

# Alton Main Street becomes heart of downtown area under McGibany

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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Through every season, the Alton Main Street organization makes itself known under Executive Director Sara McGibany.

McGibany, full of energy and optimism, said downtown revitalization is the key to keep Alton relevant on the map.



“It is exciting that downtown is the area where everyone used to shop for everything and was the heart of the community,” she said. “Alton Main Street is tied into a national trust for historical preservation. That is what started the Main Street organization. It came out of the ‘70s and ‘80s when there was a mass exodus from historic downtown districts with malls and suburbs spreading into an urban sprawl. It started as a preservation thing to save old buildings and make sure the buildings don’t crumble.”

Over the last five to 10 years, McGibany said the Main Street program has almost taken on an economic development standpoint.

“Saving the buildings is still at the heart of the mission, but this can also be an economic engine for the entire community,” she said. “A healthy downtown spills over into quality life issues and people being connected to the past and how things used to be. People get so excited when they see the old Sears, Woolworth and Snyders stores being redone.”

McGibany has been at the helm of Alton Main Street for eight years and it has simply become part of her life and everyday existence. She doesn't have to be sold on the mission of the Main Street program, she is an ambassador throughout the community for what Downtown Alton can be in the future.

The executive director said by cultivating commerce, culture, and community, Alton Main Street makes a huge impact that stimulates our local economy and improves the quality of life well beyond the downtown district. The organization's 2015 partnership drive is now underway to gather support from citizens and business owners who would like to help make the Downtown Alton experience even more beautiful and compelling. Alton Main Street is a non-profit organization.

”When you give to Alton Main Street, you are supporting public art and pocket parks, free festivals and cultural experiences, locally-owned businesses and funky old buildings - all of the things that give Alton its charm and distinct personality,” said McGibany, “Your support is needed so that we can preserve and improve Alton's historic downtown to the best of our ability.”

By connecting with the Main Street program, residents and business owners can play a major role in elevating the entire region, and each financial contribution helps enhance our community in a variety of ways, she said.

“Alton Main Street coordinates unique events to encourage locals and tourists alike to recreate in Alton; making memories with family and friends, while supporting our hometown businesses,” she added. “Main Street projects such as the Alton Farmers' & Artisans' Market, Mississippi Earthtones Festival and Tree Lighting Ceremony add to the fabric of our community. The organization depends on financial resources and volunteer manpower from citizens and businesses in order to provide these free civic events.”

Alton Main Street beautifies the area through public art, streetscape garden planting and maintenance, holiday decorations, and litter clean-ups. “When citizens infuse energy

into creating social activity and improving how an area looks, new investors and developers take note,” said Debby Edelman, Vice President of the AMS Board of Directors.

Four to five times a year, through the national Main Street program, McGibany receives valuable training.

“The Alton Main Street has to pay for a hotel, but the Main Street organization offers free training and workshops,” McGibany said. “They provide us with training, best practices as examples and also networking with other peers, which is invaluable.”

The Alton Main Street area is from Third Street to Piasa to Ninth Street, down Broadway to Fast Eddie’s and the entire riverfront commercial district. Each fundraising opportunity of Alton Main Street supports the overall mission of the group, McGibany said.

Downtown Alton is definitely on an upswing from a business perspective, McGibany said.

She mentioned the success of Frew's Bridal downtown, along with Old Bakery Beer Company and several others taking old buildings and renovating them into a modern structure, yet retaining the historical past.

Alton Main Street maintains an informational Facebook page and website to help community members and business owners stay connected and learn about the latest developments.

Community members can make a difference as partners of Alton Main Street. Now is the time for businesses to become partners by sending annual dues of \$100. Families may contribute by donating \$50, and individuals can make an impact by pledging a gift of \$25. Checks can be mailed to Alton Main Street at 200 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street – Suite 100 Alton, IL 62002. Donations can also be made via PayPal at [www.DowntownAlton.com](http://www.DowntownAlton.com). Event sponsorships are also available for businesses who would like extra exposure and community involvement. To join the excitement of the team and enlist in a meaningful volunteer experience, please contact 618-463-1016 or [sara@altonmainstreet.org](mailto:sara@altonmainstreet.org)