

ROSE CITY RENAISSANCE – THE NORWICH MAIN STREET PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR ENDING DECEMBER, 2007

MISSION

Rose City Renaissance is a preservation-based, volunteer driven non-profit organization working to revitalize the historic downtown and waterfront areas of Norwich, through creativity, cooperation and community partnership. RCR continues to be in the forefront of downtown revitalization, driving the critical issues relevant to its sustainability and growth of downtown by supporting the needs of those who live, work and play there.

VISION

Downtown has an atmosphere which attracts visitors.

It is the center of activity for the residents of Norwich, and especially those who live downtown and in the inner ring neighborhoods, a thriving community with character and livability.

The downtown is home to a viable and profitable business community, as well as relevant governmental agencies, properly sited, with the infrastructure necessary for their efficient operation.

The waterfront is an integral part of downtown, providing active and passive recreation; retail, restaurants, and arts and entertainment venues; private residences as well as hotels, inns and bed and breakfasts; and marina and marine-related commerce.

Through its proactive efforts and commitment to good design, Norwich has melded its architectural heritage with new structures meeting the needs of the next generation.

Norwich celebrates the arts and promotes its history and cultural diversity, providing them with a supportive environment. In addition, it serves as the gateway to “The Last Green Valley” of the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor and all of Eastern Connecticut.

VALUES

Rose City Renaissance is committed to core values of good design, ethical practices, environmental responsibility, civic leadership, diversity and inclusiveness. It seeks to initiate creative change in Norwich in order to return the historic downtown and waterfront districts to their role as the thriving centers of community life. It will achieve this result by creating a culture of positive thinking – continuously demonstrating unwavering commitment and contagious enthusiasm, and most importantly, establishing a standard of cooperation in the community among government, citizens, organizations and special interest groups.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND UNDERTAKINGS FOR 2006-2007

Rose City Renaissance continues to be the leading independent voice of advocacy for Downtown Norwich, a constant source of information for the media, and when requested, provides information and updates to governmental officials and agencies.

RCR is requested to serve on a variety of boards and committees and participate on various panels requiring downtown expertise. RCR uses this voice and visibility to continuously promote the city and its revitalization. During the past year, the Executive Director has been involved in the following activities:

- Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce
 - o Board of Directors
 - o Chairman, Tourism Committee
- Heritage Discovery Center
 - o Board of Directors
- America in Bloom
 - o Committee
 - o Drafting Sub-Committee
 - o Tour Sub-Committee
- YMCA
 - o Advisor, Road Race
 - o Advisor, Bicycle Race

Our President, Les King served as our representative to the City's Administration, Personnel and Economic Development [APED] Committee.

RCR sponsored the Farmers Market at Howard Brown Park for the second consecutive year. While rainy weather impeded many of our prime summer days, our patronage remained strong, with 100-200 visitors on good weeks. In addition to a large banner in the Route 82 corridor, regular press releases and a weekly market newsletter kept the Market and Downtown Norwich before the public from early June through 31 October. This year, we implemented two "market preview days" in May – one for Mother's Day and We had visits from both WVIT-NBC 30 and WFSB-TV3. In June, RCR was presented with the Connecticut Main Street Center's Award for Best Ongoing Activity for the Downtown Farmers Market. The 2007 year ran from June through October. Although challenged throughout the season by weather, the market continued to provide quality produce throughout its run; meeting the diverse needs of the community for produce, especially the elderly and the disadvantaged. Once again, access and parking proved not to be a problem, and many of the Brown Park customers preferred shopping downtown to the Uncas on Thames campus.

This past May, on a section of Main Street closed to traffic, RCR hosted the Second Annual Youth Street Fair with the Norwich Anti-Bullying Coalition and the NAACP. The DJ for the evening, provided by RCR, served as host for the numerous exciting and enjoyable activities and demonstrations. Working collaboratively with several city groups and agencies, we were once again able to bring several hundred youths, accompanied by their parents and guardians, to downtown Norwich.

"Grand Openings" and "Grand Re-openings" continue to provide focus on the expanding business community downtown. By coordinating these events with the Mayor's Office

and the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce, we are able to provide these downtown entrepreneurs with broad exposure to the business community, government officials, and most importantly, potential clientele. They serve to recognize that economic development is incremental, often taking place one business at a time. RCR was recognized for this effort when it received the Best Public Relations/ Organizational Communications Award from the Connecticut Main Street Center. In light of our ongoing partnership with the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce, we invited our colleagues from the Chamber to receive the award with us at the ceremony.

During the winter, RCR sponsored “A Taste of Downtown”, a downtown restaurant sampler featuring eight our new restaurants and “old favorites”, all highlighted by the recently restored ballroom at the Wauregan.

Following this event and in anticipation of the upcoming Farmers Market season, the RCR Promotions Committee prepared a map of downtown restaurants, parking locations and landmarks. Its distribution was well received in the community and served as a yardstick for many as to the growth taking place downtown. At the present time, this committee is in the midst of compiling downtown facts and locations to make it even more interesting. RCR volunteers passed out this map throughout the Spring and Summer at each of the Farmers Markets, the concerts at Brown Park and the Norwichtown Green, RiverFest and similar events. Feedback was in many cases instantaneous, with people positively commenting on the obvious number of dining choices they now had downtown. Recognizing this is a dynamic document, we are printing smaller quantities o provide for more frequent updates.

RCR compiled an inventory of parking spaces – public and private – located throughout the center business district. This also includes large parking areas owned by businesses for their own use. At various times and dates, the public parking lots were surveyed for occupancy. The results of the survey are being analyzed and will be presented at a “Community Conversation” soon. This is a dynamic document to be maintained and utilized.

RCR conducted a Retail Niche Marketing Study to evaluate retail development options in downtown Norwich and the surrounding areas. The consultant conducted interviews, evaluated large quantities of data and compiled extensive findings. RCR conducted a primary evaluation of the report, and held a Community Conversation at the Spirit of Broadway Theater on 13 November 2007 to share the results with the public. Fifteen people attended. Conducted by Greenberg Development Services, the study, valued at over \$5,000, was provided through funding from the Connecticut Main Street Center. It is available on our website at www.rosecityrenaissance.com.

Recognizing that the reorganization of the Small Business Development Centers might have a chilling effect on its use by small business people and “emerging entrepreneurs”, RCR has strengthened its ties with the Connecticut Community Investment Corporation [CT-CIC] to offer a variety of their services locally – free of charge – through RCR. We are currently working with Otis Library and Norwich Adult Education to serve as partners and conduits in providing such services. Also, in cooperation with the Norwich Adult Education’s ESL program, we will be reaching out to the more recent foreign populations to the greater Norwich area. A structured effort will be undertaken to take advantage of our rich cultural diversity and translate this into retail and food service projects

downtown; and it will be undertaken in conjunction with CT-CIC and Three Rivers Community College.

RCR regularly meets with people interested in opening businesses or purchasing property in downtown Norwich or the immediately surrounding area, relocating to Norwich, or entrepreneurs already engaged in Norwich. We seek to provide them with information, any other counseling that they may need, and directions to other appropriate agencies. Both directly and through the Connecticut Main Street Center, we are able to provide connections to a variety of resources.

The Rose City Renaissance Design Center was home to the Christmas Committee's Santa Workshop display for a second year, which included visits with Santa Claus during the holiday season. Open over a four week period during the holiday season, the Workshop was a pleasant return for many to a Norwich holiday tradition.

Immediately following the event, the space was used as a "warming stop" for the First Night Celebration; providing hot cocoa and snacks to downtown visitors.

With initial funding provided by the City of Norwich, the RCR Design Center at 91 Main Street served as the gallery for "Robert Rauschenberg, Artist-Citizen: Posters for a Better World", from February to April. Partnering with the Norwich Arts Council, who provided curatorial and docent services, the exhibition, a component of the Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibition Service [SITES] reached over a thousand attendees. RCR provided the facility, in addition to funding for environmental monitoring, security, facility upkeep and maintenance, promotion and marketing, the Grand Opening Reception and other events held during the run of the three month show.

Following the Rauschenberg exhibit, RCR needed to find a new home for our "Design Center", and a committee was promptly formed. As can clearly be seen from past reports, the display and meeting space of the RCR Design Center on Main Street served as a valuable community resource. Whether bringing organizations together to engage in joint programs, sharing information related to downtown revitalization, providing a gathering place for educational programming and community celebration, or serving as a meeting space for RCR and any other Norwich area organizations, it fostered activity downtown and cooperation in the community.

During the several months following the SITES visit, the group developed a concept for a "Community Information Center", which would provide a "graphics/visual home" for groups and agencies of importance to Norwich, its residents, its visitors and its newcomers. An innovative modular/portable display system was designed so that the space might also serve as a display area for events like First Fridays or exhibitions featuring local collections. Designated the Norwich Community Information Center – Sponsored by Rose City Renaissance, we sought and received \$10,000.00 in grant funding to move the project towards fruition. We anticipate an opening within the first quarter of the new year.

RCR continued its commitment to First Fridays, hosting receptions and special events; as well as promoting it via e-mail to the greater Norwich community. Some of the more popular events were performances by the folk group, "Ask your Father", Pottery Night, beading demonstrations, and "Scan Night", where we made digital copies of peoples

historic photos and documents. The RCR site continues to serve as a rendezvous point for groups as they get started on their First Friday activities.

One of the more popular First Friday events was our Second Annual Norwich Juried Photography Show and Contest. The success of this contest, concentrating solely on Norwich-based subjects, continues to grow with more than 40 entries this year. These contests are also generating an exciting, evolving photographic record of Norwich and its revitalization.

A conscientious subcommittee of our Design Committee completed the first full draft of the Comprehensive Design Guidelines and Standards for the City of Norwich. This draft has been submitted to the APED Committee of the City Council for their input and action. The draft will include waterfront issues and signage.

In an effort to improve the streetscape and create a visually interesting pedestrian experience – as well as reinforce a sense of increased safety, The Design Committee has been developing model illumination themes for display windows and storefronts in the downtown area. Not only will this help promote a business's offerings, the illumination will provide ambient light on the street and actually save the shop owner money in overall lighting costs. The installation of four applications should be underway by December, 2007.

Rose City Renaissance officially submitted its Economic Incentives package to the APED Committee, which approved the package, sent it to the City Solicitor for redrafting into the appropriate language, where it will then move the Council for consideration. .

The Executive Director of RCR, serving as Chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce, has been working with the committee to develop two basic strategies of importance to Norwich. The first is to work with local historical groups, such as the DAR and the Leffingwell, to increase access to their collections; the second is to work with promoters of the cruise ship visits to New London to develop local tours for the visitors.

RCR provides visitor services to the Norwich Tourism Office during days and times when the part-time director is not in. Thursdays continued as a popular day for in-person visits during the spring and summer months of 2007. It was not uncommon to have more than 8-10 visitors a day.

The Design Committee continues work on "Every Building has a Story", a documentation project for a downtown building's civic history, to memorialize not just the important structures in the city's architectural inventory, but the people who worked and otherwise conducted business there. Combining history and photography, each significant building in Norwich will have its own poster. We have written and received two grants for this project.

The Annual Meeting of Rose City Renaissance continues to serve as a community update on downtown activity. Our awards program continues to recognize significant individual and corporate contributions to Norwich in the areas of developing activity downtown, adding to the building environment downtown, and providing spirit to spur downtown revitalization. This year's winners included developer Janny Lam,

restaurateur Bennick Tan of Red House Restaurant, developer Bruce Becker of the Wauregan and local businesswoman Jackie Quercia of Norwich Coin and Jewelry.

In addition to this annual event, RCR seeks to reach the community in more frequent ways:

- Its website, www.rosecityrenaissance.com, recently updated
- Its monthly e-zine
- Its First Friday Update
- Its Farmers Market Weekly

Rose City Renaissance continues to visit downtown merchants accompanied by professional business consultants from the Connecticut Main Street Program, the Small Business Development Center, SECTER and the Connecticut Community Investment Corporation to provide them with information on resources available to them, and to see if there are any issues with which they might help.

Rose City Renaissance has met and continues to meet with Connecticut arts and humanities organizations about projects related to a Norwich-based “portal” to Eastern Connecticut.

RCR has assembled the resources to implement its Community Leadership Training Program to get more people involved in Rose City Renaissance and similar organizations, as well encouraging participation in local government, on volunteer boards and commissions.

