



# Downtown Happenings

An e-publication of  
Downtown Blackstone, Inc.

## March 2011

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Chamber of Commerce

Lafayette Dickens, Ex-Officio  
Program Manager, DBI

## Thank you Citizens Bank & Trust Co. Inc. !!!



Pictured l-r: Branch Manager, Kimberly Broughton, Senior Vice President, Lynn Shekleton, DBi Executive Director, Lafayette Dickens and DBi Organization Committee Chair, April Wright.  
(Photo courtesy of the Courier Record)

### Director's Desk

March ushers in spring and we just recently saw some of the first blossoms peaking through! March also ushered in some of our largest donations to date! Thank you Citizens Bank & Trust Co. Inc. for leading the way by becoming our first Revitalization Benefactor of 2011 with your donation of \$1,000! We feel very fortunate to have such community minded partners on our side!

We are excited to add S.B. Cox Ready Mix Inc., and Spencers Drugstore Inc. to the growing list of 2011 business supporters of DBi! If you like the positive changes that are taking place downtown, please join these companies in supporting our efforts with a tax deductible cash donation today! Because of our tax status as a 501 (c)3 organization, we cannot charge membership dues so we ask for donations from those who are in support of our mission which is "to 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".



The Virginia Main Street model calls for one third of our funding to come from local government, one third from donations, and one third from fund-raising. The Town of Blackstone committed to provide all of DBi's funding for 5 years so as we enter into our fourth year, fund-raising and ongoing annual donations are critical in order to enable us to relieve the financial burden on local government.

### **Downtown Concert Series Public Forum**

On Wednesday, March 16th, DBi met with merchants to get their input on the idea of initiating a summer concert series in Blackstone. DBi presented its findings from other communities that have had success with similar events, including South Hill, Franklin, and Lynchburg. We invited downtown merchants but opened up the topic to any interested citizens for input via facebook, or e-mail or through direct participation in our public forum.



Attending the meeting were Debbie & Frank Yancey, Lynn Shekleton, Tommy & Polly Watkins, Jo Ann Coles, Nikole Johnson, Francis Gilmore, Joe Allman, Carolyn Davis, Kim Moody, Candy Early, Shirley Wilkins, Debbie Barnes, Bob Henkle, Jane Barnes, Kimberly Broughton, Richard Eaton, Bill Menting, Beth & Frankie Winn, Richard Eaton and Lafayette Dickens.

Topics discussed ranged from how the event would be funded and whether alcohol would be served and who the food vendors would be and what type of food would be served to how such an affair would impact the local restaurants. Also cleanup concerns and possible locations were discussed. Ideas were entertained about how to capitalize on such an event to promote the local businesses. The overwhelming consensus was that such events would be a positive for the local economy and would elevate the image of Blackstone as a progressive and fun place.

Based on the findings of our Promotions Committee, we took the next step which was to go before the Blackstone Town Council and request permission to pursue this further.



Promotions Committee Chair, Kim Moody, (pictured left) took the podium at the Town Council meeting and explained that DBi had spoken with all the merchants downtown about the idea of a concert series and then held a meeting to get their ideas, and concerns out in the open. Both at the special meeting as well as on a one on one basis, the overwhelming majority (84%) of those who responded were in favor of the idea and 14% expressed no opinion. And out of all those who responded, only one individual opposed the idea. Council approved the concert series proposal unanimously. In the next 30 days, DBi will solidify the proposal further and come back before Council in April for any additional approvals that may be needed.

Photo courtesy of the Courier Record

## Blackstone Welcomes Philip Vannoorbeeck as its new Town Manager



People waited outside anxiously. Later, inside Council Chambers the Mayor presents Mr. Vannoorbeeck a Town lapel Pin.

Town Council officially presented Philip Vannoorbeeck as the newly hired Blackstone Town Manager at a special Council session on Thursday, March 24th! We look forward to working closely with him in our continued efforts to keep the Revitalization of Downtown on track. In case you have not had a chance to meet Philip, to the right is a photo of him proudly holding the Town lapel pin that he was just presented with by Mayor Billy Coleburn. Philip resides in Amelia and is very highly regarded by Town Council, some of whom knew him from his prior service with the Town of Blackstone several years ago. Mr. Vannoorbeeck's first day on the job was Friday, March 25th.



