



| CASE STUDY |

DOWNTOWN DAYS

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In Downtown Bellefontaine, community events are more than just fun, they're part of a year-round strategy to bring people downtown, grow small businesses, and build emotional connections to place. What began as a simple idea to bring locals together on the first Friday of each month evolved into a robust and intentional placemaking strategy.

Today, the monthly event model has transformed into Downtown Days, a curated series of themed activations that deliver economic value, regional reach, and meaningful experiences.

FROM FIRST FRIDAYS TO DOWNTOWN DAYS

The story begins with First Fridays, an initiative launched by the Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership to encourage community engagement and downtown commerce. The idea was simple: make the first Friday of every month a time to gather, celebrate, and support local businesses. Over time, First Fridays gained popularity and helped build a sense of rhythm for downtown activity.

But as the community evolved, so did the needs of its businesses and audience. Organizers began noticing that the fixed Friday format was limiting. Not every audience could attend a Friday evening event. Retailers wanted flexibility to align promotions with peak shopping times, and community members asked for broader experiences that could extend across entire weekends.

Recognizing these opportunities, the Partnership made the strategic decision to retire First Fridays and relaunch the concept as Downtown Days: a more versatile, experience-focused series that could occur on any day, at any time of the month.

This shift not only improved participation and event design, it allowed for a new level of creativity, inclusivity, and business integration. Downtown Days was built around the belief that experience matters and that great experiences can drive economic development, tourism, and pride of place.

EVENT DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Each event on the Downtown Days calendar is strategically selected to reflect seasonal themes, attract a diverse range of audiences, and support the needs of downtown businesses. Whether it's a spring scavenger hunt, a fall wine walk, or a winter holiday shopping weekend, the calendar is curated to keep energy high and foot traffic consistent throughout the year.

The Partnership carefully considers business needs, cultural moments, and community feedback when designing events. Some events cater to families with children, others focus on nightlife or regional visitors, and some highlight specific sectors like restaurants or retail. This intentional programming helps ensure a steady and varied stream of activity for all types of downtown stakeholders.

BUSINESS INTEGRATION

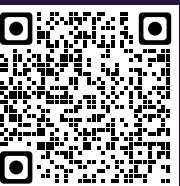
Downtown businesses aren't just participants in Downtown Days - they're co-creators. Events are structured to pull guests into storefronts through mechanisms like scavenger hunts, passport cards, product tastings, and themed



| SMALL BUSINESS. BIG IMPACT. |

Downtown Days began with a bold vision: to transform simple monthly gatherings into a cornerstone of Bellefontaine's economic and cultural identity. By reimagining events as immersive, experience-driven

activations and fostering deep collaboration with businesses and community partners, they turned that vision into a thriving model for small-town success. Scan the QR code to learn about our next Downtown Days event. →





giveaways. Shops like Peachtree Boutique, Four Acre Clothing Co., and Triple Moon Design Co. regularly align their inventory, décor, and hours to support the broader event theme.

These activations create discovery moments that help people explore places they might otherwise walk past. For example, during the Chocolate Walk, guests stop in at multiple businesses to collect treats, creating direct engagement opportunities for shop owners to promote upcoming products or services. Similarly, themed crawls and “shop hop” style events encourage people to linger, visit multiple stops, and share their experiences online.

The result is higher visibility, deeper connection, and increased sales for businesses throughout the district.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT

Behind every Downtown Day is a network of partners who contribute in ways both visible and behind the scenes. The City of Bellefontaine provides logistical support through departments like public works and police services, ensuring safe, accessible streets for eventgoers. The Logan County Chamber plays a key role in promotion and outreach, helping spread the word across broader regional audiences.

Local sponsors, both corporate and community-based, contribute funding, supplies, or prizes that help elevate each event. Whether it’s underwriting horse-drawn carriage rides or supporting a children’s activity zone, these partners help enhance the overall guest experience.

At the center of it all, the Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership serves as the coordinating body. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Partnership is able to pursue grants, maintain a community-first mission, and remain focused on enriching the downtown district for all.

PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Downtown Days are designed to welcome a wide variety of participants, including local families, young professionals, regional visitors, and out-of-town tourists. This diversity of audiences reflects the broad appeal of downtown Bellefontaine and its small-town charm combined with big-city experiences.

To reach these audiences, each event is supported by a layered marketing strategy. Social media plays a central role, with custom graphics and videos used to promote themes, merchant specials, and entertainment schedules. Email marketing is used to reach loyal followers, while partner organizations amplify messages through shared networks. Certain events, especially the larger seasonal





celebrations, also benefit from billboard ads from COM-STOR Outdoor, influencer collaborations, and local media coverage.

As a result, awareness and attendance have continued to grow year over year, with many events now considered regional draws.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Downtown businesses regularly report increased revenue and foot traffic on event days. In many cases, Downtown Days deliver a “holiday-level” sales boost, especially for retailers and restaurants that offer themed products or limited-time specials aligned with the event.

Beyond the numbers, Downtown Days help small businesses by increasing exposure, building brand awareness, and drawing first-time customers who later return on non-event days. Many merchants also benefit from event photography, social media content, and email list growth that help power their own marketing efforts long after the event ends.

Even service-based businesses or those located slightly off the main street corridor see benefits through extended hours, sidewalk activations, or collaborations with other merchants.

CREATING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

One of the most important outcomes of Downtown Days is the creation of emotional connection. These events are designed to create traditions, memories, and joyful moments that keep people coming back.

Whether it's friends meeting for cocktails at Galentine's, families searching for giant pineapples during Pineapple Palooza, or children lighting up during Hometown Christmas

carriage rides, these experiences build loyalty, not just to businesses, but to the entire community.

Downtown Days give people reasons to explore, gather, and celebrate together. They turn downtown from a place you pass through into a place you plan around.

MEASUREMENT AND FUTURE GROWTH

The Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership measures event success through both quantitative and qualitative metrics. They gather feedback from business owners about sales performance, analyze social media engagement, and estimate attendance using foot traffic patterns and check-ins.

Surveys and anecdotal feedback are also valuable tools, capturing ideas for improvement and identifying what resonated most with guests.

Looking forward, the Partnership is exploring opportunities to make Downtown Days even more inclusive, immersive, and collaborative. New ideas include digital event maps, expanded art installations, and experiences that span entire weekends or introduce new community partnerships. As downtown grows, so will the creativity behind these experiences.

Downtown Days exemplifies how intentional placemaking and event planning can drive small-town success. What started as a monthly gathering grew into a powerful engine for economic development, tourism, and community pride.

With the support of local businesses, city partners, and nonprofit leadership, Downtown Days has become a model for how towns of any size can use experience-driven strategies to grow their downtowns - and their impact.

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