



The Connecticut Main Street Center Founder's Award

presented by



Connecticut Main Street Center presents the Founder's Award in recognition of individuals and organizations who dedicate themselves to promoting an awareness of the necessity of a comprehensive management approach to the revitalization of Connecticut's historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. This year, CMSC has selected Upper Albany Main Street and the University of Hartford to receive this award.

Since June 2000, Upper Albany Main Street and the University of Hartford have been partners in creating an environment where the university and its neighboring community can benefit from one another. The nonprofit Upper Albany Main Street program has collaborated with the University to bring small business assistance and urban design expertise to The Avenue. For 16 years, led by University of Hartford President Walter Harrison and Upper Albany Main Street Executive Director Marilyn Risi, this partnership has brought real world learning and service to the community, while engaging the neighborhood with an outstanding educational institution right in its own backyard.

The Connecticut Main Street Founder's Award will be presented by Eversource at the 2016 CT Main Street Awards Gala on June 6th in Storrs Center.

Upper Albany Main Street & University of Hartford

The University of Hartford was created in 1957 with a vision of being "a private university with a public purpose". Nothing speaks more dramatically to that vision than the University's Handel Performing Arts Center on the corner of Albany Avenue and Westbourne Parkway – the Gateway to the Upper Albany Main Street district. When the stunning center was dedicated in September 2008, University President Walter Harrison commented that, *"a combination of charitable gifts and public support enabled us to turn an abandoned auto distributorship into a world-class facility for training actors and dancers. The center's location will help immeasurably in the economic development of the Upper Albany and Blue Hills neighborhoods of Hartford."*

The University's vibrant relationship with the Greater Hartford community – and especially with the Upper Albany neighborhood - is a hallmark of President Harrison's leadership. The University is a recognized leader in helping to improve public schools. It was the first private university in the country with two public magnet schools on campus—the University of Hartford Magnet School and the University High School of Science and Engineering.



As an example of University of Hartford’s investment in healthy main streets, the Upper Albany Micro Business Incubator (MBI) was developed in 2002 as a joint project by Upper Albany Main Street, the University of Hartford and the Metro Hartford Alliance. The MBI program matches micro-enterprises in Upper Albany with students from the University of Hartford’s Barney School of Business to cultivate business capacity using an on-site one-on-one training model that enables students and business owners to work together. Over the past ten years this program has provided training and technical assistance to 153 businesses. As a direct result of the MBI program, 28 businesses have received computers and training, and 50 businesses received loan assistance totaling over \$3,270,000. More than 250 new jobs have been created in the neighborhood; 4 businesses significantly expanded their operations by opening satellite branches. There has been over \$95.5 million dollars in private investment infused within the community of Upper Albany and \$195 million in public investment. At least 415 students have participated in the program providing a staggering total of over 55,733 hours of training to the business owners of Upper Albany.

Upper Albany Main Street’s mission is “to preserve, revitalize, and support the commercial district of Upper Albany Avenue to create a neighborhood of choice.” When the Upper Albany community applied to become part of the Connecticut Main Street program in 2000, the neighborhood’s leaders were motivated by their determination to “take back the neighborhood” and stop its downward spiral toward social and economic decline. By dedicating itself to a solution-oriented culture, building strategic alliances, and remaining focused in the face of competing issues, Upper Albany Main Street has positioned itself as the convener and professional manager of The Avenue, playing a central role in such initiatives as:

- The 2011 construction of the new 8,000 square foot Albany Avenue branch of the Hartford Public Library, at the corner of Albany and Blue Hills Avenues. This branch is a part of a “campus” that connects with the Artists Collective, and the John E. Rogers African American Cultural Center. Part of that “campus” idea is a renewed vision of how to strategically use Keney Park and how to find new uses for the Martin Luther King Elementary School and the Lewis Fox Middle High School buildings.
- The \$28 million Route 44 (Albany Avenue) Safety Improvement Project (streetscape and realignment), which begins construction in 2017. The project’s main focus is to address safety, deteriorating infrastructure and socio-economic challenges along this area of the roadway.
- The Upper Albany Commercial façade improvement program, a \$6.2 million investment in the neighborhood, which will improve 31 properties over the next three years.



The board and staff of UAMS is committed to continuing as Upper Albany Avenue’s key community-business organization linking Upper Albany Avenue businesses to outside resources and to the residents; working to position the Avenue as a destination for arts, education and entertainment. ***Connecticut Main Street Center and Eversource are proud to recognize Upper Albany Main Street and the University of Hartford for their outstanding contributions to Main Street Revitalization.***

About the Founders Award

From the start, Connecticut Main Street Center was borne of innovation and a deep commitment to Connecticut’s downtowns and Main Street districts. CMCS’s Founder’s Award pays homage to its unique beginnings in a utility company, acknowledging the Connecticut Light & Power Company’s (now Eversource Energy) establishment of the Connecticut Main Street Program in 1995. CL&P later partnered with the State of Connecticut and numerous public and private community and economic development entities in 1999 to create the nonprofit Connecticut Main Street Center. As a nonprofit entity, CT Main Street Center is able to leverage resources and serve as a visible symbol of renewal and a new future for downtowns across the state.

CL&P was recognized for their visionary Main Street Program initiative with the 2006 National Main Street Business Leadership Award. To this day, CL&P remains the only private corporation in the country to have founded a statewide Main Street program. CMSC’s Founder’s Award, presented by Eversource, annually recognizes individuals and organizations for their own similar dedication to revitalizing our downtowns using a comprehensive management approach.

[Click here](#) for a list of previous recipients of the CT Main Street Founder’s Award, presented by Eversource.