

## CENTER UPDATE

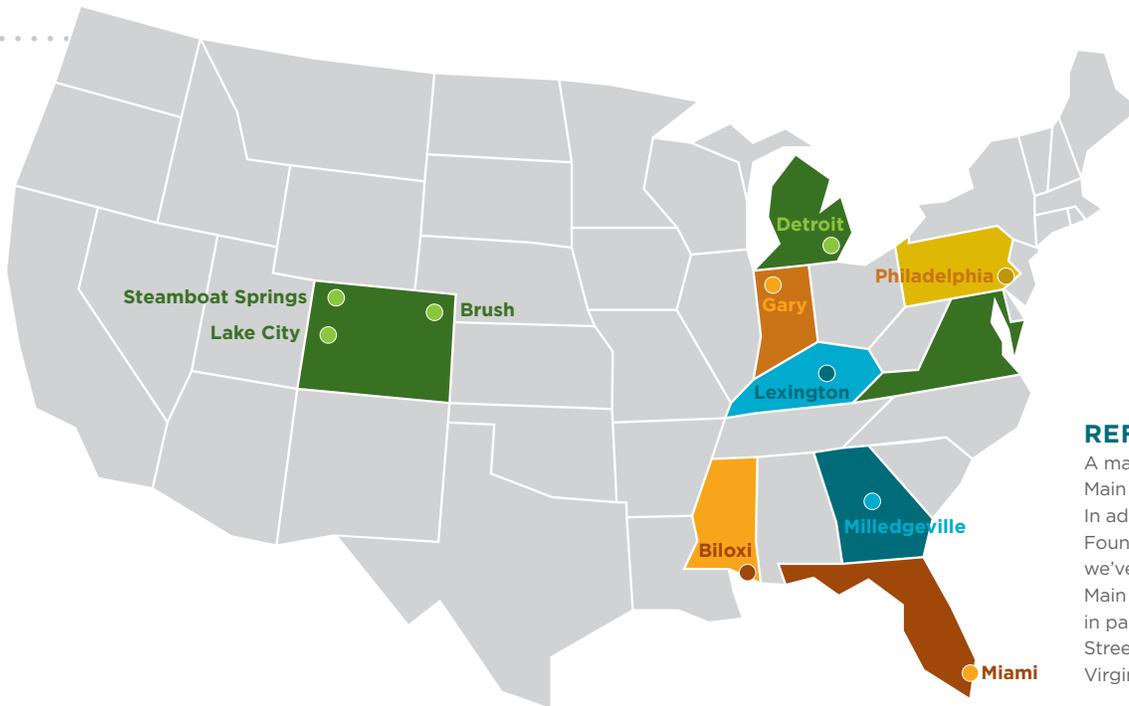
# MAIN STREET AMERICA *Refresh*

Since the Main Street movement's beginning over 35 years ago, the Four Point Approach has provided a critical road map for communities of all stripes and sizes, giving them a framework for transforming their downtown economies, rallying volunteers, and celebrating their historic character. As the Main Street America network knows well, the four points taken together—Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality—are truly greater than the sum of their parts. With over \$65.6 billion reinvested, 260,011 buildings rehabilitated, and 556,960 net new jobs, it is no exaggeration to say that Main Street programs—with the Four Point Approach in hand—have played a critical role in the revival of America's downtowns over the last several decades.

However, the community revitalization field, and our economy more generally, has changed dramatically since 1980. New realities like the changing face of commerce, increasing income inequality, and shifting demographics are impacting every community, from small rural towns to busy urban commercial districts. And within the Main Street America network, there has been a growing recognition that elements of the time-tested approach are in need of updating. New forms of funding and different kinds of organizational structures are not always compatible with a strict adherence to the four committee model, and the ever-increasing focus on outcomes among funders necessitates greater focus documenting and communicating impact.



The refreshed Main Street Approach is centered around cross-cutting 'transformation strategies,' that are based on community input and a solid understanding of market data, implemented through the Four Points, and measured through qualitative and quantitative outcomes.



**REFRESH: PILOT SITES**

A map of the first round of Main Street refresh pilot sites. In addition to the Knight Foundation-supported sites, we've conducted refresh pilots in Main Street America communities in partnership with Colorado Main Street, Michigan Main Street, and Virginia Main Street.

