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## **Downtown goes digital**

### ***RDA helps downtown businesses go online with launch of E-Ren program***

Vibrant online networking and marketing has never been more important! The Covid 19 crisis has only highlighted the need for business owners across the nation to move to social media and online sales. To help Danville’s downtown businesses make that move successfully, the River District Association (RDA) is launching E-Ren program, which will cover the cost for a minimum of eight business owners to construct or improve their own e-commerce sites as part of an upcoming and comprehensive website building learning lab.

“We’re extremely excited to present this series of e-commerce workshops,” RDA Executive Director Diana Schwartz said. “We want to help businesses that don’t have an e-commerce storefront establish a website or add online sales to an existing one. The great thing about this program is that it will also teach business owners how to manage their own sites.”

The Website Learning Lab is being hosted by Letterpress Communications, in partnership with Danville-based firms Business Cannon and Rivertown.

The River District cohort funded by RDA will be the first to complete [The Website Learning Lab](#), which is designed for business owners who want to create a fully functional website but don’t want to do it alone. The course also provides instruction on branding, marketing, editing and maintaining the site.

In addition to the standard Learning Lab curriculum, RDA is also covering the costs of hosting the sites for a full year, a professional photoshoot and a special training session on taking high-quality images using a mobile phone.

The River District Association has offered an annual entrepreneurship program since 2018, River District Association Dream Launch that offers grant money to entrepreneurs who pitch the best business plan following a six-week business boot camp. Previously secured funding from the City of Danville, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem of the Dan River Region cover expenses for that RDA project.

“With COVID, everybody’s shopping online,” Schwartz said. “For long-term sustainability, it’s good for businesses to have online marketing available — even when we get back to the new normal.”

Building sites alongside other downtown business owners, Learning Lab participants will attend weekly classes and receive one-on-one support during the class, along with troubleshooting help after launch, if needed. Guidance on how to incorporate polished written content and images as well as crafting a brand and creating a website promotion plan will be provided by Letterpress Communications.

“Building a website is about more than just the website. It is about your brand, your marketing strategy, your sales goals,” said Principal of Letterpress Communications Ilsa Loeser. “This class is a unique hybrid and we are pleased to partner with Rivertown and Business Cannon to provide one-on-one, local coaching for students.”

“We’re excited that Letterpress is partnering with local Danville businesses,” Schwartz said. “That adds another layer of support for small local businesses. It’s a win-win for all.”

Applications for the program will be accepted through Wednesday, May 20 and are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until funding is expended. The program will launch Tuesday, May 26.

In giving Danville businesses this opportunity to grow their reach, RDA is showing that truly “We are in this together!”

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**[About River District Association:](#)** RDA follows the Main Street model in partnership with City of Danville, area businesses, and institutions to attract and retain businesses, visitors, and residents in downtown Danville, VA

**[About Letterpress Communications:](#)** Letterpress Communications brings local, handcrafted marketing strategies and the latest digital storytelling techniques to businesses in Southside Virginia.

**[About Business Cannon:](#)** Business Cannon is a website design and online marketing agency located in Danville that gives businesses the chance to have a professional website and grow online, without having to break the bank.

**[About Rivertown:](#)** Rivertown Creative Agency is a full-service creative agency in downtown Danville that specializes in photography, design, branding & social media management.