



**FORMER GREAT AMERICAN  
MAIN STREET AWARD WINNER,  
HOWELL RESHAPED  
DOWNTOWN FOR BUSINESS  
SUCCESS**

# HOWELL

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Narrative by Kate Litwin, Howell  
Main Street Director, and Phil Eich,  
Storyville Social, as part of the  
Michigan Main Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## **Introducing Howell**

“Main Street Howell is an amazing hometown experience in Michigan: a quintessential small town, but so unique. We have historic charm but with a cool, fun, new vibe offered by the businesses we have, and the programming we do makes every day an event.

Main Street Howell isn't Anywhere, USA. We don't have chain businesses here. All of our businesses are locally run, locally operated small businesses. They're one of a kind. For example, you won't find national coffee chains: you'll find true, homegrown coffee shops where the baristas know you by name.

We're different from the surrounding communities. We don't have everything that they have—and that's OK. We are Howell, and we have our own unique blend of what works for our community.

We're always asking, 'It's your downtown; what do you want to see?' Getting that feedback is amazing and from that feedback we keep adding more events and programming and things people want. Feedback helps make growth organic and not cookie-cutter.

It feels like you're walking into a place different from anywhere else, and that's what gets people excited about being here.

There's so much to do and so much to explore, and it's great that we can be authentically ourselves. We want our downtown to be a destination for both our residents and our guests. We want visitors to say, 'That was a cool little town.' and come back, and we want our residents to say, 'This is a cool little town' and stay."

### **How has Michigan Main Street helped Howell?**

"Michigan Main Street provides so many services for us here in Howell. The staff is amazing and they can see our community from every angle because they work with so many different communities. They have tons of experience and know what it takes to run a downtown. While the Main Street program provides a formula or a model for success, the great part is that every community can implement it differently—they can improve while still being themselves.

One of the biggest advantages to the Main Street approach is how it connects you to all the players in your community and builds excitement around its potential. It also connects you to an exceptional state and national network of Main Street directors and board members who share ideas and support each other, so Main Street gives you this huge network of people who can pick you up and push you in the right direction."

### **Getting a boost from grants**

"The Match on Main program is really cool because it helps businesses that are just starting out or existing businesses expanding their footprint. We have two businesses here in Howell that have benefited from Match on Main funding. The first is Coratti's Pizzeria Bar & Bocce. Coratti's received a \$25,000 grant to purchase a brick oven and bring it here all the way from Italy, so not only do they make true Neapolitan-style pizza, but they make it in an oven that came all the way from Italy to Howell!

The second winner to receive this funding is our Uptown Coffeehouse, which we kind of equate to Central Perk in 'Friends.' It's the place to 'see and be seen'.

But COVID hit them hard. They couldn't be open for a long time and they needed a complete overhaul inside, so we applied for the grant so they can take an underutilized portion of that space and expand their kitchen. With that, they'll be able to bake on-site, make fresh soups, sandwiches, and, long-term plans, possibly even get a liquor license so they can cater to an evening crowd as well."

### **A Redevelopment Ready Community**

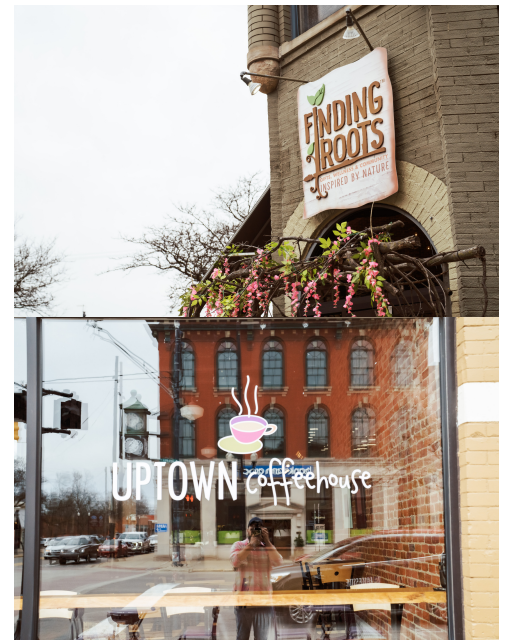
"Being a Redevelopment Ready Community means we have done the legwork to be open and welcoming to developers. We've identified priority sites within our downtown that we think are ripe for development. The RRC program helps get marketing out to developers who might be interested in coming to Howell. It's a great program to be a part of, but being both a Redevelopment Ready Community and a Main Street community is where it's at!"

