



Grant might make money available for downtown business

BY JOE GIESSLER • THE EAGLE-GAZETTE STAFF • AUGUST 27, 2010

LANCASTER -- A touch of paint here, a new awning there and some eye-catching signage can transform a dull storefront into a vibrant and, potentially, money-making property.

Downtown property owners can make those and other improvements to their buildings for half the cost, thanks to a new Main Street Lancaster program.

The Main Street Lancaster Facade Improvement Grant is a 50 percent reimbursement grant, up to \$1,500, for storefront or sign improvements. An owner could receive \$500 back for a \$1,000 project or \$1,500 reimbursed for a project costing \$3,000 or more.

"People want to go someplace that looks nice," Main Street Lancaster Director David Uhl said. "We're hoping a few businesses and property owners really catch on."

The grant program is funded by proceeds from recent Main Street events, including Gus Macker Basketball Tournament and the Chocolate Walk. He declined to say how much money is available in the fund.

"This is a great opportunity and one of the ways we can reinvest in the community," Uhl said.

Interested businesses or property owners can apply for the grant by contacting the Main Street Lancaster office. A project must be supported by the Lancaster Historic Commission, then approved by the Main Street Lancaster Board of Directors.

Uhl said projects must be started within 30 days and completed within 90 days of receiving the grant.

"We don't want to be a stickler, but what we're not going to do is wait around for a year," he said.

The deadline to apply for the grant is Dec. 31.

Despite the deadline, Uhl said he expects the grant to be offered again in 2011. He said the deadline was put in place to spur action among downtown property owners.

Dan Bright, owner of the Olde Cottage, said he thought the grant program was a "great idea" and can see it benefiting his restaurant, 157 W. Main St. Bright said he wants to install permanent benches, an awning and better signage in front of the business.

"I am definitely interested in that (grant)," Bright said. "The outside of the buildings (downtown) all need to be (beautified)."

However, Therese Ryckman, co-owner Four Reasons Baker and Deli, 135 W. Main St., disagreed with the use of proceeds from downtown events.

"I'd rather them lower the SID (Special Improvement District) tax on businesses. I say each time there's a surplus (from an event), the tax paid should be that much less," Ryckman said. "So people can spend their own money the way they see fit."

Uhl said businesses also have the opportunity to receive a low-interest loan of up to \$75,000. Four area banks -- Fairfield National Bank, Standing Stone National Bank, The Community Bank and Peoples Bank -- set aside \$500,000 each for a total of \$2 million.

The loans are available for an interest rate of 5.25 percent fixed for five years. Loans must be applied for by Dec. 31.

Fairfield National Bank President Steve Wells said the bank has a vested interest in seeing other downtown businesses succeed.

"Obviously we're headquartered in downtown so we like to do what we can to promote business downtown," Wells said.

He said the fixed length of the 5.25 percent interest rate for the loan is what makes the offer special to local businesses.

"I hope we have borrowers that take advantage," he said.

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