

Main Street Matters

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PUBLIC RESTROOMS ATTRACT MORE THAN FLIES

Before we get started, you might be thinking, “what does tourism have to do with Main Street?” A lot, actually. After all, the number one activity of visitors – not the reason they come, but the top activity once they arrive—is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian-friendly setting: your downtown. This is where 80% of all non-lodging travel spending takes place and why there’s a Downtown Disney outside each of its parks.

Once they arrive, relieved visitors spend more and stay longer. That’s good news for any downtown.

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PUBLIC RESTROOMS ATTRACT MORE THAN FLIES



By Roger A Brooks, CEO, Destination Development Association

Editor's Note: The Destination Development Association (DDA) provides essential resources to help make communities sustainable, thriving places to live. It's the sole source that brings together tourism, economic development, downtowns, cities, counties, chambers of commerce, and other stakeholder organizations under a single umbrella getting people to work together on common projects and goals rather than in independent silos.

The following article is an excerpt from the book "Your Town: An Amazing Destination – The 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism"

"I gotta go." Those are the three most feared words heard by a parent on a long trip in the family sedan. You know it will be miles before you reach the next rest stop. It hasn't been that long since you passed the last one and asked the kids, "Do you have to go?" Of course, no one said a word. You press your foot down a little harder on the accelerator, hoping to make time pass quickly as your children begin to squirm in their seats.

Who would have ever thought that a small bladder would be such an important part of a community's tourism strategy? Restrooms are one of the easiest devices for luring visitors into your community. After all, you never know when the urge to go will cause them to stop.

Most state and provincial highway departments won't post signs for public restrooms other than rest stops, but if communities can promote the fact that they have them, they are sure to benefit from additional visitor spending.

You'd be surprised how a billboard with the words "Clean public restrooms — easy access" can translate

into visitor spending. How? After you have used the facilities, have you ever said, "While we're here, why don't we look in that shop over there?"

Or, "While we're here, why don't we get something to eat?"

In fact, once people are out of their cars, you have nearly a four-times greater chance of getting them to spend money. With that in mind, always place them in the heart of your spending district.

If your public restrooms also incorporate a visitor information kiosk, or are located next to an antique store, restaurant, or attraction, the "facilities" can be surprisingly effective at bringing in customers. People like to stretch their legs a bit. They like the break. Your town needs to take full advantage of the most basic of human needs and the number one reason passers-by make unscheduled stops.

Businesses make a big mistake when they post signs stating that restrooms are for customers only or post "no public restrooms." Most people don't even think about buying anything until they come out of the



Photo Credits: Glass Restrooms

restroom. They will always empty the bladder before the pocket book. Prohibitive signs discourage visitors from becoming customers.

McDonald's doesn't offer public restrooms, but it knows that its restrooms are often seen that way. Every restaurant makes a priority of keeping its restrooms clean because their use typically translates into sales; "while we're here, let's get something to drink or eat." Nearly half of the restroom sales are referred to as "guilt sales;" "we used the restrooms—we should buy something."

It's simple math. Imagine seven people crammed into a van on their way to a conference. After about one hundred miles, someone squirms uncomfortably and shouts, "Take the next exit. I see a restroom!"

What the person sees are golden arches. At the McDonald's, seven people pour out of the van. A couple of them go across the street to the Chevron Mini-Mart, and the rest enter the restaurant. Fifteen minutes later, they pile back into the van relieved of \$40 spent on drinks and snacks to fuel them up until the next stop. This was a real-life example experienced by the author while traveling through rural Nevada.

Multiply this one van by the number of vehicles that could be taking your off-ramp every day, and it can pay for a lot of toilet paper.

You'd probably be surprised at the sales volume mini-marts make as customers walk past the candy aisle and drink cooler on the way to and from the bathrooms. Or, maybe you aren't surprised because you are often one of those customers. This is also why keeping restrooms clean and supplied has become a top priority. It translates to additional spending—especially in this age of mini-mart fuel stops.

