



MONITOR

TECHNICAL BRIEF

June 2003

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The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Main Street Program provides downtown revitalization technical assistance to Virginia communities, using the National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach™ (Organization, Promotion, Design & Economic Restructuring) to comprehensive preservation-based revitalization of historic commercial districts.



Department of Housing and
Community Development

What Is a Kiosk and Why Should We Have One?

By Sandy Hanger

Have you ever been a visitor lost in the downtown area of a community? Did you have to go around the block several times to find an available parking space? Once you found a space, you may have become disoriented in direction—where you are and where you want to go. If you didn't come downtown with a destination in mind, then you will probably want to know just what is available.

Before panicking or stopping a local resident to ask directions, wouldn't it be wonderful to have that information available, like a beacon in the night, directing you to shopping, eating establishments, municipal buildings and historic sites? Well, you can in communities that have incorporated the use of kiosks in the downtown areas to help visitors find their way around.

The purpose of kiosks is to provide orientation and information about downtown to pedestrians. Many communities across the country have developed wayfinding sign systems to help visitors self-navigate around unfamiliar territory. Once in the downtown area, the kiosk provides more detailed information for pedestrians, thus making the visit more satisfying and enjoyable.

An example of this type of information is commonly found in malls. Usually the mall has a map associated with changeable slots that list businesses within the mall. Some are even interactive providing services such as ATM and email, which can be expensive and require a high degree of maintenance. The best kiosks for downtown are simple in nature. Most provide a map with a list of businesses and a "You are Here" location. This information is relatively permanent being updated only as new businesses are established. The kiosk also allows the community to communicate other

information such as special events, restaurants, local entertainment and other current events. This type of information isn't permanent, thus stirring even the local residents to visit and use the kiosks as a source of information

about what's happening in their downtown.

There are many different styles and types of kiosks. When considering a kiosk, there are some simple guidelines to consider, such as type, cost, placement, appearance, versatility and management of the kiosk. Kiosks can range from very simple to very ornate, architecturally-rich centers of information.

When determining the **type** of kiosk for your community, it is very important to consider the style or appearance of the kiosk. The design of the kiosk should

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A kiosk recently designed for the community of Shenandoah uses the side of their town hall to house two lockable glass display cases containing orientation information and community events. A decorative awning was used to call attention to the kiosk as well as to provide an inviting space to view information.

Kiosk

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relate well to the downtown area in **scale** as well as architectural features. It is important that the kiosk match the scale and size of your community. When determining the **style** of the kiosk, your downtown can provide the best cues. Look around at the many different architectural styles inherent in the downtown area. Look at the scale of the buildings, sidewalks, and streets and their relationship to one another and pick a kiosk that will relate well to these other elements.

Color is an effective way to call attention to the kiosk, thus providing a visual cue for visitors to look for when they need information. Your wayfinding sign system can provide very effective colors to use for the kiosk.

Visitors have already been conditioned to look for the colorful wayfinding signs as they navigate to the downtown area. Using a color in that system is a natural transition to wayfinding from the automobile to the pedestrian level.

The **materials** used in the kiosk also reflect the elements and styles found in the downtown area. Kiosks can be made from many types of materials and combination of materials, such as metal, wood, brick, stone, plastic, glass, and can also have illumination. From simple to complex, the materials can simply be metal display cases that are attached to existing structures to more complex, freestanding structures. To help determine the type of



Staunton purchased freestanding kiosks for their downtown that provide visitors and local residents with information and current events. The design of the kiosk fits well with the architectural elements and scale found in downtown Staunton.



Winchester's kiosk is located in the downtown pedestrian mall and uses architectural elements that reflect the character of their historic district.

materials to use, you must also determine what your budget will allow.

The **cost** of a kiosk varies greatly. Using creative design ideas, such as the one in Shenandoah, can help keep costs down. There are many design styles and

sizes that are pre-fabricated and can be ordered. Custom designed kiosks cost the most, but enhance and reflect the unique image of an area.

The **placement** of kiosks at key locations plays an important role in creating a seamless and hassle free experience, and in giving the visitor a more positive image of the community. Think about the path the pedestrian takes to major attractions in your downtown. Try to locate kiosks in locations along those paths. These would include garages, parking lots, major intersections and key landmarks located on major corridors that meet the space requirement necessary for that particular style of kiosk.

Underlying the success or failure of the kiosk is its **management**. It must be maintained and the information kept current. Don't take on more than you can manage. Simplicity is key in the management of kiosks. Failure to maintain the kiosks and the information can strongly influence people's perceptions of the community as well as their ability to find their way around. ■

Sandy Hanger is a graphic designer for Frazier Associates in Staunton.



This kiosk/shelter in Orange is located next to their historic train station and takes advantage of the opportunity to display some history about the community. The architectural design reflects the character of the adjacent train station, and is an inviting and welcoming feature.

Virginia Main Street Forum: Developing a Successful Membership Program

By Sarah Dillard Pope

A special thanks is extended to **Bedford, Lexington, Lynchburg, Manassas, Orange and Rocky Mount** Main Street programs for providing information on this topic.

So how do you do it? How do you develop a fantastic membership program with limited budget and staff? Looking at the membership programs of six designated Virginia Main Street communities, four common factors for developing a successful membership program come to light from which other organizations might learn.

1. Reflect the Organization's Overall Goals and Membership Base of Your Particular Community

Like other elements of a fundraising program, dues structures should take into consideration a broad range of issues that reflect the organization's overall goals. A 1997 *Main Street News* article, "Membership Dues: Setting up an Effective Structure," provides this advice, "Leaders should identify who the program's participants should be, define the total budget, estimate how much of total revenues should be generated by each group of constituents, decide whether to include merchant contributions for retail promotion in the dues structure and finally, package, promote and monitor the system."

In Virginia, membership dues structures vary from community to community. Some communities target only retailers and property owners within the Main Street district, while others cast a broader net and also target individuals, businesses and corporations outside of the Main

Street district. Many of the Main Street organizations that provided information for this feature emphasized that you should know your membership base and develop a dues structure that is realistic, yet optimistic, for your particular community and the goals of your organization.

A multi-tiered membership dues structure with separate categories and costs for businesses within the Main Street district, businesses outside of the Main Street district and individuals and families, is a structure that some Main Street communities have adopted. Bedford, which advertises its membership program on its web site (www.bedfordmainstreet.org/membership.htm), offers three levels of giving for individuals and non-Centertown businesses: \$25 (Friend); \$50 (Supporter); and \$100 (Benefactor). Annual dues for businesses in the Bedford Main Street district are set at a flat \$100.

Another option for devising a dues structure is to consider the number of employees per business. Other variables to consider are

street frontage, square footage, and gross sales. The Lexington Downtown Development Association charges \$50 per full-time employee of the business with a minimum contribution of \$100 from professionals and \$150 from retailers. Due to the large number of employees, restaurant dues are capped at \$250. The

organization also offers a Friend of Downtown Lexington membership at the individual level (\$35) or family level (\$50). While a business is not eligible for individual membership, a property owner may join at this level. Manassas has a six-tiered membership structure, and also provides an individual/family category: \$50 for individual partner (Manassas has a creative method of recruiting new individual members by placing its membership brochure in relocation packets); \$135 for business partner; \$250 for junior partner (10-24 employees); \$500 for senior partner (25-50 employees); \$1,000 for executive partner (up to 100 employees); and \$1,000 and above for corporate partner (more than 100 employees).

Other communities do not distinguish between individual or business membership, or set dues according to business size. For instance, the Orange Downtown Alliance offers these membership options: \$50 for friend; \$100 for patron; \$250 for

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One Method of Calculating Retail Dues

(taken from "Membership Dues: Setting Up an Effective Structure," *Main Street News*, November, 1997)

- Estimate the program's retail promotion budget for the year.
- Divide the retail promotion budget by the number of retailers you expect to participate as members.

