

# **Alton Main Street celebrates efforts to preserve the past and promote the positive**

by Jeff Allsman, Executive Director  
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ALTON - Alton Main Street touts efforts to preserve the past and promote the positive.

Alton Main Street held an Appreciation Party recently at WOW on Broadway. The event welcomed members and volunteers of the Alton Main Street community to meet the new Board of Directors and enjoy a presentation. WOW on Broadway offered a stunning environment for those in attendance. WOW on Broadway is an event venue perfect for hosting smaller events of one hundred or less.

The non-profit organization created 22 years ago by Alton city officials to engage the community in the continued renewal of the historic downtown district and Mississippi River heritage by cultivating an attractive center of economic and social activity, celebrated another year of improvement in the Downtown area.

“This is our opportunity once a year to shine a light on the doers and the dreamers,” said Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany. “It takes people who come up with ideas. But it takes a lot of people to carry out and execute the ideas. None of the projects we do would be feasible if we had to do it with paid labor.

“This is all volunteer, grassroots efforts to accomplish things people want to see happen in their community and they donate whatever time or talent they have to the effort,” she said. “This is our opportunity to celebrate them.”

Board President Sasha Bassett thanked the many sponsors and volunteers and talked about several projects Alton Main Street accomplished in 2018. But mostly, the theme of the evening centered around the unity, passion and single-purpose mindset of those who offered their time and talents to the Downtown area.

“When we come together, build relationships and accomplish things together, that’s when everyone benefits,” Bassett said.

While the number of building permits recorded in 2018 by the city’s Building and Zoning Department dropped from 2017, still nearly \$15 million was spent on construction in the city. Alton Main Street’s annual report noted 20 new or expanded business that received their support in 2018 and events like the Chili Cook-Off, which drew a record-breaking crowd to its new location in the valet parking lot of Argosy Casino and the ever-growing popularity of the Alton Farmer’s and Artisan’s Market.

“Engaging our community in the continued renewal of our historic downtown district and Mississippi River heritage by cultivating an attractive center of economic and social activity” is the Alton Main Street members and volunteers mission.

The group honored some members with 2018 Service Awards. Debby Edelman was celebrated for six years of service to the Board of Directors. By-laws require Edelman to relinquish her seat on the board for one year, but she plans to continue volunteering.

“I’ll still volunteer for the organization,” Edelman said. “Alton Main Street has a mission I believe in. Sara is a star everyone wants to hitch their wagon to. You just want to work with her because whatever you try is going to be successful.

“We’ve had some colossal failures,” she said. “But we’ve learned and regrouped and kept our eyes on the vision. That’s what all of our sponsors, vendors, and supporters know: that we’re going to keep moving forward.”

Krista Reese, who donated hours of volunteer graphics and marketing work in 2018 received the Volunteer of the Year Award. Chris Velloff, owner of Brown Bag Bistro and 1904 General Store was honored as Business Owner of the Year. YouthBuild was named Organization of the Year, Alton Public Works employee Paul Wallace received the Extra Mile Award and Alton Community Service League was tabbed Partner of the Year for its beautification and planting efforts Downtown.

“These are all people who have Alton’s best interests at heart,” McGibany said. “And they’re actually doing something about it. When you get all these people in the same room with that fire, it’s always exciting. These are really magical gatherings.”

Deanna Barnes, Alton Deputy Director of Development and Housing, serves as an advisor to the board and was one of the event speakers. “I think partnerships and relationships are the most important things,” she said. “People are what makes our cities. When you have a group of volunteers that come together to do things for the citizens of the community; and to work to bring businesses to our community, and to make our community welcoming to visitors, that’s everything. I feel like Alton Main Street is really an extension of the city because they’re doing things to bring business to our city. I feel very lucky to be part of that.”

Then thoughts turned to 2019.

“You always have to be thinking about the next big thing,” McGibany said. “You always have to be looking at trends to figure out how people are earning income to do entrepreneurial work. We’re serving a social purpose and we’re trying to do everything we can.

“We would like to work closer with the city and larger developers that are purchasing properties downtown and we’d like to create a unified vision for the future and culture

of Alton and what we want it to be together,” she said. “We’re providing the means for everyone to come together, to give people a voice and let them have an opportunity to give some input in the future of Downtown Alton.”

Alton Main Street also works with volunteers on litter removal and landscape maintenance. Their hundreds of hours of volunteer work help keep the city looking beautiful while also saving the city money. They help coordinate many of the community events in the area along with many other community projects.

If you’re interested in seeing all of the unique offerings of downtown Alton along with the many events held year round. Or if you’re interested in volunteering in the community check out Alton Main Street on Facebook or their website:

[altonmainstreet.org](http://altonmainstreet.org)

[Leanne Guthrie also contributed to this story.](#)