While this article was written with the visitor in mind, remember that the number one reason people travel is to visit friends and family. And you want your local residents to bring them downtown—your community living room—where they can spend both time and money.

Smart communities have a profitable little secret when they provide people with the thing they need the most—restrooms. Located close to attractions or other visitor amenities with easy highway access, toilets will attract more money than flies.

Rules to success:

1. Always put your restrooms in the heart of your spending district. You will see less chance of vandalism, and relieved visitors spend more.
2. Make sure they are open 24/7, 365 days a year.
3. Develop multi-stall restrooms for security reasons. Less mischief takes place when other people can walk in at any time. Include a separate "family" restroom with diaper changing table.
4. Add visitor information outside the restroom doors. This makes the potty a visitor information center and can help increase both visitor and local spending.
5. Have them cleaned three to four times a day: 7 a.m., noon, 6 p.m. During peak summer months and when there's heavy activity, add another cleaning at 11 pm.

Photo examples: Your restrooms can be a great visitor attraction. Consider Sulphur Springs, Texas, whose downtown is located about a mile north of Interstate-30. They had two customized restrooms created for Celebration Plaza, then promoted them on freeway billboards. Why? Because they are built using one-way glass—from inside you can see through the walls. From the outside, you can't see in—thank goodness. These pulled curiosity seekers into downtown and once there they saw how amazing downtown has become—and they stuck around visiting shops and eateries. That's the power of public restrooms. Especially these.

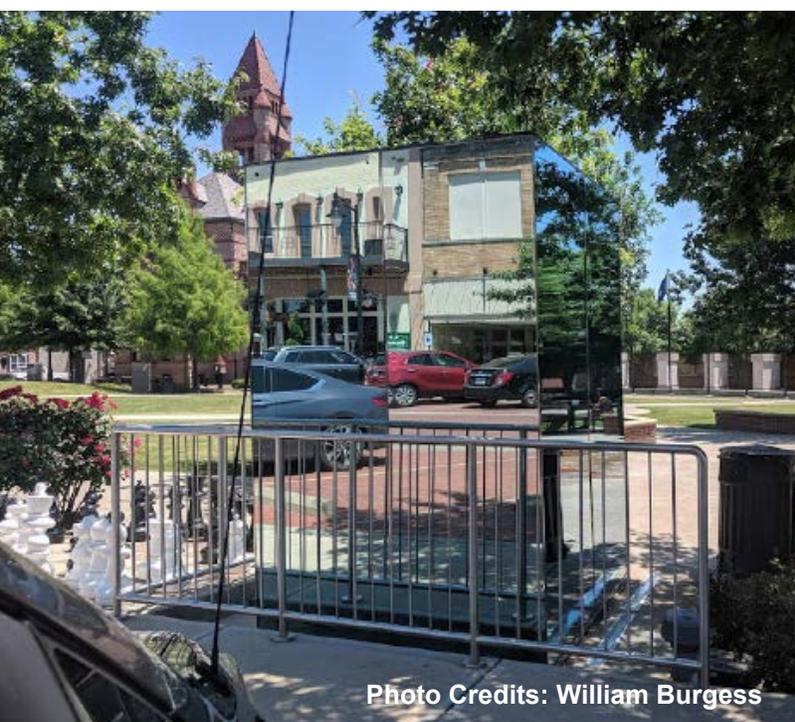


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DOWNTOWN ROCKWALL'S AWARD- WINNING PUBLIC RESTROOMS: CAIN'S CORNER PARK



*By Bethany Browning, Main Street
Manager, Rockwall*

Rockwall and the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, in general, have experienced exponential growth over the past 10 years, contributing to the economic boom we've been so fortunate to enjoy downtown. With growth comes the demand for enhanced amenities, better experiences, and premium shopping and dining opportunities. Main Street and the Downtown Rockwall Association have worked together to create signature events. We've been very fortunate to draw an attractive collection of retail and dining establishments to the district. In 2010, the city hired a landscape architect firm to revamp the downtown master plan that had been shelved since 2004.