Example:

\$5,000 retail promotion budget ÷ 60 retail businesses = \$85 per business

- Add the retail dues assessment to a base assessment (that supports general operating expenses for the program).

Example:

\$85 retail promotion assessment + \$75 base = \$160 annual dues

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benefactor; \$500 for advocate; \$1,000 for leader; and an open-ended "other" category. From the complex to the relatively simple, tailor your membership dues structure to your particular community and organization.

2. Personal Contact

Recruiting that new member or renewing the membership of a current member begins with a phone call from the executive director or a board member. A face-to-face visit can then be scheduled with the prospect and the board and/or staff member. Informational materials and brochures don't have to be professionally designed and printed. In fact, most Main Street communities produce attractive informational packets and membership brochures in-house at a nominal cost. The orientation materials you provide to potential members can include pieces such as a flyer or brochure with the organization's membership breakdown, benefits of membership, goals and accomplishments of the organization, how the membership money will be used by the organization, a current organization newsletter, and information on any financial and technical assistance programs the organization offers.

In Rocky Mount, board members take the lead in contacting potential members—a little friendly "peer pressure" from board members has proven highly effective in this tight-knit community. Jeff Sadler, Executive Director of the Rocky Mount Community Partnership for Revitalization, says that active board involvement in the membership program is the "key to their success." In Manassas, each board member is tasked with raising \$1,000 through membership renewal and must select names from existing members who are to renew, make a telephone call to the member, and offer to pick-up the renewal check. This past

spring, Historic Manassas, Inc. held a successful cash bar membership kick-off, featuring a silent auction, at a local restaurant that donated the food and entertainment. The organization advertised the event in their newsletter and a week before the kick-off posted flyers on colored paper throughout the downtown. The day of the event, volunteers made reminder calls—the hard work paid off with a healthy attendance of 120 members at the kick-off.

Lynchburg recently held a membership recruitment "blitz" that resulted in over \$10,000 in membership dues and 87 new members. Split into two teams, fourteen membership volunteers participated in a recruitment contest. The volunteers first gathered together and were given the rules of the contest and a packet of information about the Lynchburg Main Street program's accomplishments, mission, frequently asked questions, benefits of membership, etc. Provided with a list of 200 leads from companies based downtown and other companies who were reaping the benefits of revitalization (real estate brokers, construction companies, architects, etc.), each team was given two weeks of telephone "pre-selling" time. They then returned back to the Main Street office for the five-hour "blitz," faxed membership forms out to all of their leads, and then called the lead on a cell phone that was donated by a board member who works for NTelos. If the volunteer received a verbal commitment of membership, he or she got to roll two big fuzzy dice and received a dollar for every point on the dice. The volunteer also went to a board that had 100 numbers posted on it



Supporters of Historic Manassas, Inc. enjoying the organization's membership kick-off at a local restaurant this past spring. Over 120 people attended this successful event.

and chose a number—when they looked on the back of the number there was a door prize listed or a "try again" message. After the blitz day the volunteer had one week to follow-up with their leads. Lynch's Landing then held an awards luncheon for the volunteers and gave out donated prizes to the top sales person and the top sales team. Executive Director Terri Proffitt commented on the event, "It was a lot of fun and 200 people (our leads) got to learn more about our efforts even if they ended up not joining."

Some other Virginia Main Street communities haven't had this level of board or volunteer participation and rely on staff to make that initial contact and subsequent follow-through with potential and existing members. Though membership programs administered primarily by staff can be successful, they can also lead to an over-extended executive director and/or support staff person and present the appearance that the staff is raising money to support their own salary. Ideally, the membership program should rely on the initiative and follow-up of board members and volunteers with staff playing a behind-the-scenes supporting role.

