

# Community

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## The Queen City Comes Back

When Marquette was a thriving shipping center for Upper Michigan's mining industry, it proudly called itself the "Queen City of the North"; but by the 1980s, the city had seen some tough times. Then a pair of ominous events helped impel Marquette into its impressive comeback. Wards, downtown's retail anchor, closed and downtown's aging infrastructure began to deteriorate.

Prior to these events, Marquette had begun to plan downtown development in the 1970s as businesses moved to shopping centers west of town. In 1976, the City Commission formed a Downtown Development Authority (DDA). But the urgency of dealing with downtown's physical needs in a declining retail business environment helped property owners, retailers, and the city focus their near- and longer-term vision for the city.

First National Bank President

assessed for extensive sidewalk and landscaping work. There was also a keen awareness that downtown needed systematic marketing and business development.

As development momentum began to grow early in the 1980s, Marquette inventoried its assets. High on the list were the town's usable historic buildings; and for the first time, people looked seriously at the lakeshore's potential.

To make the most of its historic buildings and at the same time develop business downtown, Marquette became a National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street City in 1984. (See page 3.) As work progressed on streets and sidewalks, Main Street Marquette coordinated downtown's marketing and preservation. Major infrastructure improvements were completed in late 1984, and in 1986, the DDA coordinated construction of a much-needed downtown parking facility.

Lakeshore development is a longer-term goal. The Lake Superior shore adjacent to downtown had been an industrial area since the late 19th century when the harbor was Marquette's gateway. As the town's business developed, however, it physically turned away from the industrial harbor area and the lake. With a renewed and vigorous downtown and declining industrial usage of the lakeshore, Marquette undertook to develop the area into an attractive space that would also reinforce downtown's development. Much of the lakeshore area is now being turned into public "green" space. The city has helped out with infrastructure

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*Marquette's revitalized Washington Avenue meets the Lake Superior shoreline. Plans are underway to develop a green space at the lakefront.*

Photo courtesy of Beauchamp's Camera Corner, Inc.

COMMUNITY welcomes your comments and observations. You are also invited to share your community affairs program or community development initiatives with COMMUNITY by writing Carolyn Line, Community Affairs Coordinator, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 250 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55480, or telephone 612-340-2048. To make address changes or to order additional copies, contact COMMUNITY at the same address.

Ellwood Mattson describes the development as a grass roots process that has involved business people, financial institutions, and the city. City Manager David Svanda adds that the catalysts combined at a time when each party was willing to accept the risks of comprehensive redevelopment. The city was committed to necessary sewer and street repair. Downtown merchants and property owners demonstrated their commitment by asking to be

# Main Street Center: Bringing the Past and the Future Together

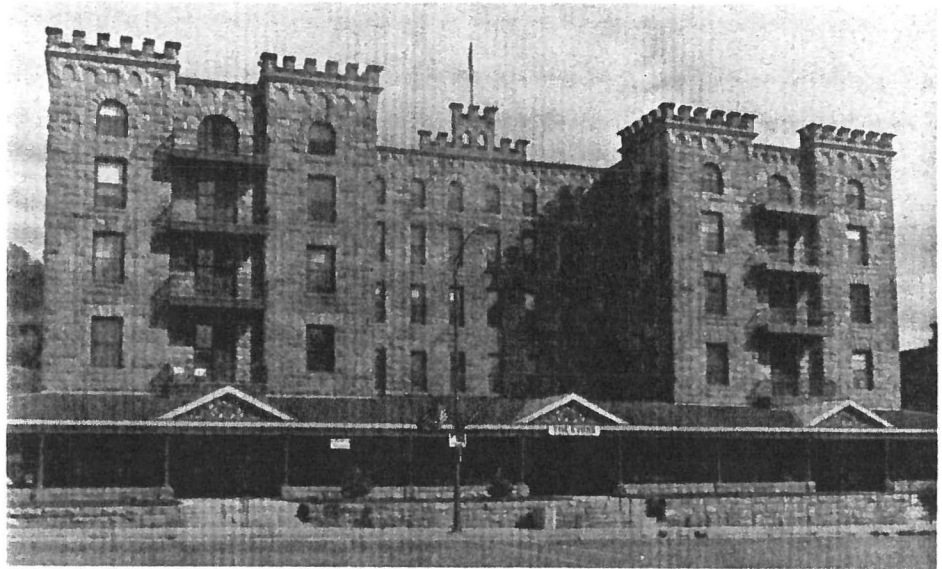
Established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980, the National Main Street Center focuses on the special problems faced by aging small city downtowns. It is a human resource and technical reference center that provides assistance in stimulating economic development within the context of historic preservation.