After several years of careful planning, the city presented its Downtown Capital Improvement project to Rockwall residents in 2012. Residents responded, approving the \$8.6 million bond package. Construction began on the 16-block project in 2013. Two and half years later, April 2016, the city hosted Celebrate Downtown, a huge block party to commemorate the project and rejoice in the completion of the massive construction project. It included new streets, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and the creation of San Jacinto Plaza and the Courthouse Stage. The transition of South San Jacinto Street to a pedestrian plaza greatly changed the downtown landscape. The impact of this newly created greenspace was felt straightaway. The city quickly began programming the venue,

hosting weekly concerts each Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night from May all the way through October. The weekly concerts coupled with the well-attended seasonal Farmers Market, equated to roughly 2,000 additional visitors to the square each week. The need for public restrooms was apparent.

The city had been interested in a specific property for years because it was centrally located on the square and ideal for adaptive reuse as a public restroom facility. In its early days, this tiny building housed Ted Cain's Used Cars, a fixture on the historic town square. The years following its closure as a used car lot, it served as a popular gathering spot for Mr. Cain and his friends to enjoy their morning coffee and catch up on current events. Needless to say, there were many fond memories affiliated with this property. Family members struggled with the idea of ever selling or leasing the property, which sat unoccupied for over 15 years. Fortunately, in 2017, the Cain family approached the city with a proposal, which they were eager to hear. The Cains would finance the complete remodel of both the interior and exterior, including the installation of all new restroom facility fixtures and equipment. The city would install the pocket park out front, then lease the property back from the Cain family for the next 15 years. The property includes the



Cain's Corner Park Public Restrooms

pocket park, the building, and parking lot in the rear, which now serves as public parking.

The public restroom facility has made a huge impact downtown, as visitors routinely voice their appreciation of the amenity. Visitors now have a clean, climate-controlled facility. In addition to resolving an ongoing struggle to provide public amenities, this project also demonstrates the value of community partnerships and thinking outside the box. The Cain family has called Rockwall home for decades and is genuinely invested in enhancing the community. The City of Rockwall is fortunate to have a good working relationship with their family.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

KRYSTAL SMITH

BRIDGEPORT MAIN STREET MANAGER



1. What is your hometown?

My hometown is Riverside, California, however I spent a majority of my school-aged years in the little West Texas town of Monahans.

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

My Main Street city is Bridgeport. I've been here since August, so it's safe to say I'm a newbie!

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

Walking or driving our Main Street around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, this is when it looks like a scene straight out of a Hallmark movie. Families eating ice cream at our local shop, people strolling the sidewalks, businesses full of shoppers, laughter, and community just coming together to enjoy our revitalized downtown.

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

I enjoy being associated with a program that is passionate about revitalizing local economies and bringing our communities back together. It's exciting witnessing our Texas town that once looked like a ghost town come back to life and it's coming back to life full throttle!

5. What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Whatever you do—give it 100%. Don't settle for anything less than YOUR best!

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MAIN STREET AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FINDING COMMON GROUND



*By Mark Thomas, President/CEO,
Taylor Economic Development
Corporation*

Over the past few years, I have been invited to teach the Attraction and Recruitment class at the Basic Economic Development Course (BEDC) in Texas. There are many modules taught over several days and this course is a great way for anyone to learn more about best practices in economic development. I have noticed Main Street managers attending the course and the feedback I get from them is that most of the strategies for economic development can easily be adapted to Main Street.

The key I stress in the Attraction and Recruitment class is that “deals” trump everything. Meaning how many deals you do, the frequency, the size of the deals, and the impact of the deals you do are how you ultimately are measured in economic development. From that success, or lack thereof, comes how long you stay in your job, how you are perceived in your job, and also how you are treated. Waiting for the ax to fall because of the lack of completed deals is a very hard place to exist. My sense is that it is not too different in the Main Street world. If a Main Street program is interested in working more closely with economic development, then I would recommend the Main Street program bring more deals to the table that meet the goals of both Main Street and economic development. Sounds easy right? By doing this, then both programs get a win, and all of the resources that both programs have available can be deployed.

