

Main Street Matters

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THE MAGNOLIA EFFECT



By Chris Dyer, President/CEO, Dr Pepper Museum, Waco

I grew up in Waco, and downtown looks vastly different now than when I left in 1998. From my vantage point, at that time there was not much going on. This wasn't entirely true, as I now realize all the sweat equity that forward-thinking Wacoans put into reviving downtown. Twenty years later, here I am, leading one of the original tourism attractions in downtown Waco—the Dr Pepper Museum—and looking out my office window at Magnolia Market at the Silos just a block away.

If you haven't heard of Magnolia, *Fixer Upper*, or "The Silos," where have you been? A pilot of Chip and Joanna Gaines' Waco-based show *Fixer Upper* first aired in 2013, with the first full season beginning in April 2014. Following that success, the Gaineses opened Magnolia Market at the Silos downtown in October 2015. The rest is history.

The Dr Pepper Museum officially opened to the public in 1991 and serves as the mecca for "Peppers" from all over the United States. A record year for us pre-Magnolia was 75,000 visitors. We struggled, just like many other businesses heavily invested in downtown, until the Magnolia "spaceship" landed in October 2015, as our director of finance likes to say. At that time, our National Register-listed Artesian Manufacturing & Bottling Company Building (AMBC) served as the museum and was

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equipped to accommodate 35,000 visitors annually. By October 2016, our annual visitation more than doubled overnight. Jumping to the present, our Convention and Visitors Bureau projected that over 2.7 million people visited Waco-area attractions in 2018. Assuming an \$85 per person expenditure, this is expected to generate over \$229 million in area spending. With this amazing gift, downtown businesses face some very real and unanticipated challenges.

I arrived on the scene in July 2018, and it was obvious that we had morphed from a small nonprofit to a complicated, large business in mere months. The time for planning on the front end was limited and nobody really knew what to expect. We now have 35 employees, are open seven days a week, and project 170,000+ visitors in the current year. We are thriving, but truth be told, we struggled unnecessarily in many areas trying to catch up, and we learned some valuable lessons along the way.

For a small business, it can be scary to invest capital when something like Magnolia happens. You just don't know how long it will last. We've heavily invested in our people, primarily in areas related to customer service, training, scheduling, and creating positions to cover the workload. In our field, customer service is paramount and employee burnout is a constant concern. Like so many other businesses, we had to train ourselves to see customers as more than just dollar signs. The museum didn't initially put our best foot forward. One of our biggest mistakes early on was not immediately investing in technology, specifically with our point of sale system, security cameras, staff scheduling platforms, online presence, intercom systems (our campus is split between two facilities), and visitor data capture systems. Our reluctance to proactively embrace new technology resulted in some hiccups including slow-moving lines, frustrated patrons, poor social media reviews, exhausted employees, wasted time, and missed financial opportunities. Small nonprofits and businesses have a strong tendency to be reactive, neglect planning, and act too conservatively because of our history of struggling for resources. Being reactive usually costs more in the long run.

We struggled the most with visitor accessibility. The 1882 and 1906 buildings on our campus were not originally designed to be visited by 35,000, let alone



Waco was able to double the footprint of The Dr Pepper Museum by purchasing and renovating the Kellum-Rotan building, and make some much needed repairs and renovations.

170,000 visitors annually, or to accommodate the mobility impaired. We have been able to effectively expand our campus and handle some of the traffic, but we failed miserably at addressing visitor flow. We are in a constant battle to retroactively open the floor plan of our public spaces. Doing this after the fact negatively impacts visitor experience due to necessary construction and closures, and it is extremely expensive. This issue holds true for our public restrooms as well. Bathrooms struggling to accommodate 1991 visitor numbers were woefully underperforming in 2018. \$50,000 later, we have new restrooms in place. I'll also mention that we had carpet in some of our galleries and residential-grade flooring in other portions of our campus. "Had" is the key word here.

The positives vastly outweigh any negatives with Magnolia in town. We were able to double the museum's footprint with the purchase and renovation of the historic Kellum-Rotan building, and make some much-needed repairs to the historic Dr Pepper bottling plant. Our endowment has grown significantly, and we've been able to restructure and hire additional staff, renovate our exhibitions to make them easily serviceable, switch to LED lighting systems to reduce our utility costs, and provide live, innovative programs for our visitors. Our rental and retail sales are through the roof, visitation



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continues to climb, and the visibility that we have by default has made us very appealing to donors and corporate sponsors.