3. Demonstrated Benefits and Consistent Communication with Members

From personal design advice

from Main Street staff, to discounted admissions to special events, to cooperative advertising opportunities with local media, providing that “carrot” to members for joining and renewing is an important facet of a membership program. Communicating with your members throughout the year via venues such as your organization’s newsletter, special events, workshops and face-to-face visits is also essential in ensuring a successful program.

Some Virginia Main Street communities offer varying benefits according to the membership level. Bedford Main Street, Inc., (BMS) for example, offers subscriptions to *Centertown Quarterly*, discounted admission to BMS festivals, and an invitation to its annual gala for the \$25 *friend* category. For those members who join at the \$50 *supporter* level, they receive the newsletter, an invitation to the annual gala, discounted admission to BMS festivals, and an individual membership to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (valued at \$20). The \$100 *benefactor* has the same benefits as the \$50 member level, but also receives two complimentary tickets to the annual gala.

Other organizations offer one benefit package for all membership levels that can include such components as free admission to local Main Street-sponsored events, the organization newsletter, discounts at participating stores, membership pin and sticker, free admission to business enhancement seminars or other training opportunities, and the opportunity to apply for grant assistance for façade improvements or other physical improvement projects.

Being specific about how membership dues are being used by the organization is yet another method of effectively communicating with your members. Downtown Lexington’s membership recruitment packet included a sheet that provided specific examples of what annual dues

pay for throughout the year. For example, \$100 can cover a monthly phone bill, a tank of helium, four hanging flower baskets for downtown; \$150 can cover one 1/4 page holiday ad, 700 brochures for the “back-to-school” packages; \$200 pays for postage for the Holiday Open House postcards; and so on. Another simple method for communicating with your members is through a renewal letter that includes a summary of your organization’s yearly accomplishments and a statement that this important work is due, in large part, to the generous support of your members.

4. Organized Method of Tracking Members

The ultimate survival and success of your membership program relies on an organized system for tracking members and renewing membership dues. Some Virginia Main Street communities use software programs such as Quick Books that generate invoices for membership renewal. Other communities create Excel spreadsheets that list name, telephone number, membership month and year, most recent renewal year, and past and current membership levels. The organization then generates renewal notices based on that information. Renewal notices can be short invoices or more detailed letters, depending on the size and character of your membership base. One Virginia Main Street organization mailed out invoices, but made the change to a more personal renewal letter, when it received complaints from some members that the invoice was too much like a bill.

Rocky Mount has created a simple, but effective method for sending out their monthly renewal letters. In addition to having their membership information entered into an Excel spreadsheet, the organization has created a physical file folder for each month of the year. The folders include the renewal letters for each

member whose annual membership expires in that particular month and a copy of the member’s last dues check. At the beginning of each month, the pertinent file is pulled and the appropriate members are sent renewal letters.

Ultimately, there is no one membership system that is appropriate for every organization or situation. However, the four common elements found in the membership programs of some of Virginia’s Main Street communities are smart tenets to incorporate when developing or redeveloping your own organization’s program. ■

Sarah Dillard Pope is a downtown revitalization planner with Virginia Main Street.

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Manassas Named as 2003 Great American Main Street Award Winner

The National Trust for Historic Preservation presented its Great American Main Street Award to Historic Manassas, Inc. director Tricia Davis and several of her board members, at the National Town Meeting on Main Street in Cincinnati, Ohio on May 19. Manassas was one of only five Main Street communities from throughout the country to receive the prestigious national award this year.

Manassas' award marks the second time in two years that a Virginia community has won a Great American Main Street Award. "I am proud to congratulate the community leaders and citizens of Manassas on their Great American Main Street Award," said **Governor Mark Warner**. "The community has shown an incredible commitment to restoring its downtown area and truly deserves this national honor," said Governor Warner.

"The fact that we have had two winners in two years is a point of pride for Virginia and a testament to the success of the Virginia Main Street program and our designated Main Street communities such as Manassas." Staunton was a 2002 winner of the award.

