



# Main Street Minute

a quarterly publication of Marengo Main Street, Inc.

## “So, what does Main Street do?”

I've been asked that question a lot since I was hired as the Executive Director of Marengo's Main Street program last July.

If you want a quick-and-clear answer, our Mission Statement says it pretty well:

*Marengo Main Street is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of our downtown, for the benefit of the community.*

To our Board of Directors, the most important words in that statement are, “For the benefit of the community.”

Since July, I've also heard many stories about the way Marengo “used to be.” There was a sense of community that folks tell me has fragmented in recent years. Our program's goal is to bring that sense back and once again made downtown Marengo *the* place to be.

Marengo Main Street isn't an office of City government. We aren't part of the Chamber of Commerce. Though we work closely with those two groups, we are completely separate.

We're part of a federal program, under the direction of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, that began in 1977. It's administered at the state level by the Lt. Governor, Pat Quinn's, office.

Illinois is one of 40 states with Main Street programs, and with 69 towns currently participating, it's one of the largest state programs in the country. The Main Street communities closest to Marengo include Harvard, Crystal Lake, Woodstock, Genoa, and



Downtown Marengo hosts over 3000 guests during “Saturday Night on Main Street” in October 2007

Elgin. St. Charles is our “mentor town,” always ready to help when we have questions.

Main Street does its work through a patented “Four-Point Approach” that has been time-tested and proven as a great way to get a lot of work done with minimal personnel and time. If you've ever been involved in a volunteer-based organization, you know how important that is!

The Four Points, each with its own committee that meets monthly, are:

**Organization Committee**—gathers the human and financial resources needed to implement a Main Street revitalization program.

**Design Committee**—works to get our downtown into top physical shape. Historic preservation is vital.

**Promotion Committee**—markets the district's unique assets to bring people downtown.

Organizes and runs special events in the downtown district.

**Economic Restructuring Committee**—improves the downtown's economic base by recruiting new businesses and assisting existing ones.

Marengo Main Street currently has 28 proud volunteers, but we always welcome more. If you're interested in finding out how you can get involved, or want more information about what Main Street means to Marengo, call our office at 568-8440. I'll be happy to answer your questions.

I hope you enjoy this first issue of our quarterly newsletter—it's a great introduction to “what we do.” Vol. 1, No. 2 will be in your mailbox in April.

*Pam Gitta*

Executive Director

P.S. Check out p. 3 for more info on the work of our four committees.

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Get the latest Marengo Main Street news at:  
[www.marengomainstreet.org](http://www.marengomainstreet.org)

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### See you at the Expo!

The Marengo-Union Chamber of Commerce Business Expo is coming to town on February 9-10 at MCHS, and Marengo Main Street will be there.

Stop by and take a look at our picture collection—it includes photos from Marengo's historic past, and some great “before and after” shots of the work that Main Street has done in other Illinois towns.

We'll be there to answer your questions and chat about Main Street on Saturday from 10am-4pm and Sunday from 11am-3pm.

Come out and say hello!



## A letter from the President

Bob Levin

“There’s a stake for the whole community in the Main Street program.”

It's pretty obvious why a building/store owner like myself would be interested in downtown revitalization, but the impulse is not quite as self-interested as it may seem. There's a stake for the whole community in the Main Street Program.

Downtown is an important community symbol -- the traditional center of government, finance, commerce, and civic life. It symbolizes local pride, community identity, community economic health, the physical, historical and cultural heritage of our town. However, the value of downtown to the entire community is more than just symbolic. Everyone has a stake in the economic and physical health of the downtown. This concept of community ownership is an important principle in our approach to downtown revitalization.

All the residents of Marengo stand to gain from a vibrant downtown community by:

- Protection of property values
- Local accessibility to goods and services
- Increased opportunity for social interaction through the preservation of civic gathering spaces

- Community pride, identity and sense of accomplishment
- Preservation of a community for future generations

Businesses located outside of the Downtown benefit by:

- Increased visitor traffic to the community
- Increased business through an overall healthier economy
- More dollars circulating longer through locally owned businesses
- Opportunities for cross promotion
- An improved, higher quality image associated with Marengo
- and much more

As Frank Lloyd Wright said, "The thing always happens that you believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen." Together, all of us stand to gain through a Marengo Main Street Program.



IHPA Architect Darius Bryjka leads a design training session for Marengo Main Street volunteers and guests

## State architect visits Marengo

On the bitterly cold night of January 23, 2008, a group of Marengo residents braved the weather to attend a special presentation by visiting Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) architect Darius Bryjka.

One of the major benefits of the Illinois Main Street program is the free architectural services provided to participating towns through the IHPA office Springfield, IL.

At no cost to building owners, these historic architecture specialists will come to town; meet with a building owner to hear his or her wishes and concerns; and produce a rendering of what the building could look like, that includes recommended paint, awning and other decorative choices.

Mr. Bryjka gave an entertaining and informative presentation on the principles of design espoused by the National Trust's Main Street Program, and ended his show with a variety of "before and after" photos of fantastic work the IHPA has accomplished throughout Illinois in partnership with Illinois Main Street volunteers.

Before this meeting, a smaller group of extremely hardy souls, including Marengo Main Street (MMS) President Bob Levin, joined Mr. Bryjka on a walking tour of downtown Marengo. This is a requirement for full admission into the Illinois Main Street Program, and he had a lot of encouraging words for us.

He pointed out that the decorative columns on the building at 220-224 S. State Street are made

of cast iron, and estimates the building as dating from the early 1880s.

We stepped inside Bobby's Shoes, where MMS Vice-President Gene Carroccia (and Cody) greeted us and verified that his building was built in 1872. The wonderful wood floors creaked to announce our arrival, and made it very easy to believe the building is that old.

Mr. Bryjka was impressed with the leaded glass on the south end of the "State Street Pub," and noted the building's striking similarity to the Denhart Bank Building in Washington, IL.

It was a cold but fascinating and informative night, and reinforced our belief that Marengo has a beautiful downtown!

## Design Committee

The primary goal of the Design Committee in the first few months of 2008 is going to be to take over the world.

If that doesn't work out so well, then we are going to be researching the general architectural options that were available to building owners in Marengo's history.

We currently have six volunteers, with two more coming on board in February.

We've started familiarizing ourselves with Marengo's ordinances and zoning laws.

We're researching historical paint colors, and we've found that there are 11 McHenry county sites on the National Historic Registry, with two of them being in Marengo.

A couple of our volunteers are getting pictures of all sides of each building so that we can

Charles Butler

create a map of downtown in 3-D, to help our building owners in visualizing changes to the exterior of each building.

After visiting with IHPA architect Darius Bryjka, we now have a downtown property owner who is interested in repainting his building. We'll keep you updated on that exciting development as spring (a.k.a. "painting weather") approaches.



## Economic Restructuring Committee

Matt Keenum

"What did I hear you say?" "Boring?" Absolutely not!

The "E/R Committee," as we like to call ourselves, is the backbone of Marengo Main street. All of the other committees exist only to serve us.

All kidding aside, we are a diverse group of Marengoans—some lifelong residents, some

relative newcomers. What we have in common is our desire to see Marengo's downtown become vibrant again.

Our goals are many. We are in the midst of a complete downtown assessment: boundary determination; building vacancy rates; as well as gauging the general condition of the structures.

We also hope to become the conduit for friendly dialogue with building owners to assess their desires.

Additionally, we will look to apply the community's desires for the downtown as far as aesthetics and types of businesses they would like to see.



## Organization Committee

John Wyrstek

The Organization Committee or the "funnest" committee, is chaired by John Wyrstek and is comprised of Randy Hauschildt, Warren Casey and Kelly Hall.

We are the planning people. Our function is to make sure Ma-

rengo Main Street has the funds it needs to operate. Along with Pam, we will be the ones you will meet to discuss supporting Marengo Main Street.

Our motto is, "There is only one thing worse than being talked

about, and that is NOT being talked about."

With the support of our community, we will make differences you can be proud of in our Downtown.



## Promotion Committee

Ryan Varney

It's 2008, time for a new beginning. We have an exciting year ahead with some new events and very successful second-year events.

The Promotion Committee will be working to get the word out about what Marengo Main Street will do for the community.

Last year's most successful event, Putt Putt Day, had a great turnout, even though some in the community did not know who or what was responsible because

Marengo Main Street was just getting started. I have to applaud Rocco Gailloro of Flatlander Market, John Wyrstek, & all those who made the event possible. This year's 2nd Annual Putt Putt will be even bigger, because I am still hearing buzz from last year's event.

One of the new events we are preparing for is the "Marengo vs. Harvard Sweetcorn Throw-down." This event will be a cooking competition between Marengo & Harvard on Satur-

day, August 23rd. And as you might guess the competition will be all about corn.

Each town will use locally-grown sweet corn. Purdom Farms has agreed to be Marengo's supplier. This event will be for all ages, with games for the kids and plenty of corn for everyone.

Hope to see you there!



