

Arts & Entertainment District Plan for Downtown Hagerstown



February 16, 1999

The idea for an Arts and Entertainment District in Downtown Hagerstown was introduced to our community in 1996 in the Chamber of Commerce's *Downtown Enhancement Plan* (LDR International, Inc.). The City of Hagerstown's *1997 Comprehensive Plan* endorses implementation of the elements in the *Downtown Enhancement Plan*, including the A&E District component. In 1998, the Chamber appointed a subcommittee for the purpose of creating a plan for the A&E District. This winter, the Chamber will present the A&E District Plan to the Mayor and City Council of Hagerstown and the Washington County Commissioners to seek the support of the two governments towards the implementation of the Plan's recommendations.

VISION

The vision for the A&E District is an active, vibrant area in Downtown Hagerstown with the flavor of Georgetown, New York's Broadway, Baltimore's Inner Harbor and Memphis' Beale Street in a unique atmosphere which could only be found in Hagerstown.

GOAL

The goal of the A&E District is to foster the continued concentration of cultural, dining, educational and entertainment enterprises in this area to draw families, tourists, arts patrons, fine dining patrons, and school groups to Downtown Hagerstown on a regular basis.

THE PLAN

This concept plan for the A&E District is designed to identify the strengths and challenges of the area and to discuss both short term and long term strategies that could be deployed to foster the continued growth of arts and entertainment activities and uses in downtown Hagerstown. The plan is intended to be a guide to our community to channel resources in a specific area of downtown for a specific purpose to enable revitalization to occur with direction while at the same time not stifling creativity and spontaneity.

Part I: Analysis of the District

Positive Characteristics of the Area

There are many positive features already in place to cause an arts and entertainment district to thrive in downtown Hagerstown.

1. ***Eclectic Architecture:*** Styles range from early-mid 19th century townhouses to the Art Deco style Professional Arts Building. Heights range from two- to ten-stories, with major materials of brick and stone. Current building uses include institutional, mixed-use and residential.
2. ***Important Historic Resources:*** There are a number of historic resources which are important to the historic significance of Downtown Hagerstown: (a) The Maryland Theatre, (b) Colonial Theater, (c) Masonic Temple, (d) First Hose Fire Company, (e) Barnwood Books Building, (f) The Kohler Building, and (g) the historical collection in the Western Maryland Room at the Washington County Free Library.
3. ***Contributing Historic Resources:*** There are several other historic resources which contribute to the historic presence of Downtown Hagerstown: (a) Elizabeth Hager Center Buildings, (b) Harry's House of Blues Building, (c) Old Dutch Kitchen Building, (d) Rocky's/Frostburg/Jeweler's Daughter Buildings, (e) Fleisher Building, (f) FSU Meeting Room, (g) Hays Building, (h) Carol and Co. Building, (i) Professional Arts Building, (j) Alexander Hotel, (k) Bob Veil's Building, (l) Henry's Theater, (m) Edison Apartment Building, (n) Schindel-Rohrer Building, (o) Joe Walker's Building, (p) Tri-State Building, (q) M&M Accounting Building, (r) WCAC Building, (s) Twilight's Building, (t) Ben's Florist Building, (u) Colonial Hotel, (v) Schmankerl Stube Building, and (w) Grand Building.
4. ***Central Gathering Place:*** The defined area has the nucleus of a central gathering space with the recently refurbished Public Square. This has always been the geographical and historical center of Hagerstown.
5. ***Historic Theaters:*** Over the years, downtown Hagerstown contained several historic theaters, including the Maryland Theatre (the cornerstone of the district and the one in continuous operation today), the Colonial Theater, Henry's Theater, the Temple Theater, and the Academy Theater.
6. ***High Quality Restaurants:*** This area has witnessed the development of a variety of excellent quality restaurants: The Schmankerl Stube, Twilights Deli and Ristorante, The Plum, The Washington Spy, Roccoco's, and 'Round The Square/Harry's House of Blues.
7. ***Entertainment Activity Generators:*** There are several organizations and festivals that

generate significant entertainment value to downtown Hagerstown already: (a) The Maryland Theatre, (b) The Maryland Symphony Orchestra, (c) The Washington County Playhouse, (d) The Women's Club, (e) The Potomac Playmakers, (f) The Frostburg State University Center at Hagerstown, (g) Harry's House of Blues, (h) The City Ballet School, (i) The Potomac Classical Youth Ballet Company, (j) Washington County Free Library, (k) Western Maryland Blues Fest, (l) Augustoberfest, (m) The Mummer's Parade, (n) the Washington County Arts Council and Gallery, (o) Community Concerts, (p) Miss Maryland, and (q) Magic in Music and Motion. (Certainly this list is not comprehensive and there may be organizations or events that have been omitted.)

