



Downtown Happenings

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Board of Directors

Joe Allman,
Chairman Fisher &
Allman

Shirley Wilkins,
Secretary, Moncure

HAPPY NEW YEAR!



This is a photo from the Pedestrian Mall in Winchester Va, location of the 2011 Main Street Managers' Retreat.

Director's Desk

Virginia Main Street Communities throughout the state thrived in 2010 despite the tough economic times and Blackstone was no exception. Following a prescribed four point approach to revitalization seems to work as well today as it did when first introduced in the early 80's. For local merchants, having a Virginia Main Street organization is a no-brainer. Who would question focused and dedicated support never before available in a competitive market place that has heretofore been dominated by the malls and shopping centers?

Of course anything that is new is often misunderstood and sometimes citizens of the local community and businesses outside of the district may question the emphasis we place on the downtown commercial core. To this end, Main Street Organizations have to work overtime to get the word out about their activities and accomplishments, their mission and vision for the future and their purpose. In regard to Blackstone, if anyone has a question about any of these things, please feel free to contact DBi at (434) 292-3041, or stop by 107 W. Broad Street and I will be happy to field all your questions and answer any concerns you may have.

<p>Insurance Agency Joe Borgerding, Treasurer Citizens Bank & Trust</p>	<p>Essentially, the identity of a town is its downtown commercial core. This is where the oldest surviving historical architecture is found and where the last of the mom and pop family owned businesses are located. A healthy and vibrant downtown ultimately benefits the entire community with increased tourism and investment downtown which in turn spikes local revenue. Market research shows that dollars spent locally, recirculate many times in the local economy. Money spent in malls and shopping centers tends to go to the big box stores which often are owned by out of town interests. Main Street exists to counteract the decline of the historic downtown commercial districts.</p>
<p>Barbara Thompson, Council President, Town of Blackstone</p>	<p>The challenge we face is in changing the landscape that has been established by the status quo. Malls have managers who have the benefit of market studies and research and they have studied and replicated what healthy main streets used to offer, anchor stores surrounded by complementary smaller shops. By controlling the placement of stores and maintaining attractive storefronts and facades where vacancies are, malls have maintained interest for strolling shoppers to keep them strolling throughout the mall when they visit.</p>
<p>Richard Keller, Councilman Town of Blackstone</p>	<p>Authentic main streets don't have the benefit of a mall manager because each business is independently owned and there tends to be a lack of collaboration between owners and competitiveness between them as well. That is the landscape as it exists and our challenge is to gain trust and create collaboration and cooperation between businesses and property owners in order enhance their competitiveness in today's marketplace. Our challenge is to get property owners to the table in order to establish a long-term vision for the downtown business mix rather than leaving it up to chance. In the meantime, we simply strive to fill the vacancies and make the district attractive to shoppers and investors and visitors alike. So far so good in those respects. Vacancies have gone from 22 down to just 7 since 2007 (a 68% decrease)!</p>
<p>Beth Winn, Economic Restructuring Chair Blackstone Emporium</p>	<p>There are many benefits for designated Main Street Communities including access to a pot of funding occasionally set aside for them based on the success they have achieved in revitalizing communities across the country. For example, Governor McDonnell has just recently put forth an amendment to increase the funding of the \$138,000 VMS budget by \$500,000 to revitalize distress communities and a portion of these funds, if made available, will trickle down specifically to organizations like DBi across the state. We will be petitioning Senator Lucas to support this action and invite you to join us in this worthy cause!</p>
<p>Debbie Yancey, DBi Design Committee Chair</p>	<p></p>
<p>Barbara Gibbs, Barbara Y. Gibbs & Associates, Blackstone Chamber of Commerce Ex- Officio</p>	<p></p>
<p>Carolyn Davis, DBi Economic Restructuring Committee, Access Realty</p>	<p></p>
<p>Jennifer Beck, Ex-Officio Acting Town Manager, Town of Blackstone</p>	<p></p>
<p>Lafayette Dickens, Ex-Officio Program Manager, DBI</p>	<p></p>

The Main Street Mission

By design, the mission of Main Street communities focuses on helping businesses that are located within downtown commercial districts. Businesses receive assistance and support simply based on their geographical location. These organizations are not member or dues based. Main Street Organizations like DBi form partnerships with stakeholders and civic groups and rely on the support of volunteers and donors from a wide cross section of the community for their existence.

Trainings are held annually to educate committee and board members on the nuances of revitalization that relate to their specific area of focus. One such training is the annual Virginia Main Street Managers' retreat which was held in Winchester this year. Main Street Managers from around the state assemble and share tips and learn how to be effective in their roles as program directors. Below are some pictures from this year's retreat.



The trip up was a bit snowy and icy but I pushed through. Karen Helm is Winchester's ED and she gave us a tour of the local Pedestrian mall. The buildings on the mall have unique character and architecture.



We got to experience some of the town's culture. Below Kyle and Doug lead a session.



The return trip was much less treacherous since the temperatures had risen and roads had been cleared by then.

I received a phone call from Jane Barnes, Executive Director of the Blackstone Chamber of Commerce, while en route home from Winchester. She informed me that the Governor was going to be speaking on Workforce Development at Southside Virginia Community College on Monday Morning and she was giving me a heads-up about this. So our first order of business on Monday, January 30th was attending this roundtable discussion. What follows below is a summation of the Governor's comments that were made at that gathering.

"I think we're charging forward" says Governor McDonnell citing a spike in tax revenues over the last 9 months after two consecutive negative growth years and a \$400 million dollar surplus this year.



At a roundtable discussion session at SVCC in Alberta on Monday, Jan. 31st, Governor McDonnell outlined some of his budget amendments. Several Board members from the Blackstone Chamber of Commerce, Nottoway Board of Supervisors, and Dr. Grounard, Superintendent of the Nottoway Public School system were among those in attendance.

Highlights of Governor McDonnell's comments

- Finding ways to get people back to work is this administration's top priority
- *\$54 million financial economic development package before the General Assembly*
- Education is a key piece of the plan to cut into the unemployment rate.
- Top four issues laid out for the General Assembly are higher education, education reform, restructuring and re-investment, Job creation and economic development Transportation, and government reform

The Governor's Higher Education Plan

- 75 million of new money is being put into higher education
- *My goal for the State is 100,000 new degrees in Virginia over the next 15 years.*
- focus on the disciplines that are going to create the high paying jobs
- maintain competitiveness with countries in the Pacific Rim

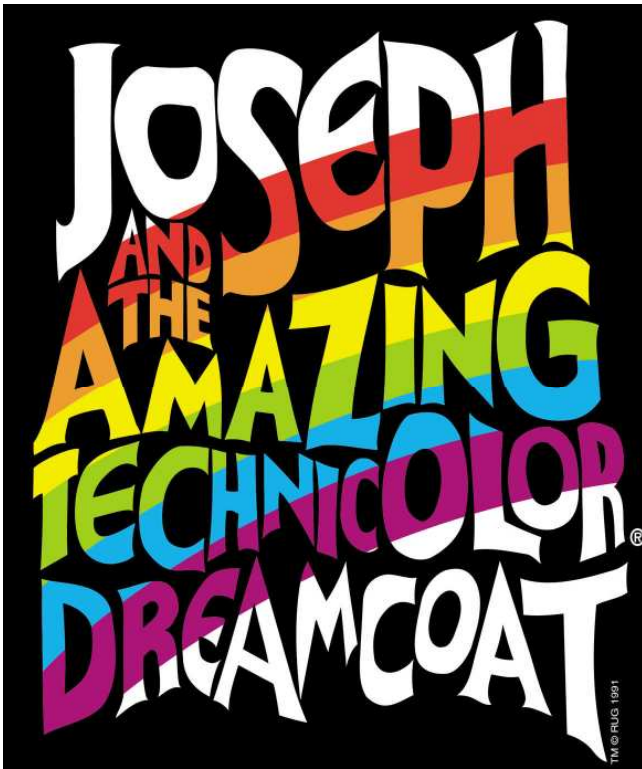
Work Force Development Funds for local Community Colleges

- *\$3 million dollars targeted toward work force development in our community colleges which will help tremendously the value of one third the cost of a 4 year education*
- counties need to team up and recruit businesses regionally
- We've been also working closely with the Tobacco commission to combine our pools of funding with their pools of funds to develop a better package for a particular project.

Upcoming Events

The Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring "The Nottoway County Living History Panel". The Panel members will be Mr. Doug Coleburn, Mr. Clarence Williams, Mr. Clarence Simpson, Mr. Haynie Robertson and Mrs. Constance Wynn of Blackstone, and Mrs. Bernice Rich of Crewe. The event will be held at the Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center in Blackstone, on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., with dinner being served. The cost for the evening is \$20.00 per person.

Upcoming Events (continued)



Nottoway County Public Schools presents...

Andrew Lloyd Webber's

Joseph!!

March 17-19 @ 7PM.

March 20 @ 3PM

Tickets—from cast members or
at the door

\$10 general

\$15 reserved seating

For more information e-mail Alice Allman at

fisherallman2@embarqmail.com

Committee News

The Promotions Committee

We have met and soon will be meeting with the Organization committee to coordinate plans for a summer concert series. Other communities are being contacted in order to gather ideas and advice on how to organize such an event. Once we feel that we have enough facts gathered, we will meet with business owners to get their input, ideas and answer any concerns they may have before we proceed.

The Organization Committee

Steps have been taken to initiate a direct mail donation campaign that will target local businesses. By spring, we will repeat our bulk mail donation campaign that will go out to residents. Support will also be provided to assist the Promotions Committee in carrying out a summer concert series.

The Design Committee

With new businesses continuing to open, we are looking at plans for signs to help them have visibility in their location while trying to stay in keeping with appropriate signage for the historic district. Wayfinding is a priority this year for us and we want to keep pursuing funding for directional signage for parking and the museums.

The Economic Restructuring Committee

Virginia Main Street Program officer, Todd Barman delivered his Economic Restructuring report and the committee is looking at implementing some of its recommendations including the formation of a business relations team to develop closer relationships with property owners.

Ladies Blackstone Now Has TWO New Dress Shops Downtown: Introducing House of Fashions



The business mix in downtown now includes a couple of Ladies' clothing stores! The House of Fashions is owned by Charles Epps Jr. of Dinwiddie. I caught up with his wife, Tammie Epps and she had this to say... "Yes, We are Back.....House of Fashions ...Formerly Epps Fashions located Downtown Blackstone, at 215 S. Main Street next door to Farmers Cafe. Same Great Fashions at Unbelievable Prices.....The name House of Fashions...really does speak for itself"!



Above and below are examples of the latest fashions available to choose from at the House of Fashions.



We offer clothing for everyone's style. Whether you are that woman who wants to dress like she's ready to walk the run-way for New York's Fashion week or you are the modest lady dresser who wants the contemporary classy look....Whatever your style is, we offer it here at the House of Fashions! From the Work place to Fun Time or Formal/Church wear, this is the place to come.

We offer group orders and Tuxedos Rentals too. Sizes range from 4 to 36 w and most of our suits are one of a kind. So if it's in your size and you buy it....Bingo! It's Gone! Did I mention the Super Great Prices! We carry top labels at affordable prices."So come down and check out Blackstone's "Best Kept Secret"....The House Of Fashions formerly Epps Fashions! You are sure to find the same great fashions at the same great prices and you will receive the same great down

home friendly service. So the next time you are Looking for that perfect out fit to make you feel relaxed, confident and on top of the world, remember to visit the House Of Fashions formerly Epps Fashions. We will do our very best to make it happen for you. I hope to see you soon!

We still will be doing our "Give Back Program"! At various times through the year...where we donate back a percentage of each purchase to a designated church or organization of your choice! Again, God Bless...and I truly appreciate your past-present and most of all your future support! So come on down... A New Year...A New You...A New Beginning...Lets make it happen at The House of Fashions (Formerly Epps Fashions)!!

INTRODUCING: "DIVINELY INSPIRED BOUTIQUE"

The newest business to open downtown is Divinely Inspired Boutique located at 118 West Broad Street next door to Town and Country Cleaners directly across the street from Winn Furniture.



The front windows simply say "Divinely Inspired Boutique" on the glass.