The tourism industry in Waco breathed a collective sigh of relief when Chip Gaines recently let it slip on *The Tonight Show* that Magnolia is launching a new lifestyle media network. Fortunately, many of us in downtown Waco are taking lessons learned from the first wave and proactively preparing for the next rush and even for a post-Magnolia world, while we hope that day never comes.

During this boom, financial resources are not the issue – fear of the unknown is the limiting factor. Things like customer service, technology, efficiency, staffing for success, facility maintenance, aesthetics, and accessibility should always be a business owner's focus. Admittedly, hindsight is 20/20.

I hope your downtown finds its *Fixer Upper* (or it finds you). Before that happens, I implore you to proactively evaluate and invest in your people, technology, facility, and your customers now so you can instantly make the most of your next opportunity.

SAVE THE DATE!

Summer professional development
will be in Mount Pleasant.
June 10-14, 2019



THE SECRET WEAPON FOR MAIN STREET VIBRANCY



By Judy and Len Lester, Owners of The Escape Fine Crafts & Gifts

Editor's Note: This month's contribution comes from Judy and Len Lester who provide tips and tools Main Street managers can use as they work with downtown merchants toward supporting a vibrant business district. For 20 years, Judy and Len owned an award-winning business, The Escape, on the square in downtown Georgetown.

In recent visits around Texas, we have enjoyed conversations with stakeholders in several Main Street cities. There are many common threads. First, most exhibit great passion, interest, and enthusiasm concerning their part in revitalizing their historic town centers. Second, they quickly begin to stumble on all the things that they believe marginalize or impede success. Many of these stumbling blocks point out: streetscapes, facades, events, and lighting. You get the picture. You have likely been a part of advocating for some of these kinds of enhancements.

If not, these improvements are probably on the wish list. They are the tangible, often more comfortable to fund components to a vibrant downtown since you can see evidence of the investment. When you explore beyond these visible improvements, the most significant defining measure is foot traffic. In almost every town, the million dollar questions have been and always will be: How do we acquire more visitors? How do we get locals to come and shop? How do we draw in tourists from the highway? How do we get more professional businesses to open?

In 1996, my husband and I sat in a mostly vacant downtown, street parking filled with government employees, and decided a 450 sq. ft. space on a corner would be a great place to start a retail store. We opened the doors after five months of preparation and expected people to come flooding in announcing, "Hooray! I am so excited that you are open!" There were a few of those, but we also had many tell us, "you will never make it." We tallied the number of people who came in each day. It was usually 5-10. There were many zero revenue days. We were surprised by the initial lack of instant support. On top of that came the realization of the other typical hindrances you hear today. The list included events that often hurt traffic and sales more than they helped, new businesses opening and cannibalizing product, lack of productive collaboration among merchants, the need for joint marketing, and so much more. We considered

Streetscapes



Before



After

Facades



Before



After

Events



Before



After

Lighting



Before



After

(Top row, 2nd image): Photo Credits: Keith Peterson. (Bottom row, left to right): Photo Credits: City of Georgetown Archives, Photo Credits: City of Georgetown, TX - Government, Photo Credits: City of Georgetown, Photo Credits: City of Georgetown, Lucas Adams

throwing up our hands and closing our doors. Instead, we chose to enact a proactive, confident, and determined mindset. That mindset IS the secret weapon. Armed with a proactive mindset, we steadily grew our Main Street business for more than 20 years until we sold it for a substantial profit. We focused our energy on what we could control, not on what we couldn't. We planned for the worst and prepared for the best. Our continuous focus on how we could take the business to new levels each year certainly paid off. This mindset is not the norm, and the good news is it is not far from reach. We have outlined some tips below to help you begin a little shift in conversations that might help build a more positive mindset with your merchants.

“Mindset IS the secret weapon. Armed with a proactive mindset, we steadily grew our Main Street business for more than 20 years until we sold it for a substantial profit. We focused our energy on what we could control, not what we couldn't.”

- Judy Lester

When new businesses open, there are many fears and doubts to overcome. As customers come in and walk out empty handed, those fears and doubts multiply. As an owner, it is normal and even protective to find reasons to blame the lack of instant success. After all, they have just created their dream. They love what they created. They wonder why it isn't an overnight success and look anywhere to lay the blame.

That is where you come in. You innocently stop by to see how things are going and then instantly wish you had put on your protective gear and grabbed your fire hose before you walked through the door of that business. Maybe then you would feel ready to battle their fire, only to leave scorched and concerned that they aren't going to make it.