8. ***Entertainment Activity Supporters:*** Retail enterprises which supplement and support the activities of the entertainment generators include, but are not limited to, The Bookstore Etc., R. Bruce Carson Jewelers, The Jeweler's Daughter, Carol and Company, Bikle's, Footlights, Barnwood Books, Hoffman's, Lena Darner, Figurehead II, APCWS, Ben's Florist Shop, the restaurants, other retailers in the area, and the financial institutions (although they are outside the defined district, they provide significant financial support to the arts).
9. ***Educational Centers:*** The presence of the Frostburg State University Center at Hagerstown in downtown Hagerstown has increased academic, cultural, and educational benefits for the entire population of Washington County. The Washington County Free Library provides materials, resources, and activities for intellectual stimulation, life long learning, every day living, and fun and enjoyment. The City Ballet School has added dance to the mix of educational opportunities downtown.
10. ***Renovated Buildings:*** Over the past 15 years or so, a large number of buildings in the area have been completely renovated and as a result have been fully leased or have modern space available for lease. The upper floors of many of the larger buildings would present good opportunities for higher income housing. Some of the renovated buildings include, but are not limited to, the Professional Arts building, the M&M Accounting building, the Washington County Arts Council building, the Twilights building, the Colonial Hotel building, the Schmankerl Stube, the News Agency building, the Max Simon building, the Lena Darner building, the Frostburg Center, the Grand building, the Fleisher Company building, the FSU Meeting Room, NBC TV-25, the Alexander House, and the Elizabeth Hager Center.
11. ***Public Investments:*** Many investments have been made by the public sector in this area to enhance the area as a center for business and government services. Some of these investments include the recently renovated Public Square, the N. Potomac Street Parking Deck, the period street lights, the street trees, the Northeast parking lot, City Hall, the Home Store, the Washington County Free Library, and the in-progress District Court project.

Existing Characteristics which may Inhibit Continued Growth of the A&E District

1. ***Parking Shortages:*** Parking continues to be a major concern for businesses or cultural organizations and their patrons in the A&E district. While there are approximately 600 spaces available to the public in the parking deck and the N. Potomac Street parking lot, parking is not evenly distributed throughout the area. This concentration of parking gives the perception of parking shortages in other areas not immediately served by public parking.
2. ***Security Concerns:*** Security in the A&E district is a continued concern for businesses, cultural organizations, and their patrons.
3. ***Vacancies and Building Deterioration:*** While the majority of the buildings in the area have been renovated, there are still a few buildings in the A&E district that are vacant or underutilized. Some of these buildings need to be fixed up to increase the marketability of these properties and to enhance the beauty of the district. Buildings holding great renovation or redevelopment potential include Henry's Theater, the Schindel-Rohrer building, Joe Walker's building, the Tri-State building, the Double-T building, the People's building, and the old Dutch Kitchen building. While these buildings have immense potential for development, the costs to accomplish this may be prohibitive in some cases without help.
4. ***Concentration of Below Market Rate Housing:*** There is an abundance of below market rate rental housing units in the immediate vicinity of the district. A balance needs to be created through the addition of middle and upper income housing.
5. ***Public Nuisance:*** The area contains, or is adjacent to, a few notable businesses which serve a clientele not generally drawn to the types of uses which this plan is attempting to encourage and who are on occasion the cause of public disturbances in the area. In order for the district to be successful, it will be necessary to keep a close watch on such businesses to ensure that the public peace is maintained and that the businesses are not contributing to a negative perception of the area.

There certainly may be other characteristics that inhibit the continued growth of the A&E district; however, the five items listed above are the most crucial issues that need to be dealt with in a positive manner. These five items represent challenges but should be viewed in a proactive way to enhance the future potential of the development of the A&E district.



