

Inside Main Street

News and information on Bastrop's Main Street Program February 23, 2010

Bring on the birthday cake!

Grab your friends and neighbors and come on down to Main Street this Saturday to join the Bastrop Main Street Program's landmark third birthday celebration.

This free, public event runs from 2 to 4 p.m. and will be held, weather permitting, at 923 Main Street, the vacant space (next to Baxters on Main restaurant) that the City recently acquired and is using as an events plaza. In the event of bad weather, the birthday party moves indoors to the Bastrop Opera House. The community party celebrates three transforming years for the downtown business district and marks a concerted effort to brand Bastrop as a tourist destination with a special emphasis on heritage tourism. During those three years, more than \$3.8 million in private funding has been spent in restoring and rehabilitating downtown businesses and another \$1.3 million in public expenditures. The latter includes the Chestnut Street Improvement Project now in progress.

Event sponsors include the First National Bank of Bastrop, Frontier Bank, the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa, the Insurance Network of Texas/JBA Properties, the Lost Pines Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, Maxine's on Main, Bluebonnet Electric, Gaeke Construction, and Collier Construction. "Candles on the Cake" contributors include Bastrop Abstract, Jimmie Ann Vaughan Realty and Main Street attorneys Aleta Peacock, Virginia Piper, Joe Grady Tuck and Derek Van Gilder.

The event will feature birthday cake, of course, souvenirs, and live music. Event coordinator Terry Moore encourages musicians in the community to "jam", bringing their instrument of choice and a chair.

Food Pantry seeks to fill 'empty bowls'

Before you get to next Saturday's birthday party, consider first filling an "empty bowl"...with delicious food provided by area restaurants and caterers at the Bastrop County Emergency Food Pantry and Support Center's Empty Bowl fundraiser.

The event runs from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Bastrop High School cafeteria and draws on the talents of Bastrop Independent School District students as well as local chefs and artists. Highlights this year include live music, a silent auction and celebrity soup judges (Austin Food Critic Rob Balon, Hudson's on the Bend Chef Kelly Casey and ***Texas Highways*** Editor Charles J. Lohrmann). Tickets are \$20 per person; all proceeds go to support the Center's services.

Empty Bowl events are held throughout the country and, according BCEFP board president Mary Rose, "truly represent the spirit of the battle against hunger." For further information about the Food Pantry and event tickets visit www.bastropfoodpantry.org.

Planning effort identifies four strategic initiatives

There's definitely a plan...for the Bastrop Main Street Program to move beyond the basics of getting established and into sustaining progress made over its first three years and tackling some significant new challenges.

More than 40 Main Street Program volunteers and City officials gathered at the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa on January 30 to review the program's accomplishments to date, determine where additional work was needed, and address new challenges and opportunities. According to BMSP Manager Nancy Wood, participants proposed four major strategies:

- **Facilitating a marketing initiative to promote Bastrop as a tourist destination.**

This initiative would be undertaken in collaboration with BMSP partners and would review existing marketing efforts by the individual partners. The desired outcome would be to devise a coordinated program of marketing that would enhance communication of Bastrop's message to external audiences and better present Bastrop's tourist draw. Consultant research underpinning the City's branding initiative would serve as a springboard for this coordinated program.

- **Improve way-finding to and within the central business district for visitors and residents alike.**

This initiative answers a need identified last year and answered, on a temporary basis, with way-finding signs for pedestrians along Main Street. A more permanent solution, including signage in the Chestnut Street Improvement Projects, will be identified and implemented within the coming year. For several months BMSP representatives have been engaged in conversations with the Texas Department of Transportation about possible improvements to highway signage directing motorists to the downtown business district/historic district and parking. Those conversations are expected soon to yield a concrete action plan and will entail some cost, possibly funded through a combination of grants and a local fundraising effort.

- **Develop a downtown "green space" that would provide respite for shoppers and visitors, public restroom facilities and a venue for downtown events.**

During the past few months the Main Street Program's Design Committee has proposed adapting the vacant space at 923 Main Street, once the site of Texas' oldest drugstore, for such a purpose. The City recently acquired the lot, which runs from Main Street to Water Street, and will use the back portion of the lot for additional downtown parking. Participants eagerly embraced the idea of developing the front portion of the lot for this public space. The Design Committee is developing concept drawings and attempting to assess cost. Participants anticipate that costs would be funded through a possible grant and local fundraising.

- **Focus attention and energies on revitalization of the portion of the Bastrop Main Street Program that extends along the Chestnut Street corridor from Highway 71 to Texas 95.**

Participants suggested commissioning a study to assess the development potential of the area. That study would underpin the development of a long-range plan for an appropriate mix of commercial activity along this pathway into the downtown business district. Attention will be given to building upon the Chestnut Street Improvement Project, currently in progress, to create an attractive commercial venue and strengthening generally the BMSP area's vitality and viability.

At its March 1 meeting the BMSP Advisory Board will further explore these recommendations and devise action plans for accomplishing them. BMSP Manager Nancy Wood anticipates that each of the four standing committees—Design, Economic Restructuring, Promotions and Organization—will develop action plans toward achieving these outcomes.

Facilitator for the daylong retreat was Debra Farst, State Coordinator of the Texas Historical Commission's Main Street Program. Debra, who has facilitated previous Bastrop planning retreats and is a frequent visitor to Bastrop, noted that "it takes a village to raise a downtown."

"I have never seen a board, a group of volunteers, and a partnership that works as hard or as well. Bastrop is one of the most highly successful of all of Texas' 86 Main Street Cities. Bastrop has accomplished more in three years than many programs that have been at it eight or more years. You all are doing everything so well, so good... continually; you guys are awesome and, as I deliver training or consult with other programs, I more and more hold Bastrop up as an example."

Not to be missed

The February 18 issue of the *Bastrop Advertiser* included a 16-page special insert celebrating the Bastrop Main Street Program's amazing three-year history and the partnerships that have transformed the downtown business district...and providing a glimpse of what lies ahead. A cooperative endeavor between the newspaper and the BMSP, the insert featured stories and photos recounting the Program's remarkable achievements:

- A then/now photo study of Main Street restorations and rehabs
- A recap of the recent planning retreat (reprinted in this issue of *Inside Main Street*)
- A feature on how the BMSP works
- The BMSP "back story", from the perspective of City Manager Mike Talbot and BMSP Manager Nancy Wood
- The BMSP's many distinctions, honors and accolades—not the least of which was the February 3 designation of Bastrop as a National Trust for Historic Preservation "Distinctive Destination." (reprinted in this issue of *Inside Main Street*)

Production costs were underwritten by the *Bastrop Advertiser* and the many businesses that supported this publication through advertising. Editorial content was the work of a collaborative committee made up of BMSP Advisory Board members Dick Smith, Susan Weems Wendel (Bastrop Chamber of Commerce CEO) and Nancy Wood (BMSP Manager). Others contributing editorial content were Martha Granger and Angela Ryan. Photographs were provided by Jane Hunt, Dick Smith, Joe Newman and Cindy Wolford and from the files of the Bastrop County Historical Society. The *Bastrop Advertiser* staff provided layout and production services, as well as ad sales under the direction of Advertising Manager Debbie Denny.

National Trust names Bastrop ‘Distinctive Destination’

What locals have known for years—that Bastrop is a special place—was affirmed on February 3 as the National Trust for Historic Preservation tagged Bastrop as a “Distinctive Destination”.

Bastrop was one of 12 communities named this year and joins an elite roster of 132 towns and cities across the nation accorded this elite honor. According to the National Trust, Bastrop’s designation recognizes “the city’s work to preserve its historic character, promote heritage tourism, enhance the community and extend its welcome to others in enjoying its offerings.” Bastrop is one of only six Texas towns and cities (Bastrop, Fort Davis, Fort Worth, Fredericksburg, Galveston and New Braunfels) to have been named since the National Trust initiated the program in 2000.

According to National Trust resources, the designation is reserved “for communities across America that offer cultural and recreational experiences different from those found at the typical vacation destination. From dynamic downtowns and stunning architecture to cultural diversity and a commitment to historic preservation, sustainability and revitalization, the selected destinations boast a richness of character and exude an authentic sense of place.”

Bastrop was singled out as a “Distinctive Destination”, according to the National Trust, “for its unique place in Texas history, its well-preserved and vibrant downtown, its rich and varied calendar of annual events and its proximity to the Lost Pines natural region.”

“The city of Bastrop is remarkable for its vibrant, walkable downtown, distinguished architecture, celebrated cultural diversity, and a population devoted to protecting its character,” said Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Bastrop embodies everything that a distinctive destination should be.”

Go ahead and just stuff it!

The National Trust wants your vote—just as many times as you may be inclined—for your choice of “fan favorite” among the 12 locales named “Distinctive Destinations”...and you have three more days to stuff the ballot box.

The gambit pits Bastrop’s fans against those of the other 2010 destinations: Sitka, AK; Huntsville, AL; Simbury, CT; Fort Collins, CO; Cedar Falls, IA; Provincetown, MA; Rockland, ME; Marquette, MI; St. Louis, MO; Chestnut Hill, PA, and The Crooked Road, VA.

So far, Marquette, Cedar Falls, Fort Collins and Rockland are proving to be more dexterous than Bastrop at packing the ballot box although Bastrop enthusiasts have kept this city in the top 50 percent of “fan favorites” since the voting began on February 3. With voting now in its final days, Bastrop Main Street Program Manager Nancy Wood encourages all to throw aside their inhibitions and click away.

Voting continues until February 28; the winner will be announced on March 1, 2010 and declared the Fan Favorite Destination for 2010. Voters may also register to win a two-night stay at any Historic Hotel of America. (No purchase necessary. Offer void where prohibited.)

Visit www.PreservationNation.org/ddd for official rules, to learn more about this year's destinations and to **vote Bastrop!**

And while you are flagging 'favorites'

Surf on over to the Bastrop Main Street Program's new website: www.cityofbastrop.org/departments/main_street_program and add it to your browser "favorites".

The site went live in late January, along with the launch of a redesigned city website (of which the Main Street Program is a component). Information on the BMSP can be found under the CITY DEPARTMENTS menu and includes

- recent issues of *Inside Main Street*, a monthly electronic newsletter on Bastrop's program and related activities
- recent issues of *Main Street Matters*, a publication of the Texas Historic Commission's Main Street Program division.
- work plans for the BMSP's four standing committees: Design, Economic Restructuring, Promotions and Organization.
- Program honors, awards and benchmarks
- A link to the BMSP's Facebook page, filled with lively commentary on Bastrop.

According to volunteer Martha Granger, who compiled the site, there's a "wealth of information about the program...and there's substantially more on the way." Martha indicated that she is "building this plane in flight" and, almost daily, is adding and further organizing content and refining graphics.

All this, said Martha, is a direct response to a recent survey that found that an overwhelming majority of respondents wanted to learn more about Bastrop's program and wanted to receive that information via the Internet.

More surfing...

Check out two key local websites, both touting new designs.

The **Bastrop Chamber of Commerce's** redesigned website went live on February 1 and reflects new graphics, substantial reorganization of content and easier pathways to information. New features include the 2010 Bastrop Chamber of Commerce Business Directory—a virtual document that is easy and fun to navigate—as well as a feature that allows Chamber members and community organizations to electronically submit their entries to the online calendar. Chamber Office Manager Troyanne Bush noted that the site also represents a substantial—though invisible—improvement in site maintenance (content updating and report generation). The redesign was the work of Lawton Publications, also publisher of the Chamber's hardcopy directory. www.bastropchamber.com

The **Downtown Business Alliance** website has a new look.... The new site continues to give dominant play to DBA's signal events—Yesterfest, the Pet and Pal Parade, Halloween Fest and the Veterans' Day Car Show—and provides information and resources for vendors at DBA's

street markets on the second Saturday in December and during Yesterfest and the Veterans' Day Care Show. Resources for the public include "restaurant", "shopping", "entertainment", "services" and "recreation" pages where DBA members may post display ads. The new release also includes an opportunity to join DBA's e-mail list as well as a "members-only" gateway. The new release is the work of Jamaica Moers, of Jimmie Ann Vaughan Realtors and MorzArt Originals Web Design.

