The Tour of Empty Buildings, 2017 update

We set a date …
and a time …
wrote about it in the paper..
Told about it on the radio …
shared it on Facebook, twitter and blogs…
talked at the various service clubs about it …
put it in the enewsletter …
made flyers and posters and hung up all over town…
called people and asked them to participate …
and held the Tour of Empty Buildings.

Chamber Champions

Retired Chamber members were asked to join us and tell the stories about what was in the building before and share any ideas they had.

Art Downard used to own the movie theatre.

Realtors

Realtors and owners when possible were also present and answered questions about square footage, price, details and more.

Tyler Abens, Abens Realty with two customers

Sandy Van Hauen of Jim Fortune Realty, showed one of the Mexican restaurants

Buildings on the Tour

Sold

Sold to Melanie Plain and her company Prime Life LLC.

- Furniture store on Superior

Sold

- Chalfant Plumbing

Neighbors Plumbing from Ames expanded their operations to Webster City and also hired new employees.

Sold – now belongs to Underground Ink.

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Nancy Kayser, original owner of 817 Des Moines Street said,

"*I just couldn't put another for sale sign in a window in Webster City. With the closing of Electrolux there were for sale signs all over town. I just couldn't put another one up.*"

In fact, she was reluctant to be on the tour because she had work to do to clean out the offices.

- Kayser Law Office

Sold

Iglesio del Dios Pentacostal purchased this building and uses it for a church and community center.

They have joined the Chamber and are very active in the community.

- Old Public Health Office

Sold

- Webster Theater

It was bought by a group of citizens who formed a non profit organization called Help Entertain and Restore Organization, HERO.

They raised over $200,000 in a grass roots campaign to renovate and re-open the theater.

Their first showing was September 19 of 2015.

Rented

- Old Bridal Gallery

It also became an incubator space. A resale shop was there for three months and they didn't work out.

However, a new business, Chicago Style, is now open there.

Incubator space and rented

The owners made it available rent free for 3 months and reduced rent for the rest of the year.

Fiscellas, an Italian restaurant, was there for a year and moved to another town (husband got a job offer he could not refuse).

A local business rented the space for one year and used it as a Mexican restaurant while they upgraded their building.

Now it is back in the incubator project and is a business called The Big Picture. Unique and wonderful gifts are sold there.

- Old Lomita's building

One space rented

El Benedicio is a produce and grocery store.

The store front had been empty and it is in a large building with 1 other empty storefront.

The building is being talked about and suggestions are flying to buy the building, renovate and have apartments upstairs and storefronts downstairs.

The big deal … people are talking and working on ways to take possibility and turn it into reality.

Building on 2nd St.

Negotiating

- Al Reynolds, the barber, vacant store next door

Al the Barber (the owner) rented the building out to a small business that made Laotian smoothies. She moved her business elsewhere after a year, and now the building is for rent again.

Al is working with a cell phone repairman to re-open here.

Available

Mathews Plumbing

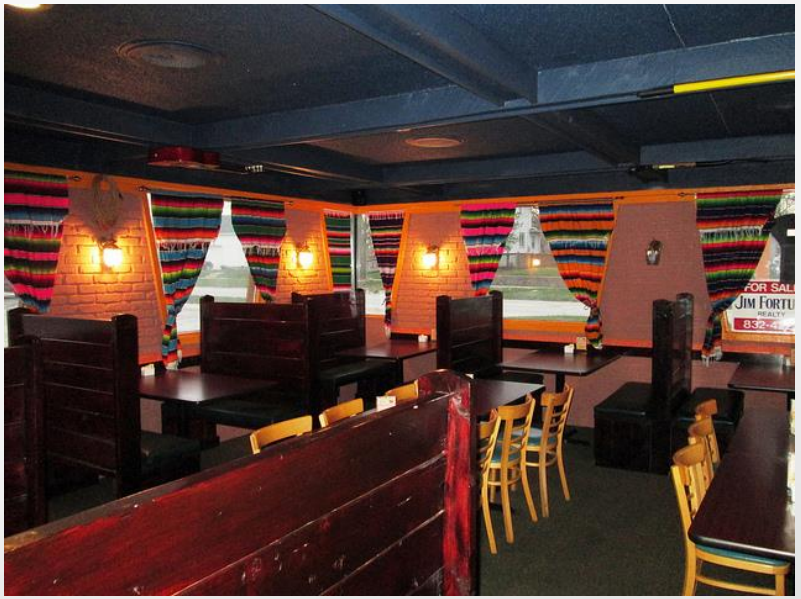
Business is still being conducted and as a result of The Tour, Morts Plumbing had an empty building right next door and they have rented it out to a local contractor.

Sold

El Toro Loco

The building was bought by an investor and he rented it out to a Mexican restaurant. They had some personal problems and were forced to close.

It has been bought and is now a used car dealership.



3 Storefront building

Available, kind of

This is a three store front building – and it has not been sold.

There is one new business that rents one of the spaces. They make shocks and brakes for race car drivers.

Results …
Then and Now

Relatively Immediate Results

The short tail:

- **Buildings, inside and out, were cleaned up.**
- **People were talking, in coffee shops, churches and around town.**
- **http://smallbizsurvival.com/2013/05/small-town-economic-development-idea-tour-empty-buildings.html picked up the story and shared it on their national website.**
- **Wordofmouth.org shared the idea online at http://wordofmouth.org/blog/how-to-make-boring-stuff-more-remarkable**

Ongoing Results

- An incubator program was born
- We spoke on a webinar for the National Association of Realtors and were heard across the country
- A new business came to look at the incubator spot, fell in love with Webster City and bought another building and opened a shop called SOS Vintage
- The closed movie theater was bought by a nonprofit group who raised $200,000 to fix it and open it.
- Schloefeldt Engineering designed maps of the tour that were handed out – and later partnered with Peterson Construction to do walk throughs of buildings for new buyers.

People are excited and more involved in the community – and talking about possibilities instead of failures!

Phone Calls and Comments

Ben Hillyer / The Natchez Democrat — Walt Grayson films from inside the old Odom's Optical shop on Main Street as local Natchez Inc. officials walk down the street. Grayson was in town filming empty storefronts for his weekly "Look Around Mississippi" video piece. Grayson 's video will focus on the upcoming Possibilities Tour.

By Stephen Hemelt

Possibilities Tour will showcase potential of downtown buildings

Published 12:01am Tuesday, November 5, 2013

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NATCHEZ — Natchez-Adams County economic development officials are hoping locals and visitors imagine the possibilities for 15 vacant buildings in downtown

Charleville, Australia added this to their current tour operation.

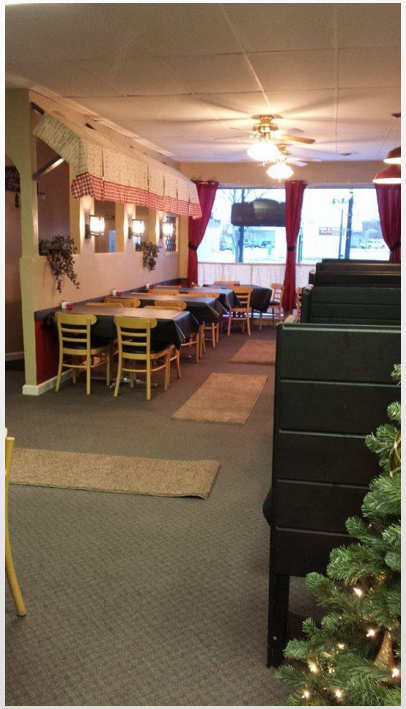
What a fantastic idea, you guys on the other side of the world are unreal. As part of our tour operation we do a two hour 'Check out Charleville' tour, I will be adding in some empty buildings. This is going to be an excellent add on.

Cheers from Charleville Australia.

Jewell, Iowa (just down the road), Fairpoint Harbor, OH, Natchez, MS all conducted a tour in their own locations.

Incubator Project

Connie and Ron Gilbert own two separate store fronts downtown. After discussion they **agreed to be a part of the Incubator Project**. They put both these store fronts into the project and made them available for free rent for 3 months and reduced rent for the rest of the year. Both of these buildings had been on the Tour. Today, one has a Clothing store in it and the other is home to The Big Picture. That's two new businesses.



New Business in New Location

SOS Vintage took a look at one of the incubator spots, and decided they liked what we had to offer and have bought one of the buildings that came available after the Tour was completed. The owners live in Eldora, Iowa and have been working from their home and are very excited to be a part of our community.

And Still …. People are Talking

Finally, people are talking. **The conversations over coffee, at ball games, after church and with friends are once again filled with hope**. They are dreaming about possibilities in Webster City. We know how to make dreams a reality and our long tail is a strong, prosperous Webster City.

12 Buildings were featured.

- 6 are sold
- 4 are rented,
- 1 is being negotiated on,
- 1 has not been rented or sold.

Do the Math – 83% of those empty buildings now have a business in them!

Thank you!

Deb Brown

www.buildingpossibility.com

www.saveyour.town

641-580-0103