

New focus on arts in downtown Manchester

By Felicia Whatley - Staff Writer
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Steve Gates of Manchester's Board of Directors talks about 'Imagine Main Street.'
Photo by Felicia Whatley.

Volunteers are hard at work making plans to enhance the arts and culture scene in downtown Manchester. The first event they have scheduled is "Strollin' on Main" on Thursday, June 7, which is part of the town's Pride Week.

"There is a lot of momentum and energy seen in a market study and [in the attitude of] shop owners and residents to make Manchester an arts mecca downtown with more galleries and music," said Imagine Main Street Chairperson and Manchester Town Director Steve Gates.



Seen as a key driver in ramping up efforts to revitalize the downtown area, a town-organized community brainstorming session resulted in the formation of a new committee with a vision of an arts area. The committee, called Imagine Main Street, is a collaboration of the town staff, local businesses, artists, non-profit organizations and the Downtown Manchester Special Services District.

"Our goal is to leverage the great work already underway by the many arts and cultural organizations in Manchester. In combination with the increased focus on the Downtown District, we feel the arts can be a major component of the economic growth plan for Manchester," said Gates.

Imagine Main Street will begin with a series of downtown neighborhood events. The initial event is a cooperative effort with the Pride in Manchester Week Committee.

"This is an exciting time and [there is] much enthusiasm for the arts," said Gates, who has been involved in local community work for several years, having also been PTA president at Manchester High School for five years. "Manchester Community College will be opening a building in downtown that will have a gallery of arts. This group was not something I planned to get involved with," Gates said, "but I am very happy to. I have always been a consumer of art and have found Imagine Main Street to be a lot of fun."

"Strollin' on Main" will include many of the traditional activities, which replicate the days of the '50s to the '70s when the community strolled down Main Street on Thursday nights for business and fellowship.

Gates said Imagine Main Street is striving to become a non-profit, so the group will be able to receive grants for some of its projects. "Our group meets every Thursday. I am probably the least creative in the group.

"On June 7, many store owners plan to display art in their windows and we are hoping to get the owners of vacant buildings to do the same and maybe turn them into vintage art galleries or ice-cream stations," said Gates.

"Pride in Manchester is thrilled to see this project get its public inauguration during our town's special week... What better way to show your pride than to gather great volunteers, build an exciting vision, and create more activity than ever?" said Joyce Hodgson, Pride in Manchester Week chairperson.

"Development of an arts and culture focus in the downtown was a recommendation of the recent Downtown Market Study. Manchester is fortunate to be blessed with an abundant creative community. The Downtown Manchester Special Services District looks forward to working with members of Imagine Main Street to bring the talents, enthusiasm and creativity of the arts community to our historic downtown," said Department of Manchester Special Services District Manager Tana Parseliti. "This new energy will complement our existing business mix, build on the opening of MCC on Main and help create a renewed sense of place for our downtown."

For more information or to volunteer, contact the Imagine Main Street Committee at ImagineMainStreet@cox.net. Additional information is also available at the Town of Manchester website, townofmanchester.org/prideandheritage.