

Lawrenceville Main Street marks 20th anniversary with new events

By: [Mercerspace](#)
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Lindsey Bohra, Lawrenceville Main Street executive director, board member Dawn Monsport and board President Vince Scozzari with Joyce Arone as Mrs. Claus and Joe Arone as Santa at the 17th annual Lawrenceville Main Street Holidays in the Village event.

By Jacquelyn Pillsbury

A little more than two decades ago, a group of volunteers banded together in an effort to turn around Lawrenceville's declining Main Street business district.

In celebration of their successful efforts, the organization the volunteers created — Lawrenceville Main Street — is planning to hold a celebration of its accomplishments sometime during this year with an event meant to bring the community together.

According to executive director Lindsey Bohra, there is a lot to celebrate.

In the late 17th century, Main Street, originally known as the King's Highway, was part of the first Colonial road in New Jersey. For much of the next three centuries it was a thriving center with active merchants and two trolley lines connecting Princeton and Trenton (one of which has since become part of the Lawrence Hopewell Trail).

But as malls, retail centers and big box stores moved into the area, Main Street's mom-and-pop shops began to suffer and businesses, such as Lawrenceville Hardware, closed.

In the fall of 1995 the township's Historic Preservation Advisory Committee noticed the decline of the historic Village of Lawrenceville and convened a number of meetings that included residents, public officials, merchants and property owners to discuss the problem and try to reach a solution.

The outcome of these meetings was the creation of the volunteer board of directors with Maura White serving as a paid acting project manager. Lawrenceville Main Street was set up as a non-profit separate from the town and is comprised of 57 businesses.

The Lawrenceville School, located directly across the street from the Main Street businesses, donated 17 Phillips Avenue to use as its project office, a location that the organization continues to use as their offices. The school also gave it seed money to jumpstart its fundraising efforts.

Today, Lawrenceville Main Street is led by Bohra, the organization's fifth part-time leader and an all-volunteer board of 18 people from the greater community.

Lawrenceville Fuel on Gordon Avenue is the oldest business in the Main Street area, having been founded by board member Gary Hullfish's father, Charles Hullfish, in 1925 (the business was originally formed by his maternal grandfather as Lawrenceville Ice in 1876).

Hullfish said that his father had a vision for Lawrenceville. "Charles Hullfish built the bakery and the barbershop. He wanted a barber. Joe (Guido) is now the second barber."

Guido has been in his Gordon Avenue barbershop since the mid-1960s. When Village Bakery closed in November 2011 (following Hurricane Sandy), Hullfish waited patiently for another bakery to fill that void, also on Gordon Avenue. Kate Pollock (Hullfish's daughter and owner of Hullfish Real Estate) found Joanne Canady-Browne and, who opened the Gingered Peach last December.

"Father also wanted a doctor," Hullfish said. "When a dentist approached him he said 'that's the closest I'll get to one.'" Today the former dentist's office at 11 Gordon Avenue houses a chiropractor's office.

Ann Garwig and Hullfish are original board members who are still active with Lawrenceville Main Street. "Lawrenceville Fuel has been the biggest supporter of Lawrenceville Main Street throughout the years," Bohra said.

On Sept. 9, Starbucks Coffee Company became the newest business on Main Street when they opened their drive-thru coffee shop in the space formerly occupied by Sun Bank.

"Starbucks has already reached out to Lawrenceville Main Street and HomeFront," Bohra said. "They asked how they can be included. Hopefully what they will offer is foot traffic — people walking to town in the end that will help all of the businesses. They'll see the local Allstate agent, the bakery [the Gingered Peach], Purple Cow ice cream and all of the businesses will benefit."

In early 2016, Jill Sasso and Roe Manghisi plan to open what will then be the newest business in the Lawrenceville Main Street business district at 9 Gordon Avenue, in the former location occupied by Fusion Employment Services.

In September, the two women went before the Lawrenceville Main Street Board with plans to open Local Roots, a local farm-to-table market. According to paperwork given to the Board, Sasso and Manghisi's mission is "to connect the community with the local farmers that grow, raise and harvest organic products. From local produce to heritage breed animals and grains, we strive to bring our customers the healthiest ingredients that are an alternative to the commonplace industrial food markets."

