

WISCONSIN DOWNTOWN ACTION COUNCIL DOWNTOWN PROJECT CASE STUDY PROFILE

Date: August 20, 2010

Project Name: Northwoods Mainstreet Managers Roundtable

Project Location: Eagle River, Tomahawk, Rhinelander

Project Type (check all that apply)

- Residential
 - Commercial
 - Industrial
 - Adaptive Reuse
 - Redevelopment
 - Signage
 - Creative Partnership
 - Financing
 - Mixed Use
 - Historic Preservation
 - Transportation
 - Open Space
 - Other: Main Street Programs
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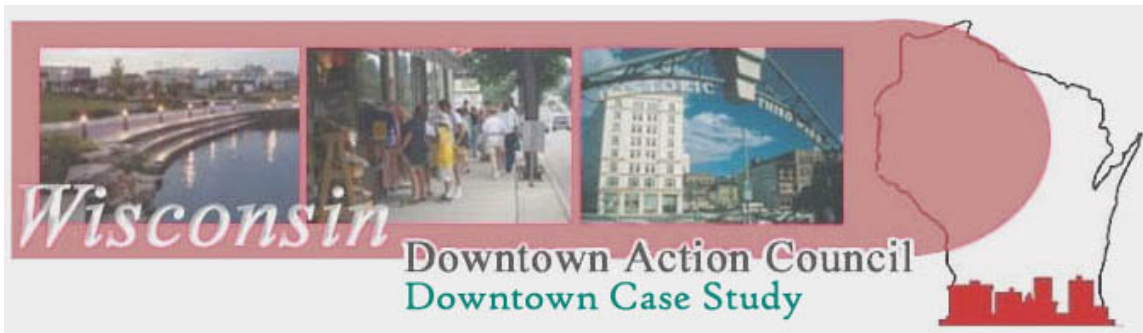
Brief Project Description

Mr. Jim Engle of the Wisconsin Mainstreet Program held a roundtable with three 'northwoods' community Mainstreet program managers in order to discuss successes and challenges

Key Words, Special Features

Funding, Partnerships, Volunteerism, Organizational Structures, Outreach

Other Key Development Members: Jim Engle, Wisconsin Mainstreet, Facilitator, Rita Fritz, Eagle River Revitalization Program, Lori Koppelman, Tomahawk Mainstreet Inc, Sue Bessert, Downtown Rhinelander Inc.



Experience Gained (Key Issues, Difficulties, Challenges overcome, Solutions..)

Mr. Jim Engle, Wisconsin Mainstreet Director asked about the various organizational structure of the Mainstreet organizations:

Lori Koppelman indicated that Tomhawk had been a mainstreet community since 2008 and that they have a part time director with over 80 volunteers on a roster that assist the organization with various projects. She noted one retired couple has put in over 40 hours. Tomhawk's organization is funded by the City, Membership fees through pledge drives and other fundraising efforts. They maintain a strong partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce and work together to expand their volunteer base which includes high school students. One local promotion they created surrounded a buy local school supplies campaign which helped overcome the business challenges of street reconstruction. Lori noted that Tomhawk originally struggled with the Mainstreet program requirements, but eventually hired a director and she noted that the Mainstreet program brings energy to Tomhawk's downtown.

Rita Fritz of Eagle River indicated that they have been a mainstreet community for 11 years and that the program had changed the perception of Eagle River's downtown for the better. Eagle River's program is supported by a BID district containing 265 businesses which funds 65% of their costs, along with private contributions and city support. One of the projects they accomplished was the purchase of a parking lot which is leased back to the city for revenue and they maintain excellent relations with the City. Their organization maintains an office in the City Hall where there is great access to city staff and other resources. They are currently working on a fundraising effort to revitalize their riverside park and they are also working on the arts whereby local art is being reproduced on banners and being funded by local business pledges. Over 40 local artists are involved in this program.

Sue Bessert of Rhinelander indicated that their organization is a 501c3 non-profit and that their mission includes historic preservation and economic development. They have a supporting BID district of 50 to 60 businesses. Their program is also supported by private contributions, events and programs such as auctions. The City of Rhinelander also contributed \$25,000 in the first year and \$30,000 for low interest loan programs for business expansions and physical improvements. Rhinelander's program is volunteer based with 200 volunteers on their roster with about 100 to 150 of those being active. Rhinelander's program includes four working committees: organizational, design, economic restructuring and promotion. Rhinelander's program maintains a strong presence in the community through publicity, press releases and media events.

Mr. Jim Engle then asked what 'trademark' projects have worked well for the communities.



Lori indicated that Tomahawk undertook a 'win the window' program where thousands of dollars in donations were displayed in downtown business windows and customers could buy a sticker to register their name for prizes. Tomahawk has also assisted in 5 projects consisting of over \$400,000 in renovations. She noted that they are very proud of these improvements as they have been contagious and have encouraged other improvements downtown.

Rita of Eagle River noted that they undertook a streetscape and decorative sidewalk program on Hwy 45N, receiving over \$1,000,000 in grants. This project included floral baskets, artscape banners and a TE grant to restore a historic railroad depot with landscape improvements. Some of this project included donation support.