Getting to more deals is the bottom line of the BEDC Attraction and Recruitment course. How you do that is the what the course is all about. Traditionally, economic development typically concentrates on

6. What’s your favorite tip for someone in our economic development/downtown revitalization industry?

It may not be going the way you originally planned, but it WILL get to where you envisioned it to be!

7. Who has been the most influential person in your career?

There’s not one particular person that I could say is the most “influential person,” it’s a collective of numerous individuals along the way that have invested, mentored, and believed in me even on the days that it seemed overwhelming. My most influential, as far as personal, is definitely my husband, children, and fur babies! They have been my motivation, my strength, and my biggest cheerleaders.

8. What’s your favorite inspirational quote?

“Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching.” – C.S. Lewis

9. If you could plan a vacation to anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

If I could go on vacation anywhere in the world, it would definitely be Italy and Spain. One day I’ll make it across the pond and submerge myself in my ethnic background, until then I’ll stay in Texas dreaming!

10. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

In my spare time I enjoy photography, SHOPPING (local, of course), and relaxing at home on the back porch with a nice glass of good ol’ Texas wine while watching my husband BBQ!



“primary job” type projects that create more capital investment and also jobs. These projects usually go into industrial parks. So, the normal activities of an economic developer don’t necessarily include looking at a Main Street location for the types of projects that are typically worked on. With that said, I am talking about the traditional version of economic development which in the old days was called industrial development.

Today, things have changed somewhat. Economic development is what a community wants it to be. Destination retail could be an economic development strategy, as can high tech office as we have seen in downtowns of large metro areas. Once you really understand what your economic development target is in your community, then I think you can begin to target prospects that fit the Main Street goals and the economic goals.

The last article I did for the September 2018 newsletter was about Texas Beer Company in Taylor. Let me go back to that project as one that perfectly met the goals of the city, economic development, and Main Street. All of the entities worked together to make it happen, and everyone celebrated wins for meeting their respective organizational goals while creating a destination location in downtown, while also creating a separate manufacturing facility that is housed near downtown in an industrial building. To me this is a good example of a project that met the goals of all organizations. In this case, Main Street

provided a façade grant, but the larger investments of \$200,000 and \$250,000 were made by the economic development corporation, and the city. This is the example I was referring to in the beginning as a “deal” that all entities could invest in and spend time on to land in the Main Street district.

So, moving forward how can you be proactive to make one of these deals happen that brings economic development to the table? Again, know what the goals and objectives are for your local economic development organization. Once you know what they want and what they consider a “win,” then you can be proactive to try and recruit a deal that will meet the criteria of all entities.

I always like examples, so I will give up one of my targets for the greater good. I believe that craft breweries, wineries, and now distilleries are excellent targets that fit both the goals of most Main Street programs and economic development organizations. These operations bring tourists to even remote locations where many wineries and distilleries are starting up, and they have a manufacturing component which allows for economic development funds to be invested. Look at Fredericksburg—they have used this strategy to almost perfection. But I believe there is still a lot of room for other communities to do a smaller version of this huge success with a relatively large impact on a smaller community.

Going back to bringing a deal to the table is how to get everyone to the table. I would recommend a proactive marketing campaign to all of the wineries, brewers, and distillers not only in Texas, but also across the country. There are companies that provide the names of these companies. The company I use is Info USA. You can slice and dice the information located there and download only the names you want to market to, in Texas, the Southwest, wineries only, distilleries, whatever you are targeting. I would use a strategy of sending a letter to each of these companies inviting them to take a look at your community and in the letter let them know what you are willing to do to get them there. And then **MAKE A CALL TO EVERYONE YOU MAIL!!!** This strategy works and is what many do not do. We are after all in sales, and this is selling. This works big time.



Pilot Knob Vineyard in Taylor,
Image Source



funds designated to invest in projects located in your community's Opportunity Zone if you are fortunate to have one. <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/opportunity-zones-frequently-asked-questions>.

