



# A SHARED TABLE

A STUDY OF THE IMPACTS OF LOUISIANA MAIN STREET

July 2018





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Homer Main Street

This report was commissioned by the Louisiana Main Street program of the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development. Louisiana Main Street is a Main Street America™ Coordinating Program. As a Main Street America™ Coordinating Program, Louisiana Main Street helps to lead a powerful, grassroots network consisting of over 40 Coordinating Programs and over 1,200 neighborhoods and communities across the country committed to creating high-quality places and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development.

Cover image courtesy of Ruston Main Street.

Prepared by:  **PlaceEconomics**





Denham Springs Main Street

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report considers the first 34 years of Louisiana Main Street and the participating Louisiana Main Street communities. Main Street is economic development in the context of historic preservation. It is a strategy that capitalizes on existing assets to make each community competitive through differentiation rather than imitation, celebrating the local flavor and unique characters of each place. The results of these community-driven efforts are places with strong social cohesion and economic sustainability, places that support innovation and opportunity, and places where diverse participants work together for the benefit of the whole. While this benefit can be quantified in economic data, it can also be heard in the stories of the people on the ground. This report both quantitatively and qualitatively demonstrates the impact of Louisiana Main Street on the economic and social health of the state of Louisiana.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, Louisiana Main Street communities have seen:
  - \$931 million in Total Investment
  - \$553 million in Private Investment
  - \$460.5 million in New Construction and Rehabilitation
  - Over 9,000 Net New Jobs
  - Over 1,900 Net New Businesses
  - Over 150,000 Volunteers since 2004
- Private sector investment has generated an average of 119 direct jobs and 98 indirect jobs **each year** for the last 30 years. These jobs have meant an average of \$7 million in income from direct jobs and \$2.4 million from indirect jobs **each year**.
- Louisiana Main Street is cost effective economic development, costing \$1,632 per net new job or \$5,802 per net new business.
- Since 1995, a typical Louisiana Main Street community saw the following each year:
  - 2.8 Net New Businesses
  - 11.8 Net New Jobs
  - \$517,890 in Public Investment
  - \$860,367 in Private Investment
  - 338 volunteers



Ruston Main Street





Dear Louisiana Main Street Stakeholder:

Historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts are the heart and soul of communities across Louisiana. They give the community its sense of place and character and provide the uniqueness that sets one community apart from another. In addition, historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts are great locations for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Since 1984, Louisiana Main Street has been helping to revitalize these commercial districts by offering a roadmap for locally-owned and locally-driven prosperity. Louisiana Main Street is designated by the National Main Street Center as the state's Main Street coordinating program. It provides year-round, ongoing support and training to designated communities in Louisiana.

Main Street is economic development with its foundation in historic preservation. Locally designated Main Street organizations have reported economic development statistics to the state coordinating program since its inception. We commissioned this study to demonstrate the impact of Louisiana Main Street and to show that Main Street is a demonstrably good investment for property owners, business owners, local governments, and the citizens of Louisiana.

It is no secret that we are in challenging financial times in Louisiana. As the following pages show, Main Street is a valuable historic preservation tool and a strategy for economic development. Yet, for the past 10 years, the Louisiana Main Street program's budget has been dwindling to the point that its ability to provide services to designated communities is severely limited. This report demonstrates that the benefits of this program to the state are substantial. We must work to rebuild the Main Street program's ability to provide services to the underserved areas of our state – small towns, rural areas, and neighborhood commercial districts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Billy Nungesser".

Billy Nungesser  
Lieutenant Governor



Winnsboro Main Street



# INTRODUCTION

***You don't have to be in the state long to know that Louisiana is special.***

There is an undeniable vibrancy, a culture of generosity, and passion that is impossible to measure—though some have tried. A 2010 American Community Survey brief shows that Louisiana has the highest percentage of residents who were born there, meaning that native Louisianians either stay or come back.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps even more compelling is a 2014 paper released by the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research, entitled “Unhappy Cities.” Of the top 10 U.S. cities with the highest reported happiness, four cities in Louisiana were included: Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Houma.<sup>2</sup> No other state claimed more than one spot. Louisiana Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser was not surprised by these results: “There is no doubt that Louisiana is known for its music, food, and culture, but what really sets Louisiana apart is its people. As I travel our great state, what really stands out to me is the generosity and the passion of everyone I encounter. This passion lends itself to the work our office does in facilitating downtown revitalization efforts in local communities.”

Folks in Louisiana embrace sharing, whether that be passing on a sacred family recipe, theatrically relaying a cajun folktale or ghost story, or teaching newcomers the fastest way to peel a crawfish. As Louisiana author Ian McNulty says, nobody makes a gumbo for one. Underpinning this obvious zest for life is a strong foundation of community, and a community is the condition of knowing a place has been shared over time. Louisiana is rich in shared history, and its colorful culinary and musical traditions are owed to the diverse people and cultures that made the state home in the past and present. The blending of French, African, Caribbean, Spanish, Native American, Latino, and Vietnamese traditions, to name only a small few, have created a unique regional culture unlike any place in the world. A deep sense of pride for this cultural complexity manifests in a passionate attachment to place, and Louisianians are not afraid to share it.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-07.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Dana McMahan, “Why people in Louisiana are so happy (and how you can be too).” TODAY. <https://www.today.com/money/why-people-louisiana-are-so-happy-how-you-can-be-1D79966402>

Main Street, similarly, is about sharing—sharing knowledge, resources, and tools for the advancement of the community. Main Streets are also places for cultural exchange, and Louisiana communities take full advantage. Main Street began in the late 20th century, when many downtowns were suffering disinvestment and neglect. The Main Street Four-Point Approach® was created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in an effort to revive historic downtown commercial districts. The power and value of its four points—Organization, Economic Vitality, Design, and Promotion—have proven successful in over 40 states and more than 2,500 communities, making Main Street a major engine of economic development in the context of historic preservation. The Main Street program helps build the capacity of each participating community by providing technical assistance, training, and resources. Largely volunteer-driven, it is one of the most cost-effective economic development strategies in the United States. Main Street is successful where residents have a strong emotional, social, and civic connection to place—and Louisiana is such a place.

It is also important that Main Street programs deliver visible results, both from shorter-term, high-impact projects that energize the community, and from long-term goals and visioning that bring about substantial positive change. Public resources are scarce, and competition for private resources can be intense. This is especially true in Louisiana, where the economy is largely dependent on the success of the oil industry. Over the last decade, with plummeting global oil prices, Louisiana has felt the squeeze with the impact first being felt in the state budget, and later in freezes on new construction and significant job loss. Under such circumstances, it is critical to demonstrate impactful and productive use of financial resources and volunteer hours, and to show how those translate into new jobs and revenue.

This report was commissioned to evaluate the impact of Louisiana Main Street throughout its 34-year lifespan. In terms of both quantitative and qualitative measures, Main Street communities provide valuable contributions to the economic, social, and cultural health of Louisiana.

**“THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT LOUISIANA IS KNOWN FOR ITS MUSIC, FOOD, AND CULTURE, BUT WHAT REALLY SETS LOUISIANA APART IS ITS PEOPLE.”**  
- LT. GOVERNOR BILLY NUNGESSER

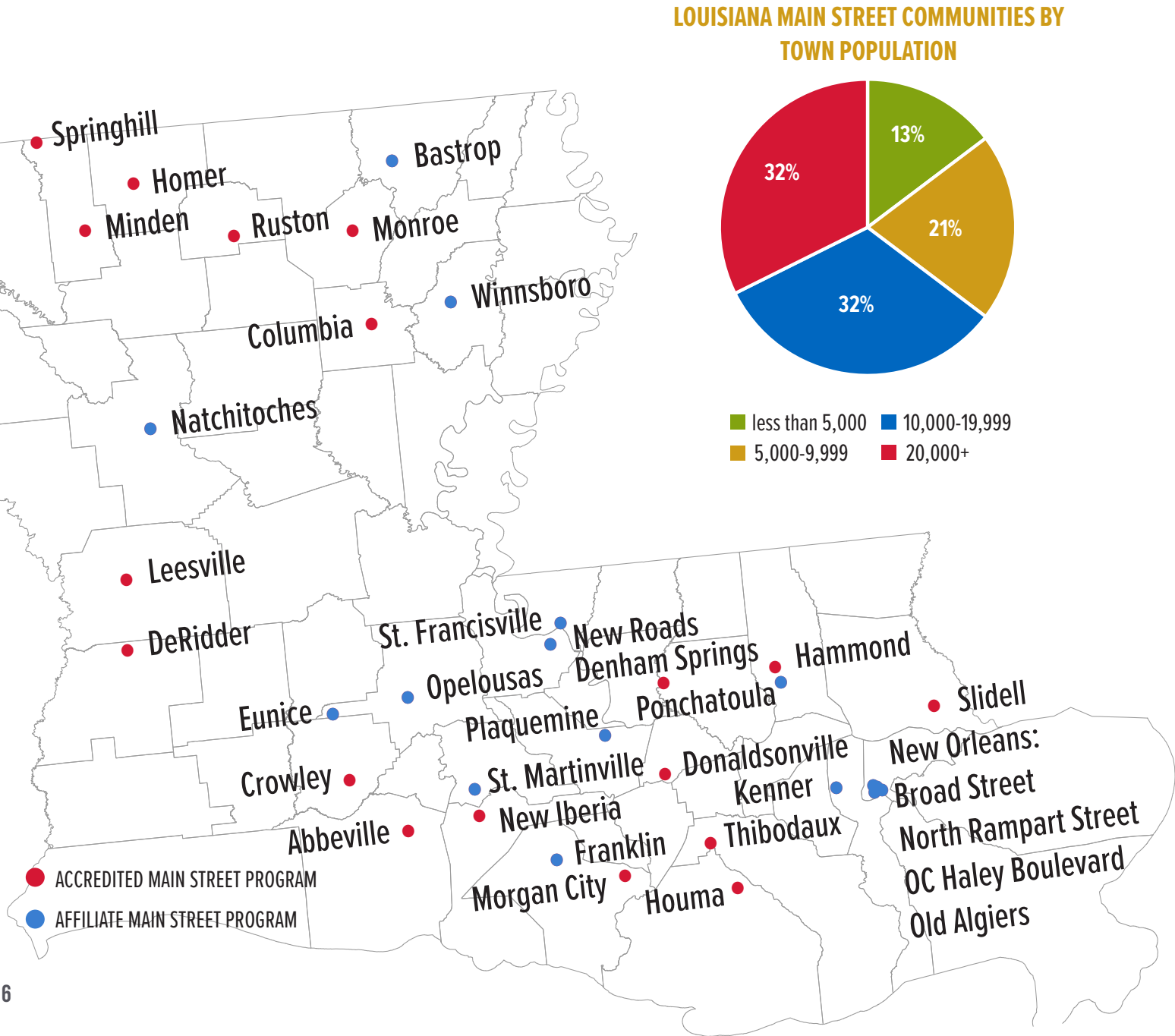
Denham Springs Main Street



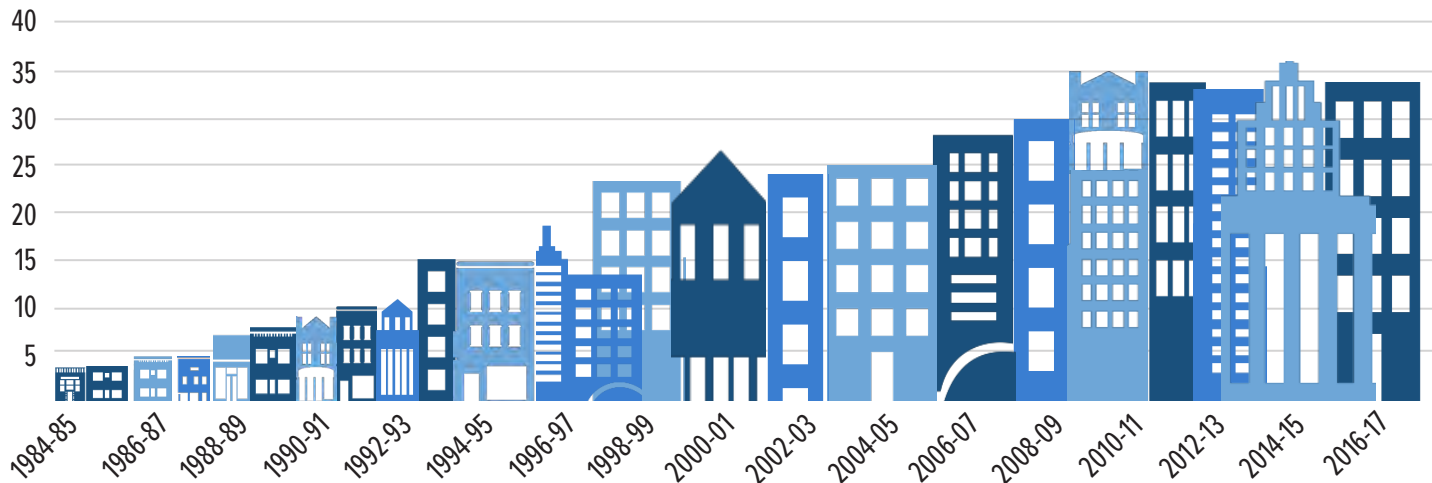
# LOUISIANA MAIN STREET

Since 1984, Louisiana Main Street (LMS) has helped over 40 communities with design, planning, staff training, and capacity building. The program began with 4 Main Street towns—Donaldsonville, Franklin, Hammond, and Houma—and today consists of 34 active programs. These programs serve communities of all sizes, from towns of under 500 people, to cities like New Orleans where there are 4 active urban main street programs.

Main Street America™ currently consists of two tiers: Affiliate and Accredited. Affiliate programs are organizations that have demonstrated commitment to comprehensive community revitalization. This level of membership allows communities that are interested in learning about the Main Street model to access the national network’s resources, and it allows those organizations that do not yet have the capacity for full designation to begin their revitalization efforts. A Main Street American Accredited™ program signifies a commitment to comprehensive revitalization, community engagement, and rigorous outcome measurement. This tier describes communities who have fully implemented a Main Street program and meet all 10 criteria of achievement as established by the National Main Street Center. Accreditation standards are slightly more rigorous, requiring an active board of directors, committees, an operating budget, and a program manager. Louisiana Main Street currently has 18 Accredited programs and 16 Affiliate programs.



ACTIVE MAIN STREET PROGRAMS



## THE PAST AND FUTURE OF LOUISIANA MAIN STREET

The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism created a strategic plan for each of its departments for Fiscal Years 2017-2018 through 2012-2022. Louisiana Main Street sits under the Office of Cultural Development (OCD), and the program is situated to play a significant role in the achievement of OCD’s goals. Louisiana Main Street is employed strategically in Objective 3, and called out explicitly in Objective 6 of OCD’s strategic plan.

### FROM THE OCD STRATEGIC PLAN:

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Assist in the restoration of 2,000 historic properties by 2022.

State Outcome Goal: Economic Development

Strategies:

- 3.1 Increase the number of historic properties listed in the National Register.
- 3.2 Administer federal and state tax credit programs for the restoration of historic commercial and residential buildings.
- 3.3 Allocate and oversee funds for the restoration of properties as a result of Section 106 mitigation.
- 3.4 Provide funding for the Main Street Facade Restoration program.
- 3.5 Fully implement federal and state programs mandated for the purpose of this objective.

**OBJECTIVE 6:** Create 2,000 new jobs by recruiting new businesses and supporting existing businesses in designated Main Street historic districts between 2018-2022.

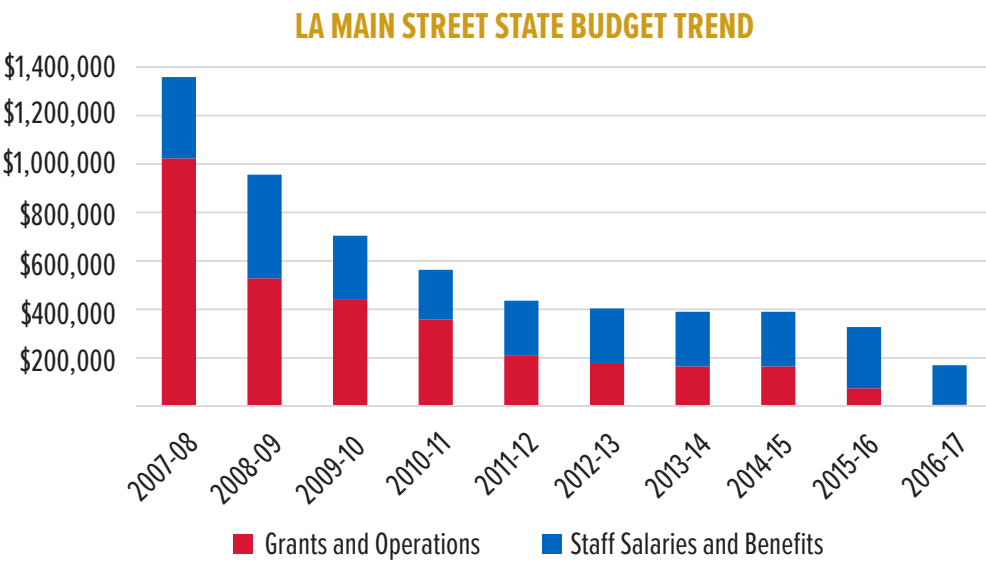
State Outcome Goal: Economic Development

Strategies

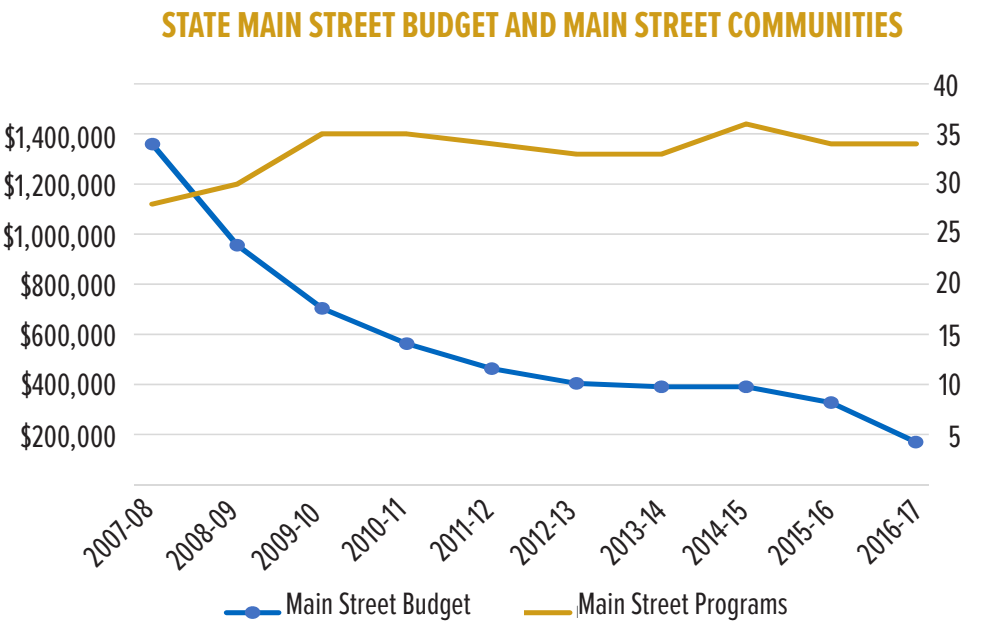
- 6.1 Fund and supervise Main Street historic revitalization programs and Certified Local Governments in rural communities as well as in traditional commercial areas in larger cities.
- 6.2 Fully implement federal and state programs mandated for the purpose of this objective.



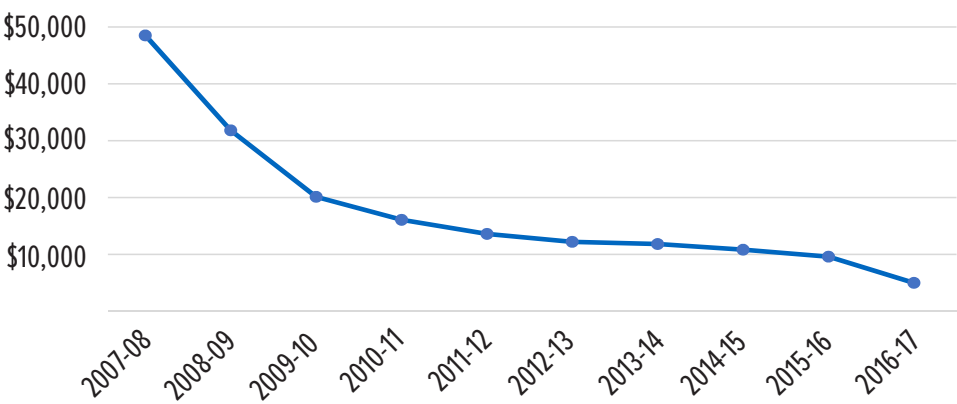
The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism clearly sees the value of Louisiana Main Street both as a historic preservation tool and as a strategy for economic development. Yet, for the past 10 years, Louisiana Main Street’s budget has been dwindling. In 2007, 75% of the state program’s budget went to grants and operations. These funds supported the Louisiana Main Street Redevelopment Grant—which provided dollar-for-dollar matching funds toward hard costs for the preservation of historic commercial buildings in designated Louisiana Main Street towns—Main to Main grants, workshop supplies, travel, etc. But, by 2016, the state program could only allocate 4% of its significantly reduced budget for these purposes.



As the number of active Main Street towns increased, the state program’s capacity to support them steadily decreased. By 2017, this meant Louisiana Main Street could allocate less than \$5,000 per Main Street program.



**STATE MAIN STREET BUDGET PER MAIN STREET COMMUNITY**



Despite these budgetary challenges, the Main Street towns of Louisiana have made remarkable progress. This report was commissioned to demonstrate the value of Louisiana Main Street, and the pages that follow outline the ways and means—both quantitatively and qualitatively— the Main Street process has impacted the state of Louisiana.

The historic Frankel Building is a gem in downtown Crowley that has been rehabilitated with the help of the Louisiana Main Street grant program. The \$10,000 matching grant allowed local developers to restore the brick exterior, canopy, and transom windows.



**BEFORE:**



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Widest Selection of  
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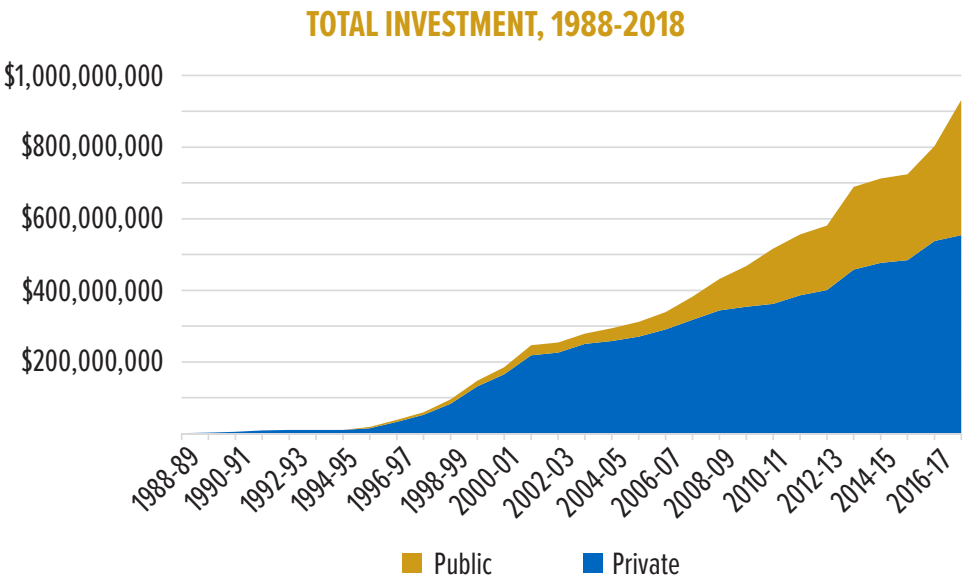
Brandt's Jewelry  
Crowley Main Street



# THE IMPACTS

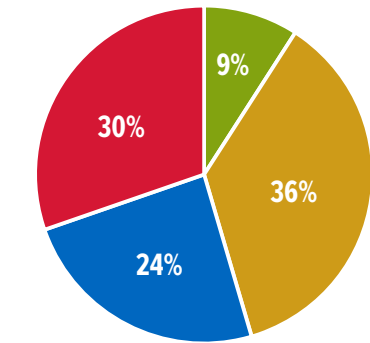
## TOTAL MAIN STREET INVESTMENT

Since 1988, over \$931 million has been invested in the buildings, infrastructure, and public improvements of Main Street districts. 60% of this was from the private sector, which has invested more than \$553 million in rehabilitation and new construction in these downtowns. These investments included everything from streetlamps and new sidewalks to facade improvements and full building rehabilitation.<sup>1</sup>

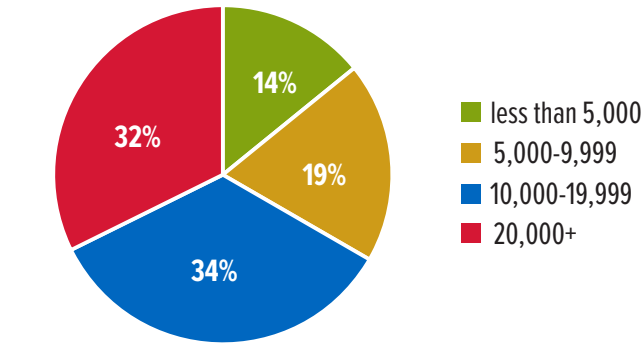


These investments have not only been made in larger cities like New Orleans, Monroe, or Hammond. Towns with more than 20,000 people only saw 31% of the total share of investment. 36% of these investments were made in towns with between 5,000 and 10,000 people. The ten towns that have less than 5,000 people have attracted over \$67.8 million in public and private investment.<sup>2</sup> Towns that have less than 10,000 people have captured 45% of the total investment.


### TOTAL INVESTMENT BY TOWN SIZE



### PRIVATE INVESTMENT BY TOWN SIZE



<sup>1</sup> The LMS reporting system does not distinguish dollars spent on new construction vs. rehabilitation.  
<sup>2</sup> There have been 10 towns with populations of less than 5,000 people in the LMS program since 1988. As of 2018, there are only 5.



**THE 10 SMALLEST LOUISIANA MAIN STREET TOWNS—WITH A COMBINED POPULATION OF ROUGHLY 32,000 PEOPLE—HAVE ATTRACTED MORE TOTAL INVESTMENT THAN NEW ORLEANS, A CITY OF NEARLY 400,000.**

While some might suspect that a disproportionate amount of these dollars are going to New Orleans, that just isn't the case. Since 1988, New Orleans has captured \$60,877,671 in public and private investment—just 8% of the statewide total investment—despite having had six Main Street Programs in that time frame. If you combine the population of the 10 Main Street towns with populations under 5,000, they would equate to a city of roughly 32,000 people. With \$67.8 million in public and private investment, these towns have attracted more total investment than a city of nearly 400,000! The reality is that Main Street towns of all sizes are attracting significant investment.

**TOTAL INVESTMENT (WITHOUT NEW ORLEANS)**

Town Size	Percentage
less than 5,000	10%
5,000-9,999	39%
10,000-19,999	27%
20,000+	24%

Main Street is economic development in the context of historic preservation, but that doesn't mean that the program freezes these streets in time. Between rehabilitation and new construction, over \$460.5 million have been invested in Main Street buildings. Not surprisingly, most of those dollars were invested in larger Main Street cities, where acquisition costs can be greater, buildings larger, capital more readily available, and economic opportunities more diverse. Yet the ten towns with populations under 5,000 people—which combined, would create a town with a population of roughly 32,000 people—have invested over \$37.4 million in new construction and rehabilitation on their Main Streets. These building investments put vacant buildings back on line, or increase the property value of buildings already in use. This means greater property tax revenue for local governments that depend heavily on property taxes to pay teachers, hire police, and fix potholes.

**CUMULATIVE BUILDING INVESTMENT IN LA MAIN STREET PROGRAM**

Year	Cumulative Investment (\$)
1988-89	0
1990-91	0
1992-93	0
1994-95	0
1996-97	0
1998-99	0
2000-01	0
2002-03	0
2004-05	0
2006-07	0
2008-09	0
2010-11	0
2012-13	0
2014-15	0
2016-17	0

**BUILDING INVESTMENT BY TOWN POPULATION**

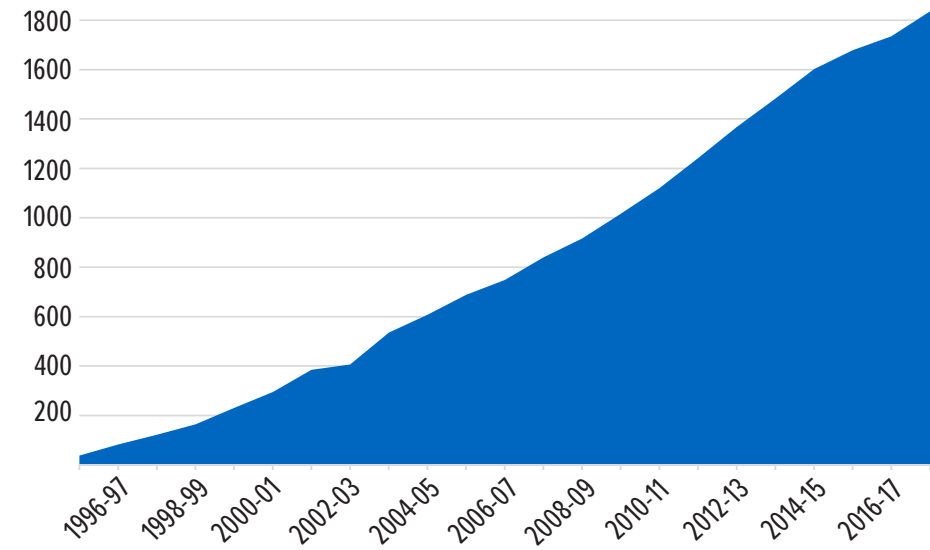
Town Population	Percentage
less than 5,000	8%
5,000-9,999	13%
10,000-19,999	30%
20,000+	50%



# NEW BUSINESSES

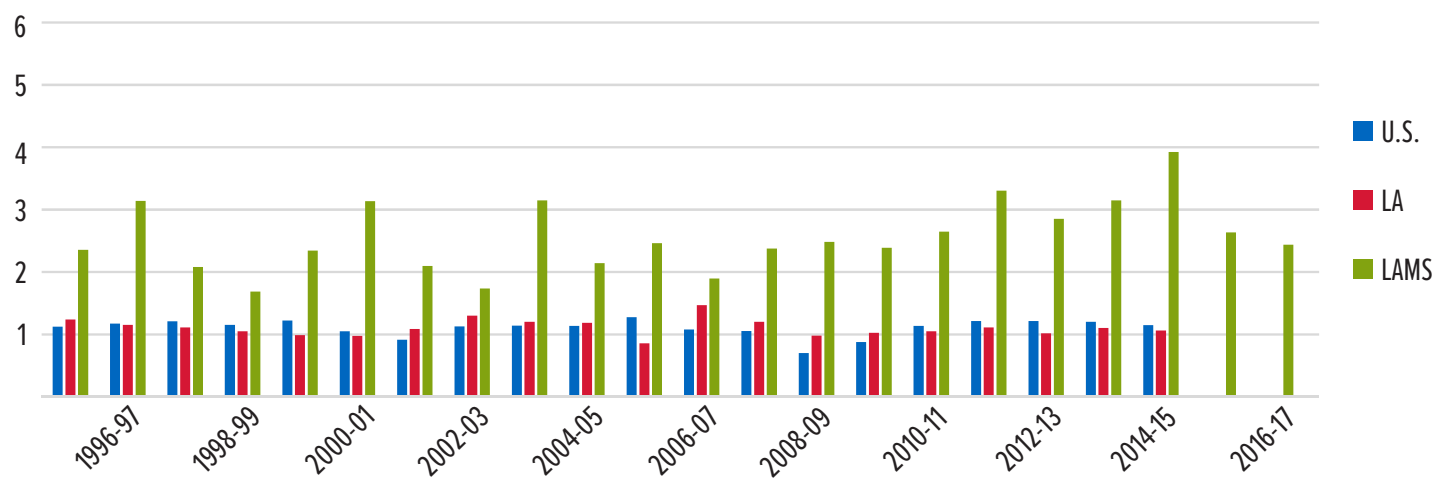
The activation of vacant storefronts is critical for revitalization efforts, and being able to document small town business growth is a powerful indicator that these efforts are working. The number of net new businesses since 1995 tops 1,830, which breaks down to an average of 83 new businesses a year. Each new business is a small-scale, but powerful, economic engine that creates jobs, sales tax revenue, and overall momentum for the street.

CUMULATIVE NET NEW BUSINESSES  
1995-2018



While the cumulative total of new businesses over time is an impressive statistic, it is an incomplete metric for economic growth. A more useful test of local economic health is the relationship between the number of businesses that open vs. those that close. Fortunately, Main Street communities are required to report not only when new businesses open, but also when businesses in their districts go out of business. During the last ten years, many communities struggled under the Great Recession—nationally, for every 100 businesses that opened, 93 closed.<sup>3</sup> But, every single year since 1995, Louisiana Main Street communities, as a whole, have far outperformed both the national and statewide patterns.<sup>4</sup>

RATIO OF BUSINESS GAIN/BUSINESS LOSS



<sup>3</sup> 2006-2014.  
<sup>4</sup> These numbers represent the years 1995-2018, as data collection prior to 1995 was inconsistent. <sup>4</sup> State and national data are not available yet for most recent years.

The relationship between business openings and closings can be expressed as a ratio. For a town that saw 12 new businesses open, but 10 other businesses shut their doors, this ratio would be expressed as 1.2. The entire US economy was hit hard in the recession—which officially lasted 18 months beginning in 2007—but the aftershocks were felt by communities for years. Louisiana did not fare as poorly as many other states during this time, and it actually outperformed the national average in the years between 2007 and 2010. In 2006, the national open-close ratio was 1.1, meaning that for every 110 businesses that opened, 100 closed. By 2009, that ratio was down to 0.84, meaning only 84 businesses opened for every 100 that closed. That same year, Louisiana businesses saw an even 1.0, meaning that roughly the same amount of businesses closed as opened. But in Main Street towns, that ratio was a remarkable 2.4. In every single year, Louisiana Main Street towns have been not only more stable, but thriving.

Hannah Fulgium and Jill Daggett Deshotel opened Shabby to Chic Salon & Spa on Crowley’s Main Street in 2017. They are located in the newly renovated W.W. Duson Building, renovated by local developer Ed Habitz. Jill said, “I wanted to be downtown so that we could be right in the heart of the city, around all the other businesses. We have generated more business since we moved here, and we’ve been here only for a year. So we are very optimistic to the future. Hannah and I both like the historic feel, and we are happy to be here.”



Shabby to Chic Salon & Spa

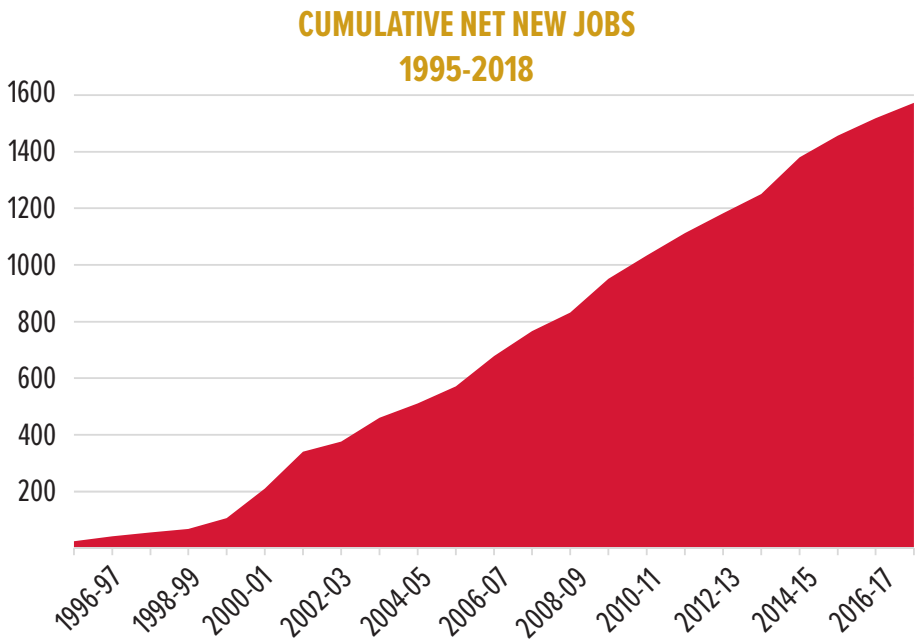
Photo credit: Crowley Main Street Facebook Page

