

DOWNTOWN EVANSTON 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

February 2024

DEAR DOWNTOWN EVANSTON STAKEHOLDERS...

As we reflect on 2023, we extend our gratitude to the community for its ongoing support amidst the challenges posed by the lingering impacts of the pandemic. Throughout the past year, Downtown Evanston remained committed to enhancing the vibrancy of our business district through our many services, initiatives, and programs. 2023 was also a year of transition for our organization, as we said farewell to Executive Director Annie Coakley, and welcomed new Executive Director Andy Vick. The leadership change went smoothly, and the Board is proud of Downtown Evanston's strong work over the past year under both directors.

In partnership with the City of Evanston, we managed downtown maintenance and landscaping services to ensure that our streetscapes remained welcoming and clean. Downtown Evanston staff also organized a variety of events and promotions, both in public spaces and in collaboration with local businesses, to create a sense of place and to help build community. We partnered with other organizations to bolster their downtown events and to help them attract new audiences. Throughout the year, we continued to celebrate and leverage our new Downtown Evanston brand through targeted advertising campaigns and an active and engaged presence across multiple social media platforms.

We hope that this 2023 Annual Report provides you with an overview of how the Downtown Evanston Board of Directors and staff worked to provide important services for downtown businesses and the entire Downtown Evanston community. As we embark upon 2024, we look forward to further elevating our engagement with all stakeholders, amplifying our outreach initiatives to attract an even greater influx of visitors to downtown, enhancing the visual appeal of the downtown district, and strengthening our support for the many unique businesses within our special service area. Thank you again for your continued support!

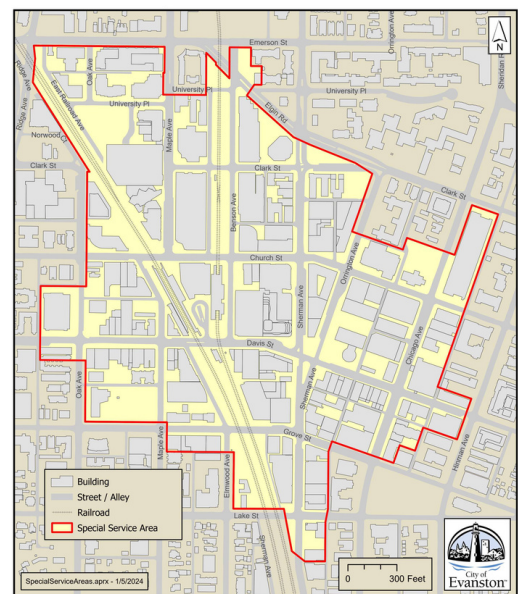
Best regards,
Downtown Evanston Executive Committee

Mike Smylie, Chair
Angela Valavanis, Vice Chair
Andrew McDonald, Treasurer
Gretchen Brauer, Secretary
Nathan Kostant
Isabelle Libmann
Jazmine Lee



ABOUT DOWNTOWN EVANSTON

Downtown Evanston is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation established in 1987 that works with commercial and residential property owners, businesses, community organizations, and the City of Evanston to enhance and promote the downtown district. The organization is the sole service provider to Special Service Area (SSA#9) and is funded through an additional tax levy on commercial properties within the SSA district boundaries. Additional financial support comes from Northwestern University and other local sponsors who help to fund our special events and community programming.

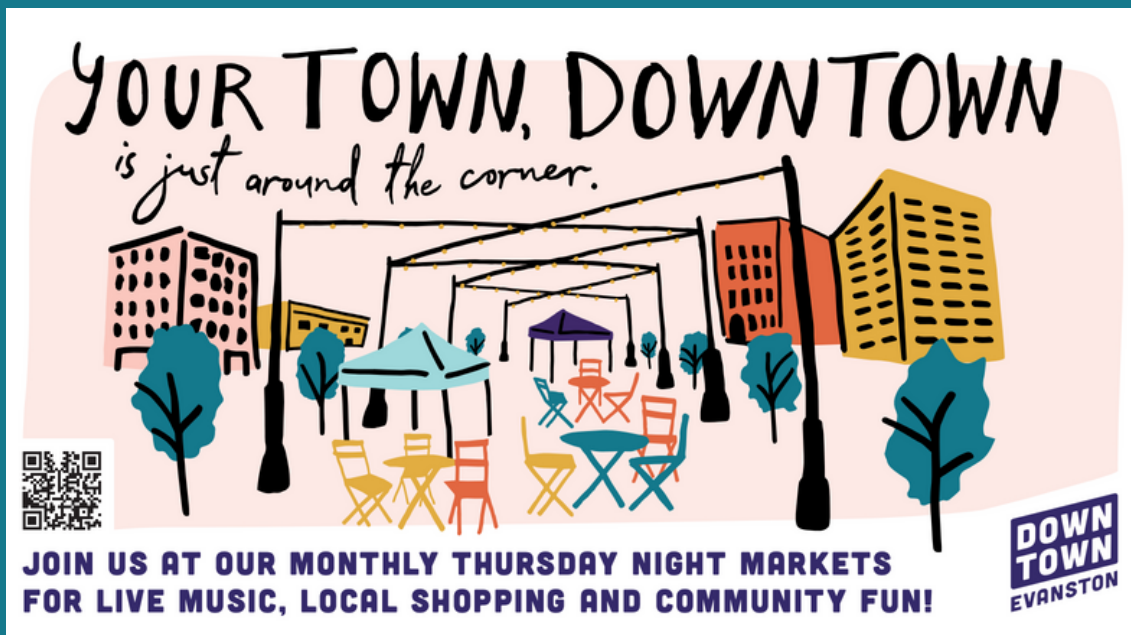


SERVICES

- Marketing: Advertising, Promotions & Events
- Business Retention & Attraction
- Placemaking: Public Art & Activations
- Maintenance: Landscaping, Seasonal Plantings
- Holiday Decor: Tree Lights and Decor at Fountain Square

MARKETING

Downtown Evanston primarily uses digital advertising to promote the business district through ads on local and regional news sites, extended reach retargeting campaigns, social media advertising, and owned media. In 2023, we also designed, printed and distributed an illustrated postcard (see below) to 25,000 households highlighting summer and fall events and directing people to our website. In addition, we promote events through posters and signboards, a centrally-located kiosk at Fountain Square, and our biweekly e-newsletter.



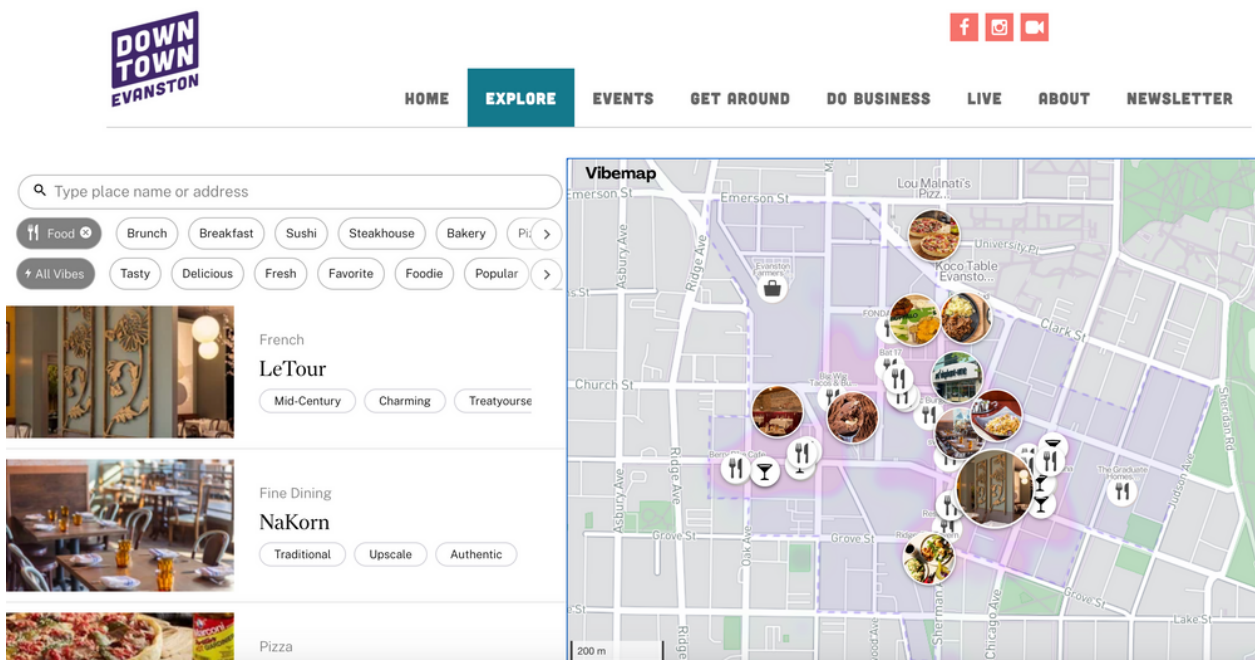
Find that perfect cup of coffee
using our Insider's Guide!

BRANDED MATERIALS



WEBSITE

New in 2023, we contracted with Vibemap to develop an interactive map of the downtown business district which uses civic data about how the community “feels” about various destinations to help people connect to businesses and experiences. In addition, we added a Spanish-language translation functionality to the website, and continuously update the website based on activities taking place downtown.



ADVERTISING

- **Extended Reach Digital Campaign (June - September and November - December)**
 - 14 weeks of digital advertising within a 15-mile radius to promote summer events, holiday shopping/dining, and general visitation to Downtown Evanston
- **Chicago's North Shore CVB (year-round)**
 - Monthly website and newsletter ads
- **The Daily Northwestern (August)**
 - Print ad to promote restaurants & events in the annual Orientation issue
- **Our Evanston (September)**
 - Quarter page ad promoting restaurants
- **Evanston Now (year-round)**
 - Annual social media stream on homepage
 - Display ads for special events
 - Direct email campaign to subscribers
- **Evanston Roundtable (seasonal)**
 - Digital ads on homepage
- **Chicago North Shore Moms (year-round)**
 - Monthly newsletter and social media ads to promote events
- **Social Media Advertising**
 - Boosted events and business promotions on Downtown Evanston Facebook & Instagram pages throughout the year



SOCIAL MEDIA



- **December 2023: 13,800**
- **December 2022: 12,600**



- **December 2023: 12,100**
- **December 2022: 11,800**

E-NEWSLETTER

Distributed 30 e-newsletters, on average 2 per month, featuring business promotions, community events, and other announcements to 9,000+ opt-in subscribers.



PR & MEDIA COVERAGE

- Distributed 10 press releases to local and regional media outlets
 - Hygge Fest (January)
 - Downtown Evanston Local Business Food Drive (March)
 - Thursday Night Markets (May)
 - Sidewalk Sale (July)
 - Downtown Evanston Hires New Executive Director (August)
 - Evanston en Blanc (September)
 - Downtown Trick or Treat Stroll (October)
 - Holiday Events: Small Business Saturday, Warm Bevvv Walk & Light Celebration (November)
- Media Coverage
 - Various articles covering topics listed above appeared in the following publications:
 - Evanston Now
 - Evanston RoundTable
 - The Daily Northwestern
 - Chicago Tribune/Pioneer Press
 - Read articles at DowntownEvanston.org/media

BOARD & COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION

- Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Evanston Chamber of Commerce
- Margarita Inn Good Neighbor Advisory Council (GNAC)

SPECIAL EVENTS

HOST EVENTS

- **Hygge Fest | February**
Businesses hosted a mix of virtual and in-person workshops at our Hygge Lounge and we hosted an Ice Carving & Hot Cocoa event at Fountain Square (200 people attended)
- **Downtown Earth Day Clean Up | April 21**
Community clean up event with downtown residents, office employees and Evanston Police Department to collect trash in downtown Evanston
- **Spring Sip 'N Stroll | May 6**
Shopping event to promote Mother's Day shopping and preview summer items
- **Thursday Night Markets | June to September**
Hosted artist & maker market at Fountain Square the first Thursday of each month with DJ music and beer tent. Sponsor: Byline Bank & Avidor Evanston (75 vendors overall; 400-500 attendees each market)
- **Sidewalk Sale & Chalk Art Contest | July 22-24**
Annual sidewalk sale with chalk art contest, activity tent at Fountain Square to promote the new brand with giveaways
- **Evanston en Blanc | September 16**
Downtown Evanston and Evanston Women in Black partnered to host an outdoor Diner en Blanc at Fountain Square (300 people attended)
- **Trick or Treat Stroll | October 28**
Trick or treaters visited 30 plus local businesses for candy (400 attendees)
- **Big Bite Night | October 1**
Self-guided walking tour and food-tasting of downtown restaurants for Northwestern students (28 restaurants; 500 attendees)



EVANSTON EN BLANC



BIG BITE NIGHT

SPECIAL EVENTS

HOST EVENTS (continued)

- **Small Business Saturday | November 25**
Shopping Passport program with a \$25 Evanston Gift Card giveaway for shoppers that spent \$100 or more at local businesses (24 businesses; 75 passports redeemed)
- **Holiday Light Celebration at Fountain Square | December 2**
Tree lighting with Mayor Biss, City Clerk Stephanie Mendoza and Santa, with holiday music and live entertainment. The Merion hosted Photos with Santa. Sponsors: Valli Produce, Goldfish Swim School, Top Tier Lessons (700 attendees)

PARTNER EVENTS

- **Umbrella Arts Fest | May 14**
Sponsor and logistical support for the annual Asian South American Pacific (ASPA) event at Fountain Square
- **Evanston Made Maker's Markets | June to October**
Co-hosted four makers markets at the Maple Garage with Evanston Made
- **Find Waldo Local Scavenger Hunt | July**
Partner event with Bookends & Beginnings to host a Waldo scavenger hunt with local businesses during Independent Retailer Month
- **Evanston en Plein Air | July 11-16**
Week-long plein air event culminating in a contest and celebration at Rotary International building (75 participants; 250 attendees)



WARM BEVVY WALK



TRICK OR TREAT STROLL



HOLIDAY LIGHT CELEBRATION



PHOTOS WITH SANTA AT THE MERION



THURSDAY NIGHT MARKET



EVANSTON PLEIN AIR FEST



THURSDAY NIGHT MARKET



UMBRELLA ARTS FEST

PHOTO: EVANSTON NOW



SIDEWALK SALE & CHALK ART CONTEST



PLACEMAKING

Fountain Square

- Large-scale flower installation at Fountain Square (May-October)
- Holiday lights on trees throughout the district and at Fountain Square

Streetscape, Storefronts & More

- Umbrella Window Decorating Contest (April)
- Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest (July)
- Holiday Window Decorating Contest (December)

Public Art (in partnership with Evanston Mural Arts Program)

- New mural by artist Jeff Zimmerman on Church Street (under Metra tracks)
- Updated mural by artist Anthony Lewellen on Church Street (under Metra tracks)



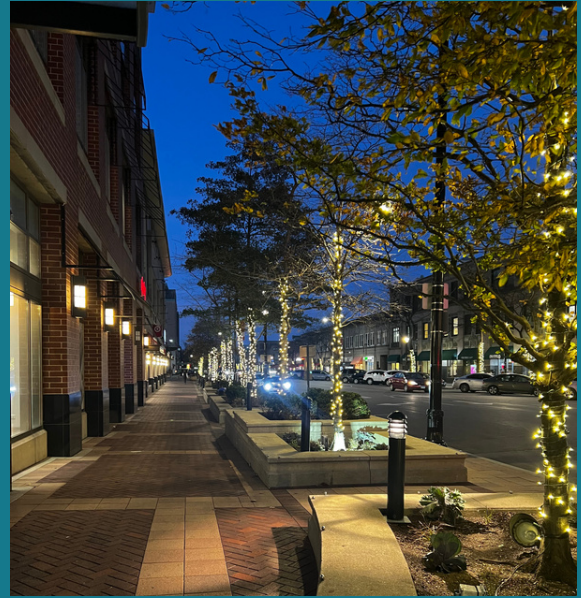
HOLIDAY WINDOW DECORATING CONTEST



UMBRELLA WINDOW CONTEST

MAINTENANCE & AESTHETICS

- Installed lights on trees for the holiday season - 150 wrapped trunks & 34 full trees at Fountain Square and Orrington Plaza
- Replanted perennials and added protective mesh to select ground level planter beds on Church Street and Sherman Avenue



RETENTION & ATTRACTION

- Key stakeholder in development of priorities for Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan
- Hosted private Welcome Event at LeTour for Underwriters Laboratories | November 14
- Welcomed new businesses to downtown:
 - Beacon Academy Annex – 1026-A Davis St.
 - Bitter Blossom Bar – 1707 Maple Ave.
 - Egg Harbor Café - 1701 Maple Ave.
 - Impress – 901 Church St.
 - Semper Laser – 900 Church St.
 - Big Wig Tacos – 950 Church St.
 - LaserAway – 820 Davis St., Ste. 103
 - CM Chicken – 1009 Davis St.
 - Studio 819 – 819 Davis St.
 - Hangry Joe's – 500 Davis St.
 - Skylight Vintage, Etc. – 1716 Sherman Ave.
 - Skyzone - 1711 Maple Ave.
 - Soli Grill – 1709 Benson Ave.
 - Sunny Spa – 1521 Sherman Ave.
 - Underwriters Laboratories – 1603 Davis St.



