



WASSAIL FEST AND A FOCUS
ON PLACEMAKING ARE
REIMAGING DOWNTOWN

BLISSFIELD

Narrative by Heather Marks, Former
Director Blissfield Downtown
Development Authority and Main
Street, Phil Eich, Storyville Social,
as part of the Michigan Main Street
Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

From Small Business Owner to DDA Main Street Director

Blissfield is the Hallmark Christmas card of small towns. It's a quaint, very close-knit, rural area. We have a little over 3,000 people now in our community, and we're supportive of one another, not just the businesses, but the community as a whole.

I'm a small business owner in Blissfield, but I also worked as Blissfield's DDA Main Street director for about three years. As a local business owner, I had seen forward momentum in our downtown with new businesses coming in and wanted to see that continue. When the director position opened up, I told my business partner, who is also my mom, that I wanted to apply for the position to keep that momentum going—not only for our small business, but for all the small businesses in Blissfield.

Owning a business gave me some insight into what would benefit all of us here in the downtown. It also allowed me to become closer to all the other businesses around me. I hope that in my time here, I was able to unify us a little more and grow the

businesses' relationships with one another as well as with the Village.

Small Businesses That Make Blissfield Special

Ben and Lindsey of Starling Lounge are fantastic business owners here in Blissfield. They're evolving and excited to be starting a brewery. In the meantime, they offer so much more than just your cup of coffee or tea. They add a sense of place to our downtown, which is so important. Friends are meeting there all the time, families meet up there, and it's just a great place to engage and have a conversation.

Another small business that stands out in Blissfield is Lena's Italian Restaurant. Lena's is one of those great family businesses that has been passed down through the generations. The community and I are thankful for Stefano and Cindy taking over the business after Stefano's parents.

Lena's is one of those great restaurants that you want to eat at every single night. There's just so much they offer. The owners are very involved in our community, always giving to so many organizations. They really have that understanding of what it is to be a business in a small town.

Special Events in Blissfield

We have so many great events happening from May through December in Blissfield. Two of our most popular events are the Blissfield Yuletide Festival and our Wassail Fest.

Our Yuletide Celebration, which started as a small retail event almost 50 years ago, has grown to include not just shopping but a food tasting event, a cider and beer tasting event with a live band, and Santa and his reindeer are here all weekend long. We try to hit that event out of the park to bring more people to our community and help our local businesses succeed.

Wassail is another special event in Blissfield, and it's pretty unique. All the participating businesses make homemade wassail, which is like spiced mulled cider. People get mugs and go around and sample all the wassail and vote for their favorites. That one is a really fun

community event for the adults. Our residents enjoy the Wassail Fest, for sure.

Bringing Coach Light Plaza Back to Life

When I first started my job as Blissfield's DDA Main Street Director, the Coach Light Plaza was for sale. Most of the businesses there were vacant except for our only grocery store, and it looked like it was stuck in the 1970s. It wasn't very attractive, the parking lot had giant potholes, and I knew that, unfortunately, if something wasn't done to turn it around, we might lose our grocery store and that would be devastating.

Understanding that, the board put together a plan focused on rehabilitating the property, what we wanted to see happen to it, and how we could make those changes.

Although it didn't work out for the DDA to buy and rehabilitate the property itself, we brought the issue to the forefront of our community and a local investor came forward and purchased it. Not only did he purchase the plaza, but he used a lot of the pieces that we had created with a developer. We're super excited. Our grocery store is still there, our bowling alley is reopening, and, in time, the plaza should be completely full—a huge win for a small community like ours.



"The owners are very involved in our community, always giving to so many organizations. They really have that understanding of what it is to be a business in a small town."



Pacemaking Efforts Underway

We have placemaking efforts happening now in Blissfield. The DDA is working to reimagine and transform a piece of property the Village owns that serves as a walking path from Lane Street to a parking lot. It could be so much more! We have been working with a local landscaping firm and looking at ways we can transform the space into something usable. We imagine a space where people can sit and have a cup of coffee and chat with their friends, listen to a guitarist, visit a food truck, and see local art. We applied for and received a vibrancy grant through the Michigan Small Business Development Center to help make it happen.

We also have the potential for a development project, the Carpenter Furman project. On one of our corners in Blissfield, there's a building that really needs some attention. Working with a local architect/developer, there is an awesome opportunity to turn it into a mixed-use property with businesses on the ground floor and two levels of apartments.



"The DDA is working to reimagine and transform a piece of property the Village owns that serves as a walking path from Lane Street to a parking lot."



Michigan Main Street Story Series



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION