

Alton Main Street Recognized for Outstanding Revitalization Efforts at Illinois Main Street Conference

by Sara McGibany

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ALTON – Alton Main Street is pleased to announce being awarded The Lieutenant Governor Award for Excellence in Revitalization, recognizing the Untold Black Stories of Alton project. The award is one of the most notable recognitions for Illinois Main Street communities to achieve for their work in bringing economic prosperity to their communities. The awards highlight projects, activities and events focused around The Main Street Approach™ (Design, Organization, Economic Vitality and Promotion), as well as outstanding volunteers and board members.

“Revitalization is about using talent, resources, new ideas, and paths of collaboration for positive change,” said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. “I am so proud of this year’s award recipients for their amazing work strengthening Main Street communities after the challenges caused by the pandemic. Because of their efforts, our main streets will continue to provide goods, services, economic opportunities, and jobs that build purpose and a sense of community throughout Illinois.”

The project that received the honor was a visual listening tour created by a team of local organizations to amplify StoryCorps’ Untold Black Stories project. Portraits were commissioned of Alton residents who contributed their oral histories to the archive. Large format photographs were displayed in storefront windows throughout the downtown district, and the exhibit was guided by an app on a mobile device. QR codes at each stop linked to short excerpts edited from StoryCorps recorded conversations.

Partners included Alton Main Street, Jacoby Arts Center, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, the All Town USA podcast, and the Mythic Mississippi Project, a public engagement venture of the University of Illinois that promotes community development through Cultural Heritage programming. This project was made possible with support from Illinois Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Illinois General Assembly. The portraits animated the business district with striking imagery to further engage the community in the Untold Black Stories of Alton and celebrate the participants who shared their stories.

“We are thrilled for Alton to receive this award for such an important collaboration to catalyze diversity within our historic downtown district,” said Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street, adding “One of the portraits now serves as an enduring memorial to our friend Yvonne Campbell, which makes the award feel even more special.”

“Our organizations are pleased to partner on placemaking efforts to enhance the aesthetics and walkability of Downtown Alton,” said Rachel Lappin, Executive Director of Jacoby Arts Center and Design Committee Chairperson for Alton Main Street, adding “We share the vision that our community is strengthened through diverse, inclusive, and equitable projects such as this one, where the views and voices of those who experience structural and social inequities are front and center.”

On Wednesday, October 19, the office of Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton and Joi Cuartero Austin, Sr. Program Officer for Economic Vitality at Main Street America, gave fourteen (14) awards. Ten (10) recognitions for program efforts, two (2) for outstanding volunteers and one each for Board Member and Volunteer of the Year. Awards were announced by Jim Miller, new State Coordinator for Illinois Main Street and Quinn Adamowski, Regional Advocacy Manager for Landmarks Illinois.

Full list of recognitions as follows (details can be found on Illinois Main Street website):



Awards for Design

- *Downtown Springfield Inc.* | Springfield, IL – Monroe Street Art
- *Six Corners Association* | Chicago, IL – Community Mural Project
- *Alton Main Street* | Alton, IL – Untold Black Stories of Alton

Awards for Economic Vitality

- *Discover Dixon* | Dixon, IL – Economic Enhancement Initiative
- *Action Brown County* | Mt. Sterling, IL – Revitalization & Relocation of Annual Events

Awards for Organization

- *Jacksonville Main Street* | Jacksonville, IL – 2021 Illinois Main Street Conference
- *Sterling Main Street* | Sterling, IL – The Keystone Group
- *Calumet Area Industrial Commission* | Chicago, IL – Pullman/Roseland Neighborhood History Bike Ride

Awards for Promotion

- *Austin African American Business Networking Association* | Chicago, IL – Our Past Shapes Our Future Black History Month Campaign
- *Downtown Pontiac* | Pontiac, IL – A Hometown Holiday

Outstanding Volunteers

- MainStreet Libertyville – Maureen Hunt
- Waukegan Main Street – Jay Stephen

Volunteer of the Year

- Downtown Bloomington – Bonnie Brown

Board Member of the Year

- Batavia MainStreet – Bob Hansen

“Year round, Illinois Main Street organizations work hard helping businesses and property owners, while bringing residents and guests to the heart of their communities,” said Joi Cuartero Austin, Sr. Program Officer for Economic Vitality at Main Street America. “We are grateful for the opportunity to recognize a reflection of work being done by people for their communities across the state.

The Illinois Main Street Conference is hosted in partnership with the Chicago Main Street program, the office of Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Landmarks Illinois and the City of Bloomington.

All projects, activities, or events submitted for recognition/nomination must have been completed in 2021 through June 30, 2022. Volunteer nominations reflect an amalgamation of work done with the Main Street organization and community.

Learn more about Illinois Main Street at ilmainstreet.org. Keep up with Illinois Main Street and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#), or sign up for our [email newsletter](#).

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ABOUT ALTON MAIN STREET

Alton Main Street engages our community in the continued renewal of Alton's historic downtown district and Mississippi River heritage by cultivating an attractive center of economic and social activity.

ABOUT ILLINOIS MAIN STREET

Illinois Main Street supports a network of communities across the state that are working to bring prosperity to their older and historic downtowns and commercial districts. IMS does this by providing hands-on training, statewide workshops, networking opportunities, and other resources. Illinois Main Street programs have collectively secured nearly \$1.2 billion in public and private reinvestment, added over 11,000 jobs, created over 2,300 new businesses, and rehabilitated 1100 buildings since 1992. Illinois Main Street is administered by Main Street America, a national movement of neighborhoods and communities who share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Learn more at ilmainstreet.org.

Caption for attached photo #1:

Untold Black Stories of Alton exhibit portrait featuring sisters Evelyn and Yvonne Campbell, on display at My Just Desserts - 31 E. Broadway in Alton.

Pictured in photo (left to right), back row:

Melissa Campos, Calumet Area Industrial Commission; Judy Tighe, Jacksonville Main Street; Sara McGibany, Alton Main Street; Jennifer Johnson, Main Street Libertyville; Alex Geisler, Action Brown County; Janna Groharing, Sterling Main Street; Joi Cuartero Austin, Main Street America; Mary Jones, Downtown Pontiac; David Kennedy, Downtown Pontiac; Kevin Beck, Office of the Lieutenant Governor; front row: Tracy Murray, Calumet Area Industrial Commission; Haley Simpson, Downtown

Springfield, Inc.; Kayla Graven, Downtown Springfield Inc.; Kayla Palmore, AAABNA; Bonnie Brown, Downtown Bloomington; Jeremy Englund, Dixon Chamber of Commerce & Main Street; Bob Hansen, Batavia MainStreet.