



CITY OF KENNER

PRESS RELEASE

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RIVERTOWN REVITALIZATION GETS HUGE BOOST WITH DESIGNATION AS A MAIN STREET COMMUNITY

Kenner, LA. - Kenner's historic Rivertown district has been officially named a Main Street community by state officials, a designation that opens up federal, state and local resources and something that Kenner has been working toward for more than seven years.

"We have had a multi-faceted plan that we have been following for some time to revitalize Rivertown, and this designation will help us enormously," Kenner Mayor Michael Yenni said. "This qualifies us for additional tax incentives and programs, but perhaps more importantly, we are now part of a community of Main Street leaders throughout the state and can tap into their experience and expertise."

Kenner is one of only 36 Main Street communities in Louisiana, which includes five in New Orleans. It is the only Main Street program in Jefferson Parish.

"This is the best opportunity possible to help revitalize Rivertown," said Michael Ince, a Kenner planner and grant administrator who, along with Planning Director Jay Hebert, has helped spearhead the Main Street application process for Kenner. "We now have access to all of the Main Street communities in the state – to learn from their past successes and to review available training manuals – valuable information we can give to our board members and volunteers and learn from."

As a Main Street community, Kenner will receive a \$5,000 grant each November to hold a special event promoting the Rivertown area, Ince said.

The Main Street program was started in Louisiana under the National Trust for Historic Preservation's model and sponsorship as a way to revitalize downtown districts throughout the state that had been neglected as the locals moved away from inner cities to suburban areas. That trend is reversing and the Main Street program aims to help with the renewal.

All Main Street communities create four committees for both volunteers and businesses in the district: economic restructuring, design, promotion and organization, Ince said. Help is available not only from other Main Street communities but from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"They will bring in consulting firms to come and perform a community assessment to tell you some of the best options you have to revitalize your district," Ince said.

"We are all so thrilled about this," said Jenny LaBella, treasurer of the Rivertown Merchants and Business Association. "This opens up a lot of federal resources that help businesses develop and grow."

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LaBella, who owns a catering company and is in the process of opening a wedding and banquet facility in Rivertown, credited the support and encouragement from Yenni and singled out Ince for almost daily contributions to the process.

For Julie Cantrell, president of the Rivertown merchants and business group and an 11-year veteran of the historic and cultural district, studies and proposals in the past have raised hopes only to be dashed at some point.

“There’s always been a start and a stop in the past here in Rivertown,” she said. “It would be ‘maybe we can do this, but maybe not.’ But this is not just talk. This is something written on paper that we are a Main Street program. This is the biggest thing to happen here in Rivertown.”

Hebert said the goal has always been for the city to step aside once the businesses in the area, along with volunteers, begin to act as a cohesive unit capable of moving forward independently. “Placing the oversight of Rivertown in the hands of the stakeholder community ensures that the needs of the historic district will always be a top priority, regardless of any future city administrations.”

For more information on Louisiana’s Main Street program, visit <http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/mainstreet.aspx>.

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