

# HARRISONBURG DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE

2020 ANNUAL REPORT





# Letter from the Executive Director

## 2020: The Best Worst Year?

Who's ready to bury the word "pivot"?

Who isn't?! But, we all did it. Shoppers & diners - you changed how you supported local. Downtown businesses - you adapted to safely provide your goods and services. And, our HDR team - we never hit pause on trying to keep community members connected to downtown while trying to help businesses stay open.

When people ask "how is downtown doing?", they are surprised to hear that we had a net gain of businesses last year and we didn't have the widespread closures that were feared.

This is because our community is resilient. Fans of downtown were committed to supporting small businesses and businesses weren't going to give up. What's more, Harrisonburg has a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, and I am proud that HDR is a big part of that.

We raised money for grants and services. We never let businesses feel in the dark or isolated - our weekly emails told them everything they needed to know from PPE to PPP. We curated a webpage that offered customers updates on e-commerce options, delivery, and adjusted hours. Our blogs and social media spotlights reminded the community about the people behind businesses. We even ran one of our biggest holiday campaigns yet.

Please indulge me as I say THANK YOU to our supporters! I am blown away by the on-going support from our sponsors, partners, and donors. You have been with us every step of the way - your words of encouragement and your contributions keep us going. All of you made 2020 the best worst year ever! I hope you agree after you take a look at our 2020 annual report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea L. Dono".

Andrea L. Dono





# Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

**Our Mission:** To build a downtown destination where businesses thrive and people enjoy memorable experiences

**Our How:** Businesses assistance programs, destination marketing, special events & beautification projects

**Our Why:** We believe everyone deserves a special place that they consider the heart of their community



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Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

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# COVID-19 RESPONSE

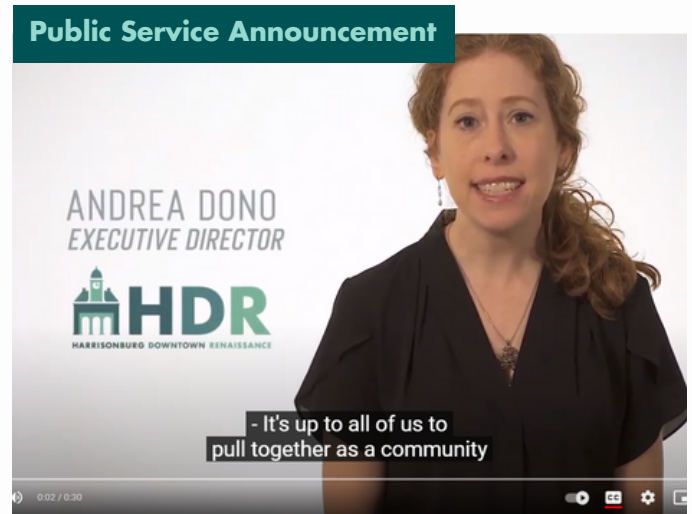
## Harrisonburg-Rockingham Small Business Taskforce

The week our first local case of COVID-19 was confirmed, area economic development partners began weekly convenings to coordinate our support to local businesses. The Taskforce partners filmed a PSA encouraging people to support local businesses safely (thanks to Appeal Productions!), surveyed business owners to identify needs, surveyed customers to gauge changing consumer behaviors, built a COVID-19 resource page, launched a grant program, and more.

**22** grants went to downtown businesses  
for a total of **\$68,000+** invested in downtown.

The catalyst for the resilience grant program came from Aaron Ludwig who asked his banker at F&M Bank to help find a way to save small businesses. F&M immediately seeded the grant program with \$50,000. Contributions from Atlantic Union Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, individual donors, HDR's Friendly City Fortune and a grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development helped us raise over \$100,000 in grants for Harrisonburg-Rockingham businesses.

