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State leaders, local officials to celebrate downtown successes during Wisconsin Main Street Days July 7-10

Events across the state will recognize best in class downtown revitalization projects, business successes and welcome new program members.

MADISON, WI. July 7, 2020 – Local officials and business representatives will host events recognizing the critical role downtown business districts play in Wisconsin’s economy as part of Wisconsin Main Street Days between Tuesday, July 7, and Friday, July 10.

In lieu of an in-person awards ceremony bringing people together in one place around the state, smaller groups will gather for award presentations and photo opportunities (and in some cases virtual events) in 29 communities around the state to celebrate the success of the Wisconsin Main Street and Connect Communities programs, which provide technical support and training for organizations dedicated to downtown or commercial corridor revitalization activities. Events will include award presentations, new program announcements and local proclamations in honor of Main Street Days. Additional recognitions will be made over social media using the hashtag #WIMainSt.

“Main Street Day recognizes the importance of downtowns in all our cities and towns, as well as the Main Street and Connect Communities programs that help them grow,” said Governor Tony Evers, who issued a proclamation announcing Main Street Days. “It reflects our commitment to all our Wisconsin communities, which is why we’ll be honoring them throughout the state this week.”

A list of communities and projects receiving awards is included in this release, along with a brief paragraph detailing the unique local success stories being recognized at the event.

As part of the Wisconsin Main Street Days celebration, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) announced the acceptance of Downtown Ashland into the Wisconsin Main Street Program, joining 34 existing Main Street districts. This designation will provide Ashland’s downtown district with additional technical resources and assistance to further their revitalization goals.

The Wisconsin Main Street Program, which launched in 1987 and is overseen by WEDC, provides support and training for organizations dedicated to downtown revitalization efforts. Since the program’s inception, Wisconsin Main Street communities have created more than 2,800 net new businesses and over 15,000 net new jobs. They also have generated more than \$2.1 billion in public and private investment since then and are renovating more than 250 buildings per year.

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Additionally, four new members have been accepted into the Connect Communities Program, an initiative designed to provide training and networking for communities or organizations working on revitalization efforts. The new participants include Blair, Black River Falls, Juneau and Sun Prairie.

With these additions, there are now a total of 78 Connect Communities. The Connect Communities program offers options for communities looking to provide additional resources to support local commercial district businesses and property owners, as well as individuals interested in networking with other professionals. Since the Connect Communities Program launched in 2013, participating communities have created more than 430 net new businesses and over 1,600 net new jobs and spurred \$2.7 billion in public and private investment.

“The Connect Communities Program aids communities in leveraging the unique assets of their downtowns and commercial districts by providing them with access to resources, training and networking opportunities with other downtown organizations,” explained WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. “This program, along with the Wisconsin Main Street Program, has helped propel new businesses and revitalize downtowns, and we are looking forward to the same type of success in our newest participating Main Street and Connect Communities.”

As another initiative to support the health of Wisconsin’s downtowns, this year WEDC helped create the Main Street Marketplace, a website that allows online shoppers to patronize their favorite Main Street community businesses, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 230 businesses, selling everything from food and clothing to books and crafts, can be found on mainstreetwi.com.

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About the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) leads economic development efforts for the state by advancing and maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, communities and people to thrive in a globally competitive environment. Working with more than 600 regional and local partners, WEDC develops and delivers solutions representative of a highly responsive and coordinated economic development network. Visit wedc.org or follow WEDC on Twitter @WEDCNews to learn more.

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2020 Main Street Days

Participating Community Achievements and Recognitions

As with most events this year, this year's Main Street Days are unique. Held around the state in dozens of small ceremonies, this year's celebration welcomes the new Main Street and Connect Communities participants as well as recognizing those organizations, businesses and individuals that achieved award-winning results in 2019. These success stories would traditionally have been lauded at our annual awards dinner, which could not be held due to COVID-19. Nevertheless, we want to shine a light on their achievements and highlight all that is possible on Main Street.

Ashland:

A successful (and award-winning) Connect Communities participant since 2015, Ashland has been accepted as a Wisconsin Main Street community, bringing the total number of participating communities to 35. With this designation comes access to Wisconsin Main Street's resources and assistance, including business startup, retention and recruitment expertise; façade design renderings; business and event marketing; and more.

