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Main Street Ozark

by: Sandy Key

The Main Street relationship to retiree relocation was recently explained in a news letter from Thomas Warren and Associates. Alan Church explains that for over 25 years cities all across America have been organizing, promoting and revitalizing their downtowns. The progress is a credit to thousands of small civic groups organized with the help of The National Trust for Historic Preservation through its National Trust Main Street Center program. The Main Street program emphasizes four main approaches to a successful revitalization effort; organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. Today's wealthiest members of society, retirees and baby boomers, are noticing their efforts. Not only do retirees love revitalized downtowns, but they also help to further reinvigorate downtowns through their spending.

A retiree attraction program is designed to entice resourceful retirees to move into a community thereby bolstering businesses, governments, and volunteer and charitable organizations. A strong synergy can be realized from the combined efforts of the Main Street program and a retiree attraction program because of shared goals in each of the four Main Street approach touch-points.

Organization – Successful retiree attraction programs must have the consensus of the community at large to be successful, not unlike the Main Street programs. Key players in the organization of such programs within the private sector include banks, retail shops, service businesses, and health care. While

important players in the public sector include utilities, school boards, local governments, chambers of commerce and, convention and visitor's bureaus. An education process is necessary to explain the benefits of retire attraction and spell out exactly who the beneficiaries are when working together as a community. Fortunately, retiree relocation programs have no significant drawbacks and virtually everybody reaps the benefits. Many of the perceived drawbacks are due to misinformation and erroneous stereotypes.

Promotion – Both retiree attraction and downtown revitalization do not occur without diligent promotional work. To attract retirees it is imperative to determine where the community shines. Success of the program relies on identifying and promoting the unique strengths (amenities) of that community. Attracting relocating retirees requires marketing to people outside the community, but it is equally as important to market to the community internally as well. The marketing programs need to reinforce why their town is a great place to live. Retiree attraction programs rely on a dialogue with citizens and relocating retirees; once interested it is critical to keep them informed.

Design – Relocating retirees can also help to reshape the main street look and feel. Although retired from their 'career' jobs, baby boomers still want to be involved and active within their new communities; some cities have been successful in their revitalization efforts by offering economic incentives to retirees that open a new business in commercial districts. Motivated retirees on a main

street will not only enhance their own properties, but will also help motivate existing businesses in the area to do the same.

Economic restructuring – Relocating retirees bring wealth to a community and provide economic development that most brick and mortar businesses cannot. Every sector in the community benefits.

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Retiree households spend \$36,000 per year on average. Spending stimulates new business growth, a portion of which is certain to land in downtown. Additionally retirees pay local taxes equaling \$3,000 per year on average. They create between 2 to 2.5 (entry and professional level) jobs. Retirees support public schools through property taxes, yet do not enroll pupils. Retirees are also the greenest form of economic development, and once established in your community, are likely to stay for up to 15 years.

Due to a common set of goals, collaboration between a main street program and a retiree attraction program create a win-win situation. Any main street program without a program promoting retiree relocation is not as strong as it could

be. Likewise any community promoting retiree attraction should fully investigate implementing their own main street approach.