



DOWNTOWN

R O C H E S T E R • M N

2015

**Annual
Report**

MISSION VALUES GOALS



The **Mission** of the Rochester Downtown Alliance is: "To be an unique, vibrant, urban experience – a central gathering place – for the community that is attractive, inviting, fun and livable."

Our **Values** are to be:

Accountable to our stakeholders by following through on our commitments

Fair in the treatment of our stakeholders by listening to and balancing their diverse interests and requests

Continuously improving

Fiscally responsible to our stakeholders and the community in the delivery of our services

Respectful of the diversity in our community; providing excellent customer service

Forward thinking as we encounter challenges and opportunities

Our **Goals** are:

To provide a unique, vibrant urban experience for all

To facilitate successful and energetic programming within the downtown

To advocate for policies that assist in accomplishing our core mission

To create a sense of community through experience

To promote and market the downtown brand and identity

To effectively operate and administer our organization

To build partnerships with community organizations and entities that assist in accomplishing our core mission

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As 2015 comes to a close we take time to reflect on this past year. We are excited to share the Rochester Downtown Alliance's (RDA) various accomplishments, which you will see reflected in the pages to follow. In addition, we also are eager to share the 2016 outlook as the next year promises additional advancements and successes. First we will call attention to some key achievements. In April, the RDA relocated to 4 3rd St. SW, just above Grand Rounds Brewpub. This move reflects not only the growth of the RDA but, the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce. The RDA presented **RedBall Rochester** in early June. This temporary art installation was the culmination of two years of work by the Downtown Cultural Initiatives (DCI) committee. RedBall Rochester impacted an estimated **27,300 people**. In August, the RDA hosted the first ever **Dogs Downtown** event. This event, geared towards our four-legged furry friends and dog lovers alike, brought over **3,300 people** into downtown Rochester on a Sunday afternoon. Finally, the RDA Board held a strategic

planning session in October with the intention to continue this planning work into 2016.

As we advance into next year we are excited about all of the possibilities and the plans to further the work of the RDA and downtown Rochester. This will include new one time events including a **Ladies Night Out**, **Downtown Dining Week** and activating various spaces to encourage vibrancy and engagement. In addition to these events, the RDA will be completing a branding process to ensure the organization and downtown Rochester is in a good position as it continues to provide a brand and identity for the downtown.

Finally, we are excited to share that the RDA will continue to broaden its focus to connect with you, our stakeholders. This will come in the way of an improved **BE!** print newsletter – sent out quarterly – as well as informal opportunities to connect with each other and our Board of Directors throughout the year. In addition, we will host the first ever **RDA Annual Meeting** in December 2016. We encourage you to stay connected and stay informed about all that is going on with the RDA and in downtown Rochester. Furthermore, we also ask that you to reach out to us with any comments questions or concerns. Thank you for your continuous support in 2015 and as we welcome the New Year.



Top: Jenna Bowman, RDA Executive Director
Bottom: Dan C. Aguilar, RDA Board Chair

The **Rochester Downtown Alliance** is a Minnesota nonprofit corporation comprised of a broad range of people—representing property owners, business leaders, the city and others with a direct stake in enhanced business and economic development conditions in the downtown district. We work together to build a vibrant downtown community.

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THANK YOU MARK STEEGE & STEVE COURTS

The Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA) Board of Directors will bid farewell to fellow directors **Mark Steege**, President Titan Development & Investments, and **Steve Courts**, CEO/Executive Director Rochester Area YMCA. Both Mark and Steve have served on the Board of Directors since 2009.

Over the past seven years, they have each provided an incredible amount of time, dedication and expertise to the RDA. Mark and Steve have also been longtime members of the Policy Committee. In addition, Mark has served as the RDA Chair, Vice Chair and currently serves as Secretary/Treasurer. Steve could often be found at the end of a Thursdays on First & 3rd, assisting with the cleanup and tear-down efforts. These are only a couple of examples of the large impact these two have had on the RDA and downtown Rochester.

