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Pawtucket's "Shop Main Street" event helps to promote downtown businesses - by Donald Grebien

December 10, 2021 - Rhode Island



Donald Grebien

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit many of our local businesses hard and although the worst of the pandemic is likely behind us, its lingering economic impacts continue to have detrimental impacts to small businesses the city's historic downtown. People remain reluctant to shop in-person along Main St. which has continued to impact their bottom line. These small retail stories rely on foot-traffic to sell their goods and services.

To help address this, the city, Pawtucket Restaurant Week Committee comprised of local business owners and city officials, and the nonprofit The Pawtucket Foundation worked with a couple dozen downtown-based businesses and community partners to host a "Shop Main Street" event on November 6th. Stacey Riendeau, the owner of Bake My Day, had originally approached the city with the idea to host this event. For years, she has worked tirelessly to support local businesses surrounding her small retail bakery to increase foot traffic and activity in the area.

Shop Main St. also included local restaurants and retail stores selling their goods from tables placed on the public sidewalks in front of their storefronts. Participating restaurants included Bake My Day, Atrium on Main, Plouffe's Diner, EP Kitchen, and other eateries from the Still on Main Building at 250 Main St. This event also gave commercial lending institutions, and nonprofits with the opportunity to promote themselves to over 100 people who attended. They included Navigant Credit Union, Pawtucket Housing Authority, YMCA, Progreso Latino, RI Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Black Lives Matter – R.I. Chapter, and Childhood Lead Action Project. Throughout the day, people enjoyed live music in three locations along Main St. At one point an artist gave a public art demonstration – the creation of a colorful sidewalk chalk mural.

The Rhode Island Department of Health offered a vaccine clinic and was able to administer 20 COVID-19 immunization shots. Along Main St., there was also a Rental Assistance Workshop hosted by the R.I. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and R.I. Housing which assisted over 30 at-risk Pawtucket residents to apply to federal rental assistance programs.

Shop Main St. was a success in supporting Pawtucket's small businesses located on Main St. We were pleased to see it become a valuable community resource for both Pawtucket residents and businesses alike. It also boosted the income of these businesses. The Bake My Day shop reported more than \$900 in sales from this event and others also reported increased sales on that Saturday.

We will continue to build on Shop Main St., working with our partners and local downtown businesses, to host additional activities along Main St. to promote the revitalization of this business district.

Donald Grebien is the mayor of city of Pawtucket, R.I.

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