

# ANNUAL REPORT

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## NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE BEGUN

Downtown Lewistown, Inc., in partnership with the Borough of Lewistown and the Mifflin County Communities That Care Organization, is assisting residents in the "Five Points/East End" Neighborhood, roughly defined as properties east of Dorcas Street to Walnut Street with the southern edge including Rec Park. This area also picks up the former site of the Mann Edge Tool Company and includes properties north of East Third Street. These organizations are working with a Neighborhood "Action Team" to assess the overall conditions of the area to include the percentage of owner to renter occupied housing, state of roads, sidewalks, curbing, lighting, etc. potentially deficient/condemned properties, and a measure of resources available to/within the neighborhood among other variables.

The consulting firm of Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson (JMT), has experience working with similar communities and has been engaged by the Borough of Lewistown to work with the partners and Team to prepare a Revitalization Strategy guided by the PA Department of Community & Economic Development's "Elm Street" methodology and the first phases of a Redevelopment Plan following Commonwealth of Pennsylvania statutes.

This initiative is made possible through a \$25,000 grant from the PA Department of Community & Economic Development and contributions from private businesses and individuals. In addition, the Borough has made a significant commitment allocating its 2007 Community Development Block Grant funding to address infrastructure deficiencies in income eligible sections of the neighborhood. The Borough will also work with the consultant and Team to address blighted conditions from a code enforcement and property maintenance standpoint.

The completion of the Neighborhood Plan is slated for the end of December with submission to the State for consideration for designation as an "Elm Street" Community, awarded to municipalities demonstrating the capacity, planning, and determination to improve.

### ANNUAL MEETING HELD TODAY

The Downtown Lewistown, Inc. Board of Directors present the Officers and Directors for the 2006-2007 year in addition to the summary of projects, programs, and services advanced during the past year.

### PUBLIC INVESTMENT UPDATES

The long awaited Montgomery Avenue Enhancement Project has been bid with the determination to move ahead pending available funding forthcoming. This project is made possible through the contribution of land from Crider-Mitchell Construction and former Mann Edge Tool Company, the efforts of the Borough of Lewistown and Borough Engineer, pro-bono contributions from Lepley Electric, Dauphin Electric, Gold Key Real Estate & Appraising, and Moon Brothers Landscaping.

The \$230,000 Dorcas Street Gateway Project will move to the design/engineering phase utilizing funding from the Borough's Community Development Block Grant allocation for the Federal TEA 21 project. Work on this phase is anticipated for late 2006/early 2007 pending preparation of engineering services bid documents by the Borough.

Aided through allocations from the Commonwealth and supported through local commitments from the Borough of Lewistown, Mifflin County Commissioners, MCIDC, local business industry and private property owners, these investments are crucial to fuel economic development Downtown in combination with efforts to improve the region as a whole.

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## DOWNTOWN STEWARDSHIP

The Mifflin County Historical Society, DLI and the Juniata River Valley Visitors Bureau/Juniata Area Chamber of Commerce continued the program to recognize owners of significant historical properties and the care they have taken to maintain and preserve the landmark. Each owner was presented with plaques, manufactured by local entrepreneur Bryson Wagner, representative of the sites contribution to the heritage of Mifflin County, and the date of the property's significance. This year the Committee and Society recognized the H.E. Ahrens Construction Company Offices at the corner of West Market & Juniata Streets, Lewistown Hospital, Sacred Heart Church, the former Montgomery Ward Department store building on Monument Square, and the original site of "Peacock" Major's Tavern at the corner of East Third and North Main Streets. With the addition of these five buildings/sites, the sites so honored now numbers twelve with several more to be recognized this summer.

This Committee continues its efforts to develop a historic walking tour of important buildings and sites educating both visitors and residents using the Historical Society videotape as a starting point.

## DESIGN CHALLENGE GRANT

The Design Challenge Grant Program offers direct financial assistance to commercial property and business owners stimulating investment in the Downtown Charter Plan area. A range of exterior improvements are eligible for reimbursement grant funding up to a maximum of \$2,500 per building per year subject to review by a Community Design Committee made up of knowledgeable residents and a qualified design consultant under contract with the SEDA-COG Community Resource Center. The consultant offers design and technical assistance to Downtown business and property owners ranging from comprehensive surface preparation for painting projects to detailed construction plans for major building and storefront improvement. After review by the Committee and design professional, recommended eligible projects are forwarded to the DLI Board for approval. Since the inception of the revitalization program, 21 property owners have received reimbursement funds for completed and approved work with another 8 in construction or pending final review. As evidenced throughout the revitalization effort, the minimal amount of public funding leverages long lasting, visible, and appropriate improvement of properties in the downtown area. These reimbursement grant funds are made possible through an allocation from the PA Department of Community & Economic Development and supporting partners and is administered by Downtown Lewistown, Inc.



Miller Theatre marquee  
rehabilitation

## DOWNTOWN BUSINESS UPDATE

This past year several businesses opened or expanded their market presence in Downtown; RCW Pets and More, Folks Barbershop, Patrice's Boutique, DD Collectibles, offices of Community Partnerships Resource Conservation & Development Council, and Keystone Service Systems. The Trolley Car changed hands, Dolly's Alterations relocated to Valley Street and Soft Sands expanded into a new location while Leoras Cafeteria, Lewistown Restaurant, Monument Square Barbers, Accent On Mortgages, and Stringer's Antiques are no longer in business or have discontinued their downtown business or commercial venture.

DLI continued business development services to private business owners by offering Marketing/Promotion meetings on a regular basis for the sharing of ideas and exploring cooperative marketing efforts and direct assistance on a one to one basis on a wide range of issues/concerns. DLI continues to hold Business Development & Economic Restructuring Committee meetings to review development opportunities and programs, review trade area and customer base research, maintain an up-to-date commercial property listing, web presence and explore funding opportunities and programs to address reinvestment options in the Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. DLI has partnered with other economic development groups to assist with retention and expansion opportunities for existing businesses and is actively working to improve the quality of life for employees and residents of the Juniata Valley.

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## PRIORITY PROJECTS ADVANCED

This past year the DLI Board of Directors continued work on four major priorities for action. Significant progress was noted in advancing three of these priorities, while the fourth remains unsettled. The number one priority, "to establish a community college in Downtown Lewistown" remains a possibility while the multi county Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11 reviews options for placement of college center(s) in its service area. The former East Market Street branch of the Juniata Valley Bank remains a possibility for locating supporting educational facilities or other uses. The second priority, "to develop the center of town/Monument Square area" should be bid in the near future to allow construction of the nearly 1/2 million dollar PennDot "HomeTown Streets" Project. The County Planning & Development Department is coordinating all aspects of this project with support from property and business owners. Downtown Lewistown, Inc. contributed \$2,000 to aid with the design/engineering work for this most visible project. The third major emphasis, "encouraging the revitalization/redevelopment of mixed use commercial and residential neighborhoods" profiled previously, encourages Five-Points/East End neighborhood residents, business owners, and community partners to actively participate in developing a strategic plan to rehabilitate and redevelop the area and increase overall investment in the neighborhood. The fourth priority, redevelopment/reuse of the former industrial site of Mann Edge Tool Company is included within the Five Points/East End Neighborhood Redevelopment area providing potential opportunities for reuse of the nearly 4 acre site.

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## DOWNTOWN/EMBASSY THEATRE DEVELOPMENTS

During the past year, Downtown experienced a surge of property sales and increased investment. Several of these properties had been vacant for some time and now are receiving rehabilitation for reuse as business, residential and future investment opportunities. Additional sales of notable properties with the promise of increased investment are anticipated in the next several months. These investments and other improvements tracked for the first five years of the downtown effort are detailed in an investment brochure produced by Downtown Lewistown, Inc. and reflect a return on investment of over 690% leveraging private investment to access public monies.

DLI assisted the Friends of the Embassy Theatre to complete a feasibility study examining potential development options and programming of the Theatre/Community Cultural Center facility. This work also entailed the development of a Historic Structures Report documenting existing building conditions and outlining rehabilitation needs of the 1927 Theatre building. The Market Feasibility Study/Historic Structures Report was made possible through a \$15,000 grant from the PA Historical & Museum Commission, matched with an equal contribution from the Friends through a bequeath from the Helen Price Estate. The Friends contracted with the SEDA-COG Community Resource Center to coordinate the project which encouraged public input to plan for programs and entertainment offerings of interest to residents within the Juniata Valley. Based upon this public comment and demographic realities, a range of feasible entertainment possibilities will be incorporated into the Historic Structures Report to plan necessary facility upgrades and provide a basis to leverage future funding.

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## KISH RIVERWALK & TRAIL PROJECTS

With the completion of the Riverwalk & Trail Feasibility Study, construction of a trail segment along Kish Creek was noted as a crucial first step toward development of a system of pedestrian connections to Rec and Victory Parks, nearby neighborhoods, shopping centers and other destinations within the community. The Borough of Lewistown has been engaged in the development of this segment linking Rec Park with South Main Street through the surveying of affected properties, negotiating with neighboring property owners, and securing necessary inspections of the abandoned railroad bridge over Kish Creek. Once the affected properties are secured by the Borough and design & engineering work completed, construction of this trail will commence. This \$220,000 project entailing the reuse of the abandoned railroad bridge, preparation of a 10' wide walking/biking surface, lighting and other improvements is made possible through a \$110,000 grant allocation from the PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, leveraged monies from the Federal TEA 21 Montgomery Avenue Development Project, and a donation of land to the Borough from Omega Bank. This project is targeted for completion by April 2007.