Sue of Rhinelander noted a petunia project that was done in the City through donations for hanging baskets whereby a 110 year old business in the community adopted the project and assists with the costs of fertilizer, water and plant materials. Downtown Rhinelander Inc. also employs individuals meeting LMI requirements to water. She noted that the petunias have become a trademark of the downtown area. In addition, they have implemented an arts project called 'Hodag's on Parade' which include artist inspired hodag sculptures that are auctioned off for revenue to support the downtown area.

Jim Engle then asked the group what the biggest challenges that they have faced.

Sue Bessert of Rhinelander indicated money, property maintenance issues and what the community can support during tough economic times have all been issues. They would also like to do more to promote technological advances in the community such as wifi and high speed internet offerings.

Rita noted that one of Eagle River's challenges has been funding sources for businesses that want to rehabilitate their business/buildings.

Lori indicated Tomahawk's challenges have included business loan needs as well, but also the control of rumors that have negative affects on business investment. She also noted that they just don't have enough resources to do all the things they would like to do.

Jim then asked if it was difficult to recruit volunteers given local demographics and the influx of visitors in the tourist season.

Lori noted that Tomahawk has noticed that transplants to the area see volunteerism as a way to get connected and networked in the community. Sue noted that Rhinelander's aging population requires flexibility if seniors are to be engaged. Rita noted that Eagle River sees many of the same people working on events year to year, but they do well in recruiting new people for specific events.

Jim asked for one or two pieces of advice for directors that make programs successful.

Rita of Eagle River said that a director should not sit in the office, but rather get out to the businesses, keep people involved and engaged, get their feedback and remember that it is a job so try not to take setbacks personally.



Lori of Tomahawk noted that it is always important to be positive in what she phrased 'no stinkin thinkin' and have a can-do attitude, figuring out ways to accomplish challenges. She said this state of mind has transformed negative people. She also noted that it is important not to participate in talking bad about people as it will come back to you. She recalled a project where they raised money for two properties damaged in a fire that was a positive experience for the community.

Sue noted that it is important to have a long-term perspective as things take time, keep moving forward and understand that small victories lead to big ones.

Jim asked how these organizations partner with other organizations in the community.

Lori noted that they partner with the Chamber, Lions Club, local schools, churches and media on events and promotions.

Sue noted that they partner with UW Extension in applying for a grant through the Smithsonian to get a 'history of food' exhibit to downtown Rhinelander as a local promotion.

Rita mentioned the Eagles of Eagle River artists collaboration, sharing volunteers with other organizations and the Lions Club in remodeling restrooms in riverside park.

Jim asked if it has been tough to adapt in tough economic times.

Sue stated that she pulled together the chairs of collaborative committees to adjust budgets in response to the economic conditions, scaling back somewhat to adjust, but she noted that the BID has remained strong.

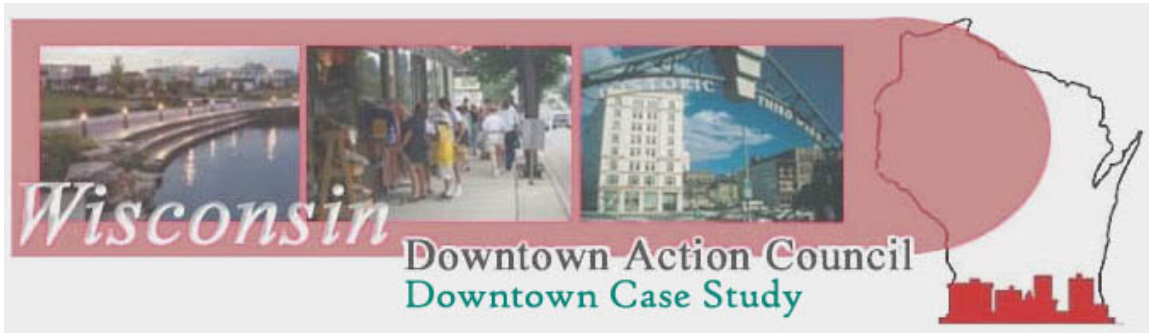
Rita stated that they have scaled back projects to keep the BID stable-they charge \$.95 per thousand of valuation (a three year trend in their BID). She also noted that they have rescheduled and rerouted some projects and that they are looking at ways to raise money differently through self supporting programs such as their farmers market.

Lori noted that fundraising has brought over \$14,000 to help and that they have to measure every project by its cost and benefit.

Jim then asked what the future holds for these organizations.

Lori stated that Tomahawk has received a donation from Citizens Bank to have the Main Street office located in their bank offices. They would like to eventually renovate an older deteriorating building that could be a gem in the downtown and possibly offer business incubator space while saving the old building. They will contribute energy and vision to promote positive change in the downtown.

Sue noted that they would like to work on a gathering place for seniors and youth, moving a senior center to the downtown area. They will also be working on streetscape improvements through their



TIF, a banner program that will guide visitors to the downtown and viewing and access areas to the waterfront.

Rita stated that Eagle River will continue to educate residents, promoting all that the downtown has to offer, get their riverside park revitalized and increase their cranberry festival attendance to help local businesses.