

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019



## METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE



# GETTING THINGS DONE

## Storefront Improvements

Over \$60,000 in matching grants were given to businesses and owners for storefront improvements in 2019. Recipients of MDA grants included: Cai's Café, Primecare Medical Group, See-more Appliance, Tiny Town, CVS, Nauti Cajun Crab, and Menya.

A Main Street New Jersey Transformation Grant of \$23,000 helped to improve Metuchen News, Pyramid Vitamin, Jewelry Doctor, and Antonio's Brick Oven Pizza. Further placemaking improvements were made to Imagination Alley.

Grant Funding for \$5,000 was provided by Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a division of Department of State. This supported murals on Be My Guest / A Creative Twist and Sentirsi Studio.

Another \$8,490 came from the "A Community Thrives" contest. This included \$3,490 from private families and businesses and \$5,000 from the Gannett Foundation to make more third places downtown. This helped projects at: What's the Scoop, The Kabab Factory, and Olive Press Eatery.

## Business Openings

A total of 18 businesses opened downtown in 2019. Retail vacancy by square foot remained consistent at 4% in 2019.

1. Dean's Cafe & Juice Bar, 21 New St
2. Law Office of Jace C. McColley, 540 Middlesex Ave
3. KC Jewelers / Alpha Rugs, 552-566 Middlesex Ave, 4
4. Olive Press Eatery, 25 Pearl St

5. Family & Youth Services, 407 Main St, Suite 214
6. Trinity Physical Therapy Rehab, 660 Middlesex Ave, F-G
7. Hoboken Strategy Group, 10 Station Place, Suite 6
8. BurgerIM, 660 Middlesex Ave, H
9. Mangia Toscano, 422 Main St
10. Fresco by Jimmy, 456 Main St
11. Lotsa Balls, 25 New St
12. Sentirsi Studios, 20 Hillside Ave
13. Allone Insurance, 562 Middlesex Ave
14. Tiny Towns, 438 Main St
15. Café Song, 10 Pearl St
16. Club Pilates, 660 Middlesex Ave, A
17. Nauti Cajun Crab, 7 New St
18. Sam's Air Control LLC, 385 Main St, Suite 1A

We attended the ICSC Municipal Showcase in Philadelphia and the ICSC Dealmaking show in New York City in December 2019. Between the two we met many people with an interest in downtown Metuchen.

## Clean & Green

We continue to implement our Clean & Green goals with regular weekly cleaning of the downtown. Our 50 downtown planters have been refreshed with seasonal plantings in March, July, September, and November.



## Public Art

Temporary installations and projects included Adirondack chairs built from shipping pallets and transformed by New Jersey-based artists. “The Portal” designed by Metuchen resident Robert Russo was situated in Imagination Alley and hosted performances, poetry readings, and events through the summer and fall.

## Holiday Decorations

Our holiday decorations program was expanded this year with garland and ribbons added to poles throughout the downtown.

## Grow with Google

We continued to provide trainings for our downtown businesses through a partnership with Google. A highlight was when 56 attended an hour-long session in June 2019 at **Mangia Toscano**.

## Downtown Videos

Through a partnership with the Borough of Metuchen, the Downtown Alliance retained the services of Brandon Uhlig with Metuchen Media to produce videos promoting the downtown. These were shared on Facebook and YouTube where they received thousands of views.



# PROMOTIONS

## By the Numbers

### Facebook

2,891 likes (2,224 last year) ↑ 29.9%

Average reach 48,523 / month

### Instagram

1,297 followers (1,094 last year) ↑ 18.5%

### Twitter

350 followers (207 last year) ↑ 69.0%

### Contacts

3,611 contacts (2,960 last year) ↑ 21.9%

## Retail Promotions



### Downtown Goes Green

A day full of music, specials and most importantly, ideas about ways you can think global by acting local!



### Downtown Loves Moms

Find that perfect gift for mom while enjoying music, food, and fun on the Town Plaza.