Sasso and Manghisi are working with the township to receive the proper permits, and preliminary plans call for their food to come from local businesses, including Griggstown Farms, Blue Moon Acres, Cherry Grove Farms, Honeybrook Farm and Double Brook. Zone 7, part of Z-Farms on Princeton Pike, will be providing the distribution of their foods.

"We are becoming a food destination," Bohra said.

For \$100 a year, businesses can become an official member of their business organization. The fee includes a link to their website from the Lawrenceville Main Street website (lawrencevillemainstreet.com/businesses/index.htm) and advertising. Types of businesses range from art to yoga, with a concentration of casual to upscale dining establishments.

In addition to supporting local businesses, Lawrenceville Main Street runs many events throughout the year, including Music in the Park, Night in the Village Walking Restaurant Tour, the Jubilee and the Scarecrows in the Park Fall Festival.

Music in the Park is a free event that takes place in Weeden Park on most Thursday nights each summer. A local band performs and food is available for sale from a local restaurant. The 2016 series will begin on June 23.

According to the Lawrenceville Main Street 2015-2020 strategic plan released in September, the event was considered a great success by those surveyed last year. On nice summer evenings, several hundred people of all generations gather together.

On Sept. 20, Lawrenceville Main Street held its fourth annual Night in the Village Walking Restaurant Tour of 11 local establishments with two seatings. The event is Lawrenceville Main Street's largest fundraiser and raised \$18,000 this year.

The Jubilee is held every spring. Last spring was the 17th annual family-style carnival held in the area behind the restaurants on Main Street. In 2015 it raised \$15,000 for Lawrenceville Main Street, and brought over 3,000 people to the Main Street district. In 2016 it will be held on May 1.

The organization hosted the 17th annual Scarecrow in the Village Fall Festival on a chilly October afternoon. People created scarecrows that remained in Weeden Park throughout the fall. This year Lawrence Middle School teacher Melissa Clark won the scarecrow decorating contest.

Last month, Santa and Mrs. Claus made an appearance at the annual Holidays in the Village event. Hundreds of people turned out on a balmy 60-degree December day to have their pictures taken with Santa. Every child who attended the event received a candy cane and a stuffed animal.

As a charitable nonprofit, Lawrenceville Main Street runs on donations. Last year, they launched an annual appeals campaign with the goal of raising \$20,000. They came close, receiving \$18,500. They recently began their 2016 campaign with a goal of \$25,000.

The funds go toward funding Lawrenceville Main Street's free events, helping to pay for musical entertainment, insurance and portable toilet. Funds raised also pay for landscaping baskets along Main Street, and holiday lights.

Lawrenceville Main Street also solicits grant money to fund larger projects, such as the decorative street light posts and trash cans installed on Main Street. The organization receives no money from Lawrence Township.

As part-time executive director, Bohra draws a small salary to manage administrative work, such as creating a weekly newsletter and planning events. In the beginning the newsletter was created quarterly and hand-delivered to local businesses. Today it is emailed weekly to just under 1,000 interested parties, including the Lawrenceville School, which then distributes it to their population.

Bohra is the first to admit she does not do it all alone. The Lawrenceville Main Street Board meets monthly and serves as the backbone of the volunteers who are needed in order for events to run successfully. One of the most active groups is the Landscaping Committee, "a group of dedicated women and one man who keep the flowers watered all year in Weeden Park and along Main Street, including the hanging baskets," Bohra said, adding that they helped keep the flowers alive all last summer when there was little rain.

At its September meeting, the Board adopted a new mission statement and a new 5-year plan.

"Lawrenceville Main Street is a volunteer-led nonprofit organization that promotes revitalization and improvements to The Village, the National Register Historic District. We accomplish this work by implementing exciting events, recruiting new shops, building meaningful partnerships, and marketing and beautifying the charming historic shopping district for Lawrence Township residents," reads the mission statement.

The new five year plan, which will be made public on the organization's website, supports this mission through increased fundraising and volunteers. It calls for increasing the committee (or team) system to use "capable volunteers who are empowered to execute the projects enumerated in this Strategic Plan through the creation of work plans which are approved by the Board."

Lawrenceville Main Street, 17 Phillips Avenue. Phone: (609) 219-9300. On the web: lawrencevillemainstreet.com. Lawrenceville Main Street is always seeking volunteers, including students seeking service hours for school.

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