

Making Headway in Milbridge

Community Celebration

July 30, 2016



“Making Headway in Your Community” is a community engagement program featuring three public meetings, facilitated by GrowSmart Maine and the Maine Downtown Center. Working 8-10 months, communities identify what they value most in their towns and select small projects that bring new energy and focus to the community while drawing attention to collaborative work, improving connections and building capacity within the community. www.makingheadway.me is the searchable website designed for sharing these success stories and connecting with local, regional, statewide and even national organizations offering information and services to help communities in these efforts.

This is a report on the third and final public event in Milbridge, their Community Celebration.

Program funding is provided by the **Elmina B Sewall Foundation**. Making Headway in Your Community is a collaborative program of **GrowSmart Maine** and **The Maine Downtown Center**.

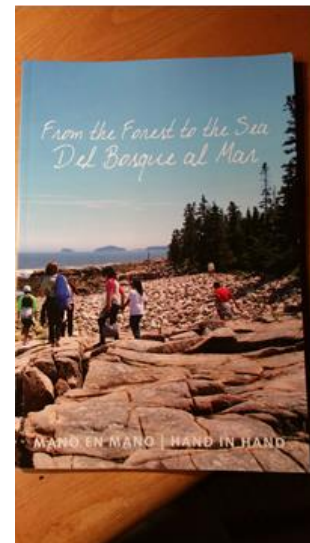
Making Headway In Milbridge Community Celebration:

Project: Enhance the Visitors' Information Center currently located at Schooner Gallery, including an easily signage on Rt1. The goal is to encourage residents and tourists to spend more time enjoying local offerings of this "gateway community".

Lead: Crystal Hitchings, Washington County Council of Governments & Mindy Leighton, Camden National Bank, Milbridge Branch

Project Overview: The goal of this project is to connect residents and visitors with local businesses and cultural and recreational opportunities. An existing visitor information display is located within a local business, The Schooner Gallery. This generous donation of space is greatly appreciated, but limits availability to the season and daily hours the gallery is open. This project improves the inside gallery while adding an outdoor kiosk and roadside signage. This project was brought forward by the Milbridge Area Merchants Association (MAMA) and won the Community Conversation competition.

Project Highlights: One Visitors Sign on Route 1 has been installed with another planned and the visitor information rack inside was updated with new activity categories, in anticipation of the upcoming BikeMaine event. In addition to planned improvements to the visitor information center, staff at Mano en Mano provided a new Spanish and English version of "A Visitor Guide, From the Forest to the Sea" for the Latino locals and visitors. Presenters noted that perhaps 25% of Milbridge residents are Latino.



Event:

The Community Celebration had lighter attendance than expected, with only a few guests, including State Representative Joyce Maker. Local leaders selected this day with the belief that the Milbridge Days Celebration, which is a large regional event, would encourage greater attendance at this event.. However, the community at-large and businesses were primarily focused on the events of the day. (Milbridge Days

is very well attended with multi events including a 18 minute parade, craft sales, food and a Cod Carry). The Celebration was held at the Schooner Gallery, with Crystal & Mindy leading the conversation and answering questions. Crystal noted that the roadside sign has already resulted in increased visits to the information center. Catherine Hill Winery hosted a wine tasting. Crystal provided 2 Blueberry Pies &

beverages.



Matching Grant Funds: Sunrise County Economic Council (SCEC) provided matching funds for a Bike Maine Map of the region and to update and enhance the local MAMA website for better visitor and local connections. (in-kind donation of time from Mindy and Crystal, Gallery owner and workers? perhaps others?)

Next Steps:

Project:

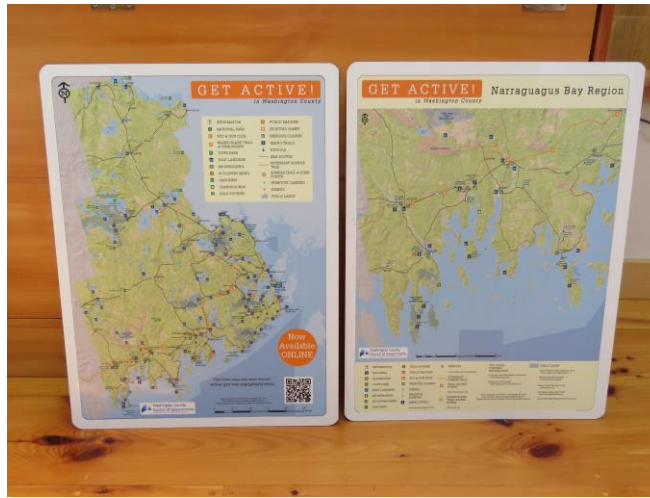
The Making Headway team will work with Sunrise Economic Council to deliver destination tourism training to the Schooner Gallery staff how best to welcome visitors. More indoor displays are planned as well. The outdoor kiosk will be installed with a protective covering outside the back entrance, providing information for visitors who come when the gallery is closed.

An area map both printed and online is being designed with the BikeMaine event in mind, modeled on Norway, Maine's map with similar intent.

The gallery owner is pleased with the improvements and is engaged in the process, creating a new relationship with the Sunrise County Economic Council.

MAMA noted that use the Visitors' Center is a value tool for its members. They will continue to market the area on state level, and engage in monthly meetings with Office of Tourism, including connection to Bold Coast initiatives. There is interest as well in promoting of Milbridge as an arts center.

These maps, produced previously by the local Healthy Maine Partnership, will be on display at the Visitors Center along with the new Millbridge Area Map produced through Making Headway and Bike Maine.



Other Projects from the Community Conversation:

Improvements to Millbridge Commons: Women’s Resource Center – wanted to create Edible Gardens; Mano en Mano – wanted to create a Gathering Space. This is a project is underway, providing a community space for events and group gatherings as well as a beautiful community garden. WRC is working with businesses owners to add gardens and get the word out.

Milbridge Theater: Gateway Milbridge is actively fundraising for much needed improvements. Memorabilia is being archived and carefully stored at the Historical Society in preparation for building improvements. New relationships are being created that will strengthen the community as they undertake this significant effort.



Lessons Learned:

Project and Event: Timing the Community Celebration during Milbridge days was not effective in boosting interest and attendance. It actually had the opposite effect. Local business owners were

“minding their businesses” and Milbridge area volunteers were otherwise involved in the events of the day. It is Blueberry picking season, many local Latino families were engaged in that enterprise and Mano en Mano is fully engaged in their outreach programs. Perhaps if the project had been more focused on the residents, it would have been a better fit for the day.

As for the overall timing, summer is a difficult time to bring businesses together on a project because of the significance of the summer tourist season.



Happy Parade Watchers

Dunk Tank and Music at Vasques' Mexican Restaurant

MHYC Process:

Consider timing of engagement and the impact of community and economic realities, to ensure greatest availability of time and energy.

Ensure there is a documented project team for the winning project at the close of the Community Conversation. Talk about steps to complete the project and match. Build time into the agenda to talk about team building.

Skills, Abilities and Instincts: This \$500 community scholarship has not yet been expended. There is interest in sending several people to the GrowSmart Maine Summit Oct 19th, with its session on Arts & Culture as economic drivers and sending two people to the Maine Association of Non Profits Board Boot Camp.

MHYC Attendees: Nancy Smith, GrowSmart Maine; Lorain Francis, contract for the Maine Downtown Center

Followup Thoughts after BikeMaine: to be completed by the Community. How did these project enhance the BikeMaine event for both locals and the event participants?

Attachments: Poster, PR and contacts with emails from previous events.