### Pre-Prom

Prom goers take a walk on the red carpet and enjoy this fun milestone with their friends, family, and neighbors.



### Downtown Loves Dads

In June we celebrate dads with a Beer Garden on the Town Plaza, games, haircuts, and our first air guitar contest!



### **Movies Under the Stars**

The first Saturday of the month from June to October we show free movies on the Town Plaza.



### **Downtown Rumble**

WrestlePro brings an exciting night of entertainment to our Town Plaza. Food from local restaurants is also featured.



### **Haunted Downtown**

Businesses are invited to provide activities on the sidewalk and in store, especially for kids and families.



### **Small Business Saturday**

MDA has been a Neighborhood Champion since 2016. This work has driven over \$398,000 in sales to more than 60 businesses.



### **New Year Celebration**

Skating, photo booths, pop-up food vendors, an early ball drop, and friendly snowball fight make for a festive atmosphere on our Town Plaza each year.

# AWARDS

## **Volunteer of the Year – Bernie Hetzel**

Past awardees

2018 – Elaine Edgcomb

2017 – Dan Cea

2016 – Bobbie Theivakumaran

Bernie has been active in several areas – assisting storefronts with improvements, most notably helping with See-More Appliance and the Main Street New Jersey grant projects. Bernie has attended the national Main Street Now conference twice. He also took the lead on holiday decorations in 2019.

## **Storefront Improvement Award – Amarpreet Singh, Metuchen News**

Past awardees:

2018 – Mansi Khandelwal, The Kabab Factory

2017 – Rob DeFillipis, Runner's High

Metuchen News was among the first businesses to receive a storefront consultation in 2017. Since that time, he has transformed the inside and outside of his business. As a Main Street New Jersey grant project, new awnings, signage, paint, and lightings have made his storefront one of the most attractive.

## **Business Champion Award – Jimmy Katims and Jason Penedos, Lotsa Balls**

Past awardees:

2018 – Jenny Lai, Picture Perfect Studios

2017 – Jim and Olympia Keane, La Rosa Pizzeria and Restaurant

2016 – Colleen Hanson, Cai's Cafe

Lotsa Balls has been a welcome addition to the downtown, racking up several awards and glowing reviews since opening in June 2019. Their retro sports themed restaurant provides fun for the family and people of ages. Lotsa Balls has also participated in and benefited from many promotions occurring downtown.

## **District Owner Award – Rich Mongelli**

Past awardees:

2018 – Michael Ciesielka, Nexus Parking Systems

2017 – Jeff Jossell, Suburban Square, LLC

Long-time owner Rich Mongelli has taken excellent care of his historic building at 439-443 Main Street where his offices are headquartered. Additionally, he proved instrumental in helping to make it possible for the Imagination Alley project to occur in the area next to his building.

## **Promotion Award – Ian Fawcett**

Past awardees:

2018 – Linda Levine

2017 – Joanne Cruz

2016 – Bobbie Theivakumaran

Ian is the head, heart, and often the hands too behind many of our successful downtown promotions. New in 2019 we had the first ever Downtown Loves Dads promotion. Ian also keeps the Downtown Alliance website up-to-date and looking its best.

## **Innovation Award – John Manzo / Be My Guest and Joanne Cruz / Creative Twist Events**

Past awardees:

2018 – Bernie Hetzel

2017 – Edward Wetzel

2016 – Elaine Edgcomb

Commercial kitchens have become essential features to encourage innovation in downtowns. John Manzo and Joanne Cruz have created an active vibrant space at 10 Pearl Street with a number of businesses and start-ups also sharing space there including Café Song.

## **Public Official Award – Construction Department & Zoning Department**

Past awardees:

2018 – Brandon Uhlig, Metuchen Media

2017 – Allison Inzerro, Council Member

2016 – Fred Hall, DPW Director

Collaboration with construction and zoning officials increased significantly in 2019 with work on many MDA grant-funded projects. Most notable was the Metuchen News to Antonio's Brick Oven Pizza project. Throughout the process we found ways to streamline submission and approval of projects.