Crowley Main Street

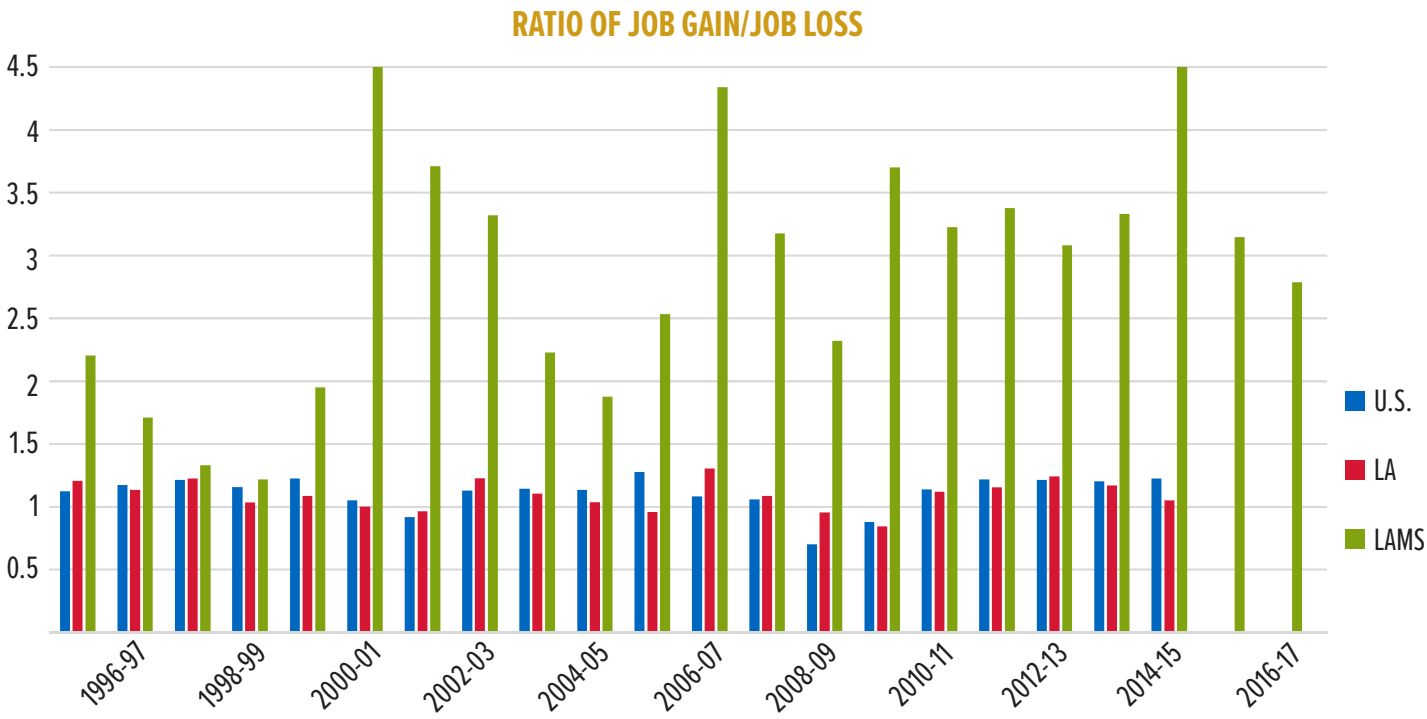


# NEW JOBS

New businesses also mean new jobs. Since 1995, Louisiana Main Street districts have seen more than 7,800 net new jobs. Of all of the net jobs gained in Louisiana Main Street districts, more than half came from towns with populations of more than 20,000. However, even the smallest of Main Street towns still produced net new jobs over the last decade.



During a recession, jobs are certainly lost, but even the strongest local economy during the best economic times will see some job losses. Again, it's a matter of ratios. Even in years where the state of Louisiana fared worse than the national average, Louisiana Main Street communities saw more jobs created than lost.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> State and national data are not available yet for most recent years.



Cafe Reconcile is a mission-driven restaurant that provides at-risk youth with job training in the hospitality and restaurant industries. The free training gives participants the opportunity to earn up to \$1,100 while in the program, as well as access to life skills classes and employment consulting. The cafe employs around 30 staff members and handles about 120 kids each year. In some cases, the students come back to work at Cafe Reconcile as full-time employees.



Photo credit: OC Haley Boulevard GMA7A Video

OC Haley Boulevard, New Orleans

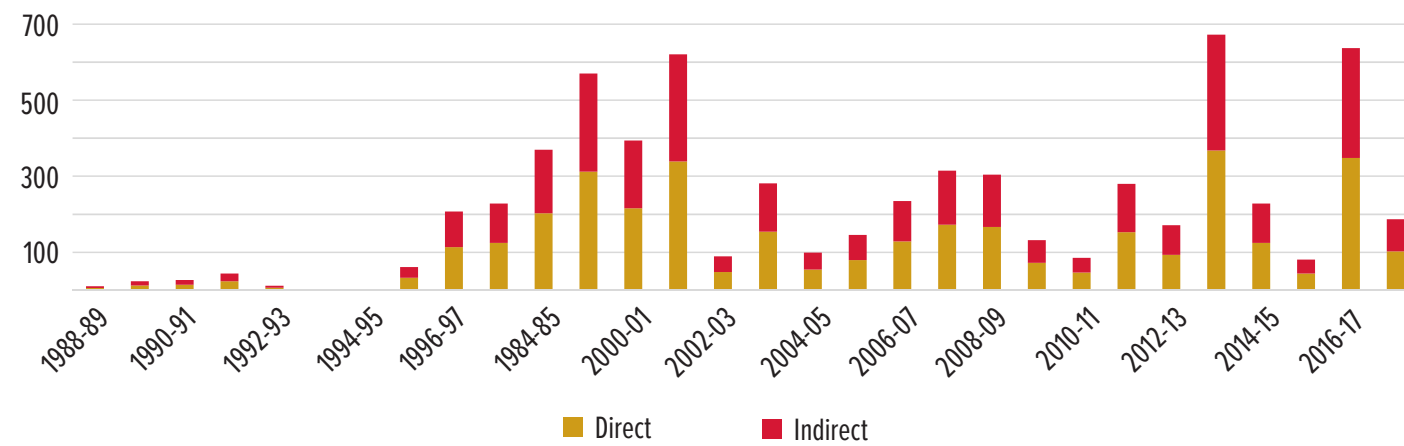


NEW JOBS ON MAIN STREET HAVE MEANT AN AVERAGE OF \$7 MILLION IN INCOME FROM DIRECT JOBS AND \$2.4 MILLION FROM INDIRECT JOBS EACH YEAR.

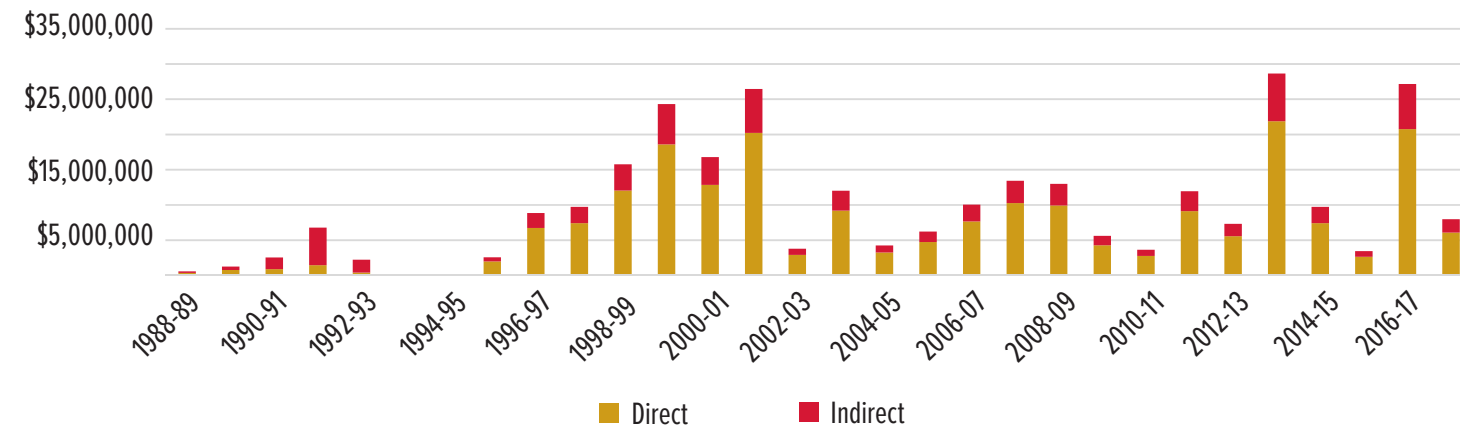


While the number varies greatly from year to year, the average number of jobs generated from private investment in Main Street districts has been 119 direct jobs and 98 indirect jobs each year for the last 30 years. These jobs have meant an average of \$7 million in income from direct jobs and \$2.4 million from indirect each year. In extremely conservative measures, the state has collected an average of at least \$190,000 a year in state income tax from jobs created by Main Street investment.

**JOBS FROM PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN MAIN STREET DISTRICTS**



**INCOME FROM PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN MAIN STREET DISTRICTS**



Cassidy Keim, Karl Puljak, and Dean Norton—two architects and a business man—are behind Ruston's first microbrewery. Cassidy was a student of Karl's at the nearby Louisiana Tech University School of Design. Dean was the owner of Trenton Street Cafe, one of the earliest restaurants to open in Ruston's Main Street district. Though Cassidy has worked in larger architecture firms in cities like Los Angeles and Phoenix, he says the team couldn't pass on the creative opportunities that Ruston presents—both professional opportunities to transform downtown spaces like Utility Brewery Company through design, but also to participate in the burgeoning artistic culture in Ruston.



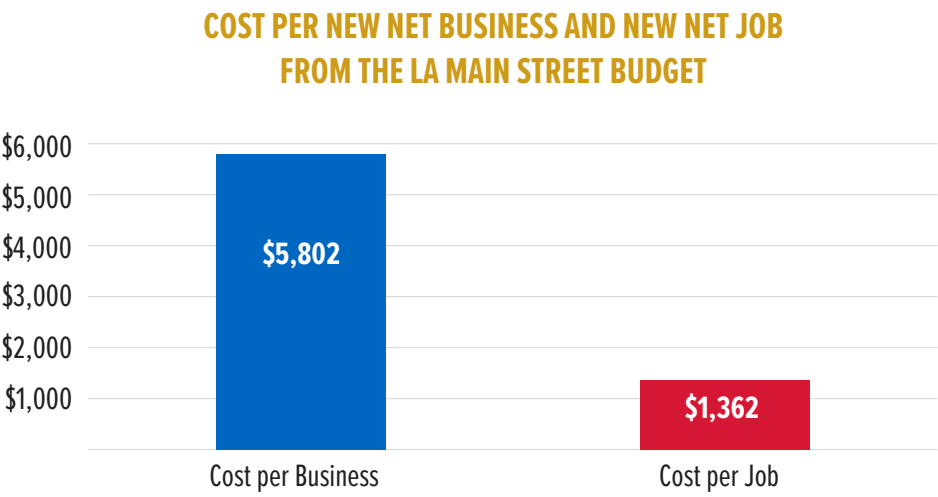
Ruston Main Street



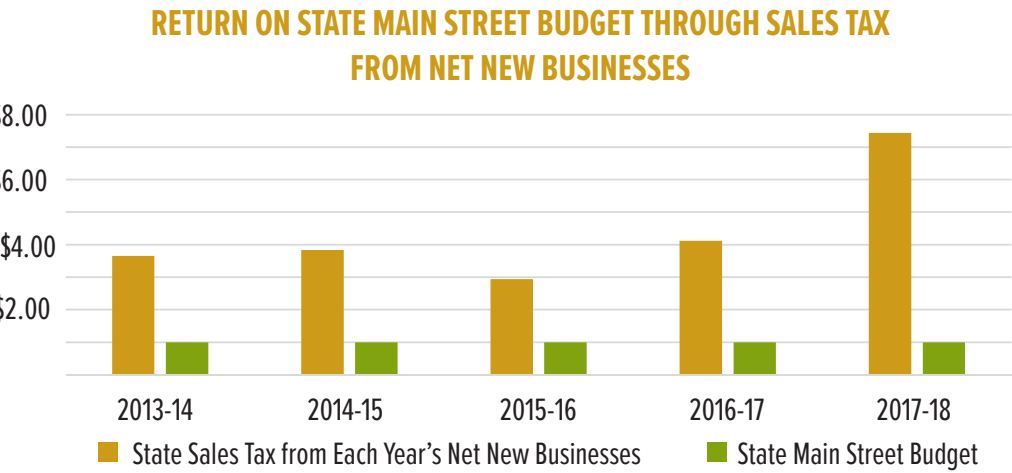


# RETURNS ON THE STATE BUDGET

As noted earlier, Main Street Communities over the last decade have seen the addition of 7,800 net new jobs. That puts the cost from the Louisiana Main Street budget at only \$1,362 per job. Job creation is not cheap. Even an active labor market program—which connects workers to existing jobs—runs somewhere between \$500 and \$3,000 per job. In contrast the creation of an entirely new job requires associated capital and operational expenditures. One study estimated that, in calculating the associated costs of opening a coffee shop that employs three to seven people, each new job created might represent between \$25,000 and \$35,000 in cost. Investing in Main Streets means investing in cost-effective job creation.