To address these issues, and to ensure the continued success of the Main Street model, the National Main Street Center began what has come to be known as the Main Street Refresh, a process through which we have engaged with experts and long-time practitioners within the Main Street network, as well as leaders from other related fields. The result is a new, “refreshed,” Main Street Approach that preserves what has always worked so well about the model—its comprehensive nature and community-driven orientation—and infused it with a new strategic focus.

Thanks to funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, as well as support from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and several of our Coordinating Program partners, we have had the opportunity to test out this new approach in a number of different communities over the past year. Some of these pilot sites, like Biloxi, Miss., and Steamboat Springs, Colo., have existing Main Street programs in place, providing us with a chance to better understand

how the new approach can integrate with existing Main Street structures and work-flow. Others, like Jefferson Chalmers in Detroit, Mich., and the East End and North Limestone districts in Lexington, Ky., are non-Main Street communities where we are able to test out how the new approach resonates with those who have less familiarity with the “old model,” as well as see how it fits in a variety of organizational structures.

The fundamental components of the new Main Street Approach are: 1) Inputs: Community Engagement and Market Understanding; 2) Transformation Strategies, implemented through the Four Points; and 3) Impact: Qualitative and Quantitative Outcomes.



Norma Ramirez de Miess and Kennedy Smith leading a community engagement exercise in Milledgeville, Ga.

In each of the pilot sites, representatives from the National Main Street Center have worked with local partner organizations to go through the steps of the new approach. In each case, community leaders have been provided with basic market data so they can better understand what the economic realities are, where the gaps may be, and where the potential lies. But, market data only captures a small (though useful!) snapshot of the realities on the ground in a community. This is where community engagement comes in. While engagement can take many forms, from online surveys to community meetings to online discussion platforms to interactive in-person polling, the key is getting broad participation, and ensuring that people feel their voices are heard.

With these key elements—market data and community input—in hand, Center staff worked with local programs to select their community transformation strategies. Transformation strategies provide direction for the revitalization initiative, and are implemented



Kathy La Plante and Josh Bloom go through the steps of the refreshed approach with Kristine Borchers, Executive Director of Lake City Downtown Improvement and Revitalization Team (DIRT), in Lake City, Colo.

through work across the four points. For instance, the Main Street program in Milledgeville, Ga.—home to a large student population—will be focusing on a transformation strategy aimed at better serving the needs of the millennial population, while supporting their entrepreneurial potential. The North Limestone district in Lexington, Ky., will be working on a convenience goods and services strategy aimed at better serving the day-to-day needs of local residents. Over the course of the pilot program, we have learned that some programs can readily implement transformation strategies using the more traditional four committee model, while in other contexts, programs are finding that leveraging ad hoc working groups, task forces, and partnerships proves more effective.



**NORTH LIMESTONE TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY: CONVENIENCE GOODS & SERVICES FOR RESIDENTS**

Create a business district where local residents can purchase goods and services for day-to-day needs.

ECONOMIC VITALITY	DESIGN	PROMOTION	ORGANIZATION
<p><b>Current activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with neighborhood businesses regarding how to grow</li> <li>Night Market—especially business spin-offs to become bricks &amp; mortar in neighborhood.</li> <li>Establishing market in the Greyhound Building—e.g., multi-tenant public market</li> <li>Customer/resident surveys (400 people) regarding wants/needs</li> </ol> <p><b>Potential activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop tools/program to help Night Market vendors transition to permanent store</li> <li>Business development pipeline: e.g., Assist cottage/home-based business to Greyhound Building market</li> </ol>	<p><b>Current activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small-scale live-work housing</li> <li>Rehab of properties for commercial use (food; Broomwagon/cafes; bookstore) —primarily market-driven.</li> <li>Clean-up programs</li> <li>Stormwater remediation</li> <li>New sidewalks</li> <li>“Walk Your City” wayfinding</li> <li>Planting street trees</li> <li>Interior store design services offered to businesses (CDC staff)</li> </ol> <p><b>Potential activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facade improvement incentives</li> <li>Two-way street conversion</li> <li>Pedestrian access at intersections</li> <li>Improved wayfinding</li> </ol>	<p><b>Current activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Night Market</li> <li>Neighborhood business map</li> <li>Branding (e.g., NoLi logo stickers)</li> <li>Individual businesses are doing their own events/marketing</li> </ol> <p><b>Potential activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update business map</li> <li>Promote businesses in the neighborhood in a more coordinated way</li> <li>Better promotion of neighborhood businesses to neighborhood residents (E.g., work with businesses to offer specific resident-oriented promotions)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Current activities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ad hoc meetings with local business owners</li> <li>Newsletter (CDC)</li> </ol> <p><b>Potential activities and needs:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional staff person for economic development and business coordination</li> <li>Re-activate neighborhood business association</li> </ol>

