

# Downtown Johnson City energized by new business investments



“Downtown’s current growth and success is mounting and building at a rapid rate. While existing property owners, employees and merchants create the synergy being built on today, more recent activities have spurred the latest developments.” *Quote and following article by Bridget Roberts Executive Director Johnson City Development Authority*



A wave of excitement and energy is building in downtown Johnson City as revitalization begins to take on a brand new meaning in the richly historic commercial district. Not only is the Spring season bringing a fresh line of tulips along the streets, sidewalks and rail lines, but new projects and activities are budding as a new era for downtown Johnson City is appearing in the horizon. Buildings are being renovated and cleaned, businesses are booming and the streets are taking on new pedestrian life. New patrons are converging into downtown, intrigued perhaps by the recent buzz about the history of the rail lines, or inquiring about the up and coming Tipton Street residential and commercial project. Perhaps they've come to see the latest art gallery opening at one of the increasingly popular First Friday events, or to check out the newest children's exhibit at the Hands On! Regional Museum. Many are coming to be a part of the latest rage, Texas Hold 'Em Tournaments of the Tennessee Poker League, originated by the owners of Numans Billiards, a downtown billiards club emerging into the finest billiards facility in the region. No matter what the reason, downtown Johnson City is increasingly becoming the place to be!

### **How downtown died**

The road to fresh energy and life into downtown has not been an easy trip. Many years ago, Johnson City, along with thousands of other cities across the nation, experienced massive population growth which adversely affected the traditional central business district. While this growth was a great positive for the city and the region, urban sprawl left the historic downtown empty and desolate. In an effort to save and bring new life back into the historic downtown, a year-long study was conducted in the mid-1980s by the Chamber of Commerce in which a large number of citizens, community leaders and elected officials participated to recommend action. As a result, the Tennessee

General Assembly passed legislation in 1985 calling for remedial action to be taken towards strengthening and re-energizing a dying downtown. The state legislation created the Johnson City Development Authority (JCDA), organized in 1989 to carry out development and redevelopment activities in under utilized areas within the City of Johnson City, particularly downtown.

### **JCDA catalyst for growth**

Currently, the JCDA Board consists of 17 members appointed to three-year terms by the Johnson City Board of Commissioners. An Executive Director administers the daily activities of the Authority, overseeing an Executive Secretary and facilitating numerous committee activities consisting of additional volunteers and supporters from within the community. As downtown Johnson City begins to prosper and grow, a strong commitment to the continued success and vitality of downtown is the focus of the Johnson City Development Authority. Through such focus, a concerted endeavor is being made to strengthen business, control sprawl, eliminate economic deterioration, enhance a sense of community, and protect the architectural visual representation of Johnson City's heritage to pass on to future generations.

Specifically, the Johnson City Development Authority provides assistance to investors and businesses seeking to locate and expand in downtown Johnson City. The JCDA makes recommendations and implements projects to improve the business climate and overall appearance of downtown, while actively recruiting business and development projects for downtown. Additional goals of the JCDA include the building of public/private partnerships to revitalize downtown property as well as informing the public and decision makers of the needs and benefits of downtown Johnson City. The JCDA





support for Main Street were passed by the following Boards: the City of Johnson City Board of Commissioners; the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce; the Johnson City, Jonesborough, Washington County Economic Development Board; the Johnson City Historic Zoning Commission; the Friends of Olde DownTowne; and the Downtown Neighborhood Association. Through a focused effort towards ensuring organization, design, promotion and economic restructuring activities equally occur in downtown, Johnson City is now moving forward at a much more effective and efficient mode of revitalization.

desires to serve as a catalyst for, as well as implement programs and projects that ultimately enhance the economic well being and quality of life in Johnson City.

### **Small business thrives**

Over the last few years, several new businesses have located into downtown, lending way for increased business activities to occur. Cultural resources have been added with the addition of AR Gallery on Buffalo Street, Celtic Roots on East Main Street, African Xprezz on West Market Street, along with T'Neilles Urban shop on Spring Street. Around the Block on East Main Street and New 4 U on West Market Street offer creative and vintage consignment clothing options for young and old alike.

Illusions Nail Studio, Premier Salon and Craig's Crown salons add additional beauty elements into the downtown while the Golden Gate Design Center will open soon on South Roan Street, offering state of the art home furnishings and fabrics. Colonial Insurance arrived into downtown at 101 Fountain Place in 2005, bringing supplemental insurance resources at downtown's fingertips. iPlenus Bioinformatics, Inc, recently moved into the Kings Building on East Main Street, dedicated to crafting effective and attractive innovative business tools and database applications using Internet technologies. Networking

and Computers relocated their office to 208 North Roan Street in late 2004, bringing an additional dimension to computer technology services offered to businesses and individuals alike.

Those mentioned are only a few of the many businesses that have relocated, started, or expanded their companies into the downtown over the past year. As indicated by the diverse mix of business types, downtown is continually increasing its variation of activities offered to those who choose to frequent downtown. As business activity increases, additional services will only add to the expansive base of retail, services and residential hustle and bustle of downtown. More and more, people are finding a reason to come downtown to shop, live, worship, play, and conduct their business.

Downtown's current growth and success is mounting and building at a rapid rate. While existing property owners, employees and merchants create the synergy being built on today, more recent activities have spurred latest developments. One such activity is the recent introduction of the Tennessee Main Street Program. The Main Street Four Point Approach to revitalization provides a successful national model by which the JCDA is now following. The Four Points include: Organization, Design, Promotion and Economic Restructuring. Many resolutions of

### **Investors**

In 2002, Chuck Tessier, a developer with notable successes in downtown Asheville, North Carolina, was hired as a consultant to the Johnson City Development Authority to study downtown and make recommendations for improvement. As a result, the 2002 Downtown Action Plan was approved and serves as the JCDA planning guideline today. Tessier continued his commitment to Johnson City by pursuing investment opportunities with local participants holding a passion and strong interest in the continued development of the heritage and heart of the city. As was started and continues with individuals such as Marvin Carter, credited as the pioneer of downtown Johnson City revitalization efforts, a new generation of developers has joined Carter and others.

This new generation of developers formed Tipton Street, LLC, a group of fifteen investors in and outside of Johnson City, and Main Street Partners, LLC, a group of five investors, all with a commitment to take ongoing revitalization efforts to the next level. The managing company, Urban Redevelopment Alliance, takes property not only owned and invested in by the Tipton Street, LLC and Main Street Partners, LLC, but also additional downtown property, and serves to further efforts and encourage others to invest their businesses and residents into downtown.

Another attribute to downtown's current growth and success is found in the recent attention and commitment being made by the State of Tennessee. In October of 2004, top officials of the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development arrived in Johnson City to provide a specific, dedicated workshop session to local property owners, business owners, interested citizens and legislators involved in downtown development. The workshop resulted in the State of Tennessee providing in-depth details into the Tennessee Main Street Program, as well as details into helping small business grow and succeed. Officials of the department continue to offer personalized attention to downtown Johnson City. Recently, departmental official Melinda Keiffer conducted a Main Street Board Training Session, while regular one-on-one meetings occur monthly in the JCDA office between business owners and departmental official Ronnie Wade. The monthly meetings provide businesses with an opportunity to become certified to conduct direct business with the State of Tennessee. Wade conducts his meetings in the downtown JCDA office to prove a committed dedication to downtown Johnson City. His commitment, along with Keiffer's commitment to the Tennessee Main Street program, reveal a strong dedication and invested interest by the State of Tennessee to the success of downtown Johnson City.

Finally, attention to downtown has also been given to the State of Tennessee's Department of Transportation through the introduction of a federal enhancement grant for downtown Johnson City. This is the first time Johnson City has sought enhancement dollars for downtown. The grant request includes aesthetically pleasing crosswalks, sidewalks, historic markers and welcome signage into the downtown core. While church renovations, the new Johnson City Public Library, and many other downtown projects have occurred, pedestrian connectivity is key to maintaining a safe and walkable environment. Pedestrian connectivity through sidewalk and crosswalk enhancements will connect these community spaces together throughout downtown. While the grant process is highly competitive, the State of Tennessee has been presented with the need for pedestrian connectivity throughout downtown.

Downtown Johnson City is experiencing a brand new era of growth in the heart of the city. With the popular activities of existing businesses, the introduction of the Main Street Program, a new generation of investor alliances, a new dedication and commitment by the State of Tennessee to downtown growth, new life is coming to downtown Johnson City. Each and every piece involved form a concerted, large puzzle that when completed, will ultimately reflect the image, pride, prosperity and true

level of investment taken to restore and preserve the heritage heart of the great city of Johnson City, Tennessee. The stars of Downtown Johnson City are lining up as the community poises itself, ready to grab hold and continue moving downtown back into the vibrant and alive place to be!



### Downtown business— old and new

Downtown Johnson City was the core of the City of Johnson City from its earliest days when founded in the 1860s. The city really began to grow in the early 20th century when commercial and consumer retail businesses began. Two businesses founded in the early 1900s are still in business today and profiled below:

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**Beeson, Lusk & Street Architects (BLS)** was founded in 1912 by D.R. Beeson Sr, and is today led by president Anthony K. Street, A.I.A. BLS (originally Beeson Architects) has always been located in the downtown area: The BLS earliest location was at the corner of Main and Roan in the building where Masengill's has always been located. Later BLS was located on Broadway and for the last 30 years in Fountain Square.

BLS has for 93 years produced award-winning design to meet the challenges of changing aesthetics, technological advances and rapid growth in communities, business and industry. The company has designed renovations and new structures for education, industry, retail, civic/institutional, medical and churches. Some of the landmark architectural designs in Washington County are Daniel Boone High School, Indian Trail Middle School, Woodland Elementary, Medical Sciences Building at James H. Quillen Med School, JCMC Medical Center additions, Veteran's Administration Medical Center, renovation of the Jonesborough Courthouse, Freedom Hall Civic Center, Snap On Tools, Harris Tarkett Manufacturing, Kennametal Corporation and many others. Clients are located throughout the Southeastern U.S.

Some current projects include Grace Baptist Church Sanctuary addition in Elizabethton, TN, First United Methodist church restoration in downtown Johnson City, a new branch of Elizabethton Federal Bank on State of Franklin Road in Johnson City, Snap On Tools addition in Elizabethton, TN, courthouse addition for Avery County, NC, comprehensive facilities study for Washington County, TN schools, and comprehensive schools facilities studies for Carter County schools and Dickenson County, VA.

BLS also has an office in Kingsport, TN. For more information call: 423-928-1175 [www.bls@blsarch.com](mailto:www.bls@blsarch.com)

**Masengill's Specialty Store** has been in business in the same location (Main and Roan) since 1916. Founded by

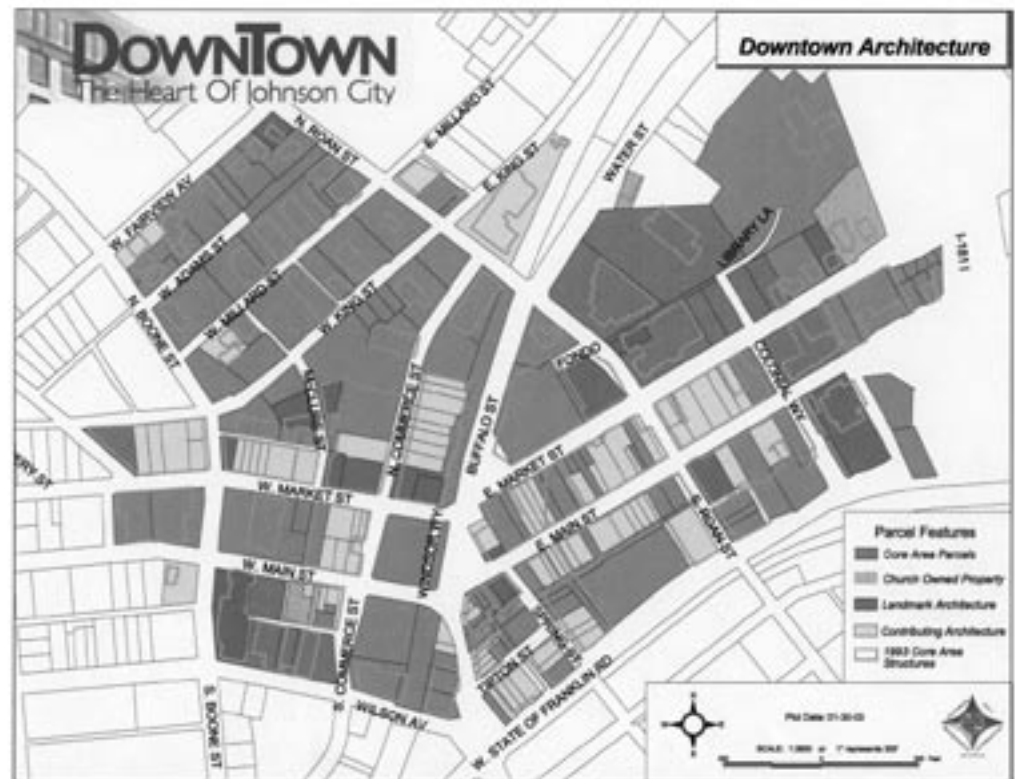
John Masengill to carry a wide array of ladies and men's apparel, the business was purchased by Ambers Wilson and his father-in-law in 1959. The owners expanded the store from one to three floors for women's dresses, suits, sportswear, separates, shoes, jewelry, furs and a full line of wedding gowns, bridesmaid and wedding party apparel and tuxedo rentals.

For many years the signature window display for Masengill's has been the latest in gorgeous wedding dresses posed in front of a full-length mirror. "At one time, brides were expected to be covered up and very modest, today the most popular style is strapless. But the range of styles today is extremely varied, you can find fashion from every decade of the last 100 years," said Masengill owner Ambers Wilson.

The same is true for all fashion today. Most of the purchasing for the store is done in Atlanta and New York. "I buy quality and what looks good, not by prices," said Wilson. I am glad for women and their freedom of choice today, but good taste is still good taste."

**Bradley Machine and Welding** is one of the oldest industries still operating in downtown. Founded 28 years ago by Bill Bradley the company motto is, "No job is too large or too small." Located at 118 Water Street Bradley specializes in metal fabrication, welding and design of structures. "Whether you bring us a concept or complete design of a part or structure we'll build it to suit your needs and exceed expectations," said Clay Thomas, general manager of Bradley Machine and Welding, Inc.

Projects range from 6,750 gallon mixing tanks to small appliance repairs to fabricated custom handrail/staircase systems, custom trailer hitches and bumpers, roll bars, off road vehicle modifications, trailer modifications, industrial equipment (original, modified and repairs) and many other applications. Bradley works in carbon steel, stainless steel, aluminum, brass and copper. Customers include, PMT Surgoinsville, Seimens, Milligan College, Transit Mix, Benjamin Moore plants, Keystone Cement Company, Harris Tarkett and WJHL-TV. For more information call: 423-926-5042.



# List of Downtown Johnson City Businesses

A Shade Above/A&H Brass 126 W Main St.  
Adams Auto Sales 211 W Main St.  
African Xprezz 122 W Market St.  
Albert's Loan Office & Pawn Broker 104 W Market St.  
Alley & Associates 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 3A  
Anderson & Associates 240 E Main St., Suite 300  
Anderson, Fugate & Givens 114 E Market St.  
AR Gallery 75 Buffalo  
Arnold, Haynes, & Sanders Attys 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 2A  
Aromatones 323 E Main Street  
Arrington, Schelin, & Herrell PC 111 Spring St., Suite 1  
Artopia 324 E Main  
Around the Block 234 E. Main St.  
Atlantis 242 E Main St.  
Atomik Comics 213 E Main St.  
Audio Video Integration 101 Fountain Place, Suite 1D  
B & B Produce 139 W Commerce St.  
B & F Bonding Company 126B E Market St.  
Beeson, Lusk & Street 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 3C  
Bernard Cantor & Associates PC 126 Spring St.  
Black Tie Formalwear 200 W Market St.  
Bridal Boutique 414 S Roan St., #100  
Campbell's Morrell Music 118 W Market St.  
CCS Marketing 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 2E  
Celtic Roots 314 E Main Street  
Central Baptist Church 300 N Roan St.  
Christian Science Reading Room 325 E Main St.  
Colonial Insurance 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 1A  
Craig's Crown 111 Spring Street Suite 1  
Creative Energy, Inc. 300 E Main St., Suite 400  
Cross Stitch & Crafts 240 E Main Street  
Cutshall's Automotive Machine Shop 110 N Commerce St.  
D&D School of Real Estate 406 S. Roan  
Dental Arts (4 dentists) 111 W Fairview Ave.  
Dixieland Bar 120 W Main St.  
Don Spurrell, Attorney 128 E Market St.  
Down To Earth Skate Shop 128 Spring Street  
Downtown Auto Sales 223 W Main St.  
Downtown Centre 101 E Market St.  
Downtown Christian Church 335 E Main St.  
Downtown Partners 101 Fountain Place  
Downtown Used Tires 231 W Market St.  
Doyen Computer 118 W Main St.  
Econo Storage 250 W Market St.  
Essyx Art Services 107 N Boone St.  
Executive Assessment Systems 101 Fountain Pl Suite 2C  
Fair's Heat and Air 224 W Market St.  
Fairy Tales 404 S Roan Street  
First Presbyterian Church 105 S Boone St.  
First Tennessee Bank 103 King St.  
Flowers by Marge 318 E Main St.  
Fowler and Fowler 130 E Market St.  
Free Service Tire 126 Buffalo St.  
Freeman Auto Repair & Auto Sales 257 W Main St.  
Gatsby's Café 227 E Main St.  
Granny's Attic 229 W Market St.  
Greyhound Bus Lines 137 W Market St.  
Hair & Bodyworks 117 W Fairview Ave.  
Halo 211 E Main St.  
Hands On! Regional Museum 315 E Main St.  
Happy Hour Clocks 22 Downtown Square  
Hard Copy Solutions 10 Downtown Square  
Herndon, Coleman, Brading, & McKee 104 E Main St.  
Hide-away 235 E Main St.  
Holy Resurrection Orthodox Christian Church  
Illusions Nail Studio 111 Spring St., 2 & 3  
iPlenus Bioinformatics, Inc 300 E Main Street, Ste 302  
J McErins 216 E Main St.  
James Nidiffer 126-A W Market St.  
James R. Miller II 200 E Main St.  
James T. Bowman, Attorney 128 E Market St.  
John Sevier Center 141 E Market St.  
Johnson & Associates 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 3B  
Johnson City Area Arts Council 214 E Main St.  
Johnson City Bedding Co 250 W Market St.  
Johnson City Dental Lab 106 Tipton St.  
Johnson City Development Authority 207 E Main Street, Ste 1-B  
Johnson City Federal Credit Union 333 E Main St.  
Johnson City Press 204 W Main St.  
Johnson City Public Library 100 W Millard St.  
Johnson City Transit System 137 W Market St.  
King's Coffeehouse & Eatery 300 E Main St., Suite 101  
Kitchen Concepts 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 2J  
Leisure Time Foods 108 N Boone St.  
