



# NETWORK NOTES

Do you have successes or challenges, interesting projects or ideas you would like us to consider for Network Notes? Please e-mail them to [mainstreet@savingplaces.org](mailto:mainstreet@savingplaces.org).

## Littleton, New Hampshire: Focus on the Arts

Littleton, New Hampshire, a 2003 Great American Main Street Award winner, is a small town of 6,000 people nestled in the White Mountains. It is a regional shopping destination for New Hampshire's North Country, as well as for Vermont and Maine, where customers enjoy tax-free shopping. A covered pedestrian bridge over the Ammonoosuc River, mill restorations, and expanding arts businesses have turned downtown Littleton into a destination for recreation, shopping, and the arts. Over the years, Littleton's arts community has grown, and businesses have focused on adding excitement, color, and fun to downtown's streets to emphasize the town's focus on the arts.

Dave Ernsberger, a retired IBM executive and owner of Nest of Littleton—"Treasures for Your Nest"—wanted to launch projects that would showcase Littleton as an arts community; as a result, he has spearheaded several arts-focused events downtown. Galleries and arts-related businesses hold Second Friday Art Walks and other events to draw customers to the commercial district. But artists and business owners wanted to create a more visual connection in the public

realm to add excitement and color to the streets. Ernsberger drew upon projects he'd seen work in other places and thought would be great for Littleton as well. Main Street programs learn to "steal with zeal" when it comes to great ideas.

First on the list was the piano project, which Ernsberger had seen in Austin, Texas, where it was called "Play Me, I'm Yours." Starting in London, 26 nations around the world have launched pianos-on-the-street projects. Littleton is the home of Eleanor H. Porter, author of *Pollyanna*, so the community named its piano project, "Be Glad, Make Music," which reflects an optimistic town that believes in its potential. The bronze sculpture of Pollyanna in the heart of downtown was Littleton's first public arts investment thanks to the Eames family, who own the local theater and several downtown properties.

Littleton's piano project finished its third year in 2013,

*Maggie Hadlock, an outstanding Littleton High School senior, has participated for several years as "Pollyanna" in many events and activities.*



with about six pianos and guitars scattered throughout downtown and down by the river. People are encouraged to sit, play, and have fun. The project is very popular and highlights the town's strong musical roots and performances at its Opera House. The pianos were purchased or donated and then painted by local artists. Special covers were made for the pianos so they could remain outdoors during the summer and early fall. The expense of tuning and maintaining the pianos is included in the project plan.

Last year—2013—marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Pollyanna* and Ernsberger came up with another idea. [The umbrella project](#) was inspired

by Agueda, Portugal, where thousands of colorful umbrellas hang above the streets.

Ernsberger chose an alley near his store, which leads from the river through the Pollyanna Gateway to the Pollyanna Vista for the display. He worked with an engineer to install the rigging and electrical equipment. The umbrellas, though colorful, will be replaced next year with higher-quality umbrellas. During the Second Friday Art Walks and other arts events, umbrellas are placed in front of local galleries. Music and color now liven the streets all summer long. Once the umbrellas come down in the fall, cascading lights take their place.

Many of the initial costs for the piano and umbrella projects were paid by Ernsberger, with additional support from the Chamber



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*The Calvin Family (top) from Gorey, Ireland, seen here posing before the umbrellas that decorate a downtown alley, made a special side trip to Littleton in July, 2013, so that their daughter Pollyanna, age six, could visit the Pollyanna sculpture and tour the hometown of author Eleanor H. Porter.*

*The Littleton Piano Project (bottom), which showcases the town's strong musical roots, has been a great success, as people of all ages enjoy playing the pianos and listening to the impromptu concerts.*

of Commerce, private investors, businesses, and the town.

In 2014, Littleton will see additions to the improvements in the River District Redevelopment area, emphasizing the arts and the town's many unique assets.

*By Kathy La Plante, Senior Program Officer, NMSC.*

