

Moving old Ewing Depot will be 1st project

By January Wetzel – The Tribune (www.tribtown.com)

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Brownstown/Ewing Main Street members had reason to celebrate Thursday night as they kicked off a fundraising campaign to raise \$25,000 for a project to enrich their community.

The group, which formed in June 2010 to help breathe life back into the downtown and nearby Ewing, has raised just under \$1,000 toward the goal. That money will be used to move the old Ewing Depot away from the CSX railroad line onto property that was donated to the cause.

Main Street chairwoman Linda McCormick said there are plans to restore the depot so that it can be used again, possibly as a rest stop for bicyclists and other visitors to the area.

“Our ultimate goal is for our town to be successful,” McCormick said. “We should not take for granted that what we have will always be there.”

Brownstown resident Carl Shake has volunteered to reconstruct what was called the watchman’s shelter on the future depot site. The shack-like structure was used in the early 1920s by a watchman who would stop traffic while trains passed.

Darlene Butt, owner of W.R. Ewing banquet hall and Ewing Antiques, is spearheading the depot project. “Why it’s important to me and other people is that there’s not many of them left,” she said of saving the depot. “We could tear it down or let it keep falling apart, but what will the kids have? They won’t know about it. This is something we should leave for them.”

Besides preserving a piece of community history, the depot could become another way of attracting out-of-town travelers to stop and explore the area, she added.

“The more people we can get to come into this town, the more we can show them; and we have a lot to offer,” she said.

McCormick said restoring historical buildings does more than just save a piece of history.

"Historic restoration brings economic development," she said. "A lot of communities have seen this."

The organization also is looking at finding a way to improve the old feed mill property, possibly turning it into a community center.

"It's one of our oldest buildings downtown," McCormick said. "We are looking really hard to find someone to invest in that building."

Main Street recently was turned down for a disaster recovery grant that would have helped with revitalization efforts, but McCormick said she is not discouraged.

"It could be a blessing in disguise," she said. "Applying for that grant has led us to Mike Kopp with RE/MAX in Jeffersonville, who specializes in this kind of work. He is looking to find private developers to restore it. I have a lot of faith in him because he has turned New Albany's downtown around too. I'm hoping that we won't even need a grant."

Other projects the organization is working on include creating a downtown pocket park, purchasing banners to hang downtown and constructing a gazebo on the courthouse lawn.

Another Main Street achievement that will help draw people to the area is the addition of Brownstown to the Indiana Historic Pathways, a scenic byway that travels along U.S. 50 from Vincennes to Lawrenceburg and on U.S. 150 from Shoals to New Albany.

Main Street member Dick Rumph said the 250-mile pathway connects 16 Hoosier counties and follows the direction of the old Buffalo Trace, the path buffalo took from the southwestern part of the state to reach salt licks near the Ohio River. Along the historic pathway are sites such as Jackson-Washington State Forest and Skyline Drive, Starve Hollow State Recreation Area, Brownstown's Historic Downtown, the Shieldstown and Medora covered bridges and the Jackson County Visitor Center in Seymour, which also is housed in a restored train depot.

In all, Jackson County has seven listings on the Indiana Historic Pathways map.

"It can have an impact on tourism in southern Indiana," Rumph said of the Indiana Historic Pathway designation.

In 2012, Brownstown served as the host location for a Historic Pathways teacher workshop, bringing educators from across the state together to learn more about teaching Indiana history.

Also in 2012, Main Street completed an architectural master plan with recommendations and suggested uses and improvements for specific buildings, including the old feed mill, the 100 block of South Walnut Street near the courthouse and the Jackson County History Center.

The group also invested in a new logo and website, brownstownewingmainstreet.org, to advertise the community's assets and help brand Main Street's efforts. The town also is being featured on www.shopmainstreet.com as a way to drive business to the area.

"We have a lot of history and artisans here," McCormick said. "And that is where our branding is going to be. We want that to be known. We have so many things that people will want to come and see. We will be a destination."

On April 27, Main Street will conduct the first Brownstown/Ewing Artsfest. Member Wilma Wessel is serving as chairwoman of the event.

"It's all about bragging," she said. "With the local talent we have here, we want to bring attention to that."

Wessel said local artisans will be paired with Brownstown/Ewing businesses so that visitors will be able to learn about both. There also will be musical entertainment provided by local acts, she said.

"Not only do we have a rich history, but there are so many people here who have so many talents," she said. "We want to showcase that and show people what we have to offer."

To help out with the Depot project or any other project in the Brownstown/Ewing area, send a check to Community Foundation of Jackson County, P.O. Box 1231, Seymour, IN 47274.

For information about Brownstown/Ewing Main Street visit brownstownewingmainstreet.org