Taskforce partners: HDR, the Harrisonburg Rockingham Chamber of Commerce, The Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, The City of Harrisonburg, The Shenandoah Valley Partnership, The City of Harrisonburg - Economic Development, Rockingham County - Economic Development and Tourism, JMU - Professional & Continuing Education, and The Shenandoah Valley Technology Council.



# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## The Heartbeat of Main Street Grant Program

**\$800,000 to 67 businesses across the nation**

The Hartford Insurance Company and The National Main Street Center teamed up to award \$800,000 to small businesses throughout the U.S. as they adapted to operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. HDR quickly got this opportunity out to downtown businesses & wrote 20 customized letters of support with personalized stories for each applicant

Only **6** communities in Virginia received a grant.

**\$17,993** was awarded to  
**3** downtown Harrisonburg businesses.

Only **1** city received more than **3** awards.

 **20** Letters of support were written by HDR.

In March at the start of the pandemic, HDR emailed downtown businesses, sometimes multiple times a week, to notify them of grant opportunities and federal assistance programs & resources. HDR also conducted two customer surveys to inform businesses of consumer patterns to help them pivot operations and respond to evolving preferences.

5



"HDR started sending out sometimes daily emails with updates about things that were happening at a local, state and national level with economic relief for COVID. HDR was a lifeboat that I could hold on to and stay afloat and help the business stay afloat — 8 months later, we're here and we're thriving."

Lauren Penrod, Owner of Lola's Deli



A POP-UP FOOD BANK FOR RESTAURANT EMPLOYEES

Seeing the immediate need for out-of-work food industry workers, we supported Pale Fire Brewing and Digital Minerva to launch Pale Fire HELPs – a pop-up food pantry stocked with donations from Sysco Virginia.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Bricks & Clicks

We modified our Bricks & Clicks small business assistance program to provide grants & one-on-one expert guidance to help businesses modify their spaces ("bricks") for increased public health & improve their online/e-commerce presence ("clicks") so they could be more nimble in their response to operating during a pandemic.

 **20** businesses participated. All applicants were accepted!

 **NONE** of the businesses in the program closed.

 **\$45,000** was invested in downtown businesses.



The Virginia Economic Developers Association recognized Bricks & Clicks with a state award noting our 360-degree business support for participating entrepreneurs and the innovative partnerships that made it happen. HDR and the City of Harrisonburg's Dept. of Economic Development were featured panelists in the VEDA online conference to share our best practices.

The Dept. of Housing and Community Development's Virginia Main Street also held up our Bricks & Clicks as a model for our statewide downtown revitalization network!

The success of Bricks & Clicks is made possible by our program partners – the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center and the City of Harrisonburg Economic Development.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Bricks & Clicks Testimonials

"I am so humbly grateful to the Bricks & Clicks program. The funds have helped me pivot my business to include retail hair care products for the black and brown community, upgrade my appointment setting and sales recording capabilities, and make my shop safe and sanitary to comply with COVID-19 guidelines.

**Your encouragement and belief in my business created renewed enthusiasm and excitement in my shop."**

**Diane Madden**  
Dinamic Cuts & Styles

"I cannot express my gratitude for working with us to build a more sustainable business as e-commerce is clearly the way of the world, and to help us market our business. **The Bricks and Clicks program was a driver in challenging me, when I felt sort of like waving the white flag of defeat,** to keep fighting to build a business to survive such a tremendously difficult time in 2020!"

**Tina Miller**  
Walkabout Outfitter

**"The front end cashiers are always telling me how grateful people are that we are offering this online service."** The success of Co-Go means less people in the store, which in turn helps to keep our shoppers feeling safer."

**Lindsey Denny**  
Friendly City Food Co-op





# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Downtown Business Development

Despite all of the challenges and uncertainty small businesses faced in 2020, downtown Harrisonburg survived the chaos and even gained some great new establishments.

12

new downtown businesses opened

7

downtown businesses closed

4

downtown businesses expanded their spaces and/or operations



Merge Coffee Company opened their first location three years ago across from EMU. In 2020, they brought new life to the intersection of Liberty St. and Main St. and expanded their business with a new location in Downtown Harrisonburg.



