



# Main Street! Matters

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

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## SPOTLIGHT ON AMARILLO, TX

*Written by Beth Duke, Executive Director,  
Center City of Amarillo, Inc., Population  
approx. 195,250*

Amarillo thrives as a city created by partnerships. One of the earliest partnerships between pioneers and the railroad laid the foundation for the largest city in the Texas Panhandle.

Later, Amarillo achieved fame when historic Route 66 and today's Interstate 40 made our city the crossroads of America. World War II brought the expansion of the Amarillo Air Force Base with hundreds of airmen stationed at the base north and east of downtown.

Downtown Amarillo was the financial, legal, and retail hub for vast areas of the Texas Panhandle, the Oklahoma Panhandle, and Eastern New Mexico. Because branch banking was illegal in Texas until 1986, customers came downtown to do all their banking. Retail shops lined the sidewalks of Polk Street, Amarillo's "main street." Downtown was home to the city's oldest high school and the city's largest churches.



Texas dancers twirl at High Noon in Amarillo.

Then, in the 1970s, three things happened that changed Amarillo's downtown forever:

- Amarillo Air Force base closed, taking a huge federal payroll and hundreds of families out of Amarillo. Development between downtown and the air base came to a halt. The city began growing toward the southwest.
- Amarillo High School's downtown campus burned. The school was rebuilt in the growing neighborhoods in the southwest part of town. Students and their parents no longer came downtown every weekday.

- Shopping patterns began to change. A new suburban shopping area developed west of downtown. Indoor shopping malls soon followed — each one moving further west as Route 66 turned into the modern Interstate 40.

In 1990, a group of 60 Amarilloans took action to revive downtown. Amarillo had one of the best collections of buildings in the style called "Pueblo Deco." This style of architecture draws on geometric themes in the Art Deco style with embellishments inspired by regional flora and fauna. Some of the buildings have colorful tiles around the roofline with



Unveiling the historical marker for the Courtyard by Marriott at the Historic Fisk Building

motifs from Native American sand paintings.

The historic buildings in downtown were in danger of becoming parking lots for the banks and office buildings that remained. The group commissioned a strategic plan for downtown. In partnership with the city of Amarillo, they formed a nonprofit organization — Center City of Amarillo, Inc. — to invite businesses and visitors back to downtown.

From that plan, Center City began its own history of successful events with the goal of bringing people downtown:

- High Noon on the Square — Center City sponsors free concerts every Wednesday in June and July on the Courthouse Lawn of the newly restored Potter County Courthouse. High Noon will celebrate its 20th season this year. The event has grown from 25 people who brought brown-bag lunches to a catered picnic for

more than 600 people each week. Musicians volunteer their talents to entertain the crowd and support Center City.

- Center City Block Party — the Center City Block Party will celebrate its 19th year this year. The party began with one stage and two bands. For 2014, the party will include four stages, a



The historic Potter County Courthouse, which was restored through the THC's courthouse preservation program

VIP area, a vintage car show, food vendors, and retailers. More than 6,000 people attend the Center City Block Party held annually on the third Saturday in August.

- The Center City Electric Light Parade welcomes the holiday season on the first Friday in December. The parade starts at sunset. Each float must be lighted or glow. The parade has grown to include more than 65 entrants with more than 100 vehicles and floats. Thousands of families come downtown to see the parade, visit with Santa Claus, and watch the mayor light the city's Christmas tree.

Center City of Amarillo became a Texas Main Street City in 1996 with its urban program. The restoration of The Marizon building from an empty eyesore to a thriving café and antique shop started momentum, which continues today in downtown Amarillo.

Center City of Amarillo owes its success to partnerships dedicated to strengthening downtown Amarillo.

- Volunteers — With a full-time staff of two people and a special events intern each summer, Center City relies on volunteers to bring its programs to life. A volunteer board of directors meets monthly to oversee the organizational finances and governing policies. The Design Review committee meets quarterly to review applications for the Façade Grant Program and allocate \$60,000 from the city to make downtown more welcoming. The Center City Block Party Committee

includes 24 members who start meeting in February to plan the August festival. On the weekend of the festival, the volunteer army grows to more than 200 with help from other nonprofit groups and companies that adopt booths at the event. Volunteers do everything from putting wreaths on the Hoof Prints of the Great American Quarter Horse Art in Public Place project to organizing floats for a parade.

- The City of Amarillo — Unlike many Main Street programs, Center City is not a department of the city government. The City of Amarillo is Center City’s largest partner. The city allocates \$60,000 for façade grants annually for Center City to administer. The Façade Grant program has invested more than \$400,000 in downtown. Because it is a matching grant, the impact exceeds \$1 million. The Façade Grant program has been an important public/private partnership as shown in Quarterly Reinvestment Reports through Texas Main Street. Through a contract with Center City, the city provides a portion of Center City’s operational funding. City departments partner with Center City at special events such as the Center City Electric Light Parade. Last year Center City, the Amarillo Civic Center, and the City of Amarillo Parks and Recreation Department partnered to purchase a beautiful new Christmas tree for the city with each entity paying one-third of the cost.

- Potter County — Center City also partners with county government. Every Wednesday in June and July, the county allows



Crowd at High Noon on the Square

Center City to sponsor High Noon on the Square. In 2012, Center City hosted a reception for the courthouse rededication after three years of restoration through the Texas Historical Commission’s courthouse program.

- West Texas A&M University — Center City achieved a major goal in 2008 when West Texas A&M University opened an Amarillo campus downtown. The WTAMU Downtown Campus occupies three floors of the Chase Tower and includes classrooms, a bookstore, and a computer learning center. More than 900 students attend classes there each semester. Center City also partners with WTAMU for Education on Demand courses including a session on improving PowerPoint presentations and an upcoming historical walking tour of downtown for National Historical Preservation Month in May.

- Amarillo College (AC) — Amarillo College is a two-year community college with four campuses in Amarillo including one downtown. In 2013,

Center City partnered with AC to establish a pocket park and historical marker commemorating all the schools that originated on the downtown campus — from the original Little Red Schoolhouse, to Elizabeth Nixon Junior High, to Amarillo High School. Today the historical marker serves as a landmark for class reunions and class photos when they return to Amarillo.

- Texas Tech University, Laura W. Bush Institute for Women’s Health — Although the Texas Tech Health Science Center Campus is about six miles west of downtown, Center City partners with the institute for quarterly Lunch and Learn sessions on women’s health. With almost 10,000 women working downtown, the sessions bring programs on important health topics to a new audience.

- Amarillo Symphony — As one of the resident companies of the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts, the Amarillo Symphony is a big Center City partner. A symphony ensemble performs at High Noon on

the Square annually. This year the Symphony and Center City co-sponsored Symphony Underground — an after-concert party in a downtown parking garage with music, street food, original art, and adult beverages. The party sold out with 300 guests and many more on the waiting list.

- Amarillo Opera and Lone Star Ballet — Two other resident companies of the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts also partner with Center City. They provide entertainment for High Noon on the Square. For the past two years, the Lone Star Ballet partnered with Center City for a Nutcracker theme for the Electric Light Parade. In October, the Amarillo Opera promoted a downtown opera weekend complete with a historic walking tour from Center City.

Partnerships are the framework for a strong Main Street program. No Main Street program can exist without partners. Center City is always looking for new ways to partner with community groups and organizations to make a bigger impact and achieve our mission through the Four-Point Approach.™ Whether the partnership involves banners for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure downtown or a planned cattle drive down Polk Street this summer, Center City works to make downtown “everybody’s neighborhood.”

## Focus On

### Main Street Design

#### ONCE UPON A TIME, BEFORE THERE WERE CARS

The best way to get people to experience the historic architecture in your Main Street city is to get them out of their automobiles and onto the sidewalks. You can accomplish this by providing a great walking tour.

What constitutes a great Main Street walking tour? In a word: planning. Every great walking tour starts with a map. Locate every historic building, business, public artwork, and residence in the Main Street District on your map and you’re off to a terrific start. After all of the sites have been located and inventoried, the tour must develop around a theme. Some ideas for themes include architectural styles, building maintenance, narrative history (who, what, when, and where) associated with the buildings, or the urban growth pattern of the city as it developed around a courthouse, railroad, or highway (how these growth patterns shaped the physical form of the city). Whatever the theme, it must be of interest to your visitors. You must ask yourself if the people on the tour want to learn the information you have to offer and, furthermore, if you can successfully market the tour.

When the theme has jelled, it’s time to cull out the specific stops on the tour. Time limits are one factor in deciding what is addressed on the tour and how long to spend at a particular location. A rule of thumb for

walking tours especially in hot/cold/rarely in-between Texas is one hour; longer than that and you are going to end up with worn out and cranky people. The other thing to be aware of is the number of stops you take. Ten stops in the hour is probably the limit; more than that and you are overwhelming the visitor with information.

Once you have narrowed down your destinations, you need to figure out the best way to get from one place to the next. Consider where the tour should logically start and end. Investigate any potential safety issues along the proposed route such as wide street crossings or areas deplete of safe sidewalks. When people are at a stop on the tour are they able to sit or stand in shade on a hot day? Are there potential problems with property owners at the stops? Does traffic noise prohibit your tour members from hearing the guide speak?

Just to recap for a moment; you have a theme, you have stops, and you have a path. What else do you need to make your Main Street walking tour a success? You need to define exactly what you want your participants to learn as a result of taking the tour. You need to define the tour’s objectives. Certainly, upon completion of a Main Street walking tour, you will want participants to be able to describe some of the more important architectural styles in the downtown. You will want people to have some understanding of how the town developed over time and who was responsible for its development. You will want to convey the history of commerce in your town and how it affected the



Main Street participants on walking tour of a historic downtown.

current appearance of the town. Finally, you might even want to point out things in town that have had a negative effect on the town and allow participants to consider or discuss possible ways to correct those issues.

One way to keep a sense of flow and cohesion with your tour is to think of it as a form of storytelling. A good story has a distinct beginning, middle, and end. A good story also has interesting characters and action. So too does a good walking tour, and just as every good story is geared toward a specific audience, the Main Street walking tour should be carefully crafted with a specific audience in mind. Renowned heritage interpretation authority John A. Veverka has determined that a walking tour audience will fall into one of the following categories:

- Local residents who have lived in the community a long time and who may have history to share in

the form of memories or artifacts/ photographs

- Local residents who are new to the community but are anxious to immerse themselves in the history of their new home

- Local school groups who may be required to take the tour as part of their studies. This can be a particularly difficult tour if themes and objectives haven't been very carefully outlined.

- Tourists from Texas who have a general knowledge of their state's history but are interested in focusing in on the particular's your city has to offer

- Tourists from outside of Texas who are seeking a broader knowledge with the occasional foray into the details a particular place offers

- Families comprised of all age groups that likely require differing themes and objectives all within

the same tour. This has to be the most difficult tour to provide.

- Architects/historians/preservationists who will require very specific themes and objectives clearly defined well in advance of the tour.

The last point to cover in our discussion of walking tours is the form that the walking tour will take. While this article was put together with a real-person tour guide in mind, the information similarly applies to self-guided walking tours as well. Some further thoughts from Veverka:

- The self-guided tour booklet can be an effective tool. It can be obtained at a variety of suitable locations such as convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, local museums, shops, and government buildings. It can be made to be graphically appealing with maps, photographs, and brief written narratives about important sites, and it can be kept as a memento to be revisited by the participant at a later date.

- The interpretive panel/wayfinding type walking tour requires more financial investment (the cost of the signs and likely site development at each sign location) but under the right circumstances, this approach can result in a highly effective walking tour. One example is a former industrial site that has been transformed into an open-air museum; different steps in a manufacturing process might be highlighted with photographs, diagrams, and narrative in a well-crafted and visually appealing interpretive panel. Veverka points out that a self-guiding booklet

or at the very least a map is still usually required for this approach.

- The last type of tour we'll discuss is the electronics-based tour. Not too long ago, this meant tape recorders (Walkmans), followed by compact discs, finally leading up to today's cell phone and QR code technology. It is safe to say that this approach, if done well, can be quite expensive but the results can easily be worth the investment.

Clearly, we have only scratched the surface in this discussion of walking tours. There are so many other considerations such as establishing and providing a budget, determining if tour items are offered for sale (and if so how the accounting would be handled), how many visitors are honestly projected to partake of the tours, how the tours will be marketed and promoted, who is the point of contact for tour information and scheduling, and finally, what is the expected rate of return on the tour investment? Is the tour going to have a noticeable impact upon the local businesses, particularly the cafes, bakeries, markets, and restaurants?

Finally, realize that walking does more than expose people to the unique architecture and history of your Main Street city; it consumes calories, builds appetites, and gives residents and visitors a reason to linger. Linger, of course, is what Main Street is all about.

*Howard Langner, Main Street Design Staff*

Bibliography/references:

The work of John A. Veverka, Interpretive Planner  
Portland Walking Tours, David Schargel Blog

The Cupcake Tour of New York

## Note from New Assistant State Coordinator

During my interview for this position, I was asked about one of the communities in which I had previously worked “What made the area you were working in succeed?”

I am sure I gave a polite, succinct answer that was appropriate to the question. Obviously, it was good enough to convince Debra Drescher to invite me back for a second interview. But since that interview, I have been pondering this answer.

What I should have answered was: People. Emotions. Dedication. And Pride.

A bit of background on myself: I have worked in economic development with a Main Street approach for several years. One neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Mich., has been highly successful. But many other areas and neighborhoods I worked with failed. They had the funding, the staff to move programs forward, the infrastructure, and the potential. But they failed. These areas were lacking the human component. They missed connecting emotions that are associated with place. Yes — emotions associated with place. Stop and think about that.

Let me ask you a few questions?

- Where did you have your first soda/milkshake/beer?
- Where were you when you had your first kiss?
- Where were you married?

- Where did you celebrate your birthday?

You can remember the place that these events occurred, correct? Life is but a series of events, an opportunity to create memories. Main Streets matter because they are the places where these memories can occur. Main Streets are cornerstones of our community. They were designed to bring people together — for necessities such as shopping, for news and gossip, and to create a safe feeling of community. We cannot exist without interaction with one another, and we need places where we can connect to each other. We need places to make memories. Main Streets are now more important than ever for that community connection.

What were the key ingredients to revitalization in the area that I worked in that was highly successful? People and pride. In a city where the young leave after high school and don't return, in an economically depressed place where the latest news was who was losing their jobs that week, in a place where the infrastructure was literally collapsing under our feet, the difference was a handful of volunteers who made others believe and take pride in their place.

In the beginning, the area was overrun with prostitution, drugs, and crime. It was a truly depressed area. It started with a handful of people who just simply cared about place. We created a new nonprofit organization and compiled a leadership team of dedicated volunteers who spearheaded the effort. We worked



Rebekka Adams, Assistant State Coordinator,  
Texas Main Street Program

together to find best practices of community revitalization. Keep in mind that none of us (at the time) were economic development specialists. We were students, hairdressers, antiques dealers, property owners, shop owners, and residents of the community for generations. Together, we created community gardens on vacant properties, we picked litter up off the streets, and we looked people in the eye and greeted them when we passed. It was simple efforts that spread.

It gave hope. Slowly, we gained momentum, and approached civic leaders to help change the area. It was a slow process.

But over that time, we instilled pride in the people living in the area, we included them to help reshape their community, we invited them to get to know their neighbors, and to become connected once again.

Sure it took years to get the roads fixed, to bring back lively businesses, and to beautify the area. But all from the beginning, we worked with people to be able to raise their head and say “Yes, I live here. And I am proud of it.”

When people visit the area now, they linger and create new memories. I’ve already heard a lot about how much all of you are already accomplishing through your Main Street programs, but I’d like to learn more. What are you doing in your communities to instill pride? How do you connect people’s emotions to your community? Please drop me a line and let me know a little about your Main Street program and why you take pride in your community. I look forward to getting to know each and every one of you and your communities.

Want to know a bit more about my background? Check out my LinkedIn Profile: [www.linkedin.com/pub/rebekka-adams/7/b53/886](http://www.linkedin.com/pub/rebekka-adams/7/b53/886) or feel free to ask.

I am here to help you.

Rebekka Adams  
Assistant State Coordinator  
Main Street Program  
Texas Historical Commission

## Upcoming Main Street Events

### April 4, 11, 25, and May 2 Huntsville

Main Street Music Series.  
Fridays 6 p.m. – 9 p.m.  
Two free concerts in the park.  
More information: <https://www.facebook.com/COHmainstreet>

### April 5

#### Elgin

Local Lore. 10 a.m. Celebrating two Texas Treasures business awards at the Depot Museum.

### April 5-20

#### Brenham

Spring Eggs Art Walk. Public art display of spring eggs painted by local artists. More information: <http://www.downtownbrenham.com/eggartwalk/>

### April 12-13

#### Elgin

April 12: Elgin Art Show, various studios throughout downtown and Pearls of Youth Art Show. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., 201 North Main Street.  
April 13: noon – 6 p.m. Art Studios and downtown stores open and Horse Boy Foundation concert.

### April 12

#### Ferris

Third Annual Earth Day  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m., Celebration and Annual Creek Cleanup, Mutz Memorial Park.



**April 12  
Harlingen**

7th Annual Jackson Street Classic Car Show. 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**April 12  
Lufkin**

22nd Hoedown Festival  
10 a.m. Parade, followed by arts and crafts and entertainment for the entire family. For more information call 936.633.0205.

**April 12  
Paris**

3rd Annual April in Paris Wine Fest. Features samples of Texas' top wines and delectable local cuisine while strolling in historic downtown. Proceeds will benefit the Paris Main Street Building Improvements Grant. For more information contact Cheri Bedford at cbedford@paristexas.gov

**April 23  
San Marcos**

Downtown Historic Photo Roundup.  
10 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
More information:  
[www.sanmarcostx.gov/historicphotoroundup](http://www.sanmarcostx.gov/historicphotoroundup)

**April 23  
Vernon**

The Annual Roy Orbison Birthday Party, Weenie Roast & Community Picnic, held at the site of Orbison's birth at the corner of Deaf Smith and Pease Streets in downtown. For more information contact Dan Kelleher at [dkelleher@vernontx.gov](mailto:dkelleher@vernontx.gov).

**April 23-26  
Corsicana**

Derrick Days. Four days of cultural arts, entertainment, and family events including live music, wine walk, car show, carnival, marketplace, chili and barbecue cookoff, and a "weiner fest" in downtown Corsicana. More information: [www.derrickdays.com](http://www.derrickdays.com)

**April 26  
Ferris**

18th Annual Ferris Brick Festival. Hosted by the Lions Club, includes a brick sled pull, brick throwing contest, brick painting, Little Mr. & Miss Ferris, and Baby Crawl. More information: [www.CityofFerris.org](http://www.CityofFerris.org)

**April 26-27  
Georgetown**

15th Annual Red Poppy Festival Features artisans from across the nation, classic car show, red poppy 5K run, parade, Red Poppy tour, street dance, and great bands.

More information: <http://poppy.georgetown.org>.

**May 16-18  
San Marcos**

22nd Annual Swing on the Square. More information: [www.SMTXSwingFest.com](http://www.SMTXSwingFest.com)

**May 16-17  
Mount Vernon**

Piney Woods Wine Trail Festival. Friday 5 p.m. – 9 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Vendors, Artisanal Foods, Live Music, and Wine Tastings.

**June 13-14  
Nacodoches**

25th Annual Texas Blueberry Festival. More information: <http://www.tbf.nacogdoches.org/>

**July 4  
Cotulla**

Fourth of July Celebration. Music, entertainment, food, and games. Fireworks at 9:15 p.m. The 'Almost Patsy Cline Band' plays until 1 a.m.

If you would like one of your Main Street events posted here, email: [rebekka.adams@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:rebekka.adams@thc.state.tx.us) at least one month in advance.



# Main Street Professional Development

**May 18 – 20**

## **Detroit, Michigan**

National Main Streets Annual Conference: “Works in Progress: Making Places, Moving Forward”  
[www.preservationnation.org/main-street/](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/)

**June 10 – 11**

## **Lufkin**

New Main Street manager training all day June 10 through noon June 11. (New board members also welcome to attend.)

**June 11 – June 13 (noon)**

## **Lufkin**

Summer Main Street professional development for all Texas Main Street managers.

**November 4 – 7**

## **Granbury**

Texas Downtown Development & Revitalization Conference  
Co-sponsors: Texas Main Street Program/Texas Downtown Association  
<http://texasdowntown.org/revitalization-conference-2013.html>

## Websites of Interest

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: [www.achp.gov](http://www.achp.gov)

African American Heritage Preservation Foundation: [www.aahpfdn.org](http://www.aahpfdn.org)

(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation: [www.ahlp.org](http://www.ahlp.org)

(The) American Institute of Architects: [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org)

American Planning Association: [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org)

American Society of Landscape Architects: [www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org)

(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation: [www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)

(The) Handbook of Texas Online: [www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online)

Keep Texas Beautiful: [www.ktb.org](http://www.ktb.org)

League of Historic American Theatres: [www.lhat.org](http://www.lhat.org)

National Main Street Center: [www.preservationnation.org/main-street](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street)

National Park Service: [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

National Trust for Historic Preservation: [www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)

Partners for Sacred Places: [www.sacredplaces.org](http://www.sacredplaces.org)

Preservation Easement Trust: [www.preservationeasement.org](http://www.preservationeasement.org)

PreservationDirectory.com: [www.preservationdirectory.com](http://www.preservationdirectory.com)

Preservation Texas: [www.preservationtexas.org](http://www.preservationtexas.org)

Project for Public Spaces: [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)

Scenic America: [www.scenic.org](http://www.scenic.org)

Texas Department of Agriculture: [www.TexasAgriculture.gov](http://www.TexasAgriculture.gov)

Texas Commission on the Arts: [www.arts.state.tx.us](http://www.arts.state.tx.us)

Texas Downtown Association: [www.texasdowntown.org](http://www.texasdowntown.org)

Texas Folklife Resources: [www.texasfolklife.org](http://www.texasfolklife.org)

Texas Historical Commission: [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us)

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)

Texas Rural Leadership Program: [www.trlp.org](http://www.trlp.org)

Texas State Preservation Board: [www.tspb.state.tx.us](http://www.tspb.state.tx.us)

Urban Land Institute: [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org)

Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin, TX 78711-2276  
512.463.6100  
fax 512.475.4872  
[thc.@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:thc.@thc.state.tx.us)



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