RCR’s “Guide to Development in the City of Norwich” is a guide to new construction, preservation/restoration and remodeling – both downtown and throughout the city. It is currently being reviewed by the City with our intent to have it published on-line at the Norwich Now! Website, or in the alternative, at www.rosecityrenaissance.com.

FY08 GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

GOAL 1 – ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To engage businesses, residents, government, civic organizations and other key partners and stakeholders in the redesign and recreation of a vibrant downtown community, and to serve as an advocate for their interests

[O-01] Continue E-Zine Publications

- First Friday Update
 - o Promoting downtown activities
 - o Distributed on “last Friday”
- RCR Newsletter
 - o News of RCR, Downtown and City
 - o Distributed mid-month
- Farmers Market Bulletin
 - o Weekly during season

[O-02] Implement programming that will illuminate important issues and provide a focus for community debate and discussion

- “Community Conversation” Forums
- Op-Ed Production

[O-03] Update and enhance the RCR Web Site

[O-04] Continue and enhance constituency services to more fully engage the community

- RCR Presence at Community Events
- Annual Meeting
- Awards Program
- Develop a Community Partners Leadership Training Program to provide an educational forum on government, its structure and how it works. The CPLT should be offered on a regular schedule.

[O-05] Engage students in the community to participate in the RCR mission

[O-06] Maintain our sustainability by ensuring our relevance and visibility as an organization to support the businesses, residents and visitors to downtown Norwich.

- Database/Mailing List Maintenance
- Membership Development
- Fundraising
- Volunteer Recruitment and Training
- Reporting

GOAL 2 – PROMOTION AND TOURISM

To identify, develop and promote the unique character of downtown, including the waterfront areas; and to engage in activities which will create a sense of opportunity, of community and of place, so that it might become the location of choice for residents, businesses and visitors.

[P-01] Develop interdisciplinary, interactive curriculum units with area schools to focus attention on all aspects of Norwich history

[P-02] Compile downtown assets survey

[P-03] Seek to add more Public Outdoor Dining

[P-04] Provide “Value Added Services” for other organizations and groups who bring people downtown

[P-05] Develop a Downtown Guide to include restaurants, parking and points of interest

[P-06] Operate First Friday activities for RCR

[P-07] Downtown Merchants Association

- Develop a Comprehensive Activity Plan for DMA

- Continue Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies for new or remodeled businesses
- Continue Personal Merchant Interviews
- Develop energy efficient window and storefront lighting options for downtown merchants
- Work with knowledgeable professionals and local merchants to improve the appearance of the streetscape of downtown businesses

[P-08] Operate and promote the Farmers Market in Brown Park

[P-09] Conduct the Third Annual Photo Competition and Exhibition

[P-10] Reinvigorate all aspects of tourism in conjunction with affinity organizations

- Destination Retail
- Historic
- Heritage
- Sports and Recreation”

GOAL 3 – DESIGN AND LIFESTYLE

To preserve and ensure the historical and architectural integrity of downtown assets and provide for quality design in new development.

[D-01] Establish and promote Design Review Standards for downtown

[D-02] Prepare and implement a Corridor Improvement Plan for a two block section of downtown

[D-03] Evaluate the New Jersey Rehab and Renovation Code for use in Norwich
 - Modify where necessary and work for implementation

[D-04] Building Poster Project

[D-05] Determine feasibility of RCR Design Center

- Determine purpose and need for Center
- Locate, evaluate and obtain space for an RCR Design Center

GOAL 4 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

To position Norwich so that it is able to attract new businesses to its downtown; and to ensure that our downtown merchants and other business owners are fully prepared to meet the challenges of operating in its environment.

[E-01] Complete the Downtown Building Inventory/Survey

[E-02] Conclude efforts for passage of the RCR Economic Incentive Plan

[E-03] Evaluate Housing Opportunities for Downtown Norwich

- [E-04]** Advocate for a comprehensive approach to transportation, parking and traffic to, through and from the region; and to participate in its implementation processes.
- [E-05]** Identify and integrate new foreign residents into the local economy
- [E-06]** Implement cooperative educational programs between local businesses and post-secondary educational institutions like Three Rivers Community College
- [E-07]** Implement a program of business support, recruitment and skill development for local merchants, utilizing merchants for training, networking and promotion