To calculate some return on dollars spent through the Main Street budget, one can look to the number of net new businesses. With 1830 net new businesses, the state’s investment then amounted to \$5,802 per net new business. Conservatively, the sales tax generated for the state treasury during each of the last five years, by each of those net new businesses, was somewhere between \$2.90 and \$7.40 for every \$1 in the state Main Street Program budget. The graph underrepresents the real returns to the state. While the cost per net new business is a one-time expenditure, the sales taxes are generated for the state each year the business is in operation.



Sew Much More Quilting and Embroidery is a new business on Winnsboro’s Main Street that is already beloved by both recreational sewers and serious quilters. The shop does impressive business, bringing visitors from around the region to Winnsboro’s Main Street for their professional expertise, vast selection of fabrics and patterns, and friendly atmosphere. “Sew Much More” is an appropriate name, as the business is no small operation—the back room features several industrial sewing machines and long arm quilting machines. The ladies at Sew Much More are active in the social and cultural life of Winnsboro’s Main Street community, offering sewing classes and demonstrations for both beginners and children.

Winnsboro Main Street



# EAT SLEEP READ LOCAL



APRIL 2018 MAY 2018

WRITE IN IRELAND & ITALY

WINTER 2018 OKRA PICKS

MAY 2018

ORPHAN MONSTER SPY

THE UNICORN RESCUE

REBOUND

KWAME ALEXANDER



Genius

10 days to Subtraction Mastery

10 days to Multiplication Mastery

recharge

Gobblet

Find us on Facebook

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Cavalier House Books  
Denham Springs Main Street



# CASE STUDY TOWNS

HOMER



RUSTON



WINNSBORO



CROWLEY



OC HALEY BOULEVARD



## SHARING PLACE

While Main Street emphasizes measurable outcomes, the story is not just numbers. Main Street is about community—the condition of knowing a place is shared. The story cannot be told without recognizing the individuals and groups celebrating their downtowns and working together to reclaim public spaces, organize festivals, or to just practice yoga together. The five case study communities in this report demonstrate that the qualitative impacts of Main Street are every bit as impressive as the quantitative.

Photo Courtesy of Ruston Main Street





## CROWLEY, LOUISIANA: homegrown developers

POPULATION: 13,155

HOUSEHOLDS: 4,978

MEDIAN AGE: 36

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$27,433

Shabby to Chic  
Salon & Spa



SINCE 1999:



30299 | VOLUNTEER HOURS

4827

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS



83

NET NEW BUSINESSES



319

NET NEW JOBS



\$14,304,000

TOTAL INVESTMENT

Brandt's Jewelry  
Crowley Main Street





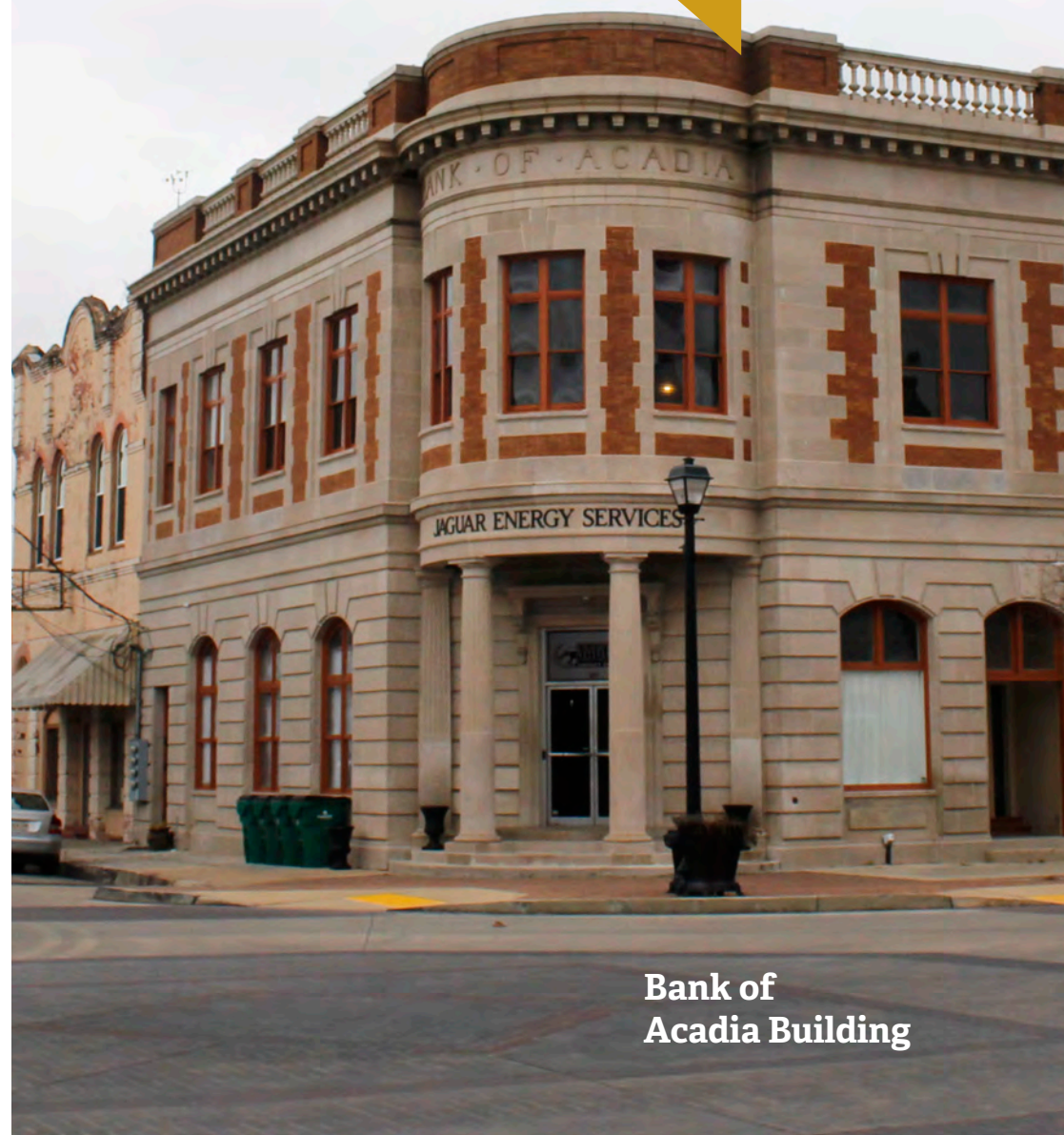


Rice Theater



Gremillion's Drugstore

"MAIN STREET  
HAS COME ALIVE."



Bank of  
Acadia Building

### CROWLEY MAIN STREET

Crowley is known as the rice capital of the world, a place where "life is rice and easy." It's location in the southwestern prairies of Louisiana can be attributed to the sheer force of will of one man. W.W. Duson was a newspaper man who saw the agricultural opportunity of the land in the 1840s, while others were still settling along the state's major rivers and tributaries. The city was laid out in an orderly one square mile grid, and the plan is still legible today, with a wide boulevard running down the center that ends at Acadia Parish Courthouse. The first rice mill was built in Crowley in 1893, and at one point in history, the region milled more rice annually than all of the rice-producing countries in the world. By the 1920s, the cheap and delicious grain formed the basis for nearly every Cajun dish. There are still mills lining Mill Street, and the Rice Interpretive Center features an exhibit that explains the impact of the industry on the area. Today, the International Rice Festival draws thousands of visitors for one weekend in October for music, food, and festivities.

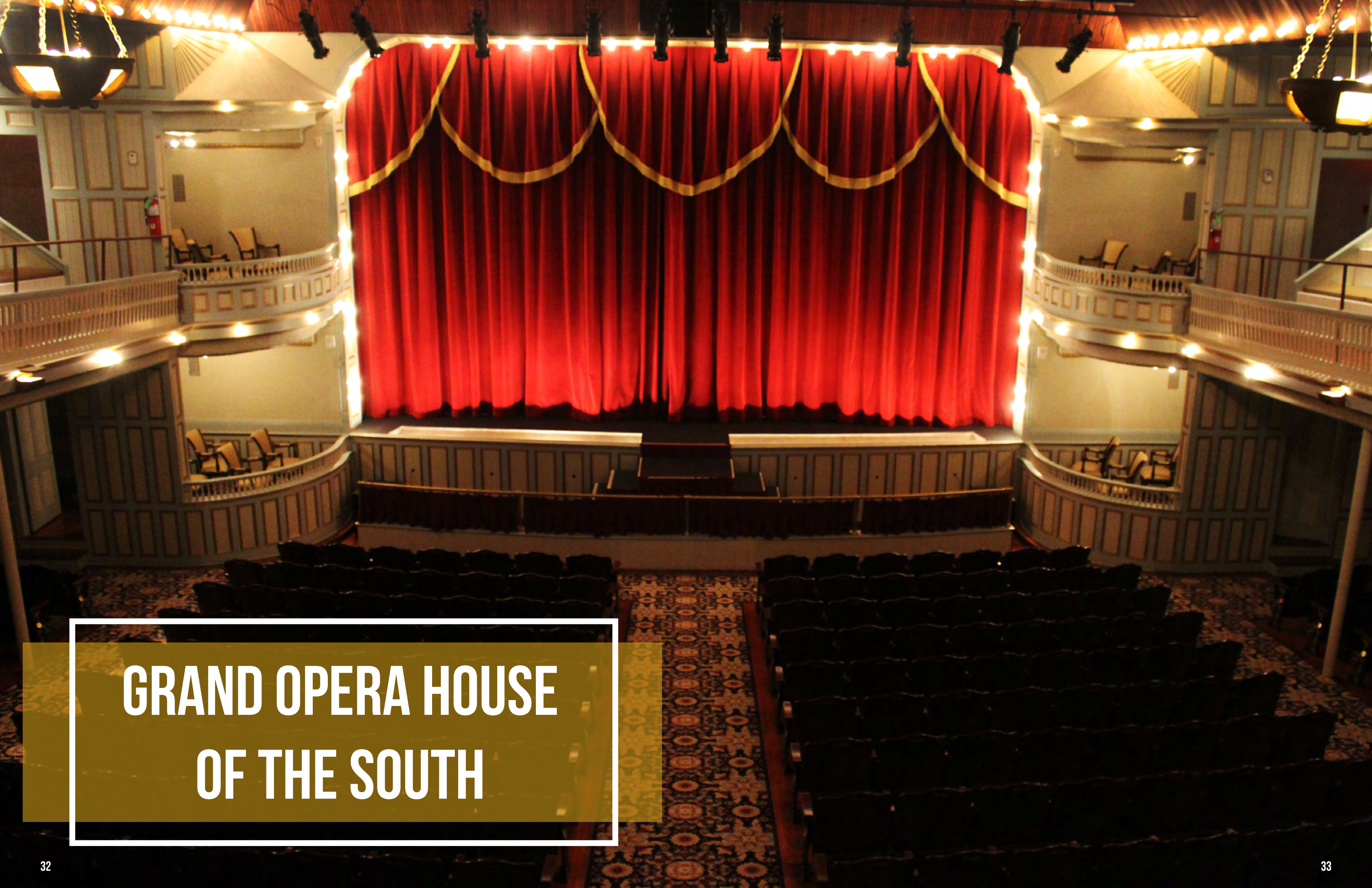
### SMALL TOWN DEVELOPERS

Crowley is a place people care about. That pride is obvious when one notices the combined efforts of the Main Street coordinator, the Crowley Arts Council, and some homegrown developers. One such developer is Ed Habitz, a local contractor who has taken on several rehabilitation projects on N. Parkerson Avenue, Crowley's Main Street. Ed first got involved with historic rehabilitation with the American Legion Building and later with the W.W. Duson building, named for the town's founder.

His most recent project transformed the Bank of Acadia building, a structure built around the turn of the 20th century and one of several iconic buildings on Crowley's Main Street. Ed says that without the support of Crowley Main Street, and the help of Main Street Manager Connie John, projects like this one are challenging. "But that's the great thing about working with these older buildings. There are grants available and people who want you to succeed." With the help of Louisiana Main Street, Ed received grant funding for the Bank of Acadia building for waterproofing, exterior masonry, and reintroducing wood windows in place of the aluminum casings that had been installed. He also received assistance through Main Street on the use of state and federal tax credits. Currently, the building functions as the offices for Jaguar Energy Services, bringing jobs to Crowley's downtown.

