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## **Growing your downtown starts here: Looking at Lewiston and Auburn**

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Included among the cornerstones of any successful community are the fundamental building blocks of stability, growth, and positive spirit. From reinforcing the cultural vibrancy to strengthening municipal programs that enhance the visual appeal of the downtown, the cities of Lewiston and Auburn are cultivating a confident wave of enthusiasm within the Twin Cities.

Once central Maine's shopping focal point, retailers are looking at Lewiston and Auburn with renewed interest as they stake their claims within the downtowns. Office professionals, buoyed by the nearly 6,000 students enrolled in higher education, have relocated their businesses and grown by tapping into our trained and educated workforce.

Entrepreneurs attracted by affordable rents and motivated by market opportunities are moving their families and expanding their businesses within the second largest population center in the state. Residents, fascinated by the smells, delights, excitement and buzz, have once again taken to the sidewalks to peruse and shop as they experience new offerings only recently made available by new store fronts.

Representing the heart and face of the community, downtown Lewiston and Auburn have seen increased investment from entrepreneurs and new businesses alike. From new glass frontage on restaurants and eateries to sidewalk entertainment and festivals, plans are already in motion for a community customized as an urban playground while destined to fulfill the needs of the next generation family.

After a year of renovations to a historic building, Forage Market (located at 180 Lisbon St.) has been busy offering gourmet foodstuffs, fine meats, cheeses, rustic breads, beverages, local produce, and more. Popular among students and young professionals, the market bustles with activity and commerce throughout the week.

In addition to housing Forage Market the building has become a hot bed and incubator space for entrepreneurs. Anchored by Life Ideals and Chill Yoga, a number of galleries and photographers have utilized space on the upper floors before expanding into new locations. The most recent addition is Downtown Handmade & Vintage, a boutique that offers antiques, vintage collectables, and custom made locally designed arts and crafts.

After a stunning renovation of the nearly 5,600 s/f building at 97 Lisbon St., bicycle enthusiasts from throughout New England now have the opportunity to enjoy both a coffee and sandwich while browsing an extensive inventory of bicycle related products at the new location of Rainbow Bicycle and Fitness.

In addition, The Bread Shack recently announced their expansion into the 97 Lisbon St. location as they continue to grow their retail operations by offering artisanal breads and sandwiches as well as award winning pastries and treats.

Argo Marketing Group announced a \$2.4 million renovation of the former 25,000 s/f McCrory's department store located at 64 Lisbon St. Work has begun on the renovation which will result in approximately 150 new positions added to the 80 employees already working locally. The renovation will include 5,000 s/f of retail/café space designed to take advantage of the foot traffic already generated by The Vault wine shop as well as several other restaurants including Fuel, Marche, Mother India, and recently opened Orchid Restaurant.

Having opened in early June, Orchid Restaurant, located at 29 Lisbon St., is an Asian Fusion themed restaurant that provides an exciting mix of Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese inspired offerings.

In addition to the Lewiston Auburn Film Festival, Lewiston Auburn Magazine has contributed to the growing arts scene by renovating space at 223 Lisbon St. for a new art gallery and entertainment venue called Prose Gallery.

Located at the 140 Canal St. Plaza in downtown Lewiston, the owners of Blush Beauty Boutique fully customized their studio to create a modern and sophisticated high-end specialty hair salon.

Healy Terrace, an affordable downtown housing complex, underwent a nearly \$8 million renovation turning the 100 year-old Healy Asylum into 32 affordable units for senior citizens.

Built in 1854, the Lofts at Bates Mill underwent a nearly \$9.8 million renovation to construct a 48-unit mixed income housing project. Serving as the first residential mill conversion in Lewiston, the apartments were fully leased ahead of schedule.

Market rate living accommodations within the downtown continue to gain favor as each new project further enhances a sense of community while providing the convenience of a no drive commute. As an urban oasis full of recreational opportunities and events which all include access to the waterfront, L/A's two downtown districts present a variety of walkable activities including restaurants, museums, theaters, and one-of-a-kind retailers.

Located at 43 Lisbon St. in the Newberry Building, three market rate apartments were converted on the upper floors into a mix of one and two-bedroom units. Successfully rented before renovations were completed, future plans call for a restaurant on the ground floor.

Sold before construction even commenced, two condominiums are being developed on the third floor of 49 Lisbon St. while the top floor was converted into an expansive 5,000 s/f home earlier this year.

Requiring extensive exterior work including window replacements and the cleaning and repointing of the brick exterior, eight apartments are under construction in the historic McGillicuddy Building located at the corner of Lisbon and Ash Sts. Tenancy is expected by winter 2014.

