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**DOWNTOWN FLORENCE EARNS 2023 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION
Forward-Thinking Approaches Rooted in Community Connections Credited**

CHICAGO, ILL., (March 27, 2023) – Main Street America announced today that the **Downtown Florence Main Street Program** in Florence, South Carolina, has received the prestigious **Great American Main Street Award** (GAMSA), which recognizes communities for their excellence in comprehensive preservation-based commercial district revitalization. The 2023 GAMSA designations, sponsored by The Hartford, were presented at the opening plenary for the Main Street Now Conference in Boston, Massachusetts.

Selected by a national jury of industry professionals and local leaders in the fields of economic development and historic preservation, Downtown Florence Main Street is being recognized for developing innovative and forward-thinking approaches to creating community buy-in through representative leadership and inclusive programming.

“Downtown Florence Main Street sets a national standard for downtown revitalization rooted in community connections,” said **Main Street America Interim President and CEO, Hannah White**. “Their success demonstrates the power of creative approaches to engaging stakeholders, creating a strong culture of volunteerism, and fostering pathways to increased downtown housing, while also championing the preservation of historic community assets.”

At just eight blocks, downtown Florence is a jewel where locals and visitors find exceptional local dining, award-winning entertainment venues, whimsical public art, and buildings rich in architectural heritage. It has not always been the case, however, that Florence’s downtown enjoyed this reputation as a place of vibrant businesses and welcoming gathering spaces.

For decades, the area suffered from a negative public perception fueled by empty storefronts, racial divides, and a practice of demolishing neglected, yet culturally significant, buildings in favor of new construction. Efforts to address these issues began in 2002 with limited success, until the organization began implementing a community-informed revitalization plan in 2011. Through strategic initiatives to leverage dedicated volunteers, establish partnerships, and support catalytic projects, this plan has generated over 100 units of new housing, \$300 million in investment, and over 90 new businesses.

“Being selected as a winner of the 2023 Great American Main Street Award is an unbelievable honor—it’s the once in a lifetime achievement representing the boundless investment, hard work, tenacity, and vision from local investors and partners, small business owners and residents, government officials and leaders, and our statewide Main Street network over the last twenty years—and especially over the last decade,” remarked **Hannah L. Davis, Main Street Program Manager at Downtown Florence Main**

Street. “Once described as too far gone to be saved, Downtown Florence has become the place to be, to live, and to do business in our region, and we aren’t done yet!”

The organization is also proud of its ongoing efforts to bridge both physical and metaphorical divides through meaningful conversation and intentional action. In 2020, a data-backed and strategic approach to ensure that the board of directors mirrors the community yielded this desired effect. The newly installed North Dargan Street Mural is the latest in the organization’s efforts to honor the legacy of Black entrepreneurship, enhance the downtown’s African American Historic Business District, and foster community trust.

“Florence winning GAMSAs is a tremendous achievement. The Downtown Florence Main Street team models exemplary revitalization with strong partnerships, visible transformation, and a commitment to historic preservation,” said **Jenny Boulware, State Coordinator at Main Street South Carolina.** “Downtown Florence has brought a new level of respect and awareness to the power of the Main Street Approach across South Carolina and throughout our southern region. We are excited to celebrate this prestigious win – and how fitting for it to be awarded during the state Main Street network’s fortieth year.”

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ABOUT THE GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

The Great American Main Street Award program recognizes communities exemplifying the use of the Main Street Approach™ to revitalize commercial districts. Winners are selected from a nationwide pool of applicants by a jury of Main Street professionals and leaders in the fields of community and economic development and historic preservation. Since the award’s inception in 1995, over 100 Main Street programs have been honored as GAMSAs communities. For more information, visit mainstreet.org.

ABOUT MAIN STREET AMERICA

Main Street America leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. For more than 40 years, Main Street America has provided a practical, adaptable, and impactful framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization through the Main Street Approach™. Our network of more than 1,200 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. For more information, visit mainstreet.org.

ABOUT DOWNTOWN FLORENCE MAIN STREET

The Downtown Florence Main Street Program is a partnership between the City of Florence and Florence Downtown Development Corp. (FDDC), a 501c3 non-profit organization established by the City of Florence to foster revitalization in Downtown Florence, South Carolina. FDDC is an Accredited member of Main Street America and its state coordinating program, Main Street South Carolina, which directly guides preservation-based economic development and community building. For more information, visit www.florencedowntown.com.