A sample transformation strategy-based work plan from Lexington, Ky.

With strategies and work plans in place, our pilot sites are moving on to implementation. As in all Main Street work, revitalization takes time and is achieved incrementally. However, the new Main Street Approach recognizes the importance of setting benchmarks, measuring incremental progress, and focusing on short- and long-term impact. So, we have been working with each local partner to develop a list of qualitative and quantitative outcomes that are not too burdensome to collect, but that can be powerful indicators of positive change over time.

After a year of planning, and a year of testing the new approach on the ground, we are eager to share what we have learned with the entire network. In the coming months, we will be rolling out a suite of new resources, including publications, videos, webinars, and training opportunities that will be available for the Main Street America network. We look forward to sharing what we have learned, and learning from you as you put the new approach to work revitalizing your own communities.

**Tips for Creating Your Metrics**

- ✓ Consider both qualitative and quantitative
- ✓ Don't forget the basics (vacancy rates, tax base, new businesses/jobs)
- ✓ Gear towards transformation strategy(s)
- ✓ Create a baseline so you know where you have been
- ✓ Track short- and long-term impacts
- ✓ Leverage for advocacy and resources

## CENTER UPDATE

# CULTIVATING PLACE IN *Main Street Communities*

In small towns and large cities across the country, the key to building robust and resilient local economies is in creating unique, vibrant communities with healthy senses of place.

In 2015, with the generous support of Anne T. and Robert Bass, the National Main Street Center (NMSC) and Project for Public Spaces (PPS) launched a new joint program to help revitalize towns and communities through Placemaking—a citizen-led process that champions holistic assessment of physical, social, and cultural assets and emphasizing community-led, collaborative planning for the activation of public spaces. Placemaking's powerful set of tools bolster the Main Street Approach and offer easy-to-learn, actionable strategies for revitalizing downtown and other community destinations.



Photo: FlipFlopFoto

To kick off the program, NMSC and PPS partnered with the White House Rural Council to host the first-ever White House Convening on Rural Placemaking in November 2015, bringing together Main Street leaders and representatives of federal agencies dealing with rural communities. This convening was crucial in

developing partnerships with federal agencies and philanthropic organizations who could play an important role in getting Placemaking projects implemented throughout the country. Not only did this event prove to strengthen key partnerships, but it provided a platform to help direct future federal and philanthropic investments towards the creation of better and more sustainable places in rural communities.



Photo: Lindsey Wallace

To make the concept of placemaking more actionable in the field, NMSC and PPS presented a two-day training later that month for our network of Main Street America coordinators. Led by Project for Public Spaces founder and President Fred Kent, this training centered on integrating

Placemaking into the “DNA” of coordinators’ work on the state, county and city-wide level. Kent also focused on how to bring about Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper transformations in communities, a Placemaking strategy that encourages individuals and communities to make immediate and affordable changes to public spaces—pocket parks, movable parklets, public art—while also building local support and demonstrating to stakeholders the potential for further long-term projects and investments.

Later that fall, NMSC and PPS turned their focus to developing an intensive training program focused primarily on the “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper,” concept. The training program, *Cultivating Place in Main Street Communities*, was designed to scale Placemaking efforts throughout the country, bringing tools and expertise to 35 Main Street communities in five states. After a competitive application process, Oregon Main Street, Main Street Alabama, Connecticut Main Street Center, Missouri Main Street Connection, and Montana Main Street, were selected for the trainings as they demonstrated both strong community interest and clear paths for Placemaking project implementation.