Having been bypassed for years, businesses have once again focused their attention and conviction into downtown growth opportunities. Baxter Brewing Company is engaged in a \$2 million expansion designed to quadruple production within the Bates Mill. By growing their staff to 15 employees the expansion will allow brewing production during three shifts. When complete, employment will increase to 24 and Baxter will be the third largest brewer in Maine.

TD Bank extended their lease in the Bates Mill complex to the year 2025 keeping approximately 1,000 people working in the downtown.

Willis Insurance leased 10,000 s/f on the top floor of Bates Mill #2 Wing and Storehouse transforming the vacant area into spectacular Class A office space.

Just one floor below, Maine Community Health Options, a new insurance company founded in response to the Affordable Health Care Act, will provide affordable health insurance for Maine

people and businesses. Already employing 29 people, they are rapidly ramping up to 42 employees.

Meanwhile the Riverfront Island Master Plan continues to gain traction. Consultants have put their finishing touches on the proposal and with considerable public feedback and participation, the Master Plan documents won the 2012 American Planning Association Northern New England Chapter "Plan of the Year" award. The documents have subsequently been incorporated as part of the City of Lewiston's Comprehensive Plan and were showcased extensively during the recent Lewiston Comprehensive Plan event called Planapalooza.

Across the increasingly recreationally popular Androscoggin River, the City of Auburn welcomed new enterprises and eateries creating a hub of activity for residents. As new development increased demand and occupancy levels for housing opportunities, entrepreneurs took advantage of the architectural beauty of downtown buildings and surrounding neighborhoods.

New restaurants over the last year include Naral's Restaurant and Bar, 84 Court Pizza and Restaurante, the recently renovated Garden Grille & Bar at the Hilton Garden Inn Auburn Riverwatch, and newly opened Kelvi's Pizza in New Auburn. All providing distinct flavors and aromas wafting over the city, residents passionate about food opportunities have flocked back to the downtown as a result.

Top It Frozen Yogurt Bar is in the midst of renovating their 170 Main St. location. Providing self-serve frozen yogurt with a variety of flavors, the facility will include both indoor and outdoor seating accommodations that provide scenic views overlooking the waterfront. In addition, Maine Gourmet Chocolates will also share their space for added appeal.

Located at 86 Main St., Tarbell & Brodich Professional Association, a full-service law firm, relocated their Maine office from Augusta to Auburn in order to better serve their clients throughout the state.

Lewiston Auburn Canoe and Kayak Rentals, a seasonal business located behind Gritty McDuff's Brew Pub, provides both canoe and kayak rentals as well as tours along the riverfront. Further enhancing the urban playground and scenic opportunities within the downtown, tour guides are available to help bring outdoor enthusiasts all the way up to Great Falls as well as help navigate the many sluice-ways and canals along the river.

Individual town houses were constructed at 261 Main St. facing Academy St. and Community Little Theatre. The medium income development project continues to grow the appeal of urban living while providing the convenience of being just steps away from a performance hall.

Additionally, work is underway at the intersection to create a single apartment building containing a mix of one, two, and three bedroom units.

Located at 31 Court St., Norway Savings Bank recently completed ground floor and exterior renovations on their 22nd branch. Founded over 145 years ago, the full-service branch will have at least six employees as well as a drive-through at their newest location across from Auburn City Hall. Essential to growing the creative economy, representatives from the Auburn Public Library officially welcomed cardholders and the public to experience their new, state-of-the-art digital media center in early January.

The first such digital media lab to be located within a public library in New England, the aptly named Create! Media Lab is available for both Auburn Public Library and Lewiston Public Library cardholders. Equipped with three Apple Mac computers and the latest technological tools available, the lab provides a hands-on learning experience for students and professionals.

Across the street Dojo Digital, a website development and design business that delivers cutting

edge website features, moved into the Engine House located at 158 Court St.

With growing momentum focused on the downtowns and centered along the Androscoggin River, there are ample reasons to feel optimistic towards the growing opportunities forged from our community's tenacity and resolve. Billed as Business-Friendly Communities and Certified by the Maine State Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) as such, the progress made over the last year helped reinforce the fact that in the cities of Auburn and Lewiston, it really is happening here.

Calvin Rinck is marketing director of Lewiston-Auburn Economic Growth Council, Lewiston, Me. Co-authors include: Lincoln Jeffers, Alan Manoian, Roland Miller and George Dycio. A grand opening. Shown (from left) are: City of Lewiston director of economic & community development Lincoln Jeffers; Auburn city councilor Joshua Shea; City of Lewiston mayor Robert Macdonald; Lewiston city councilor Craig

Saddlemire; owner John Grenier; Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce president Chip Morrison. Photograph courtesy of Lewiston-Auburn Economic Growth Council

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