There is no doubt that you truly desire to help. The question is, “how?” Follow these proven steps to diffuse the frustration and begin the mindset turnaround. Let's play with this complaint. “What is the city going to do about parking?” Feel free to insert any *common issue*.

1. **Listen and validate.** The goal is to make the owner feel heard and know you care. This technique usually tames anger and allows the mind to shift to new ideas. Here's an example script: “Tell me all about what bothers you concerning our current parking situation.” Listen. Then validate. “It sounds like a real struggle for you and your customers. I hear many difficulties with this very issue. Like you, I wish there were a quick, easy fix.”
2. **Build trust.** The goals are to make the owner feel like you really care. “I appreciate your thoughts and openness to share with me. As much as I wish I could, I am unable to fix this situation at the moment. Know I will add your vote toward exploring options to our next discussion on the topic. I see you are passionate about this. **If you have ideas for possible solutions, please put them down in writing and send them to me.** I will make sure they are considered in our ongoing discussions.”
3. **Be clear.** It is natural to panic and to get wordy as you try to respond. State clearly what you hear the owner saying, comment on what, if anything, can be done at that moment, then shift the focus to what he can do. “While we wait on the solutions that might improve the situation in the mid and long-term, what are some possible things you can do to draw in patrons in spite of the parking? What other creative ways can you serve them to make it worth the extra effort?” If he says consumers shouldn't have to make the extra effort, validate that would be the ideal, and the reality is that visitors really do have to want to visit. To get him thinking that way, it might help to say, “Think about a time when you had to park somewhere inconvenient to shop or dine but you did it anyway. What was the driving factor to make the effort? What kind of compelling reasons could you create for your patrons?”
4. **Point to success for all.** Plant a seed that sharing ideas is a great way to overcome a difficulty. “Would you consider chatting with your neighbor about how you might work together to incentivize patrons who make an effort to walk the extra block to get to your stores? This might be a real opportunity to make a unified effort toward the value of shopping on this side of the street.” Whatever the response, acknowledge that you heard what she/he was saying, validate the feeling

conveyed, and offer a slight re-direct toward what she/he can control.

- 5. Show Gratitude.** Appreciation always feels good and helps shift feelings. By offering sincere thanks, you create value in the relationship. “Thank you for your desire to see downtown prosper. We both know that more parking is one thing that will support that goal. I am grateful you are willing to consider all you can do to work around the lack of parking until we enact a plan.”
- 6. Be proactive.** Be mindful of hot topics. Try to be out in front of the complaints by creating short-term solutions. Communicate that you are working on solutions. “I am working on some ideas for marketing that will educate patrons on where to park during peak times. Watch for news about that soon.”

In summary, when blame is laid on anything other than self, it is usually a way to defer responsibility. As you become more adept at validating that the stakeholder’s feelings are normal and shared while ushering her/him back to what she can do that is within her/his control, the sooner you can turn down the nozzle on your fireman’s hose and step into businesses full of customers and cash. That is true vibrancy.

WHAT EXACTLY IS PR AND DOES IT MAKE SENSE FOR YOUR DOWNTOWN?



By Lisa O'Neill, Principal of Breakaway Public Relations

Editor’s Note: Breakaway Public Relations a boutique public relations firm that builds awareness, influence and reputation for consumer brands and nonprofit organizations. The Austin, Texas-based agency has more than 25 years experience in a range of industries, with a focus on travel and tourism, hospitality, retail, nonprofits, and arts and architecture. Breakaway PR has represented the Georgetown, Texas Visitors Bureau since 2015, implementing an extensive media and influencer relations campaign on the state and national levels. This consistent outreach has resulted in coverage in outlets such as Texas Monthly, Texas Highways, TravelChannel.com, Southern Living, San Antonio Magazine, Dallas Morning News, Texas Standard radio, Paper City (Texas edition), Budget Travel, TripSavvy.com, Southwest Spirit and more.

Everyone seems to know the terms, “PR,” “good PR,” or a “PR nightmare,” but not so many understand what public relations actually entails. How does public relations fit into a broader marketing program, and how can it benefit a destination such as a downtown program or association?

