



# A publication of Main Street Mobile, Inc. DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE NEWS

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## THE PUBLIC SPACE ACTION PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN

By Rhonda Davis

It has always been the goal of Main Street Mobile, Inc. to create a downtown where people can live, work, and play in a vibrant area. In 2001 the organization's Board of Directors entered into a contract with the renowned New York-based company, Project for Public Spaces. This group was given the task of assessing downtown and creating a public space plan that could be used as a blueprint for planning, programming, and revitalizing downtown. Hundreds of people participated in public meetings, focus group meetings, one-on-one meetings, and on-street surveys. Considerable research; hours of observations on how we use our downtown; and many, many thoughtful conversations with community, cultural and governmental leaders were held.

In January 2003 Project for Public Spaces introduced the Public Space Action Plan for Downtown Mobile. The plan is a prioritized guide to catalyze projects throughout downtown. The projects range from making changes to streets and sidewalks; to revitalizing parks, plazas and squares; to establishing guidelines and

a review process for how the ground floors of new buildings are designed and built.

Four years later, here is a brief review of the goals and recommendations of the Public Space Action Plan and a check list of actions to see what has been accomplished.

### The Goals of the Public Space Action Plan

- Activate downtown public spaces by developing strategies for attracting people to them on a regular basis.
- Strengthen the perception that downtown is safe and full of positive energy.
- Make the downtown a pedestrian friendly environment.
- Leverage all new development so that it positively impacts the surrounding public spaces.
- Streamline city bureaucracy and regulation around enabling and encouraging the private sector to make improvements.

### Overall Recommendations

**Improve the ground floor retail continuity throughout the downtown**

**Develop a program for filling vacant buildings and storefronts**

**Support and strengthen existing retailers**

Sidewalk cafes have been encouraged throughout downtown. The establishment of an experimental outdoor café was created at Spot of Tea with moveable tables and chairs on both sides of Dauphin Street. The café was a huge success. Outside dining has become so popular in downtown that Heroes Sports Bar and Grill has built a new outdoor deck on the Jackson Street side of their restaurant. Movable tables and chairs have

been added to Cathedral Square so people can enjoy a brown-bag lunch or take-out from local restaurants during the week and for picnics on the weekend. Other popular outdoor dining spots include Courtney's Café, Busaba's, Downtowner's and Wintzell's Oyster House. Almost all of our restaurants now have added two to three outdoor bistro tables for their customers.

The Mobile Transit Authority has added colorful umbrellas and benches at all moda! stops. This has helped people identify the stops and has made waiting for the moda! more comfortable. The free moda! circulator now runs six days per week around downtown.

*LoDa Dining & Shopping Guide* has continued to be printed by Main Street Mobile and distributed to downtown hotels, restaurants, museums and retailers for use by visitors and locals alike.

### Use frequent and regular events and art-related activities to jump-start the revitalization of the downtown and the use of existing public spaces

*The Government Street Market* opened in the spring of 2003 in the parking lot of Government Street Presbyterian Church. The market was so successful that it has expanded to a spring and fall market. Now established, the market has transformed into *Market on the Square* and is held in Cathedral Square on Saturday mornings and has opened in Bienville Square for a Noon market on Wednesdays during market season.

Alabama Contemporary Dance Company moved into their new home at 9 South Joachim Street across the street from the Saenger Theatre.

Formation of the Conti Street Initiative Task Force, a group committed to improving Conti Street and promoting the arts organizations and events in downtown.

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## REGENTS TRAVEL INTO THE FUTURE

The Crewe of Regents is now patrolling the District on a Segway, a high-tech personal transportation device that allows both speed and better visibility. Atop the Segway, Regents travel with the openness and accessibility of foot patrols, but with the speed of a motorized vehicle. Regents cover the 75-block Business Improvement District by foot, bicycle, Kubota, truck and now Segway.

The Segway, which glides along the streets and sidewalks noiselessly, was a big hit with *BayFest* visitors and even helped apprehend a suspect who tried to flee before police arrived on the scene of an altercation. Currently, the Alliance is the only organization routinely using this device downtown.



## REGENTS AND STEWARDS

Fall is a busy time for the BID's Regents and Stewards, what with the extra pedestrian traffic cooler weather brings and the crowds of *BayFest* and *Arts Alive!* But they've kept pace with the season and are keeping the District friendly and clean.

As the chart indicates, the vehicle assist service continues to be very popular with folks in the District...now averaging more than one assist per day. Fortunately the addition of the Segway is helping the Regents answer these and other calls for help more quickly. The Regents and Stewards both continue to work closely with the Police, alerting them of anything unusual as they make their way up and down the streets of the District

This past month the Regents tackled a new project: taking inventory of every garbage can in the public right-of-way in the District. Our office receives regular complaints from pedestrians who must walk past many unsightly and smelly garbage cans as they go to lunch or head to meetings. This inventory will help us develop a plan to make our sidewalks a place for people instead of garbage cans.

### CREWE OF STEWARDS - OCTOBER 2006

Trash Pick up	Landscaping	Debris Removal	Graffiti/Sticker Removal	Pressure Washing
359 bags	9 sites	23 truck loads	2 sites	15 sites

### CREWE OF REGENTS - OCTOBER 2006

Meet & Greet	Merchant Visits	Patron Assist	Vehicle Assist	Garbage Can Inventory	Police Referrals	Homeless Assist
11,584	291	111	39	72 Sites	2	54 encounters

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**Angela Eberhardt**, Office Manager  
**Carol Hunter**, Communications Manager  
**Evelyn Marshall**, Administrative Assistant

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# DIRECTOR'S LETTER

By Elizabeth Sanders

## A CONFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Two great trends in the demographic make-up of our country are combining with advances in technology and worldwide environmental and political issues to paint a rosy picture for downtowns across America and ours is poised to blossom as a result. Careful nurturing by our elected leaders and wise investments by our business leaders and land development specialists will enable Mobile to enjoy this time of optimism for our urban core.

So what are these demographic trends? The first is the gigantic Baby Boom generation which is now moving into a time of parenting freedom; good health; and ample leisure time. There are 76 million of them aged 42 to 60 and they are moving around and open to the downtown lifestyle. The second is the Echo Boom or Generation Y group. There are 83 million of them aged seven to 25. Combine that with the Generation X group, of which there are 62 million aged 26 to 41, and you have 49% of the US population. Both of these latter two groups are highly disposed to urban living, provided certain attributes prevail.

First let's talk about the Baby Boomers. This group has set trends throughout its 50 – odd year history. They have largely opted for a suburban lifestyle and will predominantly continue to do so. They are however enjoying the fact that their children are off and on their own. Many are finding that the large four or five bedroom house is too much to clean; too costly to heat and cool; and too much effort to maintain and they are opting in large numbers for something smaller and more maintenance free. Many are enjoying the equity they have in their houses while maintaining a place of residence where they still have primary business and social connections. This group is healthier at its age than any previous group at the same age. This good health and greater affluence, combined with the technology that allows them to be connected wherever they are enables them to travel more. What is good for people like this? A condo downtown that you can pick up and leave with no worries.

The advances in health technology that are coming our way in the next 10 – 20 years will continue to enable this group to live a very active lifestyle and will keep this group alive and healthy a lot longer. This group will be a potential market for us for many years. We have some issues with them, however because they remember shopping downtown with their parents and downtown will never be like they remember. This group is risk averse so safety is a priority, especially if one is meandering between mountain house, visiting children around the country, and spending time at their downtown condo. They want peace-of-mind that the place is safe while they are gone. They do love the arts and cultural events that abound downtown. Our challenge is to nurture this aspect of the offering and to make it a real and dependable asset that they can count on to offset other current deficiencies such as the retail offering. This group shops extensively via the internet, which frees them up for more entertainment oriented activities such as concerts, gallery walks, social gatherings, and dining out. Even if we only get a percentage of those moving and/or downsizing, because it is such a large group, they are a very real market for us in downtown Mobile.

The second group of great interest is the Echo Boom or Gen Y population. These folks offer a huge potential market for downtown Mobile's offerings. There are some very interesting things about this demographic group. They largely grew up in the suburbs and find it boring and passe. Downtown is the new, exciting, cool thing. This is the generation that has grown up with the internet, cell phones, ipods, and blogs – the most connected generation – electronically. Interestingly they are very social and they crave the walkable, dense lifestyle that downtowns offer. If we can

get that right in downtown Mobile we have a huge shot at these folks. These people will largely be renting through @ 2015 when the leading edge starts buying their starter homes – all of which, if we design them right, can be offered downtown.

These children are very tolerant – of other people, other lifestyles, and other ways of thinking. A good attribute for those we are trying to attract to our diverse downtown. The great growth is in the current minority groups and these folks will continue to be a major growth area for downtown.

Echo Boomers are very environmentally aware and green development combined with support for environmental causes will be significant for appealing to them. We are a little lacking on this one, but the market will drive this forward soon. The world's natural resources will continue to be taxed as China and India urbanize. The world's oil reserves are largely controlled by unstable governments so prices will continue to be volatile. The good news is that technological advances with wind and solar, and who knows what else, will probably help offset this volatility. Densely built urban areas do offer many economies, but we can do better with this one with green roofs,

energy and water efficient appliances, and enhanced public transit. The great news is that because of advances in technology the cost of building green is very nearly equal to building using traditional building methods. This is an area that downtown properties can use to differentiate themselves from suburban competitors.

Good for Mobile is the trend that the South has the highest net migration and that the prediction is that the move is to 2nd and 3rd tier cities. People are going to be moving from more expensive areas to less expensive areas. These are predicted to be the places of the future and Mobile is on that map.

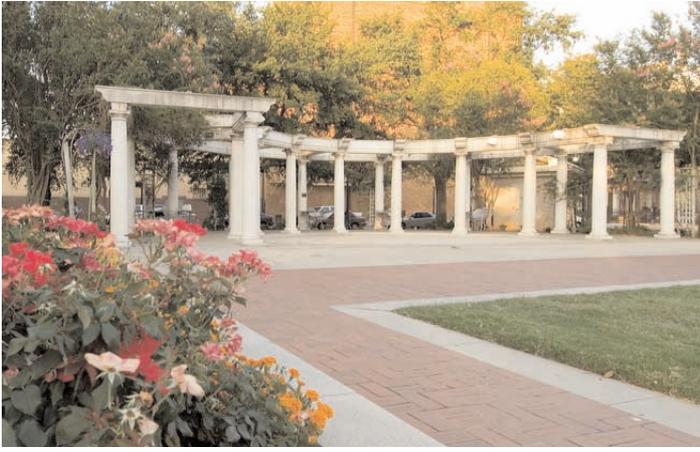
Our challenge with this group is again to be authentic to that walkable, dense lifestyle we say we offer, but clearly we have some work to do before we get there. The city in the 1990s invested in 100 plus blocks of sidewalks which are great and along which much development has happened, but the effort seems to have stopped in recent years. The development community must continue to demand that the city provide good sidewalks downtown. This matter of walkability is what sets us apart from our competitors and we must ramp up the effort to restore the downtown infrastructure.

We must shift our priority from the car to the pedestrian and by that I do not mean that everybody must sell their

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### Amenities Important for Attracting Young Consumers

1. Natural light – lots of it
2. Parking – must deal with this one
3. Space – open layout
4. Broadband – must have with this crowd
5. Architecture heavy in the design – emphasize those interesting features
6. "Green" and energy saving features – this generation gets the environmental thing
7. Clean, well- maintained, and well-lit sidewalks
8. Fitness facilities
9. Allowances for pets – dog runs need to be developed throughout downtown
10. Secure places for package delivery – remember this group orders off of the internet extensively



*Cathedral Square*

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The creation of *Arts Alive!*, an outdoor arts celebration centering on Conti Street and Cathedral Square. The event has been so successful that it is held twice a year – spring and fall.

The creation of the *LoDa Artwalk*. This is a monthly open house for downtown art galleries, retailers and businesses.

The restoration of the historic Saenger Theatre, 6 South Joachim Street, was completed in 2004. The Saenger Theatre is a 1,900 seat theatre that hosts concerts, plays and is the performance home to the Mobile Symphony.

The opening of:

Space 301, an 8,000 square foot exhibition space featuring contemporary art shows, 301 Conti Street.

Mobile Arts Council Inc. moved to 316 Dauphin Street, across from Cathedral Square in August 2005. The new space includes the Skinny Gallery that features art by local, emerging and regional artists and also serves as an information outlet for arts in our community.

Chesser Gallery, 306 Dauphin Street, opened in 2004 and features local and emerging artists.

Off-Dauph, 5 North Jackson Street a new contemporary art gallery located just steps off Dauphin Street.

Greater Mobile Arts Awards Ceremony presented by the Mobile Arts Council in Cathedral Square every September.

*WoofStock* a new animal-oriented celebration in Cathedral Square held in October.

**Institute traffic-calming measures throughout downtown**

A raised cross-walk was installed on Dauphin Street connecting Spot of Tea to Cathedral Square as a way to slow traffic and also to encourage pedestrian movement.

A four-way stop sign with a blinking light was installed at the intersection of Dauphin Street and Warren Street, in front of Wintzell's Oyster House.

Conversion of one-way streets to two-way streets. Phase one begins in early November and includes the streets surrounding the RSA Battle House Hotel and Tower. The streets included in phase one are Royal Street from Government Street to Congress Street and Dauphin Street and St. Francis Street from Royal Street to Water Street. On-street parking will be preserved along many of these arteries.

**Establish pedestrian-friendly gateways at key entry points**

The design work has been completed for two new gateway parks into the downtown area. Construction will begin in 2007. These parks are located at Broad Street and Springhill Avenue and Broad Street and Dauphin

Street. The new gateways will help define the western entrance into downtown and will feature fresh plantings and statuary celebrating our history.

**Establish guidelines and zoning codes to direct all future development**

The City of Mobile adopted the 2003 International Building Code.

The City Ordinance regarding sidewalk materials has been amended within historic districts. Now the Architectural Review Board has the ability to make recommendations to the City Engineer on exceptions to sidewalk materials used

within a historic district. This gives historic districts the opportunity to have sidewalks that reflect their date of establishment. For example, brick sidewalks may be used in DeTonti Square to create a more authentic and aesthetically pleasing sidewalks.

Urban Development created an Overlay District in 2006 that includes all historic districts. The Overlay District allows exemptions within historic districts for regular setback regulations.

A change in zoning was passed for properties within the B-4 zoning district (which encompasses most of downtown) that allows residential development by right. The exception to this change concerns buildings in the core area for which Planning Commission approval is still required for ground floor residential development.

The Mobile Historic Development Commission can now write a letter requesting exemption from the flood plain rules for historic buildings located within the flood plain.

The Mobile Historic Development Commission has certified Tax Credit Projects for Tilmon Brown's development of St. Emanuel Place and Tom Townsend's mixed use development at 459 Dauphin Street.

A Part I Certification to Jack Zeaman for a project at St. Michael Street and Washington Avenue has been issued by the Mobile Historic Development Commission.

The creation of the GO Zone by the Federal Government. This legislation provides tax incentives for businesses and developments and targets 20 counties in Alabama and includes the downtown area. The State of Alabama has a fund of \$2.1 billion to be used for GO Zone tax exempt bond financing.

Federal historic tax credits have increased from 20% to 26% until 2009 in the Katrina impact zone.

Non-historic tax credits for buildings built after 1936 have increased from 10% to 13% until 2009.

**Create as many incentives as possible to attract diverse artists and young entrepreneurs**

The opening of new galleries and the increase of art

related events downtown has given young artists venues to show and sell their works. The *LoDa ArtWalk!*, held monthly, is a perfect example of a new arts inspired activity that has increased artists' exposure and engages the public on a regular basis.

The diverse programming of *Arts Alive!* has given new performance opportunities to performing and visual artists that they did not have before.

**Other Positive Effects**

The most significant step forward has been the formation of the Business Improvement District. This step was a result of two years of intense work that has brought together property owners who pay an assessment that is being used to help improve downtown. The formation of the BID, managed by the Downtown Mobile District Management Corporation, has given property owners within the District the ability to manage programs of their interest.

Currently the DDMC is providing a clean and safe program that includes teams known as the Crewe of Stewards and Crewe of Regents. These teams help with everything from sidewalk cleaning, trash pick-up and



*Saenger Theatre*

tourist information assistance to after-hour escorts for downtown workers to changing flat tires for stranded motorists in the District. They are changing the appearance of downtown everyday and are helping to keep our community safe and beautiful.

The opening of the new cruise ship terminal, Alabama Cruise Terminal, at the southern point of Mobile Landing.

The Oakleigh Venture Revolving Fund is constructing four new townhouses along Dauphin Street.

The Mobile Historic Development Commission through its Revolving Fund sold the Franklin Fire House on St. Joseph Street along with an adjacent vacant lot to Ann Bedsole that is now under development as a mixed use office and residential complex.

The Residential Market Potential Study has been completed by Zimmerman/Volk Associates and was presented on November 9.

The Retail Market Analysis and Recruitment Strategy is now in the development stage. The results are expected spring 2007.

**And the Little Things That Count**

Downtown has responded to the idea of planting flowers. Many property and business owners have added window boxes or planters outside their doorways and have filled them with flowers and foliage. A stroll down the street is now more colorful than before.

The city's Parks Department has continued to hang and maintain colorful hanging baskets throughout the downtown area, adding a wonderful punch of color to downtown.

Through fund raising efforts of Main Street Mobile, new and additional holiday décor was installed in



*Family Fun in Bienville Square*

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Bienville Square and Cathedral Square. This effort brightened the holiday season and raised the bar for downtown property owners.

Pet waste disposal bag dispensers have been installed in Cathedral Square, Bienville Square and Spanish Plaza to help pet owners keep our parks free of pet waste.

More trash cans have been installed throughout the downtown area to help with trash disposal.

Mobile Area Water and Sewer System has repainted all the fire hydrants in the BID.

Keep Mobile Beautiful is introducing a new campaign to curb the amount of cigarette butts thrown on the sidewalks and streets.

### The Stumbling Blocks

The recession that began around 2000 and continued until 2002-03 had a negative effect on downtown as well as the city overall. Downtown services provided by both city and county government were scaled back due to a flattening of the tax income stream. Additionally many downtown businesses closed during this time.

The devastating fire at 208 Dauphin Street caused the closing of Dery's Ole Time Café. Dery's was a popular downtown restaurant that featured one of the first outdoor street-side cafes. The hot music venue "Monsoons" was forced to move to another location.

Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 caused damage in the downtown area. This slowed some construction projects and damaged many historic buildings within the core. Hurricane Katrina also caused extensive damage to Cooper Riverside Park. The damage caused the park to close for an extended period of time. Annual events and programs traditionally held in the park had to be canceled and public access limited. The park is still not up to its pre-Katrina standards.

Political leadership that is more focused on nurturing suburban sprawl than rebuilding the city's top economic engine.

There seems to be no planning effort to make Water Street a more pedestrian friendly street.

The proposed new I-10 bridge that will rise above the southern side of downtown Mobile has the potential to adversely impact the Cruise Terminal, the proposed Maritime Center and key downtown businesses.

### On the Drawing Board

The opening of the new 35-story RSA Tower will change not only the landscape of downtown, but the population. New businesses and their employees will bring a new and exciting level of energy to downtown Mobile.

Construction on the new Federal Courthouse located on St. Louis Street is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2007. The Moshe Safdie designed courthouse will make a dramatic statement on St. Louis Street and will include major public art commissions and an urban park.

### In Conclusion

Although many things have been accomplished in the past four years, there are still major issues and areas of work to be addressed. The concept of converting a few blocks of Conti Street into an open air market that would be open everyday was disappointingly shelved because of a lack of coordinating personnel. The addition of street performers and vendors in the parks came to a halt because of the many city regulations and issues that could not be worked through. The Sidewalk Rehabilitation Program that enabled downtown to have new sidewalks, lights and trees ended in 2002.

Creating a more pedestrian friendly downtown is still a major challenge. Government Street has seen no changes in calming traffic or pedestrian-oriented management. Water Street is still a speedway and the median a parking lot during Mardi Gras and Bayfest.

## MAJOR PROJECTS RECENTLY RENOVATED, CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION OR PLANNED FOR 2007

Building	Location	Investment
RSA Battle House Hotel and Office Tower	Dauphin and Water Streets	\$162,000,000
Riverview Plaza Hotel	64 South Royal Street	\$70,000,000
Taylor Martino Kuykendall Law Offices	51 St. Joseph Street	not available
St. Emanuel Place	Dauphin and St. Emanuel Streets	not available
Bedsole Complex	6 & 8 St. Joseph Street	1,000,000
Buick Building Lofts	455 St. Louis Street	2,000,000
Mattress Factory Lofts	412-416 Dauphin Street	2,000,000
Clarkson Townhouses	500 Block of Dauphin Street	1,000,000
Lafayette Plaza Hotel	301 Government Street	6,000,000
202 Project	202 Government Street	1,100,000
MDI Media Group	601 Government Street	200,000
Mobile Public Library Renovation & Expansion	704 Government Street	10,000,000
Hampton Inn	Royal and Conti Streets	15,000,000
Crescent Theatre	208 Dauphin Street	1,600,000
Centre for the Living Arts	301 Conti Street	4,000,000
DeTonti Square Apartments	258 N. Claiborne Street	not available
459 Dauphin Street	459 Dauphin Street	500,000
Burns, Cunningham, Mackey	50 St. Emanuel Street	300,000
662 St. Louis Street	662 St. Louis Street	200,000
Conti Street Apartments	459 Conti Street	100,000
Lyons Pipes Cook expansion	7 North Royal Street	200,000
St. Louis Lofts	308 St. Louis Street	1,000,000
Central Optical	St. Emanuel Street	1,400,000
Parkside Home and Garden	Conti and St. Emanuel Streets	500,000
Restaurant Development	210 Dauphin Street	500,000
Neisner Building	22-26 S. Royal Street	1,500,000
Veet's expansion	66 S. Royal Street	not available
The Royal Scam	South Royal Street	100,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>282,200,000</b>

Conventioners and visitors still have the challenge of crossing Water Street to get back and forth from the Arthur Outlaw Convention Center to our hotels and museums. City officials have taken few measures in transportation planning to make downtown a walkable community. The issue of getting visitors from the Alabama Cruise Terminal to the central business district has only been aided by the change in the moda! route that has helped move tourists into downtown. Now cruise visitors can jump on a moda! and ride to Royal Street to visit the Ft. Conde Visitors' Center, Museum of Mobile, Gulf Coast Exploreum, Conde Charlotte House and Dauphin Street.

On the positive side, the Public Space Action Plan for Downtown Mobile has worked to give Main Street Mobile, and now the Downtown Mobile Alliance, an articulated vision of what downtown can become. The plan

has been a powerful tool used to engage the community. It has shown people that something as simple as planting a few flowers can change perception. The Public Space Action Plan has been used in both short-term goal setting and long-term strategic planning with results being experienced everyday. With just four years of focused work under our belt, the changes in downtown are being seen. The Public Space Action Plan has proved that master plans do work and are an important part of the revitalization process.

The Public Space Action Plan has been a call to action. Everyone is invited to share in this creative and active plan for downtown. To download a copy of the Public Space Master Plan for Downtown Mobile, please visit [www.mainstreetmobile.org](http://www.mainstreetmobile.org) or [www.downtownmobile.org](http://www.downtownmobile.org).

### A New Definition for a New Approach - Placemaking

After more than a half century of urban planning and transportation policies geared largely to facilitating the safe, efficient movement of automobile traffic, a broader approach is taking hold and gaining momentum throughout the country. This approach, which we refer to as "placemaking," looks at the overall role that streets, parks, markets and other economic activities, as well as public institutions, can play in enhancing communities and creating new destinations. Placemaking aims to revitalize communities by creating human-scale public spaces that respond to community needs, where people feel safe and comfortable and where communities can come together.