Built in 1945, this historic downtown building on W. Gay Street was originally Big L Tire until they moved to their new location on N. Main Street. This former garage space was successfully renovated and reopened as Magpie Diner and The Perch co-working space, along with Chestnut Ridge Coffee Roasters.

## Did You Know?

HDR engaged in on-going advocacy to protect downtown's historic Denton Building on Court Square from being acquired for the use of court infrastructure expansion and possible demolition. We hosted a community presentation that drew 200+ concerned residents and teamed up with Dr. Carole Nash, Archaeologist and Associate Professor at JMU's School of Integrated Science. We shared lessons learned about the impacts past demolitions have had on downtown that continue to be felt today and to keep the community informed.



# PROMOTION & MARKETING



## #EverydayHVA Campaign

HDR created the #EverydayHVA campaign to encourage people to continue supporting downtown businesses by shopping their e-commerce sites and purchasing gift cards.

Participants were encouraged to email HDR copies of their receipt(s) showing \$25 or more in purchases at downtown businesses. Each receipt submission equalled a chance to win one of four weekly \$25 gift card prizes to the downtown business of each winner's choosing.



**269** receipts were submitted.



**42%** said the campaign made them think more about the importance of supporting local.



At least **\$6,725** was spent at downtown businesses during the campaign.

**Half of the winners spent 50% more than the value of the gift card.**



# PROMOTION & MARKETING

## Social Media, Newsletter, & Website Metrics



9,681

Facebook Likes  
in 2020

8,943

Facebook Likes  
in 2019



1,209,588

Reached through posts



82,595

Interacted with posts



4,200

Instagram followers



191,044

Website pageviews



3,085

Newsletter subscribers

3,085

Newsletter subscribers  
**Most Popular Facebook Post  
from 2020**

## COVID-19 Business Directory

At the start of the pandemic, people still wanted to support downtown businesses but didn't know how. Some temporarily closed, others had new hours - so one of our first actions was to connect customers to businesses by curating a new online directory that made it easy to find which were open, their new hours, who offered delivery, take-out, or quick pick ups, and who offered e-commerce. Our directory format was replicated by countless communities near & far.

"We've given our COVID-19 Downtown directory a major facelift - the information is now much more streamlined to make it easier to shop online, buy gift cards, and continue to support our downtown businesses."



18,678 Website pageviews

54.4K reached 366 likes 451 shares



# PROMOTION & MARKETING

## Downtown Storytelling

### "Friendly Faces of the Friendly City"

Local blogger and Harrisonburg enthusiast, Katie Mitchell, wrote a series of 17 pieces sharing the stories of both Harrisonburg residents and downtown business owners. The "Friendly Faces of the Friendly City" series garnered a lot of attention and gave us some of our most popular posts and webpages.

 **6,419** Website pageviews

 **40,105** Reached on Facebook

 **254** Facebook shares



## Business Spotlights

We ran a social media spotlight series to showcase businesses and owner stories to reintroduce them to the community and highlight what they offer to promote supporting local.



Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance  
9.8K like this · Nonprofit Organization

Sep 8, 2020 · Water Street Vintage & Bohemian, a downtown business with a loyal customer base, all began as one man's way of connecting to a time long since passed. Mike Harlow, owner of Water Street Vintage, grew up in Harrisonburg in the 60s and 70s—a time he sees as easier, when everyone...



Click  
Here to  
View



Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance  
9.8K like this · Nonprofit Organization

Nov 2, 2020 · Benny Sorrentino's is famous for their pies, serving up slices over a foot long. However, long before they became known as, "Home of the Virginia Slice," Benny's started as a one-man business. Years ago, a man named Benedetto, nicknamed "Benny," became famous for the pizza pies he...



Click  
Here to  
View

**Our most-viewed page on the HDR website in 2020 was a "Friendly Faces of the Friendly City" blog**

### "Friendly Faces Of The Friendly City: Cy Khochareun"

Cy Khochareun, the owner of Beyond, tells his story of immigrating from Laos to Thailand, and eventually the United States where he went from picking apples on a farm outside of Harrisonburg to opening Beyond, Taste of Thai, Cy's Electronics, and the Oriental Food Market.

 **1,042**  
Pageviews



# PROMOTION & MARKETING

## Holiday Campaign & Gift Guide

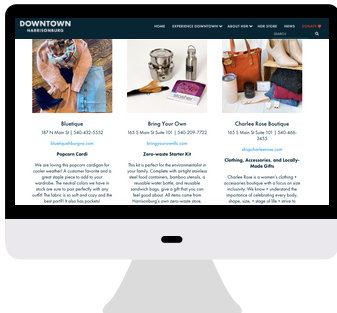
We ran our biggest holiday shopping campaign to date in 2020! We featured a digital holiday gift guide & insert in the DNR, a postcard campaign, TV commercial & gift card giveaway.



**18,000**  
reached with our  
Holiday Gift Guide Daily  
News Record insert



**14,000** households reached with our holiday postcards  
encouraging area residents to shop small



**1,139**  
Webpage views of our  
2020 Holiday Gift Guide

## Shop Small for the Holidays Commerical

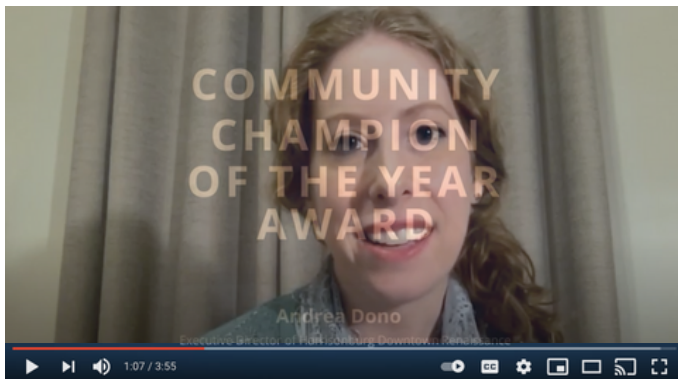


In 2020, HDR partnered with the Friendly City Merchants and the City of Harrisonburg's Economic Development Dept. to produce a commercial for WHSV & social media that encourages supporting small businesses during the holiday season. The majority of businesses surveyed in January said that many customers reported making a concerted effort to buy local for the holidays.

# AWARDS & RECOGNITION

## Community Champion of the Year Award

The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce recognized HDR's Executive Director, Andrea Dono, for her contributions to our community with a 2020 Community Champion of the Year award!



The National Main Street Center asked Andrea to be a panelist in a webinar to share our COVID small business response strategies, which positioned our organization as a leader in this nationwide network of downtown revitalization programs.

## Grills Fund for Main Street Revitalization

## Did You Know?

HDR was one of 8 recipients of a \$10,000 Grills Fund for Main Street Revitalization grant from the National Main Street Center. Only accredited Main Street America communities were eligible for this very competitive nationwide grant. The Truist Foundation also awarded HDR a \$10,000 grant to contribute to Bricks & Clicks!

# EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

## Sofapalooza

Sofapalooza was a nine-part virtual concert series hosted by HDR on our YouTube channel. It not only spread some joy, love, and music through the downtown community during a hard time, but raised funds to support local musicians and small businesses.

Over **11K** video views  
**\$5,470** granted to downtown businesses  
**\$1,500** paid to local musicians



## Bingo is Life

HDR partnered with brothers/entertainers, Chris and Mike Howdyshell, to put on a free community bingo event for a sold out crowd of 270 people in Court Square Theater. We gave away over \$1,000 in prizes at this one-of-a-kind celebration of the creativity of the Friendly City.