## DBi Program Manager returns to his roots

Speaking to students just happens to be something that Lafayette Dickens did for 27 years in his career as a professional fundraiser. When Nottoway Middle School called looking for business leaders to share a Commonwealth Scholars powerpoint and testimonials about their career to their 8th grade students, it was an easy task. So on Thursday, March 17th about 200 8th graders settled into the cafeteria where three speakers took turns sharing. In addition to Dickens, Brittany Timberlake of the Nottoway Sheriff's department and High School Athletic Director Peter Jones shared information about the job prospects for students depending on their level of education. It was an excellent opportunity to share and each speaker did a fine job!



Above l-r: Jackie Reid, counselor, George Smith, principal, JackieWinn, counselor, Peter Jones, High School Athletic Director, Lafayette Dickens, DBi Executive Director, and Brittany Timberlake, law enforcement officer.

Commonwealth Scholars is a program that uses business leaders to motivate 8th grade students to complete a rigorous course of study in high school—one that will give them a boost in college and their career. If your school or civic organization wants to know more about the progress of Downtown Revitalization or how the Main Street program works, do like Nottoway Middle School did and just call the DBi office at (434) 292-3041 or [manager@downtownblackstone.org](mailto:manager@downtownblackstone.org).

## Blackstone Business Outlook

Although the JC Penney Catalog store closed on March 11th, after over 20 years downtown, the overall business outlook remains bright in Blackstone. Two new businesses are preparing to open so the business mix is evolving but continuing to grow! Andrew and Kim Moody are opening their businesses at 108 N. Main and Francis and Sara Gilmore are preparing to open a wine shop on at 116 West Broad Street across from the Gilmore Environmental Consulting office and next door to UAV Pro RC world. Just as we report this, we got more good news from a local industry !

### Reiss Manufacturing Announces Expansion: soon to add 40 jobs!



Above: Carl Reiss, Lt. Governor Bolling, State Legislator Tommy Wright, Mayor Coleburn and Reiss Mfg. employees pose for a picture in front of the entrance of the plant.

Reiss Manufacturing Inc., announced recently that it will add more than 40 jobs at its Blackstone plant as it expands production of an environmentally friendly radiation shielding material! Reiss Manufacturing is located on Northwest Avenue. The rubber manufacturing plant first opened in Blackstone in 1987 and presently employs about 200 employees.

The good news that DBi has been reporting of business growth appears to have been corroborated by the increase in meals tax revenue. While it may be difficult to prove exactly where all that increase came from, the fact that **over 60 net new jobs have been created downtown** certainly must have contributed because with more people working downtown, there are more of them eating daily and at one of the many restaurants available. Now with the news of Reiss Manufacturing expanding their plant, the economy of Blackstone continues to grow even stronger!

What is happening here goes beyond paint on buildings and flower pots and benches on the sidewalks. Although all the news is not positive, the fact is that the positive outweighs the negative. We actually have seen **over 90 new jobs created since 2007** but we lost about 30, still the net gain of 60 far surpasses the loss. This is not the case in every town that has undergone revitalization!

Don't just take our word for it, walk down Main Street or West Broad and you will literally see for yourself the signs below in the windows of buildings being prepared for new shops that are soon to open in downtown Blackstone!



## 2011 VMS Milestone Achievement Awards Luncheon



The venue was the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond. Winchester was recognized for \$100 million in private investment!!

Keynote speaker, Jean Carroon spoke on the topic of Sustainable Preservation: Greening Existing Buildings. She made the point that it is much more earth friendly to preserve existing buildings than to replace them with new construction and she backed her point with very sensible facts and figures. Many awards were presented. Lafayette Dickens was among three recipients of the John Marllles Scholarship which will be used to defray the cost of attending this year's National Main Street Conference in Des Moines, Iowa May 22—May 25th! The most notable award of the evening went to Winchester Old Town Development board for having reached the milestone of \$100 million dollars in private investment!

Virginia Main Street really works! Local Program funding for organizations across the state like DBi return an average of \$18.24 in private investment for every dollar local dollar invested. DBi's return on investment stands at \$19.89! The estimated market value of volunteer time is \$13.8 million dollars with 679,700 hours contributed since 1997! DBi has registered 3,529 volunteer hours which is valued at \$73,520! Over 5,000 businesses have been created retained, and expanded and physical improvements top \$677 dollars with public investment over \$304 million dollars to date!! DBi has performed on par with these program wide averages so far!

We have outpaced attrition by 16 businesses with an average of 8 new businesses every year since 2007! Private investment downtown is at \$3,727,698 and still rising! Public investment since DBi was formed stands at \$382,720! This puts cumulative investment in downtown Blackstone since DBi was formed at a total of \$4,110,418! So the conclusion one can draw from all these statistics is that the town's investment in DBi has been a remarkably sound decision that has paid huge dividends for Blackstone in a very short timeframe!

### Introducing Shine System & Technologies

A gathering of about 40 local residents consisting of business owners, members from the Nottoway Board of Supervisors, Blackstone Town Council members, Chamber of Commerce, DBi, and local civic organizations were invited to dinner at Slaws restaurant to listen to a proposal and presentation by Shine System & Technologies, a new company seeking support in their effort to pursue Tobacco Commission funding to start their business model in Nottoway County. In essence, two companies are proposed, each requiring start up funding in the neighborhood of about \$800,000.

The Innovation Catalysis Model (ICM™) features a web-enabled backbone to vet any new business idea in a 30 day period of time to determine its market viability. If the idea is deemed viable, ICM™ engages a myriad of resources to bring that idea to market. The second initiative is the Apocalyptic Assessment Rubric (A2R™). This company would analyze vast volumes of data to provide threat assessments so as to provide national defense and homeland security the probability of specific terrorist acts occurring based on analysis provided by a sophisticated computer model.

Both companies would require high tech employees as well as cutting edge computer equipment. For economic and logistical reasons, the group sees Nottoway County as an ideal place to establish their base of operations and since they are targeting Tobacco Commission funding, they seek the support of local Business partners to write letters to Terry G. Kilgore, Chairman, and Neal E. Noyes, Executive Director of the Commission supporting their proposal. The jury is still out on how their ideas were received by those in attendance.



Kenny Golden, Shine Sr. Advisor lays out the concept.



Robert L. Bowers explains A2R.



Jeff Thomas, President.

## **Announcements:**

### **THREE NEW BUSINESSES OPENING APRIL 22<sup>ND</sup>!!!**

Blackstone's newest retail store is opening April 22<sup>nd</sup>, "trend." owned by returning Blackstone Natives Andrew & Kim [Parrish] Moody will carry a variety of house wares, home goods, gifts for weddings and baby showers and work by Virginia artists and craftspeople. The store (as well as the Moody's new offices is located at 108 North Main Street between the Herb Cottage & Blackstone Emporium). Shop local, and welcome them to downtown Blackstone!

### **Downtown Property Owners Meeting April 27th at 5:30**

The DBi Economic Restructuring Committee invites all residents who own buildings in the downtown historic district to a special meeting for property owners. This gathering is set to take place on Wednesday, April 27th at the Fire station on Church Street at 5:30pm. We are excited about getting this group together so we can grapple with the issues that exist and craft a plan for the future. This is an extremely important meeting and relevant discussions include maximizing the use of vacant buildings, increasing your property values and developing a masterplan.

### **Congratulations!!!**

We congratulate Lynn Shekleton for her recognition as volunteer of the year at the Chamber of Commerce annual dinner. Lynn was instrumental in organizing what turned out to be one of the most successful Arts & Crafts Festivals on record!

Congratulations also goes out to Carolyn Davis whose business, Access Realty, was voted "Business of the Year" by the Chamber of Commerce. Both of these ladies are active volunteers with DBi and we appreciate and applaud their community spirit!

### **Upcoming Events**

If you have an event coming up that you would like us to list in our next newsletter please send it via the following link: [EVENT REQUEST](#)

## ***Blackstone Garden Club Presents: 2nd Annual "Spring Flowers & Fashion"***

*Floral Designs by, Bob Henkel  
Luncheon & Fashion Show*

*Saturday, April 16th, 2011  
12:00 Noon*

*Blackstone Herb Cottage - Banquet Room  
Located at:  
104 N. Main Street  
Blackstone, Virginia*

*For more information contact:  
Shirley Obradovic (434) 292 - 5674*



**Tickets are \$20.00 & will not be available at the door.**

**FIRST MONTHLY CRUISE-IN, SATURDAY APRIL 30th**

Blackstone's first Cruise-in of 2011 will begin at 4 p.m. on Saturday, April 30th at North Main and Tavern Streets. In addition to the fabulous display of vintage cars, there will be a special "Elvis Impersonation Show" featuring Joe Forrester, a professional entertainer and Elvis Impersonator. As always, the Cruise-in is free to the public and the entertainment will be free as well. Call organizer, Walter Mac Osborne for more details (434.292.9617).

