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## Award-winning Eagle River shows how high Wisconsin's communities can soar

*Local leaders welcome Secretary Missy Hughes, highlighting downtown, entrepreneurs, and National Historic Registry designation*

**EAGLE RIVER, WI. MARCH 14, 2025** – When it comes to creating a dynamic downtown, communities may want to seek out advice from Eagle River.

The Vilas County community was named the 2024 Wisconsin Main Street of the Year at the 34<sup>th</sup> annual Wisconsin Main Street Awards Ceremony in Menomonie on Thursday.

The honor recognizes the city's efforts to become a thriving, historic, and community centered city where economic opportunity, cultural heritage, and local creativity come together to build a brighter future.

"The projects we've worked on — whether it's revitalizing spaces, expanding opportunities for businesses, or preserving our history — feel like common-sense efforts to make Eagle River a better place for everyone," said Karen Margelofsky, executive director of the Eagle River Revitalization Program. "We never set out to win awards; we simply focus on what's best for our community."

That means creating a downtown space where people go to gather, shop, and dine, but also an environment where innovation, art, and history are recognized and celebrated.

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Secretary Missy Hughes spent Friday afternoon in Eagle River and saw firsthand what the Northwoods city of 1,600 has done to create an award-winning downtown.

"Eagle River has created a downtown that addresses today's needs, acknowledges the past, and looks to the future," Hughes said. "The result is a welcoming downtown where people want to spend time."

Every thriving downtown needs a space where residents can gather, whether it's for a farmers' market, concerts, or just to meet friends. Community Square fosters those connections and creates a welcoming atmosphere to that people choose to stay and engage in.

Eagle River has a rich architectural history in its downtown and holds a cultural and economic significance as a tourism destination, where people come to experience the Northwoods. Earning a listing on the National Historic Registry recognizes this and also ensures a commitment to preserving historic buildings and keeping that character intact.

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The city also recognizes that farmers' markets aren't just about purchasing items. They're about community, education, and sustainability. The expansion allows the market to support local farmers, promote farm-to-table foods, and educate individuals and families on the importance of healthy eating and sustainable agriculture. The inclusion of local artists celebrates creativity and craftsmanship.

Eagle River also recognizes it's critical to educate the next generation of entrepreneurs and business owners. Through its Young Entrepreneur Market, young people receive guidance and support to develop ideas, identify economic gaps, and understand market needs all while being empowered to create businesses that fill a need or enhances the local economy.

The city also knows art plays a powerful role in a community's identity and is working to integrate public art into the streetscape, through the expansion of the Artscape banner program, murals, sculptures, and interactive installations.

"Each piece strengthens both downtown and the entire city, shaping Eagle River into a destination that inspires innovation, fosters deep community connections, and leaves a lasting impact on everyone who experiences it," Margelofsky said.

During her visit, Hughes spoke with Young Entrepreneur Market students, visited the downtown, and stopped by Riverstone Brewing Company, which WEDC supported with a Community Development Investment grant.

She also learned about Andy's Pontoon Saloon, which earned the Best New Business Award for the energy, community engagement, and economic impact. The business has become a destination that mirrors the area's lakeside culture. It offers a fire pit and stage, live music, trivia, events, and relaxed setting.

"Eagle River really represents many of the qualities that make Wisconsin unique – a strong community identity, a sense of place, a spirit of creativity, and a continuous drive to make each day a little better," Hughes said.

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