If you’re savvy to the definition of public relations and how it differs from other marketing tools such as advertising, digital marketing or direct marketing, feel free to skip ahead. If you’re a bit fuzzy – **public relations is the practice of building influence and reputation among target audiences for an individual, organization/business, product or service.**

Smart PR practitioners start with a clear set of messaging. “Unique selling points” or brand messaging are the foundation for communicating across ALL marketing platforms. For example, over the past three years, we’ve amplified these core messages in all of our

IT’S A REVOLUTION!



Corsicana made it in the Top 10 of the Small Business Revolution Main Street contest, and are in the running to win \$500,000 for our small businesses and revitalization in our town. They are rallying for community support as they head into the next phase of the contest and need as many public votes as possible to have a chance at winning. You can learn how to be involved and how to make your vote count on a daily basis.

media and influencer relations for Georgetown's Visitors Bureau: 1) authenticity, 2) preservation and beauty (The Most Beautiful Town Square in Texas), and 3) outdoors/nature. These messages were supported by a wide array of tangible, newsworthy elements, from their annual Red Poppy Festival and designation as a Great American Main Street City to shopping, dining and history around the town square, the popular spring-fed Blue Hole and winning a 2017 Parks Gold Medal from the Texas Recreation and Parks Society to name just a few.

From there, your PR person or team develops a customized plan that includes one or more of the following tactics, based on your specific communications goals:

- earned media – non-paid media placements such as news or feature stories, calendar listings, profile pieces, photo spreads, etc
- content creation - think bylined articles, blogs, video how-to's or expert contributions
- influencer relations –the most influential voices on social media and the web
- special events – the best way to deliver real-time/ face-time influence directly to your audience
- community relations – significant partnership(s) with a nonprofit can generate multiple opportunities to build awareness
- social media – if you *do* have a PR effort in place, social media should either be managed by the PR team or work hand-in-hand as far as messaging and brand-building objectives

Although not included above, PR is also the best—and first—method of response in times of crisis. When something goes wrong or something controversial is brewing, a crisis communications plan is the first step toward controlling your message and communicating your position in a time-sensitive manner.

For the purposes of this article, let's focus on how thoughtful PR can help your Main Street promote the good news and build interest among targeted audiences.

From press releases and social media postings to video news releases or an opinion piece in the local newspaper(s), PR can “broadcast” your controlled message across many formats.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

SONYA WATERS,
KILGORE MAIN STREET MANAGER



1. What is your hometown?

Born in Opelika, Alabama but grew up in Brisbane, Australia.

2. What Main Street city do you represent and how long have you been there?

Kilgore and January will be one year with the City of Kilgore and the Kilgore Main Street Program.

3. What is your favorite spot in your downtown and why?

I don't like to say I have favorites, but local restaurant Downtown D'Lite's has such a wonderful warm and welcoming vibe along with delicious and nutritious lunch options, I just love going there. The owner Debbie Van Doren and all her staff are so friendly and I always see people I know there so it's a great chance to catch up with friends.

4. What do you enjoy the most about the Main Street program?

Being new to Kilgore and to Texas, I enjoy the opportunities to meet and get to know so many residents and business owners. I love being able to promote the downtown and provide so many free, fun events for the community.

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PAYING IT FORWARD FROM TEXAS

Last year when Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, the National Main Street network kicked into high gear to help out Main Street cities—Cuero, La Grange, Beaumont, and Victoria—who were impacted by the storm. Donations are being accepted through www.downtowngiving.com for North Carolina downtowns impacted by Hurricane Florence in September 2018.



There's no better way to share your news and stories in a *credible* manner than via public relations. Reading about your new public arts program on a major newspaper's website or seeing a historic property renovation in *Texas Highways* provides tons more influence than a paid advertisement. The folks in Georgetown can attest to this fact. Data from downtown retailers, hotels and area bed and breakfasts have experienced steady, and at times, rapid growth over the past three years.

Public relations is the most credible tool in the marketing toolbox because it involves a third-party endorser. That endorser being media and non-traditional media such as bloggers and social media influencers or even a popular industry conference in which your spokesperson or CEO is presenting.

Note that public relations is more of a marathon than a sprint, so you'll see more return on investment when committing consistent resources over the course of at least a year. A press release here and there is a scattershot approach, which may get some attention, but will soon be forgotten. To see the fruits of a PR campaign, it's best to bundle tactics, enhance with other forms of marketing and continue the outreach for months, if not years. For example, Georgetown continues to place targeted advertising buys such as *The Daytripper* on Texas PBS stations, billboard, a revised website and attention to search engine optimization.

If you have the budget to bring in external public relations, it's money well spent. PR is a blend of soft and hard skills such as strong writing and editing

5. What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?
If at first you don't succeed, try, and try again. Whether it's a complete fail or something that just needs a little improvement, rarely do we do something perfect the first time. With 10 years of event experience, I know that nothing always goes exactly as you want it to, so I always strive to make the next year or next event better. I also love the quote by Thomas Edison, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

6. What's your favorite tip for someone in our economic development/downtown revitalization industry?
Make it personal. Promote the individuals that make up your downtown; business owners, volunteers or just the well know characters that every town has!

7. If you could plan a vacation to anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?
I LOVE to travel and have been very fortunate to have visited 40 countries so far. There are lots still left on my list, particularly in Central America. Our next trip is to Belize, I can't wait to do some more diving.

8. Who has been the most influential person in your career?
I really wanted to be a hairdresser; I used to do all sorts of crazy hairstyles on my younger sister (much to her dismay) but had to rule it out due to my abysmal cutting skills!

9. Who would you switch places with for a day?
I've always been so interested in Richard Branson and his story, so I would love to see what a day in his life would be like.

10. What's your favorite inspirational quote?
"Not all who wander are lost."

11. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
As I said I love to travel, so if I'm not in downtown Kilgore, my husband and I are travelling somewhere - whether it's Austin or Seattle, I've usually got something planned.

skills, staying abreast of news trends, trusted media relationships, persistence and adaptability. If your Main Street program is doing newsworthy things that deserve more attention in your community and beyond, it may be time for PR.

LLANO ARTIST AND AMAZING VOLUNTEER

Lynda Gammage happens to be the current Main Street Board President, but her work with and for Llano Main Street, as well as the Llano community, extends back several years, and across more volunteer and community efforts than we can list.

Below is a photograph taken of her two years ago in front of the angel wings she created for the Llano Earth Art Fest and World Rock Stacking Championship—artwork she created and donated to the non-profit festival as a souvenir photo op for festival goers.

She also organized and hosted the hospitality tent for all of the “rock stars” from all over the United States and the world. She donated her own time and money to provide a respite and meeting place for these rock-balancing and earth artists to relax away from the crowds, grab a bite or refreshment, and share camaraderie.

Lynda is an artist herself and devotes many hours and creative energy to many different organizations, events, and causes in and for Llano. In addition to her artistic and hospitality contributions to the Llano Earth Art Fest mentioned earlier, she hosts musicians from all over at her home every year during the Llano Fiddlers Contest. Lynda is known far and wide by fiddlers from all over the U.S. who compete in the contest every spring and have enjoyed her generous hospitality and meeting the other musicians.

Llano Main Street is in a unique situation as Main Street organizations go, generating a major portion of its operating expenses and program work from the profits made from the sales of concessions at the Lantex Theater. The city-owned facility stays open to serve the Llano community through the subsidy of the city and by the generous donation of time and sweat equity of Main Street volunteers. Thousands of hours have been donated by these volunteers and board members repairing and restoring the building, hosting events, staffing the concession stand during movies

and the monthly Opry, organizing and hosting special events and fundraisers, and especially the grand 90th anniversary of the theater last December.

The chief party planner was Lynda Gammage, who, working with the Main Street manager, exercised an attention to detail that made the anniversary fundraiser a great success. Not only every detail of the party was well considered, but she even crafted 90 birthday cupcakes with candles to ceremonially commemorate the historic event. She also made the giant donation “birthday present” boxes in the lobby, where donors could discretely drop their contributions during the celebration.

Lynda leads the Llano Main Street with a firm, no-nonsense style—but still fun—which has resulted in many improvements to the program’s organization.

The Llano Main Street program is celebrating its 15th year as a Texas Main Street city this year, and because of all of these things mentioned and more, we would like to recognize Lynda Gammage as an outstanding Main Street Volunteer. She is entitled to all accolades and rewards that accompany that recognition!



Lynda Gammage in front of the angel wings souvenir photo-op art she created for the Llano Earth Art Fest.



REAL PLACES

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This will be the Texas Historical Commission's biggest and best conference yet with Main Street programming, workshops and tours, and 20+ sessions with 60+ speakers including:

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- Noted museum expert **COLLEEN DILENSCHNEIDER**
- Bestselling author and speaker **NINA SIMON**
- Architect and urban planner **CURTIS DAVIS**
- Author and TV personality **BRENT HULL**

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