Executive Director, Jenna Bowman shares, "Mark and Steve are wonderful examples of individuals committed to their community. It is through their efforts and leadership that the RDA is where it is today. While we will miss seeing Mark and Steve at our monthly meetings, I am confident that neither will disappear. Since stepping into my role, I have been fortunate to have received advice and insight from each of them. This has been invaluable to me and I am

incredibly appreciative. In addition, you will not find two kinder people."

When asked to share their perspective on their time on the Board of Directors, here is what they had to say:

"My experience on the RDA Board has been a tremendous learning opportunity for me," said Steve. "As a result of my participation I know a lot more about Downtown Rochester and the network of people I've been privileged to come in contact with has been stellar. I only hope I contributed as much as this experience has contributed to me," he said.

Mark also shared his perspective.

"It has been a pleasure to serve on the RDA board the past seven years and to see the wonderful changes the RDA has assisted with to make downtown the place to come for events, entertainment and shopping," he said. "The staff and board is poised to assist with continuing to bring vitality to downtown and to coincide with the goals of DMC & the downtown community. I look forward to seeing the continued growth of the downtown district."

Mark and Steve, from all of us, we thank you and hope you know just how large of an impact you have made. Congratulations on seven wonderful years on the RDA Board of Directors.



Top: Steve Courts, CEO/Executive Director YMCA

Bottom: Mark Steege, Titan Development & Investments President



PEACE PLAZA

A total of **99,783** people attended non-RDA events hosted on the Peace Plaza in 2015

Since re-opening in 2008, the Peace Plaza has been gaining traction as the premier public and private event space in the heart of downtown Rochester. In that first year, the Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA) showed only two documented event rentals within the space as the Rochester area experimented with the new venue. The RDA is pleased to say that in 2015, the number of rentals has grown to 32 and booking requests for 2016 indicate that number will continue to see growth. This growth is reflective of the hard work done by all of the RDA staff and a community that has embraced the space as a place to gather and experience Rochester in a unique and urban way.

This past summer, the Peace Plaza again hosted a number of popular

public events such as: **Oktoberfest** by Apollo Wine & Spirits, The Boys & Girls Club **Chili Challenge**, The Salvation Army's **Donut Day**, Hiawatha Homes' **Festive Mixology**, Rochester Pridefest, SEMYO's **Silent Film**, and the return of **Irish Fest** to the Peace Plaza. There were a number of private rentals which included: weddings and receptions, local high school class reunions, prayer vigils, and corporate dinner receptions for local and national organizations.

The wide variety of events demonstrate the versatility of the Peace Plaza as a premier rental venue and its ability to bring out residents and guests to experience the heart of our city. The RDA looks forward to this growth and is excited for all that 2016 has to offer.

AND NOW, A WORD FROM OUR STAFF

In April 2015, the RDA office relocated to 4 3rd Street SW, Suite B, which is located above Grand Rounds Brew Pub. The organization had been located within the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce space since the organization was founded in 2010. This move reflects growth of the RDA and also the expansion of the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce staff. RDA's new space allows for all four staff members to share an open concept work space and also a conference room that can seat eight. This move allows the staff to work more collaboratively. We are very excited about our new space. And now, a word from our staff.

Ender Göçmen, Marketing Manager: "Hello and welcome to the RDA's 2016 Annual Report. I hope you're having as much fun looking over all that the RDA has accomplished in 12 short months as we had putting it all together! From the wildly popular Thursdays on First & 3rd Summer Market and Music Festival to our newest addition to the downtown events family, Dogs Downtown, 2015 has been another year of excitement, continued tradition, and new additions. And we plan to keep the

momentum going in 2016."

Laura Engelman, Community Engagement Manager: "It is hard to believe that 2015 is coming to an end. I look back on this year with great memories of working our events in downtown and getting to know our stakeholders and community members. The RDA has some exciting plans in store for 2016, and I look forward to continuing our involvement in making downtown vibrant and a destination for residents and visitors alike. Thank you for a great year!"

Karli McElroy, Events & Volunteer Coordinator: "If I could have one word to describe 2015 it would be: Busy. It's said that it takes about 6 months for you to feel comfortable at a new job, so when I started working at the RDA in July 2014 much of that year was becoming oriented with downtown Rochester and my role here. In 2015, I've been able to soak up the knowledge of a full year with the RDA, look for ways to improve processes, brainstorm with my co-workers, and help make Rochester a place I'm proud to call my hometown. I say, bring on 2016!"



Above: RDA office space located at 4 3rd Street SW



RDA ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

DCI Grant: The creativity that exists within the Rochester community is truly a thing to behold. The Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA) and our Downtown Cultural Initiatives (DCI) committee is proud to give back by supporting these creative individuals by providing a grant of up to **\$3,000** for first-time events within the downtown core district. We tip our hat to the following event grant recipients in 2015:

Rochester Art Center, **Contemporary Connections: PechaKucha**, April 9, Attendees: 70; **I Can't Let Go: A Tribute to Linda Ronstadt**, April 11, Attendees: 300; **Rochester EarthFest Eco-Fair**, April 25, Attendees: 500; **RedBall Project at Cooke Park Design District**, June 10, Attendees: 2,000; Alliance Française's **Bastille Day Celebration**, July 14, Attendees: 1,600; **The Sound of Scars**, August 5 – 21, Attendees: 180.

Façade Improvement Program: The Façade Improvement Program was started in 2010 as a way to help encourage investment into downtown Rochester. Since the program began, close to **\$600,000** has been awarded to businesses. This has resulted in a return of close to **\$2.4 million** in investments into downtown properties. Many of these recipient properties are some of our oldest buildings in Rochester. This program has benefited the property owners and downtown as a whole. 2016 projects include Paine Furniture Company window replacement, full exterior update at Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, The Tap House patio and Grand Rounds Brew Pub mosaic border.

BE! Newsletter: Downtown Rochester's official stakeholder newsletter, BE! is the RDA's informational print newsletter providing updates on activities, initiatives, events, and updates from our leaders, and spotlights on our diverse stakeholders that make up the downtown community.

BE! Launched in October 2014, and since then, has been followed by four subsequent issues and increased its page count from six pages to eight. 2016 marks the beginning of our third volume, and with the new year, comes **new improvements!**

In 2016, BE! will transition to a non-folded 8.5" x 11" flat mailer with saddle-stitch stapled binding and more pages! This is an upgrade from our current folded and tabbed mailer offering a high quality printed newsletter with presence, sophistication, and quality. We are also increasing our page count to offer more space for telling downtown's story. Please contact the RDA for more information about the BE! RDA Newsletter.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

In 2015, the RDA focused on utilizing the power of online media. And currently, there is no online tool more powerful than social media.

When speaking of social media, the RDA has elected to leverage the industry's top three channels: Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook – the current king of social media. The RDA also publishes videos on YouTube.

Part of a solid social media strategy includes utilizing multiple channels, setting goals, crafting tactics, and most importantly, user engagement. Each and every RDA event, initiative, and activity has its own social media strategy alongside it. The RDA has the amazing task of being the voice and identity of the downtown community, and our online presence is the first impression many visitors, residents, and employees have with RDA.

Backed by this strategic social media marketing, the RDA saw record-setting increases (upwards to 200% depending on the metric) in user engagement over 2015. The RDA measures metrics like **applause rate** (likes or favorites per post), **amplification rate** (re-shares per post), and **conversation rate** (comments per post). While metrics like "followers" and "impressions" are important, they only offer surface-level

insight and are tough to measure with regards to quality user engagement and experience. One example of this substantial increase due to strategy is the 2015 SocialICE Specialty Drinks video, which in 48 hours after its release, reached over 2,000 views – shattering 2014's video which garnered just over 950 views in its lifetime (as of writing this article). The RDA achieved these results by focusing on user experience rather than simply focusing on obtaining views.

