

Downtown New Bern 2010...a year of celebration and many good happenings.....overview presented to Swiss Bear board members and guests at the December 2010 Board meeting by Susan Moffat Thomas, Executive Director

It has been a busy event-filled year for New Bern and Swiss Bear and downtown New Bern has continued to move forward.

In January, we hosted the 30th Annual NC Main Street Conference and Awards Banquet. In 1980, North Carolina was one of the first states to participate in the Main Street program developed by the National Trust to help small towns revitalize their dying downtowns. New Bern, one of the first of five cities selected to participate in North Carolina's new Main Street Program under the Department of Commerce, was chosen to be the host City as New Bern downtown revitalization effort is recognized throughout the state and nation as a Main Street *success story*. We were honored to serve as the host City to the 400+ elected officials and people involved in revitalization effort/projects across the state who attended. Swiss Bear and the City received an award for the Best Public Private Partnership for the Broad Street Improvements and Bridge Replacement project.

In April, Governor Perdue and other state and local officials sung our praises at Swiss Bear's 30th Anniversary banquet celebrating the long-standing public private partnership that led to one of the most successful revitalization efforts in the state. What is so compelling about our program is the local government's involvement of the private sector. From the beginning, the business community embraced the effort. Downtown property owners agreed to the creation of a Municipal Service Tax District that allowed the City to place an additional tax on their property within the district to fund badly needed public improvements. Influential board members and community leaders developed strategies and lobbied to acquire state and federal grants for projects. The community has always been generous in their support of our many fundraising campaigns for downtown improvements and projects. The public/private partnership in our downtown revitalization effort has been a powerful force in enriching our community and enhancing the growth and economic development of New Bern and Craven County.

The project to restore and relocate the historic Grumman F-11A Tiger located on MLK Jr Blvd. since it was dedicated to the City in 1973 is moving forward. In partnership with the City, Swiss Bear and the Fleet Readiness Center East, the jet was transported to Cherry Pt. last summer. FRC-E, along with volunteer marines, removed the old paint and made the necessary repairs. The jet has been repainted to the Blue Angels livery to re-capture its Blue Angel assignment in 1966-67. Our plan is to mount it in flight position on a pedestal in Lawson Creek Park, which can be seen from Hwy 70. The goal is to develop the site with lighting, landscaping and storyboards relating to the history of the plane and recognition of contributors. The cost of the project is \$40K and we are a third of the way there. We anticipate raising the balance of the funds in the near future so the project can be completed and dedicated by the summer of 2011. Alva Windham chaired the committee until he recently moved to Williamsburg. We appreciate all he has done, and hope he will stay in touch and continue to be a part of the committee.

The Sculpture project is moving forward. Pilings were driven, the base constructed, and column put in place in the location behind the Convention Center adjacent to the Riverwalk. A fundraising campaign to cap and surround the base with granite panels is underway. The crown/flower will be placed on the column when the artist comes to New Bern in April 2011.

Over the past 30 years, we have worked to promote the revitalization of the Five Points area and included it in the 1990 and 2000 Urban Design Plans (UDP) we coordinated and helped fund for the City and served on the City's Five Points Revitalization Committee. The City worked to improve housing with block grant money... bought the First Citizens Bank Building at Fort Totten for City offices and built a new Fire Station and Police Department. The Broad Street Improvements as recommended in the 2000 UDP were completed enhancing the Five Points gateway and commercial corridor. The Uptown Business & Professional Association, led by Mary

Peterkin, work hard to enhance the area and operate a learning center to help local residents gain their GED certificate.

However, to meet the true challenge, a great deal has to be done and the Mayor and Board of Aldermen are very focused on meeting the challenge. They asked Swiss Bear to place a greater emphasis on the Five Points area and make recommendations for establishing a Five Points Committee which were forwarded to the Board in late May.

To show our commitment to the effort, we up-dated our mission statement:

“To promote the economic vitality of the City and to preserve its rich legacy linking the present to the past...”

Swiss Bear Downtown Development Corporation, a private nonprofit in partnership with the City of New Bern, is committed to the continuous improvement and development of New Bern’s downtown district, its waterfront and the Uptown Five Points commercial area.”

We are excited and support the City’s submission of a HUD Choice Neighborhoods application for a \$30 million grant that would be used for housing, education, jobs, reducing the density at Craven Terrace by building new housing with 3 and 4 units in on surrounding property, recruiting new commercial business to meet the needs of the residents. It is a very competitive grant and many organizations including Swiss Bear are committed to helping the City with this effort.

