



Audubon County Economic Development Corporation

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January 2009

WHAT IS A DOWNTOWN?

They were the central business and government districts, the places of tall buildings, busy sidewalks, and courthouses. In recent years they have grown more diverse in their uses and play two critical roles.

First they are mixers of people, places that welcome all and facilitate human interaction. This makes downtowns ideal places for doing business, as they put buyers, sellers, and producers in proximity. It also makes them ideal places for entertainment, culture, learning, governing, and living. Downtowns are places that are owned by people of all types, where everyone feels welcome.

Second, downtowns are places visitors go to understand what makes our communities unique. Downtowns have attributes that welcome all, facilitate human interaction and reflect local character. Downtown businesses can cluster and feed off of each other. This sends a clear signal to visitors and new merchants as to where the heart of downtown lies and where to walk and browse.

HOW CAN DOWNTOWN ATTRACT BUSINESSES?

Strategies to attract businesses to a downtown can include a coordinated marketing program with visitor maps, events, advertising, logos, etc. This helps package the downtown as a shopping district instead of a series of individual stores working alone.

Another strategy is a strong downtown business association that encourages common business hours, signage and window display standards, data gathering (sales, patronage, customer demographics), contacts regional retailers, etc.

One other strategy is to have landlords who carefully consider the tenant mix in their buildings to have those that support the greater downtown vision. Unlike a mall where a single landlord controls all the tenants, landlords in a downtown must cooperate in order to achieve the proper synergies.

HOW CAN DOWNTOWNS AND THEIR RETAILERS PREPARE FOR ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS?

In slow times the best thing is to protect and maintain your position. Its survival and maintenance of market share that downtowns should put the most emphasis on. The second thing is to take the opportunity to reposition yourself so you can take advantage of the upswing when things get better to do your growth.

Look for new ways to reach out to the community and take care of your core customer base. Get your face out there and reach new residents. The population

always turns over, so there is always people who should know about your business but don't. Events are great for that.

In terms of product and service be prepared to compete better to get your share of the pie. Businesses can look for opportunities to form strategic partnerships with one another to deliver better services, products, bargains for the consumer, and sales for themselves.

Re-evaluate your business plan and store displays when traffic is slow. It may be just moving stuff around and getting rid of some old things will give your customers a fresh inviting feel. It may the right time to mark down the things you want to get off the shelf and create some income.

All businesses are in this together and it is critical to review business plans and see if we are meeting the needs of the community.

IMPROVING DOWNTOWN'S APPEARANCE

To attract people and businesses to downtown it needs to be functional and include a façade that offers a sense of place and well-being. A couple low cost ideas on how to make a building look lively are: decorate and light the windows including vacant buildings, display in a window a video of local attractions and events, showcase local art (professionals, amateurs, or beginners) in vacant windows, consider using sides of buildings for murals that represent the business or the community, encourage physical improvements some of which could be exchanged for a reciprocal favor.

DEFINING A MARKETING NICHE

Downtown is a natural for a marketing niche that offers specialized businesses. Maybe we need to capture an existing niche or we may need to create a new one. To help find those niches identify successful niches in other comparable communities, study how current local businesses fit together (walking and taking pictures may be helpful), survey shoppers to find out who is shopping downtown and why, build a database of commercial space to include data on ownership, square footage, tenancy, and business category. The latter database has been completed for the City of Audubon and the City of Exira. The other towns will be done as time allows or if you have need now we can get right on it for you.

Some potential niches are, retirees, tourists and travelers, office workers, artists and crafters, county government users, medical facility users, and students.

AUDUBON COUNTY ENDOWMENT FUND

The Audubon County Endowment Fund was established in 1998 and affiliated with the Omaha Community Foundation. This relationship eliminates the need for each of seven affiliated counties in southwest Iowa to maintain separate IRS tax status. The fund is managed by a local advisory board. The funds are used to assist programs that support Historical, Cultural, Environmental, Educational, and Recreational objectives within the county. The endowed assets hit 1.2 million in 2008.

This year the Southwest Iowa Foundation offered a \$50,000 Challenge Match Grant for new contributions to the Audubon County Endowment Fund by 12/15/08. In other words, if we raise \$50,000 new money they will match it with an additional \$50,000. That's \$100,000 new money to be added to our Endowment Fund this year. Yes, we made it! We met the match on time. Thank you Audubon County and it's supporters.

The Audubon County Endowment Fund has grown into one of the most awesome benefits this county could wish for. In 2007 and 2008 a total of \$164,000 was distributed in grants. The spring 2009 distribution is expected to exceed \$102,000 and the fall 2009 distribution is expected to be in the \$60,000 range. Although the current economic meltdown has its negative effects, this program is holding strong. The grants will go on forever. Endowment detail information is available at www.auduboncounty.com.

TODAY’S ECONOMY COMMENT

We have discussions almost daily regarding the economy and its impact. My take is that we can choose to panic or we can be calm. I think the logical choice is to be calm. The media makes us believe that big business and politicians has crippled our economy or that everyone is hurting in these unprecedented times. I think the real facts are that our markets have not ceased to function, our economy has not collapsed, commerce still continues for all essential goods and services, most Americans are still employed, most companies are still operating aggressively, non-profits are still fundraising, and we have a new administration of supposed change.

History may be the best guide we have to inform and educate us during uncertain times. Various sources suggest that we have had numerous serious events with serious impact on the economy since 1940 and that the U.S. stock market generally recovered in a year or so. I think it is normal to feel anxiety during economic downturns but we need to be aware that emotional reactions may not lead us to rational decisions. None of us know what the economic future will bring, but I think we need to stay rational, stick to our plans, be motivated by our businesses purpose and mission, and be mindful and helpful to those hit with economic challenges.

Thomas R Nielsen
Executive Director

Food for thought....

- If you don’t ask,-----you don’t get
- Get rid of anything that isn’t useful, beautiful, or joyful
- Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere

Audubon County Tourism

Margee Shaffer

Audubon Community Banquet

**January 10th at 6:00 PM at the Saint Patrick’s Hall at 102 Market Street, Audubon
Everyone is encouraged to attend! Tickets are \$15.00 For questions call 712-563-3780**

Legislative Briefing ~ January 24th, February 21st and March 21st at 8:00 AM at the Audubon County Economic Development Community Room at 800 Market Street in Audubon ~ Your chance to visit with Senator Nancy Baudler and Representative Clel Baudler

2009 AUDUBON COUNTY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Events Submission Form

Please fill out the form for your events. Audubon County Tourism will make sure they are added to the Audubon County website. Please mail to Audubon County Tourism at 800 Market Street, Audubon IA 50025-1050 or Email to audubontourism@iowatelecom.net or Fax to 712-563-2537

Name of Event _____

Date of Event (Start & Ending date) _____ Time _____

Location of Event _____ City _____ Zip Code _____

Event Contact Person & Phone # for Publication _____

Event Email address _____

Organization _____

Contact Person _____

Contact Email Address _____

Description of the Event _____