Engaging with the RDA via social media is also a priority. By locating, user-tagging, and engaging with downtown stakeholders' social media channels and posts, the RDA is able to bridge and amplify downtown's voice, reach, and engagement across multiple platforms and audiences. Also, all of the RDA's events come with digital resources like Facebook timeline banners, sample posts text, and other digital graphics made available to downtown stakeholders free of charge.

The RDA encourages all downtown stakeholders to participate in social media, reach out to the RDA, and engage with the RDA anytime at Downtown Rochester MN (Facebook), @Place_2be (Twitter), and @DowntownRochesterMN (Instagram).





SOCIALICE THURSDAYS ON FIRST & 3RD

Date: Feb. 19 - 21

Attendance: 46,193

Rochester, MN's Ice Bar returned for its seventh year to the Peace Plaza. Attendance in 2014 was 43,089.

Dates: Thursdays, June - Aug.

Attendance: 260,000

New for this year, "Themed Thursdays" where six Thursdays were programed with activities on Historic 3rd Street set to a unique theme. Attendance in 2014 was 300,000.

MOVIES ON THE PLAZA

Date: Select Saturdays, June - Aug.

Attendance: 1,480

Movies on the Plaza brings families together in the way only the Peace Plaza in downtown Rochester can. Great family-friendly movies, set to our beautiful downtown city-scape. Attendance in 2014 was 1,765.



DOGS DOWNTOWN

Date: Aug. 2

Attendance: 3,300

In its inaugural year, Dogs Downtown brought the community and their four legged friends together for a fun-filled Sunday afternoon.

STYLE ON THE PLAZA

Date: Sept. 17

Attendance: 300

*502 tickets were purchased for this event; however due to inclement weather, a modified show was created indoors with a smaller capacity, which was held at the Shops at University Square. Attendance in 2014 was 574.

HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS

Date: Nov. 27

Attendance: 1,500

With attendance at 100 in 2014, this event saw its largest crowd in 41 years

SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

Date: Nov. 28

**Participating
Businesses: 20**

New for this year, the RDA coordinated a Shop Small Passport Activity to encourage shoppers to visit at least four downtown stores throughout the day. Prizes included one \$100 and two \$50 downtown gift cards. The RDA received 35 completed Passports. 15 small business participated in 2014.



REDBALL ROCHESTER

Date: June 6 - 12

Attendance: 27,300

Kurt Perschke's RedBall Project is a sculptural installation traveling around the globe, adopting cities as its canvas. RedBall Rochester appeared in six locations: Rochester Art Center, Government Center, Pedestrian Bridge, Mayo Building in Annenberg Plaza, Peace Plaza, Cooke Park Design District, and Historic 3rd Street.

••2015 EVENT RECAP & WHAT'S AHEAD IN 2016...

The RDA is eager and ready to welcome 2016. Looking to the left, you will see we are continuing to plan, produce and promote our core events. In addition, we will be adding unique one-time experiences meant to engage a variety of audiences in a new way. This type of creative and targeted planning and energy speaks to the RDA's commitment to building vibrancy and activity in downtown

In addition to our focus on events, we will be completing a branding process that will assist the RDA in marketing and communicating the value and identity of our

downtown community. We will keep the stakeholders and community involved in this journey.

Finally, we will be reaching out to you, our stakeholders to ensure you are aware of what we are doing within and outside the office walls. This will include an improved **BE!** print newsletter, informational stakeholder gatherings and the first ever RDA Annual Meeting, which will take place in December 2016. Again, we look forward to 2016, and we continue to encourage you to stay aware, stay connected and help us move downtown forward.

COMING 2016

LADIES
NIGHT
OUT

MARCH 10

POP
UP
PARK

JUNE 16

PARK(ing)
DAY

SEPT. 16

DOWNTOWN
DINING
WEEK

OCT. 16 - 22

FALL
HARVEST
CELEBRATION

OCT. 16

Dates are subject to change

