

Grants help spruce up image

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Port Main Street programs offer cash for business improvements

If you subscribe to the theory that you only have one chance to make a first impression, a palette of grant programs from Port Washington Main Street have gone a long way to help local businesses put their best first foot forward.

The downtown business development organization made a host of grants last year, polishing the images of several key retail locations.

Main Street's facade grants offer as much as \$1,500 in matching money for approved exterior projects.

Jen and Paul Groh, owners of Harbor Temptations, 215 N. Franklin St., received a \$1,500 grant to fix up the front of their retail shop.

"It was great. We didn't even know grants from Main Street were available to businesses," Jen Groh said.

"We knew we had some work to do on the building, and Dan Micha suggested we look into getting a grant from Main Street. The previous owners of the building used wood on the facade that wasn't supposed to be used outdoors and it needed to be replaced, but the project was kind of like opening Pandora's box."

Groh said they ended up spending much more than the grant covered, but added, "that \$1,500 was a big help."

At the Chocolate Chisel, 125 W. Grand Ave., John Reichert got a \$750 grant for a door replacement.

"It had gotten to the point where we couldn't close our door, and we ended up spending \$3,800. That \$750 is a big help," Reichert said.

"It is great to see Main Street money being shared with local businesses, and the application process was simple. They were very easy to deal with."

A sign grant program offers up to \$250 in matching money for new or restored business signs.

Grants were used to create new signs at Wardrobe Safari, 302 N. Franklin St., and Blue Heron Artisan Gallery, 102 E. Pier St.

"It has made a huge difference in the downtown and it is going to continue make a difference here," said Port Main Street Executive Director Sara Grover.

"This is free money and the business community has been very receptive."

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A final component in the array of improvement initiatives is the Paint the Town Program, which provides a 25% discount for businesses that purchase paint and supplies from Drew's TrueValue hardware store. There is also a \$5 per gallon reimbursement from Main Street for paint purchases.

Last year, Main Street offered \$6,000 in grant money for improvement projects, and Grover said that pool of funds has been increased to \$9,000 for 2013.

She said businesses in need of more substantial amounts are invited to apply for low-interest loans offered by Port Washington State Bank through Main Street.

"Loans totalling \$60,000 were approved last year, and two more requests are pending. Money is readily available at 1% interest," she said.

Details and application forms for any of the Main Street programs are available at the joint website www.visitportwashington.com, through the business resources link.