In 1977, the National Trust, in an attempt to creatively preserve buildings in older, small-city commercial areas, launched a pilot program involving three Midwestern towns. Its goal was to develop a comprehensive strategy for economic revitalization emphasizing Main Street's historic assets.

The need was apparent. Even in many small communities, downtown businesses declined as discount stores and climate-controlled shopping malls located on the edge of town. These were easily accessible by highways that bypassed the central business district.

In response to this turn of events, businesses often tried to compete by modernizing building facades (and hiding ornate architectural details), adding garish signs, or closing main streets to vehicular traffic. These plans failed for the most part because they ignored the inherent assets and individual character of an older downtown: rich architecture, personal service, and traditional values.

After three years of intensive analysis and on-site involvement in all aspects of revitalization in the three community laboratories, the National Trust expanded the Main Street approach. The National Main Street Center was established in 1980, and a demonstration project was undertaken that involved 6 states and 30 small cities. Of the 30 demonstration cities, 28 formed new downtown organizations or strengthened existing ones; 28 established low-interest loan pools or subsidy programs to encourage facade renovations and building rehabil-



*The Evans Hotel, built in 1892, is located in Hots Springs, South Dakota, one of the original three Main Street pilot communities.*

*Now home to senior citizens, the Evans was restored through the efforts of the Hot Springs Housing and Redevelopment Commission with the support of the community and was completed in 1980.*

itations; and 5 of the demonstration states added communities to the program. Currently, more than 300 communities have made the basic three-year commitment to the Main Street approach.

What is this magical formula that can turn neglected downtowns into thriving business districts? It is a pragmatic, integrated four-point program that builds on the idea of the downtown's total image and encourages public/private partnerships. Ironically, the Main Street approach uses the management strategies of modern shopping malls, whose proliferation initially contributed to the decline of downtowns. It is also incremental in nature, producing highly visible, short-term results, while creating fundamental changes in leadership and the economic base of downtown. The four interrelated elements of the Main Street approach are organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.

**Organization.** Strong, unified leadership by downtown mer-

chants in partnership with financial institutions, city government, the chamber of commerce, and others is essential to the development of a consistent revitalization effort. Formation of a nonprofit downtown association is one way to create an organized program.

**Promotion.** It is essential to promote and advertise using special events to convince people that downtown is an exciting community stage, a meeting place bursting with activity. Promotions can include special retail sales and festivals and creation of a consistent image through graphics and media presentation such as a special logo and a downtown directory.

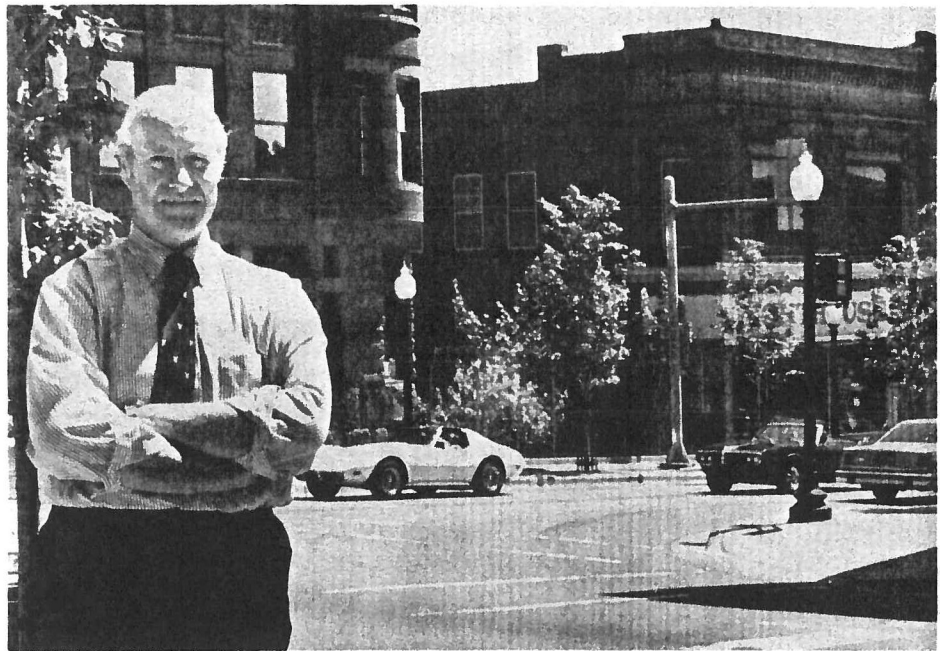
**Design.** An attractive downtown appearance is one step in building the confidence of merchants, investors, and shoppers. Rehabilitating tired facades and installing street landscaping, new signs, and bright window displays will add to the pleasure of shoppers and other visitors.

**Economic Restructuring.** All elements of the Main Street approach should create a climate for reinvestment. Because downtown competes with the suburban mall, it is essential that the downtown economy be diversified. Activities include recruiting new stores to provide a balanced retail mix; converting unused space into housing, offices, entertainment, or cultural facilities; and sharpening the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants.

The National Main Street Center offers a number of publications and slide show packages to assist local efforts in the promotion of downtown revitalization.

*For more information, write to:*

National Trust for Historic Preservation  
National Main Street Center  
1785 Massachusetts Avenue N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036



*John Stevens, Main Street Marquette project manager, lived in many cities before he retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel. During 28½ years in the Air Force, John was stationed twice at K.I. Sawyer AFB. He and his family chose to make the area their permanent home.*

## Main Street Marquette

In May 1984, when Main Street Marquette was just getting started, business on main street, Washington Avenue, was slow. There were ten empty storefronts in the prime shopping block alone. Today, the central business district is booming with all storefronts occupied and 75 percent of office space rented.

To reverse a decade of neglect of the central business district, the City Commission formed a Downtown Development Association (DDA) in 1976. As the DDA and local people cataloged the town's assets, they realized that an important one was Marquette's historic buildings. The Main Street program was thus viewed by the DDA as one avenue for downtown revival. When revitalization around a historical theme was favored by respondents to a 1983 survey, the DDA further explored the Main Street option. Goals for the central business district were consistent with those of the National Main Street program—to stimulate downtown economic growth within the context of historic preservation. Marquette applied to become a Main Street city and received designation in February 1984.

An 11-member Board of Directors formed in March 1984 included representatives from both public and private sectors. Currently, both First National Bank and First of America Bank are represented on the Board. In May, the Board named Lori Bulera project manager. Lori guided Main Street Marquette through its first three years; John Stevens was named project

manager in May 1987.

In the midst of a major public improvement project that literally tore main street apart (see page 1), downtown began to market itself. Main Street Marquette and downtown merchants urged people to "dare the detours" and shop downtown. In November 1984, public improvements were completed and Main Street Marquette coordinated a three-day promotion with a variety of festivities. Retail sales for that holiday season were 14 percent higher than the previous year.

