

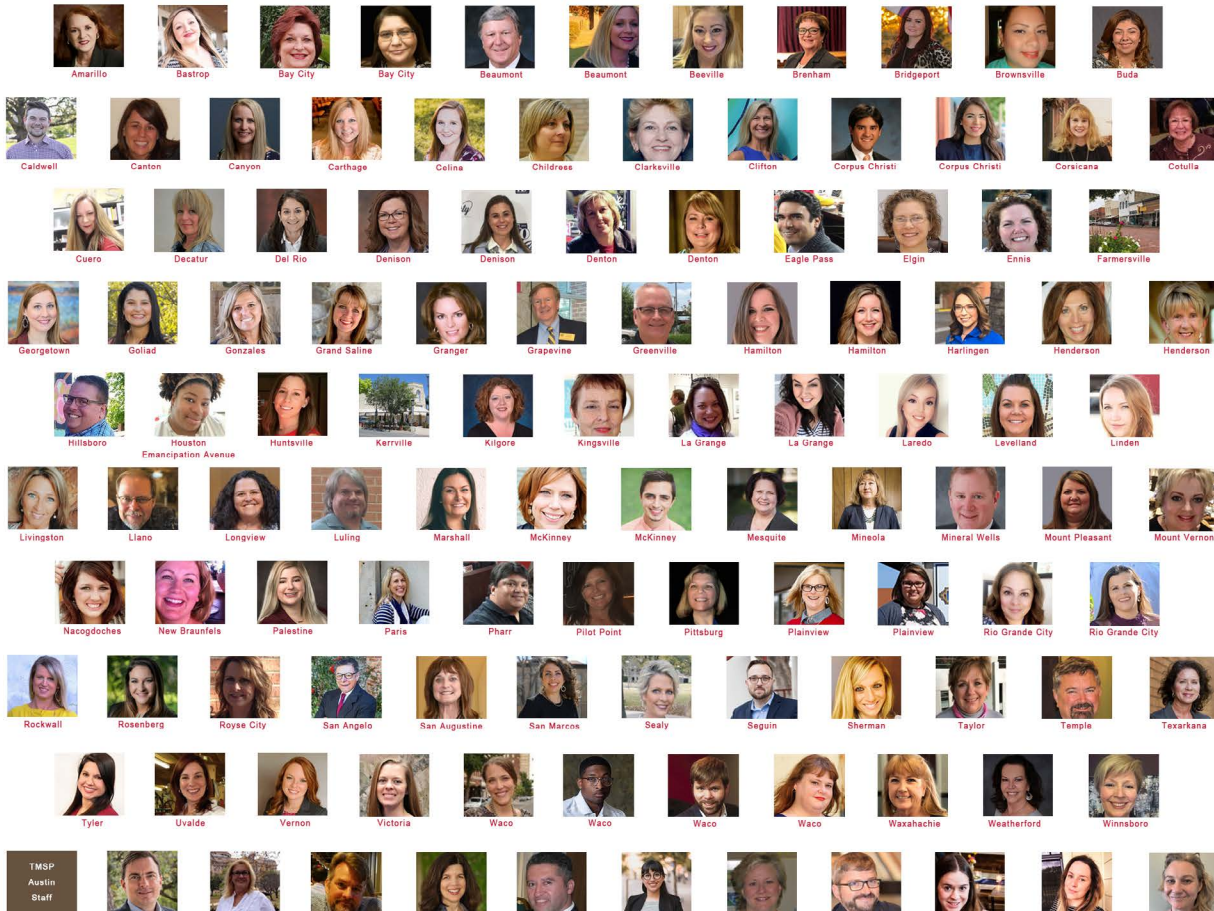
# Main Street Matters

SUMMER 2020 • A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

## MAIN STREET RESPONDS TO COVID WITH COURAGE, RESILIENCE, CREATIVITY.

It comes as no surprise that our Main Street communities have been tested – and transformed – by COVID-19. The pandemic has forced Main Street programs and downtown businesses to think far outside the box and change the way they do business in almost every conceivable way. Seemingly overnight, Main Street programs have become information clearinghouses, food delivery services, sign shops, webinar producers, cheerleaders, and counselors. This special issue of Main Street Matters is our salute—our “love letter”—to our 89 Main Street cities who continue to tackle the challenges of a COVID world.

