

***Downtown New Bern 2011 – Overview presented to Swiss Bear board members and guests at the December 2011 Board Meeting by Susan Moffat-Thomas, Executive Director.***

New Bern's vibrant downtown has never looked more beautiful. It is all decked out and enjoying a Dickens of a Christmas...beautiful decorations, many lights and a multitude of festivities are taking place. 2011 is a year of many new businesses opening, expanding and or downsizing and several major renovations. The sidewalks are bustling pedestrians and parked cars line the streets. Festivals and events fill the calendar year round. It was a busy productive project and event-filled year for Swiss Bear.

Swiss Bear was responsible for the final 300th project concluding in March. A Time Capsule Committee assembled and placed memorabilia in a time capsule in commemoration of New Bern's 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, to be opened in 50 years on September 16, 2060...50 years from the date of the September 16 kicked off the 300<sup>th</sup> Jubilee weekend.

Memorabilia included area students' essays and artwork on what they envisioned New Bern would look like in 50 years. As stewards of the time capsule, the students agreed to organize the "Grand Opening" of the capsule in 2060. The capsule is on display in the City Hall Courtroom.

Two major projects we worked on over the past five – six years came to completion. The dedication of the restored historic Grumman F-11A Tiger in Lawson Creek Park, held October 30, included the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing Band and Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 2 Color Guard. It was a well-attended joyous occasion. Three professionally designed storyboards relate the jet's history as Grumman's first supersonic fighter and as a top performer for many years with the Blue Angels and those who helped make this project a success and our City's close relationship with the military.

The Spider Lily Sculpture Project, initiated in 2005, was dedicated December 12. Dr. Jim Congelton commissioned Susan Pascal Beran to design and construct the 29' sculpture reminiscent of New Bern's prized Spider Lily and Swiss Bear facilitated the project. Like many of our projects, the on-going series of challenges over the 6.5 years were met and resolved. Residents and visitors now enjoy a beautiful sculpture on the Riverwalk behind the Convention Center and the landscaped adjacent space with hundreds of Spider Lily bulbs and two new benches funded by contributions from the community.

To extend the Riverwalk to Lawson Creek Park we received a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) 2009 for \$649,450 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 grant covered 50% of the total project's estimated cost. We dealt with the many issues associated with a project of this magnitude however, significant changes to the economy nationally and locally affected the progress of this project and the ability to raise the required funds, which led to the Board's decision in late spring to forfeit the grant and put the project on hold.

MUMFEST's 31st year was the best ever! Two days of sunny skies and record crowds. Special thanks to Joe Alcoke Auto & Truck Center, Title Sponsor for the past 10 or 12 years and the forty-six other sponsors who participated in this award-winning event offering *something for everyone*. The festival, a city sponsored event produced by Swiss Bear in cooperation with area businesses and nonprofits, attracts 80,000+ to the downtown area with an economic impact of more than \$3.5 million on New Bern's economy.

The Ship Hauling Machine, a massive piece of maritime equipment is a significant artifact of New Bern's long-forgotten history as a maritime and boat building center and its dependence on water transportation. The machine was used by Barbour Boat Works to haul vessels to and from the water for maintenance. Its open gear system indicates it dates back to the late 19th or early 20th century.

When Maola donated the machine to Swiss Bear in 2005, the City dismantled and moved it to City property for safe storage. We plan to pursue funding to reassemble, construct a concrete base and place interpretive signage at a City approved site. In addition to the educational value of the Ship Hauling Machine as a historic artifact, it will contribute to the growing number of tourism attractions in the area.

Swiss Bear's Executive Director is a member of the Inter-Agency Committee, a group of nonprofit directors and city and county officials who meet monthly. Currently, the group is exploring the need to articulate the city/county by developing a brand that would give a competitive identity in furthering the economic goals of this area.

We organized an ad hoc committee to meet with representatives of the Empire Group who purchased the Elks Building prior to 2008 for major renovation. This five story commercial structure, built in the early 1900's is an important structure in the heart of the downtown at the intersection of Pollock and Middle Streets. The committee is working with representatives to explore financing options and strategies that can move the renovation of the project forward.

The City's commitment to improve the quality of life in the greater Five Points area led to being selected as a recipient of a U.S. EPA Brownsfield Area Wide Planning Pilot Program focused on developing realistic and implementation-focused revitalization strategies for both the commercial and residential parts of the study area. The Boston firm Goody Clancy is working with a citizen based steering committee that includes Swiss Bear's Executive Director. Development of the plan is expected to facilitate community involvement in brownsfield assessment, cleanup and redevelopment, connect brownsfield reuse to new job opportunities, and increase transit opportunities for the community. A final report will be presented to the Board of Aldermen in late winter/early spring for adoption.

In 2012, Swiss Bear is committed to working with the City to carry out the recommendations in the Goody Clancy plan for the revitalization of the greater Five Points commercial area and surrounding neighborhoods and other major projects identified in the 2012 Program of Work.

Over the past 31 years, the City's partnership with Swiss Bear produced an award-winning downtown revitalization effort recognized throughout the state and nation. We 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.

As the year concludes, special thanks is extended to the Swiss Bear Board of Directors who volunteer their support and time to fulfill our organization's mission; to our city elected officials, city manager, department heads and employees for their support and assistance; to all the many people in this room and the many, many more whose contributions of time, talent or money support our projects for the greater good of the City.