

Meet Andy Vick, new executive director for Downtown Evanston



by Belinda Lichty Clarke
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Andy Vick is new to his job as executive director of Downtown Evanston, the nonprofit that helps support and promote the downtown Evanston business district.



Andy Vick, executive director of Downtown Evanston. Credit: Laura Brown

But he is not new to Evanston. Vick is an Evanston native and 1983 graduate of ETHS.

“I’m really excited about this new role because it will put me right in the middle of all the action in downtown Evanston,” Vick said. “I love being out in the community, meeting new people, working on special projects and programs.”

A University of Pennsylvania graduate, after college, Vick moved to the D.C. area, where he worked in marketing and human resources. It was there he met his wife, Beth Piver. Vick and Piver lived on the East Coast for more than 20 years and then moved to Colorado Springs for another 10. They moved back to Evanston in April from Colorado Springs to be closer to family. He started at Downtown Evanston last month.

He has tackled downtown revitalization before.

Artist relocation

In Cumberland, Md., there was a need to fill vacant commercial and retail properties in and around downtown. Vick worked on a team initiative that attracted dozens of new artists and creatives to occupy vacant spaces, brand the city as a destination for cultural tourism, and contribute to its downtown.

In Colorado Springs at the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region, Vick helped launch a video-based program called “Creative Stays.” This program invited 13 diverse creatives from the Colorado Springs arts community to curate their personalized recommendations for favorite lodging accommodations, community attractions, restaurants, entertainment activities, hidden hangouts and not-to-miss cultural destinations. It was a celebration of local creatives and tourism, he said.

In Evanston, post-COVID, “The challenge for our office is to find new and creative ways to entice people back to downtown,” Vick said.

“Downtown Evanston is planning to produce new programming, like bringing back a Thursday evening concert series at Fountain Square, or hosting a series of family- friendly bike rides, that will give people from throughout the community new reasons to come back to downtown,” he said.

The association’s job also is to manage downtown landscaping contractors. It supports efforts such as murals and street pole banners as well as programs and activities for public spaces like Fountain Square.

Vick encourages everyone to follow the association on social media, and to “sign up for our email communications at [DowntownEvanston.org](https://downtownevanston.org).”

Downtown and NU

Vick already has experience working with several colleges and universities and hopes to find ways to collaborate with Northwestern.

In both his job as executive director for the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region and as executive director of the Alleghany Arts Council, Vick said he forged partnerships with the college radio stations to promote local happenings to the campus communities.

That “paid big dividends in terms of getting students and faculty to participate in off- campus community programming and to patronize local businesses,” Vick said.

He also “worked closely with the visual art, music, theatre, dance and English departments to involve students in special off-campus programming,” he said.

“In my new role at Downtown Evanston, I hope to cultivate similar opportunities,” he said.

Calling Northwestern “a key partner for Downtown Evanston,” Vick said he wants to find creative ways to attract students, faculty and staff to downtown businesses and restaurants.

Downtown Evanston already has a page on its website that features various back-to-school student and family discounts.

‘Apples to oranges’

“Evanston is a special place because of the passion, pride and diversity of our residents, and its unique geographic location between the City of Chicago and the communities to the north and west of us,” according to Zick.

“Because of the density and scale of our downtown, we have very different challenges and opportunities than our neighboring municipalities. Comparing downtown Evanston to other North Shore suburban downtowns is really apples to oranges, and we all should be focused on celebrating and enjoying our many unique assets and attractions.”

Road to recovery

As for his overall strategy, Vick is urging residents to patronize local businesses and to be patient “as the city’s multiple business districts continue their post-COVID recovery.”

The recently adopted Evanston Thrives Retail District Action Plan will help his team define priorities, he said, and added that a key to success is for everyone, such as elected officials, business owners, community partners, and individual residents, to communicate effectively, respect differences of opinion, find common ground and work collaboratively for the greater good.

Jeff Perlman

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Best of luck. We really need this.

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