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**MONROEVILLE MAIN STREET EARNS 2024 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION**  
**A Success Story of Collaborative Problem Solving and Creative Solutions**

**CHICAGO, ILL., (May 6, 2024)** – Main Street America announced today that **Monroeville Main Street** in **Monroeville, Alabama**, has received the prestigious **Great American Main Street Award** (GAMSA), which recognizes communities for their excellence in comprehensive preservation-based commercial district revitalization. The 2024 GAMSA honors, sponsored by The Hartford, were presented at the opening plenary for the Main Street Now Conference in Birmingham, Alabama.

Selected by a national jury of industry professionals and local leaders in the fields of economic development and historic preservation, Monroeville Main Street is being recognized for facilitating an incredible renaissance rooted in economic vitality, thoughtful design, and the literary arts.

“I am so incredibly inspired by Monroeville Main Street’s extraordinary success, especially in a relatively short amount of time,” said **Erin Barnes, President and CEO at Main Street America**. “They are truly writing the next chapter for Monroeville through a passionate dedication to collective action and preservation with a purpose.”

In rural southwest Alabama, where the Black Belt Heritage Area meets the coastal plain, Monroeville is a small town making monumental strides in enhancing the quality of life of its residents and creating an inviting international tourist destination. Just nine years ago, downtown Monroeville faced significant challenges. The historic district suffered from a high vacancy rate of 31 percent, with many of its buildings sitting empty and unused. The lack of businesses and vibrancy were the result of a culmination of decades of economic decline resulting from the exodus of a once bustling textile manufacturing industry.

In 2014, Monroeville Main Street was established to revive the downtown district. Through catalytic projects, strategic initiatives, and passionate people, downtown Monroeville has experienced a profound aesthetic and economic turnaround. Initial efforts included small, but highly visible, design and promotion projects such as branded pedestrian banners, sidewalk pressure cleaning, and the installation of self-watering planters. Monroeville Main Street leveraged the community’s revived pride of place to celebrate the town’s literary heritage through public art projects including the installation of 17 murals, 14 bronze sculptures, and a 24-panel story trail.

“We are incredibly humbled and honored to be recognized as a 2024 GAMSA winner,” said **Anne Marie Deas Bryan, Executive Director at Monroeville Main Street**. “This achievement is a testament to the unwavering commitment and hard work of our board members, volunteers, property owners, entrepreneurs, and community partners, as well as the power of the Main Street

Approach. We are grateful for everyone’s passion and dedication, which have collectively contributed to the revitalization of downtown Monroeville.”

The organization quickly coupled its commitment to preserving and building upon its heritage with bold economic development initiatives that activated the downtown’s vacant spaces. With the help of Main Street Alabama—the state’s coordinating program—Monroeville Main Street mobilized to maximize the full potential of the district’s large buildings by encouraging property owners to sub-divide ground floor spaces and to add upper story residences. They also worked with local developers and other partners to facilitate the renovation and adaptive reuse of 42 properties, resulting in the creation of 15 loft apartments, 12 new commercial spaces, and 23 smaller and more affordable storefronts. From façade improvements to complete restorations, these projects—valued at \$6 million—have breathed new life into the downtown’s historic buildings, filled a much needed gap for downtown rentals, and created opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Monroeville Main Street has leveraged these renewed and affordably priced commercial spaces to bring businesses downtown. To date, 42 new businesses have opened, creating over 72 new jobs—a significant number for the town of 5,900 residents—and the vacancy rate has dropped to 5 percent. Additionally, the organization actively invests in the development of the next generation of Monroeville entrepreneurs through their Business Understanding & Ownership for Youth (B.U.O.Y) program, a free 8-month training program for area teenagers and young adults.

“We have thoroughly enjoyed working with Monroeville Main Street the past several years—they are always prepared, always excited, and always willing to reach for new goals,” said Mary Helmer Wirth, President/State Coordinator at Main Street Alabama. “From the day they were announced as a newly designated Main Street program to being recognized as one of the best Main Street programs in the country, they have not slowed down one bit! We are incredibly proud of them.”

Monroeville Main Street’s success is also credited to their dedication to preserving and honoring their rich arts heritage. Known as the Literary Capital of Alabama for serving as the birthplace or home of writers like Harper Lee, Truman Capote, Marva Collins, and Cynthia Tucker, Monroeville Main Street’s public art programs and community events celebrate the town’s legacy while building upon it. Events such as the Monroeville Literary Festival and Paint the Town Paint Out attract visitors from around the state. In 2021, Monroeville Main Street and the Monroeville/Monroe County Chamber of Commerce created the smART Moves in Monroe County mural trail, a unique public art initiative that showcases the talents of local artists and beautifies the historic downtown. Through their Abandoned Art Project, local artists create and place free artworks in unexpected places for the community to enjoy, adding to Monroeville’s charm.

As a recipient of the 2019 Partners in Preservation grant, Monroeville Main Street secured a \$125,000 grant to bolster existing preservation efforts of the historic Monroe County Museum. In 2021, these efforts resulted in the museum achieving National Landmark status. This designation reinforces Monroeville Main Street’s commitment to historic preservation and dedication to working with partners to maintain the architectural integrity of downtown Monroeville for generations to come.

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**ABOUT THE GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS**

The Great American Main Street Award program recognizes communities exemplifying the use of the Main Street Approach™ to revitalize commercial districts. Winners are selected from a nationwide pool of applicants by a jury of Main Street professionals and leaders in the fields of community and economic development and historic preservation. Since the award's inception in 1995, over 110 Main Street programs have been honored as GAMSA communities. For more information, visit [mainstreet.org/gamsa](http://mainstreet.org/gamsa).

#### **ABOUT MAIN STREET AMERICA**

Main Street America leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. For more than 40 years, Main Street America has provided a practical, adaptable, and impactful framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization through the Main Street Approach™. Our network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. For more information, visit [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

#### **ABOUT MONROEVILLE MAIN STREET**

The Monroeville Main Street program was established as a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation in 2014. Prior to its creation, the Downtown Redevelopment Authority, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Board, and other groups worked independently to revitalize downtown. Now, Monroeville Main Street is the hub linking those groups and other partners together as part of a sustainable, cohesive, progressive plan. Monroeville Main Street is one of 33 communities selected to participate in the statewide Coordinating Program, Main Street Alabama. For more information, visit [monroevillemainstreet.com](http://monroevillemainstreet.com)