

Chamber-Main Street News and Knows

by Interim Director Jim Davies

I attended my first Main Street Iowa Workshop held March 4 & 5 in Jefferson.

I drove to Jefferson on Monday afternoon to attend a pre-workshop social. This was my first opportunity to connect in person with the Main Street Iowa leadership team since becoming the interim director of the Greater Franklin County Chamber of Commerce/Main Street.

Two of the first people I saw at the social were the recently named Main Street Iowa State Coordinator, Carol Lily, and Downtown Economic Development Specialist Jim Thompson. I knew Carol through my involvement with Preservation Iowa. Jim and I have known each other for many years crossing paths at past Main Street Iowa events.

I then met Jim Engle, Iowa Downtown Resource Center (IDRC) Director. I had communicated with Jim when he contacted me in February to ask if Hampton would host a Downtown Forum held by the IDRC. Yes, Hampton will be hosting the forum on Wednesday, June 25 to be held at the Windsor Theatre. Time will be allowed for the up to 50 attendees to shop and eat at downtown businesses.

Tuesday began with networking, conversation, and coffee prior to the welcome, introductions of new directors, and an unveiling of the new Iowa Main Street logo. Next followed roundtable discussions on three topics dealing with membership investment, advocacy and telling the story of the local Main Street program, and volunteer recruitment and involvement.

After lunch, Tara Allen, lead faculty and coordinator for the Marketing Management Program at Kirkwood Community College and founder of Eagle Eye Vision Consulting facilitated two thought-provoking discussions.

The first was “A.I. and the Future of Your Business: Streamline, Automate, Innovate.” Take aways for me were being introduced to ChatGPT, Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), Linktree, Skillshop, and Reticular Activating Systems.

The second discussion was “Bend Time, Don’t Break It: 168-Hour Perspective.” We all have 168 hours each week. Through interactive exercises I looked at where I was spending my time and rethinking how to better use my time on what truly matters. I also took a personality test and found I was ENFJ-A (76% Extraverted, 77% Intuitive, 60% Feeling, 68% Judging, and 71% Assertive).

An evening reception and dinner was held at an amazing business, RVP~1875, the world’s leading historical furniture shop and museum. Owner Robby Pedersen is a Master

Furniture maker with over 20 years of experience, who has built over 900 pieces of historically accurate furniture using only the tools, techniques, and finishes used in 1875 Iowa.

After the tour of RVP~1875, dinner was served at the History Boy Theatre. The History Boy Theatre Company, a non-profit regional theatre, was started by Pedersen in 2009. A mix of professional and local actors perform in a 120-seat theatre built into the back of the warehouse portion of RVP~1875.

Many of the other Main Street directors left the workshop early on Tuesday because of the blizzard. I opted to stay. On Wednesday morning the wind was wicked, making it very, very difficult to see, but I made it safely back to the downtown meeting location.

The second day began with Jim Thompson and Keegan Hall presenting “Incentive Tools for Development.” It was good to see Keegan again. Keegan is a Downtown Rehabilitation Specialist who was recently in Hampton providing design services for four upper story residential downtown properties.

Jim and Keegan shared information about local funding sources such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Hotel-Motel Tax, and Local Option Sales Tax (Lost). Also discussed were Catalyst Grants, Challenge Grants, Emergency Grants, Community Development Block Grants as well as building design standards, and prevention and elimination of slum and blight.

Next followed presentations from local leaders, including Modus Engineering manager Christ Deal, City Administrator Scott Peterson, and Multicultural Family Resource Center Director Sara Huddleston.

The City of Jefferson has provided financial assistance for 32 building projects spending \$4.2 million dollars through grants and loans. TIF funds the city’s façade improvement and forgivable loan program.

Design Coordinator Sarah Lembke was next up and gave Design updates sharing information on the next round of Main Street Iowa Challenge grants and the new BOOMS Tracker from National Main Street. Building Opportunities on Main Street (BOOMS) Tracker is a property inventory tool for gathering, storing, and showcasing information about buildings and lots in the main street district.

An Economic Vitality update finished up the workshop with a new Market Snapshot of each community. This document includes updated demographic, housing, retail, and tourism data.

I ended up staying an extra night because of the blizzard and road conditions.

Jefferson, the county seat of Greene County, is 43 miles west of Ames on Highway 30. Jefferson had a population of 4,073 in 2024 compared to Hampton’s 2024 population of 4,253.

Jefferson is the home of the Mahanay Memorial Bell Tower, 168 feet tall, located on the town square. Wild Rose Casino & Resorts is located along Highway 30 on the north side of Jefferson. The 18,000 square foot casino opened in July 2015. Other Wild Rose Casinos are in Clinton and Emmetsburg.





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