New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) can be a powerful tool for development in an area that has been designated as New Market Tax Credit eligible. The areas that qualify are highly distressed, but as is the case in Taylor, there is a portion of downtown that is in the NMTC zone. Without getting too technical, the targeted size of projects that can use this tool is normally \$5,000,000 plus. It will likely take a bank, consultant, and an attorney to utilize this technical incentive, but it can be well worth it. Effectively, a New Market Tax Credit project gets a 39% tax break taken over seven years against federal income taxes. Large banks will buy these tax credits (at a discount) because they get credit toward their community reinvestment act requirements and provide cash to a project up front.

So, let's take a \$10,000,000 project. That will generate \$3,900,000 in tax credits that a bank will pay approximately \$3,200,000 for. After consulting fees, that net can drop to +/- \$2,000,000. But that is up front money to a company that they can use as equity to get a deal done. If you could provide a site (say to a distillery in the downtown area on land the community is providing in a NMTC area), then you could potentially be offering \$3,000,000 in up front equity to a company and they may not have to come out of pocket for the project loan of \$7,000,000 on a \$10,000,000 project. These are the kinds of deals we try to do using everything that is available and leveraging all that to the max. I know that is a technical example, but I wanted to show what is possible as you work together to put deals together. Here is the mapping tool for New Market Tax Credit Zones: The pink areas are the valuable areas. Or you can look at Baker Tilly NMTC mapping tool if the link does not work. <https://www.policymap.com/widget?sid=117&wkey=4D2AFE10710D41918F180775F0A353F2>

Good luck, do proactive marketing, work together, and I believe you will land deals on your Main Street. From the search I just did on Info USA, there are 830 distillers, and 14,000 wineries and brewers in the USA. Happy Hunting for Main Street!

This is where Main Street and economic development can collaborate up front to identify a site that works, incentives that may be available, and also what the community might do to help market the project once it opens in your town. By implementing this proactive marketing approach, I believe you will get the cooperation of other organizations in the community. Most people do not like to make those calls. If you bring qualified prospects to the table, that can be claimed as a win for Main Street, the city, and the economic development organization, you will have everyone engaged with you. If not, you can close the deals yourself and bask in the glory alone.

There are so many incentive strategies available, but there are two that I want to mention here. One is Opportunity Zones. This is all the rage right now, and there is more than a trillion dollars looking to make investments, but the rules are still being developed about how to use these dollars. The issue is finding qualified deals. You have to be in an Opportunity Zone to take advantage of the Opportunity Zone benefits. Here is a link to a mapping tool where you can see if your community has an Opportunity Zone. That is step one. <https://go.bakertilly.com/contactbtc0618>.

Secondly, it is possible to create an Opportunity Zone Fund. Anyone can start an Opportunity Zone Fund and that might be a way to develop a pool of

SMALL BUSINESS CENTER STAGE: TYLER'S ETX BREWING CO.



By brothers Brian and Matt Gilstrap, ETX Brewing Co. Owners

Since ETX Brewing Co. began construction in May of 2016, the goal has been to help revitalize the beauty of Downtown Tyler, in hope that their small taproom would encourage Tyler residents and tourists to visit, taste brews, and frequent other up-and-coming shops in the downtown area. They quickly gained massive support from the community and realized an expansion was necessary. To ensure having something for everyone, they offer 18 different craft beers on tap daily, as well as Texas ciders and wines. ETX Brewing Company was