Public Space Action Plan for Downtown Mobile  
Project for Public Spaces, January 2003



Kids Day in Bienville

## MEETING AND CONVENTION SCHEDULE

Scheduled for the  
Arthur Outlaw Convention Center

### DECEMBER

**Alfa Insurance 2006**  
December 7 – 11

### GMAC Bowl

December 15-20

### JANUARY

**Software Technology, Inc.**  
January 8

### Premier Cheerleading 2007

January 13-14

### A Wedding of a Lifetime

January 14

### Gulf States Horticultural Expo

January 29 – February 4

## GO ZONE APPLICATION AWAITS GOVERNOR'S APPROVAL

The Downtown Redevelopment Authority approved at its October meeting the application of the DDMC's "Downtown Mobile GO Zone Pooled Projects Initiative." Recognizing that many of the projects proposed for Downtown Mobile over the next year would be too small to take advantage of the GO Zone Tax Exempt Bond Financing feature, the DDMC initiated the creation of a pooled application. Owners of approximately \$45 million in project value expressed interest in the pool. The application now goes to Governor Riley for designation. The Authority and the Governor had previously approved a \$6.5 million allocation for Lafayette Plaza, LLC for their hotel renovation.

## HOT LINE

One of the most popular services provided by the Downtown BID has been the special dedicated phone line for anyone in the District who needs assistance. The service went into effect in February and has been steadily growing in popularity ever since.

By calling 251-327-SAFE (7233), patrons are connected directly to one of the Alliance's Regents, who can be by the patron's side in 10 minutes or less. Services provided include motorist aid, visitor information and escorts to vehicles after dark. The phone line is provided by Cingular Wireless and is staffed Monday through Wednesday from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m., Thursday through Saturday from 7:00 a.m. until midnight, and Sunday from 7:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

## REAL ESTATE REVIEW

Each edition of the Downtown Alliance News will feature a different downtown property. The goal of this feature is to provide information to the public on real estate options in the downtown area. If you would like more information on the property featured, please contact the management company or leasing agent directly.

### THE COMMERCE BUILDING

**Address:** 118 North Royal Street

**Owner:** Combile Realty LLC

**Management:** Julius Marx Inc. Realtors

**Telephone Number:** (251) 432-1854

**Year Built:** Redesigned in 1958 by Dumas Millner of Jackson, Mississippi

**Occupancy Rate:** 68%

**Available Square Footage for Lease:** 21,719 – with separate tenant storage available

**Leasing Rate:** \$13.50 per square foot

**Leasing Agent:** The McAleer Tunstall Company

**Leasing Telephone Number:** 473-7517

The Commerce Building has a wonderful and rich history. Originally built in the 1930s as a pharmaceutical warehouse, the building was transformed in 1958 by the regionally acclaimed firm of Dumas Millner of Jackson, Mississippi. Following the redesign and construction, the first tenant, Cooper T/Smith Stevedoring moved in. They occupy office space in the building to this day. In 1971 Julius Marx Inc. Realtors bought the Commerce Building. Julian Marx is still part owner of the building and his company, located on the 6th floor, serves as the management company for the Commerce Building.

The Commerce Building sits on the corner of Royal Street and St. Louis Street, in the northeast sector of downtown. In 2002, the building underwent a \$500,000 renovation that included painting the exterior of the building; tinting the windows; remodeling the front porch and lobby; and upgrading the entrances to the building. One of the most beautiful features of the remodeling project was the addition of 19 palm trees around the perimeter of the building and the creation of wonderful raised planters across the front entrance. The building, with its classic symmetric design, is going through changes once again. A major modernization is currently underway with a \$400,000 state-of-the-art elevator system being installed.

"When the construction of the RSA Tower was announced we knew we needed to look at the building to make sure we could remain competitive in the marketplace. Plus we have an obligation to our tenants to change the atmosphere of the building with upgrades. The owners agreed that we should do what we felt was best for the building. Cooper also gave us complete cooperation and support," explained Marx.

When asked what sets the Commerce Building apart from other buildings downtown Marx made a list. "We are close to the Alabama State Docks and the maritime industry. Parking for the building is a plus. We have 240 parking spaces that we manage and we are next door to the Automobile Hotel. Tenants have an owner who manages the building which means we respond to tenants needs as quickly and as best as we can."

Recent development projects have also helped with the northeastern boundary of downtown. "The FBI Building gave strength to this end of downtown. The Press Register Building anchored the north. BankTrust's move is a plus. The G M & O Building is very nice," stated Marx. "Downtown feels better. There is more posi-

***"Downtown feels better. There is more positive energy downtown."***

tive energy downtown," Marx stated then teasingly added "even though there is still a fear of flooding," alluding to the active hurricane seasons of the past few years.

"Downtown reminds me of my favorite television commercial from the 1950s, a Crest toothpaste ad. The ad was about a cowboy who bought a new hat, new chaps and a new shirt. Then a pretty girl came by and said 'what you need to do is brush your teeth.' This commercial is a great analogy for what ails downtown and the City of Mobile. We just need to brush our teeth," explained Marx.

### Commerce Building Tenants

Peebles & Cameron

Phillip's Hair Salon

Austill, Lewis, Simms, Pipkin & Moore PC

Cooper T/Smith

Guthans Court Reporting

ISS Marine Services, Inc.

Juba Aluminum

*The Commerce Building, redesigned in 1958, is a wonderful example of symmetric design. Located at 118 North Royal Street, the building is in a perfect location to serve the maritime industry. Photo courtesy of Julian Marx.*



# WEAVING THE FABRIC OF DOWNTOWN MOBILE

Each issue of *Downtown Alliance News* will feature a brief profile on a downtown business, a non-profit organization and a resident. Look for this profile to discover more about our community and our neighbors.

## FIRE HOUSE CAFÉ

Dauphin Street's newest restaurant, Fire House Café, opened on October 5. Located at 153 Dauphin Street, the bright yellow and red café sits on the corner of Dauphin Street and St. Emanuel Street, across from Bienville Square. The owners, Elizabeth and John Carpenter, caught the entrepreneurial bug while working with the Downtown BID.

"We would have never opened a business downtown," expressed Elizabeth, "we never came down here. When we started working for the BID a year ago and seeing all the positive things going on we knew we wanted to open a business downtown," continued Elizabeth. "We have always wanted a restaurant," explained John, "and the good Lord put a place in our lap. The price was right and the location great," emphasized John.

Fire House Café is filled with fire memorabilia. When you visit you can enjoy a collection of firemen's

***"When we started working for the BID a year ago and seeing all the positive things going on, we knew we wanted to open a business downtown."***

helmets and tee-shirts posted around the walls from volunteer fire departments from around the region. When asked about the memorabilia, John grinned and explained that he has been a volunteer fireman with the St. Elmo-Irvington Volunteer Fire Department for 12 years. The tee-shirts commemorate the brotherhood felt by firefighters.

The Fire House Café is really a family affair. The Carpenter's oldest son, T.J. did all of the carpentry work, their daughter Katie can be found running the register and son Adam cooking in the kitchen. When Elizabeth and John are not working as Regents at the BID, they are at the café.

The Fire House Café is quickly becoming a favorite lunch spot for the downtown workforce. The most popular item on the menu is the Conecuh sausage with peppers and onions. The chicken salad and bowtie pasta salad are most delicious too. All are recipes cultivated by



It's a family affair at the Fire House Café. Katie Carpenter serves customers and manages the register while her brother Adam cooks.

Elizabeth and John. The menu items are very affordable and the service is quick. Soon the Fire House Café will be open for breakfast. And of course, discounts are given to all police officers and firefighters.

When asked about plans for the restaurant John explained that they are working with an architect to install the proper equipment to transform the restaurant into a smokehouse. Look for these improvements over the coming year.

## MOBILE ARTS COUNCIL

The Junior League of Mobile, Inc. saw a need for an organization to help promote, facilitate and support the arts in our community. As a result, the Mobile Arts Council, Inc. was formed in 1955. 51 years later the organization is still working hard to raise awareness of the arts, support artists and art related activities, and advocate for a stronger arts community in Mobile.

This past year the organization moved their offices to 316 Dauphin Street, across from Cathedral Square, and opened the Skinny Gallery. The gallery features rotating exhibitions from emerging local and regional artists. The move to the new space has been a success. It has given the public better access to the Arts Council



Bob Burnett, Executive Director of Mobile Arts Council, Inc., stands with a sculpture by local artist Casey Downing in the Skinny Gallery, 319 Dauphin Street.

and has helped raise awareness of the organization and the services it provides. Executive Director Bob Burnett feels the arts can unite communities in fundamental ways, drawing on the shared human experience. "At the heart of its mission, the Mobile Arts Council is about community development," he explained. "Art brings people together in fun and meaningful ways. The arts, in all their diverse forms, make us aware of life's challenges, triumphs and celebrations," Burnett added.

One area that the Mobile Arts Council has made a significant impact in our community is in education. Each year an Arts-in-Education directory for teachers is published and distributed by the organization. This is a tool that teachers use in their classrooms as a resource guide for the community. The Arts Council also facilitates grant programs that assist in financing arts related programs for children.

Another event that helps encourage our children to

***"At the heart of its mission, the Mobile Arts Council is about community development"***

participate in the arts is the production of *Arts Alive!*, an outdoor celebration of the arts sponsored by the Mobile Arts Council. *Arts Alive!* is produced twice a year – spring and fall. The event is staged along Conti Street and Cathedral Square, touching all of our downtown art organizations: Saenger Theatre, Space 301, Mobile Arts Council, Alabama Contemporary Dance Company, Mobile Symphony and Mobile Opera. This event has made a significant impact on showcasing the visual and performing arts in Mobile.

As downtown Mobile changes there is one thing that we know: the state of the arts in downtown will continue to grow and evolve under the leadership of the Mobile Arts Council, Inc.

For more information on the Mobile Arts Council, Inc. visit their website at [www.mobilearts.org](http://www.mobilearts.org).

## A PIONEER IN DE TONTI SQUARE

It was the summer of 1976 when Rennie Brabner joined friends and bought an apartment building on Conception Street, his second DeTonti Square real estate project. As most people were leaving downtown, this pioneer was investing in and living in an area that could easily be mistaken for a quiet section of the French Quarter.

In 1986, Brabner and his wife began restoring a beautiful home at 303 North Conception Street. They moved in Christmas of 1987 and that has been their home ever since. They have raised their two children in the DeTonti Square house, a daughter now 25 years old and a son 21. When asked what it was like to raise children in an area that was not considered a suburban neighborhood, Brabner explained that it was wonderful. "The children attended Catholic schools and what we discovered was their classmates lived all over the city and in Baldwin County, so we weren't going to experience the feel of living in a suburban neighborhood anyway."

Brabner retold many stories that he and his family have shared with each other over the years. One story he recounts with amusement is when their children's friends would come over to their house for the first time for birthday parties or sleepovers. The visiting children and their parents would always be a little apprehensive about coming to this part of downtown he explained. Once they came through the front door the children were enchanted by the large living and dining rooms and everything would be fine. "The children also thought it was neat to see ships coming up the river from the third floor window," Brabner teased and winked.

"As the children grew, our home became the house where everyone came for *BayFest* and Mardi Gras. One year after a McGill-Toolen dance everyone came back here. We had 75 kids on our living room floor. Not everyone has the space for that to happen," Brabner recalled with a smile. "I think our kids were served well by living here. I would not want them raised in a cocoon," Brabner stated with conviction.

When asked why he invested in DeTonti Square so long ago, Brabner explained that his parents always liked New Orleans and the feel of that area, DeTonti Square had that same feel and we liked that too. Over the years Brabner has seen many changes. "At one time we would have to look underneath our cars to see if a wino was sleeping before we could drive to work. Now, we see the BID people picking up cigarette butts off the sidewalks. DeTonti Square has gotten better every year, it has been

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303 North Conception Street has been the home of the Brabner family since Christmas 1987

**“At one time we would have to look underneath our cars to see if a wino was sleeping before we could drive to work. Now, we see the BID people picking up cigarette butts off the sidewalks.”**

a continual progress,” Brabner said.