In addition, Ashland's downtown beautification project is recognized as the Best Large Connect Community Revitalization Project. Downtown Ashland's public spaces have undergone a transformation in recent years. By fostering partnerships with the Workforce Investment Board, Northwest Concentrated Employment Program, Bayfield County Jail and the Ashland School system, the Ashland Chamber has been able to facilitate trades program projects on behalf of the downtown district. The partnerships have supported development of a renovated park featuring a pergola and Edison lighting, an information kiosk and public streetscape amenities. Coming in 2020 will be a new Santa House/Ice Cream Stand. Students in participating programs gain relevant work experience as well as appreciation for the local community. Through this innovative partnership, the downtown benefits from well-crafted improvements acquired at a reduced cost, as the chamber covers the cost of materials and grant funds pay for instructor time.

Beloit:

Winning the award for the best interior renovation investing \$50,000 or more, the 310 State Street building recently underwent a full transformation. Jeff and Sue Johnson purchased the property in 2017 and invested more than \$300,000 on a full renovation of the property. On the first floor, a somewhat dated retail space was transformed into a modern and welcoming downtown storefront for Medical Grade Aesthetics. Upstairs the couple created a welcoming home for themselves with a complete transformation from a dated and deteriorating space into a modern loft. The renovation included opening back up the large windows to take advantage of downtown views. The project also included an addition to the rear of the property to

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accommodate a garage, as well as drainage and foundation repair work to address other structural concerns.

Blair:

One of four new Connect Communities this year, Blair is joining the program under the leadership of the Blair Chamber of Commerce. Over the past five years, the community has taken several steps to focus on revitalizing the historic downtown as part of their community development initiatives, including the creation of a city-wide comprehensive plan, downtown TIF district and formation of a city Economic Development Sub-Committee. The organization hopes to leverage its involvement in the Connect Communities Program to help create an effective and achievable strategic plan and provide structure to support the planning, management and implementation of priority projects they hope will help create a vibrant and welcoming business district that is attractive to entrepreneurs and small businesses and welcoming for residents.

Black River Falls:

Rejoining the Connect Communities Program after a few years away is the Black River Falls Downtown Association. The organization had withdrawn from the program following a change in board membership. After a few years of focus primarily on festivals and events, the district is hoping to refocus its efforts on a more holistic approach to revitalization. Current plans include beautification initiatives, a new wayfinding signage system and efforts to improve the overall look of the district. Next steps will be expanded emphasis on business development and property renovations, for which the community hopes to utilize technical assistance and best practices as part of the Connect Communities Program.

Chippewa Falls:

Winning the award for the most impactful public improvement project completed in a Main Street district by a government or nonprofit entity, the Chippewa Falls Riverfront Park project has been named the Best Public Improvement Project of 2019 by WEDC and Wisconsin Main Street.

Downtown Chippewa Falls' location along the banks of Duncan Creek and the Chippewa River historically had been the site of major lumbering and fur trading operations. Due to flooding for generations, it was largely neglected and became an eyesore. The scope of this project was to completely reimagine the entrance to downtown in three phases. After a property acquisition process that took years to complete, development began, including a new office building, chamber facility and hotel. The next step was to integrate environmentally friendly parking and transportation routes into the floodplain areas. The final phase required input from the entire community to make the park as active as possible, with fountains, an amphitheater, pavilions, trails, fishing piers and more. Main Street hosts many events in the park, and it was completed just in time for the city's 150th anniversary. Levels of public and private investment in the project have been extraordinary. The Business Improvement District value increased by nearly \$26 million compared to its value prior to the development taking place. Today as you crest the bridge, this site is no longer an eyesore, but instead a grand entrance to our great historic downtown.

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De Pere:

De Pere received three awards this year. The first award honors the best exterior façade renovation completed for under \$12,000. Nominations were judged based on design quality and sensitivity to the historic architecture. Wisconsin Main Street and WEDC award the Best Façade Rehabilitation of 2019 to 268 Main Avenue.

When Saks Holdings purchased this building in De Pere, the upper façade was still intact, but the lower portion was covered with fake stone held up with wire mesh, and a metal canopy covered the transom area. Aside from determining that it was once a post office, they were unable to figure out what the original storefront looked like. Working with a local architect and engineer, they made some educated guesses and moved forward. They found that the structure was sound and that storefront windows were still intact under the stone. They were able to piece together and replicate the original window and door layout while still making it ADA accessible. They attracted a tenant that had outgrown its space across the street, and now utilizes the large display windows for their merchandising. The completed façade work cost just under \$25,000.