## **Board Service Award – Jay Muldoon, Borough Administrator**

Past awardees:

2018 – Grace Shackney

Jay helped found the Downtown Alliance while serving as a Borough Councilmember. For the past several years he has provided distinguished service as Borough Administrator. On the Downtown Alliance Board, he chairs the Communications Team and serves on the Nominating Team. Often, he can be found volunteering downtown at various promotions or recently when he helped with installation of the holiday decorations.

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Moshe Atzbi**

Hailey's Harp & Pub

**Eric Berger**

United States Real Estate Acquisition

**Diana Callinan**

Friends of the Family Childcare

**Sue Fitzgerald**

The Scottish Dog

**Mark Harris**

Metuchen Arts Council (At-large)

**Jenny Lai**

Picture Perfect Studios

**Jay Muldoon**

Borough Administrator (Ex officio)

**Linda Koskoski**

Borough Council (At-large)

**Stuart Schooler**

The Maven Group

**Leon Schwartz**

Carpet Maven II and Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce (At-large)

**Bobbie Theivakumaran**

Managing Partner, Citibank (Resident)

**Gary Tilbor**

Tilbor Realty

**Gary Wade**

Wade Appraisal and Parking Authority (At-large)

**(Vacant)**

District Owner

# STAFF

Isaac D. Kremer

Executive Director

[isaac@downtownmetuchen.org](mailto:isaac@downtownmetuchen.org)



# BE PART OF OUR SUCCESS

The success of our program is rooted in the work of our volunteers. Our 142 volunteers contributed 4,450 hours valued at \$101,705 in 2019.

## **Communication Team**

We're working hard to get the message out about Downtown Metuchen through earned and unearned opportunities. Help us find the right mix of tv, print, and other marketing to enhance the image of the downtown.

## **Fundraising Team**

Help with managing our sponsorship program, resident campaign program, and other fundraising to support the work of our organization.

## **Promotion Team**

Continue the process of turning Metuchen into a convenient regional destination for families and kids where something fun, new, and exciting is always happening. Help activate the downtown with opportunities, products, activities, and experiences. This includes the Town Plaza, which will become a place for people to gather daily and for extraordinary events. Example: Kids Takeover, Haunted Downtown.

## **Public Art Team**

Enhance the image of the downtown with new and exciting public art. Assist with implementing the MDA Public Art Policy developed with support from a public art professional. Contribute to the continuous improvement of the downtown through public art.

## **Storefront Team**

Guide businesses through the process of upgrading and improving their storefronts. Assist them with planning and implementation of improvements. Work with MDA, consultants, and the Borough to facilitate best design practices that enhance shopability, visibility, and aesthetics downtown.

## **Tech Team**

Build on Metuchen's heritage of independent, creative people to cultivate innovative and unique small businesses, entrepreneurs, and artists. Examples include business education, advocacy, recruitment/retention, and more. Our Tech Team helps businesses use technology to grow.

**You may sign up to volunteer online...**

<https://www.downtownmetuchen.org/volunteer/>

## DONORS

Amit Anand  
Ruby Bender  
Eric Berger  
Chris Bernardo  
Lisa Bernstein  
Nicole Blankiet  
Alexander Brown  
Jonathan Busch  
Daniel Cea  
Seanette Corkill  
Joanne Cruz  
Jason Delia  
Doreen Doherty

Ian Fawcett  
Traci Gerckens  
Robin Greenberg  
Colleen Hanson  
Mark Harris  
Jessica Kaimo  
Anisha Khan  
Linda Koskoski  
Isaac Kremer  
Kunhan Lee  
Robert Levin  
Justin Manley  
Sean Massey

Jennifer McGrath  
Richard Menziuso  
Madison Molner  
John Muldoon  
Todd Pagel  
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Michelle Schutz  
Gary Tilbor  
June Verderosa  
Lisa Wachter

## SPONSORS

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Group**



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*The Jossell and Rosamilia Families*