The next big wave for surfing will hit in March when the Bastrop Economic Development Corporation launches its redesigned website. Watch for further news from BEDC and ***Inside Main Street*** on this release.

Main Streeters in the news

Tim Shuminsky, former owner of Scooters Coffee Shop and a Bastrop Main Street Program and Downtown Business Alliance stalwart, has resigned the chairmanship of the BMSP Advisory Board. Succeeding Tim on an interim basis will be Board Vice-Chair **Jane Hunt**.

BMSP leaders stood out at the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce 72nd Annual Banquet, February 13, at the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa. Named 2009 "Man of the Year" was **Frank Huffman**, a member of the BMSP Advisory Board; BMSP Manager **Nancy Wood** and Organization Committee Chair **Shawn Pletsch** were singled out as 2009 "Points of Light".

Presenting the 2009 "Woman of the Year" honors to Baxters on Main owner **Terri Knop** was 2008 honoree and Advisory Board member **Debbie Denny**. Advisory Board member and 2008 honoree **Dick Smith** presented Frank his award.

Getting with the program

The Bastrop Main Street Program is driven by a vision and the talents and energies of its all-volunteer army...and fresh recruits are always needed and welcomed. Pick up some volunteer brochures from Nancy Wood and enlist your friends and neighbors.

The Organization Committee welcomes Delma Howlett of Alize' Premier Salon while the Promotions Committee welcomes Liz Jones, a volunteer in community youth programs, and the Design Committee welcomes Jeanette Condray from the Bastrop Fine Arts Guild; Conor McAnally joins the Economic Restructuring Committee

The door is always open...

Bastrop Main Street Program volunteers and other members of the public are welcome to attend any Committee and Advisory Board meeting in which they have an interest. Holidays and scheduling conflicts among participants may prompt changes in meeting, time and place; please check with Nancy Wood at Mainstreet@cityofbastrop.org for updated information.

February 24 Organization Committee, noon in the Chamber Conference Room

February 27 BIRTHDAY PARTY, 2-4 p.m., the "Plaza" on Main Street

March 1	Bastrop Main Street Program Advisory Board meeting, 6 p.m. in Chamber Conference Room
March 15	Promotions Committee, 5:30 p.m. in Chamber Conference Room
March 18	Design Committee, 5 p.m. in City Hall
March 24	Economic Restructuring Committee, 5:15 p.m. in TBD (Special Meeting)
March 31	Organization Committee, noon in the Chamber Conference Room
April 5	Bastrop Main Street Program Advisory Board meeting, 6 p.m. in City Hall
April 14	Economic Restructuring Committee, 5:15 p.m. in Chamber Conference Room
April 15	Design Committee, 5 p.m. in City Hall
April 19	Promotions Committee, 5:30 p.m. in Chamber Conference Room
April 28	Organization Committee, noon in the Chamber Conference Room

For information about upcoming community activities, consult the events calendars at www.bastropchamber.com and www.visitbastrop.org.

Inside Main Street is an electronic newsletter to keep Bastrop Main Street Program participants “in the loop” on program developments, the work of its four standing committees (Promotions, Economic Restructuring, Design and Organization) and the activities of the Advisory Board. Produced monthly (except December), ***Inside Main Street*** is compiled and edited by Dick Smith on behalf of the Organization Committee and the Advisory Board.

Please share this newsletter with others who have an interest in learning how Bastrop’s Main Street Program is making a difference.

Feedback and suggestions welcomed! Contact Dick at soyrps@gmail.com or Nancy Wood at Mainstreet@cityofbastrop.org