The second award honors the best rehab, renovation, or development on the upper floors of a district building, awarded this year to Falk Flats.

The Falk Flats are two 700-square-foot loft units developed on the second floor of a historic 1888 building in downtown De Pere. The apartments had not been updated for more than 60 years, and this project required completely gutting the spaces and updating plumbing and electrical before restoring the original hardwood floors and adding upgraded fixtures including stainless steel appliances, quartz countertops and custom fixtures. When the project was complete, more than \$70,000 was invested in each unit over a three-month buildout, and rental rates for the new units more than doubled from pre-renovation levels as tenants flocked to the centrally located spaces within walking distance of downtown De Pere amenities.

De Pere's final award honors the local Main Street Program and public entity that have demonstrated the highest degree of cooperation in downtown revitalization efforts. The winner of this award is the Public Art Program.

The City of De Pere and Definitely De Pere have worked together and demonstrated a strong commitment to championing the arts as integral to downtown revitalization and economic vitality. The Public Art Program includes The Art Alley, Sculpture Walk De Pere, artistic benches and the Mulva Cultural Center. The Art Alley is an installation that merges 2D and 3D mediums into one cohesive art experience. Sculpture Walk De Pere is an ongoing seasonal public art exhibit. In 2019, 10 sculptures were on display through October along the main corridors. And the development of the \$55 million Mulva Cultural Center will offer world-class traveling exhibits typically seen in major metropolitan areas in the U.S. The City of De Pere allocated \$100,000 in Excess Stadium Tax funds to provide seed money. An additional \$150,000 was allocated for streetscape projects. Both programs are administered by Definitely De Pere in partnership with the City of De Pere.

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Eagle River:

Often an entity, individual or group of individuals demonstrate unique accomplishments worth celebrating that do not fall into one of Wisconsin Main Street's established categories. 2019 was one such year. Wisconsin Main Street staff and WEDC would like to recognize the Board of Directors for Eagle River Revitalization Program, including Susie Erickson, Dan Anderson, Jessica Bartolotti, Cassandra Reid, Dan Dumas, Shirley Egan, Ron Kressin and Gail Newitt.

While it is not uncommon for boards of directors to take the reins during a time of transition, the engagement of this board over the past year was nothing short of extraordinary. When Executive Director Martha Geiseman was forced to take a leave of absence, board members stepped up, not only maintaining essential duties but attending workshops, participating in Chatter discussions, completing monthly reports and pursuing an ambitious work plan. Despite unforeseen financial challenges and unpredictable weather, the board successfully shepherded the organization through a challenging period, and Wisconsin Main Street staff would like to recognize their tireless efforts over the past year and let you all know how touched they were by it all. And they were overwhelmed with hope when they got to see Martha at a Main Street workshop in early March. They thank all of you for inspiring them.

Fond du Lac:

Downtown Fond du Lac this year received several awards. The first, in recognition of the best exterior façade renovation completed for over \$25,000, goes to Sam Meyer and 18 Hands Ale Haus.

In 2018, Sam Meyer purchased a building originally constructed as a livery stable in 1880. It had been so altered over the years that it had no historic character left—just a modern stucco box with small windows. Meyer began working with Wisconsin Main Street to come up with a design to convert it to a *biergarten*. He researched historic photos as well as examples of similar livery stables of the era. After a few design schemes, they settled on a final plan. While the original building was brick, it had been covered by stucco for so long that the best option was to leave it as stucco but add more detail and reconfigure the entrances and window openings. The existing parking lot next to the building was converted into a patio with a gas fire pit, wood pergola and outdoor bar. New operable doors open up to the patio when the weather is nice. The upper floor was converted to two loft apartments. This \$450,000 renovation was partially funded from Downtown Fond du Lac's Building Improvement Grant, a WEDC Community Development Investment Grant and tax increment financing.

The second award for Fond du Lac, for the business or building owner that has completed an outstanding renovation to the interior of their building for over \$50,000, went to the Hotel Retlaw.