During 1985, using a Facade Grant from the Michigan History Bureau, Main Street provided property owners with architectural renderings and cost estimates for exterior renovations. Several improvements were undertaken that year. In mid 1985, a two-level parking facility developed by the DDA opened; and as 1985 came to a close, retail space was 80 percent rented. 1986 brought a full schedule of downtown promotions and special events, more facade improvements and interior rehabilitation, and the beginning of an ongoing education program for downtown business people.

A successful downtown revitalization program is a self-help program, which means that both the public and private sectors must be willing to share the costs. In Marquette, total investment since 1984 has been nearly \$7 million. Of this, 58 percent (including special assessments) was private investment. Government funds

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*Queen City continued from page 1*

improvements, and organizers have raised much of their \$100,000 goal. The fundraising effort has been largely volunteer.

By improving the lakeshore and creating recreational space, planners and organizers hope to stimulate economic use of the area. They also see the harbor as a natural extension of downtown. Their objective is to emphasize the central part of downtown and the harbor as a whole to avoid creating two distinct destinations.

Marquette's investment in its downtown is now close to \$7 million. Of this, 58 percent (including special assessments) is private investment. Total project funding has been complex, involving five or six funding sources. Marquette has used these funds and other investment incentives creatively. For example, the city originated a special assessment tax credit that allowed property owners to reduce their special assessments through dollars spent on improving their property, on a 2 to 1 basis. Mar-

quette also lent proceeds of a Small Cities Block Grant to property owners for improvements, creating an income stream (principal and interest payments on the loans) dedicated to servicing municipal debt issued to build the parking facility. Local lenders have also been important. Ray Beauchamp, a local retailer, once observed that when things were tough and we needed the bankers, "they didn't run away from us."

The investment has paid off tangibly for Marquette. Since redevelopment started, 40 businesses have opened downtown bringing 79 full-time jobs; 17 existing businesses have expanded, creating 47 additional jobs; and retail sales have increased dramatically.

Marquette expects better things yet to come. While there are outstanding land acquisition questions, lakeshore development is progressing. Downtown Washington Avenue and adjacent streets are doing well, and townspeople have turned their attention to the longer term. Underscoring their

success, townspeople frequently refer to "enthusiasm," "team effort" and "pride," and to the depth of the volunteer effort. People emphasize that successful redevelopment is a self-help process that involves willingness to agree on a common direction and to support the effort with time and money. The ability of the city, merchants, financial institutions, and individuals to plan strategically and to back it up with personal commitment is the linchpin of Marquette's success.

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This newsletter is designed primarily to assist financial institutions in the Ninth Federal Reserve District in developing creative responses to consumer issues and to the goals of the Community Reinvestment Act.

COMMUNITY is produced under the direction of Richard K. Einan, assistant vice president and community affairs officer, and Carolyn P. Line, community affairs coordinator.

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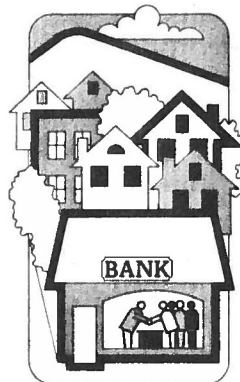
invested were 10 percent federal, 19 percent state, and 13 percent city.

Today, street-level occupancy is 100 percent; 40 businesses have opened and 17 existing businesses have expanded. The three-year retail sales average compounded annually for November and December has increased 30.2 percent. John Stevens says that no one person or group is responsible for Marquette's success—that it reflects the hard work and shared efforts of downtown merchants and financial institutions, the Downtown Development Authority, Main Street Marquette, and the city of Marquette.

The only major weakness that Stevens sees is Marquette's lack of a stable manufacturing industry base. But the town's historic flavor and its location on Lake Superior are real assets. "The town has been through a rough time," says John, "but it's on the rebound."

Main Street Marquette will continue to be a part of Marquette's comeback. The Board of Directors voted this spring to continue the program for at least two years.

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND ISSUES FOR BANKS IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING**



A Summary of a Roundtable

*Sponsored by*  
the Office of the Comptroller of  
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