



Main Street! Matters

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

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HOW WINTER TEXANS CHANGED OUR APPROACH TO MARKETING DOWNTOWN

*Article written by Cheryl LaBerge,
Harlingen Main Street Manager*

Most Main Street managers have heard the adage, “if you’re only open weekdays between 9 and 5, you’re catering to the unemployed.” And yet, because downtowns are populated by independent businesspeople who set their own hours, many of our businesses are open only during the day.

So, a few years ago, we undertook a concerted effort to market downtown Harlingen to folks who are available between 9 and 5 and, in fact, actually prefer to get out and about while it’s daylight: Winter Texans.

In the Rio Grande Valley, we are blessed with thousands of Winter Texans. The majority of them are retirees who migrate south seasonally from the upper Midwest and Canada. They mostly stay in RV and mobile home parks while in



Coupons and other promotional items are distributed at the Winter Texan trade shows.

the Valley for one to six months, and are looking for fun things to do. Dining out is among their favorite activities. And, like most retirees, Winter Texans love bargains and discounts.

At Winter Texan shows, amidst booths offering dolphin watch cruises, fresh shrimp, and drawings for free rounds of golf, we soon discovered our basic information on historic Downtown Harlingen was not that compelling. Believe me, it is not only humbling but instructive to discover fun-loving retirees find your product boring. So, we decided to change it up a bit and tap into those

Winter Texan interests in dining out and discounts. Pretty soon we were stopping them in their tracks by asking “Would you like some coupons for restaurants in downtown Harlingen?” With this approach, we quickly had a line of folks at our booth, hands out for coupons, and eager to see what other goodies we had to offer.

Now, every fall, we visit restaurants in our district to see if they would like to offer some sort of Winter Texan special. Suggested discounts include: buy one meal, get the second meal half price; free drink with meal; free dessert with purchase of entrée, etc. Then, we use Publisher® to create a page of

coupons (with March 31 expiration dates) and print them off colored paper in our office as needed during the season.

We also discovered new BFFs called RV Park Tour and Activity Directors, who are responsible for organizing trips and activities for their residents. We learned that there are dozens of Red Hat Groups who are constantly looking for fun things to do. We felt like we hit pay dirt when we connected with an organization of Red Hat Queens, who are the Red Hat Group leaders.

Yet still the challenge was: how do we get these groups to see downtown as a fun destination? Yes, we have shops, and yes, we have restaurants that offer Winter Texan specials, but what else is there to DO in Downtown Harlingen?

So, we set about creating some activities. We learned that jam sessions are popular in the RV Parks.

All types of musicians get together to play folk, gospel, bluegrass, and pop music and many non-musicians show up to listen. So, we decided to try and organize some jam sessions in downtown Harlingen. Since most parks hold jams in a rec hall or activity center, we scouted our downtown businesses for a location with adequate seating, restrooms, etc.

Fortunately, a model railroad clubhouse was about to open on our main street and was eager for publicity. They volunteered to host the jams at no charge. And, as luck would have it, one of their members, Vance Greek, is a musician who played in Branson years ago and is very popular with Winter Texans. Vance and some of his group volunteered to serve as the “house” band for the jams. That ensured that some musicians would be present, and that there would be a sound system so folks could hear the show. Thus, Jammin’ on Jackson

with Vance Greek & Friends was born, and has just completed its third season. The jams are generally on the second and fourth Thursday of the month, from November through March, with sessions at 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Usually 150-200 folks attend each session, which is about 45 minutes long. In between, there is a break for lunch. And, of course, attendees get discount coupons for downtown Harlingen restaurants, all within walking distance of the facility.

Another businessperson volunteered to give free downtown walking tours during Winter Texan season on Saturday mornings, a slow time for his business. So, we offer those now too, every Saturday morning from mid-November through March (except on the first Saturday of the month, which is when we hold Jackson Street Market Days). The tours start at 9 a.m. at Java Café, and last approximately 1.5 hours. On some Saturdays, there

Downtown Harlingen
JAMMIN' ON JACKSON ST.
with Vance Greek & Friends

FREE LIVE MUSIC
NOVEMBER 2014 - MARCH 2015
THE RAILROAD CROSSING Model Railroad Club & Event Center
101 E. Jackson / Downtown Harlingen

SHOW TIMES
10:30 a.m. / 1:00 p.m.

2014	2015
- November 13	- January 8
- November 20	- January 22
- December 11	- February 12
- December 18	- February 26
	- March 12
	- March 26

Musicians!
Bring your instruments and play

Come enjoy

- Folk
- Country
- Gospel
- Bluegrass

For more information, call the Downtown Harlingen office (956) 216-4910
www.downtownharlingen.com



Missionaries participate in Jammin’ on Jackson with Vance Greek and Friends



In downtown Harlingen, there are several popular activities available. (Top left) Red Hat Groups enjoy their time together at Inner Artist. Large crowds gather to take a downtown walking tour (top right), and (bottom left and right) Segway tours in downtown Harlingen.

might be 30 or 40 participants; other times there are 10-12, and occasionally just 1 or 2 people. And, at the end, guess what? Everyone gets discount coupons for restaurants in the district, many of which they strolled by on the tour.

We also offer free walking tours for groups on weekdays by appointment. Generally, that means one of our downtown restaurants gets 15 to 40 folks for lunch after the tour. Often, they linger downtown in the afternoon for a bit of shopping as well.

We created flyers/posters to promote these new activities: one for the jams and one for the walking tours. Because these activities are sponsored by our downtown district, and are free and open to the public, we found

that lots of places were willing to post them on bulletin boards or put stacks on their counters for people to take. We also sent out press releases. The regularity of the events made them easy to include in the community calendar published in our daily newspaper and in weekly publications like the *Winter Texan Times*. We entered the events in free online calendars available through the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations.

Not all of the activities we promote downtown are free. Last year, we partnered with a new business to offer Segway tours of downtown for small groups with a sense of adventure. By being the first city in our region with Segway tours, we received tons of favorable publicity.

And the most common comment? "Gosh, that looks like fun!" This year, many of the Red Hat Groups have been enjoying a new "paint your own canvas/paint your own pottery" business downtown. A creative session at The Inner Artist, a locally owned business modeled on The Tipsy Canvas chain, has become a very popular activity, particularly with those who are unable or reluctant to do a 90-minute walking or three-mile Segway tour.

Now that we have all these different activities downtown, some interesting things have started to happen. Local folks are showing up for the Saturday morning walking tours, because they read about it in the newspaper or heard about it from a friend.

Often they are long-time residents who have family or friends visiting from out of town and are looking for ways to entertain them. Sometimes we get folks who have just moved here and are eager to learn about their new community. Local families are booking Segway tours of downtown Harlingen, too. And The Inner Artist is becoming a popular place to hold bridal showers and birthday parties.

The real lesson in all of this is that we've become much more activity-oriented in all of our downtown marketing, for locals as well as retirees. Our new Downtown Harlingen brochure emphasizes events and activities. Yes, there are those folks that will seek out Main Street districts because they love historic architecture and unique, locally owned shops. But the majority of people are looking for things to do and, most importantly, they want to know what there is to do that is fun!

Our downtown—and your downtown—will become a more popular destination if it's perceived as fun. Most people enjoy going out to eat or listening to live music. For some people, a walking tour is fun. For many, a Segway tour is a blast. A “girls night out” sipping wine and learning to paint is pretty cool too. You get the point. Most people have limited amounts of leisure time and lots of options as to how they spend it. Your downtown will start to get some buzz if there are fun things to do there.

So, consider taking a few tips from those fun-loving Winter Texans. Try reworking your marketing

materials from lists of what you have in your district to descriptions of what there is to do there. Make it easy for people to enjoy your downtown.

And, if your restaurants are willing, throw in some coupons. That little “something extra” just might be the hook that entices folks to visit your historic city center.

Local discount coupons for Harlingen restaurants.

MIDBLOCK CROSSWALKS

Article written by Howard Langner, Texas Main Street Design Staff

The care and respect that we strive for in rehabilitating historic Main Street buildings also applies to how we treat historic Main Street sidewalks and roads. The walkable streets movement, along with initiatives such as Better Blocks, Tactical Urbanism, and Livable Centers, has had a profound impact on our Texas Main Street cities.

As preservationists we need to be mindful that no matter how successful an urban strategy has proven to be, we must introduce such strategies in a manner that respects and upholds the goals of historic preservation in general and the restrictions that a local historic district might impose. One such strategy that we will explore in this article is midblock crossings.