In 2016, Legendary Hotels purchased the historic Hotel Retlaw at auction. Three years and \$26 million later, the downtown hotel has been restored to its former glory, offering 121 luxury guest rooms along with a full complement of event spaces and amenities including a café, wine bar, salon, spa and rooftop patio. The project was a community effort, utilizing a Community Development Investment Grant from WEDC and tax increment financing from the city, along with historic tax credits and PACE funding. The project has not only provided quality lodging

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options for downtown Fond du Lac visitors, but it has also spurred renovation of several nearby properties, further contributing to the vitality of downtown.

Green Bay:

Green Bay's On Broadway District this year is recognized for their Wine and Beer Walks as the Best Retail Event.

The Broadway District Wine and Beer Walks were organized with the goal of getting people to visit businesses and come back to the Broadway District regularly. Each of the participating businesses offered a wine or beer sample to ticketholders. The events included the Winter Wine and Beer Walk, the April Broadway Beer Hop and the Wildflower Wine Walk. There were over 2,500 tickets sold between the events in 2019. Businesses had a \$50 buy-in and were asked to provide a server to pour. On Broadway provided each business with the licensing, beverages and cups. In 2019 they added food samples, and between the five event dates, the total expense was around \$33,000 with a net income of \$56,738.

Hillsboro:

Hillsboro Brewing Company is this year's Small Connect Community Best Revitalization Project award winner.

The \$2 million project to renovate a long-vacant, 28,000-square-foot historic milk plant into a brewery and event space was, in the words of City Administrator Adam Sonntag, "the best rural development story in the country." Kim and Snapper Verbsky started Hillsboro Brewing in a downtown property eight years ago, first operating as a brewpub with offsite brew facilities. Rapid business growth from locals and tourists alike pointed to the need for more space, and the Carnation Milk Plant seemed like the ideal opportunity. The project took more than two years to complete, but ultimately was able to accommodate brewing operations for all 24 Hillsboro brews, an expanded restaurant with four times more seating, and a small event space. The upstairs 500-seat event venue, with its industrial vibe, attracted more than two dozen weddings in the first year it was open. The business has grown to employ more than 50 local residents, and future plans call for development of an adjacent 60-room hotel to allow more visitors to experience the venue and enjoy the amenities offered in the region.

Juneau:

Juneau is joining the Connect Communities Program for fiscal year 2021 under the leadership of the City of Juneau. The community became interested in the program after undertaking initiatives within the Blue Zones Project. The committee is focused on initiatives including placemaking and community development, and determined that participation in the Connect Communities group would provide access to additional tools and resources to help them achieve their goals for making downtown Juneau a thriving and livable place for residents and visitors. Specifically, the group hopes to incentivize new housing and retail development downtown, activate downtown's sidewalks, and improve the aesthetics of downtown—both natural features and the built environment.

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Kenosha:

Kenosha this year received two awards. The first award, Best Storefront Display, recognizes Equinox Botanical Boutique.

Equinox is a 20-year-old business in downtown Kenosha that underwent a huge transformation in 2019. Originally a service-based location, the boutique offered massages and facials, with a secondary focus on merchandising and product lines meant for body and soul experience. The updates included a much larger space on the main floor for merchandise, allowing owner Maria Caravati to become creative in promoting her products and botanicals with fun displays. The displays have all centered around seasonal elements of merchandise, and utilize reused materials, greenery and colored materials. What started out as a creative outlet with an investment of only \$1,000 annually has left a phenomenal impact on her business sales, her exposure, and her guest experience.

Also receiving an award this year is the Stella Hotel, recognized as Best Historic Restoration Project for 2019.

Construction for the Kenosha Elks Club building was completed in 1919, exactly 100 years before it was reborn as the Stella Hotel. Originally built as a hotel with a swimming pool and ballroom, it was later called the Heritage House. It was abandoned in 2009, and a small fire in 2011 left it in danger of demolition. In 2014, a grassroots group named "Save the Elks Club," spearheaded by the late Christine Roemer, worked with Gorman & Co. to save it. With estimates of \$21 million, they worked to secure funding including nearly \$4 million in incentives such as Historic Preservation Tax Credits and a CDI Grant from WEDC. Staying true to its early 1900s design, Downtown Kenosha Inc. helped connect Gorman & Co. to local business owners that salvaged original woodwork and chandeliers from the ballroom. Additional preserved items include the wood and terrazzo flooring, support beams, exposed brick and windows throughout the building. New elements of an upscale restaurant and coffee bar have been added. The final cost for the project was \$26 million, and it has created 76 permanent jobs.

