

On behalf of Main Street Waterbury, I would like to wish all of you a very happy and prosperous New Year 2012. As is customary with my January column, I would like to review the accomplishments of Main Street Waterbury for 2011 as we look forward to 2012.

First let me say that once again, Main Street Waterbury achieved a National Accreditation status from the National Main Street Center in Washington D.C. for an impressive 7th straight year. I couldn't be prouder of our organization, our volunteers and our Board of Directors for making this possible. This is no easy task but it shows that we continue to make incremental progress in our efforts to revitalize Downtown Waterbury by following the Main Street "four-point" approach to the letter. In addition, we continue to be one of Connecticut Main Street Center's flagship programs.

Here's a look at our accomplishments for 2011. We did have a very successful Brass City Brew Fest in September. Coming off a 2010 event that was well run but fell a little short in the beer supply department, we more than made up for that this past year and held what some are saying as the most successful event in the six years we've been doing it. The weather was great, the attendance was great, the beer tasting was plentiful, the downtown bars and restaurants benefitted very well after the event, and the positive feedback from out of town attendees was a very rewarding outcome. The 2012 Brew Fest will be held on September 8. Once again this past year, on every Wednesday from June through September, we held Music at the Exchange on Bank Street. This weekly music event featured area artists and musicians singing and playing a variety of different genres to entertain downtown workers and residents during their lunchtime. The event, sponsored by TDBank, really hit its stride this year with better crowds, craft vendors, and more food. With the exception of one rainy Wednesday, the weather was great throughout the summer. Attendees were treated to great music by Marty Q., Angelo Ruggiero, The Dangermon Band, Christi-Maia-Jones, and the Irish Minstrels, to name a few. Main Street Waterbury presented two free concerts on the Green in August with The Big Band Sound of Andy Nichols and his Orchestra as well as the Fulton American Band under the direction of Joe Jacovino. These two orchestras provided top quality music from some of the area's finest musicians. It was a real treat to listen to swing music and American classics on our Green on beautiful summer nights.

In June we held the second annual Stephen R. Sasala II Community Partnership Award event at the Palace Theater. The partnership award went to Ingrid Manning from the Connecticut Community Foundation. Ingrid's tireless work in our community and her partnership with Main Street Waterbury emulated the qualities that Steve stood for and made her an ideal recipient of this award. In addition, Main Street Waterbury awarded the first ever Stephen R. Sasala II Scholarship to Wolcott High School Senior Marisa McCann.

Our Promotion Committee released the second edition of the downtown restaurant guide "Tastefully Waterbury". This award winning piece features updated information regarding all of the dining establishments, bars, coffee shops, and lunch counters in the downtown area. It has been distributed around town and continues to be an excellent resource for visitors to refer to when looking to grab a bite to eat. Additional efforts were taken this year to make sure every downtown office worker has their own personal desk copy.

The Pole Banner sponsorship program continued in 2011 with updated and renewed sponsor slices on the E. Main, Bank, and Grand Street light poles.

The 2012 Main Street Waterbury Wall Calendar has been released and the theme for this year is the Monuments of downtown Waterbury. The images are inspiring and I recommend that you purchase one. You can contact the Main Street Waterbury office for details.

The Design Committee launched a "Bike Rack" work plan for Downtown Waterbury. The intent is to install whimsical colorful bike racks in and around the downtown area to accommodate the increasing use of bikes by downtown workers and residents. In partnership with the Greater Waterbury YMCA, Mattatuck Museum, City of Waterbury and other downtown businesses, designs are being crafted now and hopefully, a sponsorship plan will be developed to get these racks locally made and installed in 2012.

The Design Committee also coordinated the Sixth Annual Holiday Decoration Contest. This event highlights the downtown Waterbury merchants holiday window displays and recognizes those exceptional windows with awards for best design, most visual impact, best creativity and best overall.

Main Street Waterbury's Design Committee in partnership with the Waterbury Development Corporation continued to administer and promote the Façade Improvement Program. Four building facades have been completed, two more are scheduled to get under way this month, and four more downtown buildings were selected to get their facades updated in 2012.

The Organization Committee coordinated another successful year of Monthly Happy Hour events at many downtown bars and restaurants. In addition to this being a social networking event, it also created the added economic benefit to the downtown bars who appreciated the extra business.

The Organization Committee continued to schedule and present Downtown Business Watch meetings most notably the Forum held at Uconn Waterbury Campus in October for the three mayoral candidates. We continue to update our website mainstreetwaterbury.com with downtown event listings and other important information. In addition, we publish a bi-monthly newsletter and provide Downtown Alerts to our merchants and businesses to advise of street closings, snow removal, emergency situations, and other information that could affect their daily operations.

Main Street Waterbury's volunteer Downtown Ambassadors, who are mostly local high school students, continued their work this year at various downtown events most notably the Mayor's Inauguration at the Palace Theater on December 2.

The Economic Restructuring Committee continued to maintain the Available Properties list which is a resource of information, provided by Main Street Waterbury, free of charge, to any interested party looking to rent or buy retail/commercial space in the downtown district. As part of the Downtown Business Recruitment and Outreach strategy, this committee also updated the Main Street downtown Waterbury demographic sheet with relevant facts and stats that would be important to potential developers and investors. This requires significant data collecting such as number of downtown residents and households, traffic counts, average household income etc. The ERC has spent a good deal of time planning for free workshops to be held in 2012 designed to offer help to our downtown merchants and businesses.

Overall, Main Street Waterbury continued to market the parking options in downtown Waterbury through the website waterburyparking.com and by encouraging downtown parkers to purchase the parking card for use on downtown parking meters.

As you can see from this listing, Main Street Waterbury had a very active year with many ongoing projects and several new ones. It is most important to note that the business of downtown revitalization is not about any one aspect but rather a combination of many details and efforts all related to the Four Point Main Street approach and involving much effort throughout the course of a day, week, month and year. As we tie up loose ends and deal with any number of daily issues from litter, to panhandling, to special events, parking, beautification, marketing the downtown district, data collection, merchant concerns, and so much more, we continue to remind our volunteers, supporters and stakeholders that we are the “go-to” organization that can deal with these matters.

We look forward to these continued efforts and more for 2012. We will need your help. If you are interested in volunteering please contact me at 203-757-0701 ext. 302 or email me at crosa@mainstreetwaterbury.com and remember, keep thinking Main Street Waterbury, Culture, Education, Business!!