Michael Cain, City Manager

MICHAEL CAIN SEES THE MAIN STREET APPROACH AS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND BOYNE CITY'S DOWNTOWN TRANSFORMATION

Photos and Story by Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

I've been the city manager here in Boyne City for almost 20 years.

Before I came here, Boyne City really wanted to preserve the city's heritage and reinvigorate the downtown. They did a lot of research and came across the National Main Street Program. Shortly after I arrived, the State was getting back into the Main Street Program. When they opened up an opportunity for interested communities to go down to East Lansing, we sent some people.

When they came back, they told me we shouldn't get into the Main Street program because it was going to be a lot of work and we didn't have the time for it.

That was probably the best advice I didn't take.

The Michigan Main Street Program has opened up so many opportunities for us and we've come of age together—both Boyne City and the State's program. We've tailored it and tweaked it to Boyne City's needs and worked with the state program as they've developed it. We've tried things that worked, some things that didn't, and, as it's evolved, we've evolved together. It's put so many things in our toolbox—whether it's design concepts, or the various services, or the training they provide.

One of the most important pieces of the program is that we have a Main Street executive director, somebody who is focused on helping all these things take place.

When we submitted our application, we were thinking we could only provide a part-time person, but the state said it's full time or no time—you're in or you're out. It was a gut-check moment for us to see if we could generate the level of support to fund that position. Throughout the process, there have been leaps of faith—educated, informed guesses where we thought we were headed in the right direction—and 90% of the time, it's worked out.

Our downtown infrastructure and amenities—the streets, sidewalks, curb and gutter, brick pavers, trees, streetlights, wayfinding signage and even the utilities underneath the road—they are all a result of the Main Street program. Also, the building façades are a lot more historically correct.

Most importantly, there's a can-do spirit in Boyne City that wasn't here prior to Main Street. Boyne City is a more confident community than it was before. It's not afraid to take chances and try new things. It's really been building on its past and focusing on the future.

"THERE'S A CAN-DO SPIRIT IN BOYNE CITY THAT WASN'T HERE PRIOR TO MAIN STREET… BOYNE CITY HAS REALLY BEEN BUILDING ON ITS PAST AND FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE."

When I was hired, the City Commission basically said, 'There's a lot of great communities in Northern Michigan—Traverse City, Petoskey, Charlevoix, Harbor Springs—we don't want to be those communities. We want to be the best Boyne City that we can be.'

Main Street gave us the tools to help accomplish that goal—to look at our past, build on it and go forward.

When we tried 'Stroll the Streets' or 'Boyne Thunder,' nobody knew if those were going to be successful. We established our Team Boyne program—where we just get people together to talk—it seems so simple and so basic, but we've had other communities say they're amazed we can do that. They can't even get the city, the chamber, the schools—whatever the organizations are—in the same room to talk to each other.

For us in Boyne City, all the pieces came together, and the gears meshed well in 2003, and they've been meshing well ever since. That doesn't mean we don't have rough times where we need to put some oil on those gears. It's not a perfect relationship—nothing ever is, and nobody should expect it to be.

You start out at a real basic level and the first few years we asked if Main Street was really doing anything for us. And then we started seeing results and over time, it's become clear it's made a real difference in our community.

—Michael Cain, City Manager for Boyne City

Michigan Main Street Story Series

MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION