



MEDIA RELEASE

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Historic preservation, economic development partnership highlight Main Street training

Bringing two different philosophies together under one development plan to better enhance and move forward work being done to revitalize Main Street communities across the state was the topic of a day-long seminar provided by Kansas Main Street during its winter quarterly training sessions held in El Dorado, January 12 and 13. Todd Barman, senior program officer for National Trust Main Street Center, was the presenter.

The training session challenged current Main Street communities to not only embrace the role of economic development as a necessary part of future historical preservation and central business district development, but use of its basic tenets to move downtown projects and revitalization efforts forward to engage both entrepreneurs and developers was vital to continued success in this economy.

“We came away with the idea that the National Main Street four-point approach of design, organization, promotions, and economic restructuring are building blocks for the continued improvement of our downtown areas, however all points need to be addressed from an economic development point of view” states Wendy Scheidt, executive director of the Leavenworth Main Street Program, Inc. ®. “At the same time, we were challenged to look at our programs and projects with an eye focused on economic development, including heritage and human assets, much the same way as a developer would. It was refreshing and a bit daunting at the same time.”

In asset-based economic development, heritage assets include a community’s built history (design) and its cultural history (promotions). The human assets encompass cultivating and recruiting entrepreneurs (economic restructuring) and engaging the general public (organization) in the events and projects in the central business district.

Having a downtown development plan picks up where the economic development philosophy leaves off. According to Barman, the successful private, for-profit commercial developers attract investors and tenants by helping them see a vision of themselves making money as part of a successful place, namely Main Street. Kansas Main Street communities would then, in essence, become successful non-profit developers for their own districts.

Scheidt said the seminar also provided development process exercises to help local Main Street leaders itemize the downtown heritage and human assets, summarize their programs' market research efforts, help build credibility and trust within their communities, and determine how they are inspiring action among building owners, store owners, volunteers, entrepreneurs, and shoppers.

The second day of training focused on the delivery of Kansas Main Street products and services that program directors felt they need for professional development and what they in turn could use to continue expansion of a sustainable and successful Main Street program. Scheidt commented, "The retreat format gave all directors the opportunity to voice specific products and services they could use to keep them fresh and motivated to grow their programs. For me, it was time to ponder where Leavenworth Main Street is, what we want to accomplish in the next one to three years, and what we need to get us there. That, in and of itself, was worth the drive and time away from the office. As we move forward utilizing our boards' goals, coupled with economic development, our program will continue on a positive track."

Kansas Main Street quarterly trainings are free to Leavenworth Main Street members and volunteers, providing excellent, timely education within a variety of subjects.

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