



## *Milan Area Chamber of Commerce*

KIM RHONEY AND THE MILAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SEE VALUE OF MAIN STREET

---

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

"The Milan Area Chamber promotes Milan by helping keep our businesses healthy, and by supporting nonprofit organizations, education, networking, and marketing of the community. Before I became the Director of the Chamber, I had a long history of marketing hospitality destinations and in arts organizations, and I also worked for a nonprofit. This role gave me the opportunity to use my skills and experience to help my hometown.

I am also an artist and I work mainly in oil paint. I work in multiple mediums, but oil painting is kind of my thing. It's funny, when I finished school, I traveled a bit and I thought I had to move to a big city to be discovered as an artist.

But really, what I had to do was move home to the farm fields of Milan Township. I'm two miles southwest of town and just started painting what I knew. It was there I found my joy, my stride, and my work evolved. I started a family and that impacted my work because I started becoming more conscious of health. Oil painting is known for using solvents and toxins, so that led me to working without solvents, which means working with knives. Then a friend of mine introduced me to cold wax, which is like beeswax and a little bit of resin, which is low VOC and I began adding that to my paint. Now, I have this kind of thick, chunky, luminous wax...and it's cool!

I do events at my studio out in the country at my little hobby farm. People love to stop in and then come into town to the bakery and visit the stores. My role at the Chamber and my art has been a nice kind of marriage that allows me to support my town and make my community better.

Milan is in the midst of a hot housing market that has been driven by nearby Ann Arbor, which seems like it has New York City prices now. Housing is more reasonable here, so people have moved here and continue to move here. Milan is a really nice, somewhat affordable alternative and with that, they get this small-town feel while still having access to what Ann Arbor has to offer.

We work with Main Street to support programs that will either foster more visitors from out of town to our businesses, or turn our own residents into more frequent customers. We also do a lot of programming and education to help our business owners. A lot of our small business owners are first time entrepreneurs: for example, they might need help with creating graphics for social media. With things like that, we can introduce them to something like Canva or other apps that can help them look more professional without a big investment. We've helped people plan for social media and better understand how the algorithms are working for and against them.

For me personally, and from the Chamber's point of view, I consider what Jill has done with the Main Street program as an integral piece to getting our vacancies downtown filled. If it wasn't for the Third Thursdays program, I'm not certain that we would have the same vibe of retailers that we have here now. The event gives retailers an opportunity to dip a toe into building a business, and by attending market events, they can build some confidence and create a following.

From that program, one new permanent retailer led to another. They all kind of nested together here and that is now starting to spread out even beyond the Main Street area. I don't know if someone in an office, hidden away from downtown and not producing regular events designed to recruit businesses would have had the same success.

Milan has a vibrancy right now that I haven't seen in a long, long time, and its future is very bright. I love seeing all the young families moving in. I love to see entrepreneurs building their businesses, not just downtown, but out in the community and out of their homes. That is very cool, and we want to continue to cultivate that energy."

—Kim Rhoney, Director of the Milan Area Chamber, Milan



"MILAN HAS A VIBRANCY RIGHT NOW THAT I HAVEN'T SEEN IN A LONG, LONG TIME, AND ITS FUTURE IS VERY BRIGHT."





# Michigan Main Street Story Series



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC**  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION