CMSC Celebrates Downtown Revitalization Successes at Annual Meeting

Celebrating the successes of their local downtown revitalization organizations and focusing on the strength of an empowered Main Street network, the Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) held its first Annual Meeting and “Welcome to Main Street” Reception on Monday evening, June 11th at the East Hartford Community Cultural Center.

East Hartford Mayor Timothy Larson officially welcomed attendees to the Center, the restored former Central High School. “My grandparents attended school in this building. The restoration and adaptive reuse of this facility, along with the beautiful adjacent Town Green-Alumni Park are a great source of pride in our community,” Larson said. This project is an example of the combination of historic preservation and mixed-use development that are the very tenants of the Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization™. The Center now houses the town’s Parks and Recreation Department, classrooms for Manchester Community College, the Producing Guild’s set design workshop and residential artists’ studios. With it’s Auditorium/Lecture Hall and Gymnasium, the Center also plays host to a variety of performances and special events throughout the year.

CMSC board chair Jack Shannahan, Director of the Connecticut Historical Commission, reported on the achievements of the program to date and reflected on its early days.

Winsted Celebrates Acceptance into Connecticut Main Street Program

Lieutenant Governor Jodi Rell joined representatives from the Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) and the Town of Winsted to celebrate Winsted’s acceptance into the Connecticut Main Street program at a public ceremony on Monday, June 11th at the Winsted Town Hall. Together with CMSC officials, Lt. Governor Rell kicked off the program by discussing what it will mean for Winsted and outlining what happens next. “Today the future meets the past in Winsted. In earlier years downtown

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He said, “Main Street is about saving the very fabric of our communities. Together with the talents and resources of our expanded board of directors, CMSC is moving forward as the leading downtown revitalization and economic development program in the state.” (The CMSC board of directors and officers elected Monday evening are listed on page 11.)

Executive Director John Simone addressed CMSC’s plans for moving forward. “Our key priorities are providing technical assistance to participating towns, advocating for growth strategies that complement downtown revitalization and helping prospective towns gain acceptance into our program. Our technical assistance will be focused on helping communities to develop market-driven strategies and action agendas and educating each community on how they can enhance the ‘urban design’ of their commercial district. In this context, ‘urban design’ can apply to any community and is defined as how a commercial district distinguishes itself, reinforces historic patterns, eliminates pedestrian barriers and has buildings that encourage pedestrians to move from one building to another.”

The evening featured a special award given to the Connecticut Light and Power Company (CL&P) for outstanding contributions to the Connecticut Main Street program. CL&P launched the program in 1995 and is the only private corporation in the country to do so. In 1999, CMSC was spun off into a non-profit organization. CL&P still provides generous funding and in-kind office space. Steve Laden, Vice President of Customer Support for Northeast Utilities accepted the award and challenged other corporations and entities to participate in the revitalization of our Main Streets. Laden said, “CL&P is proud to have its name associated with this award as it helps carry out the mission that motivated the company to establish the program. CL&P made this investment understanding that the viability of downtown and neighborhood commercial districts are critical to the quality of life and economic well being of towns and cities. CL&P has millions of dollars invested in downtown infrastructure, so to the extent the company can assist with commercial district revitalization, it’s a win-win scenario for all involved.”

Also receiving a special award was Lisa Bumbera, Community Development Consultant at CL&P, who was charged with creating the Connecticut Main Street program in 1995. Ms. Bumbera currently serves as the board secretary and continues to help guide and grow the program. “This is an exciting day for the Connecticut Main Street Program and a reason for celebration. It gives me great pleasure to reflect back on the accomplishments of this program to date and to see our communities reclaiming their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.”

A keynote address by Stephanie Redman, Program Manager for Technical Services of the National Main Street Center,
Meet Our Main Street Program Managers

by Kimberley Parsons-Whitaker

A founding member of the board of the New London Main Street Corporation, Penny Parsekian became the organization’s executive director at a watershed moment: while the city of New London and its Main Street organization were preparing for OpSail 2000. With 900,000 visitors streaming into New London over the five days of the celebration, Penny discovered a whole new level of “community organizing”!

Penny brings to her position a passion for revitalization of neighborhoods and a love of history. Together with her extraordinary writing skills, New London Main Street is fortunate to have such a well-spoken advocate in their front office. A graduate of Lake Erie College for Women and Brown University, Penny’s resume is as diverse as one could imagine. She has been a director of marketing research for Associated Merchandising Corporation, a teacher of English as a second language to business executives for the New York-New Jersey Port Authority Language School, a writer, editor and copyeditor for Scholastic Inc., a reporter for The Westerly Sun (RI) newspaper and a free-lance writer for National Geographic and a number of colleges, museums and organizations. Scanning the list of her publications, many of which have received national awards, Penny has an obvious talent for teaching through her writing.

Over the years, her volunteer activities have clearly focused on those organizations that place a high priority on quality of life. Penny has served, and continues to serve, on boards of a number of coalitions and grassroots organizations: Trail and Rail Action Coalition, and it’s New London Vista Walkway; Thames Hilltop Neighborhood Association (both of which she co-founded); New London County Historical Society; the Pawcatuck Estuary Interstate Management Plan Advisory Committee; and she is a current member of the Board of Trustees of the Children’s Museum of Southeastern Connecticut.

Penny, with her “can-do” personality, is one of New London Main Street’s greatest assets!

Connecticut Main Street Managers

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<tr>
<th>East Hartford</th>
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<td>David Obarowski</td>
<td>Elizabeth Swenson</td>
<td>Marilyn L. Risi</td>
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<td>Terry Concannon</td>
<td>Luise S. Ernest</td>
<td>Katie Breen</td>
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<td>Penny Parsekian</td>
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Winsted Celebrates Acceptance into Connecticut Main Street Program — continued from page 1

For more than two years, a group of Winsted citizens, led by developer Ernest Wolff, has been at work on the application for designation as a Connecticut Main Street Community. “We are delighted that all of our hard work has paid off. The experience and technical assistance that CMSC brings to the table coupled with the enthusiasm and commitment we have generated locally makes us confident that we can make a significant difference over time here in Winsted,” stated Wolff, president of “Friends of Main Street.” “Friends” took the lead in submitting the application to the Connecticut Main Street Program.

To be accepted into the program, communities must demonstrate that they have broad-based community support for commercial district revitalization, a commitment to Main Street’s comprehensive approach to revitalization and a commitment and resources to hire a professional program manager. Jack Shannahan, Chair of the CMSC Board of Directors said: “Winsted is ready. There are already a number of exciting initiatives begun that can add value to the overall revitalization of their commercial district. A local Main Street program can help coordinate, leverage and add value to what is already happening with new initiatives, a comprehensive work plan and an inclusive approach. Four years down the road, on the 50th anniversary of the 1955 flood, hopefully we can say we have recovered Main Street, that we have brought it back.”

Winsted was the hub of government, cultural and commercial activities. Today’s announcement ensures that it will again be a hub in the future,” said Lt. Governor Rell.

“Through this program and other revitalization efforts, the vitality and importance of downtown Winsted will be restored and an important part of Winsted’s history will be retained,” she said. In speaking of CMSC, Lt. Governor Rell said, “In the five years the program has been in existence, eight towns have joined the Connecticut Main Street program and $93 million in public and private funds have been reinvested into these downtowns. It’s obviously a great program that brings about great results - Winsted will soon see its own results.”
Upper Albany Business Network

Good Customer Service Makes Good Business Sense

by Chris Parliman
University of Hartford

Good customer service is so essential to the success of a business. Businesses that have happy, satisfied customers returning again and again have the best chance of surviving and thriving in good times and bad. And what makes customers happy and satisfied? High quality products and excellent customer service! The problem is, so few of us in the service professions are actually trained in customer service skills.

Well, now there are training programs and materials being made available to Hartford area small businesses at no cost other than the small commitment of time to attend. The Upper Albany Merchant’s Association (UAMA), in partnership with the University of Hartford, has developed a 10-part Customer Service training series, which they are making available to small business owners and managers. These programs address difficult service issues, such as dealing with diverse customers, making a good service team, focusing on the customer and managing angry, emotional, indecisive and hard-to-please customers, among others.

The training package includes a video and written support materials to help managers and owners coach their service staff members.

Managers and Business Owners can attend a three hour program each week for ten weeks, in any one of four scheduled weekly time slots. At these sessions, they will be coached in how best to use the video and training materials to help their employees develop excellent customer service skills. They will be given their own binder with the video and materials to take back to their business site.

These training materials have been developed with the Upper Albany and Hartford Area businesses specifically in mind. Program attendees will see representatives from their own business community recounting incidents where specific customer service skills were required. Business owners and managers, as well as representatives from the University of Hartford and the customer community, give advice and suggestions on how to give customers of all types the best service on a consistent basis. Each video segment is accompanied by trainer support materials to help coaches plan and carry out training.

The UAMA and University of Hartford Center for Customer Service hope that these training materials offer Hartford’s small business owners an unprecedented opportunity to bring excellent Customer Service Skills to their business. This development effort will bring greater prosperity to the businesses and an improved image to the Hartford business community.

If you would like to know more about the development of this unique program, you can request a copy of the paper: “Community Economic Development for Upper Albany” by Margery Steinberg, Ph. D. Margy is on the board of directors of Upper Albany Main Street and is Associate Professor of Marketing and Executive Director of the Center for Customer Service at University of Hartford. Contact the Connecticut Main Street Center for a copy of this document.

All Together Now!

By George Scott, President
Upper Albany Main Street, Inc.

History was created on April 9th when the agencies and community organizations that work in Upper Albany met for the first time at St. Francis Hospital’s Center for Health Enhancement to share information about their activities in the community and to discuss ways in which they could work together and coordinate their efforts so that they could better serve the neighborhood.

The meeting was called by State representative Ken Green and facilitated by the Upper Albany Main Street Board, of which he is a member. Attendees included the Urban League of Greater Hartford, Hartford Economic Development Commission, Christian Activities Council, Connecticut...
Main Street Center, University of Hartford, Mass Mutual, Community Health Services, St. Francis Care, CPEC, Upper Albany Neighborhood Collaborative, Hartford Public Library Upper Albany Branch, DCF, Fleet Community Bank, MDC, Upper Albany Merchants Association, Upper Albany Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, The Artists Collective and the Office of the Mayor.

Green, who moderated the meeting, shared his concern that although each organization was fully dedicated to the common cause of improving the quality of life of the residents of Upper Albany, they were completely isolated from each other. This often resulted in a duplication of efforts and competition among the organizations for the same scarce resources. The only way to avoid this was for them to share information about their activities and come to some agreement that would result in greater cohesion and more efficient service to the community.

As each of the organizations gave a short presentation on their activities in Upper Albany, there was unanimous agreement on the theme of the meeting and a commitment to the concept of sharing information and coordinating efforts. To ensure that the momentum that developed at this meeting is maintained the following decisions were made:

1. All the information about the various activities undertaken by the organizations would be recorded in a graphic grid that would readily illustrate the areas of focus of the organizations’ projects. Even as this information was being gathered it became obvious to all that there were critical gaps in the service areas that would need to be addressed.

2. A community newsletter that would provide information about the activities of the organizations should be published without delay. The Upper Albany Main Street Board undertook to see that this would be done by its organization.

3. A committee of representatives from several organizations was named to meet again and follow up on the decisions that had been made and bring back recommendations for further action. It was then recognized that the organizations named were already members of the Upper Albany Main Street Board which had facilitated this meeting. It was therefore agreed that the follow-up should be done by that Board.

The meeting ended on a high note of enthusiasm. The general comment was “Why didn’t we do this before?”

ATTENTION MAIN STREET COMMUNITIES!
Has your town recently been featured in articles in local publications? Please send CMSC a copy! We want to know how your program is being covered in the media and would love to share this coverage with our readers!
Donations Can Reduce Your Taxable Income And Capital Gains Taxes

Given the recent volatility of the stock market, many of you may want to reevaluate your positions in certain sectors of the market. If you have securities which have appreciated in value, you have a capital gain, which is taxed at rates of up to 20%. That is, unless you donate that stock to a charitable organization such as nonprofit local Main Street programs or the Connecticut Main Street Center!

Making a donation of stock instead of cash will effectively exempt you from capital gains taxes on the appreciation of the security. In addition, you will usually be able to take a deduction on your income tax return for the full fair market value of the stock. Thus, by donating stock to a nonprofit organization instead of giving cash, you may qualify for substantial tax savings which you would not have otherwise realized. This means that you may even be able to increase your donation over last year and still realize cash savings.

However, you should know that if you have a capital loss, it would be better to sell the stock and donate the cash to a nonprofit local Main Street program or the Connecticut Main Street Center. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call William Clark, CPA, MSPA at (860) 247-3917.
On June 28, Connecticut Main Street Center staff attended the seminar, “Defining the New Era of Corporate Giving”, the brainchild of Theresa Hopkins Allsop, Director, Corporate Community Relations and Executive Director of Northeast Utilities Foundation. Moderated by Nancy Roberts, President of the Connecticut Council of Philanthropy, the morning session featured a corporate panel of Ronald A. Copes, Vice President of Community Relations, Mass Mutual, Hartford; Jane Driscoll, Vice President of the Phoenix Foundation; Venton Forbes, Program Officer of the Aetna Foundation; Jacqueline Strayer, Director Contribution and Communication Services of United Technologies Corporation; and Ms. Allsop.

After a luncheon address by Marie Spivey, CEO of The Learning Corridor Corp., the afternoon session convened with a non-profit panel of Luis Caban, Vice President of Operation & External Affairs Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (SINA); Kenneth R. Kahn, Executive Director of Greater Hartford Arts Council; Marsha Levinson Mason, Director of the Non-profit Resource & Training Center, United Way of the Capital Area; and Jerome Weiner, President and CEO Partners for Community.

In this first of a two-part series, we will take a close look at current practices of corporate giving. According to Theresa Allsop: “The philanthropic landscape is changing. Many corporations have established new applications, guidelines and reporting requirements for non-profits. When making funding decisions, corporations are selecting organizations that collaborate with other non-profits and have a significant impact on the community.” At this seminar, grantors and grantees shared viewpoints on the new era of corporate giving. After introductions by Nancy Roberts, each panelist spoke about their company’s corporate giving structure, funding priorities, what they look for in a successful proposal and helpful advice to those seeking funding.

Across the country, corporations have established foundations to review the thousands of grant proposals that annually come their way. To further streamline the process, on-line applications are becoming the norm - United Technologies Corporation only accepts on-line grant proposals, which are posted annually in January, that must be submitted by the June 1st deadline. The Phoenix Foundation and The Aetna Foundation both report they are moving toward the exclusive on-line application process as well. Northeast Utilities and Mass Mutual currently accept and review written grant proposals throughout the year.

Current Funding Priorities

Among the six corporations represented on the panel, funding priorities typically concentrate on education, community & civic causes, and arts & culture. Other top funding priorities include health and human services, youth, neighborhood development, the environment, diversity and capacity building in minority organizations and communities, and volunteerism and employee involvement via matching funds of employee contributions. Aetna in particular takes the view that their employees are “advocates” for non-profits. Non-profits that UTC employees are committed to are eligible for grants of up to $250, providing the employee volunteers 60 hours per year to that organization.

Each corporate panelist also discussed what they look for in a successful grant proposal:

- **Sustainability and indications of the overall health of your organization**: Is your board representative of the community? What is your organization’s standing in the community? What are your board members saying about your organization? “Can the organization pull this off?”

- Is the proposal **in concert with your mission**? What is the scope and timing of your program and does the program fulfill a community need?

- **Diversity of funding partners** - necessary for the overall health of your organization. Grantors typically want to know that you haven’t put all your funding eggs in one basket.

- **Measurable results** - do you have a system in place to measure your program’s effectiveness?

- **Collaboration** - can you implement this program jointly with other entities in your community that may have the same or similar missions?

- Do you have a **promotion strategy** in place to promote both the grant and your program?

- What leveraging opportunities exist? Many corporations and foundations institute a system of accountability whereby a company executive sits on the board of recipient organizations and thereby is involved in the internal structure of this funding partnership.

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Defining the New Era of Corporate Giving — continued from page 8

• **Outreach to neighborhood schools** - with education being the primary focus area of many grantors these days, this is an important way to involve the next generation in the work of your program.

• Does your program present unique opportunities and innovative ideas? Do you have “visionaries” in your organization, as well as the workers to get the job done?

• Has your organization or program received any **awards for the work you do or service you provide?**

• **Results!** You are much more likely to be funded again, and by others, if you’ve developed a program that follows all the guidelines above.

In addition, there were “helpful hints” passed on as part of each panelist’s comments and the question and answer session that followed:

• **Never submit a proposal without first establishing some kind of relationship with the grantor,** no matter how small your ask - you may receive helpful advice that could result in more support for a different project or program!

• For programs that are ongoing and continue providing the same service each year to their constituency (particularly in health and human services programs), **don’t try to create a “new” profile to match to the current funding priorities of the foundation.** Rather, show how you’re keeping current in your field. Are you taking advantage of new technologies and initiatives?

• In quantifying measurable results, **clearly state your objectives up front - what are your expected outcomes?** In reportage, show how you met those objectives. Get results from the community through surveys. Participate and encourage site visits from grantors to establish the strength of your board and staff. Can you display the ability to “tweak” the program to make it more effective to the community?

• **Collaboration** - for an organization or agency with different departments, get together and coordinate one proposal, offering a menu of initiatives for the grantor to choose from.

• Consider the **value-added benefits of funding your program to the corporation** - enhancement of their corporate image, the corporation’s impact on the community.

• In-kind contributions: the current trend is for corporations to lease computers and equipment or outsource printing services, so they no longer provide these as in-kind to non-profits. It was suggested, however, that non-profits **provide grantors with a list of their in-kind needs.** Very often corporations will turn over those lists to the companies that provide them with services and equipment.

• Regarding the challenge of securing funding of operational costs, organizational structure, strategic planning and fund development: **some** of your administrative costs can be contained within a grant proposal. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving provides technical assistance grants for non-profits interested in improving their effectiveness in the community through a non-profit management program that assists organizations in securing sufficient funding to accomplish their mission, strengthen their organizational capacity and address issues such as long-range planning.

According to Nancy Roberts, President of Connecticut Council for Philanthropy, current statistics show that only 5% of funding for non-profits comes from corporations, 10% comes from foundations and the remaining 85% comes from private sources. In part two of this report, we will explore examples of “creative funding through collaboration” discussed by a panel of experts in the non-profit world.

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### Resources for Non-profits

- **Connecticut Council for Philanthropy:** “Guide to Connecticut Grant Makers” book and CD, alphabetized list of over 1,600 Connecticut grantmaking foundations, corporate foundations, and corporate giving programs. Includes names and addresses.
  
  Phone: 860-525-5585. Website: www.ctphilanthropy.org

- **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving:** Non-profit Management Program provides grants and informational services to help small to mid-sized non-profits govern themselves effectively, think strategically, and respond to their constituents.
  
  Phone: 860-548-1888. Website: www.hfpg.org

- **Connecticut Association of Non-profits (CAN):** Products and services that save non-profit organizations money while providing the highest quality service available.
  
  Phone: 860-525-5080. Website: www.Ctnonprofits.org
centered on the growing network of downtown revitalization professionals in Connecticut and across the country and the power they have to change and improve their town centers and neighborhoods. Ms. Redman reminded attendees not to underestimate the power of the Main Street network: “As advocates of downtown revitalization, we are especially qualified to educate legislators, on the local, state and federal level, as to the importance of our communities. We can share insight and guidance in matters of land use, adaptive reuse of older buildings and economic development issues in our commercial centers.”

Additional funding for CMSC comes from the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development. The communities that are currently in the Connecticut Main Street program are East Hartford, Middletown, New London, Portland, Rockville, Simsbury, the Upper Albany neighborhood of Hartford, Windsor and Winsted, which was officially announced as the newest Main Street community earlier in the day at a press conference with Lieutenant Governor M. Jodi Rell.

At the annual CT Trust for Historic Preservation Conference in May, The Harlan H. Griswold Award, Connecticut’s highest recognition for historic preservation achievement, was presented to The Connecticut Light and Power Company (CL&P) for establishing the Connecticut Main Street Program.

In presenting the Griswold Award, Jack Shannahan, State Historic Preservation Officer remarked: “Economic development through historic preservation was a latecomer in America’s downtowns and in reaction to urban renewal that subsequently failed in competing with suburban malls. Urban renewal’s so-called solutions included office parks, parking lots, and suburban-style shopping plazas in urban settings. Main Street’s goals are more effective: preserving existing downtown character through reuse of buildings; accommodating both parking and pedestrian needs; encouraging businesses which complement each other; and coordinating promotional events and hours of operation.

Through CL&P’s vision and generosity, Connecticut has the Main Street program. Neither the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation nor the Connecticut Historical Commission can ensure that businesses will succeed economically and that their historic buildings will survive, even if surveyed, registered, and landmarked. Main Street enables downtowns to turn away from decline and protect these special places for future generations.”

The CT Trust’s 2001 conference was held on May 18th at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury. For more details on this conference and the work of the CT Trust, visit their website at www.cttrust.org.
Outstanding “Best Practices” Guides for Main Street Organizations

Volunteer Training Manual
-published by Main Street Waterloo (IA)

“We believe that each volunteer contributes directly to the growth and success of Main Street Waterloo, and we hope you will take pride in being a member of our team.” This handbook was developed to better acquaint potential volunteers with the local Main Street program, and to describe Main Street Waterloo’s policies and programs.

Why re-invent the wheel? This is a terrific model for other Main Street programs to follow!

Competing With the Retail Giants: How to Survive in the New Retail Landscape -by Kenneth E. Stone

• Improve Your Merchandising & Visual Displays
• Emphasize Outstanding Customer Service
• Revise Your Marketing & Advertising Plans

Written by economist Kenneth Stone, this book offers practical tips on how to compete successfully with Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Kmart by capitalizing on the niches they leave open in marketing, pricing and service.

Getting Started: How to Succeed in Heritage Tourism
-prepared by the National Trust for Historic Preservation

“Linking tourism and preservation can do more for local economies-and for tourism and preservation-than promoting them separately. That’s the core idea in Heritage Tourism: save your heritage, share it with visitors, and reap the economic benefits of tourism” - This guide covers The Ten Commandments of Eco-Tourism, Basic Elements for Attracting Tourists, a Visitor Services Checklist and much more.

To borrow these, or any other titles in the CMSC lending library, call us and make an appointment to browse!

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John Simone
Executive Director

Kimberley Parsons-Whitaker
Associate Director
Winsted Celebrates Acceptance into Connecticut Main Street Program

“Through this program and other revitalization efforts, the vitality and importance of downtown Winsted will be restored and an important part of Winsted’s history will be retained.”

An enthusiastic Winsted crowd can’t wait to get started!