

Character Counts

Written by Mallory B.E. Baches
Tuesday, 09 September 2014 13:45



Main Street Beaufort, USA helps maintain the quality of our historic downtown.

Community character is something that urbanists often refer to. It describes the sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and emotions that a place might draw out of someone: the calm you feel when you look out past a deep porch to see a boat on the river beyond; the surprise scent of the salt marsh at low tide that wafts farther inland than you might have imagined it could; the way the taste of a fried soft-shell crab seems to match the feeling of the sun on your shoulders as the Lowcountry summer quickly approaches

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Community character is also about the quality of the shared social and cultural and natural and physical life of a place, and Beaufort has more character in all respects than most towns could dream of. Nowhere is that more on display than downtown, in Beaufort's historic architecture and natural vistas and community warmth. Downtown Beaufort is where the fabric of our community is kept alive, and working to ensure the character of that community is an organization now in its 29th year here in Beaufort: Main Street Beaufort USA.

Main Street Beaufort is a non-profit tasked with supporting the ongoing redevelopment of downtown Beaufort, including promotion and advertising, business retention and recruitment,

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and design assistance. The organization is funded in small part through contract with the City of Beaufort as well as foundational grant monies, and receives additional private support: through membership dues, sponsorships, and event revenue. You may know their work in hosting events like the upcoming Shrimp Festival, but you may not know that there are many other important ways that Executive Director LaNelle Fabian, along with her board and staff at Main Street Beaufort, contribute to the quality of our historic downtown.

This past June, Main Street Beaufort received its newest certificate of accreditation with the National Main Street Center. There was little fanfare, but that



doesn't mean that it isn't a praise-worthy accomplishment. The accreditation granted by the National Main Street Center is part of a program established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation nearly 35 years ago, and it is an honor that Main Street Beaufort has continuously received since its founding in 1985. The National Main Street Center takes the mission of historic preservation from the building to the community dimension, working to protect not just structures but the historic downtowns that those structures are a valuable part of.

Preservation and revitalization are two sides of the same challenge —nurturing community character —and Beaufort is a national example of that challenge. Our historic town is a testament to the investment of those who came before us, and continuing that vitality into the future depends on a commitment to ensuring that downtown Beaufort thrives.

Norma Ramirez de Miess, Senior Program Officer and Director of Leadership Development at the National Main Street Center, has passion for not only the history but also the ongoing

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well-being of the towns where she works, especially here in Beaufort. She is quick to express how Beaufort has captured her heart, a sentiment we can all relate to.

Of her work for the National Main Street Center, Norma insists, “we definitely want to improve as much as preserve.” Satisfying that desire relies on education and outreach —growing the local level of respect for the history and also economic strength of a community (amongst property owners, business owners, and the public at large), and expanding the reach of the programs (those in the community who are not yet engaged, and those who continue to join the community).

Central to the National Main Street Center’s methodology for encouraging historic downtown vitality is the Main Street Four-Point Approach®. The Four-Point Approach responds to *all* the assets that add to the character of downtown Beaufort: to the quality of life for anyone spending time in our downtown. They include: Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring, locally referred to simply as Business Development.

Main Street Beaufort implements these Four Points, with the help of the National Main Street Center, working with a network of national, state, and local experts on revitalization and collaborating with our own downtown merchants, businesses, and property owners. Together they ensure that the strength of Bay Street and the rest of downtown makes its historic character not only worth protecting, but actually central to its success. If the quality of life for everyone who participates in the life of downtown Beaufort is better because of the character of the place, then Main Street Beaufort, with the help of the National Main Street Center, has done its job well.

Anyone can support the work of Main Street Beaufort, by becoming a member and by participating in the events they host throughout the year, including the Shrimp Festival, Taste of Beaufort, Night on the Town, the downtown Trick or Treat, the Tour of Homes, and the recent addition Plate Crawl. You can read more about their work at their website: www.downtownbeaufort.org. You can read more about the National Main Street Center and the Main Street Four-Point Approach® at: www.mainstreet.org.

You can read more about the National Trust for Historic Preservation at: <http://www.preservationnation.org>.

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