

Revolution from 1A

“Over the course of the three years of our show, we’ve received nearly 30,000 nominations from communities who know that their small towns are special and love supporting their small businesses,” Brinkman said. “This year we had 10 incredible communities.”

After the announcement, Huntingdon said, “I would like to think it’s because we’re already too good. When Small

Business Revolution visited, they were very open with the fact they were looking for something very specific — communities that need the help and assistance. Maybe Florence doesn’t need it as badly as the other communities that were picked. Maybe the other towns didn’t have that energy to begin with.

“Honestly, I think we can basically do what they were going to help us with on our own. The extra money and the expertise would help, but I think we can rally the community to

do this on our own.”

In an email, Cameron Potts, vice president of public relations and community management for Deluxe, said, “Please know this decision is not in any way a reflection on Florence or the work you are all doing to build up your downtown. ... My entire team was humbled and honored to visit Florence and we were moved not only by the welcome and reception you put on, but by the extreme passion of your community leaders and businesses for Florence. I saw

the pride in the faces of the people we met and I know there are great things in store for you moving forward.

“Overall, you have already done the heavy lifting in creating momentum within your Main Street district to revitalize and continue to celebrate downtown. I hope that the recognition from Deluxe and the Small Business Revolution will be the catalyst for ongoing conversations and community pride moving forward.”

To live stream the event in Florence, Robbie Wright and Neil Ecker, both of Siuslaw Broadband and Hyak, worked with Kathy Stone, owner of River Roasters.

“My wife and I were here Friday night — quick plug for River Roasters, they’re now open late on Friday nights — and I had the passing idea that since we’re all going to be up and watching the announcement anyway, why don’t we come here and watch it?” Wright said.

He brought a TV, hooked it up to the Siuslaw Broadband Free Wi-Fi network, and he and Ecker monitored the streaming of the event.

“We really did rally to make it this far, and I am proud of everyone,” Florence City Manager Erin Reynolds said. “It’s people like Kathy who made it possible for us to even get into the top 10, as well as the other small businesses that are gathered in this room and, of course, amazing community champions like you all. ... I was sure we were going to make it into the top 5, but in my heart, you are No. 1. We will keep on being Florence and being awesome. There is a lot to come.”

Florence took on the motto “A City in Motion” in 2015. Thanks to efforts from the Downtown Revitalization Team,

the upcoming ReVision Florence Streetscaping Project and multiple other improvements, the city gets to harness that momentum.

One thing on the radar is that Deluxe Corporation plans to return to Florence in March to hold a business seminar.

According to Huntingdon, it will be a full day at the Florence Events Center, with a lecture in the theater in the morning and a breakout session for small group work in the afternoon.

“It will basically be a mini ‘Small Business Revolution,’” she said. “They will be doing branding, marketing, some business planning and even financial small groups. ... The focus is on businesses and nonprofits, but I think it will be open to everyone.”

A small fee will be required to cover the cost of lunch, and people will need to RSVP.

More information will be available in the coming weeks.

Huntingdon said, “Communication back and forth between the towns has been so positive. Any of them that wins is going to be worthy. I hope to stay involved in the voting, and I hope other people do, too. It’s been a fun process.”

“We just want to maximize this momentum,” Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bettina Hannigan said. “As a community, we need to embrace when people step forward and want to do something different and grow their business.”

Hannigan explained that people often have a “knee-jerk reaction” to change, and don’t necessarily encourage it. However, she added, “Thinking outside the box is what is going to make progress happen.”

One Facebook user, Joy Monroe, said, “Now would be a

good time for the group to evaluate and make a plan to just deep clean inside businesses, paint facades and plant flowers like crazy. You’d be surprised how much a little love can do.”

The City of Florence and the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce already have community groups dedicated to revitalizing the Old Town and Highway 101 area, such as the Downtown Revitalization Team and Florence Urban Renewal Agency, as well as the Economic Development Committee and Public Art Committee. With the Highway 101 ReVision, the attention will begin to pull focus back toward the town center, and a new group, the Uptown 101 Committee, is seeking members to target business growth in the north part of town.

In addition, multiple community groups, nonprofits, businesses and people regularly volunteer for street cleanups, donation events and the Power of Florence/Power of One, one day a year dedicated to the maintenance and beautification of area parks and businesses.

“People need to be willing to be the boots on the ground,” Hannigan said. “Get out and make a connection, or volunteer with RAIN, the Small Business Development Center or the chamber. Or, if you’re a business owner or want to improve, carve out time to take a course. Our momentum will only continue if people engage and move.”

A big part of that will be the continued kindness, involvement and willingness to compromise, Hannigan said, as people work together to build up Florence and the Siuslaw region.

At the close of Tuesday morning’s announcement, Florence Mayor Joe Henry said, “Just the publicity and the benefits we’ve gotten from being in the Small Business Revolution’s top 10 really do make us winners in this community. It shows how important this is to us when all of you show up at 4 a.m.”

Henry then thanked Huntingdon, her committee and other instrumental community members. “What a town!” he said.

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