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 Inserro, 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
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
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