La Crosse:

La Crosse received several awards for 2019 successes. The first award, Best Business Success Story, goes to Deb Lash at the Wedding Tree in recognition for the business's longstanding success as a district anchor.

Lash purchased the Wedding Tree in 1996, along with a downtown building to house the business. From just two employees at the start, the business has grown to a staff of 20, and has expanded beyond basic bridal to offer formal wear and menswear, and a 2014 renovation created an in-house penthouse event venue, the Court Above Main. Additionally, the store's prominence in the industry has attracted other complementary businesses, fostering the annual La Crosse Bridal Expo event. Beyond her business success, Deb has always been a community leader, serving on boards and committees for more than eight local organizations over the years.

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Additionally, the Best Adaptive Reuse Project award goes to Landmark by the Rivers.

For 22 years, this 65,000-square-foot historic building has been vacant on the north side of downtown La Crosse, adjacent to the Oktoberfest grounds and Riverside Park. The redevelopment of this building into a mix of uses with residential loft apartments anchors this side of the downtown. Landmark by the Rivers features 64 loft-style apartments, with rents ranging from \$1,100 to \$2,600 per month. The \$36 million project took advantage of Historic Preservation Tax Credits and the WEDC Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant Program. This is a legacy project for the City of La Crosse and the downtown district. The impact of this project to the historic fabric of the community and the modern amenities provided for the residents are exceptional examples of historic restoration and adaptive reuse.

Receiving the award for Best Exterior Façade Renovation for Over \$25,000 is the Thill & Lapitz Building.

This 1897 building, located on a highly visible site near the post office and county buildings, was a vacant eyesore for decades. Over the years, nearly all of its historic character had been stripped away and covered with stucco. In the 1920's it was converted into an auto garage, and a concrete floor was installed. In the 1940's or 50's, two large bay windows on the upper floor were removed. The new owners decided to bring the building fully back to its original grandeur. The façade restoration included removing the stucco, revealing major brick damage, which was repaired. Amazingly, they reconstructed the bay windows, cornices and storefront based on historic photos. The original cast-iron columns, long hidden, were cleaned and repainted. A \$20,000 Downtown Mainstreet Elevate Façade Grant helped to offset the \$150,000 façade renovation costs. The reconstruction was so accurate that the building is once again listed as a local historic structure.

Marshfield:

Recognized for their new stunning interior is Uptown Coffee Company, winning the Best Interior Renovation for Under \$50,000 award.

When a 3,000-square-foot antique store closed its doors in this 1887 former hardware store, Chris and Erin Howard saw an opportunity. The building's main challenge was that the space was too large for most tenants—but original elements such as tin ceilings, columns, trim and hardwood floors were intact. They divided the space into two 1,500-square-foot spaces which required upgraded HVAC and electrical for each. The rear space was reconfigured to serve both sides with bathrooms, a shared lounge and an accessible entrance. They then recruited John and Vicki Tracy of Uptown Coffee into one half, allowing them to renovate as long as the original elements remained with their 130-year-old nicks and patina. A 1960s clock belonging to Vicki's grandfather served as inspiration for the midcentury design of everything from their logo and signage to the sputnik chandeliers, espresso bar, lounge chairs, patterned walls and seating.

Menomonie:

Winning statewide recognition for the Best Adaptive Reuse of a building that has outlived its former use is Zymurgy Brewing Company.

In early 2017, the brewery's owner, Jon Christiansen, bought the former Dennis Auto to adapt and reuse as a brewery. Built in the early 1900s, the building was a brick structure with an open

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floor plan and large outdoor space. The changes to the brewery included replacing the water piping, filling the underground reservoir, adding all new electric and adding new paint. The changes to the taproom included adding a new oversized cooler, installing a new mill, renovating two bathrooms, ripping up all the concrete for new floors, building a new bar and patching the roof. Zymurgy Brewing Company is located right on Main Street, with a powerful impact on the downtown's vitality.

Monroe:

Recognized for Best Image Campaign is Monroe's Musical Chairs on the Square.

