



Medina County (OH) REALTORS® Help Bring Dying Main Street of Seville Back to Life – November 2013

The village of Seville, Ohio (population not quite 2,500) had been hard hit by the recent recession, and before that, by the imposition of a set of extremely limiting zoning codes that left its once-charming main street commercial district 33 percent unoccupied. It was anchored at each end by shuttered gas stations, constituting unsightly brownfields. A recently closed elementary school loomed vacant nearby, not just an empty property, but representing the absence of significant tax revenue from the village coffers.

Within a year of receiving a \$15,000 Smart Growth Action Grant from NAR through the Medina County Board of REALTORS® (MCBOR) in the spring of 2012, Seville has bounced back in a big way. Susan Faust, Association Executive of the 618-member MCBOR credits member Rick Stallard, a Seville resident and civic leader, with the vision and energy that made it happen.

NAR had advised Stallard, who is a longtime REALTOR® and the Legislative Chair of MCBOR, as well as being a Seville City Councilman and its Director of Economic Development, to seek help from The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center (NTMSC) to revive the fortunes of downtown Seville. At first, Stallard was reluctant. "I've spent a lot of time and effort protecting private property rights," he says, "and all I could think of was how restrictive it would be to put ourselves in the hands of preservationists. We were already being so hindered by zoning and building codes, the last thing I wanted to do was impose another set of limits on property owners. Boy, was I wrong!"

Once convinced of the wisdom of tapping in to the expertise of The National Trust, he enlisted the support and commitment of the Mayor of the village of Seville, as well as the Council and Zoning Commission. The \$15,000 contributed by NAR brought representatives from NTMSC to conduct a study and make recommendations for reviving the downtown center; they were joined by a representative from NAR. For three days last October, the visiting experts looked, listened, and studied the problems of Seville's commercial downtown. With the information they gathered, NTMSC issued a complete analysis with clear and specific recommendations. Stallard calls it "a blueprint."

But the town's morale was on the rise before the report was even in hand. "When people saw that money was being invested, and experts were coming to advise us, they began to buy in to the plan, and really rolled up their sleeves," notes Stallard. The village applied for and received Historic status, which not only relaxes the building codes and ADA regulations on the century-old commercial buildings, but opens the door to more grants for reviving them. NTMSC helped Seville to identify county resources to have the brownfield sites assessed. The recommendations for filling commercial vacancies focused on building on the success of the existing cluster of antique and craft stores. The vacant elementary school was sold first to an investor, and then to a church from out of state that is making it a new headquarters and international college of music. This development enterprise is bringing eighteen new families to town.



Stallard himself bought the biggest vacant building on the main street, a two story structure owned by the Veterans. In return, he offered them ten years' occupancy of the second floor, rent-free. He gave the building a badly needed paint job, inspiring his neighbors to do the same. The row of stores and businesses is now fresh, cheerful, welcoming -- and occupied. Stallard's ground floor tenant, an antiques business, is so prosperous that it has expanded into a space next door.

Twice in recent months, AAA has brought bus loads of shoppers to the quaint downtown district, now a regional destination for antique- and crafts-lovers, an activity that would have been unimaginable just last year.

To learn more about how one REALTOR® has made a world of difference in Seville, Ohio, contact Susan Faust, Association Executive of the Medina County Board of REALTORS®, at susan@medinarealtors.com or 330.722.1000.

Seville's main street had boarded up businesses and unsightly brownfields before MCBOR began its efforts to bring it back to life with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a Smart Growth Grant from NAR.





Seville is beginning to come back to life, thanks in large part to MCBOR's efforts and a Smart Growth Grant from NAR.