The Crowley Main Street program helps local developers and property owners to rehab their historic commercial properties through incentive grants requiring matching private funds, as well as assistance with tax abatement and tax credit programs for restoration projects. Since 1999, 17 storefronts have been rehabilitated with over \$131,600 in grant funding through Louisiana Main Street.



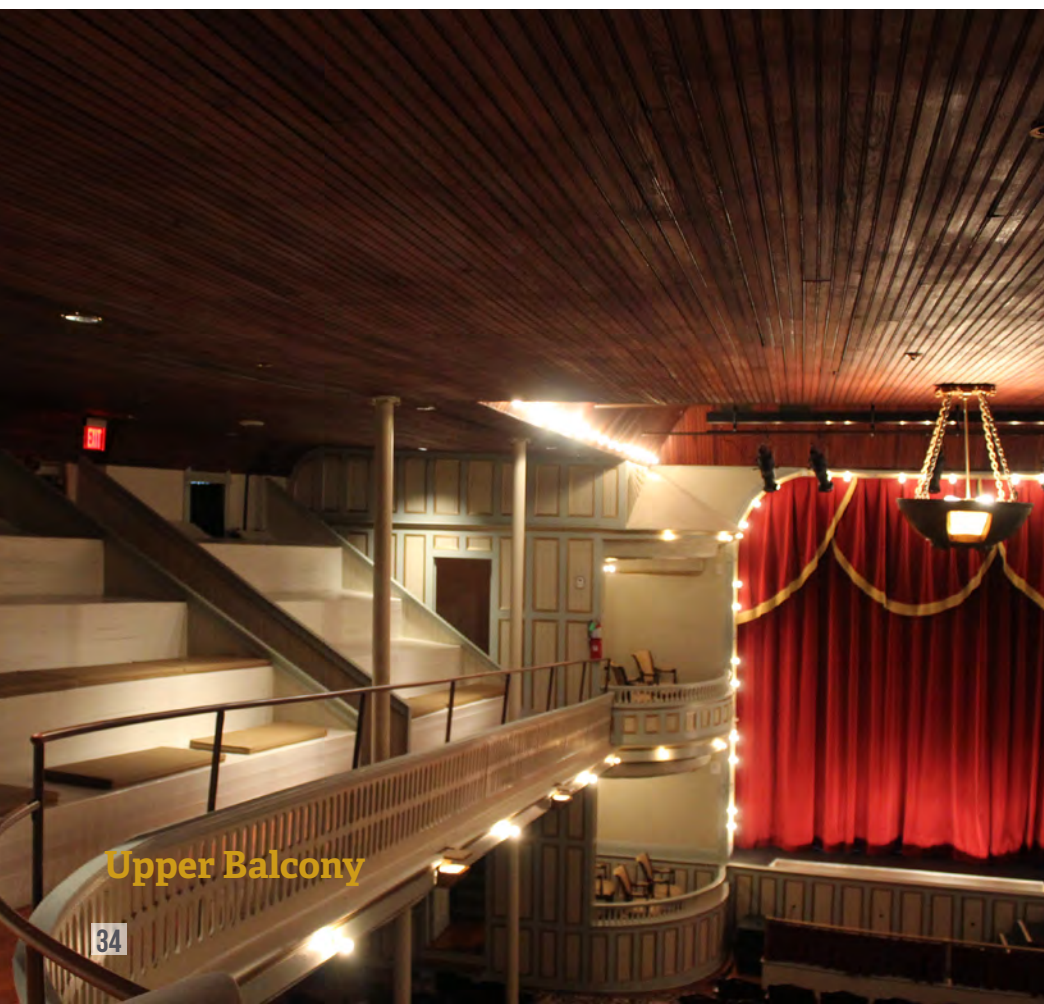


# GRAND OPERA HOUSE OF THE SOUTH





L.J. Gielen



Upper Balcony



Grand Opera House of the South

## THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE OF THE SOUTH

The Grand Opera House of the South is another of the incredible monuments gracing Crowley's Main Street that has been restored thanks to the combined efforts of the Main Street program and a hometown developer. Built in 1901, the Grand Opera House was, in fact, constructed to be the grandest theater between New Orleans and Houston. The two-story opera house was built with virgin Louisiana cypress, pine, and oak, and accented with tin tiles and angel medallions. The theater hosted vaudeville shows and minstrel performances in its early days, and silent movies and "talkies" (early sound films) as the film industry developed. Its stage has been graced by such auspicious names as Enrico Caruso, Madame de Vilchez-Bizzet of the Paris Opera, Babe Ruth, Buffalo Bill, William Jennings Bryan, and Clark Gable.

Luckily, for the 69 years that the Opera House was closed, it remained largely untouched. But by the time L.J. Gielen—a local restaurant owner and part owner of a construction company—purchased the building, the first floor was a hardware store, the grand staircase had been removed, and the second floor closed off for storage. In 2004, a 501(c)3 called the Grand Opera House of the South was created to own and operate the building, and following a \$4.5 million restoration, the Grand Opera House of the South reopened in 2008. The Opera house received several Redevelopment Incentive grants through Louisiana Main Street towards this restoration, \$1.3 million through the State of Louisiana Facility Planning and Control Division's Capital Outlay grants, and \$148,000 through the National Park Service's Save America's Treasures programs. With these funds, the opera house's magnificent staircase was completely reconstructed, the two-story theater space and balcony was restored, and the pressed-tin tiles were replaced. Even the four exclusive box seats framing the stage were restored, complete with plush armchairs and hand painted angel medallions.

Today, the Grand Opera House of the South brings a range of musical and theatrical performances to Crowley's Main Street. From country music headliners like 2018 Grammy Winners the Lost Bayou Ramblers, to performances by the Russian Ballet, and, of course, opera performances from the nearby University of Louisiana at Lafayette Opera, the Grand Opera House pulls people from near and far to experience the exquisitely restored setting. There is a tradition where performers sign the wall behind the stage, a tradition that continues to this day. Today you can see the names of contemporary artists scribbled next to the greats of 100 years ago.

Not long after this restoration, L.J. and his wife, "Chee Chee," decided they didn't want to miss out on all the opportunity and excitement coming to Crowley's Main Street. "My wife said, 'I don't want to be far away from everything.' So I said, 'Ok.'" L.J. sold his home in the country, bought a building on Crowley's Main Street, and renovated the entire second floor for a "Southern Homes and Gardens"-worthy apartment. They are hoping that others follow their lead and that more folks move back to Main Street.

In 2018, Crowley Main Street will facilitate two types of competitive grants: a \$10,000 grant for major projects, and a \$2,500 grant for minor projects available for interior or exterior rehabilitation. The beautiful work completed on Crowley's Main Street thus far stands as a testament to the impact of these Louisiana Main Street grants, promising more great things to come. Ed Habitz, as he looks toward renovating another building in the Main Street district, said, "In the last four or five years, Main Street has come alive."



# RUSTON

*Louisiana*

## RUSTON, LOUISIANA: town and gown in harmony

POPULATION: 22,245

HOUSEHOLDS: 7,806

MEDIAN AGE: 24

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$26,637

**Ruston Mural**

Photo Courtesy of Ruston Main Street



# SINCE 1989:



**16963** | VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

**4487** | TOTAL  
VOLUNTEERS



**80** | NET  
NEW BUSINESSES



**606** | NET  
NEW JOBS



**\$13,439,000** | TOTAL  
INVESTMENT



**Downtown Ruston**

Photo Courtesy of Ruston Main Street





“I HAVE LIVED ALL OVER THE WORLD, AND I DID NOT KNOW PLACES LIKE THIS EXISTED.”

The Fashion



Ruston Fashion Week  
Photo Courtesy of Ruston Main Street



Dixie Theater

### RUSTON MAIN STREET

Ruston was founded as a railroad town shortly after the Civil War, one of many towns that developed as the Pacific Railroad strung its tracks around Northern Louisiana. When a second railroad came to town in 1900, development exploded with a collection of fine structures housing merchants and service providers who worked with nearby cotton farmers.<sup>6</sup> Brick was the building material of choice, and proximity to the railroad was key. A partnership was struck where store owners who agreed to construct quality, brick buildings that faced what is now Railroad Park were given lots to build on by the railroad company.<sup>7</sup> It was also right around this time another institution that would define the physical and social character of Ruston was founded: Louisiana Tech University was established in 1894, then called the Industrial Institute and College of Louisiana.

The train still runs through Ruston and Louisiana Tech is still a thriving institution of higher learning, but that doesn’t mean that nothing has changed in Ruston. The completion of Interstate-20 in the 1960s, combined with the arrival of big-box stores in the area, significantly impacted Ruston’s downtown.

Enter Main Street. In 1989, the City of Ruston was awarded a grant to begin its Main Street program, and in the early 1990s, it worked to establish a local downtown historic district. Even early on, Ruston Main Street saw itself as the public relations tool that local business owners needed. “Main Street began cooperative advertising of events downtown and continued to urge merchants to partner with local groups in creating things like football pep rallies and school choir holiday concerts in the park—all aimed at luring people downtown and making cash registers ring,” wrote Nancy Bergeron in an article celebrating over three decades of successful Main Street work. In the 1980s, when Trenton Street Cafe opened, people started to eat downtown again. Food has always been an important anchor for Main Street communities, and perhaps especially so in Louisiana. Ruston’s Main Street district now claims 8 restaurants, a new microbrewery, and the first food truck to operate in the Central Business District!

Today, Ruston boasts a bustling 18-block downtown district, and in 2018 they won the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street of the Year Award. This district is made up of unique shopping experiences, diverse dining options, and frequent arts and entertainment events, including Fashion Week, an event started by longtime business owner Kelly Hogan. Fashion Week is a week-long celebration showcasing the variety of fashion retail available in Ruston’s downtown. Shops and boutiques host events and offer sales throughout the week, culminating in a huge runway show and street party that residents look forward to all year.

<sup>6</sup> Main Streets of Louisiana, Anne Butler.  
<sup>7</sup> Nancy Bergeron. “Program Buys Downtown” The Ruston Daily Leader.



# UTILITY BREWING COMPANY





**“WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL AT [LOUISIANA] TECH, I WOULD GO BACK TO MY HOMETOWN ON THE WEEKENDS. BUT NOW THERE ISN’T AN EVENT DOWNTOWN THAT I WANT TO MISS.”**

Louisiana Tech University



Dog Days of Summer



Railway Coffee

## AN ENGAGED BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Like Kelly, the owners of these businesses are not passive in the Main Street process. Ruston Main Street holds monthly “Meet Me On Main Street” meetings to discuss the continued development of Downtown Ruston—and they are extremely well attended. “If you don’t go to the meetings, you feel like you’re missing out,” said one business owner, “you have to be at the meetings to keep up with all the events that are going on.” Ruston Main Street sees itself as a partner to the creative and innovative entrepreneurs downtown, and the Ruston business community is highly engaged in seeing the city as a whole thrive. “Main Street is a partner to the businesses. Main Street brings the events that help the businesses stay open,” said another business owner. “We used to roll the streets up at 9, but now there’s not an empty parking space downtown.”

Nancy Bergeron explained that Main Street not only supports the business owners through coordination, it also brought grant opportunities that jump started preservation in the district. Since 2009, 17 historic buildings have been restored and renovated in the Main Street district and 2 more are underway. These funds, in turn, support local business owners, helping them create the kind of unique settings that their customers enjoy.


## TOWN AND GOWN

While the partnership between Main Street and its business owners is strong, the relationship between Main Street and the University might even be stronger. While in many college towns there may be a tension between town and gown—“town” being the non-academic population and “gown” being the university community—the city of Ruston has fully embraced itself as “Louisiana’s College Town,” serving both Louisiana Tech and Grambling University, a historically black university. Mayor Ronnie Walker says that 20 years ago, Ruston was a suitcase college town—students would come in for class for the week and go home for the weekends—but that is no longer the case. Today, Ruston is a 24/7 living and learning city, and he says that is thanks to the downtown. Kourtney Keim, a former Louisiana Tech student who now works in the Mayor’s Office said, “When I was in school at [Louisiana] Tech, I would go back to my hometown on the weekends. But now there isn’t an event downtown that I want to miss.”