Between February and May 2015, NMSC and PPS traveled around the country delivering the two-day *Cultivating Place in Main Street Communities* trainings. The trainings examined significant themes in every Main Street community—multi-use destinations, local foods, health, streets as places—and encouraged attendees to think about their public spaces in new, strategic, and holistic ways. Attendees put to use the Power of Ten, a tool that generates conversation to identify targeted Placemaking efforts, based on the idea that places thrive when users have a range of reasons (10+) to be there. For many, the highlight of the trainings was the Place Game, an interactive session outside where small groups discuss and evaluate the attributes, challenges, and opportunities of public spaces.



Photo: Lindsey Wallace

Federal agencies, philanthropic organizations, and other resource partners played a significant role at the *Cultivating Place* trainings. Representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development—among others—attended multiple trainings, working with trainers and trainees to identify ways to successfully grow, implement, and sustain Placemaking efforts after the training wrapped.

These trainings proved to be wildly popular. NMSC and PPS reached over 150 communities directly through Main Street manager and community leader attendance. Demand for these trainings was high: in Montana alone, over 75 community leaders and resource partners attended!

## PLACEMAKING AT HOME: FROM INSPIRATION TO IMPLEMENTATION

Most importantly, as a result of *Cultivating Place* trainings, communities have already begun to plan and implement *Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper* Placemaking projects. During the *Cultivating Place* trainings in Oregon, The Dalles Main Street Program presented on a parklet they created for under \$5,000. The presentation was so popular among other Oregon Main Streets that the local program created a webinar for other communities on how to plan, build, and fund parklets. Elba, Ala., one of the smallest Main Street communities to attend the training, recently completed the first stage of a pocket park in a former vacant lot downtown. Hamilton, Mont., installed temporary gateway signage to demonstrate the importance of signage and landscaping in directing people from a busy highway to their downtown. And there are more. NMSC will be gathering case studies and project examples for an online Placemaking map, so the Main Street America network can be inspired by what their colleagues are doing across the county.

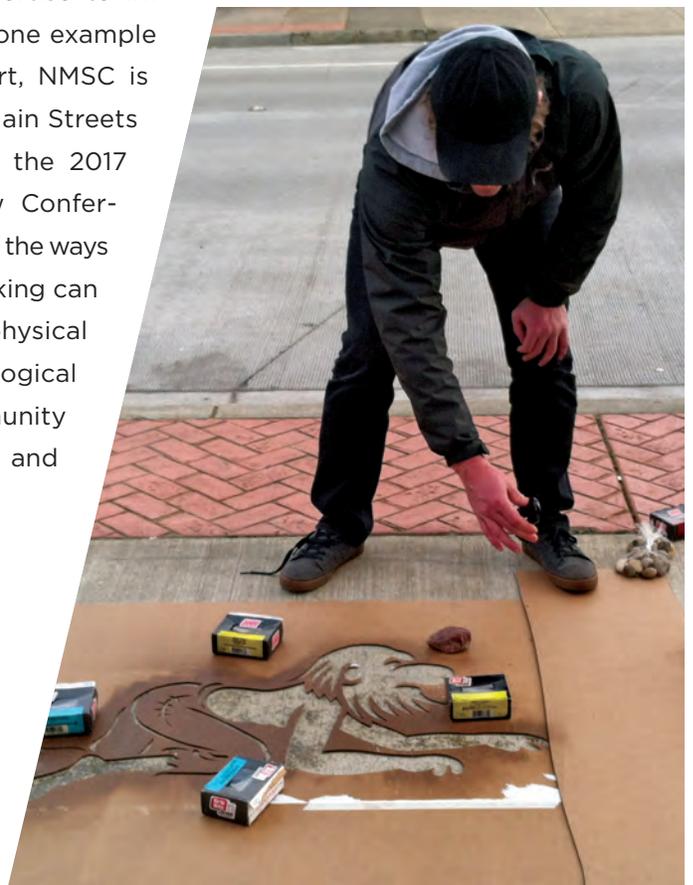
Over the next year, NMSC and PPS will be offering the second round of *Cultivating Place* trainings in five more states, hoping to reach

another 150+ communities. NMSC, PPS, and the White House Rural Council plan to meet again soon to strategize how federal and philanthropic monies can be leveraged together in efforts to revitalize downtowns through Placemaking.

## FUTURE OF PLACEMAKING ON MAIN STREET

In the coming months, NMSC and PPS will be focusing on the convergence of health and place. As research indicates, place is inextricably linked to health outcomes. Walkability, availability of fresh food, transportation connectivity, access to nature, and access to economic opportunity all have significant impact on human physical health. NMSC and PPS see an exciting opportunity to engage more deeply around this topic, leveraging tools, resources, and expertise to improve health. As one example of this joint effort, NMSC is making healthy Main Streets a core theme of the 2017 Main Street Now Conference—highlighting the ways in which Placemaking can help improve physical and psychological health and community sustainability and connectedness.

Moving forward, NMSC and PPS will build off the momentum of this Placemaking work, connecting more Main Streets to the resources, tools, and strategy that will bolster their efforts and help create vibrant places key to maintaining robust and resilient local economies.



Inspired by similar work in Seattle, local artist creates Rain Art with sustainable, water-soluble paint in Hillsboro, Ore.

Photo: Rick Paulson Photography (above), City of Hillsboro (below).

## CENTER UPDATE

## CONFERENCE REWIND

*Main Street Now 2016*

**In May, nearly 1,400 Main Street leaders and commercial district revitalization professionals came together in Milwaukee for the Main Street Now Conference.**

This year marked the 30th anniversary of the conference and we are proud to report that it did not disappoint! .....

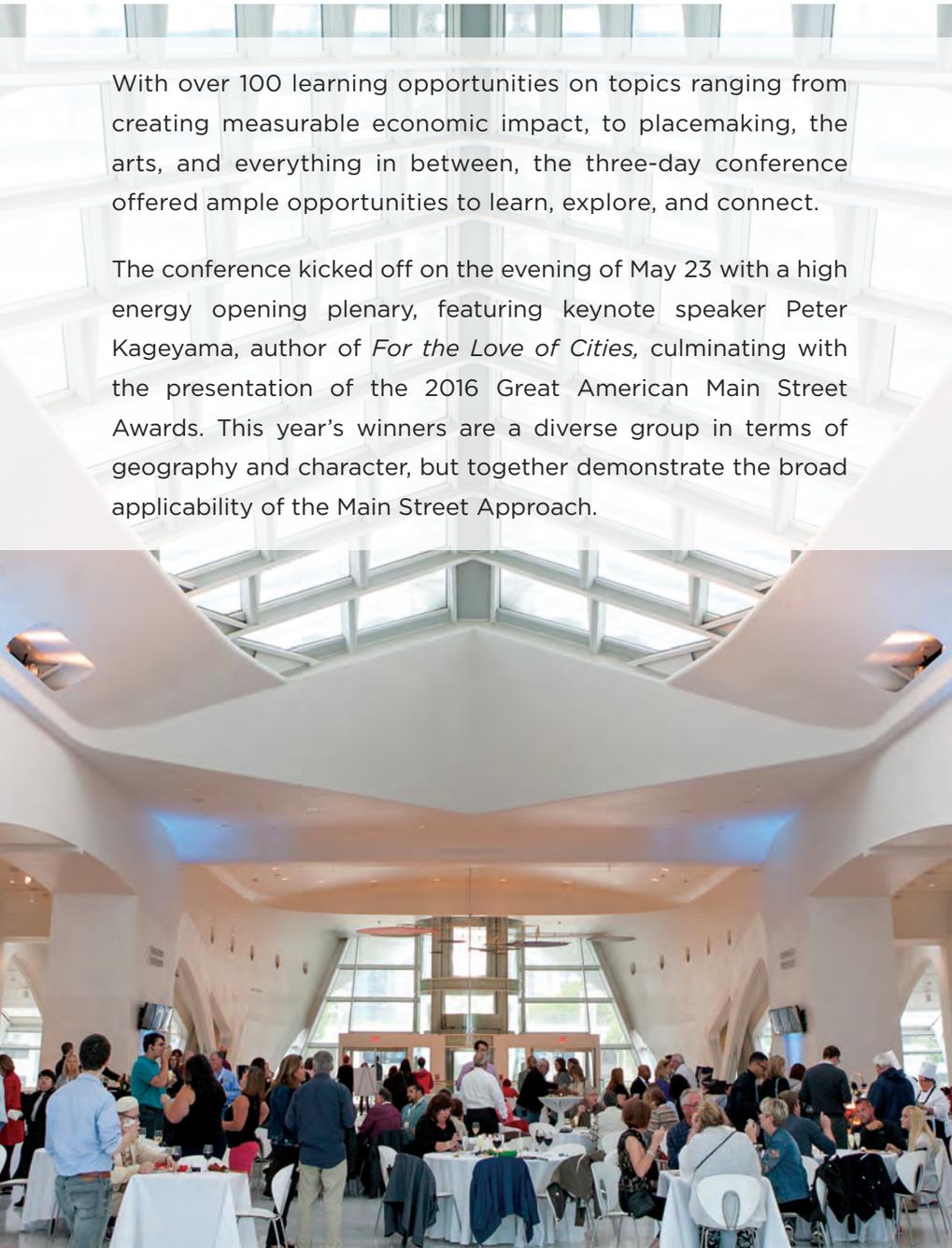
With over 100 learning opportunities on topics ranging from creating measurable economic impact, to placemaking, the arts, and everything in between, the three-day conference offered ample opportunities to learn, explore, and connect.

The conference kicked off on the evening of May 23 with a high energy opening plenary, featuring keynote speaker Peter Kageyama, author of *For the Love of Cities*, culminating with the presentation of the 2016 Great American Main Street Awards. This year's winners are a diverse group in terms of geography and character, but together demonstrate the broad applicability of the Main Street Approach.

**AUDUBON PARK, ORLANDO, FL.**

Developed post-World War II, Audubon Park was long defined by a wide, four-lane commercial main drag dotted with suburban strip malls. Under Audubon Park Garden District's leadership, that corridor is now flourishing with small businesses, gardens, and events that stand in stark contrast to typical suburban sprawl. The re-development of a foreclosed church into a nationally recognized food and culture hub, a thriving shopping and dining scene, and a retro modern home tour are just a few of the attractions that make this neighborhood one of America's best.

**[audubonparkgardens.com](http://audubonparkgardens.com)**





**SHAW DISTRICT,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

By actively involving its multicultural community, cultivating tech businesses, and supporting the arts, Shaw Main Streets has transformed a long-blighted neighborhood into a hot dining and entertainment district while preserving affordable housing and protecting legacy businesses. Highlights of Shaw Main Street’s 13-year tenure include the rehabilitation of the Howard Theatre, once the largest venue in Washington’s segregation-era “Black Broadway,” and the creation of flexible work space for 400 start-up tech businesses in a former Wonder Bread factory.

[www.shawmainstreets.org](http://www.shawmainstreets.org)

**DAHLONEGA, GA.**

Drawn by a charming and walkable downtown, first-rate restaurants, and unique shops featuring the best of Southern Appalachian hospitality, downtown Dahlongega is a top destination in the Southeastern United States. Located just 65 miles north of Atlanta and the site of the first U.S. Gold Rush, more than a million visitors travel to Dahlongega (pop. 6,000) every year. With the Main Street Approach as its guide, Dahlongega Main Street uses a combination of tools, including preservation grants, design guidelines, and promotion strategies to preserve downtown Dahlongega’s strong sense of place while also expanding economic development opportunities.

[dahlongegadda.org](http://dahlongegadda.org)



**We also selected Renaissance Covington in Covington, Kentucky, and Los Alamos Main-Street in New Mexico as ONES TO WATCH—places making great strides in using the Main Street Approach to revitalize their downtown.**

Renaissance Covington was recognized for its restoration of the historic Odd Fellows Hall, its successful use of pop up spaces for retail and performance purposes, and streetscape and façade improvements.

[www.facebook.com/renaissanc covington](http://www.facebook.com/renaissanc covington)



Los Alamos MainStreet was recognized for preserving the unique history of a town that was run by the US Atomic Energy Commission until 1957, while maintaining its reputation as a hub for innovation and invention through lively events, public-private partnerships, and building redevelopment projects.