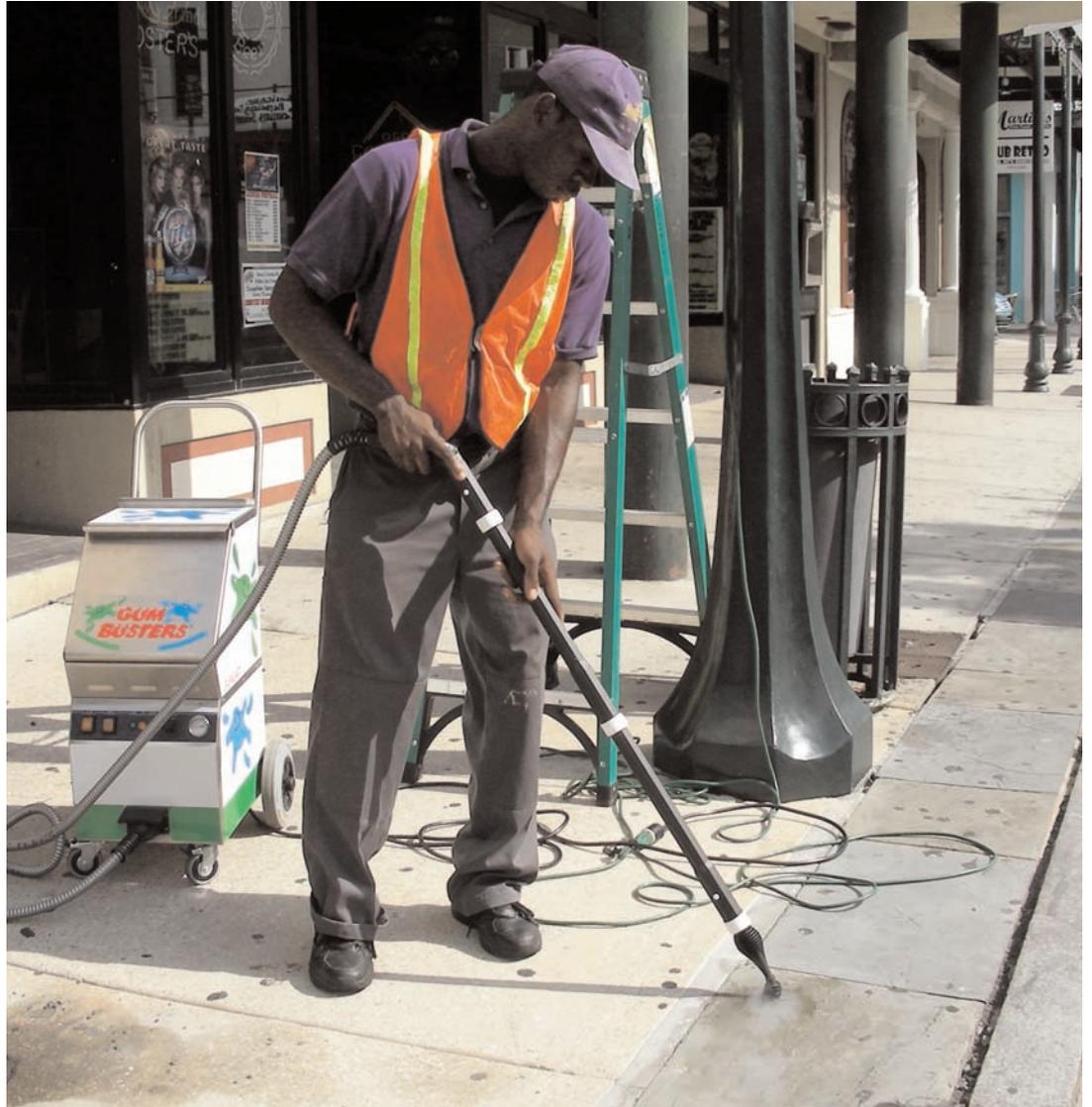
Brabner has always been involved in historic preservation. He has served on the Mobile Historic Development Commission since the early 1980’s and has been active in the DeTonti Square Neighborhood Association, serving as president for several terms. When asked what he thinks about downtown Brabner replied, “Love it! I wouldn’t like anywhere else. The next time I move will be to Pinecrest.”

## RESIDENTIAL STUDY AVAILABLE

The Residential Market Potential Study has been completed and was presented on November 9. If you would like to have a copy of the study, they are available at the DMDMC Office, 261 Dauphin Street.

**If you would like to be added to the Downtown Alliance News mailing list, please call (251) 434-8498.**

## CREATING MORE WALKABLE SIDEWALKS



For the past 12 months the Stewards of the Downtown Mobile Alliance have been focusing on the sidewalks within the boundaries of the BID. Every day they pick up trash, sweep cigarette butts, even steam clean on a regular basis. In fact, the sidewalks were so much cleaner that a new problem emerged: chewing gum. With other trash on our pedestrian walkways, no one noticed the thousands of dark spots staining our sidewalks. But with a cleaner environment, they stood out like black eyes all over downtown.

Enter the Gum Buster, a machine designed exclu-

sively for removing the unsightly, sticky mess from streets and sidewalks. The Gum Buster uses pressurized water with a cleaning solution to dissolve the gum while a small wire brush at the end of the wand scrubs the area. The process is a slow one...our Stewards can cover only a few square feet an hour...but the end result is a place that feels more inviting, more cared for. And hopefully, folks who chew gum will be less inclined to drop it on a clean sidewalk.

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car. I mean that we must create environments where the pedestrian feels superior. We need clearly marked cross-walks. We need street lights timed so that people can get across the street comfortably before the lights change and before the grumpy drivers roar their engines in fits of impatience. We need two-way streets with on-street parking and all of the messy vitality that brings – plus the slower cars and happier drivers who aren’t driving around four blocks to get next door. We need sidewalk cafes and street vendors and even a few street musicians.