### **Crowdfunding via Patronicity**

"Patronicity is like Kickstarter for placemaking. Their staff is amazing and will walk anyone through the process of funding a placemaking project with their coaching. It's one of my favorite programs and something I think everyone should try to take advantage of regardless of how big or small a project is.

First, you identify your project and create visuals like renderings so people can see what the project would look like. Then you establish donation levels, set a goal amount of funding, and start generating excitement in your community around the project. If the goal is reached, that amount gets matched by the state. So, for example, if your goal is \$25,000 dollars and you get that in 30 days, the state will give another \$25,000, doubling your effort. It's a game changer.

Our Patronicity project was Peanut Row Alley, one of the main alleys downtown.



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It needed to be more exciting and to become that 'third place' that isn't work and isn't home, but a place where you could sit and enjoy an ice cream cone or a coffee.

We used Patronicity to make that happen: providing furniture to sit on and creating an rotating outdoor art gallery so people have something new to look at.

Whether it was an individual with \$5 to give all the way up to the corporations with bigger donations, everybody could support the project through the platform. That's important because it shows broad community support for a project and helps identify what people really want to see in their downtown.

With Patronicity, we know a project is what the community wants because they were telling us while directly supporting the project with donations, and because of Patronicity, we'll be able to deliver."

#### **Lighter, quicker, cheaper placemaking**

"I love the lighter, quicker, cheaper method of placemaking. A lot of people get hung up thinking they have to do a huge project to make a difference, but it's amazing how much impact little efforts can make.

For example, through our Howell Art Project there's art all over downtown and we now have three large-scale murals. But it really started out very simple as just a local art competition.



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Then we invited high school students to come in, and they did something really cool with rain art on the concrete. You can't see it when it's nice out, but when it's raining, the art pops up.

It's those little things that pique people's interest, and then they can build and morph into something bigger like a public art gallery. It could be a pop-up or a community mural. Invite people to come out and paint-by-number for a couple of hours. It gets people excited. They can come back when it's finished and say, 'I painted that heart' or 'I painted that balloon.' It gives them that sense of place and that feeling of pride that they did something downtown. Placemaking can be starting small and making incremental changes."

#### Unique new businesses in Howell

"One of our newest restaurants in downtown Howell is Coratti's Pizzeria Bar & Bocce. They have a really cool story. They took an old building, it was a call center for the telephone company in the 1950s, and they turned it into an Italian restaurant with these amazing pizza ovens and bocce ball courts. It's a funky vibe, lots of space, open-air; they've got the garage door windows on it so that they can let in all that fresh air. It's great food, Italian fine dining, but it's also an experience.

Weaver's Kava House is another unique business we have here in downtown Howell. Not every community has a kava house. A lot of people hadn't even heard of it before it opened here.

Kava is a ground root that has properties that are very similar to ashwagandha or something that would help settle you down a little bit, kind of get you in the groove. It's not psycho-tropic, but it is supposed to help you relax and chill out and put you in a good mood. So, it's a ground-up root that they put in all sorts of different smoothies and fruit bowls. It doesn't have much flavor to it, so it can go in anything. They also have an oxygen bar. They do amazing gourmet toast. It's just a fun dining experience and something I've never seen anywhere else."

— Kate Litwin, Downtown Howell Main Street Director



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# Michigan Main Street Story Series



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