Completion of the Riverwalk from Queen Street along the Neuse Riverfront to Lawson Creek Park has been a goal of the City and Swiss Bear for many years. Several years ago, the City acquired Coastal Area Management grants and completed the pocket parks at the end of Queen Street and Pollock Street. They also received CAMA money to fund a walkway on the water in front of two private properties between Pollock Street and Union Point Park. One of the owners has given the City an easement and they are working with the adjacent property owner to acquire an easement, which may take place in the near future. It is their hope to have construction of that leg of the Riverwalk completed in 2011. Mike Avery and the Planning Dept. are coordinating these projects.

Along the Neuse River, the Riverwalk continues through the new NC History Center and we are continuing to look for funding to match the \$649,450 BIG grant from the USF&WS that was awarded in 2009 for the construction of a pedestrian footbridge connecting the Riverwalk from City land on Walt Belamy Drive to Lawson Creek Park and to develop 14 public transient boat slips and a marina.

The Fairfield Harbor Yacht Club under the leadership of Neil Ober has raised funds for a sailing ship step mast flagpole. Originally slated for placement on Jack’s Island as a gift to the city for the 300th Celebration, the project has been put on hold until another location is selected.

The restoration of the small historic Fordham Cemetery on Queen Street has been completed...a joint effort by the students of Epiphany School, the New Bern Preservation Foundation, NC Cultural Resources and Swiss Bear. This project provided a unique experience for the schoolchildren who conducted research on who was interred, raised funds through grants and public contributions and the History Club won two statewide awards in the process.

MUMFEST’s 30th year was a great success...two days of sunny skies and record crowds. The Boat Show continues to be successful thanks to Bud Van Slyke who has chaired the Boat Show Committee for the past 8 years. Many thanks to Joe Alcoke, title sponsor for the past 10 or 12 years and to the forty-six other sponsors who participated in an award-winning event which offered something for everyone. The festival produced by

Swiss Bear in partnership with the City of New Bern, area businesses and nonprofits has an economic impact of \$3.5 million on New Bern's economy.

Thanks to New Bern's 300th Anniversary, which served as a catalyst for initiating and completing major infrastructure projects by 2010, we now have two beautiful new gateways into the downtown area. The Broad Street improvements including underground utility lines, new sidewalks, light poles and landscaping are finished as well as the new \$39M Bridge.

Just some of the other many good happenings, thanks to the 300th

- Construction of the \$60M NC History Center, an innovative museum that opened in October.
- The \$12M restoration of the Federal Building on Middle and New Streets was completed in late summer in time to celebrate its 75th Anniversary and participate in the 300th Jubilee weekend September 16-19.
- Restoration of the 1920 Seth Thomas clock mechanism that ran the City Hall clock until 1989.
- The 300th Committee members and a multitude of volunteers and City staff, under the leadership of Nelson McDaniel and Linda Stauch did an extraordinary job of developing and planning events and activities for the year-long celebration along with many groups and organizations. The Celebration concluded with an event-filled day on December 31 throughout the downtown.
- The Downtown Business Council and downtown business community again organized an outstanding *Dickens of a Christmas* promotion with a multitude of activities and events attracting people downtown.
- The New Bern Celebration group, who raised private funds for 300th events, contributed \$35K so the City could purchase the wreaths to hang on the light poles on our new bridge and down Broad Street to First Street to beautify our new gateways into the downtown area.
- Seven or eight new shops and restaurants opened or expanded, enhancing the downtown mix.

Swiss Bear's focus in 2011 will be to continue its program of work including:

- Raising funds to complete the River History Park
- Restoration and relocation of the F-11
- Completion of the sculpture projects.
- Restore the ship-hauling machine, a massive historic artifact reflecting New Bern's boat building history.
- Produce MUMFEST 2011.
- Work with the City as they develop plans for the revitalization of the greater Five Point area.

At downtown's lowest point, Swiss Bear was organized by the local government and business community in 1979 to work closely with the local government to stimulate the revitalization of the downtown and redevelopment of its waterfront. Over the past 30 years, the City's partnership with Swiss Bear produced a downtown revitalization effort recognized throughout the state and nation. We have accomplished a great deal and look forward to continuing the relationship.

- Liabilities become community assets when a community invests in their downtown.
- If a community's downtown is economically healthy, it has accomplished the toughest task there is to accomplish in the economic development arena.

Special thanks to our Swiss Bear board of directors for their support, time and commitment to our mission. To Danielle Glynn my outstanding assistant, to my husband John and to everyone in this room and many others who have contributed their time, talent and effort to the City, Swiss Bear, the many nonprofits and 300th anniversary. The many partnerships enriched the quality of life for everyone in Craven County.