Historic Manassas, Inc. was recognized for outstanding downtown revitalization initiatives including their impressive train depot renovation, \$2 million pavilion and city square project, numerous outstanding historic building renovations and hugely successful special events like the Heritage Railway Festival. Since joining the Virginia Main Street program in 1988, Manassas has encouraged more than \$12.3 million in private investment and dedicated 10,600 hours of volunteer time to local downtown revitalization efforts. "We are proud of Manassas' success and the efforts of all our Virginia Main Street communities," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade **Michael J. Schewel**.

Governor Attends Business Appreciation Week Activities in Staunton

"Downtowns are a powerful economic force in our communities and are often one of the largest employment centers and generators of substantial tax revenue," according to **Governor Mark Warner** who toured downtown Staunton, met with local business owners and attended a special luncheon with local citizens at the Blackfriars Playhouse at the start of Business Appreciation Week on May 12. "Business Appreciation Week is about recognizing businesses of all sizes in all industries," added Governor Warner. Walking down



Governor Warner meeting with local business owners in Staunton. Photo courtesy of the Governor's Office.

Beverly Street, which had been closed to traffic for the occasion, the Governor was able to meet many long-time

shop owners and welcome new businesses to the community along this beautiful and historic street. The Governor recognized Staunton's long history of commitment to downtown revitalization and historic preservation and announced a \$1 million grant from

DHCD's CDBG program that will help pay for a conference center at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in town. "In my mind, Staunton is a model community that so many communities across Virginia can take lessons from," concluded Warner.

Main Street Communities Sweep VDDA Awards

Out of the 13 awards presented by the Virginia Downtown Development Association (VDDA) at the annual conference in May, the outstanding number of ten awards went to Virginia Main Street designated programs or affiliates. Recognized for: *Downtown Volunteer* - Joy Berghaus, City of **Winchester** and John C. Harrell, City of **Suffolk**; *Organization* - Henrico County for the Henrico County Comprehensive Revitalization Strategy and Suffolk Nansemond Historical Society, City of Suffolk (Award of Merit); *Elected Official* - E. Dana Dickens, III, Mayor, City of Suffolk; *Promotion* - Downtown Life Newsletter, Town of **South Boston** and Market Days, City of Suffolk; *Downtown Public Improvement and Planning* - Downtown Revitalization Plan, City of

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Hopewell and Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan, City of **Lynchburg**; *Business Development and Marketing* - Richmond Highway Facade Improvement Pilot Project, Fairfax County; *Downtown Building Improvement and Development* - Bedford Courthouse, City of **Bedford**, Masters Building, City of Winchester and Prentis House, City of Suffolk (Award of Merit). VDDA presents Awards of Excellence each year at the conference and all VDDA members are eligible to apply, so consider nominating your outstanding local projects in these categories next year. ✍

HB 2683 Signed into Law

HB 2683, recently signed into law by the 2003 General Assembly, will have a positive impact on historic downtowns throughout the Commonwealth. The major intent of the law is to give local building officials flexibility (without compromising safety) to grant modifications of existing provisions of the building code, thus encouraging rehabilitation of older buildings. HB 2683 also requires the Board of Housing and Community Development to adopt such rehabilitation regulations. Some rehabilitation regulations will be officially adopted this fall as part of the Uniform Statewide Building Code, and additional rehabilitation regulations will be forthcoming as well. The law is available on-line at: <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?031+ful+CHAP0650+pdf>. ✍

Preserve America Initiative Recently Announced

At a speech given to the National Association of Counties this spring, First Lady Laura Bush announced the Preserve America Initiative, developed in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the U.S. Departments of Interior and Commerce. Through Preserve America, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Don Evans will direct the Economic Development

Administration, which has a grant budget of nearly 290 million dollars, to support and promote more projects in America's historic downtowns. In addition, the Presidential Award for Preserve America will reward innovative partnerships that achieve public benefits through preservation. Communities that integrate preservation and tourism may also apply to be designated as Preserve America Communities. These awards will showcase model projects and encourage community leaders to share their experience with others. For more information, visit the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Web site at: www.achp.gov. ✍

Who Gives Whom What

Where contributors were once fairly behind the scenes, the Virginia Public Access Project (www.vpap.org) allows anyone with access to the Internet identify significant contributors to state and national political activities. This may help Downtown Revitalization Program to identify potential philosophical and financial supporters for their effort. ✍

New VMS Affiliates

Welcome to the following new Virginia Main Street Affiliate communities who have joined the fold in recent months:

- Town of Ashland
- Town of Halifax
- City of Harrisonburg
- County of Loudoun
- Town of Scottsville

To find out how your community can become an Affiliate and have access to Main Street quarterly trainings, check out our website at www.dhcd.state.va.us/cd/crd/msp/mspindex.htm. ✍ ■



Put GuideStar to Work for You!

At the Virginia Main Street Quarterly Training in February, 2003, Karen Rayzor, Nonprofit Marketing Manager for Williamsburg-based GuideStar, provided some useful tips on how to use your Form 990 as a marketing tool. GuideStar's philosophy: don't think of the 990 as just a financial reporting form—instead, look at it as one more way you can communicate effectively with donors and grant makers. The national database of nonprofit organizations, GuidesStar provides the Form 990s of over 850,000 IRS-recognized nonprofits. Your organization's Form 990 is already in the GuideStar database, however, you can also officially register your organization with the Web site at no cost by completing an on-line form with information on your organization. This information will accompany the Form 990 found in the database and provides a better picture of the organization's goals and accomplishments. If you register with GuideStar, you can take advantage of some great free services:

- You can accept on-line donations for free
- GuideStar provides a link to your Web site
- You can place free classified ads, post news releases, and on-line newsletters
- You can connect with Web site developers who will create or improve your Web site pro bono

For more information on GuideStar, visit www.guidestar.org and click on the "Nonprofits enter here" link on the home page. ■



**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT
OF HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

501 North Second Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Downtown Development Calendar

July '03

- 1 Virginia Transportation Enhancement Program (TEA-21) applications due
- 15 Preventing Crime Through Landscaping, Weyers Cave, VA (Virginia Crime Prevention Association 540-234-9191)
- 23-26 League of Historic American Theatres 27th Annual Conference, Miami, FL (410-659-9533 or www.lhat.org/contact.asp)
- 24-25 Creating Economic Opportunity Downtown, Trenton, NJ (Downtown Revitalization Institute 609-633-9769)
- 28-30 Business Development on Main Street, Washington, DC (National Main Street 202-588-6219 or www.mainstreet.org)

August '03

- 11-13 Creating a Web Site, Roanoke, VA (Virginia Tech Outreach Program, 540-231-5182 or www.conted.vt.edu/cre8web/)
- 20-21 **Virginia Main Street Quarterly Training**, Lexington, VA focuses on safety issues in downtown
- 29 Application deadline for Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta's Economic and Development Growth Enhancement program (Kris Lefever 1-800-536-9650 x 8026 or klevfever@fhlbatl.com)

September '03

- 17-20 21st Century Preservation-Conservation and Craftsmanship, Portland, ME (Association for Preservation Technology 888-723-4242 or www.apti.org)
- 17-20 National Urban Forest Conference, San Antonio, TX (703-904-7508 or www.americanforests.org/conference)
- 21-24 International City/County Managers Association Annual Conference, Charlotte, NC (202-289-4262)
- 24-25 **Virginia Main Street 101**, Winchester, VA in-depth focus on Design and Promotion
- 28-Oct 1 International Downtown Association Annual Conference, Cleveland, OH (202-393-6801 or dvaught@ida-downtown.org)
- 30-Oct 5 National Preservation Conference, Denver CO (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 800-944-6847 or conference@nthp.org)

October '03

- 8-10 Urban Forum II: Helping Communities Create Vibrant Commercial Corridors, Philadelphia, PA (Local Initiative Support Corporation www.liscnet.org)