At this point in the analysis, it is necessary to focus on a discussion of the short term and long term strategies that could be deployed to enhance the future development of the A&E district in downtown Hagerstown. The many strategies that are presented are broken down into short term (one to three years) and long term (three to ten years). The A&E Subcommittee (see Appendix "A" for members) has tried to consult with as many interested parties as possible (see Appendix "B" for organizations contacted). In addition to providing them with a draft of the Plan, individual members met personally with many of the organizations, and we have attempted to incorporate as many of their suggestions as possible into our final draft. As might be expected, however, although the Subcommittee is in unanimous support of the Plan, obviously, individual members and organizations have different perspectives regarding individual elements of the Plan.

Part II: Short Term Development Strategies

1. *Parking:*

- a) Complete additional northeast quadrant surface parking and District Court parking as soon as possible.
- b) Improve signage for parking in downtown areas.
- c) Improve landscaping, lighting, and pedestrian walkways to and from parking areas. This should include better lighting in the alleys.
- d) Encourage the City to put together the total number of parking places in the downtown area and publicize this information. (i.e., XXXX parking places within one or two blocks of the Maryland Theatre . . .).
- e) Encourage the City to open the gates of the parking deck at 7:00 p.m. (all other public parking is free at this point, plus the existing 50-cent exit fee can be a problem for patrons unaware of the need for quarters).

Organizations to assist with these activities: The Greater Hagerstown Committee, City Marketing Committee.

2. *Cleaning of the A&E district:*

- a) Steam-clean existing sidewalks and pick up trash on the sidewalks on a regular basis. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to continue progress made toward steam cleaning of sidewalks and trash removal.
- b) Approach local businesses to spruce-up, plant flowers, and add window boxes.
- c) Promote existing or create new funding programs that encourage businesses to fix up the exteriors and interiors of their buildings.
- d) Approach the City about prohibiting trash set-outs and discouraging tenant set-outs on the streets of the A&E district.
- e) Encourage the City and the Arts Council to develop a public art project for the district.
- f) Approach the Chamber of Commerce about the idea of encouraging businesses to set cigarette disposal containers at the entrances to their buildings as a means of cutting down on the cigarette butt litter problem.

Organizations to assist with these activities: Chamber of Commerce, City Finance Department

3. *Security:*

- a) Continue to have a dedicated police person patrolling the A&E district particularly between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.
- b) Full-time police presence is necessary and should include the parking areas.
- c) Provide strict enforcement of current laws and regulations to ensure public order and a heightened sense of security in the areas around the district.

- d) Approach the City about installation of building-mounted, decorative lighting system in the alleys around the district.
- e) Provide security in the parking deck until 11:00 p.m. every night.
- f) Re-energize a "Business Watch Program" with the help of the City and Police Department.
- g) Improve lighting in the public parking lot beside the Elizabeth Hager Center (N. Potomac Street lot).

Organizations to assist with these activities: City, Police Department

4. ***Signage:***

- a) Improve the quality of signage for parking and designated attractions along with proper lighting.
- b) Work with the City Marketing Committee to improve signage.
- c) More clearly mark the entrances to parking lots and the routes to the parking lots.

Organizations to assist with these activities: City, Marketing Committee

5. ***Sidewalk Enhancements*** — slower traffic enhances pedestrian walking, which attracts more business:

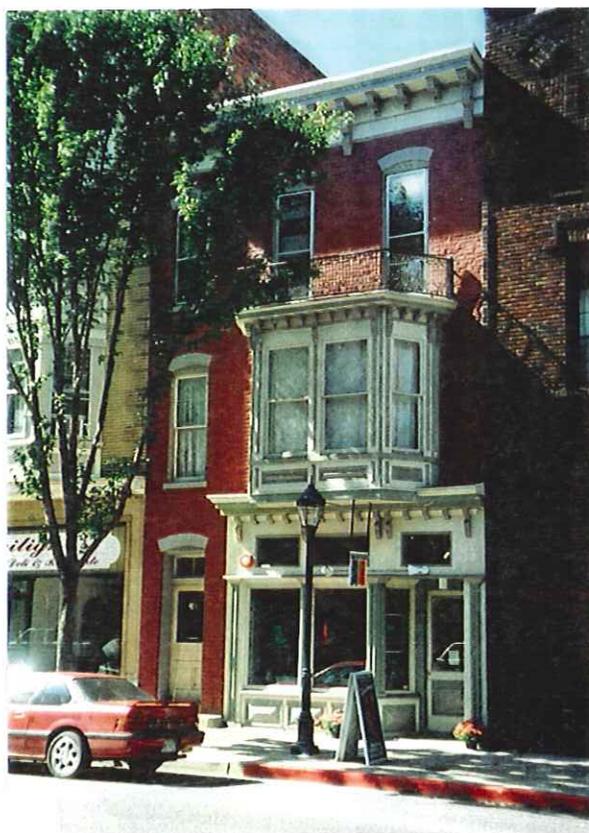
- a) Consider removal of on-street parking from the district to permit expansion of sidewalks.
- b) Propose that the City do an impact study of widening the sidewalks in the A&E district. This is key to establishing outdoor cafes, holding outdoor artists exhibits, and to promoting pedestrian friendliness.
- c) With the advent of the District Court, the City should consider making the alley along the side of the Plum pedestrian only.
- d) Encourage entertainment in the Square and provide space for current restaurants to offer sidewalk dining.

6. ***Theaters:***

- a) Work with the City to determine the feasibility of establishing a maximum image theater, such as IMAX or Omnimax. The focus of this theater would be to show historic movies, Civil War films, and science and technology documentaries.
- b) Investigate the feasibility of developing smaller theaters (seat 100 people) for showing art films and old movies (similar to the Sheperdstown Opera House) and for presenting small music and dance concerts, master classes, and workshops.
- c) Encourage the Board of Education to move the planetarium downtown.
- d) Investigate the feasibility of developing a first-run movie theater in the downtown.

7. *Attractions for Families and Children:*

- a) Facilitate efforts with the Board of Directors of Discovery Station to develop a facility in the district.
- b) Expand offerings by the MSO, WCAC, the City Ballet School, the Potomac Classical Youth Ballet Company, the Library and the Bookstore, Inc. for families and children. Develop closer ties between these groups to foster children's activities.
- c) Continue the growth in the Music in Motion programs.



8. *Cooperative Relationships to Increase Draw to the District:*

- a) Increase marketing cooperation among the existing arts and entertainment entities. For example, cross-list each other's activities in their advertizing.
- b) Encourage restaurants to offer after-theater specials.
- c) Encourage A&E District members to institute a regular A&E Night (i.e., entertainment events, galleries open, educational institutions offer lectures or exhibits or films, restaurants offer two-for-one's, merchants offer specials or discounts, etc.).
- d) Investigate use of a publication, such as the Washington County Arts Council calendar of events, to promote A&E district events.
- e) Reintroduce "Classic Movie" night tied in with local restaurants for "Classic Dining."
- f) Utilize the resources of the Convention & Visitors Bureau and public access cable

- g) television channels to promote the A&E District.
- g) Support City of Hagerstown initiatives to develop antique shops in the downtown area.
- h) Support City of Hagerstown and Washington County initiatives to have the A&E District identified as a core area for a Civil War Heritage Area destination.

9. ***Traffic Calming:***

- a) Take steps to slow the traffic on South Potomac Street and West Washington Street.
- b) Encourage the City to work out an alternative truck route for traffic heading West to East. This issue should also be studied for traffic heading East to West and for traffic that heads south on Potomac Street.
- c) Complete State work that is funding crosswalk improvements along Franklin and Washington Streets.
- d) Study the feasibility of establishing two-way traffic on South Potomac Street. While there are many pros and cons to this proposal, one of the many advantages is that it would enable buses to discharge passengers onto the sidewalk on both sides of the street.

10. ***Government Policies*** — as a means of continuing the growth of the A&E district, the City should consider instituting the following policies:

- a) Create an A&E overlay zoning district to delineate permitted entertainment-related issues, prohibit uses which are inconsistent with the A&E district plan (i.e., "Class D" taverns which do not include a full-time, full-service restaurant; liquor stores; adult bookstores; etc.), restrict other non-contributing uses to upper floors, devise height and setback requirements for new construction which reflect the historic character of the district, and devise special design requirements for parking lots to minimize their visual impact on the district.
- b) Create more variety of housing by encouraging the addition of middle and upper income housing.
- c) Recruit and direct entertainment-related businesses and activities to the district.
- d) Encourage the Board of Education to move their central offices downtown.



Part III: Long Term Development Strategies

1. **Parking:**
 - a) Develop additional parking in the southeast quadrant.
 - b) Build a parking deck in the southwest quadrant.
 - c) Ensure adequate off-street parking is considered in plans for any new development projects in the area.

2. **Theater and Entertainment Complex** — Organize community resources to assist with the creation of an enhanced theater and entertainment complex.

Because the Maryland Theatre is an integral part of downtown arts and entertainment, the fullest possible utilization of the Theatre is crucial to this Plan. Increased patronage of performances at the Maryland Theatre will be advantageous to the goal of maximizing activity in the district.

Accordingly, we urge that special attention be given to sustaining the Theatre so as to ensure its being physically and fiscally accessible for years to come.

Some specific steps that could be taken to create an enhanced theater and entertainment complex include:

- a) Study the feasibility of developing a theater and entertainment complex in downtown Hagerstown. This complex might include the redevelopment of space in the first block of South Potomac Street to provide rehearsal space for the Maryland Symphony Orchestra, exhibition space for the arts, a small theater for concerts and recitals, and space for large downtown receptions.
- b) Consider establishing an endowment — perhaps administered by the Community Foundation's Board of Directors — to help underwrite the costs of selected performances and activities that enhance the goals of the Plan. For example, area businesses that benefit from the Theatre's patronage might contribute to such an endowment fund. Care should be taken, however, that such an endowment not negatively impact other fundraising activities of the District's organizations.
- c) Increase bookings and attendance at Maryland Theatre events through a dynamic community marketing program.
- d) Bus and handicapped parking should be enhanced along the first block of South Potomac Street.
- e) Consideration should be given to internal connections between buildings as a means of enhancing access within the entertainment complex.
- f) Initiate a committee that could investigate potential funding sources for such a project.

3. ***Develop Additional Attractions:***

- a) Museum of Hagerstown heritage — Civil War, transportation, industrial revolution, etc.
- b) Attract additional art galleries to the area.
- c) Consider a center that would promote the thirty plus museums in the county.
- d) Recruit unique specialty retail enterprises (i.e., antique shops, fine crafts shops, etc.)
- e) Consider a small center of outlet shops unique and different from Prime Retail.
- f) Continue to attract ethnic restaurants adding to the diversity of restaurants in the area.
- g) Explore the idea of entertainment eateries — a Civil War Pub modeled on Chowning's in Colonial Williamsburg with costumed staff, actors, food of the era, "Civil War souvenirs," a Railroad or transportation cafe; NASCAR Cafe; etc.
- h) Place interpretive plaques on buildings to share their history with District patrons, merchants, downtown workers, and residents.
- i) Seek corporate sponsorship for events, exhibits, and displays.

4. ***Security:***

- a) Review long term enhancements that can be done to improve lighting and landscaping in the main areas of parking and customer traffic.

5. ***Sidewalk Enhancements:***

- a) Implement the recommendations in the *Downtown Enhancement Plan*.
- b) Expand similar concepts to North Potomac Street.

6. ***Building Illumination*** — Attractive illumination of the buildings in the District would enhance a sense of appreciation for the architecture of the District, as well as enhance a sense of safety.

7. ***Traffic Calming:***

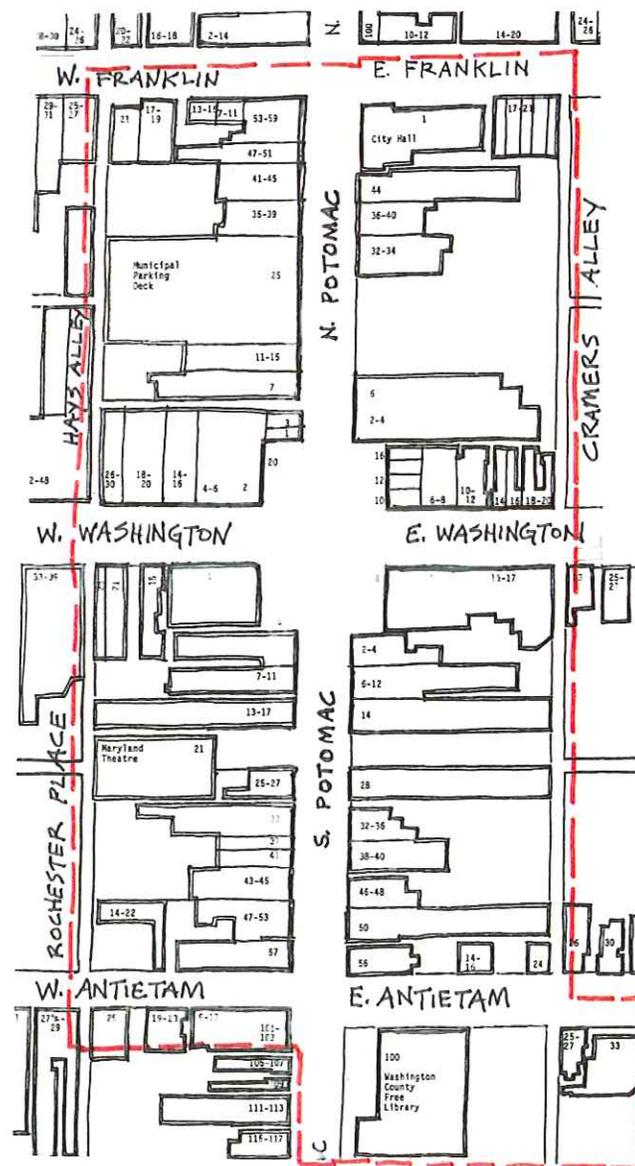
- a) Develop Memorial Boulevard bypass for truck traffic.
- b) Improve southern approach to downtown.

8. ***First Hose Fire Company*** — Approach the fire company about the idea of relocating the active fire service activities from their firehouse. This would facilitate the establishment of a full-time museum and/or restaurant or other retail activity in the old firehouse. This idea is proposed because of the disruption to the District created by fire trucks departing the firehouse and the limitations on sidewalk widening, on-street parking, and street fairs due to mid-block, fire truck turning movements.

9. ***Masonic Temple*** — Approach the Masons about their plans for the building and investigate whether more active uses might be added in the building.

Part IV: District Boundaries

The Arts & Entertainment (A&E) District has been identified as the area around Public Square and along North and South Potomac Streets. The District is bounded on the west by the Hays Alley and Rochester Place alley system, on the north by East and West Franklin Street, on the east by Cramer's Alley, and on the south by East and West Antietam Street (to include the library and The Washington Spy). This area contains the nucleus of what has become the cultural center for Hagerstown through the years.



Appendix "A"

Arts & Entertainment District SubCommittee

Jim Pierne, Chair; F&M Bank and Trust
Bob Arch, Washington County Planning Director
Barbara Bland, Washington County Arts Council, Executive Director
Lauran Clowser, The City Ballet School
Bert Iseminger, Washington County Commissioner
Bruce Johnston, City of Hagerstown Engineer
Ric Kautz, City of Hagerstown Planning Director
Marc Levy, Maryland Symphony Orchestra, Executive Director
Kathy Maher, City of Hagerstown Senior Planner
Tom Newcomer, R. Bruce Carson Jewelers
Mike Pishvaian, Twilight's Deli and Ristorante
Rich Reichenbaugh, AESI
Charles Sekula, Schmankerl Stube
Jim Shaw, Frostburg State University Center at Hagerstown
Sandy Wantz, Recreation, Arts & Culture SubCommittee of Greater Hagerstown Committee



Appendix "B"

List of Organizations Consulted About the Plan

Augustoberfest Committee
Barnwood Books
Bikle's
The Bookstore, Etc.
Carol & Company
City Ballet School
Community Concerts
Discovery Station
Downtown Assessment District
Figurehead II
Footlights
The Frostburg State University Center at Hagerstown
Greater Hagerstown Committee, Executive Committee
Vincent Groh
Hoffman Clothiers
The Jeweler's Daughter
Magic in Music and Motion
Maryland Symphony Orchestra
The Maryland Theatre
Miss Maryland Pageant
Museum of Museums
The Plum
R. Bruce Carson Jewelers
Roccoco's
'Round The Square & Harry's House of Blues
The Schmankerl Stube
Twilight's Deli & Ristorante
Washington County Arts Council and Gallery
Washington County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Washington County Free Library
The Washington County Playhouse
The Washington Spy
Western Maryland Blues Fest Committee
The Women's Club