



RALLYING COMMUNITY
INVESTMENT, MAIN STREET
ADRIAN LOOKS TOWARD A
REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN
FILLED WITH ENTREPRENEURS
AND RESIDENTS

DOWNTOWN ADRIAN

Narrative by Jay Marks, Main Street
Adrian Executive Director, Dusty
Steele, Chairperson for Adrian Main
Street, and Phil Eich, Storyville
Social, as part of the Michigan Main
Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

A Community at a Tipping Point

"Before taking this position, I was actually a senior technical advisor for Apple, working remotely for them for seven years. My wife and I also own a small business here, so we were involved in downtown and I'm involved in quite a bit within the city of Adrian. A couple of people approached me about the opportunity of becoming the Main Street director, so I reached out to Dusty Steele, he put his claws in me, and wouldn't let me leave his office.

Adrian is a small town, a rural community, but I would say that in the last ten years, I've watched about \$30 million come into the downtown, with another \$30 to \$40 million teed up already. The developers are all around and the investors are swift. They know that a tipping point is taking place, and that's what we are seeing right now.

Investment like that is great and all of those things happening is very exciting, but when you hear numbers like that, it can be hard to quantify until you see something take place. But that investment gives more opportunities for our entrepreneurs and their businesses, and for new residents to live downtown.

And it's not just investment that makes a great community,

it really takes a village. We've got involvement from our service groups, from our community members. There's a lot of passion within the community, people that want to revitalize it and make it a draw. Accomplishing that needs people who are willing to do the work and guide that process, and we do, creating a great opportunity for the entire community."

— Jay Marks, Main Street Adrian Executive Director

A Legacy of Revitalization

"I'm a financial planner, and I've been in the business for 32 years. I moved to Atlanta right after college and worked for Merrill Lynch for 12 years. I moved back because we had three children, and Atlanta's a big city. I found myself moving out to the suburbs, and then the suburbs of the suburbs. Then I thought to myself, 'Why don't I just move back home?'

I came back and almost immediately got involved. My mother was a big advocate for our downtown. Her name was Joanne Steele, and she was revitalizing buildings way back 25 years ago, and I never let go after that. This small town has a great history that goes way back—the building my business is in goes back to 1860, and the buildings in our downtown are one of our biggest assets. They're just absolutely beautiful, and there's been a lot of revitalization and beautification of these buildings like the one we're sitting in for this interview, the historic Croswell Opera House.

It's the longest-running theater in the state of Michigan; it started being built in 1853. It was a big attraction way back then. It's evolved over time, and a few years ago, they did a full remodel. It's a great economic driver for us: shows can have over 6,000 people visiting, and the majority of those are going to be from outside of our community. It was a tremendous accomplishment and a great commitment by all our community members.

It's those community members that make the difference here in Adrian. They are connected and they're working together."

—Dusty Steele, Chairperson of Adrian Main Street



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Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

"We're really looking to grow inclusive entrepreneurship in downtown Adrian while trying to get more retail. Like many communities, we had a mall that is no longer a mall, and we need to really have that focus of bringing more commerce into our downtown, so we're using programs to do that.

Launch Lenawee is a 30,000-foot view of how to operate a business, and when you're done with the program, you wind up having your business plan created. They offer mentorship. There's some micro loan availability. There's a whole education process that really takes place. They're in their sixth class, and I'm guessing they've probably had about 50 different entrepreneurs come through the program, and they continue to go back.

One way we're building out our entrepreneurial ecosystem is by developing some micro-retail spots where a business owner can rent a 200-square-foot space that's not in a building, but they can actually have their own space. Collectively, that will provide a good kind of a mini mall feeling, but in a public space and that will give entrepreneurs a stepping stone to do things like build a customer base and understand cash flow."

— Jay Marks, Main Street Adrian Executive Director

Michigan Main Street

"Being part of the Michigan Main Street program is great because it gives us guidance. We don't want to recreate the wheel when it's already there, so resource-sharing with other communities, using their ideas, and having a network with all the other Main Street directors really helps to get things moving a lot faster. Before Main Street, it would have taken years to do some of the things we're doing.

— Jay Marks, Main Street Adrian Executive Director



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Building Housing and Vibrancy

"They say 'if you build it, they will come', but I say, 'if we want vibrancy downtown, we need to create some housing.' We have waiting lists for apartments! People love and want to live downtown, so we need to create more housing. We have a new apartment building project that's being developed on the New Riverfront project, a public and private partnership, and that will help, but we need even more.

Increasing downtown housing is more than just economics; it's about a vision. Increasing the vibrancy of downtown benefits our nearby neighborhoods. In the future, I see all of our historic buildings outside of downtown being revitalized, too, as people want to live close to the downtown. I would love to see that spill effect. I see this revitalization growing outward and really helping all facets of our community: from our east side, west side, north, south, everybody should be included. Everybody needs to be a part of it."

—Dusty Steele, Chairperson of Adrian Main Street



ADRIAN DOWNTOWN

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