 5–11. Fortunately for Austin, the small business resource providers (we call ourselves the Small Business Ecosystem) have coalesced around making sure the small business climate in the capital city is conducive to achieving success year-round. But during National Small Business Week, we really try to pull out all the stops to offer free or low-cost training classes; host relevant and interesting panel discussions featuring successful small business owners; and provide access to practitioners who can help small businesses advance. Our goal is for business owners to look forward to this week each year as a great opportunity to invest in themselves by taking advantage of training and coaching events held at various times and locations all around the city.

A few examples of ways Austin has honored this celebratory week are:

- Scheduling a Mayoral Proclamation that publicly recognizes scheduled activities and contributing organizations. It's a good way to honor the economic and cultural contributions of small businesses, and it helps spread the word about what's planned.
- Offering for free some popular small business classes that normally carry a charge. Your local SCORE chapter most likely has classes that you can underwrite and help promote. If you don't have a training organization, it is very likely that you can find local practitioners willing to teach an hour-long class, sometimes for free. Topics that resonate with new and existing small businesses are effective marketing, current social media trends, human resources practices, and how to find funding. In the name of full disclosure: Austin may re-examine its policy of offering classes and events for free because surveys indicate that "free" may equate to "not having value," i.e., empty seats at a fully subscribed event.
- Educating on finding capital. We have created a moderated panel to discuss their funding requirements and how to access funds. We've included a mix of traditional lenders, a CDFI, a crowdfunding expert, and an angel investor, led by a strong moderator who understands small business needs to guide a 90-minute discussion. We have also hosted funding "trade shows" where lenders of all types get out of their offices and come to the customer. It has been very successful over the years.
- Establishing one-on-one opportunities with business coaches and lawyers in sort of a "speed dating" style. This has been very popular and easy to coordinate in public libraries to provide access to people who otherwise might not venture downtown. Fostering a strong partnership with your public libraries is a great way to ensure easy access to subscription business databases and to host information sessions. Usually, public libraries have plenty of free parking, community rooms large enough to accommodate fairly large crowds, and an inviting feel for citizens of the communities they are located in. Austin is blessed with a great library support system and most libraries are

keenly aware of their communities' changing needs and want to partner.

- Hosting live interviews with owners of popular and growing businesses that many are likely to know and respect. This gives other business owners a needed pep talk that fuels a renewed energy and helps to increase their confidence that they can achieve success as well.
- Hosting a networking event for "newbies" to learn from experienced owners and/or for peer to peer networking can be very rewarding. Often, knowing that someone has walked in your shoes is worth more than class content. We've kicked off networking events with an expert teaching "how to" tips, followed by an opportunity to use what they just learned.
- If you have time and the means, I strongly encourage you to survey your business owners to gauge the topics of interest and best time of day and parts of town to offer sessions. Not only will it inform what you can offer during National Small Business Week, it can guide your services throughout the year. And at the close of every session, I suggest you gather participant feedback on the program and collect future topics of interest. This is also a simple way to grade how well your organization is addressing needs.



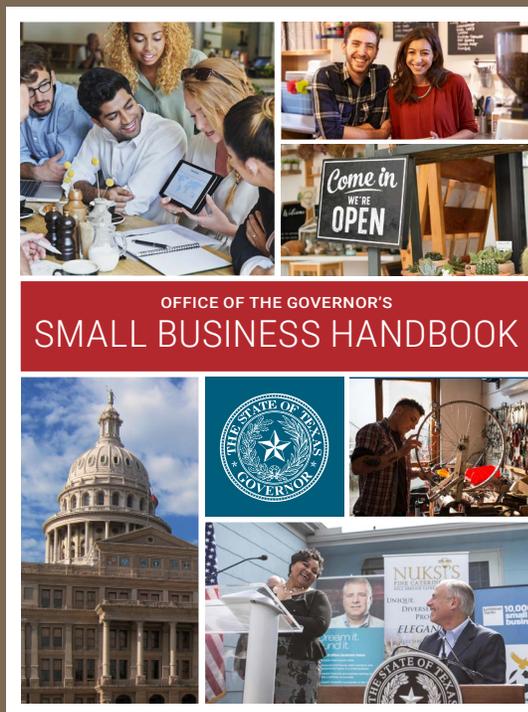
The 2018 Small Business Conference was held in Austin.

GOVERNOR'S SMALL BUSINESS INITIATIVES IN TEXAS



By Roxana Newton, Small Business Advocate, Economic Development and Tourism, Office of Governor Greg Abbott

The Office of the Governor recently published two useful resources online for small businesses in Texas: *The Small Business Handbook* and the *Texas Business Licenses & Permits Guide*. The Small Business Handbook provides in-depth information on starting a business in Texas, including information on business formation, employee requirements, taxes, and business financing. Also included is information on programs and resources available to entrepreneurs and small business owners to help them start, grow, and scale their business.



The Business Licenses & Permits Guide provides a comprehensive list of licenses and permits required to operate a business and the respective agency contact information.

Image Source: https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/business/2019_Governors_Small_Business_Online_Handbook.pdf

In addition to these resources, the Office of the Governor is proud to host annual Small Business Forums and Workshops to provide timely, relevant, and actionable information to the business community and the opportunity to network with local, state, and federal resource partners. In 2019, we will be hosting events in six Main Street communities: **Amarillo, Bastrop, Nacogdoches, Paris, Plainview, and Weatherford**. To stay updated on all upcoming events, please visit the Events Calendar or sign up for the Office of Small Business emails at <https://gov.texas.gov/business/page/small-business-programs>.

- Lunchtime has been a good time for Austin small business owners to attend events, but your community may be different. If you can include even light refreshments, they are very appreciative. Also, handouts are both valued and desired. Our surveys show that owners do not mind paying for classes if they receive reference materials. And if you have volunteer practitioners, printing the handouts is a good way to support their gift.
- Recently we have participated in a large-scale event that offered training and information in both English and Spanish. While we are not fully able to operate a bilingual program, we do have a Spanish-speaking coach on staff to handle general needs.

We are excited that other Texas communities and downtowns may recognize National Small Business Week and are happy to talk to interested parties one-on-one. The City of Austin's Small Business Program number is 512-974-7800. Program information can be found at www.smallbizaustin.org. Please feel welcome to contact our offices for additional information at any time.

MAIN STREET Now CONFERENCE

SEATTLE, WA
MARCH 25-27
2019

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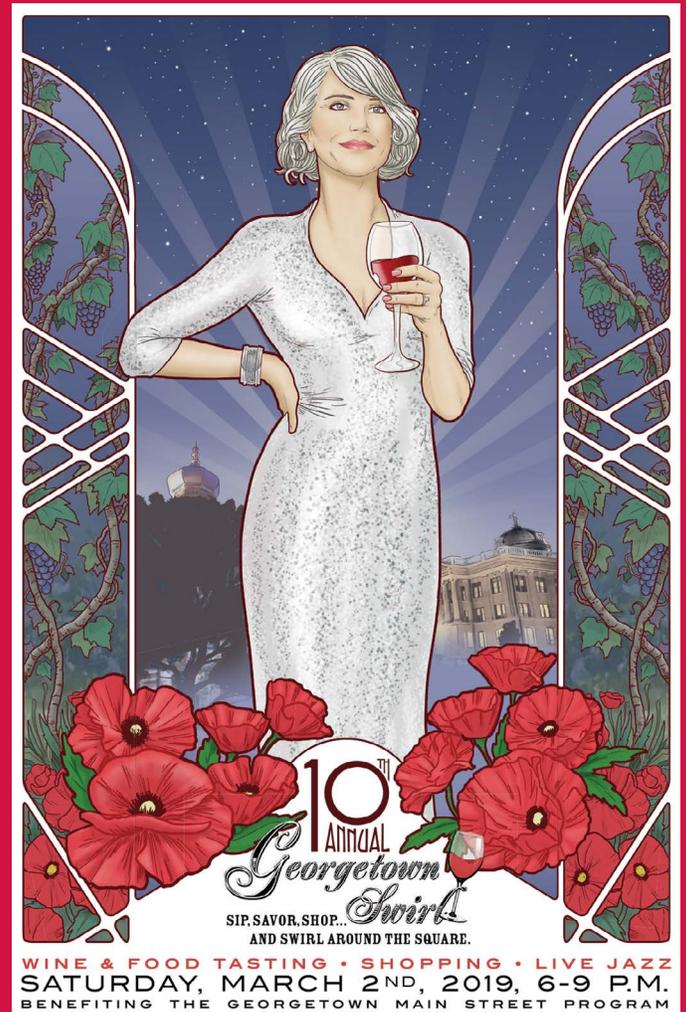
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE GEORGETOWN SWIRL



By Trisha Tallman, Georgetown Main Street Board Chair and Kim McAuliffe, Downtown Development Manager

The Georgetown Swirl celebrates its 10th Anniversary on March 2, 2019. This event has grown over the years to become a signature event in downtown and has been replicated in many Main Street cities across Texas. It is used as a tool by our economic development team when recruiting prospective businesses to Georgetown and is also part of the overall economic development strategic plan for the department. In 2012, The Georgetown Swirl won the Texas Downtown Association President's Award for Best Promotional Event, bringing further promotion and awareness of this special event.

The concept was developed in 2008 by the Main Street Advisory Board and then—Main Street Manager Shelly Hargrove. The Swirl showcases local restaurants and Texas wineries inside local retailers, creating a fun atmosphere for guests. The Swirl gives event-goers a “taste” of all there is in Georgetown by providing an opportunity for exploring local businesses they may not have otherwise known were in downtown Georgetown. While guests are encouraged to shop as they “swirl,” we often find that they come back later to savor all the delights available on the square and beyond. With the support of many community businesses, the event has been the main fundraising effort for the Main Street Façade and Sign Grant program. This program has awarded over \$469,000 in grant funding to 80 business or property owners since 2004, helping to restore and improve many of the facades of historic buildings around downtown.



The Main Street Advisory Board has worked to add unique aspects to the event, making it even more attractive to guests from out of the area. A special VIP element was added, to allow a limited number of ticket holder's admission to a private pre-party, where they are served special appetizers and wine before they join the general admission ticket holders as they “swirl” around the Square. An early bird discount ticket rate is offered throughout the month of December, and this year, ticket sales have trended ahead of all past years! We anticipate a sellout very soon! In addition to different types of ticket offerings, every year we take the opportunity to recognize local Main Street champions with the designation as “Honorary Event Chairs.” There are many supporters of Georgetown Main Street and it's always a treat to nominate and select those who have dedicated considerable time and energy to our program.

The selection of the annual “Swirl girl” is another fun component of the event. Each year, a different “Swirl girl” is designed by the same wonderful artist who has collaborated with Main Street on this element since the event started. The artwork showcases the diversity of our guests, and for the 10th Anniversary, there is a delightful silver-haired “Swirl girl” as a nod to our “vintage” guests. Collectible art posters are available, and the artist attends the event to sign posters, a highly desirable item to buy as an event memento.

As this event has spread to other Texas Main Street cities, our team has been able to visit and experience the way each city has made it their own. It is so great to see people embracing the revival of Main Street and supporting small businesses, made possible by this one-of-a-kind event. Cheers to another 10 years of The Georgetown Swirl!