



**SOCIAL DISTRICT, MURAL
MALL, AND REDEVELOPMENT
ARE RESHAPING MAIN STREET**

THREE RIVERS

Narrative by Andrew George, Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and Main Street Chairman, Tricia Meyer, Three Rivers DDA and Main Street Executive Director, and Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Origin Stories

“I moved to Three Rivers in 1995 and fell in love with the community. I became really involved at that point, but as a volunteer. I was passionate about the Historic District, passionate about the people here and the community pride.

I became very involved over the past 25 years, and a couple years ago, that turned into working for the DDA and Main Street Program. It was an opportunity for me to really make a difference in a community and downtown that I'm very passionate about, and I jumped on it.”

—Tricia Meyer, Executive Director, Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program

“I was an activist and I traveled the country participating in different issues to better communities all across America. I did that for about 10 years and one day, I decided to move back home to Three Rivers to see what I could do for the community there.

So, in 2016, I moved back. Our mayor, Mayor Lowry, came into the grocery store I was working at the time and I said, 'Mayor Lowry, what can I do to get involved with the community here?'

He said, 'Go fill out a citizen interest forum, and we'll get you placed on a board.'

About two weeks later, I got the call saying they wanted me on the Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority. At the time, I had no idea what that meant.

That was back in 2017, and it was honestly one of the greatest things that has ever happened to me. In October 2017, I joined the board and I got to learn the ins and outs of being on the board. By October of 2018, and actually one year to the date of joining the board, I became chairman. I was unsure at first, but it was my path."

—Andrew George, Chairman of the Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program

Describing Three Rivers

"Three Rivers is quaint, charming and historic. There are lots of outdoor and



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beautiful spaces. We are named Three Rivers, but we really do have three rivers in the community. More importantly, they meet at the center of the city.

It's a diverse place, full of opportunities and forward-thinking. It's a great place to be and really a wonderful community.

We're also a small community. I'd tell people, 'If you can just picture a small town with a historic downtown like you would see in a movie, that's Three Rivers. I'd pull on the internet and they'd say, 'No way! It looks like a movie, that's a real place?' And I'd say, 'Yes, that's my hometown.'

One of the new places we have coming in is replacing a brewery that we had before. We have some new, energetic business owners, Colin and Evan Monroe, who come from a family that is actually hugely involved in the downtown Three Rivers community and Colin serves on our board.

The brewery is called Useless Creatures. I'm hoping it's going to bring a nice, vibrant young crowd to downtown. I think that will help with that, being that both the owners are very young themselves. It's good to see young people investing in downtown Three Rivers."

—Tricia Meyer, Executive Director, Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program and Andrew George, Chairman



"It looks like a movie. Is that a real place?"



Placemaking

"We attended a national Main Street conference in Seattle. There, they really hammered home the importance of placemaking and we took that to heart.

We came back home to Three Rivers and talked to our board. We engaged several of our members and came up with ideas, and a former board member got really involved with a placemaking initiative we call East Alley.

Formerly, it was just a walk through to get from the east parking lot into the downtown area. The only things there were a tree and a bench. This former board member, Michael Hogoboom, had a vision for it of art and we stood behind him.

We partnered with the MEDC and they matched us 50/50 for funding, turning that empty space into a vibrant place with artwork and a little pop-up stage area for open mics, artists, and others. There's a market, lights, seating, tables, outlets, and it has just really brought the place to life. It's so amazing to actually watch people hanging out in that space from what it was before: simply a walkthrough for more parking.

We also have a few social districts that came about during COVID because of the need for people to safely social distance while also being able to support our restaurants and bars. Many of our licensed establishments were under restrictions as far as having a limited amount of people indoors. Typically, having a cocktail in a

public space in a city proper is not something that has ever been allowed by the Michigan Liquor Control, but it worked out very well for the community working with the MLCC to make that possible.

Basically how it works is that a social district allows a municipality to establish a boundary outdoors. In our particular case, it would be our Main Street's sidewalks, our East Alley, and another pocket park called the Mural Mall. A licensed establishment such as the Riviera or Landmark Taphouse can be approved to serve alcohol to people that can be taken outside for people to enjoy.

We have what is known as a capital improvements plan. Our board members brainstormed what would work best in downtown Three Rivers and what folks would enjoy most down here. We have a mural mall that used to be an alley but now has tables and art on the buildings. We just received a vibrancy grant from the MEDC to redo that alleyway, as well, doing something similar with market lights, artwork and things like that.

In the near future, we want to start working on things like an amphitheater behind downtown. It would be on the east side of our downtown because it slopes down to the river, creating a perfect, natural amphitheater. We're really psyched and amped to try to put that together."

—Tricia Meyer, Executive Director, Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program and Andrew George, Chairman

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Redevelopment

"Being that we are a nationally-registered Historic District, we're very fortunate to have some wonderful buildings in our building inventory. Many of them date back to the turn of the century, the late 1800s.

There's so much opportunity here. Where in some communities you go into, everything has to be built from scratch, we have this authentic Historic District. There is truly history here, in all these buildings. It's fascinating because many people who show interest in buying these buildings want to know about the history. They want that to be part of their story as well. We have a lot of upper-floor housing here in many of these buildings and there's a lot of potential still for that to be developed.

We have a lot of young people looking to live down here. What inventory we do have, that occupancy stays pretty full. We get inquiries on a daily basis. We think people just really want to invest and immerse themselves into the community.

Even on the outer district we have a couple of historic buildings. We were a manufacturing area and district way back when. We have a vacant manufacturing building that we refer to as the White House building because it was home to White House Manufacturing in the 1940s or 50s.

There's a young developer who's purchased the building and is working with the city. They're going to be rehabbing that and putting in urban and industrial-style apartments to help us meet the demand for housing in the city."

—Tricia Meyer, Executive Director, Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program and Andrew George, Chairman



— *Historic Downtown* —



A MAIN STREET COMMUNITY

Main Street

“The words ‘Main Street’ give an iconic image. It’s a place where not only can you shop and dine, but you visit and meet people, where you can connect and feel a sense of ownership or belonging.

We’ve been to other towns in other states where they’re trying to build what is supposed to look like a Main Street. But here in Three Rivers, we are fortunate to have one of the most intact, authentic, historic Main Streets in the State of Michigan. We think people like that nostalgia, feeling and that sense of place.

Your Main Street is the face of the town, the heart of the city. It’s what people walk away thinking and talking about, so it’s important to get right.

Being part of the Main Street community, we are a small community with big dreams. Partnering with Michigan Main Street and the National Main Street Network has just really allowed us to fast track the work in many ways for many of our initiatives. It’s enabled us to streamline our approaches and be a little more strategic. It’s by far the most sophisticated form of revitalization for a Historic District like ours.

For those looking to join the Main Street community, they should reach out to and visit the communities that are part of Michigan Main Street. They’ll obviously have plenty of stories of their own and they can see tangible things and the difference they’ve made. We are a Master Level Main Street community, eight years into it. We can certainly sit down with anybody at any point and say, ‘Here’s where we were then, here’s where we are now, and here’s where we’re going.’ We have benchmarks of success that we can show.

Michigan Main Street is definitely a great team that provides support as well. It’s all about doing your homework and coming up with a plan and then working the plan. It’s really a partnership and it’s become just another extension of what we do. We build relationships with other communities and it becomes an incredible support system.

If you have the creativity and the passion for your downtown and your community, Michigan Main Street is an instrumental piece to pulling it all together.”

—Tricia Meyer, Executive Director, Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program and Andrew George, Chairman





Michigan Main Street Story Series



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