On the issue of density, we must rebuild this city. I am always amazed at the comments from people who think a vacant lot looks better after a building has been torn down. Many of the older buildings are obsolete for their original occupancy and can make fabulous conversions for many uses, one of which is housing for these two demographic groups. The vacant lots have got to go. We must have parking, but we must have buildings. We cannot achieve the lifestyle and value of real estate we are destined for without building on all of this formerly urbanized land.

We are given an opportunity with these trends. Walkability is what we were designed for 300 years ago. “Walkable Urbanity” is what nearly 55% of the market says it wants. We must be vigilant to provide that to our current customers and our future customers. We must provide them with a good investment; a secure feeling; and a superior neighborhood environment. This is where the BID comes in as so important. Without the daily and intensive attention to detail that the BID provides to the public environment, this trend might pass downtown by. Our time is nigh, let’s seize it.

For further reading:

[www.rclco.com](http://www.rclco.com) –

“What Young Consumers Really Want”

The Experience Economy by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore

The Singularity is Near by Ray Kurzweil

Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization by Christopher Leinberger, The Brookings Institution

# DOWNTOWN EVENTS

## DECEMBER

- Through December 15 – *Breaking the Mold: Dressing Mobile with Ornamental Iron*, Museum of Mobile
- Through December 31 – *Made in Birmingham*, Space 301
- Through the holidays – *Santa vs. The Snowman!*, IMAX Theater at the Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center
- December 2 – Richards-DAR House Christmas Celebration, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
- December 2 – 3 Doors Down & Friends Benefit Concert, 9:00 p.m., Mobile Convention Center
- December 3 – *Holiday Open House*, Museum of Mobile
- December 3 – Belly Dance Superstars, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 7 & 8 – *A Christmas Carol* presented by Playhouse in the Park, 9:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m. on Dec. 7, 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. & 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 8, Saenger Theatre
- December 8 & 9 – *Holiday Open House*, 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., Courtyard Candle Company
- December 8 – LoDa ArtWalk, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m., Cathedral Square Arts District
- December 9 & 10 – *The Nutcracker* presented by Mobile Ballet. 2:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Dec 9, 2:30 p.m. on Dec. 10., Mobile Civic Center Theatre
- December 9 – George Jones concert, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 10 – *Second Sunday at the Space – For the Young at Art*, Noon, *For the Art Smart*, 2:00 p.m., Space 301
- December 11 – *Messiah Sing-In*, 7:00 p.m., 1st Baptist Church of Mobile
- December 16 – *Mobile Christmas and Holiday Parade*, 1:00 p.m., downtown
- December 16 – *Maddie's Santa Pet Adoption*, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., Bienville Square
- December 16 – *Holiday Pops* presented by the Mobile Symphony, 8:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 17 – *Rejoice, Beloved Christians* a cantata by Buxtehude, 11:00 a.m., Government Street Presbyterian Church
- December 17 – Saenger Christmas Film Series: *A White Christmas*, 3:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 17 – *Cider at the Chesser*, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m., William Chesser Gallery
- December 20 – Saenger Christmas Film Series: *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 21 – Art After Hours, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m., Lil' Lunchbox Café in the Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center
- December 21 – Saenger Christmas Film Series: *A White Christmas*, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 22 – Saenger Christmas Film Series: *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- December 22 – *Gala Christmas Concert* presented by Musica Sacra Choir & Chamber Orchestra, Melanie Zoghby Cummins and Mobile's Singing Children's Choir, 8:15 p.m., Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
- December 23 – *Fourth Saturday* in the Square, 9:00 a.m. – Noon, Cathedral Square
- December 24 – *Candlelight Christmas Concert*, 10:45 a.m., Government Street Presbyterian Church

## JANUARY

- January 12 through April 15 – *Sense of Place II: Materials at Hand*, Space 301
- January 12 through June 3, 2007 – *A Day In Pompeii*, Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center
- January 13 – Styx in Concert, 8:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
- January 14 – Legg Mason First Light Marathon and Half Marathon, 7:30 a.m., downtown
- January 20 – *Created in America* presented by Mobile Symphony, 8:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre

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# CIGARETTE LITTER FOCUS OF CAMPAIGN

Keep Mobile Beautiful is partnering with the Downtown Mobile Alliance to tackle the growing problem of cigarette litter. In many communities cigarette litter accounts for the greatest total number of items collected, often as much as 30 percent of all items. To help fight the problem, Mobile has been selected by Keep America Beautiful as one of several pilot cities in the United States to test the effectiveness of a new Cigarette Litter Prevention program.

The first phase involved a physical count of all the cigarette butts found on two blocks of Dauphin Street and was completed last month. Volunteers from Keep Mobile Beautiful covered every inch of the sidewalks on Dauphin Street between Jackson and Conception Streets and verified what national statistics indicate: Mobilians are careless with their cigarette butts.

Research shows that individuals who would never consider throwing an aluminum can, a piece of paper or an empty cup on the ground may be littering with cigarette butts. They may, in fact, be surprised to be called litterers. However, dropping butts, matches and packaging on the ground is littering, and because this litter is so lightweight, it easily washes into our waterways, trashing not only our street and sidewalks, but also our recreational rivers and bays.

Keep Mobile Beautiful will be installing several cigarette receptacles at transition points throughout downtown, most attached to trash cans along the sidewalks. We're also encouraging business and property owners to provide attractive containers for their employees and customers. To see a sample of containers available, stop by the Downtown Mobile Alliance office at 261 Dauphin Street. Or if you'd like product information, call Bob Haskins with Keep Mobile Beautiful at 251-208-6026.

After the receptacles have been installed and downtown workers and visitors have been informed of the facts of cigarette litter, a final count of cigarette butts will be taken. Let's prove to Keep America Beautiful that Mobilians are as clean as the citizens in any other city in the nation!



**THIS IS LITTER TOO.**

This message brought to you by Keep America Beautiful, Inc.  
and Keep Mobile Beautiful. Don't Litter  
For more information, call 208-6029

Made possible by a grant from Philip Morris USA.