Musical Chairs on the Square was a branding campaign to attract tourists and locals to downtown Monroe. Fifteen local artists were recruited to create pieces of art using Adirondack chairs based on well-known songs by groups like the Beatles, Elvis, Led Zeppelin and KISS. The chairs were made by a local Amish vendor. Three additional sculptural pieces were musical instruments carved by another local artist. Each piece was sponsored by a different business. The chairs cost \$750 and the instruments were \$1,200. A summer kickoff event was held with pony rides, face painting, lawn games, crafts and history of music booths. Walking tours for summer art students were given, showing how art can be a destination. Radio and billboard ads covered the entire state line region, Facebook posts reached more than 41,000 people—and the entire campaign was self-funded.

Orfordville:

Winning the award for Best Revitalization Project among Small Connect Communities is Food is Fuel LLC and owners Kevin Wellnitz and Diana Grenawalt.

Just last year, 204 West Brodhead Street was a vacant building located at a main intersection in downtown Orfordville. As owner of the adjacent property, Kevin Wellnitz purchased the property in 2018 with the intent of expanding his gas station and repair business while also improving the appearance of the property. Diana Grenawalt came forward to rent the interior space, and the two worked to fully renovate the space, opening the Food is Fuel grocery, which offers local food products produced by area farmers. The business now offers a valuable service to residents, employs five workers and has dramatically improved the appearance of a key downtown intersection.

Platteville:

2019 was a very big year for Platteville Main Street, which received three awards.

The first award is for the best new building or building addition that exhibits quality design and an appropriate relationship to surrounding architecture. Wisconsin Main Street and WEDC award the Best New Building of 2019 to Ruxton Apartments.

After nearly four years of collaboration and planning, the Ruxton Apartments opened in 2019 on the site of a former car dealership at the gateway to downtown Platteville. The project features more than 70 units at various price points, along with a first-floor commercial space that will be home to a satellite location for Southwest Technical College. The project represents a \$14 million investment in downtown, and required the use of Brownfields Grant funding, tax increment financing district support and private investment. The four-story project was designed

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to incorporate sustainable design and materials, and also integrates the historic auto dealership facility as a community space for the project. The overall result is a transformation of the downtown gateway, which complements the investment occurring throughout the district.

The next award is given to a Main Street district for its innovative approach to volunteer recruitment, retention or recognition. The Best Volunteer Engagement Program of 2019 award goes to Platteville's Community Garden.

The Community Garden is a volunteer project of the Platteville Main Street Sustainability Committee. It is located next to a small city park downtown and includes 15 different beds. The goal is to bring residents together, encourage healthier lifestyles and provide space for gardeners to share knowledge and skills. This project involves people of all ages from all over the community. City crews haul compost and wood chips to the site, then a group of Platteville High School students spread them where needed. Potential gardeners must sign a contract saying they will maintain their plot and are charged \$35—\$30 of which is refunded upon cleanup in the fall. For the young volunteers, it increases their respect and appreciation for the often elderly gardeners, and increases their own self-esteem and social skills. Thrivent Insurance provided a grant to help offset the \$300 project cost. The committee is currently looking for more downtown space to expand the program.

Lastly, the Best Historic Restoration of 2019 award goes to Cindy Tang for the restoration of the former Carnegie Library building.

This Carnegie Library served Platteville from 1914 until 1975. The building then sat vacant until 1980, when it began being used as office space. In 2015, Cindy Tang purchased it and set out to preserve and restore it. While the Tudor-style building remained largely in its original state, it needed a lot of maintenance and sensitive upgrades. The exterior required work on the windows, masonry, roof, foundation, staircase and walkways. Tang also brought back many elements that had been removed over the years, such as the original round planters and the center handrail. Historically replicated signage was also installed above the front door. Inside the building, a new elevator was installed, and the offices and bathrooms on the lower level were restored. The upper level was reconfigured into three new office areas, meeting space and a hospitality area, all designed to reflect the original woodwork and character. The project utilized both state and federal historic tax credits.

Rice Lake:

Rice Lake is recognized this year for its Downtown Wine Walk, which received an honorable mention for Best Retail Event of 2019.

The Downtown Wine Walk was the first of its kind in downtown Rice Lake. The promotion of the event was 90% social media and 10% local newspaper. The target audience for was residents and visitors, and the goal was getting all participants into downtown businesses in hopes that they could be exposed to a variety of businesses downtown. There were eight participating businesses, and each was given two types of wine from Rice Lake Main Street Association. Each of the 160 participants received a wristband that had 10 tabs for sampling, a passport that

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included coupons from local businesses, and a reusable wine glass. Tickets sold out two weeks before the event. Considering ticket sales and event costs, the event had net positive revenue.

Ripon:

Ripon Main Street is the winner of the Best Special Event for its new event in 2019, Scooping the Loop.

Scooping the Loop was a time-honored tradition for many Riponites. For decades, local residents came together to drive their vehicles through the downtown and meet up with friends. Many great memories and lifelong relationships were created during this unique social gathering. For various reasons, the activity was banned from the community in 1992. Downtown business owners brought the nostalgia back for one glorious evening last summer, signing letters of support requesting that events be exempted from the no cruising ordinance. In less than eight weeks, the Main Street organization coordinated the event, which was held in downtown Ripon. The turnout was phenomenal, a reunion of sorts for older Riponites, many of whom shared the experience with their children, helping to create a new generation of “scoopers.” Throughout the evening, the “scooping” route was packed with all types of vehicles.

Shullsburg:

Receiving an honorable mention for Best Public Improvement Project is the Shullsburg Visitors Center.

The Shullsburg Creamery had recently closed the restaurant portion of its business, and the dining space was left vacant. Advance Shullsburg worked out an agreement to utilize the space as a new visitors center. A design concept was created and volunteers began preparing the space. Designed to be self-guided during the week and staffed by volunteers on the weekends, it contains 14 museum-quality images, most with accompanying text and historic artifacts, all accented by LED lighting. As visitors tour the space in a counterclockwise direction, they are guided through Shullsburg’s history in chronological order. The rear space contains a large screen with 12-person seating with a video loop of stories about Shullsburg. In 2019, more than 5,000 people visited, and many community gatherings and art exhibits have been held there—a perfect use for a historic (1884) space in a stunning historic town.

Sun Prairie:

The Business Improvement District is partnering with the City of Sun Prairie in their efforts to enhance the downtown through participation in the Connect Communities Program. While the Business Improvement District has long provided marketing and event support to downtown businesses, the 2018 explosion that occurred in downtown resulted in the development of a new downtown plan, which the group hopes to implement. Priorities for the district include building and façade improvement, increased retail and cultural destinations in downtown, expanded and enhanced pedestrian areas and redevelopment of blighted properties surrounding the district. Joining the Connect Communities Program will provide support for these initiatives and networking for downtown stakeholders with other districts exploring similar initiatives.

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Two Rivers:

Scream 'N Conuts is recognized as 2019's Best New Business.

Scream 'N Conuts is a bright pink ice cream shop in downtown Two Rivers. Owner Emilee Rysticken opened the business in 2019 after graduating from high school. The shop serves up 16 flavors of Cedar Crest ice cream within the business's signature Conut, which is a donut ice cream cone. Emilee had long heard about Two Rivers' place in history as the birthplace of the ice cream sundae, and was inspired to open the shop to fill a gap in the downtown business mix. The shop has been popular with both locals and summer tourists traveling to local beaches and traveling to the lake for summer weekends.

Tomahawk:

Tomahawk Main Street is the winner of the 2019 Best Special Event for its Tomahawk Fall Fest.

Tomahawk Fall Fest is a day for individuals, groups and families to enjoy the walkability of downtown Tomahawk while enjoying free activities and local shopping. Tomahawk welcomes more than 600 youth and approximately 1,000 attendees to enjoy free movie showings at the downtown cinema, pumpkin painting, cooking decorating, face painting and trick-or-treating with downtown businesses. The event is a boon to retail stores, which reported increases in sales between 20% and 175%. The popular event highlights the downtown design, businesses, volunteerism and family activities that Tomahawk prides itself on year-round.

Viroqua:

The Viroqua Chamber Main Street is this year's recipient of the Best Business Development and Retention Program award for its business development classes and innovative member benefits program.