# **Blackstone Summer Cruise In Schedule**

**Held the last Saturday of each month  
starting at 4:30 PM**

*Located at the corner of Main & Tavern Streets  
(Blackstone Auto Parts / The Classic Grill / Schwartz Tavern)*



*Domestic - Imports  
Cars - Bikes - Trucks*

*All types, years and makes of  
vehicles are welcome!*



© PhotoPlanet.com

*Come early, reserve your spot, and enjoy the  
many unique shopping and dining opportunities  
that Historic Downtown Blackstone offers.*

*\*2011 Summer  
Cruise In Schedule*

*April 30*

*May 28*

*June 25*

*July 30*

*August 27*

*September 24*

**\* Weather permitting**



Contact - "Walter Mac" Osborne for more details - 434-292-9617 -

[mac@circlesales.com](mailto:mac@circlesales.com)

The annual Town-wide Clean-Up sponsored by the Blackstone Rotary Club will be held Saturday, May 14, 2011. All citizens of the town and surrounding community are asked to join together to clean up our streets and neighborhoods! Individuals, as well as civic groups, clubs, churches, and school children are encouraged to participate in "spring cleaning" our town, as we show our pride in our town! We will gather at Seay Park at 8:00 a.m. on May 14<sup>th</sup> for a morning of good, "clean" fun!

**Save the Date! June 11th, 2011**



ANNOUNCES 2nd Annual Perkinson Airport Open House:

## **Wing Fling**

Date: SATURDAY 06/11/2011

**FREE**

Time: 9:00 am-3:00 pm

Location: Fort Pickett Airfield (KBKT)

Come out for a truly one-of-a-kind experience, a close encounter with all sorts of aircraft, plus rub elbows with local fly boys who will tell you all about their favorite toys! **FREE TO THE PUBLIC**

## **Committee News**

### **The Promotions Committee**

The Promotions Committee has had a number of specially scheduled meeting sessions working hard toward our summer concert series research. In the past month we hosted a meeting for all of the downtown merchants to participate in a discussion about the possibility of having that type of event in downtown Blackstone. There was resounding support from everyone and we were able to take in many suggestions from the area merchants. After the merchants meeting, Kim Moody of the Promotions Committee approached the Town Council during the last meeting and council agreed 7-0 for DBI to pursue planning the event for the area residents to enjoy this summer!

### **The Organization Committee**

Thank you to all the residents who responded to our downtown survey and request for donations. Your input is very valuable to us and we will share the results once we get them all compiled. In addition to the annual campaign, the Organization Committee is busy helping the Promotions Committee plan a summer concert series! More to come!

### **The Design Committee**

We will soon need to replace two trees as well as paint the tree grates throughout downtown. Additionally, a dedication program is being planned to honor Connie Irby who donated all the new trees and had them planted at no cost to the town. We are also working hard to find funding to help defray the costs of quality signs and minor façade work for merchants.

#### Design Tip for the month:

With Spring comes a blanket of pollen which, as we know, can put a dull look on everything! Consider rinsing your windows and storefronts often to keep your business looking vibrant!

### **The Economic Restructuring Committee**

The ER committee will be hosting a downtown property owners' meeting at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 27th at the Blackstone Volunteer Fire Department. A short social will be followed by an informative presentation on all progress made on the refurbishment of downtown buildings. Kyle Meyer, Director of the Virginia Main Street Program, will be on hand to talk about the challenges that face Blackstone now and in the near future. Also, current projects/grants that may be available will be discussed. The committee continues to work on issues that face business and property owners such as parking, façade maintenance, garbage/trash disposal and business recruitment, all of which requires our attention each month.

## Business Spotlight: Spencer's Drugstore



Spencer Drugstore is located about 2 blocks south of the Bon Secours' Blackstone Family Practice facility at 100 N. Main Street, where it sits prominently at the corner of Main and Broad Streets. The location is very appropriate for Spencers because the business and its owners, Franklin and Debbie Yancey, serve prominent roles in the community. Spencer Drugstore is one of the longtime anchor businesses for the historic business district. The Yanceys also own several other properties in the district and have been active in the local community as members of the Blackstone Rotary club, Crenshaw Methodist Church, Blackstone Garden club, a legislative assistant to delegates of Nottoway County, DBI volunteer, Three Arts club, Nottoway Country club, etc. They are also key players in the effort to revitalize the town.

I asked Frank how the business got started and here is how the story goes. After leaving the army at Fort Lee, as a military pharmacist, Frank traveled to Petersburg, Dinwiddie, and Lawrenceville as a relief pharmacist for a year and a half. Frank and Debbie looked around in Williamsburg, Jarratt, Smithfield, and Blacksburg for a place to open a pharmacy but they liked the quaint atmosphere and potential in Blackstone. The Yanceys acquired the business and got married the same year. At that time the store was located at 106 N. Main Street, which is the present location of the Herb Cottage. In 1973, they moved the business to its current location on the corner, which formerly housed Stokes-Williams Hardware but was the original location of the drugstore in the 1800s.

Frank "Doc" Yancey bought the business January 1, 1972 becoming the 5<sup>th</sup> generation owner and chose to keep the familiar name. The Spencer name dates back to 1889 when the business was started by R.B. Spencer and passed to his son L.B. Spencer who later sold the business to Roland Garrett. John Koonce Sr. purchased the store from Garrett. Frank bought the store from Mr. Koonce and has owned and operated it ever since.

The 5,000 square foot store has a large inventory that can be best categorized as 1/3 gifts, 1/3 pharmacy, wheel chairs etc., and 1/3 other items such as over the counter cough and cold medicines. At Spencers, you can pick up all the day to day items that you would expect to find in any large chain drug store and unique items such as Tervis™ tumblers, jewelry, webkins, Hallmark cards, baby items. They have seasonal gifts, wedding gifts, and invitations, plus free gift wrapping! Spencers also has a sick room supply section dedicated to crutches, wheel chairs, portable commode chairs and the like. Their motto is "if they don't have it, you can't get it". Debbie runs a novelty shop called Yanceys Fanceys which is a store within a store giving shoppers yet another reason to frequent Spencer's. "It is a good place to browse and find things that are not common", Debbie says.

Spencer Drugstore has a full service pharmacy and they accept all third party insurance and part "D" plans. Operating hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Spencers has 5 full time employees including daughter-in-law Keri, who works as a pharmacist. Other employees include pharmacy technicians, LaToya Delaney, and Rhonda Lewis, sales associates Glenda Long and Mary Goolsby. For 38 years, Frank has prided himself in the fact that he also employs 4 high school students each year on a part time basis. They get sales experience as well as insights into the field of pharmacy and business.



l-r: Rhonda , Mary, Glenda, Doc, LaToya, Keri, and Debbie

Frank says the most important skills the students get are learning to deal with the public, developing communication skills and learning the importance of honesty in the workplace. He proudly brags on the fact that he has had students who have gone on to become preachers, pharmacists, assistant town managers, veterinarians, RNs, and potential med students. The students hired apply or are referred. He received about 20 applications this year alone! Frank says he looks for polite kids who have an interest in health care. The four students presently employed are Haley Wilborn, Marissa McMillian, Lindsey Cole, and Seth Hinton. Doc proudly boasts of having had the valedictorian from both Nottoway High School and Kenston Forest at the same time one year.

What sets Spencers apart from other drugstores is the essence of what sets shopping downtown apart from shopping at a mall or at the shopping center. Everyone here is your neighbor. They know most of their customers or their families and



Doc & Debbie pose with an original framed copy of R.B. Spencer's Board of Pharmacy license

tend to treat customers like relatives and friends and not just a number. They go out of their way to quickly fill every prescription and the down home southern hospitality is free of charge. For example, Doc says, "we offer lots of service and we offer in-town delivery. We can overnight special orders and take orders by phone. We often have prescriptions filled for people travelling from their doctor appointments by the time they arrive home." If you ever get the run around trying to get service at the other places, just stop by Spencers and they will get it done for you without putting you through a lot of red tape. They have empathy for you and your loved ones and want to get you your medicine as quickly as possible. They want Spencers to be a pleasing experience for you and when you walk out the door you feel better than when you walked in.

**2011 Fundraising Campaign progress to date**

Downtown Blackstone Inc. is proud to report positive business and job growth in the Historic District since 2007! There has also been over \$3.7 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 the 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 use paypal online. Our website address is [www.downtownblackstone.org](http://www.downtownblackstone.org). Donation levels are as follows:

**Friend Of Downtown (Up to \$49)**

Dan Clatterbuck, Judy Amos, David L. & Lily B. Varner, Leroy Cousins, Bill & Jackie Reid, Howard E. Halfacre, Robert William Buntin, Joan L. Bates, Bernice Booth

**Blackstone Supporter (\$50 to \$99)**

Homefront Appliances, Jim & Christine Hasbrouck, Sally Beale

**Downtown Advocate (\$100 to \$499)**

Dunc & Myra Quicke, Shirley Wilkins, Lynn Shekleton, Joe Allman, Teefey & Teefey P.C. Spencer's Drug Store Inc., Florence F. Cummins

**Blackstone Partner (\$500 to \$999)**

S.B. Cox Ready-Mix, Inc.

**Revitalization Benefactor (\$1,000 to \$4,999)****Revitalization Leader (\$5,000 or more)**

Thank you one and all for your support! So far, we have received \$2,680 in donations in the calendar year 2011!

**The 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."

Visit us online at: [www.downtownblackstone.org](http://www.downtownblackstone.org)