

Main Street Program gradually transforms Hillsdale town center

THE COUNTRY STORE

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

The hamlet of Hillsdale is transforming: lighting has been enhanced; landscaping has sprouted up; visual storefront improvements assistance is available; and new signage will appear.

Kathryn, a 26 year-old resident of the Mississippi neighborhood had never heard of Hillsdale and had mistaken it for Hillsboro at first.

"It seems quite nestled in," she replied as she did her laundry. "Mississippi Street has been going through a series of renovations itself with the addition of new cafes, restaurants, food carts and small one-of-a-kind shops."

Her friend, Joe, explained that he liked the unique one-of-a-kind shops in Hillsdale and was going to the bakery shortly.

"I'd love to see more cafes and brewpubs and places to sit outside in summer," Joe suggested.

"Wouldn't it be cool to add a second floor [to the strip mall side]?" offered one employee.

"This area could be a great place for an early sixties retro look," replied another.

When asked if they had seen any changes since the Main Street program had taken affect, most had only noticed new trees and shrubbery.

There are the new, large planters, the red and white lamppost banners, and the new square between the bakery and the market.

There is talk of a plaza or posada being developed where currently the parking lot is between Key Bank and Casa Colima. Bricks will probably be sold in the future.

When all were asked about participating in the development of the town center, most replied that they were unaware of notices or unable to attend.

"Meetings are held at times when I have to get the kids off to school," exclaimed one business owner who did know about the meetings.

Hillsdale, along with two other communities, St. Johns and Alberta Street, received grants from the na-



Megan Braunsten, executive director of the Hillsdale Main Street program, displays one of the new planters along Capitol Highway. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

tional main street program in October 2010.

Megan Braunsten is coming up on two years of coordinating Hillsdale Main Street (HMS) after putting in three years as the Gresham Main Street executive director.

"Events like our recent 'Wine About Winter' and the annual Paella dinner," Braunsten explained, "are HMS products."

Governed by a 13-member board, HMS brings together the Hillsdale Business & Professional Associa-

tion, neighborhood association and residents on a regular basis to address five main objectives.

Design. This component focuses on physical improvements to the Hillsdale Town Center such as landscaping; the parking area up by the liquor store; the large, red planters along Capitol Highway; and storefront improvement such as painting or redesign.

"We have a variety of architects and designers available to our business owners," Braunsten said.

Promotions. Co-marketing of the holiday golden ticket program was a joint project with sister community, Multnomah Village. An online map-clicks.com site features 360 degree virtual tours and online information. A colorful up-to-date brochure features both retail areas.

Economic Restructuring. A business advocate program helps businesses with marketing such as upgrading Facebook pages and websites as needed. Up to two hours a week is available.

Organization. Websites, social media, monthly meetings, colorful posters and an electronic newsletter are incorporated to keep everyone linked in.

Sustainability. Helping restaurants to compost, sustainable energy audits, providing a process to recycle. Energy lighting assistance is provided at no cost.

Volunteers are the backbone of the program. Approximately 70 volunteers work a month with at least one event having over 200 volunteers on hand. "We couldn't do without them," said Braunsten.

But no program is without challenges. These projects tend to go through cycles. With many of the original volunteers burnt out, "friend-raising" is the art of getting new blood and, along with it, new ideas.

Plans are underway to network with Wilson High School, connect with the Key Club, and aid each other with fundraising needs. If you are interested in volunteering please call 503-896-9211, email volunterr@hillsdalemainstreet.org or visit www.hillsdalemainstreet.org.

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