## Veterans Day

We partnered with 4 local veterans organizations to highlight the stories of area Veterans and honor their service despite being unable to hold an in-person parade.

Over **16K** social media impressions

JMU's student Veterans Association placed 7,033 flags on the quad, we worked with JMU to have the Star-Spangled Banner play from the Wilson Chimes at 11 am on November 11.





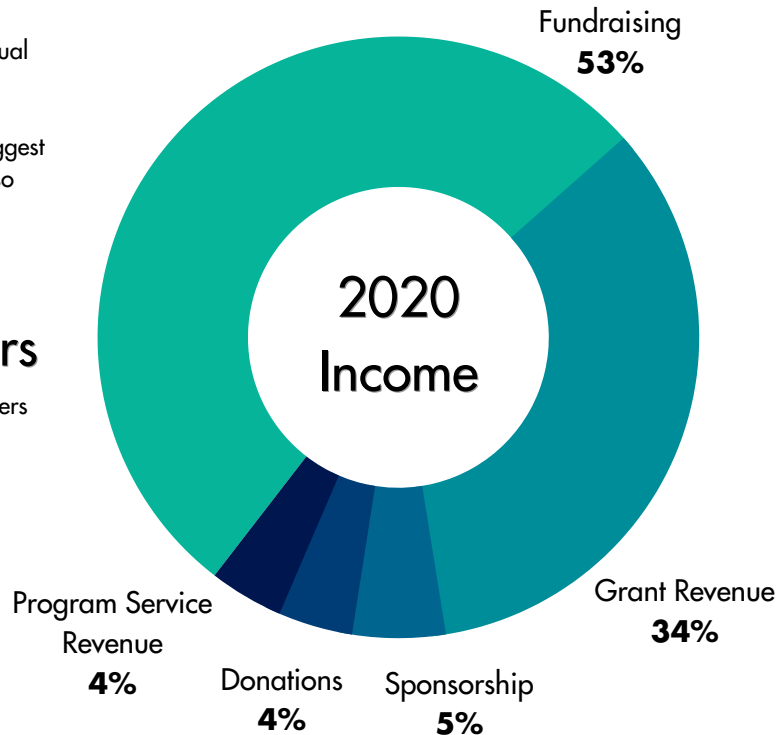
# FINANCIAL REVIEW & SPONSORS

## Friends of Downtown

Thank you to our almost 200 Friends of Downtown! Individual donations from community members and downtown businesses are among our biggest votes of confidence. We are so grateful for your continued support!

## Media Partners

Thank you to our media partners Harrisonburg Radio Group, iHeartMedia, and WHSV.



## Grants & Loans

PPP Loan- (Forgiven) \$46,600  
Truist Foundation \$10,000 for Bricks and Clicks  
Virginia Main Street \$20,000 for Resilience Grants  
National Main Street Center – Grills Fund for Main Street Revitalization \$10,000 for Bricks and Clicks

## 2020 Sponsors & In-kind Partners

### GIFTS OF \$10,000+

City of Harrisonburg  
Glo Fiber  
James Madison University  
Matchbox Realty & Management Services

### GIFTS OF \$1000 - \$3000

Brad Cohen Homes  
Digital Minerva  
Excel Heating & Cooling  
Excel Steel Works  
Farmers & Merchants Bank  
The Frame Factory  
The Gaines Group Architects  
HUGO KOHL Jewelry Boutique & Workshop  
Larson Wealth Management  
Mint Construction  
Pendleton Community Bank  
Riner Rentals

### GIFTS OF \$500 - \$999

Appeal Productions  
The Friendly City Food Co-op  
Flora Pettit PC  
The Harrisonburg Homes Team  
Massanutten Resort  
Nest Realty

### GIFTS OF \$499 and Under

Brother's Craft Brewing  
Crab Action  
Daniel J. Neher  
Generate Impact  
Pale Fire Brewing Co.  
The Razor's Edge  
Ruby's Arcade  
Spotless Specialty Cleaning and Restoration