MAIN STREET MATTERS



40 years of dedication to Texas' historic downtowns.



#TexasMainStreet



#WeAreMainStreet

# MAIN STREET RESPONDS TO COVID WITH COURAGE, RESILIENCE, CREATIVITY.

## ACTS OF KINDNESS

At the onset of the pandemic, **Main Street Mesquite** decided to send **notes of encouragement** to all of their businesses. “We wanted to encourage them and let them know we’re a team,” said Main Street Mesquite Manager Beverly Abell. Two board members, Julie Greer and Lisa Haar, volunteered to hand-write each note – more than 100 of them. Some of the 100+ notes were mailed; others were (safely) hand-delivered.

Abell said that two things made this a relatively easy endeavor: a ready stack of note cards printed with the Main Street logo, and an up-to-date database of all businesses and offices. Abell said the notes were warmly received by the downtown businesses.

Other communities encouraged their merchants and citizens with **special signs** sprinkled throughout downtown. **Waxahachie** led the way with a rollout of 36 signs, each with inspirational phrases. Merchants

selected which message they wanted for their business. The city’s marketing hashtag, #HachieHeart was printed on the bottom of each sign. Printing costs were shared by the Downtown Merchants Association, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Main Street.

Not only did they lift spirits, the signs also provided some **much-needed advertising** at a time when all merchants could use it. Anita Simpson, Waxahachie Main Street Manager, explained: “Our signage, which cost \$1,125, generated so much media coverage that we never could have bought. The signs went up on April 21 and by April 24 the Dallas news stations were already covering it.” According to Simpson, merchants reported that sales for May 2020 were higher than their sales in 2019.

Encouragement in **Seguin** came in the form of **gift cards - \$40,000 worth** - purchased by the city’s third-largest employer, CMC Steel Texas. When COVID hit Texas, CMC’s General Manager, Bill VanderWaal, reached out to Main Street Manager Kyle Kramm and asked, “What can we do to help?” Kramm suggested that local merchants could use a boost – and CMC Steel responded with a generous investment into the local community. Instead of giving the usual cash for their annual employee rewards program, CMC Steel decided to give out gift cards to local businesses.

CMC Steel purchased gift cards for a variety of businesses – not just restaurants. The impact on Main Street businesses was significant. Kramm said, “Thousands of dollars were spent downtown and this helped our businesses pay rent, utilities, employees ... Some of our downtown business owners were in





tears when they saw the money coming in.” One such retailer was Dana Hall, owner of You’re So Crafty. Hall said the cards were “literally lifelines for my business. For a large company to have such deep concern about its local, small businesses is heartwarming.”

And Main Street businesses helped their own. **Denton screenprinters, Norman Roscoe**, occupy a lively two-story shop on the Denton square. In a normal year, the company produces 1970s-inspired t-shirt swag for touring musicians. With the music industry on pause, their screenprinting business came to an abrupt halt. Needing to keep their own business afloat and wanting to lift up other downtown businesses, Norman Roscoe came up with the “**Give Back Tee.**”

When they launched the program, Norman Roscoe ran limited-time sales on a variety of tees. Shoppers could simply log onto the Norman Roscoe website, select a tee, and then select a local business to support; \$10 from each \$25 t-shirt sale went directly to the selected business. To date, the creative duo has raised \$130,000 in support of local restaurants, shops, and services through their Give Back Tee. (Today, shoppers can still order the classic “Denton” tee to support a local business.) To learn more about the creative and community-minded team behind Norman Roscoe, click [here](#).

## NEW BUSINESS MODELS

With support from their Main Street programs, many merchants quickly pivoted to **new business models**: restaurants introduced online ordering and curbside pickup; retailers positioned their merchandise on Instagram and started selling on Facebook Live and hosted private shopping parties. Though the ongoing pandemic continues to mean challenge and hardship, there’s reason for hope.

“My merchants have been amazing,” said **Waxahachie** Main Street Manager Anita Simpson. “They reacted so quickly and have been so creative about coming up with new ways to make money during the pandemic. I have so much confidence that they can survive anything that comes their way in the future.”

**San Marcos** jumped in to help its merchants by developing a **temporary parklet program**. Building on their 2015 ordinance that introduced parklets and sidewalk cafes into downtown, the city developed a detailed Streetscape Manual to guide businesses wanting to quickly develop outdoor service areas during COVID.

Parklets are generally one or two parking spaces long and are built out of semi-permanent materials installed



### Denton Give Back Tee

\$25.00

Business Name

Select one

Size

Select one

Quantity \*

– 1 +

Add to Cart

#### Description

Support your favorite local Denton Businesses by helping give back to them and showing support for Denton. Printed on a supremely soft heather charcoal tee with waterbase ink - Proceeds from every tee sold goes back to the business you choose in the dropdown.



**Denton screenprinter Norman Roscoe helped out neighboring businesses with its Give Back Tee.**

in a way that does not require reconfiguring the roadway or pouring concrete. By bringing life visibly to the street, parklets can increase pedestrian traffic, and highlight the character of neighborhoods. And, in the time of COVID, parklets can be used to expand outdoor seating area and allow for greater social distancing.

The pandemic has left many brick-and-mortar businesses feeling vulnerable, and more motivated than ever before to **beef up their online presence**. Many cities quickly mobilized to help their merchants by distributing information and hosting webinars about setting up E-commerce. **Main Street Bay City** quickly moved to fill the void in that city. “Before COVID, most of our merchants had a Facebook page, but many were not really keeping up with it. And many of them didn’t have a website.”

In tandem with the CDC and the Fort Bend County Small Business Development Center (with whom they share office space), Main Street offered a how-to webinar for its merchants. Main Street Manager Shelly Story is still following up with calls, offering help as needed. There’s still a lot of work to do – a number of merchants are waiting on funding before moving forward – but several businesses have led the way with completely renovated websites and online stores.

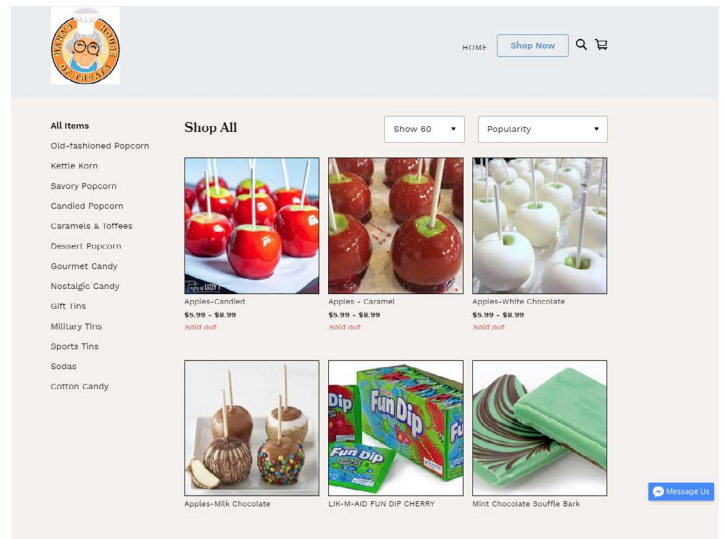
Several cities have set up **grant programs specifically aimed at E-commerce**. For example, the **City of New Braunfels Downtown E-Commerce Assistance Grant Program** has made available up to \$2,000 to for-profit businesses to cover the following:

- E-Commerce platform set-up and annual subscription fee (shopping carts, online security tools, membership, and donation systems, etc.)
- Point of Sale upgrades necessary to integrate with e-commerce platforms

One notable requirement of the New Braunfels grant program is that businesses that have an existing website cannot use the funds for redesign or site enhancements **WITHOUT** also including e-commerce enhancements. The grant’s stated program objectives reinforce the idea that E-commerce is crucial for the sustainability of downtown businesses: “The possibility of prolonged social distancing measures and the likely changes



**San Marcos business, K-Bop Korean Kitchen, captures some outdoor dining space by installing a temporary parklet.**



**Many Main Street merchants, like Nanna’s House of Treats in Bay City, are adding online selling to their brick-and-mortar establishments.**

in consumer behavior indicate that E-commerce as an augmentation of traditional downtown retail will continue to be a critical factor in the economic recovery.”

For more information on the City of New Braunfels grant program, click [here](#).



## SPECIAL EVENTS, RE-IMAGINED

Communities across Texas have been forced to cancel their special events. For example; Cuero's Turkey Fest; Elgin's Western Days; Rosenberg's Downtown Stomp – all cancelled. Still, many Main Street communities have figured out ways to “re-imagine” some of their events in creative, COVID-safe ways. While overall numbers at these events may be down, spirits have remained high.

The **Amarillo Community Market** kicked off its fifth season in quarantine on May 23; for the first three Saturdays, the Market was exclusively virtual. Main Street Amarillo posted vendor information – including links to their social media, web sites, and Etsy stores – on its Community Market website. Shoppers could order any time, but vendors had to agree to be “open” (available for ordering) during normal Farmer's Market hours, Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and to participate, they had to offer delivery or curbside pickup.

Amarillo Main Street Manager Beth Duke said that one of her vendors, Peace Love & Cookies, found some new customers “who didn't get up early enough on Saturdays to shop at our Market.” And numbers indicate success – at least in terms of introducing new people to the market: Duke said, “Our social media reached 28,600 on opening day with Facebook ads, and we gained 1,260 new followers for our page.”

As part of its usual lineup of Preservation Week activities, **Waxahachie Main Street** hands out coloring books to all second graders at area schools. The popular coloring books, which have been recently updated by a local high school student, include word

searches and other games in addition to drawings of historic buildings.

This year, with families sheltering in place and parents looking for things for their kids to do, the City of Waxahachie **shared the book online**. Individual pages were uploaded every few days to the Convention and Visitors Bureau and City of Waxahachie websites.

**Main Street Paris** gave its award-winning **Going Green** event a COVID twist. Main Street Paris launched Going Green in 2019 as a fun way to encourage downtown shopping by asking merchants to set up **temporary putting greens inside their stores**. Main Street Paris gave each merchant a \$40 stipend for creation of the greens; local sponsors pitched in to cover the cost of flags, pencils, and cards. Most merchants got into the fun by adding obstacles to their greens – one store used pool noodles as “curbs” and a local motorcycle shop mounted a loop-de-loop out of a tire.

Wanting to repeat Going Green, but still keep it a COVID-safe event, Main Street leaders tweaked the details and created a 2020 version to coincide with the re-opening of Texas. The biggest modification was **moving the putting greens outdoors**. Though merchants were encouraged to invite customers in and tell them about their specials, the greens had to remain outside. Event organizers set up a single, centralized payment station and encouraged the participants to keep their putter and ball for the entire game – instead of picking up a different putter at each store, as they had done last year. Equipment was sanitized regularly and COVID-safety signs were posted in multiple locations.

Although numbers were down significantly from last year, merchants and players enjoyed the activity – and Main Street Paris was able to donate its proceeds to the local food pantry.



**Events Re-imagined: Amarillo's Community Market (left) kicked off its 5th season *virtually*; Waxahachie shared its popular coloring book *digitally* (middle); and Main Street Paris moved its Going Green fundraiser *outdoors* (right).**

## BRINGING PEOPLE DOWNTOWN AGAIN

With many of their regular events cancelled, and with so many people staying at home, Main Street managers and volunteers have dreamed up new ways to get people downtown.

Borrowing a popular concept from other Main Street towns, **Main Street Harlingen** hosted a **Virtual Mural Hunt** in May. To participate in the hunt, people could post pictures of themselves in front of any of the city's numerous murals. Participants had to include the hashtag, "#HGNUMURALHUNT," and had a chance to be featured on Downtown Harlingen's social media sites.

Main Street Manager Alexis Alaniz said the mural hunt was great both as a boredom-buster and a way to bring some people back downtown. "I know we don't have our Art Night and our Market Days happening right now, but we still want people to come out here and to know that some of our small businesses are open." Harlingen offers its residents a rich [collection of murals](#) to visit.

**Main Street Bastrop** created a popular **Bastrop Bingo** game that ran the entire month of May. The Bingo board featured logos from Bastrop's 20 food-related businesses – plus several squares that required participants to post on social media. The boards were available online and paper copies were handed out with curbside meals. Participants were required to keep receipts to document their purchases; completed Bingo cards were handed in and entered into a raffle.

To create the prize pool, each featured business tossed in a \$20 gift card. Main Street Bastrop contributed the same: one \$20 gift card to each of the businesses. Main Street Manager Rebecca Gleason said both the players and the businesses truly enjoyed the game. (One player even handed in a "blackout" card – all spaces filled!) Asked if she would consider bringing back Bingo, post-COVID, Main Street Bastrop Manager Rebecca Gleason said, "Absolutely! It was a lot of fun!"



On the hunt to get more traffic back in their downtowns, some Main Street communities went the extra mile. Fun examples included the Virtual Mural Hunt in Harlingen (top and middle), and a popular Bastrop Bingo game in Bastrop (bottom).



## NEW WAYS TO ORGANIZE AND COMMUNICATE

Not only has COVID presented challenges to *what* Main Street programs are doing, the pandemic has forced programs to re-think *how* they're doing it. Social distancing requirements and trimmed-down budgets are demanding creative solutions.

For example, local size limits on gatherings means that larger boards can't hold their usual meetings. To work around this roadblock, the **Main Street Mesquite** Manager Beverly Abell has broken her board of 12 into 3 smaller working groups: Space and Place (design); Business Reboot (economic vitality); and Neighborhood (promotion/organization.)

**Main Street San Marcos** is taking a different approach. Realizing that they may not be able to utilize volunteers for many months, the San Marcos program is focusing instead on building relationships with **organizational partners**. Main Street Manager Josie Falletta, explained, "We realize that we may not be able to utilize volunteers for some time, therefore we are focusing on developing relationships and resources for the sustainability of our program. Our move into the chamber building is a positive step in this direction."

And communities across the state are awakening to the idea that **laying the foundation for economic vitality** is fundamental to the Main Street approach; for some, this means shifting away from an events-heavy calendar and toward a real economic development strategy. **Clifton** Main Street Manager Angela Smith explained her own community's experience: "COVID has provided considerable "freedom" from event planning, thus creating the opportunity to shift time and energy toward other projects ... As a small town, we lose considerable sales to Waco simply because certain products are unavailable locally. The increase in residents shopping locally combined with the increased realization of product gaps (some COVID-related) has sparked interest and dialogue regarding the resolution of product shortages. An increasing number of participants are now involved in the conversation of self-sufficiency as individuals and a community."

Aware that businesses needed easy access to crucial information, many Main Street communities quickly



**Main Street Ennis upped its Facebook game with frequent posts. Pictured here: Pop Top Coffee Shop.**

created a **special website (or separate page on their website) for distributing COVID-related information**. Funding sources, sanitation practices, openings, and closings – the information was coming so fast and furiously at the onset of the pandemic – and Main Street programs worked diligently to make it readily available to their businesses.

Main Street **Mesquite**, for example, created a COVID-related website: [www.roadmaptoresources.com](http://www.roadmaptoresources.com). According to Abell, the website includes "everything from official orders to available training, grant funds – whatever could be helpful. We have received more than 2,500 hits since we launched the site."

Before the pandemic, **Main Street Ennis** planned to hire a Content Manager for its active **social media accounts**. But, with a COVID-altered budget, Main Street Ennis took a different route to boosting its online presence: they hired an "insider" – a local who had grown up in Ennis and was eager to create posts about retailers and restaurants and who was willing to do this work for a "friends and family" rate of pay.

Ennis' new social media creator, Erica Todd, visits with merchants throughout downtown, snaps photos of their products, and creates a "bank" of posts that can be deployed daily. According to Main Street Ennis Manager Becky McCarty, the regular posts have been instrumental in reminding people to shop at downtown businesses. McCarty said, "I don't think locals really understood how much our downtown shops and eateries have to offer."

## MOVING FORWARD: MAIN STREET STRONG

In spite of good news around the state - including abundant acts of kindness and agile pivots from our merchants - many businesses are struggling. Struggling to keep lights on, pay rent, pay employees. Weary from the uncertainty, the constant vigilance over sanitation protocols, and the unrelenting pressure to constantly reinvent themselves.

Molly Alexander, owner of two businesses in downtown Elgin, has coined the “**Stages of the Pandemic**” in terms similar to the stages of grief. Stage 1: Survival. Stage 2: Reinvention. Stage 3: Re-opening. **Stage 4: Respond. Pivot. “Repeat.”**

Feeling hopeful, but still stuck in the Groundhog Day-like loop of Stage 4, Alexander says, “Every week, something new happens and we have to be creative all over again.”

And this is what we must do as Main Street communities: be creative all over again. **Work being done right now in our Texas Main Street cities suggests that post-COVID communities may emerge *better* than before: more capable of thriving in our new retail environment that is both online and increasingly experiential; more practiced at assessing and responding to the needs of individual businesses; more intentional about addressing retail gaps; and much more attuned to creating an inclusive community.**

As we move forward into the coming months, let us continue to rely on each other for great ideas, and draw strength from our shared commitment to building vibrant downtowns.



## MAIN STREET SIGNS ARE GOING UP!

Thanks to the financial support of Texas Historical Commission Chair John L. Nau and the Friends of the Historical Commission, **designation signs** for Texas Main Street communities have been created and are going up across the state. We encourage cities to send us images of their installed signs and let us know where they are located.

For information about how to order additional signs, email Brad Patterson at [brad.patterson@thc.texas.gov](mailto:brad.patterson@thc.texas.gov).



## DOWNTOWN TX.ORG: OUR LIST OF CITIES IS GROWING!

One byproduct of the pandemic is that with so many special events cancelled or minimized, Main Street programs have had a bit more time to launch their Downtown TX sites. Congratulations to all of the cities who have “gone live” since January 1: **Granger, New Braunfels, Kilgore, Rockwall, Pittsburg, Ennis, and Hamilton.**

DowntownTX.org is an online building inventory for Texas Main Street communities featuring historic property listings for sale and for lease. With its potential to match vacant or underutilized historic buildings in Main Street districts with interested investors, the Downtown TX.org platform holds enormous promise as an economic development tool.

Is DowntownTX.org yielding results? Yes! **San Marcos** MS Manager Josie Falletta shared this: “Three separate prospective businesses have reached out to us recently and - you guessed it - they Googled “leases in downtown San Marcos” and found our DowntownTX.org page! Apparently we were right there at the top of the list. Thanks for all of your hard work; it’s definitely paying off.” To explore DowntownTX.org click [here](#).





# TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM AUSTIN - NEW STAFF

*The Texas Main Street Program has recently welcomed three new employees: Kylie Woodlock, Tara Bonds, and Cara Lowrimore. We tossed them a few questions and included their bios below. All of our nine Texas Main Street Program staff provide pro bono services to 89 designated Main Street communities.*



**Kylie Woodlock,**  
Project Manager  
for DowntownTX.org



**Tara Bonds,**  
Project Design  
Specialist



**Cara Lowrimore,**  
Assistant State  
Coordinator

## What is your hometown?

**Kylie:** Gainesville, TX

**Tara:** Born in Austin, grade school in Spring, and high school in Tyler. Texas is home.

**Cara:** Fairfield, Connecticut (but born in Texas!)

## Favorite aspect of your Main Street job?

**Kylie:** I love working on DowntownTX.org, as the site provides cities with unique services no other state has. To me, that's what working for Main Street is all about—providing unique services to our communities!

**Tara:** Discovering, preserving, and enhancing what makes a city special. I could go on for days about this, but I think all of us in Main Street understand. It's a dream and a privilege to be a part of TXMS. I've shifted design realms in my career and in the short time I have been here I've been able to put knowledge from architecture, civil engineering, fabrication, and signage (lots of signage) in to Main Street projects. It all comes together here and that feels good.

**Cara:** I'm thrilled to be part of the urban conversation again. I love downtowns on a physical level – the textures, the spaces, the activity – but it's also fun and challenging to grapple with the big issues – how to attract new business, grow entrepreneurship, fund needed improvements, etc.