Store owner, Jo Ann Coles and sales associate Da'Qwon Carr welcome you!





Prices are very reasonable. In fact, everything in the store is \$29.99 or less!

Divinely Inspired Boutique is the brainchild of Jo Ann and Kimberly Coles of Williamsburg. Jo Ann Coles has a Bachelor's Degree from Virginia State University in the Human Services field, and is currently pursuing her Masters of Social Work from Norfolk State University where her daughter, Kimberly is a sophomore working towards her Bachelor of Social Work. The Coles Family is strongly connected to this community in various ways. They have a large extended family here, and also, with Jo Ann's spouse, Leroy Coles, leading a local congregation in Blackstone. It is quite routine for this family to be in Blackstone at least once a week. "Therefore, with the frequent visits and the fond memories of living in this small, quaint town, Blackstone was our first choice for a location to open this clothing shop with the contemporary woman in mind" Jo Ann said.

The Divinely Inspired Boutique is a unique and upscale shopping experience for the residents of Blackstone with a strong sense of femininity. The owners truly believe that "every woman feels better about herself when she looks good." Thus, it is the mission of the Coles family to have affordable and stylish clothing for all women who like to wear high-quality fashion without having to sacrifice due to price. In addition, the owners have seen ladies from many walks of life, juggling various roles and titles, and oftentimes forgetting who they are and what they want out of life. As a result, when ladies come into the Divinely Inspired Boutique the owners hope the clients can feel and see the creativity and the design that was formulated personally with the multi-tasking woman in mind. Womanhood is celebrated and appreciated through the positive quotes and inspiring sayings targeted at lifting the spirit of the applauded woman.

Divinely Inspired Boutique operates by a philosophy similar to Big Lots stores, which get inventory from large chain stores reducing their stock to make room for their new merchandise. In similar fashion, Divinely Inspired Boutique purchases closeout merchandise from the larger department stores when they are reducing their inventory to make room for new shipments. "This allows us to offer the residents of this community stylish ladies clothing at great prices without having to travel to neighboring cities; thus creating a saving of two valuable commodities, time and money".



When asked what motivated her to open this kind of store here, Jo Ann said "As a young girl, I remember walking the sidewalks of downtown Blackstone, and each time, I looked forward to passing Cole's Ladies Shop where the mannequins in the windows were always dressed so nicely with the fashions of the day. Just as this ladies clothing store had given the image of beautiful and feminine apparel for women with a good sense of style, I would like to recreate that same standard of style and class for the women of Blackstone, and also give them an

opportunity to shop locally". (Pictured above l-r: Jo Ann Coles and Kimberly Coles)

Along with Jo Ann and Kimberly Coles, Da'Qwon Carr is a full-time Sales Associate available to assist the clientele.

Fundraising Campaign

Downtown Blackstone Inc. is proud to report the addition of nearly 60 new jobs and 25 new businesses to the Historic District since 2007! There has also been over 3.4 million dollars in private investment downtown and the vacancy rate has been reduced by 68% in that time! Our impact is measurable, visible, substantial and ongoing!! We promised to publish our donor list in our newsletter as well as on our website. As we continue to receive donations, we will update the list monthly. If you or someone you know would like to support this cause, please make note of the mailing address and e-mail address listed below.

Donations are tax deductible and can be made by check payable to D.B.I. (107 W. Broad Street, Blackstone, VA 23824) or by PayPal online at www.downtownblackstone.org. As we indicated in the mailing the donation levels are as follows:

Amount/Designation

- Up to \$50 Friend of Downtown**
- \$50 to \$99 Blackstone Supporter**
Joe Allman, Lynn Shekleton, Homefront Appliances
- \$100 to \$499 Downtown Advocate**
Dunc & Myra Quicke, Shirley Wilkins
- \$500 to \$999 Blackstone Partner**
- \$1,000 to \$4,999 Revitalization Benefactor**
- \$5000 or more Revitalization Leader**



DBi Mission Statement

“D.B.I. will provide leadership in developing and promoting Downtown Blackstone as an inviting place to visit and shop, a productive place to work, and a profitable place to invest.”

www.downtownblackstone.org