In the summer, Ruston hosts “Dog Days of Summer,” a collaborative event held during Louisiana Tech’s orientation that introduces new students to Ruston’s downtown. The event includes a pep rally at Ruston’s Historic Railroad Park and a scavenger hunt through downtown businesses, bringing over 500 students and parents to Ruston’s Main Street on a hot summer night for a (very) warm welcome. Businesses stay open later to meet the students and to showcase their art and supplies. Louisiana Tech President Les Guice said, “We, as a university, try to push the things that differentiate us, and our downtown is one of those things.”

The city administration includes Main Street in the town’s budget, a blessing not all Main Street organizations can claim. Mayor Ronnie Walker knows that investments made in the downtown have paid off: “Downtown is where Ruston grew from; it is the heart of the city. And much like the body, you have to tend the heart.”





# ORETHA CASTLE HALEY BOULEVARD NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA:

**an urban approach**

**POPULATION: 6,417 (CENTRAL CITY)**

**HOUSEHOLDS: 5,476**

**MEDIAN AGE: 36.2**

**MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$22,500**

**Cafe ' Reconcile**

1922  
**FOERSTER BLDG**



# SINCE 2006:



**11381** | VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

**1607** | TOTAL  
VOLUNTEERS



**40** | NET  
NEW BUSINESSES

**176** | NET  
NEW JOBS



**\$6,252,000** | TOTAL  
INVESTMENT



CANO'S Creative Spaces  
Myrtle Banks Building





Central City Festival



Central City Festival

“THERE ARE JUST THINGS WE  
WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO  
DO WITHOUT MAIN STREET.”



OC Haley Blvd



OC Haley Blvd

## ORETHA CASTLE HALEY BOULEVARD AND CENTRAL CITY

For nearly two centuries, Central City has been home to New Orleans’s immigrant and working-class communities. Throughout the neighborhood’s history, Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard (OC Haley Boulevard) has long functioned as an incubator space that nurtures culturally diverse commercial, entrepreneurial, and artistic ventures. The boulevard, formerly named Dryades Street, is a historic commercial corridor that has undergone two centuries of transformation.

Early in its history, OC Haley Boulevard served as a racially diverse business district. African American, Eastern European, Italian, and Jewish merchants all owned and operated businesses side-by-side along the boulevard. The region thrived during the early 20th century, and at its height, OC Haley Boulevard boasted of over 200 commercial establishments. By the 1940s, OC Haley Boulevard became a shopping and entertainment alternative to nearby Canal Street for consumers who were not exactly welcomed in other districts. During the turbulent 1960s, OC Haley Boulevard became one of few streets in New Orleans where African Americans could shop safely. The broader Central City area was also home to the Civil Rights Movement in New Orleans. It was in Central City that Martin Luther King Jr. established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957.

In the 1980s, OC Haley Boulevard was posthumously renamed for Ms. Oretha Castle Haley, a young civil rights activist who in 1960 led a boycott of Dryades Street stores that would serve black customers, but not hire black employees. In the 1980s, like many Central City commercial districts, OC Haley Boulevard suffered disinvestment, and many buildings on the street fell into disrepair or stood empty. In 2006, 23 of the 50 listed properties were vacant, and there were only 9 occupied street-level retail spaces.

Fortunately, the work of several key partners over many years has reversed these trends: the Ashé Cultural Arts Center; the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority; the Gulf Coast Housing Partnership; and the Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchant & Business Association (OCHBMBA), the street’s resident Main Street organization. OCHBMBA has been a constant presence on OC Haley, leading strategic planning and facilitating investment since the 1990s, but the association only became a Main Street community in 2006. With this designation, OCHBMBA hired its first executive director, increasing its capacity to be an ally to other players on the street. “The Main Street approach is a framework that is adaptable,” says Linda Pompa, Executive Director of OCHBMBA and Main Street manager. “It works when an organization is just starting out, but it also can provide necessary structure to ongoing revitalization efforts.”

## CULTURAL ANCHORS

The Ashé Cultural Arts Center is the cultural anchor of OC Haley Boulevard and served as an early catalyst for the revival of the rest of the street. Ashé celebrates Afro-Caribbean arts and culture, African American commerce, and the civil rights heritage of Central City. It provides an accessible space for both emerging and established artists to present their work. The 18,200 square-foot, multi-use facility also features two exhibition halls, twenty-nine apartments, and the offices of OCHBMBA. The Center also hosts innovative programming, from original theater to exercise and dance programs, centered on health and human development. Art is used as a platform to discuss issues relevant to the African American community, from plays exploring race and racism to screenings of African American



# ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER







Cafe Reconcile



Dryades Public Market

films and documentaries. Annually, Ashé welcomes somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 visitors to be a part of the community's spiritual and physical development.

The Center's founder, Carol Bebel, has long been a force for good on OC Haley, a guardian angel that keeps a careful eye on the development of the boulevard. She sees the center not only as a place to experience beauty, but as a laboratory for creating a better quality of urban life. Carol says that the one thing often missing in the world of economic development is culture—that a creative community is an underutilized resource for inclusive progress. The Main Street organization has been a constant supporter of Ashé's ambition, advocating alongside them and acting as a sounding board for their shared vision: "There are just things that [Ashé] would not have been able to do without Main Street," Carol said. "They provide a voice and a think tank."

Another long-standing establishment on OC Haley Boulevard is Cafe Reconcile, a mission-driven restaurant that provides at-risk youth with job training in the hospitality and restaurant industries. The free training gives participants the opportunity to earn up to \$1,100 while in the program, as well as access to life skills classes and employment consulting. The restaurant proudly serves "soul-filled" dishes at some of the city's lowest prices, serving over 150 lunches a day and pulling lunch-goers from all over the city to OC Haley Boulevard. They see themselves not only as a job training program, but as a cornerstone for economic development in Central City, and more generally, as a gathering place for people to discuss difficult social problems. In 2013, the cafe reopened after renovating their prominent building on OC Haley Boulevard. This consisted of a \$6.5 million improvement that expanded their usable space from 2,400 to 17,000 square feet, funded through a 10-year capital campaign that included private donations, federal grants, and state and federal tax credits.<sup>8</sup> The cafe employs around 30 staff members and handles about 120 kids each year. In some cases, the students come back to work at Cafe Reconcile as full-time employees.

#### OTHER PARTNERS

The partnerships created on OC Haley Boulevard are what make it possible to combat the complex problems facing many urban commercial corridors with multidisciplinary, creative solutions. The strength of the OC Haley Boulevard Main Street district is the commitment of the many influential partners who are willing to work together to see the neighborhood thrive. Both the Gulf Coast Housing Partnership (GCHP) and the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA) have demonstrated their commitment not just through their investments—which have been significant—but by relocating their offices to OC Haley. The GCHP has invested over \$114 million into the district, and has created over 390 housing units. For every \$100 invested by GCHP, an additional \$76.3 has been generated in economic activity. A true partner for other organizations on the street, GCHP originally acquired the building that housed the Ashé Cultural Arts Center, and then allowed the organization to achieve full ownership of the building over time.

The Redevelopment Authority's contributions have been no less laudable. Through the NORA Facade RENEW program—a 3:1 reimbursable grant program that incentivizes facade improvements—over \$749,502 in grant funding has been awarded to buildings on OC Haley. These grants have been leveraged for over \$10 million in total investment. Melissa Lee, Senior Advisor for Commercial Redevelopment at NORA, says that sometimes you have to adapt the language of historic preservation for a wider audience. Investing in historic commercial corridors, especially in diverse and under-served communities, is not only a matter of historic preservation, but a matter of economic justice.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.theadvocate.com/new\\_orleans/news/article\\_fd0d529b-6901-587c-a86b-3825a5f59904.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/news/article_fd0d529b-6901-587c-a86b-3825a5f59904.html)





## WINNSBORO, LOUISIANA: a humanities haven

POPULATION: 4,788

HOUSEHOLDS: 1836

MEDIAN AGE: 35

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$19,746





Old Post Office Museum

SINCE 1988:



74897 VOLUNTEER HOURS

6815 TOTAL VOLUNTEERS



96 NET NEW BUSINESSES

606 NET NEW JOBS



\$13,085,000 TOTAL INVESTMENT





“WHAT WE HAVE DONE — THE REVITALIZATION, THE COMING BACK — WE OWE MAIN STREET SO MUCH.”

Franklin Parish Public Library



Franklin Parish Catfish Festival



Old Post Office Museum

## WINNSBORO MAIN STREET

Winnsboro is a place of pride, often called the Stars and Stripes Capital of Louisiana. The town was founded in the 1840s as the seat of government for Franklin Parish, and many of the structures lining Prairie Street—Winnsboro’s Main Street—were constructed around the turn of the century.

Winnsboro Main Street is a well established program in an economically-challenged region of Louisiana. The program was formed in 1987, and when an organization has been at work that long, it can be easy to lose enthusiasm in the face of hardship. That is far from the case in Winnsboro. “We have had some hard years, and some great years,” said Kay LaFrance-Knight, director of the Old Post Office Museum and the Winnsboro Main Street manager. But Kay, ever enthusiastic about her hometown and its potential, believes the best years are yet to come. She isn’t the only one—thinking on all that Winnsboro Main Street has accomplished, incoming Mayor “Sonny” Dumas, said, “It gives us the inclination that life is still here, and that we can still take what we’ve got and work with it, together.”

## A HOME FOR THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Kay was recently named a “Humanities Hero” by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities for her work in Winnsboro. Her passion for curation and preservation is evident when you walk into the Winnsboro Main Street headquarters, located in the Old Post Office Museum. Built in 1936, the post office building was closed in 1998 when a more modern office was built on Highway 15, a trend that had previously shifted activity away from the Main Street district. The building sat vacant and deteriorating for over a decade, until a grant and some state capital outlay funding made the building’s \$450,000 restoration possible. Today, the old post office holds not only the Main Street office, but offices for the Winnsboro-Franklin Chamber of Commerce, the Franklin Economic Development Foundation, and the Franklin Parish Tourism Commission. The ground floor now boasts a vast and beautifully designed exhibition space for traveling exhibits, and the second floor features two studio spaces where art classes are held. The building’s old loading dock has also been put to good use, serving as a stage for musical performances during festivals, and old mailboxes can be “rented” to support the museum.

In 2017, the Old Post Office Museum was one of six museums in Louisiana to host a traveling Smithsonian exhibit, entitled “Celebrating Local Sports.” The Museum regularly features well known regional artists, with its 2018 exhibits that included a Walter Anderson print collection exhibit; a visit from Cooper Michael French for the opening of his exhibit; and a live painting demonstration by French later that summer.

Franklin Parish is one of 10 rural parishes in Louisiana served by the Arts Council of Northeast Louisiana’s Rural and Underserved Presenters and Representative’s program (RUPAR). In 2018, the Arts Council conducted a phone survey of all 51 public schools in those parishes to determine the state of arts education in Louisiana’s rural communities. The study found that of the 20,279 children in rural schools, nearly half have no opportunity to study musical or visual arts—that means no opportunity to take an art class or participate in band, theater, or choir. Studies have shown that not only do students with arts education perform better in





# FRANKLIN PARISH PUBLIC LIBRARY





Fashion Retail in Winnsboro



Sew Much More Quilting and Embroidery



Winnsboro Main Street

school, but they are more optimistic about their chances of attending college—and indeed, art students are 55% more likely to attend postsecondary schools.<sup>9</sup>

In Franklin Parish in particular, 64.1% of students lack access to arts education, making the work of Winnsboro Main Street that much more important. Winnsboro Main Street is doing its part to ensure that opportunities to create and enjoy art exist on Winnsboro’s Main Street. By providing stimulating exhibits in public spaces, promoting the local theater on Main Street, and offering studio space in their headquarters, Winnsboro Main Street has made downtown a safe haven for art, culture, and expression.


The Old Post Office Museum isn’t the only cultural institution on Winnsboro’s Main Street. Book-ending the opposite end of Prairie street is the Princess Theater, a jewel of a building constructed in 1907. The theater opened as a vaudeville house, and later a silent movie theater, but closed in the 1980s due to competition from larger, multi-screen theaters in the region. In 1992, the Ramage family donated the building to the city of Winnsboro. Following extensive renovations, the theater reopened in 1994, and today it functions as a community space for musical performances, community theater, and dance programs.

Right in the middle of those bookends is yet another humanities haven: the Franklin Parish Public Library, which brings residents back to downtown to read and learn. The library’s Learning Center offers space for non-profits and community groups to gather and organize. Dotted in between these cultural anchors are a variety of surprising businesses: a small bottling plant for Kinloch Plantation Pecan Oil; a charming and wildly successful quilt shop, cleverly named Sew Much More Quilting; and Every Occasion gift shop, a store with endless variety celebrating over 30 years in business, owned by Winnsboro Main Street board member Wade Walley.

