

Looking Back, and Forward...

The State of the Organization by President Rob Gilligan



The following is the text of the speech Emporia Main Street President Rob Gilligan presented at the Emporia Main Street annual meeting on Tuesday, June 29th. [Click HERE to view photos:](#)

Each year at our Annual Meeting the past president has an opportunity to reflect on the previous year of the main street organization and to talk about some of the highlights. We also give the incoming board president the opportunity to talk about the upcoming year, and the goals that the board of directors will be working on. Since I have had the pleasure of serving this organization as board president over the past year, and the opportunity to continue in that role for one more year I felt that it would be easier to take just one opportunity tonight to reflect on the past years accomplishments and to look towards the future of this organization.

The 2009-2010 year for our organization was one of many successes and new opportunities. Last year we saw our organization grow to its largest membership base ever with 176 member businesses and individuals that shared in their support and commitment to the Emporia Main Street organization. These members represent a wide range of businesses and individuals throughout our community that believe in our mission of continuing to grow a strong and successful sustainable community that emanates from its core. Their continued support is vital to the continued growth and success of our organization and as we continue with our membership drive for the 2010-2011 year I hope that you can encourage your friends, neighbors, and business associates to consider becoming members of Emporia Main Street.

The many different events that Main Street is a part of have been

wildly successful over this past year. With increased attendance and participation in many of our programs like the Great American Market, the Annual Main Street Auction, the Artist Walk and the Taste Event, we can see a measurable growth over previous years. In addition to our events we are always excited to partner with other organizations and businesses to help support their events. The annual summer fun of the Brown Bag Concerts and Live in the Lot continue to draw people to downtown Emporia on a weekly basis and we are always excited to support the Emporia Public Library, Lyon County Historical Museum, the Emporia Arts Council and Flint Hills Music with their events.



President Rob Gilligan.

In addition to the some of the annual events that have become a tradition with Main Street we have seen some new programs and events start this past year that have proven to be very successful. In a partnership with the Granada Theater and Emporia's Radio Stations led by KVOE, the first annual Bride and Prom expo was held at the Granada Theater this past January and met with great success. I am sure that this event will continue to grow into one of our most anticipated events of the year. In early June we also had the pleasure of working with Flint Hills Music and the Granada Theater in support of the Dirty Kanza 200 celebration event. The DK200 is the preeminent endurance bike race on gravel and the opportunity to bring the riders, and their families and friends to Emporia was great.



**Flint Hills Laser Expressions
won Business of the Year.**

The garden adoption program that began last spring was started as way to get more people involved in helping us to keep our downtown gardens maintained and clean. What used to be a difficult task of just trying to keep up with the weeds has become a spirited competition among the forty plus garden adoptees to have the most stunning garden. With this effort from our dedicated volunteers and with support and education from the Lyon County Extension office our downtown has never looked as great as it has this spring.

Recognizing the positive aspects of the past year is always the easiest and most enjoyable part of this but we would be remiss if we didn't take a moment to look at some of the struggles of the past year so that we can learn where we have opportunities to strengthen and grow our community in a sustainable fashion.

The continued economic slump of our nation has started to become more visible in our downtown as we have started seeing a few of our storefronts open up. What was at one time a 94% occupancy rate within our downtown has slowly settled closer to 91% within the past year. While we are still very lucky to be above the national average occupancy of 84%-88% for commercial space, the continued effort to develop new business opportunities has never been more important. It has been difficult to see some of the businesses close or move over the past year, we can use this opportunity to strengthen our organization and grow the types of businesses that will compliment our current downtown. We will continue to promote plans that will help businesses look to expansion if the opportunity for them exist, and for those business owners that are ready to explore new opportunities, we are willing to help them with succession planning to keep things moving in the right direction. This is one area of focus that will be of great importance to the Board of Directors for the upcoming year.

Overall I feel that this organization can be very proud of the accomplishments that have been made over the past year, and believe me when I tell you that this has been just a small sample of the many positive things that are happening within Main Street over the last year, but an organization that wants to continue to develop and succeed must look towards the future and find those new opportunities for growth. With that in mind I want to highlight some of the goals that we have for the next year as an organization.

The promotions committee continues to come up with new and exciting ways to draw people into Emporia with activities and events that have become staples of our community. Over this next year they will continue their search for ways to grow and enhance some of our most successful events such as an expanded ESU Back to School Block Party, and new ways drawing customers to our community merchants and businesses. The promotions committee meetings are always fun to attend because their excitement about new ideas makes you feel good about the future or our community.

The Design committee has had great success with their garden adoption program, and the addition and planters that are available to purchase for outside of your business will continue to help beautify the downtown. Historic Preservation Month was once again a great success, and the work that they did in developing our new logo has helped us create a strong brand for the organization. This next year they are looking forward to working on additional



Conrad Wempe won
volunteer of the year.

projects downtown that will serve as an example of ways that building owners can help increase the curb appeal of their buildings.

The Business Enhancement committee is excited to take on the large but important task of working towards developing an historic district in downtown Emporia. After a detailed study of the impact that Historic Tax credits have on development and growth in downtown's it has become evident that we as a community are missing out on some strong economic development incentives that will continue to help us grow and maintain our downtown. They will continue to work on collecting research information that can be helpful to our members and also used to help recruit or develop new businesses for the community.

The organization committee is committed to continued support of growth and development in our local economy, and will be exploring new opportunities to help our current and future members grow and develop their business. In addition to helping strengthen others we must continue to strengthen and develop our organization and the recruitment and development of new volunteers will become an important priority for all of our committees during the upcoming year. The opportunities for our organization and our community are truly endless and by working together we will be able to accomplish these goals and to see even greater successes in the future.



Steve and Linda Corbin won Advocates of the year.

In closing I feel that it is always most important to recognize the groups and individuals who help to make our organization such a success. We would certainly be very limited in our abilities as an organization without the support of the City of Emporia. Matt Zimmerman and his staff continue to be valuable partners for our activities and events, and the financial support that we receive from the City Commissioners is vital to our success and abilities as an organization.

Thank you the support you have continued to show to our organization. The Emporia Chamber of Commerce, the Convention and Visitor's

Bureaus and the Regional Development Association continue to be active partners for a variety of our events and activities. Their support helps us to grow our organization and gives us encouragement to develop as strong voice in the community for the preservation of our downtown. I want to thank each of them for their continued support of Emporia Main Street. ESU is an invaluable partner to both the downtown and the community of Emporia. Their continued support with volunteers, ideas, and opportunities is important to the continued growth and vision of our downtown. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the members of this organization; it is their continued support of this organization that really keeps us going. Their belief in the mission and goals that we

work towards is what helps us to find new volunteers that are the lifeblood of their organization. Finally I want to take an opportunity to recognize the volunteers that continue to give of their time and ability to this organization.



At Emporia Main Street, we believe that community improvements, business development, job growth and a better tax base all start with you. For those of you that attended the Emporia Main Street annual meeting, I think it was pretty evident that our organizational focus is on recognizing your efforts and utilizing the Main Street organization to highlight and enhance what you do. We understand that it would be inappropriate to simply shine a spotlight on the Main Street organization, because we are an entity built of independent businesses and volunteers. Your time, effort, resources, dedication and ideas are what push Emporia Main Street, and those qualities should be the focus of our annual meeting.

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