

McKenzie receives Municipal League award

NASHVILLE, Tenn. --- If imagination is good for the soul, then dreams are coming true in McKenzie where city officials, business owners, citizens and other local entities are bustling with plans to help revitalize the city's downtown and add business potential. In the process, the community is employing new development strategies, hosting more community events and funding historic restoration projects, as part of the new vision for the city. In recognition of the city's efforts to boost the community's quality of life and create a more economically sound future for its citizens, McKenzie was recognized with a 2014 Tennessee Municipal League Achievement Award for Excellence in Community Planning, which was presented on Tuesday, June 24, 2014, at 8:00 a.m. during TML's 75th Annual Conference at the Chattanooga Convention Center in Chattanooga.

In 2010, when the town kicked off its first "Re-Imagine McKenzie" meeting, town leaders, business owners and residents sat down together to define the direction the city should take to ensure future success. Ideas included drawing more visitors and business prospects to the city, revitalizing the downtown area and increasing the city's economic potential. This meeting resulted in a Quality Master Plan and a flurry of projects that are now drawing visitors to the community.

Having achieved Certified Local Government status, the city passed a historic zoning ordinance to preserve its downtown business district, setting up a conservation district as well, to preserve surrounding neighborhoods and eventually boost property values.

The city also partnered with Bethel University, sponsoring a "Make a Difference Day," where more than 300 volunteers worked to paint, clean up, paint murals and landscape the city's downtown area. McKenzie applied for and received a Tennessee Downtowns development grant, which was used to improve and beautify downtown building facades. The grant awardees participated in a series of city-sponsored small business seminars aimed at helping them grow their businesses.

The renewed McKenzie Business Association also meets on a monthly basis to discuss topics relevant to business owners and to develop strategies to help local businesses succeed.

"The city has significantly increased business licenses by creating an environment where businesses want to open downtown," said Dana Deem, Municipal Technical Advisory Service management consultant. "This effort has helped to fill empty buildings and increase pedestrian traffic downtown."

An Industrial Leadership Breakfast was initiated and meets quarterly in order to gather leaders in industry, including the city's Industrial Development Board, City Council, College of Applied Technology, Bethel University, McKenzie Regional Hospital, and McKenzie Special School District. The group hears a speaker and discusses strategies to further the local workforce and area's industrial development.

The town purchased the historic train depot, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Industrial Development Board renovated the structure to create quality space for their offices. Plans for the remaining portion of the building include a welcome center, train museum, and offices. The city created a dual

website shared with the IDB, for easier access to information concerning the city. Renovations to the historic Park Theatre are also taking shape, restoring the beloved landmark to its 1940s grandeur. The town plans to use the facility for movies, community performances, job training and meeting space.

For Civil War buffs, the City worked with the Tennessee Historic Commission which placed two Civil War Trails markers to recognize significant Civil War events which took place in McKenzie.

A boost in events and festivals is not only injecting more fun into the community, but dollars. The city revived its popular July 4th Freedom Festival, which attracts approximately 5,000 people each year, and added a Southern Fried Food and Sweet Tea Festival, along with numerous other cultural events such as “Nights on Broadway.” The event brings a different musical group to the downtown square every Saturday night during the months of May and June.

The city’s expanded Parks and Recreation program provides quality of life experiences to people of all ages. The city has sponsored specialty classes from cake decorating to pottery along with the Carroll County Walks program. Area children can’t wait to get their chill on at the highly anticipated downtown splash pad, in the works. The water venue will join an existing skateboard park and 18-hole disc golf course.

“McKenzie has made significant progress in their master plan and deserves the TML Excellence in Community Planning Award,” Deem said. Each year the Tennessee Municipal League honors cities throughout the state for overall excellence, improvement, specific outstanding programs, or department accomplishments. Other award winners for 2012 include: Algood, for Small Town Progress; Athens, for Excellence in Community Service; Bulls Gap, for Small Town Progress; Clinton, for Excellence in Police Services; Jackson, for Excellence in Community Wellness; Morristown, for Excellence in Governance; and Mt. Juliet, for Excellence Fire Services. This is the first award McKenzie has won with the Tennessee Municipal League.