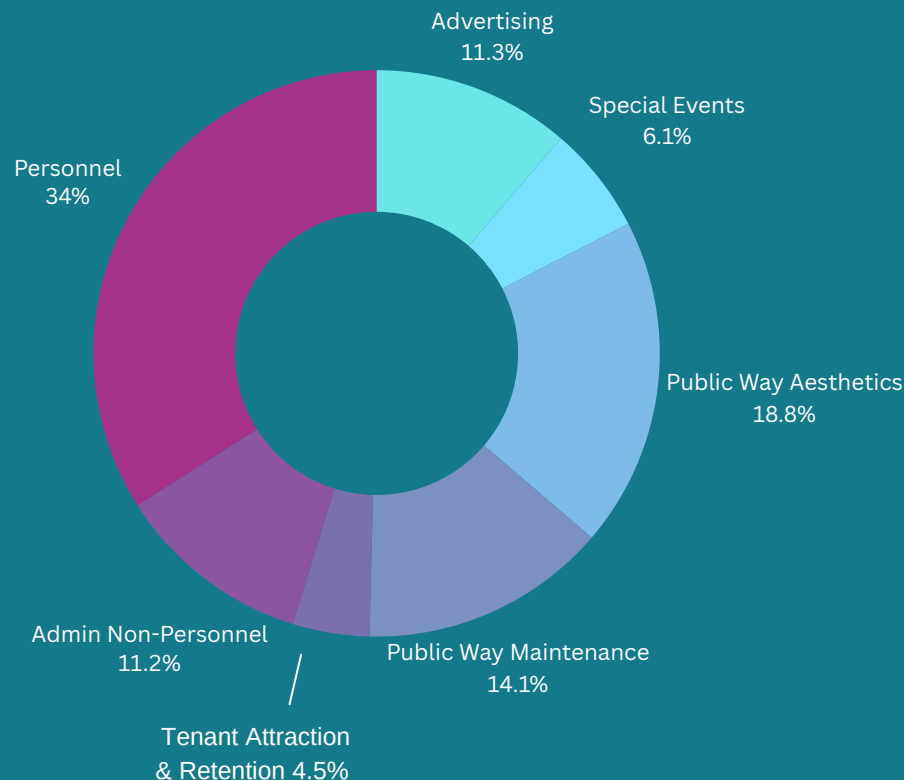
UNDERWRITERS LABORATORIES
WELCOME RECEPTION

2023 BUDGET

INCOME: \$713,781

• SSA#9 Tax Levy	\$642,145
• Northwestern University	\$18,000
• Community Sponsorships	\$27,630
• Event/Interest/Misc Income	\$26,006

EXPENSES: \$561,056



2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Mike Smylie, Chair, Smylie Brothers Brewing
Angela Valavanis, Vice Chair, Creative Coworking
Andrew McDonald, Treasurer, Rotary International
Gretchen Brauer, Secretary, Wheel & Sprocket
Nathan Kostant, Golub & Co.
Isabelle Libmann, Trufit Personal Training
Jazmine Lee, Hyatt House Chicago/Evanston

STAFF

Andy Vick, Executive Director
Laura Brown, Director of Marketing

DIRECTORS

Carol Bass, Downtown Evanston Resident
Marty Cless, Core & Rind Hospitality
Dave Davis, Northwestern University
William Flatt, Free Market Ventures
Mitch Goltz, GW Properties
Ben Kadish, Evanston Benson, LLC
Garrett Karp, Evanston Chamber of Commerce
Michael McLean, Condor Partners
Jim Nash, Farnsworth Hill, Inc.
Elizabeth Plucinsky, Lincoln Property Company
Jake Samuels, Evanston Resident
Daryl Stabak, Park-Side Realty
Luke Stowe, City of Evanston
Paul Zalmezak, City of Evanston