

RIVER DISTRICT ASSOCIATION
DANVILLE, VA 2021/2022

ANNUAL REPORT





Director's Message - Diana Schwartz M.S.A.R.P

Dear River District Stakeholders,

Many people are beginning to realize the amazing revitalization that has taken place in the River District over the past decade, but we understand that the work that our organization does is not always visible to the eye. The team at RDA realized an opportunity to insure the community understands the role we play, and we are thrilled to share our very first River District Association Annual Report with you.

We are proud of the work we do to create a place where people want to be, and contribute to a higher quality of life for residents in our region. Our organization is honored to be one of the leaders in redeveloping our downtown and re-imagining our community, but we also want to give credit to our many partners - it is only because of collaboration between many organizations and individuals that this effort is successful. We are thankful that this community engages in so many ways, every single day. Despite our inevitable differences at times, in this community we take care of one another - and THAT is what makes Danville feel like home - the people that live, work, play, and invest in it each day.

This year was marked by many "firsts" for the River District Association:

- We were one of eight Main Street organizations in the United States selected as a semifinalist for the Great American Main Street Award.
- We increased our organizational capacity to do programming by hiring two new employees, bringing our staff from 2 to 5.
- We received a \$150,000 Resurgence Grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development that will provide the initial capacity for RDA to expand our work into the North Main section near downtown Danville.
- We received a Community Business Launch grant, which in addition to support from The City of Danville, the Danville Regional Foundation, and the Entrepreneur Ecosystem, we were able to award over \$160,000 in start-up funds to 6 new or expanding River District businesses.
- We established a Catalyst Grant program for businesses who pitched in the Dream Launch Pitch Competition, and were not quite ready to have a brick and mortar location. This allows them to test their business concept, and pitch for start-up funds in the future.
- We added a Start-Up Slam event to our slate of entrepreneur programs. This fun community event encourages and rewards out of the box, creative thinking, and connects a network of new entrepreneurs to each other.

We established a monthly Mornings on Main meeting to give downtown business owners a place to learn, network, and ask questions about activities and policies that affect the River District. We expanded our suite of business support services to include a partnership with Cambridge Retail Alliance, bringing the most up-to-date technology to our Main Street business community.

There are many new projects on the horizon, both inside and outside the River District, and we are thankful for the opportunity to be a leader in the continued revitalization of our region.

Cheers to another Great Year!

Diana



Sincerely,
Diana Schwartz



President's Message - Rachel Covington



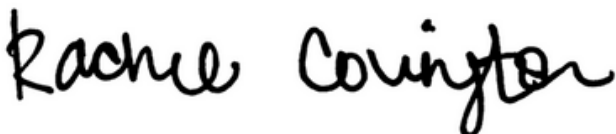
A thriving downtown is critical to enhancing the quality of life and the economic well-being of Danville, Pittsylvania County, and Caswell County. RDA's impactful work has, and will continue to shape the future of the Dan River Region.

We are proud that our Main Street community is recognized as a national model for excellence in downtown revitalization. The now re-imagined River District has become the heart of Danville, with specialty shops, restaurants, entertainment, history, architecture, and modern lofts. For the second year in a row, the River District is named a finalist for the Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA), an honor that only eight communities across the country enjoy each year.

I am grateful for the efforts of the RDA team in making this organization's vision a reality, and for each of our board members who devote time, knowledge, and resources to serving our community.

The most exciting work is ahead of us, and we look forward to continuing the work in transforming our HOME into a welcoming and lively place for all.

Sincerely,



Rachel Covington, RDA 2022/2023 Board President

A VIBRANT RIVER DISTRICT



Mission

The River District Association will continue moving forward in the transformation of Danville's River District as a welcoming and lively place for all, while inspiring and influencing social and economic development for the great Dan River Region.

RDA carries out this mission through activities to attract and retain businesses, residents and visitors while promoting Danville's high quality of life, preserving its historic and cultural assets, and capitalizing on its unique location along the Dan River. RDA works in partnership with the City of Danville and other stakeholders to reexamine this vision as the area changes and achieves important milestones.

Vision

The River District Association's innovative approach strengthens the regional economy, allowing all to experience Danville's high quality of life.

Staff

Diana Schwartz: Executive Director
Lashawn Farmer: Programs and Services Director
Will Mackaman: Programs and Services Manager
Kirsten Aherron: Communications and Events Manager
Alyssa Turner: Office Manager



Board Officers

Rachel Covington, President Hawthorne & Jade

Stuart Smith, Vice-President
FCS, Inc.

Kunal Patel, Treasurer
Ceasar's Virginia

William Crumpton, Secretary
Compassion Healthcare

Kelvin Perry, Immediate Past President
City of Danville Office of Economic
Development

Board Members

Steven Osborne
International Mission Board

Christy Harper
Danville Pittsylvania Chamber of Commerce

Drew Herring
West Main Baptist Church

Emma Sellers
Averett University

Shani Gaylord-Hunter
Goodwill Industries of Central North Carolina,
Inc.






