

DBA wins award for efforts downtown

By Hilary Dickinson

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The Downtown Beloit Association is one of the winners of the 2011 Great American Main Street Award.

The announcement was made today at the Main Street Awards Ceremony during the National Main Streets Conference in Des Moines, Iowa.

“We’re just so excited,” said Kathleen Braatz, Downtown Beloit Association executive director. “It really is the highest honor we could receive for what we do as a Main Street organization. To get this national recognition is an amazing feeling. This award goes out to all who have championed and cheered on Downtown Beloit in its 23 year history — to all our property owners, businesses, volunteers, sponsors, city and community leaders. It’s Beloit’s award.”

The Great American Main Street Award is given by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a way to recognize exceptional Main Street communities whose successes serve as a model for comprehensive commercial district revitalization.

The competition was open to more than 1,600 accredited National Main Street programs that are described as “real places doing real work to revitalize their economies and preserve their character.”

“We’re very, very pleased with the DBA, and the progress they have made in the downtown area,” said Beloit City Manager Larry Arft who was attending the conference today along with Braatz.

“Everything from the physical facade renovations to the special events are extraordinary, and this is a national recognition of their success so we’re pleased to be here to accept the award today.”

Braatz said Beloit was judged on its achievements in the downtown district and community as a whole. The judging was based on the overall community support of the DBA, the commitment to historic preservation, the economic impact of the revitalization program and successful small business development.

“This award is a reflection of what people from all walks can do when they share a common vision and invest themselves in it collectively through time, talent, and resources,” Braatz said.

The DBA is credited with helping to save the historic Hotel Hilton and Woolworths Building by developing them into attractive lofts and a local foods grocery store; reinventing the industrial riverfront into a haven for boaters and bikers; and reinvigorating the streets with lively shops, public

art and an ambitious events calendar, according to a press release from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Twenty years after the organization's founding, property values in downtown Beloit have increased by 192 percent — an average of 9.6 percent per year — and residential occupancy rates are almost 100 percent.

“Downtown Beloit Association has an impressive track record of taking underutilized areas envisioning their best use and leveraging partnerships to achieve exemplary results,” said Doug Loescher, the director of the National Trust Main Street Center. “Beloit’s rich arts offerings, revitalized riverfront, creative adaptive use projects and award-winning farmer’s market are shining examples of DBA’s outstanding work.”

The National Trust for Historic Preservation also gave the 2011 Great American Street Award to Main Street Fort Pierce, Fort Pierce, Fla.; Old Town Main Street, Lansing, Mich.; Downtown Newark Partnership, Newark, Del.; and Silver City MainStreet Project, Silver City, N.M.

