

"What's Up Downtown" Meeting Unveils New Alton Businesses, Downtown Revitalization Plans

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
November 29 2023 9:53 AM



ALTON - The nonprofit Alton Main Street sponsored their quarterly "What's Up Downtown" meeting, an information exchange about local businesses and developments in Alton, on Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2023.

New business owners were encouraged to share information about their businesses and plans to revitalize downtown Alton. Featured speakers included Melissa Bland, who will be opening her boutique [Honeybee Vintage](#) later this year, and Caleb Lewis, who is renovating several buildings in Alton and will soon open [Moon Drops + Wellness](#) in a new downtown location. Lori Bregenzer shared information about [Comfort Cuisine](#), and Dorothy Mosby spoke about her new storefront for [Mo'z Sweet Treats](#). Kim Tanner gave an update on her shop [Strangelovely](#). Markus Boyd shared his plans to renovate the Mitchell Mansion, and Cameron Ahlvers spoke about his production company [SHFT Studios](#). Ashlen Hale, general manager of [The Alton Dispensary](#), noted that the business is up and running again after a few bumps in the road. Brigit Holt introduced guests to the iMerge Community Center, where the “What’s Up Downtown” meeting was held.

Melissa Bland kicked off the night by explaining that [Honeybee Vintage](#) started as a booth at Country Meadows Antiques. She will soon open her storefront at 112 E. Broadway in Alton, where she will sell “vintage antiques and upscale resale home decor,” vintage clothing and her own line of DIY wallpaper and furniture paints. The business aims to combine the fun of antiquing and thrifting with the shop’s boutique feel. Bland was recently chosen as the woman-owned small business startup winner in the Metro East Small Business Startup Competition.

“The real test will be once we open our doors,” she added. “I just really want to make Alton proud and become a favorite stop for everyone here.”

Caleb Lewis is a board member with Alton Main Street and collaborates with John and Jane Simmons to develop the downtown area. Along with his family, Lewis is the co-founder of The Conservatory and Alton Odyssey Tours.

During the meeting, he talked about the process of buying and revitalizing the building that previously housed the Caravan Resale Shop at 112 and 114 E. Broadway. It will now be home to Honeybee Vintage and Lewis’s own business, [Moon Drops + Wellness](#). Lewis and his parents, who are working on this venture together, will also open Airbnb properties above the shops starting in the spring.

“I went full force and did my efforts in developing the city through economic development focused on the downtown Broadway region,” Lewis explained. “We really are big believers that more tourists will bring more growth to the city, and it just seems to bring new ideas and kind of inspire locals to get on board with the economic development, as well.”

Lori Bregenzer dished on [Comfort Cuisine](#), a take-away eatery at 4 E. Broadway. She explained that she prepares home-cooked entrees for people to take home and enjoy without the hassle of cooking. The menu changes every week. Bregenzer loves to share

her family recipes, and she is selling baklava through the Christmas season as a nod to her family's holiday traditions.

"I'm trying to prepare food like my mom or my aunt or my grandmother or my mother-in-law. I'm trying to give you comfort foods that are easy to pick up, take home and enjoy," she said. "This is something I've wanted to do forever. As long as I can remember, I've wanted to have this restaurant...It's been a journey. It's been so invigorating."

Dorothy Mosby is already a familiar face in Alton with [Mo'z Sweet Treats](#), but she recently opened a storefront at 413 Ridge Street. In addition to the lemonades and ice cream she usually sells on her tricycle, Mosby is now offering snacks, candy and baked goods at her "snack shop." She also has her famous fried chicken ice cream and will offer hot meals on Saturdays.

To help out other small business owners, Mosby plans to rent out space in her store for vendors to "get their stuff out in front of us without having to pay so much to be able to go brick and mortar." Mo'z Sweet Treats will start their weekend vendors and hot meals on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023.

"When you're going downtown and shopping, you can just stop in, grab you something and keep it going," Mosby added.

Kim Tanner, owner of [Strangelovely](#), shared information about her new second location at 230 E. Broadway. This vintage clothing and furniture store has seen "so much traffic" since opening the downtown location, including a lot of tourists, Tanner said.

Markus Boyd plans to restore the Mitchell Mansion, also known as the Pink Mansion in Alton. Boyd said his first priority is to stabilize the structure, and then he will likely revitalize it to offer apartment space. While Boyd isn't from the Alton area, he looks forward to spending more time in the region.

"I'm open to all community involvement and suggestions while we do this," he said. "I'm here for the long haul. I enjoy Alton. I've met some great people who make it feel like a second home. So I look forward to expanding and bringing it back to its true glory."

Cameron Ahlvers spoke about his video production company [SHFT Studios](#), which is "very passionate about telling people's stories." Previously located in the basement of Post Commons, the company will be moving to 1 Alby Street later this week with plans to grow and complete more projects in the coming year.

Ashlen Hale shared information about [The Alton Dispensary](#) and her goals to increase community outreach efforts. Following [the termination of their partnership with the original management company](#), Hale noted that they've had "a little bit of a restart," but they're "back and here to stay."

Brigit Holt spoke about the iMerge Community Center, where the "What's Up Downtown" information exchange was held. The center hosts weekly play nights for middle school-aged kids, and Holt promised they "throw some pretty good parties." She also has plans to begin offering dance classes and candy-making classes over the next few months, and she noted that the community center has esports for kids to enjoy.

John Hentrich spoke briefly about the RiverBender building, which houses iMerge Community Center and RiverBender.com, at 200 W. Third Street. He noted that there are nine suites open in the building starting at \$350 a month.

As the night wrapped up, the audience passed around the microphone so community members could share about other businesses or upcoming events. "What's Up Downtown" is a quarterly meeting. Anyone who wants to know more can contact Alton Main Street at their [official website](#).