As a member-driven organization, the Viroqua Chamber Main Street is always looking for a way to provide meaningful services and resources to members. After hearing from businesses that a lack of insurance programs was limiting small business growth in the community, Viroqua Chamber Main Street worked with insurance providers to create a member group option for vision and dental insurance at competitive rates. Additionally, we identified educational opportunities as a valued benefit. The Chamber Main Street recently introduced the 54665 Podcast to help communicate with members at their convenience, and in 2019 also introduced an in-person educational series. Non-members could also attend an individual class for a \$10 drop-in fee; topics included grant writing, merchandising and leadership, among others. As a result of these initiatives, the organization saw an increase in membership and engagement, helping further its mission.

Additionally, Wisconsin Main Street is pleased to honor Luke Zahm as the newest inductee into the Wisconsin Main Street Hall of Fame.

Not only has Zahm been a downtown business owner and Main Street board member and board president, but he has also served as a statewide spokesperson for the importance of

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small communities and downtowns. Featured in the Wisconsin Main Street 30th anniversary video, co-host of the 54665 Podcast, and recognized many times over as an advocate for and resource on local food and community-based businesses—a problem solver, a generous community donor and a person willing to spend part of his busy Saturday greeting farmers at a farmers market or entrepreneurs touring the area from Milwaukee, Zahm has given thousands of hours to Viroqua and to the work of Main Street communities throughout the state. He has left a legacy of leadership and passion, encouragement and a willingness to take risks that will be felt in Viroqua and in the Main Street community for many years to come.

Watertown:

Watertown is the recipient of this year's Best Creative Fundraising Effort for the Watertown Gift Tin campaign.

Watertown Main Street wanted to raise money for downtown beautification projects and drive consumer spending to its businesses. Through a series of discussions, the idea for the Watertown Gift Tin was born. The gift tin was a collectible souvenir containing 27 "invitation to savings" cards that each offered \$10 off a one-time \$30 purchase. The businesses included a mix of restaurants, pubs, retailers, and personal service providers such as salons. The goal was to include 20 businesses, but the response was so positive that 27 signed on. The tins boasted cover art displaying the downtown street clock and the Watertown Main Street logo. They were pre-wrapped in decorative gift bags and made ideal holiday gifts. They also contained a keepsake magnet. Quantities were limited to 280 to keep it manageable for participating businesses. After expenses, this promotion resulted in net revenues of \$7,000 for streetscape and façade improvements. Plans are already in place to offer it again in 2020.

Waupun:

Waupun is the recipient of this year's Best Revitalization Project among Large Connect Communities for the 300 block redevelopment project.

The transformation of Waupun's 300 block in 2019 required collaboration among property owners, local businesses, the Business Improvement District and the Community Development Authority. When Gysbers Jewelry decided to undertake a façade rehabilitation project for its 40th anniversary, the business leveraged \$17,000 in public funds toward the transformation. This project led to three other projects on the block—interior and exterior improvements that resulted in new commercial tenants, including a new coffee and wine bar and clothing boutique as well as renovated upper-floor residential units. These projects were also able to take advantage of available loan and grant dollars, improving the appearance and extending the life of these historic properties.

Wausau:

Wausau is this year's recipient of the Best Image Campaign award for the I Am Wausau initiative.

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Feeling angry and upset after a racially motivated attack near downtown Wausau, local photographer Tim Gutknecht sought to catalyze these feelings to make change and have an impact. He reached out to the Wausau River District with an idea: an image campaign that would showcase Wausau's diversity. Working with One Wausau as well as the Wausau River District to come up with a mission, photo layout, call for participants, location and marketing plan, Gutknecht was the mastermind behind the project, volunteering his time for planning, photography, editing, printing and more. Today, the "I Am Wausau" campaign has reached more than 40,000 people, increasing awareness of Wausau's diversity and initiating important conversations on diversity.

In addition, Wausau's Janke Bookstore was named Best Business Success Story.

Janke Bookstore, the oldest bookstore in the state of Wisconsin, celebrated 100 years in business in 2019. While many bookstores large and small have closed over the years, Janke's remains a flagship in downtown Wausau. In 1919, original owners Carl Janke and Reno Kurth purchased a downtown Wausau property to open Janke-Kurth Bookstore. In 1948, Janke became sole owner, and the store has been passed down in the Janke family for four generations. Over the years, the store has occupied four different downtown storefronts on the same city block, and today attracts customers seeking not only books, but also stationery, gifts and a large specialty card collection, or coming to attend author signings and other literary events. The store is also known for its unique window displays, making it an essential destination for holiday shoppers of all ages.

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