What is a midblock crosswalk? It's a place for pedestrians to cross the street without having to go to either end of the block. It is most commonly found in mid-size to larger cities but it can work quite well in smaller towns too. Studies have shown that people routinely cross at midblock locations even if it means crossing several lanes of moderate to higher-speed traffic. Studies have also shown that a considerable amount of foot traffic and subsequent sales are lost because people don't want to make the effort to walk the length of a block to cross the street. A midblock crosswalk can decrease random and unpredictable crossings associated with a high risk of collisions, especially in areas that are heavily traveled by pedestrians or where block lengths are long.

Is the Midblock Crosswalk Needed?

You want to be sure that the midblock crosswalk is necessary before you make the decision to build. A pedestrian tracking survey should be used to document where and how people cross a street or intersection. The survey will incorporate such things as speed and traffic volume data,



Figure 1. Image from the Urban Street Design Guide from the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)



Figure 2. Image from the Urban Street Design Guide from the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)

pedestrian volume, ages, and levels of mobility, location of pedestrian origin and destination points, existing sidewalk ramps, sight distances and obstructions, street characteristics including grades, curvature, pavement widths, and number of vehicle and bicycle lanes, location of adjacent driveways and alleys, on-street parking, street lighting, location of drainage structures, traffic signal progression, and vehicle accident history. Once you have determined the need, you must be sure that the design is successful at solving the problem in a safe, economical, and aesthetically pleasing manner. A midblock crosswalk can be so much more than a series of painted rectangles on asphalt. Vertical elements such as trees, landscaping, and overhead signage help to identify crosswalks and islands for motorists and provide peace of mind to pedestrians as they venture out into active lanes of traffic.

A typical Main Street condition is illustrated in the image above: a busy street with parallel parking on both sides, four lanes of traffic (two in each direction), vibrant

sidewalks, display windows along well-defined sidewalks, and no place for pedestrians to cross except at the ends of the block. In Figure 1 above, a pedestrian is shown crossing the street while three others consider doing the same. This situation is inherently wrong and it should be thoughtfully addressed.

In Figure 2 above, please note the following design features:

- The sidewalk is widened at the midblock crossing location. This increases the visibility of the pedestrian before the crossing is made. Removing parking spaces (up to three on each side of the street depending on specific situation) prevents pedestrians from “suddenly appearing” between parked cars.
- Stop lines for oncoming cars are set back 20 to 50 feet from the edge of the crosswalk. This allows a second driver to see the pedestrian in the crosswalk when the first driver is stopped at the line.

- The walk should be striped, painted, or paved in such a way that it is in clear contrast to the roadway surface. If contrast is insufficient, the walkway will be difficult to see especially in the evening.
- Safety islands (the long oval element in the second image above) create an additional area of refuge for the pedestrian. They also provide an opportunity for additional landscaping which creates a better looking crossing.
- There are many situations, often involving children, where raising the crosswalk (and tapering the sides) increases visibility and creates a safer pedestrian environment.
- ADA accessible ramps are included at both ends of the crosswalk installation.
- Adequate street lighting is provided throughout the crosswalk area. Remember, the crosswalk will be used in the evening hours too!

What are some other considerations?

Depending upon where the crossing is being proposed and the anticipated frequency of use, it may be desirable to include an actuated pedestrian signal (a temporary constant red light that transitions to a flashing red light). The beauty of this method is that the traffic flow remains continuous until an actual crossing is imminent; far better than a permanent stop sign or traditional traffic light.

The safety benefits of a midblock crossing cannot be stressed enough. Midblock crossings account for more than 70 percent of pedestrian fatalities. Midblock crosswalks consolidate pedestrian traffic and allow drivers to predict and expect pedestrian traffic. A study performed in Michigan revealed that 83 percent of pedestrians surveyed changed their crossing behaviors where midblock crossings were present. Where pedestrian islands have been included in the crosswalk design, pedestrian crashes were reduced by 46 percent and vehicle crashes were reduced by 39 percent.

How will the midblock crosswalk affect the historic integrity of the Main Street District?

Midblock crosswalks along with any other street/sidewalk/streetscape modifications will likely have an impact upon the historic integrity of your Texas Main Street commercial

district. While the purpose of this article is to discuss the general notion of midblock crosswalks, it is essential that the historic context be thoroughly understood and respected during the assessment and pre-design stages.

A midblock crossing design should never damage, compromise, or literally mimic historic street or sidewalk features. The new midblock crossing design should be tailored to respond to the history and needs of the community. The design professional responsible for the crosswalk might be required to consult with reviewers at the Texas Historical Commission (THC) depending upon how the project is funded. When consultation is required (a 106 review) the THC reviewer will use the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as the basis for their consultation.

Sources:

- National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) nacto.org
- Improving Pedestrian Safety at Unsignalized Crossings, Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 112
- HAWK Pedestrian Signals, Bureau of Highway Operations, Wisconsin DOT
- Michigan Complete Streets michigancompletestreets.wordpress.com
- Kansas LTAP Fact Sheet, University of Kansas Center for Road and Bridge Agencies

OUR NEW MAIN STREET CITIES GETTING STARTED

ENNIS

Article written by Becky McCarty, Ennis Main Street Manager

Ennis was established in 1872. With a current population of approximately 20,000, Ennis is located 30 miles south of downtown Dallas. Ennis is looking to revitalize with the help of the Main Street program. Ennis was hit by a tornado in the Spring of 2013. The F1 tornado crippled an already struggling historic downtown community. "What could have been the nail in the coffin was actually the catalyst that drew attention to downtown and galvanized the community to support revitalization and preservation. There was no question that Main Street was the approach," says Meg Sullivan, Ennis Main Street Board President.



Marty Nelson, EDC Director, and Meg Sullivan, President of Ennis Main Street, are just two of the many active volunteers for the program.

What the Main Street program has done already is provide not only the structure of a successful program but hope. As a resident who was raised in Ennis and a former downtown

business owner, I long for our downtown to be vibrant and fully utilized. I think everyone involved with Main Street feels the exact same way,” Sullivan says.

In the few months since it was announced that we were awarded the Main Street designation, we have seated the Main Street Board with 17 highly motivated residents, civic leaders, and stake holders. We have approved a Façade Improvement Grant program to add to the Historic Grant Program already in place and also now under the Main Street umbrella. Our Main Street Board has plans to hire a firm to create a Downtown Master Plan.

Our Main Street Promotion Chairperson Nora Puckett organized what I hope to be our Annual Spring into Art Exhibit. Artists from around the community are adorning the vacant windows downtown with beautiful pieces of art. From acrylic paintings to hand blown glass sculptures, it is a joy to walk downtown and not only see the excitement but feel it. The Ennis Farmer’s Market opened April 4th and is the beginning of 31 weeks of Main Street programming all in the heart of our downtown.



Nora Puckett and Dennis Zembala, board members of Ennis Main Street, organize “Make it at the Market,” a free children’s art project every Saturday at the farmers market.

April is always an exciting time around Ennis, the Official Bluebonnet City of Texas and the Official Bluebonnet Trail of Texas. It’s the beginning of Spring, a time of renewal and now the promise of Main Street and the renewal of our downtown.

ROSENBERG

Article written by Dan Kelleher, Rosenberg Main Street Manager

Rosenberg, Texas is a proud community with a rich history located just 30 minutes from downtown Houston. It is a community that is proud of its history dating back to 1883 when the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway laid out a town site and named it after the company’s president, Henry Rosenberg. Rosenberg began as a shipping point on the Brazos River, and later experienced a boom in the late 1800s and early 1900s as railroads developed. It grew to become a center of commerce in the 1940s and 50s, when it was known as the “Hub of the Gulf Coast.”



Today, Rosenberg is experiencing unprecedented growth in commercial and residential development while holding tight to its roots and charm.

Rosenberg’s downtown offers a unique experience. Whether you are interested in cultural arts, shopping,

dining, history, performance art, visual art, antiques, or boutiques, Historic Downtown Rosenberg has something to suit your tastes.

A State-designated Cultural District

Historic Downtown Rosenberg is the first and only state-designated Cultural District in Fort Bend County, and it is home to a burgeoning cultural arts scene. A collaboration of business owners, artists, the Central Fort Bend Chamber Alliance, the Rosenberg Main Street organization, and community leaders have collaborated to help make Rosenberg the center of arts activities for Fort Bend County and beyond. Artists, musicians, actors, dancers, chefs, historians, photographers, and arts enthusiasts call downtown Rosenberg home. With three restaurants, a wine bar, two active theaters, a museum, and art of all types on display throughout the district, the richness and depth of offerings is hard to beat!

A Historic District with Railroad Roots

Downtown Rosenberg also celebrates its railroad-oriented



Guests tour the Rosenberg Railroad Museum.

history with a flair. You can discover amazing stories about this history by visiting the exhibits at the Rosenberg Railroad Museum.

You can also enjoy an eclectic shopping experience in buildings restored to their original grandeur, take in a theater performance at CAST Theatrical Company, a piano concert or art show at the Art League of Fort Bend's 5th Street Gallery, and cap it all off with a delicious meal. Historic Downtown Rosenberg is home to the 1910 Vogelsang Building, an historic landmark, and to Another Time Soda Fountain, winner of a 2005 Texas Downtown Association Restoration Award, and the Cole Theatre, which we someday hope to see restored to its original Art Deco glamour.

With so many exciting things to do, downtown Rosenberg is an exciting retail and cultural district that offers a compelling invitation to all those who would like to shop, dine, live, work, create, or play.

DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

This month's volunteer spotlight introduces Rosenberg Main Street board chair and downtown business owner Renee Butler. Without all of our board chairs, we would not get the generous volunteers, whose contributions and dedication are so important. If you would like to honor a special volunteer in an upcoming month, please send a short narrative and images to debra.drescher@thc.state.tx.us.

Renee Butler, Rosenberg Main Street Program

Information provided by Rosenberg Main Street Manager, Dan Kelleher



Renee is an energetic community dynamo who is often found at the forefront of Rosenberg community improvement efforts. She was one of the leading volunteers with both the Historic Downtown Rosenberg Division of the Central Fort Bend Chamber Alliance, and on the successful effort to get downtown Rosenberg designated as an official state Cultural District. She also is consistently either a leader, or is centrally involved, in almost every downtown promotional event. The Rosenberg Main Street Advisory Board is very lucky to have Renee Butler as their leader.

NATIONAL MAIN STREET CONFERENCE WRAP-UP

The 2015 National Main Streets Conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia, March 30 – April 2. In the

Closing Session of the National Main Street Conference, our very own Winnsboro Main Street Program was awarded an inaugural Innovation on Main Street award from the National Main Street Center, one of only three in the U.S. recognized! Winnsboro's award was for its Shop Our Town First campaign, that helped increase sales tax receipts by \$10,000. Visit the National Main Street Center [website](#) to view the other winners across the country. A big congratulations to the Main Street Manager, Denise Miranda and the Winnsboro Main Street Program!



Patrice Frey, CEO of the National Main Street Center (left) presents Denise Miranda, Winnsboro Main Street manager, with her Innovation on Main Street award at the recent National Main Street Conference in Atlanta, Ga.

Don't forget, the month of May is Preservation Month.

Websites of Interest

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: www.achp.gov

African American Heritage Preservation Foundation: www.aahpfdn.org

(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation: www.ahlp.org

(The) American Institute of Architects: www.aia.org

American Planning Association: www.planning.org

American Society of Landscape Architects: www.asla.org

(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation: www.tclf.org

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

Keep Texas Beautiful: www.ktb.org

League of Historic American Theatres: www.lhat.org

National Main Street Center: www.preservationnation.org/main-street

National Park Service: www.nps.gov

National Trust for Historic Preservation: www.preservationnation.org

Partners for Sacred Places: www.sacredplaces.org

Preservation Easement Trust: www.preservationeasement.org

PreservationDirectory.com: www.preservationdirectory.com

Preservation Texas: www.preservationtexas.org

Project for Public Spaces: www.pps.org

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: www.railstotrails.org

Scenic America: www.scenic.org

Texas Department of Agriculture: www.TexasAgriculture.gov

Texas Commission on the Arts: www.arts.state.tx.us

Texas Downtown Association: www.texasdowntown.org

Texas Folklife Resources: www.texasfolklife.org

Texas Historical Commission: www.thc.state.tx.us

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: www.tpwd.state.tx.us

Texas Rural Leadership Program: www.trlp.org

Texas State Preservation Board: www.tspb.state.tx.us

Urban Land Institute: www.uli.org

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TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

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