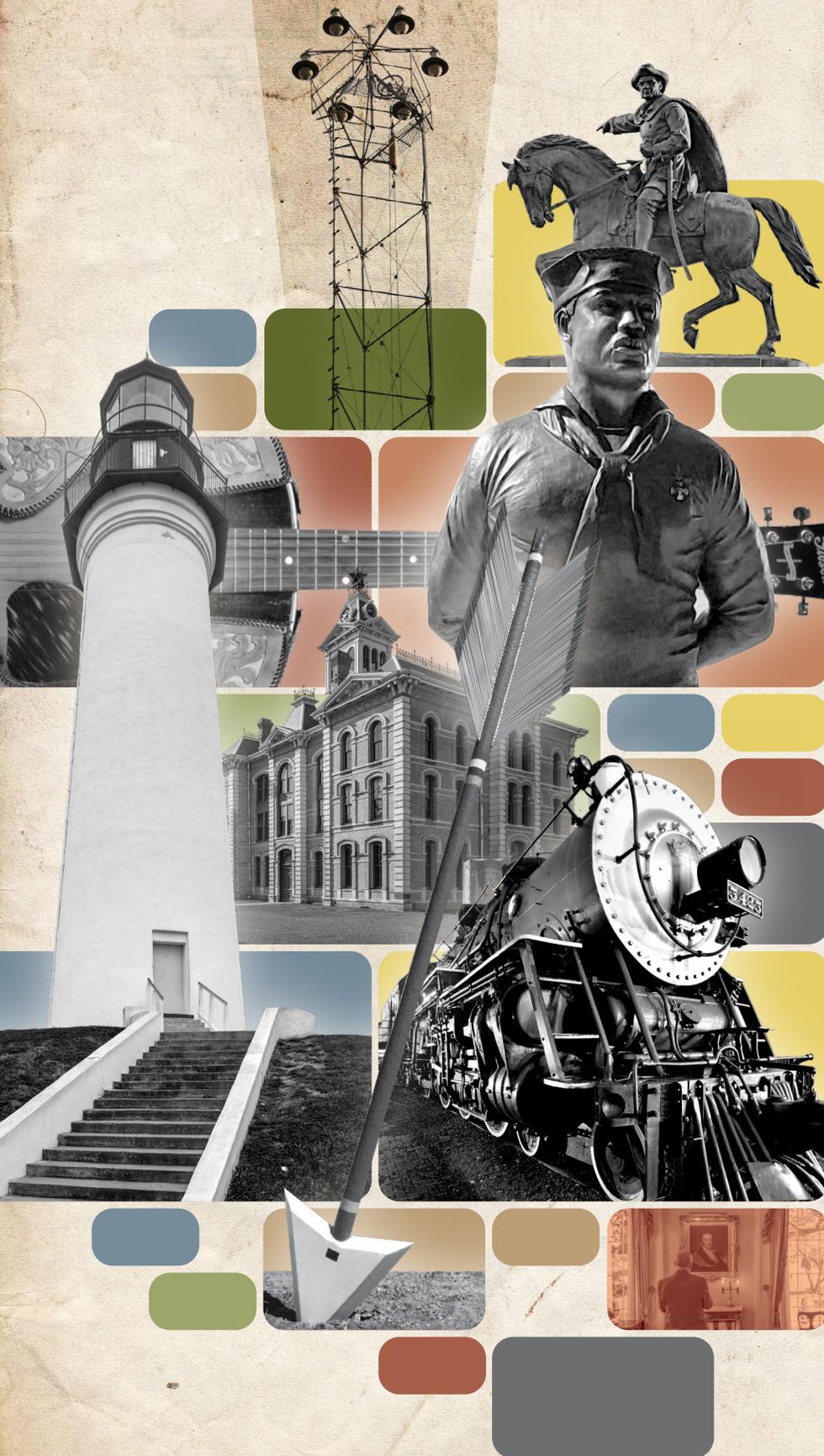
the first and only true brewpub in Tyler with a delicious gastropub menu that also incorporates several of their brews within the dishes.

Giving back to the East Texas organizations that have helped and continue to help so many of our neighbors in need is something that ETX Brewing Co. makes as a main focus for the small business. The owners have been in a position where they had to rely on support from others, and that is why this is so near and dear to their hearts. "Over the past two and a half years, we are blessed to have been able to raise money for well over 50 different philanthropic organizations here in East Texas, and we are just getting started!" said Annie Gilstrap, ETX Brewing Co. Owner. When in Downtown Tyler make sure you experience ETX Brewing Co.



Photo Credits: ETX Brewing Co.

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