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Main Street Clinton has its “Wheels A’ Turning”

Wilson, who is a Main Street Clinton board member and chair of its steering committee. “She keeps me moving. ... She put that whole BBQ on the Boulevard together.”



Photo by Quinton Frasier

The first BBQ on the Boulevard event in the fall of 2016 drew crowds. The event will become an annual competition.

Soon, another public art element will steer attention that way. Lytal just ordered a first fiberglass car that’ll be a canvas for Clinton artists’ touches.

“This is that company that did the cows in Chicago,” she said of the 1999 Cows on Parade that kicked off similar public art “parades” in cities across the country, including catfish in Jackson and Belzoni.

“We thought it’d been enough time, and we’d never done it; so we’re trying it out!” Lytal said, with a chuckle. “All our cars may be different, and they have trucks and all kinds of stuff.”

That project will take off this fall. The first car is a sample to attract sponsors; Main Street Clinton has raised enough money for several cars that’ll decorate public rights of way.

That’ll be the boulevard’s counter to The Bikes of Olde Towne project that put gaily-painted cruiser bicycles around the area.

“We’re always looking for public art installations, just because of the character they add to your downtown,” Lytal said. The bikes convey a laid-back, casual, stay-a-while feel. Decorated by local artists and others, they were installed at the downtown core, then radiated out to entice more viewers.

Acrylic and fiberglass bikes lacked a certain authenticity. So, “we just rounded up some cruiser bikes, and we got a lot of them donated. We got some from the police department that were not claimed. Some of them that were just awful, we tore apart and we’ll use those at some point — yarn bomb them or something,” Lytal said. The bright street art uses knitted or crocheted yarn to bring color and warmth to public spaces.

In that on-a-roll vein in Olde Towne,

a 2015 Spirit of Main Street award from the state association recognized Main Street Clinton board member David Parker’s efforts there. Parker was instrumental in the lively, monthly Olde Towne After Dark Trivia Night.

“We originally thought we were targeting young professionals, but it is across the board,” Lytal said, from the high school team The Little Einsteins to a senior team dubbed Four Shades of Gray.

Older events hit their stride and settled into an ongoing rhythm of four Olde Towne Markets, themed as Spring into Green, Make Mine Vintage in May, Fall for Clinton and the Holiday Market. The Fresh at Five Farmers Markets are going great, Lytal said. “It was one of the best decisions we ever made, to move that to Tuesday night.” The short 5-7 p.m. Tuesday window, June through August, concentrates the shopping for a win-win for vendors and shoppers.

Home Grown, a new Farm to Table dinner, kicked off the Fresh at Five Farmers Market last June. In 2016, Fresh at Five was honored for outstanding community education campaign in the state awards. Lytal hopes to see Home Grown return.



Photo by Susalyn Bennett

Mississippi College art professor Albert Smathers and his students completed a mural in the Main Street Clinton Boulevard District in 2014. The work of art depicts the intersection of Clinton Boulevard, College Street and Mt. Salus decades earlier, when it was Highway 80. The Chevy appears to be coming off the wall into the modern world, paying homage to the importance of staying connected to the community’s rich history. The joint project was part of Mississippi College’s 2014-2015 Town and Gown celebration.

The addition of Anna Boyd as staff assistant took Main Street Clinton to the next level, Lytal said, with more events for locals and visitors.

Investment in Olde Towne continued, with James & Leigh, Brick Street Pops, Ollie + Ray, Paxton Peak, Ellie’s of Olde Towne, Meme’s Brick Street Bakery, Molly’s Gifts and Boutique, Posh and more. Newly open or on the verge of it are Good Citizen and Winstead’s.

The only cloud may be the couple of empty historic properties on the corner of Leake and Jefferson streets, condemned for safety reasons and awaiting rehab. Out-of-state property owner Matt Wiggins was taken to court in the matter. In a non-adjudicated plea deal, he agreed to make repairs and is now on a timetable for periodic updates, review and renovation.

“We have had so much interest in our downtown, we’ve nowhere to put them because we didn’t have leasable space,” Lytal said.

In stroll around Olde Towne on a quiet Monday, even with most shops closed for the traditional retail “weekend,” charm is evident in the bikes, lights, plants and awnings. Brown paper in windows teased of work in progress and shops soon to open.

Ideally, Lytal would like to see a couple of restaurants join the Olde Towne mix.

“Hopefully, we’ll get one this year.”

She slows down as she passes the 1812 A.E. Wood House, “my favorite building.” Huge twin magnolias flank the front, and a tiny rake leans against a bench on the front porch, waiting

for someone to pick it up and go to work. It’s been vacant two years. “It just needs some TLC.”

Main Street Clinton’s horizon holds more than hope, with wheels on the right track. The City of Clinton’s rebuilt depot, in the works on a parcel of land off Leake Street near the railroad tracks, will become the new home for Main Street Clinton



Special to The Clinton Courier

Susan and Marc Wilson transformed an old Volkswagen Beetle into a planter in Main Street Clinton’s Boulevard district.

and add a much-needed event space — one more spot to bring the community together.

For more information about Main Street Clinton, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, call 601-924-5472.

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