Dr. Andrew Hessler
Danville Dental Associates

Irving Perez
American National Bank and Trust

Rachel Timm
Smokestack Theatre Company

Sandra Chinn-Gilstrap
Clement - Wheatley

RDA CONTRIBUTES TO A THRIVING REGIONAL ENTREPRENEUR ECOSYSTEM

Ideation	Business Planning	Concept Testing	Start-Up Grants	Existing Business Grants
				

Business Resources

Business Planning	Access to Capital
 	 

\$475K in Impact (2019-2022)

350 Dream Launch Bootcamp Participants
 129 Dream Launch Certifications
 18 Dream Launch Awards totaling \$375K
 2 New Business Catalyst Awards totaling \$17.5K
 10 GET Boosted Awards, totaling \$45K
 30 Dream Launch Pitch Participants
 32 Start-Up Slam Attendees, and \$320 awarded

 Pitch Programs in Partnership with Dream Launch: Rev-Up (2021-2022)
 8 Rev-Up Awards totaling \$100K


Entrepreneur Ecosystem DAN RIVER REGION



This highly collaborative work includes a stakeholder group of 12 resource provider organizations in the Dan River Region that support entrepreneurs and small businesses.

FACADE IMPROVEMENT



Façade Improvement
GRANT PROGRAM

RIVER DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

Angela's Creative Catering



In the 2021/2022 fiscal year RDA distributed \$52,000 to improve 12 downtown façades.

The River District Façade Improvement Grant Program, supported by the City of Danville, and Solex Architecture, is designed to assist property and business owners in rehabilitating facades for commercial buildings and businesses in the River District. Positive visual impact stimulates private investment, and complements other community development efforts.



To date RDA has distributed over \$102,000 to improve 25 façades in the River District.

VIBRANT WINDOWS

Vibrant Windows is a program to bring life to vacant windows in the River District. During the 2021 Holiday Season, 8 downtown businesses adopted vacant windows and decorated them for the holidays. Every window in the most prominent two blocks of Main Street was filled, creating a sense of vibrancy and holiday cheer.



COMMUNICATION, PROMOTION, EVENTS



#SocialMedia

Increases are from July 1, 2021



5,424 Followers
18% Increase



1,952 Followers
8% Increase



265 Followers
56% Increase



17 Followers
16% Increase



RDA Monthly
Newsletter

1,092 Subscribers
(41% Increase from July 1, 2021)

50 % Open Rate
(Industry Average is 25.2%)

PROMOTIONS

Shop Small Saturday and the River District Holiday Gift Guide:

This 16 page guide promoting River District businesses was distributed to 21,000 households in the Danville Region through the November 21, 2021 Sunday edition of the Danville Register and Bee.



Holiday Window Decorating Contest: Every year River District businesses put up some amazing holiday displays. This year over 20 business participated. Eight businesses also adopted vacant windows, giving our Main Street and even more festive look than usual!

HOME for the Holidays: RDA produced the "HOME for the Holidays" virtual event again this year, with a little extra fun added. Six short videos aired, each highlighting local families, businesses, and the many different holidays celebrated in our community.

Distrx App Directory and Self Guided Tours: The River District App: Distrx has grown to have 85 business listings, an updated event calendar, and 4 self guided walking tours.

EVENTS

Christmas on the Plaza: The 2021 Christmas on the Plaza was a success! There was something for everyone with performances by Smokestack Theatre, The Averett Singer, Danville Area Choral Society, Kuumba African Dance Group, and local bands Boulé and The League of Ordinary Gentleman. The Office of Economic Development hosted a community input session for 231 Main street, and RDA served hot chocolate and cookies! Approximately 1,500 people attended. The Boys and Girls Club of Danville provided amazing volunteer service.

Mornings on Main: River District Association launched this monthly event in order to help build relationships between businesses, provide a space for idea and news sharing, keep businesses up to date on what's happening in the River District, and create a stronger relationship with our city partners. Meetings have averaged 15 participants each time.

North Main Mixer: Over 50 residents, partners, and business owners of the N. Main Business District gathered to get to know each other, and learn about the programs offered by the River District Association.

Business Appreciation Week Mixer: 25 River District businesses attended a networking mixer at Ballad Brewing.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

The River District Association had significant organizational in the 2021/2022 year:

- Made the Communications and Events Manager position full-time.
- Expanded staff, adding a Programs and Services Manager, and an Office Manager.
- Provided professional development for staff including: Duke Nonprofit Management Certificate, Leadership Southside, Historic Real Estate Financial Credential Pt. 1, Racial Equity Training, Main Street now Conference.
- Invested in a more robust project management system.
- Invested in a more robust board management system.
- Moved into a larger historic office space.
- Chosen as a 2021 Great American Main Street Award Semi-Finalist
- Received \$150,000 N. Main Resurgence grant to promote economic vitality in the N. Main commercial business district.
- Received a \$95,000 Community Business Launch grant to fund the Dream Launch Bootcamp and Pitch Competition
- Renewed 3 year funding agreement with the Danville Regional Foundation

Moving forward, RDA will continue to expand capacity for programming for River District Revitalization, including:

- Creating a robust River District property database.
- Expanding services to more business districts in Danville and regionally.

Thank you to our main funding partners:

