

Bluffton NOW! Annual Report 2019

Introduction

Bluffton NOW! is extremely proud of what has been accomplished for downtown in 2019. The Parlor City Plaza has been built and is being used. The CRP program was extremely successful this year in improving our downtown built environment. Downtown occupancy levels improved to 85% (Up From 81% - 2018) occupied, 1% (Down from 3% 2018) partial occupied, 13% (Down from 16% - 2018) vacant. We got to introduce 3 new businesses downtown. Our events overall had record attendance numbers. Our marketing efforts have consistently grown in effectiveness. As well as our work with our youth has paid dividends in the long-term health of our community.

Community Reinvestment Program (CRP)

The 2019 CRP program had 12 approved applications and 11 completed Projects. 1 project did not occur due to the sale of the property. The program directly created over \$200,000 in investment in our downtown. Projects included façade improvements, interior remodels, and roof replacements. This year was highlighted by the amazing transformation of the Parlor City Trophy's building on the corner of Main and Wabash. It also played a key role in taking the Parlor City Brewery from an idea to a reality. The Community Reinvestment Program continues to grow as a key puzzle piece in the revitalization of our downtown.

Parlor City Plaza

The primary construction of the Parlor City Plaza is complete! We greatly thank the City's support in making this project a reality. The project came in, including some additional items that Bluffton NOW! added on during the construction process, within our budget. We were also able to work towards some of the Phase 2 items including the improvement of lighting throughout downtown and enhancements to the electrical service for the plaza. There are some items in Phase 2 of the project that have not been completed. These would include additional alley lighting, signage, public art, and the relocation of utility lines.

New Downtown Businesses

This year Bluffton NOW! is extremely pleased to say that we got to welcome Ellie Grace & Co. (Clothing Store), Change It Up Thrift Store (Community Care's 2nd Hand Store), and American Salvage Co. (Vintage Antique Store). We are also able to announce that the Parlor City Brewery (Micro Brewery) will be opening in 2020.

Downtown Events

This year Bluffton NOW! successfully put together or participated in several great events. These 2019 events included the 3rd Annual Bluffton Brrr Fest, Olde 303 Music Festival, Downtown Fundraiser Dinner, Bluffton Free Street Fair, Plaza Grand Opening, Community Care Fundraiser, Downtown Chili Walk, Downtown Christmas Lighting Ceremony, Downtown Passport on Small Business Saturday, and the Parlor City Christmas. There were also several downtown businesses that ran successful events as well. The growth in our event attendance across the board this year is a testament to the excitement around the revitalization of our downtown.

Marketing

Bluffton NOW! continues to strive to promote what is going on downtown. Our Facebook page grew by 1,000 likes in 2019. We started utilizing Instagram and Twitter consistently to broaden our social media presence. For the first time, we invested in promotional videos to highlight our downtown. We also have continued to update and refresh our website to keep it relevant for both first time and repeat visitors. Our website now includes an events page and featured business page.

Youth Engagement

Bluffton NOW! has continued our partnership with the Bluffton High School marketing class. This year they worked on creating marketing tools for our downtown events. They learned how to develop posters, social media content, and promotion videos. What is even more important than getting assistance with marketing materials is the opportunities we as an organization got to share with them about what is going on in downtown. They got to participate in the process of making a difference in their community. Being part of the process increased their awareness and appreciation in regards to the value of shopping local and downtown revitalization.

Conclusion

Bluffton NOW! looking back has had a great year. With great optimism, we believe that we can grow from what was accomplished in 2019 to make 2020 an even better year. We ask for your continued support so that together we can make our downtown thrive!

Sincerely,

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Michael Lautzenheiser, Jr.
Bluffton NOW!
President