[www.losalamosmainstreet.com](http://www.losalamosmainstreet.com)



A few days later at the closing session, we had the pleasure of presenting our second annual **INNOVATION ON MAIN STREET** awards, recognizing Main Street organizations for successful, sustainable initiatives that represent new approaches to an existing downtown revitalization challenge or opportunity. This year's recipients proved that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive on Main Street as they went outside of the tried and true to find new revitalization solutions:



The panel for the “Shark Tank”-like event at Main Street Alabama’s 2015 conference.

Photo: Main Street Alabama

### LARAMIE MAIN STREET ALLIANCE

Laramie Main Street Alliance of Laramie, Wyo., was honored for its “Mural Project,” which has resulted in the creation of ten large-scale murals and four smaller ones that have brought new energy into downtown and the local arts scene over the last six years. Born out of a desire to bring more public art to the buildings, open lots, and alleys of Laramie, the program has given residents, business owners, and

artists a new way to collaborate to beautify, invigorate, and celebrate downtown Laramie. In 2015 the program evolved to include a “paint by numbers” mural, drawing over 150 children, parents, grandparents, and visitors to participate over ten days. The mural project has spurred a self-guided audio tour, a curriculum guide for elementary students, and renewed community pride.

[www.laramiemainstreet.org](http://www.laramiemainstreet.org)

### MAIN STREET ALABAMA

Main Street Alabama was selected as an award winner for its “Shark Tank”-like event at the state’s 2015 revitalization conference. The session gave directors of local Main Street programs the opportunity to present their sponsorship requests to a panel of potential sponsors while an audience observed. Main Street directors pitched their events to win cash, in-kind support, and products in a fast-paced interview setting. The session succeeded by not only matching worthy projects to new sources of support, but also gave greater visibility to sponsors and Main Street programs while exposing the audience to a dialogue that is typically done behind closed doors.

[www.mainstreetalabama.org](http://www.mainstreetalabama.org)



Mural underway in Laramie, Wyo.

Photo: Trey Sherwood

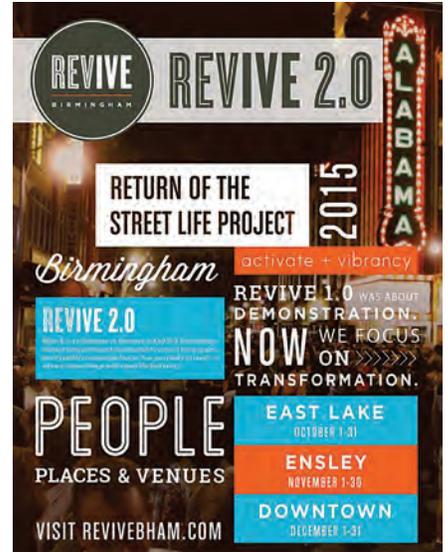


Left: Crowd in the Milwaukee Theatre at the Opening Plenary of the 2016 Main Street Now Conference.

Photo: NMSC

Right: Promotional material for the "REVIVE East Lake" initiative.

Photo: REV Birmingham



## REV BIRMINGHAM

REV Birmingham in Alabama was recognized for its "REVIVE East Lake" initiative, which brings together local entrepreneurs, artists, and property owners to activate vacant spaces and sidewalks to showcase the untapped potential in the East Lake historic commercial district. This program, which has been rolled out in several other Birmingham neighborhoods in recent years, leveraged new investment in East Lake, including

building façade improvements, tree planting and other streetscape improvements, and an artist village with a month of installations, workshops, and performances that brought new life to a long-vacant movie theater, prompting the owner to move forward with the theater's redevelopment.

[www.revirmingham.org](http://www.revirmingham.org)



Supporting Main Street  
for Over 130 Years.

Small Businesses.  
Community.  
Preservation.





A heartfelt congratulations to each of this year's award winners—you inspire us all in the work we do every day to make our communities better places.

Thank you to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, our sponsors, Wisconsin Main Street volunteers, and all the attendees for making this year's conference such a success!