“Change is inevitable, but you have to get a handle on the kind of change you want,” said incumbent Mayor Dumas. For the past 30 years, Winnsboro Main Street has been helping the town manage its change by galvanizing the infectious energy of the town’s residents. Every small success invites another, or, as Winnsboro Main Street President Paul Price put it: “The thing that Winnsboro has is the ‘can do’ attitude’; one thing happens, then another thing happens.”

9 “The State of Arts Education in Rural Northeast Louisiana,” Northeast Louisiana Arts Council. <https://nelaarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Arts-Council-of-Northeast-Louisiana-State-of-Arts-Education-web-2.pdf>





# HOMER, LOUISIANA:

where people gather, places prosper

POPULATION: 3,046

HOUSEHOLDS: 1,234

MEDIAN AGE: 36

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$18,414



# SINCE 2014:



**6207** | VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

**585** | TOTAL  
VOLUNTEERS



**7** | NET  
NEW BUSINESSES



**20** | NET  
NEW JOBS



**\$49,000** | TOTAL  
INVESTMENT







Homer City Hall



1904 Wooden Structures



Michael's Men's Store

## MAIN STREET HOMER

When Homer was founded in 1848 as the Claiborne Parish seat, its plan provided for a grand central courthouse square. The feeling of that pre-Civil War cotton town is still present, with a Greek Revival, plantation-style central courthouse surrounded by four streets of quaint and compact commercial buildings.

Main Street Homer, in contrast to the long-established Winnsboro program, is an organization in its very early stages. Main Street had been long a dream for folks in Homer—business owners in town had tried unsuccessfully to apply for Main Street accreditation in years past. On the day that Mary Hamil, former Main Street Homer Board President, had to close her business in Homer's downtown, she decided to devote herself fully to the Main Street application. In 2014, Homer became an designated Main Street community. Jimmy Hand became Homer's Main Street director in May of 2017, and he hit the ground running, fully embracing the Main Street process and becoming an enthusiastic champion for downtown Homer.

In very little time, Main Street Homer has made incredible strides developing new signature events like the Homer Harmonica Festival, the Dawg Daze of Summer Concert, and the Homer Classic Car and Bike Show. It has also been busy gathering volunteers for public works projects and improvements, obtaining grants for facade renovations, and assisting with tax credit applications for significant buildings on Homer's main square, to name only a few of the organization's accomplishments to date. Thanks to Jimmy and his equally energetic board members, the transformative power of the Main Street program can already be felt—but the challenges in Homer are still significant. Downtown Homer has 27 potential retail buildings in their historic district. Of those 27 buildings, 11 are vacant and in various states of disrepair.

But the folks at Main Street Homer are undaunted—they can already see the pay-off of their efforts thus far. “It takes time; it doesn't happen overnight,” said Jimmy, and Main Street Homer has used creative problem-solving and partnership models to meet those challenges. In 2016, Main Street Homer facilitated the sale of two 1906 wooden commercial buildings to the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation, who then used a revolving fund to stabilize and prepare them for sale to new owners. Main Street Homer is currently working to insert new businesses into those spaces, and working with the Louisiana Small Business Center to support businesses in downtown Homer more generally.

Another early success for the Homer Main Street program was to secure a \$10,000 Louisiana Main Street matching grant for the exterior renovation of Michael's Men's Store, both a prominent building and successful business enterprise in downtown Homer. The store was established in 1948 on Homer's historic town square and originally provided men's fine suits, clothing, and professional golf equipment. In 1979, the store expanded to supply complete lines of hunting and fishing products, as well as in-house service for guns and archery equipment. Northern Louisiana is frequently referred to as a “Sportsman's Paradise,” and by providing top-of-the-line equipment and service, Michael's Men's Store brings in an important business demographic for the rest of the downtown.





# HERBERT S. FORD MEMORIAL MUSEUM





Mermaid's Closet



Mary Hamil at Artist's Week



Festivals on Main Street

**"IT REALLY WAS A BLESSING  
TO GROW UP HERE. WE ARE  
GETTING HOMER BACK ON  
TRACK."**



**Main Street  
Yoga Space**

These early achievements only foretell of good things to come. "For the first few years, we had to focus primarily on fundraising and economic development," said Jimmy, "Now we are in a place to focus on education and advocacy. People are beginning to understand what Main Street is all about." In those first few fundraising years, Main Street Homer laid the groundwork for downtown Homer to become a Cultural Center for the Arts and a new downtown park.

### ARTS AND CULTURE IN HOMER

A long-term goal for Main Street Homer is to have a thriving arts and culture economy in the downtown. In 2016, Homer became a registered Louisiana Cultural District, a program that helps to revitalize communities by creating a hub of cultural activity. The program offers state historic rehabilitation tax credits on eligible expenses for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied and/or revenue generating historic structures. It also provides an exemption from sales taxes on the sale of original artwork from businesses established within the Cultural District. One such business is the Mermaid's Closet, owned by Christina Black Gladney, director of the Homer Cultural District. The Mermaid's Closet showcases and sells original works of art—from paintings and woodwork to jewelry and chandeliers—but it is also a home to the budding cultural community in Homer. In May, Christina and the Homer Cultural District collaborate with Main Street Homer to host Artist's Week at The Mermaid's Closet, where local artists and craftspeople can sell their work at a reduced sales tax with no fees or commission charged to the artists. The week kicks off with a reception at The Mermaid's Closet, and ends with the Claiborne Jubilee, a regional art, music, and quilt festival that showcases the work of artists in the area.

Building on this foundation of vibrant local talent, Main Street Homer has been working actively to build a Center for the Arts in Homer. Jimmy and his wife April—treasurer of Homer Main Street and resident Main Street yoga instructor—have long dreamed of transforming the former Masonic Lodge into a mixed-use cultural center. In June of 2018, Main Street Homer and the Homer Cultural District received a \$25,000 A Community Thrives (ACT) grant from the USA Today Gannett Foundation towards making this dream a reality. The proposed development would reintroduce a restaurant on the building's ground floor—which would inject important energy back into Homer's downtown—with the Center for the Arts occupying the upper floors. The Center for the Arts will be an incubator for artists—providing studio space for rent, opportunities to sell art at a reduced tax rate, and classrooms for art education.





Site of Future Downtown Park

## DOWNTOWN PARK

Public spaces are important civic infrastructure because they are sites of social cohesion. The ability to gather and spend time together in public space fosters healthy communities. Furthermore, social cohesion is strengthened when the members of a community work together toward a common goal, like volunteering to clear a site of weeds and debris or planning fundraisers to bring a common vision to life. Main Street Homer is fostering both types of social cohesion by leading the initiative to turn a downtown vacant lot into a new park.

In early 2017, the National Main Street Center (NMSC) and the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) launched Cultivating Place in Main Street Communities, a series of two-day trainings aimed at helping Main Street Communities revitalize their downtowns through citizen-led placemaking. NMSC later partnered with the crowdfunding platform lobby to offer matching funds, training, and one-on-one fundraising coaching to communities in ten states over two years, including Louisiana. Homer was selected as one of the communities to receive matching funds for their local public space project, and as of February 2018, Main Street Homer raised over \$14,000 in donations toward the creation of this park. The funds raised will be used to clear and grade the land, trim the large oak trees, install lighting and electrical outlets, and introduce hard surfaces for pathways and a stage area.

Main Street Homer envisions the park as a place for daily use as a green space and picnic venue, but also as an event space for art festivals, concerts, and more. The opportunity to host events downtown will support a market for local artists to sell their creations and create a place for musicians to perform, thus further supporting arts-based businesses. The new park will be a catalyst to advance Main Street Homer's mission to revitalize downtown Homer through economic and cultural development, historic preservation, and advancement of the arts. By bringing people downtown for events in the park, Main Street Homer hopes to create more demand for dining and shopping in the downtown, thereby drawing new businesses to occupy and rehabilitate historic buildings downtown.

The folks in Homer recognize the power of Main Street to uplift all the diverse members of the community, and they are setting about doing so with intention. Cynthia Steele, Chair of the Homer Historic Commission, said "Main Street is not just restoring buildings, but we are restoring lives. And we want all the people in Homer to be a part of that."





# CONCLUSION

Main Street was established on the principle that sustainable transformation of downtowns and commercial districts cannot happen overnight, with one big fix, or through the effort of a single individual. The 34 Main Street communities across Louisiana are demonstrating the power of the small, the incremental, and the collaborative. Through smart, strategic, and scaled improvements, Louisiana Main Street communities are creating vibrant and resilient local economies that celebrate local flavor and homegrown talent. Both the numbers and the stories are clear—Main Street is a powerful program that contributes to the economic, social, and cultural health of Louisiana, creating benefits shared with residents in the quaintest of small towns to the liveliest of big cities.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Charlotte Jeffers, Crowley  
Tony Duhon, Crowley  
Ed Habitz, Crowley  
L.J. Gielen, Crowley  
April Hand, Homer  
Cynthia Steele, Homer  
Anita Clawson, Homer  
Dr. Terry Clason, Homer  
Christina Black Gladney, Homer  
Ronald Day, Homer  
Mayor Danny Roy Lewis, Homer  
Dr. Terry Clason, Homer  
Haley Perot, Ruston  
Tori Ward, Ruston  
Mayor Ronny Walker, Ruston  
Louisiana Tech University President Les Guice, Ruston  
Dr. Jim King, Ruston  
Travis Napper, Ruston  
Amanda Quimby, Ruston

Cathi Cox-Boniol, Ruston  
Cassidy Keim, Ruston  
Kourtney Keim, Ruston  
Nancy Bergeron, Ruston  
BJ Durrett, Ruston  
Andy Durrett, Ruston  
Brandon Crume, Ruston  
Dean Norton, Ruston  
Karl Puljak, Ruston  
Kelly Hogan, Ruston  
Kevin Hawkins, Ruston  
Jessica Slaughter, Ruston  
Travis Lee, Ruston  
Brandon Chrome, Ruston  
Melissa Lee, New Orleans  
Carol Bebel, New Orleans  
Paul Price, Winnsboro  
Wade Walley, Winnsboro  
Mayor “Sonny” Dumas, Winnsboro  
Cloid White, Winnsboro

# METHODOLOGIES

Data for net new jobs, business growth, buildings rehabilitated and sold, amount of investment in rehabilitation and acquisition, comes from the quarterly reports each Main Street community is required to submit to the Louisiana Main Street office. Calculations for jobs and income created through the rehabilitation of buildings was based on data from IMPLAN®, an Input-Output econometric model created by the private sector firm MIG. Demographic and population data was based on 2010 and earlier US Census information. Additional data was obtained from various databases of the US Department of Commerce, US Department of Labor, Small Business Administration, and other government sources.

In every instance the selection, evaluation, and application of data was conducted by the authors of this report. Any errors of fact or judgment are solely the responsibility of the authors and not the suppliers of data, Louisiana Main Street, or the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development.

# THE PLACEECONOMICS TEAM

This report was prepared by PlaceEconomics, a Washington D.C. based consulting firm that works at the intersection of built heritage and economics. Data analysis was completed by Donovan Rypkema. Writing and report design was by Katlyn Cotton. Editing was by Carla Bruni and Molly Balzano, and comments were provided by Briana Grosicki and Rodney Swink. Rypkema is principal of PlaceEconomics. He is the author of *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide* and an adjunct professor in the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Pennsylvania. Grosicki is Director of Research at PlaceEconomics and serves on the Board of Directors for the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions and Preservation Action. Swink is Senior Associate of Planning and Development, as well as a licensed landscape architect and Professor of Practice at North Carolina State University’s College of Design. Bruni is the Associate for Engagement at PlaceEconomics. She has extensive experience working on environmental initiatives with a variety of organizations in and around Chicago and has worked with the U.S. EPA to create Environmental Justice reports and Community Involvement plans. Cotton is a Research Associate with PlaceEconomics and graduate in historic preservation from the University of Pennsylvania. Cotton is also a native of Louisiana and an alumna of Louisiana State University. Balzano is a recent graduate from the University of Pennsylvania’s graduate program in historic preservation.

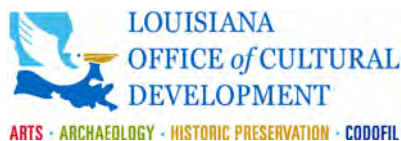


# A SHARED TABLE

A STUDY OF THE IMPACTS OF LOUISIANA MAIN STREET

July 2018

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