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# Beverly Main Streets Creates Community in a Thriving Downtown

More than 20 years ago, a group of Beverly residents and entrepreneurs decided they wanted something different for their city. They wanted to enhance and promote Beverly as a hidden gem of the North Shore, to give neighbors and visitors a reason to linger at the city's restaurants and shops. While many people had visited the North Shore Music Theatre and The Cabot, they were less familiar with the city's historic architecture, the quality and variety of the local restaurants, and the burgeoning art scene.

The group created Beverly Main Streets, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of the city, and today, Beverly is a thriving center for the arts, with celebrated restaurants, plentiful shops and businesses, and community-building events that draw residents and visitors alike to the city's downtown.

Besides promoting Beverly, the organization provides a valuable lifeline for local entrepreneurs, who have found community through casual meet-ups and get-togethers.



Lindsay Barth and her husband, Trey, own Third Wheel Bikes, a small business dedicated to creating an inclusive biking community. They opened their shop at the end of 2023, and despite success, they found owning a small business can be a lonely experience.

“I think it can be so isolating to start our own small business not really knowing what you are doing,” Barth says. “And everyone starts that way. I don’t think anyone walks into it knowing what they’re doing.”

Through Beverly Main Streets, Barth and her husband found kinship with other small business owners. “It’s so refreshing to get together and have coffee and understand that it’s a collective struggle,” she says. “If everyone’s numbers are down, it means that’s just what the landscape looks like right now. It’s not necessarily on you. And that can be just so reaffirming and helpful as we all navigate this without really knowing what we’re doing.”

Peter Bakhit, a pottery artist and owner of the makerspace Score and Slip, agrees. He has been engaged with Main Streets as a volunteer and considers the organization to be a valuable resource.

“Being a small business owner is very lonely sometimes,” he says. “Having a space where you can meet other business owners and share what’s going on and validating you is very nice.”

During the pandemic, Main Streets was integral in supporting small businesses, getting them the services and support and financial aid they needed to adapt and remain open. Coming out of the pandemic, Main Streets worked to reinvigorate a sense of hometown pride and community connection, says executive director Erin Truex.

Referring to the pandemic, Truex says, “There was so much disconnect and so much lost when we were forced to quarantine. I think we’re seeing that resurgence of people wanting to build connection in their community outside of social media and computers and Zooms. They want to be downtown and meeting people in person.”

*Montserrat College of Art | Photograph by Elise Sinagra*

While there are myriad other Main Streets programs across the country helping downtown districts prosper and thrive, Beverly Main Streets differs as a standalone nonprofit that is not answerable to the city, does its own fundraising, and uses volunteers to carry out its goals. It is an independent, safe space for businesses owners to go when they want to express concerns or have honest conversations, according to Darlene Wynne, Beverly's director of planning and development.

In addition to providing marketing resources and networking opportunities, and implementing streetscaping, public art, and clean-up campaigns, Main Streets hosts a range of community events, including arts festivals and holiday celebrations to drive downtown foot traffic.

The key event of the year is Arts Fest Beverly, which brings hundreds of artists and craftspeople, restaurateurs, vendors, and other businesses together with musicians and entertainers downtown. Last year's party drew more than 10,000 attendees and generated \$200,000, Truex says. The summertime Cabot Street Block Party, a downtown celebration with music, food, beer and wine, and vendors and games, drew an additional 9,000 visitors. Smaller events, such as the Winter Market, Halloween trick-or-treating, studio arts exhibitions with partner Montserrat College of Art, and game and trivia nights at local restaurants happen throughout the year to get people into the area, onto the streets and into local businesses.

“What I continuously hear is ‘I came to Arts Fest and now I’m grabbing a meal. I had no idea Beverly had this much to offer,’” Truex says. “I think we are a hidden gem of sorts. You can equip yourself with every ecofriendly product under the sun, then walk down the street and get \$10 mussels at the Anchor, and then walk to the waterfront and take a boat ride. There really is something for everyone.”

Wynne says Main Streets has contributed to the city’s downtown revitalization by implementing façade improvement grants, advocating for residential growth downtown to support retail, and pushing for streetscape improvements.

And, thanks to Main Streets, Beverly is growing its reputation as a cultural destination, Wynne says.

“I do hear from people who come from out of town to visit the North Shore Music Theatre or The Cabot or the Larcom Theatre and they say, ‘Wow, I didn’t realize all there is in Beverly.’”

Truex realizes Beverly may never be the tourist destination that other North Shore towns aspire to be, but she’s all right with that.

“We’re never going to be Salem in October,” she says. “But we do have day-trippers and people who want to come and experience the North Shore and experience quintessential New England, and that’s what we offer. Our goal is to make Beverly the best it can be. So, if you are here, whether it be living or visiting, you are going to have a good experience.”

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**Peggy McNamara** 6 days ago

Darlene Gallant Wynne - Great job - no surprise after knowing you since you 3 ears old and knowing your parents who were always so dedicated to Wenham's Town Improvement. I am a Beverly native - St. Mary's Grad worked at Delaney's. Woolworths and Larcom Theatre for my high school employment. My heart has always been there and so happy to know that someone like you has contributed to make everyone realize that Beverly is such a wonderful place to live. ❤️

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