Louis Shoe Shop 129 W Main Street  
Lyman A. Fulton & Associates 207 E Main Street  
MacGeorge Copier Sales & Service 200 Commerce St., Suite 3  
Magnolia Mediation Center 234 E Main St.  
Main Street Antiques & Mercantile 243 E Main St.  
Masengill's Specialty Shop 246 E Main St.  
MC Design Studio 308 E Main St.  
Mecca Café 101 Buffalo St.  
Mel's Stamps and Coins 85 Buffalo St.  
Mental Health Consultants 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 1C  
Metro Production & Photography 125 Spring St.  
MGC Company 300 E Main St., Suite 152  
Mid City Grill 110 Tipton St.  
Mr. J's Buy and Sell 140 W Market St.  
Mr. Toad's 212 N Roan St.  
Munsey Memorial UMC 201 E Market St.  
Murphy Financial Services 300 E Main Street  
N Beth Ledbetter & Assoc 101 Fountain Pl Suite 2C  
Nat D Shoun Agency 202 E. Main St., Suite 203  
Nelson Fine Art Center 324 E Main St.  
Networking and Computers 208 N Roan Street  
New 4 U 124 W Market St.  
Numan Billards 225 E Main St.  
n'tara 106 W King St.  
O'Dell's Screenart 107 N Boone St.  
Paint and Laquer Supply 256 W Main St.  
Palace Barbershop 106 E Main Street  
PBSI 407 S Roan St.  
Peoples Community Bank 202 E Main St.  
Pharaoh's, LLC 110 E Market  
Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 538 121 1/2 Spring St.  
Preferred Alternatives of TN, Inc. 202 E Main St., Suite 204  
Premier Salon 111 Spring Street  
Public Defender 142 E Market St.  
Pug's Subs & Pizza 109 Buffalo  
Quad City Control 322 E. Main St.  
Quality Safety Products 312 E Main St.  
R.C. Hunter Insurance Agency 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 2D  
Restonic 250 W Market St.  
Rick's Haircuts & Styles 103 Buffalo St.  
Roddy's Flowers 117 Spring St.  
Rose Hill Tabernacle 227 E Market St.  
Ruby's Beauty Salon 122 Tipton St.  
SB White 226 E Market St.  
Schiltz Enterprises Inc. 341 E Main St.  
Scott Air Conditioning & Heating 137 N Commerce St.  
Security Finance Corp. 257 E Main St.  
Service Loan & Tax Company 301 S Roan St.  
Shared Health Services 101 Fountain Pl Suite 1C  
Sherrod, Goldstein, & Lee 249 E Main St.  
SPC Manufacturing Co. 130 W Market St.  
Specialty Printing 221 W Market St.  
Spring Service Co 210 W King St.  
Sprint United Telephone 101 N Roan St.  
Stellar Studios 142 W Market St.  
Sterling's Auction Gallery 125 W Market St.  
T Re-Production Ltd LLC 227 W Main St.  
Tennessee Flag Co. 312 E Main St.  
Terry Muse, NY Life Insurance 308 S Roan St.  
The Angry Penguin 123 W Main Street  
The Back Porch Boutique 408 S Roan St.  
The Golden Gate Design Center 301 S Roan St.  
The River 125 W Main St.  
The Sleeping Dragon 127 Spring Street  
Tim Jones 101 Fountain Sq., Suite 2D  
Time & Pay 108 N Boone St.  
T'Neilles Urban 132 Spring St.  
Tom and Polly Salvati 100 Spring St.  
Tracy's Neck Wear 325 1/2 E Main St.  
Trend Realty 100 Spring St., Suite 100  
Tri-Cities Transmission 225 W Market St.  
Trippie Hippie 105 Buffalo Street  
Tri-State Air Cooled Engine Inc 263 W Main St.  
Two Wheel Transit 412 S Roan St.  
U-Haul 112 N Commerce St.  
Uncle Bill's Variety Mall 214 W Market St.  
Uncle Sam's Loan Office & Pawn Broker 119 W Main St.  
Univ. Phys. Group Admin Office 222 E Main St.  
Urban Redevelopment Alliance, LLC 200 E Main St., Suite 700  
Visions Design Group 200 E Main St.  
Warranty 1 245 W Market St.  
Washington County Courthouse 101 E. Market St.  
Washington County Neighborhood Service Center 300 E Main Street, Ste 303  
Washington County Sheriff's Dept 101 E Market St.  
Watauga Internal Medicine 300 E Main St., Ste 104  
Whitaker Roofing 220 W Market St.  
WJHL Television 338 E Main St.  
WW Cab Company 128 W Commerce St.

**Total Businesses - 170**