

DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE NEWS

A Publication of the Downtown Mobile Alliance

VOLUME 6 • NUMBER 1 • SUMMER 2011

The Nuts and Bolts of the Economy of Downtown Development

By Asia Frey

Downtowns are thought of in many different ways. They can be tourist attractions, hip housing havens, and desirable office locations. Downtowns can be known for great nightlife, or maybe unique cultural events. However, one vital way to think of Mobile's downtown is as an economic engine, a body driving its own economic development that is as specific and vital a force as an industrial park or any other specialized economic entity. It takes planning to bring this concept to fruition, but that is what is required to keep downtowns fiscally healthy in this, or any, economy. The integration of downtown into an overall picture of the economic health of a city and a state must be made clear to stakeholders, city and state officials, politicians and the public.

The **Southern Growth Policies Board** recently completed a study with the **Georgia Cities Foundation**, the **Georgia Municipal Association** and the **Fanning Institute** entitled: "Cities and Downtowns: Building Blocks to Recovery," and their findings and recommendations are highly relevant to the economic future of Downtown Mobile. Ringing through this publication is the simple but essential concept: downtowns are economic engines. Downtowns support a large number of small businesses, downtowns have critical infrastructure in place to support business and housing, and, as such, downtowns should be treated like any economic enterprise or new industry.

This way of approaching the economy of downtown requires more than just cosmetic upgrades and good word of mouth; it's a complex, technical process that must be accomplished by professionals as well as state and local officials.

State policies are a necessary ingredient in this process, and many states, including Alabama, lack such policies at that level. The **Downtown Alliance** is hard at work on remedying this situation, which is just the first step. The Alliance recently attended some very fruitful meetings with its counterparts from Birmingham and Montgomery to begin to craft the legislation on specific incentives. These include historic tax credits to match the federal historic tax credits, but that are specific to downtown.

Also being developed are new markets tax credits that match the federal program to generate private sector investments in low-income communities. Typical projects could include shopping centers, manufacturers, retail stores or micro-entrepreneurs. To enhance the entrepreneurial environment in downtown, angel investor tax credits legislation will be drafted that will provide tax credits of a certain percent of money invested in a downtown businesses. Lastly, the **Downtown Alliance** is working on the creation of Cultural Districts that would exempt sales tax from original creations sold within the district, a model that is currently used in Louisiana with great success. The spring issue of *Downtown Alliance News* profiled the 20 Cultural Districts in New Orleans, and is available at www.downtownmobile.org.

The drafting of the legislation is currently underway by Beth Lyons, the city's legislative advisor. The next step includes discussions with lawmakers to get this vital legislation introduced.

The Georgia study has several recommendations for state strategies, emphasizing the concept that downtowns are essential to overall prosperity. Specifically, it has been suggested that it would be wise to identify the matrices needed to track comprehensive economic activity in downtowns and publish an annual assessment of their contribution to the state's economy. This would help brand downtowns as economic engines and change prevailing misperceptions that downtowns use more financial resources than they generate.

They also recommend the establishment of annual goals to address the special redevelopment needs of downtowns across the state, and the creation of models that tailor downtown redevelopment strategies to maximize the use of existing infrastructure and other physical assets.

The economic future of downtown rests in both the creation of financial assistance and incentive programs, as well as the branding of such programs. The financial facts of this work, and the recognition and awareness of these facts, go hand in hand in ensuring the economic health of downtown, especially in the larger context of the state economy.

Major Recommendations

- Downtowns need a vision; a plan and leadership
- Downtowns are economic engines
- State and Local collaboration in support of downtowns is needed
- Alabama needs a strategy for downtowns

For the Georgia Municipal Association's full report visit the following website:
<http://www.gmanet.com/MDR.aspx?CNID=58046>

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One Day. Many Cultures.

July has been a tumultuous month for Downtown Mobile. The month began with the disorderly event outside The Temple where a large number of teens had gathered unable to get into a sellout event going on inside. One thing led to another and, unfortunately, some in the crowd chose to solve their disagreements with gunfire. Everyone knows the story – no one was badly hurt, but the animosity continues and flares up in other places throughout the month. I could devote a whole column to the tragedy of angry teens that only know to solve their problems with violence, but there are others who know a whole lot more about that than I do. My story is one of hope and resilience.

I spent much of the day of Saturday, July 23 in Downtown Mobile and it was great fun. So did many other thousands of people each enjoying the myriad of events that were taking place in the heart of our beautiful city. The day began early with the luscious offerings at our wonderful farmers' market in Cathedral Square. People young and old came out to buy fruits and vegetables directly from the farmers, all the while meeting friends and acquaintances and having the light interactions that bind people to a place and to one another.

From there one could see the construction of a pole vaulting ramp (yes, you read that correctly) right in front of our office on Dauphin Street. For the next eight (8) hours people of all ages and from as far away as Texas and Louisiana were running down Dauphin Street with a giant pole in their hands hoping to clear a bar that was inching upwards from 12 to 18 feet. I am serious; this was the craziest, and funnest event I think I have witnessed in the streets of our city. The event drew lots of families and assorted interested parties and people shuffled in and out until the event ended at 11 p.m.

The wonderful thing is, that was not all that was happening in our compact little city center that night. At the **Civic Center**, the Monster Truck Jam was raging in the **Arena**. Thousands of happy monster truck aficionados were enjoying the crushing of metal and burning of rubber at this nationally touring event. At the **Saenger Theatre**, Roger McGuinn, co-founder of the Byrds, was entertaining his audience with his unique brand of folk music. At the **Soul Kitchen**, alternative metal bands, Sevendust and Adelitas Way were playing to a full house. It was great to see the **Soul Kitchen** crowd watching the pole-vaulting-sporty-crowd as they made their way up Dauphin. Over at the **Battle House**, love was in the air as two different bridal events were taking place in the historic halls of our most famous hotel. These are just the special events going on this July weekend.

I am sure that all the businesses normally doing business on Saturdays were busy doing their regular thing throughout the day and into the evening. At the **Explorem**, science novices of all ages were learning about black holes and far flung galaxies. At the **Crescent Theater**, the house was full for three shows with people watching "Buck," the story of Buck Brannaman, a horse trainer who travels the country teaching his natural horsemanship techniques to equestrians of all disciplines.

What is noteworthy about this snapshot in the life of Downtown Mobile is how unremarkable it is. This is par for the course week-after-week for Downtown Mobile. It is not a single purpose place. It is not just an office park, or a shopping center, or an entertainment center, or a single family neighborhood of people with the same demographic DNA. Downtown Mobile is a microcosm of a city in less than one square mile.

Our diversity is our strength. We are easily and effortlessly a place where city dwellers converse with farmers, where athletes show us their strength in an outdoor exhibition, and where folk musicians play in one hall and alternative rock in another. Our halls accommodate a Christian celebration of the marriage commitment as easily as a Hindu one.

Our diversity is also our challenge. We have to rely on our fellow property owners and tenant businesses to make good choices as to what events and business to solicit. Then, we have to rely on the various levels of government to do their part to maintain peace and order. Like

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Bike & Build Riders Enjoy Port City

Recently the streets of Downtown Mobile have been decorated with groups and individuals on pedal-propelled vehicles. Bicyclist from near and far have found reason to grace our city with their presence.

With backpacks lined with reflectors, tightly over-stuffed with water bottles, sunscreen and spare tires, 34 cyclists hit the pavement on their 2-wheeled transporters, ready to build, and ready for an adventure that would lead them down the streets of Mobile, AL. This group of young adults, the **Bike and Build (B&B) Riders**, bike around the country each year to raise awareness and funds to end sub-standard housing. Beginning their journey in Jacksonville, FL, heading to Monterey, CA, the B&B Riders will cross 11 states. With Mobile marked on the trail, the group had a story worth sharing.



Friday, May 30, Mobile felt the **B&B Riders'** presence as the cyclists cruised in from Gulf Breeze, FL to build for **Habitat for Humanity of Southwest Alabama**. Greeted by a pleasantly windy day and the southern hospitality Mobile is known for, the cyclist were escorted into town by a friendly cyclist who they'd met during their stop at the Battleship. The **B&B Riders** were given a warm welcome by **Wintzell's Oyster House Downtown**, who donated a seafood buffet for all participants.

Twenty-four-year-old cyclist, Galen Andrews from Asheville, NC, sat resting his elbows onto a table at **Wintzell's** with a curled mustache, dark hair tamed neatly into a Mohawk, and a pair of glasses resting on his nose. The recent college graduate took a leap of faith for this journey; quitting his job, selling everything he owned and giving up his apartment. "I'm taking an opportunity to do something bigger than myself, to find myself," Andrews said. As Andrews found himself riding into Mobile, he admired the beautiful scenery of the GM&O, the State Port, the plentiful trees, and the large historic homes that Downtown and Midtown had to offer. Although enchanted by the scenery, Andrews noticed that as he entered Alabama, drivers and roads were a little less cyclist friendly than the paths he'd taken across Florida. The shoulders were more narrow and higher, and drivers didn't seem to know how to respond with a cyclist in their road space. Andrews encouraged that Mobilians become better educated on cycling safety in order to make the area more bicycle friendly. As he rolled up his sleeves, his tan lines revealed evidence of long bike rides in the sun, "But yea, I'd visit Mobile again," Andrews said with a sincere smile.

B&B Rider Christina Curella, is a 24-year-old who lives in Washington, DC, a top 10 bicycle-friendly city. Part of what makes cycling so successful in DC, is that the city has added over 50 miles of bicycle lanes, increased bicycle parking spaces and racks, supports learn-to-ride programs, and has implemented the largest bike sharing system in the U.S. Curella suggests that cycling education become a larger part of the drivers' manual, and become a requirement for receiving a driver's license. The **B&B Riders**, are trained

on cycling safety, which include hand signals for drivers, as well as hand signals for fellow riders to warn about upcoming speed bumps or debris in the cycle path. Curella feels that courses of this sort could be beneficial to Mobilians. However, it's not just creating laws and providing education that make areas more cycle-friendly, it's the people. "Policies and structure don't make things happen, communities do," Curella said.

Although visitors are exploring the bike scene of Downtown Mobile, so are locals. Brooks Conkle, 27, enjoys riding downtown for events such as Artwalk and ArtsAlive. "Biking downtown is relaxing, a great change of scenery, and a way to catch a cool event and meet some new people," Conkle said. Conkle has managed to get his circle of friends to join him for bike rides downtown in

order to enjoy local cuisine, live music and activities. Conkle also expressed that Sundays provide a very cycle-friendly atmosphere. "The afternoons are quiet, streets are less crowded, and I encounter more families and other groups on bicycles," Conkle said.

One business getting involved in encouraging cycling is **Candlewood Suites Downtown**. The hotel offers two Huffy bikes to its guests to explore downtown during their stay. Guests are able to sign-out the bikes for 24hrs at a time. According to Catherine Duke, Guest Services Representative at **Candlewood Suites**, guests are eager to take advantage of the bikes, and have reported positive feedback regarding their ride.

Unfortunately, a key factor discouraging individuals from cycling is safety concerns. Paige Aran, a mother of three children under the age of 8, has enjoyed bike riding in other cities, but is concerned about bicycle safety in Mobile. However, if you'd like to plan a safe cycling trip in Downtown Mobile, or other areas in your community, there are many ways to do so. One way to be safe is to ride in groups. Mobile has a few progressive, active crowds in our community that use cycling for health and leisure activities, and are influencing a larger cycling scene. Groups such as **Mobilians on Bikes (MOB)** organize trips for the Downtown and Midtown area. This is an energetic group with over 400 members. They arrange date nights, event rides and more. **MOB** attracts families, adults and children of all ages. According to Niklas Hallberg, a member of **MOB**, the group often rides to the farmers' market downtown on Saturdays, where you may purchase fresh local produce. The group also are known for taking scenic trips down Dog River, which is perfect for a date or simply a peaceful journey with your friends and family. Hallberg also shared tips for drivers practicing bicycle safety. "The most important thing is to drive slowly and pay attention," Hallberg said. Hallberg says when you need to pass, you should wait for a safe passing opportunity, and allow at least 3-feet of space when passing cyclist. Another safe way to cycle is to take cycling routes. Hallberg and the members of **MOB** have recently presented a proposal to the **Mobile**

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Bienville Square Due for a Facelift

By Carol Hunter

Bienville Square has served as a gathering spot, a respite from urban sights and sounds and a reminder of our gracious southern roots for 187 years. The square was established in 1824 on the site of the Old Spanish Hospital when an act of Congress transferred a plot of land from the U.S. government to the city with the specification that it forever be used as a park. Then known as City Park, it was quickly established as a primary gathering spot for residents. The square became even more popular as amenities such as sidewalks, benches, fences and trees were added.

It was only in 1866 that the greenspace took on the name it bears today when the square was formally dedicated to Mobile's founder, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville. As we approach the 150 anniversary of that event, we have the perfect opportunity to begin the ambitious plan to revitalize the city's marquee square, and the perfect group to tackle the project.

The **Civic Sidewalks Task Force**, formed in 2009 to tackle some of downtown's most intractable issues such as panhandling and the management of services for homeless folks, is now undertaking the renewal of

Bienville Square. For reasons that have more to do with the desires and expectations of 21st century citizens than with any specific flaw with the park, it simply doesn't function as well as a landmark greenspace should. Walking surfaces are uneven, trees have become a little too dense and while the programming the city provides periodically throughout the year is great, it isn't enough to overcome the challenges.

However, great urban parks around the world have overcome similar challenges and now serve as vibrant outdoor "living rooms" for city residents. The addition of dozens of movable chairs and café tables, or providing free wi-fi service could help attract a diverse group of park users throughout the day. In some cities, even something as small as making space available for flower vendors or a newsstand has proven to be a key to park revitalization. All it takes is a solid, visionary plan, the funding to execute it and effective partnership with city leaders. The **Civic Sidewalks Task Force** will soon be gearing up for this effort to raise money and public awareness with the goal of unveiling a revitalized Bienville Square in time for the sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary of its dedication in 2016. If you'd like to be a part of this exciting project, please contact Carol Hunter at chunter@downtownmobile.org or 251-434-8498.



"One Day" continued from page 2

with any organism or ecosystem, when one part begins to fail, the other parts have to work harder to maintain the system. Downtowns are certainly ecosystems with many parts, some of which are working mighty hard for some parts that, too often, are mighty diseased.

For all the bad press about the two events that happened in the early hours of the morning earlier in July, on this beautiful Saturday thousands of men, women, and children were fortunate enough to spend time in Downtown

Mobile and leave with great and memorable experiences – experiences that frankly would not have been as powerful in any other part of town. This unique place that makes so many experiences possible has been through war, depression, anti-urban public policy, abandonment by its citizenry, and more during her 300 plus years. Yet, here we are on this one unremarkable day celebrating in this remarkable place the athletic and creative spirit of our citizenry. I would say a place this resilient is a place worth betting on for the next 300 years.

— Elizabeth Sanders, President

Urban Emporium Brings Retail Downtown

By Asia Frey

While restaurants and galleries, office and housing opportunities crop up downtown, retail remains a big piece of the puzzle. With the creation of the **Urban Emporium**, an important commitment of the Downtown Mobile Alliance is being realized. It is with great excitement that the Alliance looks forward to the October opening of its retail incubator, a unique multi-vendor retail space that will bring distinctive and varied retailers to a central location downtown.

The retail incubator concept will encourage retail tenants into the downtown market by minimizing the risk for fledgling downtown merchants



with a dedicated support system. The **Urban Emporium** will be staffed full time by a manager and salespeople alleviating some of the challenges of staffing experienced by small business owners. Regular weekday and Saturday hours will ensure exposure for the tenants and maximum convenience for shoppers.

Ultimately, the Urban Emporium will host six to eight retailers. To become one of them, contact Fred Rendfrey, Director of Downtown Economic Development for the Alliance, at 251-434-8498 or fred@downtownmobile.org. The Urban Emporium is possible because of grants from Sybil Smith Charitable Trust, the J.L. Bedsole Foundation, and Alabama Power Foundation.

A Win-Win for Downtown

By Asia Frey

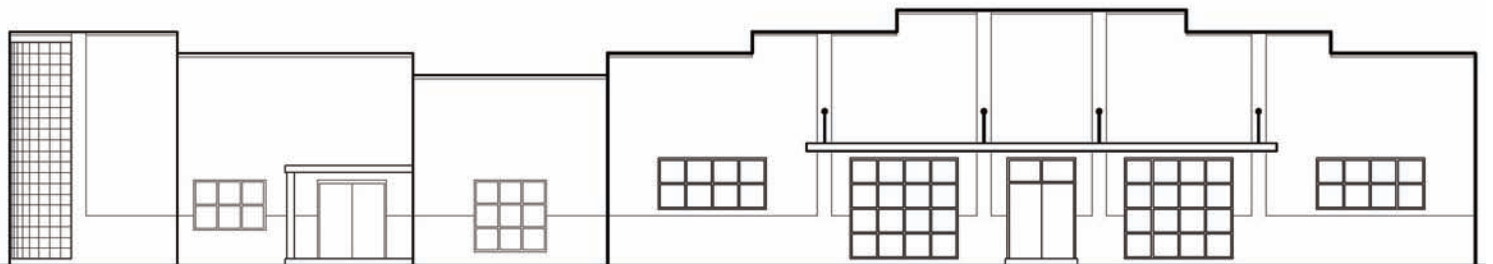
The wheels are in motion for a \$3.5 million project that will move **15 Place** and the **Waterfront Rescue Mission** to a new, purpose-built location at 279 Washington Avenue. Waterfront provides faith-based, seven month drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, while 15 Place provides meals and social services to the homeless. Greater efficiency and a reduction in duplicated services is just the beginning of the tremendous benefits in store for these two organizations, the populations they serve, and Downtown Mobile.

Moving out of their current location in two Victorian houses and an old church will mean a building better suited for the needs of the organizations says Bill Bru of the Waterfront Resuce Mission, but "it will also open up potentially terrific residential properties and perhaps a restaurant in DeTonti area." He calls the merging of the two service providers natural, stating, "we have always been partners. Now our guests and their clients will not have to traverse many blocks to get to both facilities." Lyn Walters of 15 Place says they are "going to have a purpose built building in which we can expand our services to include more agencies that serve the homeless. Waterfront will have a bigger, state of the art facility wherein they can provide the recovery services that many of the homeless desperately

need." Greater efficiencies in food services and volunteer and donations services will mean more donated money reaching the need as intended.

For downtown residents and business owners, this is also a very positive move, as it will provide more shelter beds for the homeless which should logically lead to fewer homeless people out at night. As Walters points out, this is even more important to her homeless clients, as they can seek help "farther away from the temptations of night life." As Sam Covert, Chairman of the Board of the Downtown Alliance points out, "it will increase the effectiveness for serving people who are in need of rehabilitative programs, [and] we will return three historical buildings in the DeTonti neighborhood to residential use, providing an opportunity to turn the property at 15 Place and the beautiful St. Francis Street Church into part of our art and cultural infrastructure which is perfectly located in that district."

Essentially, this move will amount to the age old adage of a place for everything and everything in its place. With partial funding commitments already in place, the 2013 opening of this state of the art facility should improve the lives of many downtown populations. As Lyn Walters enthusiastically concludes, "Waterfront Rescue Mission and 15 Place have always tried to be good neighbors. This is our city too and we want the downtown area to grow and prosper. This proposition is WIN-WIN-WIN for all."



DOWNTOWN HOTLINE 251.327.SAFE (7233)

New Affordable Housing Available

As many young people or those just starting out on a career have discovered, downtown is such a desirable place to live that rents in the city center can be among the highest in Mobile. However, the **Mobile Housing Board's** latest development just north of Downtown Mobile could help satisfy the demand for affordable housing in the downtown area.

The Renaissance, located just north of the Press-Register building at Water and Beauregard streets, is offering new 1, 2 and 3-bedroom apartment homes. The units have fully equipped kitchens and amenities such as spacious floor plans, ceramic tile floors and generous closet space. There are 88 homes in the **Renaissance** neighborhood and 48 townhomes in the nearby **Renaissance Gardens** development off of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.



The spacious Renaissance units offer all the modern amenities

Both neighborhoods are **Homeownership Catalyst Communities** designed to help renters eventually become homeowners. Programs offered to residents include advice and classes about finance, wealth building and the path to homeownership. To qualify for one of these new homes you must be at least 19 years of age and be employed for at least one year or be enrolled in an approved educational curriculum. Residents must also meet income limit requirements. Monthly rent is calculated on a sliding scale based on family income. For more information, contact the Renaissance staff at 251-434-2302.

The Housing Board's Renaissance development is a traditional neighborhood with new, affordable housing options

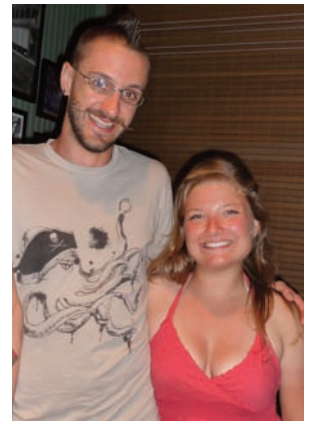
"Bike and Build" continued from page 3

County Bike Ped Planning Committee to restore a bike route that leads from Midtown to Downtown Mobile. This will provide a safe route for families. The proposals states that restoring this route will be great for cyclists who want a safe and relaxing route to shop, dine, socialize, and enjoy downtown business and events.

With downtown becoming more inviting for cyclists, this summer is a perfect time to hop on a bike for a ride. So get educated, chose a bike appropriate for your adventure and strap on a helmet. Remember, leisurely cycling burns 300 calories per hour, so you're not only improving air quality in your environment, but you're gaining some health benefits as well. Also, be sure

to park your bike at one of the unique, artful bike racks dotting Dauphin Street and around the Squares. The Alliance will soon be installing a couple of traditional bike rakes in Bienville Square sporting the new *Tour de Downtown* logo. Whether you're cycling downtown for an event, or to grab a bite to eat with friends and family, cycling can be fun and safe, and quite enjoyable in Downtown Mobile.

B&B Riders Galen Andrews and Christina Curella at Wintzell's.



Grants Available for Great Signs



Back in the day when Downtown Mobile was the center of retail for our area, one primary way businesses competed for customers was an eye-catching sign. Signs of all shapes, sizes and tastes directed shoppers and entertained passersby. In an effort to recapture the energy of our retail glory days, the Alliance is offering an incentive to businesses *Signs like this one engage and encourage customers to enter.*

wishing to install impactful signage. Two businesses have already taken advantage of the program, the Kangal Gallery at the Sail Loft and Spot of Tea. They sport very different signage, but in each case, the vitality of the block is enhanced. The photo on the left is another example of a great sign, this one in downtown Pensacola, where even if you need glasses, you wouldn't have any trouble finding this shop.

The Signage Grant Program is seeking projects that will have a significant aesthetic impact on the Downtown Mobile retail environment and that fall within the following area: Dauphin Street between Water Street and Cedar Street; Royal Street from Government Street to St. Louis Street. Eligible busi-
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WALK INTO THE FUTURE

TRANSFORMING DOWNTOWN MOBILE

SEPTEMBER 8TH • 2011

Noted Real Estate Developer to Address Alliance Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Downtown Mobile Alliance is set for **Thursday, September 8th at 11:30 a.m. at the Battle House Hotel.** The keynote speaker this year, **Chris Leinberger**, is the perfect follow-up to New Urbanist Andres Duany, who last year challenged the audience

estate industry responded to the market demand of the day and yielded many benefits. Yet we now know that it actually narrowed consumer options, consumed land at 6-8 times population growth and produced "could be anywhere" places, based upon the "19 standard product types". These drivable sub-urban formulas are re-enforced by the financing of much of commercial real estate which has turned what for thousands of years was a 40-year asset class into a product with a 7-10 year life.

to think in new ways about how we approach downtown development. Leinberger's real estate development firm, Arcadia Land Company, has active projects in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Independence, Missouri, and was instrumental in the revitalization of downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico. Leinberger coined the phrase "walkable urbanism" and is putting the principle into practice across the country.

Over the past 15 years, many consumers have been demanding different options to the "one-size-fits-all" drivable sub-urbanism. While single-family homes on large lots and strip commercial will be a significant part of the market demand for decades to come, there are many segments of the population that want something different; what I refer to as "walkable urbanism". This is where most daily needs can be met within walking or rail transit distance. These alternatives include downtown and suburban downtown revitalization, New Urbanism, transit-oriented development, green field mixed-use development ("lifestyle centers") and regional mall redevelopment, among others.

As a fellow at the Brookings Institute, Leinberger has championed the concept of "walkable urbanism," and has developed data that measure the positive impact of walkable neighborhoods on real estate values. He writes regularly about the economy, real estate and transportation policy. Following is from his website: cleinberger.com:



There is pent-up market demand for the alternative to drivable sub-urbanism that is readily apparent and we in real estate are re-tooling how we design, plan, regulate and finance to serve these markets.

The building of the built environment (real estate and the infrastructure that supports real estate) is in the middle of a structural change, only comparable to the change that took place two generations ago. The previous mid-20th century structural change converted real estate development into a modular, formula-driven industry, based upon access and parking of automobiles and trucks; I refer to it as "drivable sub-urbanism". The real

Working with many like-minded people and institutions, we are all formulating and implementing the next American Dream.

For reservations to the annual meeting, visit www.downtownmobile.org.

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EVENT SPONSORS



"Grants Available" continued from page 6

nesses include apparel and accessories; home furnishings and accessories; specialty retail and gift stores; electronics; health and personal care; and used merchandise stores.

The maximum grant amount is \$8000 which can be used for such improvements as prepping and painting, exterior lighting, signage restoration/reha-

bilitation, signage replacement, architectural/design fees, building permits/planning fees, other signage and related façade improvements. For complete details and application forms for both programs, please visit the homepage of our website: www.downtownmobile.org or call our office at 251-434-8498.

New Public Art Graces Government Plaza

A monumental new work by Mobile artist Charles Smith was unveiled in front of Government Plaza last month. The piece, entitled *Three Sisters* was commissioned by the Downtown Mobile Alliance and funded by local attorney Herndon Inge, III and County Commissioner Merceria Ludgood, with support from Mobile County.

Though most well known as a ceramic artist, Smith, whose works have been shown in the Smithsonian Institution, has created a sculpture of sweeping scale and significance. The three stainless steel pieces that comprise *Three Sisters* were fabricated by metal artist William F. Colburn, Jr. over the past 18 months.

Smith describes the piece as paying homage to women, who have been the cultural foundation of societies through the ages. The figure in the foreground is the older sister, whose role is to nurture the younger siblings so they in turn will be nurturers to the next generation. Smith says the abstract nature of the trio allows each viewer to insert his or her own

Crowd admires "Three Sisters" at the July 25th unveiling



"Three Sisters" adds visual appeal to the expansive sidewalk in front of Government Plaza

experience in the story, but for him, the *Three Sisters* represent loyalty, prosperity and justice.

The sculpture is part of the Alliance's on-going effort to revitalize Downtown Mobile through streetscape beautification projects, economic development and inspiring works of public art. Other examples include artful bike racks along Dauphin Street and two whimsical Bruce Larson sculptures.

Commissioner Merceria Ludgood, whose district includes downtown says, "We are proud to participate in a partnership with the Mobile Downtown Alliance to make our downtown even more appealing through the installation of public art. The talents and passion of artists like Charles Smith will engage people of all ages who visit our downtown and will be a legacy for future generations." Commission president Connie Hudson also praised this latest project saying, "We appreciate the help and support from the Downtown Mobile Alliance as well as the businesses and individuals throughout the community dedicated to improving our downtown business district."