## Inspirational quote you live by (or wish you lived by)?

**Kylie:** "People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within."—Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

**Tara:** "If it's not gravity, it's a choice" - David Heymann (UT SoA)

**Cara:** "Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too" -William Hutchinson Murray

## Favorite places?

**Kylie:** Generally, one of my favorite places in the world is Kona, Hawaii—my family has been on vacation there a few times and it's so beautiful and relaxing. But lately I've been wanting to revisit Vancouver, BC, where my husband and I went on our honeymoon. We went whale-watching, toured the Royal Botanic Gardens, and ate the best sushi we've ever had!

**Tara:** That's like pinning down a favorite song! New Orleans is a favorite city. The Redbirds baseball stadium in Memphis- or any ballfield is a favorite place. I gravitate to friendly places that invite us to wander- paths, lines of sight and the connectivity of spaces are especially intriguing. Unique landmarks are a big part of this and give visual clues to the pulse of a particular place. Generations of my family have been in Tomball since before Texas became a state, so in the context of Texas towns, that one is near and dear to my heart.

**Cara:** Nantucket, MA; Charleston, SC; NYC; Emmett Shelton Bridge and Redbud Isle (Austin)

## Bios

**Kylie Woodlock** joined the Main Street Program in January 2020. Previously, Kylie worked in the THC's Division of Architecture as the Preservation Tax Credit Program Specialist, administering the federal and state tax credit programs and developing new tools to facilitate program reporting and management. She received her Master of Arts in History from the University of North Texas in 2018 and her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Tara Bonds** joined the Main Street Program in October 2019. Prior to joining THC, she worked with architecture firms in Austin and collaborated with several landscape architecture and interior design firms. She also has experience in civil engineering, signage and a wide array of design-build projects. Tara holds a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Cara Lowrimore** joined the Main Street staff in June 2020. She brings a diverse range of experiences that include city planning, community development, and writing/editing/marketing. As Senior Planner for the City of Charleston, SC, Cara led a long-range planning initiative focused on Charleston's Historic Market Area. She has served as Assistant State Coordinator for Main Street Arkansas and most recently, Cara worked as Customer Experience Coordinator for a small business/startup. Cara received an undergraduate degree in American Studies and a graduate degree in Community and Regional Planning from UT Austin.

# DOWNTOWN HARLINGEN AND TEMPLE'S SANTA FE PLAZA NAMED TEXAS GREAT PLACES

A huge CONGRATULATIONS to two of our Main Street communities that were named to the list of **Great Places in Texas** by the American Planning Association, Texas Chapter, in March.

The Great Places program was started in 2017 as a Texas version of the National APA Great Places program. Applicants can enter under one of three categories: Neighborhoods, Streets, and Public Spaces. Past winners of the Great Places program include other Main Street downtowns: **Bastrop, San Marcos, McKinney, Nacogdoches**, and National Designee, **Historic Georgetown**.

Doug McDonald, creator of the Texas awards program and past-President of the Texas APA chapter had this to say about why Harlingen and Temple's applications stood out to the selection committee: "**Harlingen** is such a neat enclave of culture. It doesn't necessarily have all of the resources that other communities have, but the *community piece* – the way everyone pitches in to play a part – that really sold us."



The award that went to **Temple's Santa Fe Plaza** marks the first time the APA has ever awarded a brand new public place. McDonald explained why they made an exception for Santa Fe Plaza: "The Plaza is such a catalytic presence and with all of the work that had previously been done in Temple, it's really the icing on the cake. It is tied so beautifully to the history of the railroad."

To find out more about the program and view a video clip of the Great Places announcement featuring The Roadtripper's Chet Garner, click [here](#).





# 2020 TEXAS DOWNTOWN CONFERENCE

## NOVEMBER 9 - 12



The Texas Downtown Association is hosting its annual Texas Downtown Conference November 9-12. While the Association is disappointed not to be able to meet in person this year, they are excited to be providing online educational sessions and networking opportunities. As always, scheduled speakers and panel discussions will provide relevant strategies and vital best practices for downtowns and communities.

This year, the TDA is offering one day and full conference registrations. The kick-off session, opening keynote, and happy hour are included with both registration types.

To view the 2020 Texas Downtown Conference Schedule and/or register for the conference on the TDA website, click [here](#).