

Main Street Clinton, Depot adapt spring events and offerings



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By Sherry Lucas

The bustle of Olde Towne Clinton may be on hold, but the hustle is not as Main Street Clinton and the Olde Towne Depot put creativity into action and engage their community online (as well as at the appropriate distance).

The COVID-19 pandemic and state shelter-in-place orders caused the cancellation of scheduled events and popular community traditions in late March and April — “pretty much everything,” said Tara Lytal, Main Street Clinton director.

Activities such as the Just the Girls lunch and program, Olde Towne After Dark trivia nights, Dinner & Jazz and Dinner & a Movie hit the skids, as did the popular annual Caterpillar Parade and the Olde Towne Market that follows.

The canceled Caterpillar Parade — an event that’s wormed its way into the community heart to the point that tykes who once paraded are now teenage volunteers — was a big blow.

“Our community looked forward to that so, so much,” said Lytal. “We were all sad. We thought about a virtual parade, or a car parade, but we just felt like that did not support the governor’s efforts” and shelter-in-place order.

Instead, Main Street Clinton organized a Caterpillar Hunt downtown — an activity families could do together but that wouldn’t involve social gathering. Businesses and offices - and even homeowners - featured caterpillar sculptures and pictures that families and kids could enjoy on walks in Olde Towne. Promotion on social media nudged about a dozen businesses and individuals into action.

Local artist Chris Shepherd drew a chalk caterpillar on the sidewalk. The Bank by Pizza Shack made a caterpillar out of Chinese lanterns. The new monogram and embroidery shop As You Wish fashioned one out of a balloon arch, and “It was precious!” Lytal said. Main Street Clinton hung their foam and fabric entry at City Hall. Other enterprising participants created caterpillars from laundry baskets or displayed wood cutouts, and City Communications Director Mark Jones strung up green lights.

“It definitely livened up downtown,” Lytal said, and Main Street Clinton yarn-bombed Olde Towne, “not as much as usual, but just to make it colorful and bright.”

Main Street Clinton also encouraged townfolk to parade on their own in their backyards, and shared a video of a board member doing just that.

Now, attention turns to rainbows, with a Rainbow Hunt as part of a “Hope for Better Days” initiative. A rainbow of lights at City Hall and bright arcs in shop windows get into the swing of it.

Olde Towne Depot also meets the challenge of keeping spirits up and the community connected. Each Monday afternoon, director Anna Boyd Hawks puts a handful of train-themed craft kits into the Little Free Library there, and first-come, first-served passers-by can take advantage.

A weekly Scavenger Hunt names items at Olde Towne Depot, outside or visible through the window, for folks to find, posting the list on the door and on social media.

“The internet is a gold mine” for ideas, said Hawks. “It’s not necessarily hard to come up with ideas, but it’s hard to come up with wise ideas,” that can pique the community’s interest but not put them at risk. “When we’re pushing out these crafts, and the Scavenger Hunt and Caterpillar Hunt, we’re reminding people that, while they’re out getting necessities, to pop by here.... We want to give people things to do, but we want to be wise about it.”

That meant pivoting some activities to online versions, so they’d be more accessible from home.

The monthly Reading Railroad for children keeps chugging along.

“We haven’t been able to gather for that, but we have made it virtual,” Hawks said. They’ve picked up the pace, too, by posting daily videos of readings by department heads, teachers, city leaders and more. “Anybody can record themselves at home, reading one of their favorite children’s books.”

“We reframe it as, ‘You’re the conductor.’ You can do the Reading Railroad at your home, share it with us and we share it with the community.”

A jazz night and several community events and meetings scheduled at the Depot had to be canceled because of the pandemic and shelter-in-place orders. They’re waiting on word from Gov. Tate Reeves and Mayor Phil Fisher on May’s outlook for openings, gatherings, social distancing and more.

Moving forward, Hawks predicts that some new avenues for connection will stay open even beyond pandemic adjustments, such as continued posting of reading videos and amped-up efforts on social media platforms.

“We’ll try to keep that momentum going.”
For more information about Main Street Clinton and Olde Towne Depot events and offerings, visit their Facebook pages or www.ClintonMS.org.

