

MAIN STREETS ACROSS AMERICA

BELOIT, WISCONSIN – CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

📁 Uncategorized



○ ○ ○

A much-discussed idea among people who promote downtown vitality today is the “creative economy.” That’s the notion that the arts, and people who do creative work, are vital contributors to a community’s economic well-being. Explore this college town’s Central Business District and you’ll see this idea in successful action.

Beloit was once a strong industrial and manufacturing city, but by the 1980s, its vitality had been drained by the loss of those jobs and the rise of suburban mall shopping. In 1987, a group of businesspeople, property owners and citizen volunteers created the Downtown Beloit Association (<http://downtownbeloit.com/us/>), aiming to revive the central district just above the Rock River and the Illinois border.

Since then, “Beloit’s downtown has reinvented itself as an arts destination, evidenced by abundant public art, galleries, theaters and, as locals will boast, live music every night of the week,” said Main Street America, an initiative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which gave Beloit a Great American Main Street Award (https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NMSC/14414aa6-cd92-4a60-83bc-d336e4720b8b/UploadedImages/Awards/GAMSA/PDFs/GAMSA_2011_MSN.pdf) in 2011.

That’s not the only honor this revitalized downtown has earned. It was also named one of “America’s Greatest Main Streets” (<http://www.travelandleisure.com/slideshows/americas-greatest-main-streets#16>) by *Travel + Leisure* magazine; and in 2017, the National Trust returned to call Beloit’s downtown one of the nation’s “Five Romantic Main Streets You’ll Adore” (<https://savingplaces.org/stories/five-romantic-main-streets#.WhGoLLaZO3U>.)” Property values here have risen by 192 percent since the Downtown Beloit Association began its work, according to Main Streets America.

The downtown revival begins along the river, where a once-industrial waterfront has been transformed into a mecca for boaters, strollers and picnickers. Sculptures and murals enliven the riverside, which has pocket parks, a bike trail, a canoe/kayak launch, some 120 hanging flower baskets, and 31 planters. Within the central downtown, the old Woolworth’s building has been restored and is now Bushel & Peck’s Local Market (<http://bushelandpecks.com/>), a local food mecca. The renovation of the historic Hotel Hilton (<http://kontextarchitects.com/projects/hotel-hilton>) into apartments and a bookstore won a “Best Historic Renovation” award from the Wisconsin Main Street Program.

Downtown has over a dozen locally owned restaurants and cafes, along with bookstores, museums, art galleries and venues for live theater. More than 50 public events each year help to energize the business district. An ArtsWalk displays the work of more than 100 artists, and from May through October, more than 90 vendors bring their wares to the Saturday morning Farmers’ Market.

Today’s downtown feels like a friendly neighborhood, enlivened by the creative energies that come to life here every day.

Photo credits (L-R): Jason Dean, Mark Preuschl, Jim Simoson

Beloit, WI is home to two 2016-17 LifeChangers: David Wilson and Gina Curtis (<https://www.lifechangeroftheyear.com/search?q=beloit>)

SHARE:

