

The Bodacious Shops at Block 42
Photo Credit: Megan O'Leary Photography



Downtown Vitality

EVERYTHING'S WAITING FOR YOU!

By Danielle Letenyei

Looking for something new to do on a Friday in downtown Janesville?

You can grab a cup of coffee or a glass of wine at Bodacious Brew and sit out on a patio overlooking the Rock River. Or head after work to the Rock River Brewing Company for a pint of local microbrew.

Over the past year, new businesses such as those are making downtown a fun place to hang out.

Both Janesville and nearby Beloit know that healthy cities have vibrant downtowns. After years of work, Beloit currently has a thriving downtown, and Janesville's plans to spruce up its downtown appear to be gaining momentum.

'Heart of the community'

Revitalization has been discussed for years in Janesville, but those efforts didn't get very far until recently, said Britten Langfoss, chairwoman of the Downtown Development Alliance.

"The community is finally getting excited about things that are happening downtown," said Langfoss, who redeveloped the downtown building at

34 and 38 S. Main St. into a music and events site known as The Venue.

Since March 2016, more than 21 businesses have moved into Janesville's downtown or expanded there, according to Dayna Sarver, city economic development coordinator.

The Bodacious Shops at Block 42, which include Bodacious Brew, Bodacious Olive and So Chopped, opened late last year at 119 N. Main St. The buildings' owners, former Janesville residents Quint and Rishy Studer, used a plan they executed in Pensacola, Florida, where they live now, to bring a few new businesses to the area.

One of the businesses in the block, Sweet Velvet Cake Company, won the Studers' local business challenge, which was open to any entrepreneur wishing to start up a new business downtown. The reward was a brand-new storefront along with free and reduced rent.

On the other end of Main Street, Janesville residents Joan and Richard Neeno soon will open their new restaurant, Lark, in a building that has sat vacant since 2009.

It will be a relaxed place for friends and family to socialize and enjoy great food and drink, Joan Neeno said. The menu will change with the seasons and will feature small plates that people can share—from burgers to pasta and ethnically inspired dishes.

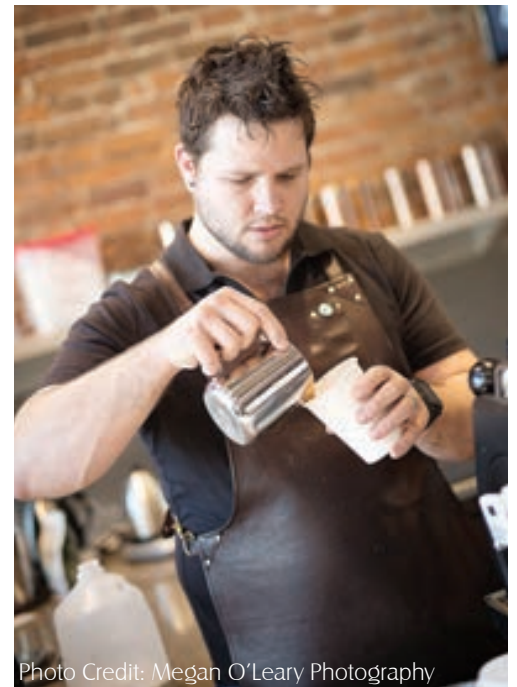


Photo Credit: Megan O'Leary Photography

It also will serve craft cocktails and beer, as well as reasonably priced wines by the glass and bottle.

“People are coming back downtown, and we see this as the right time to get in early and help build the momentum,” Joan said. “The downtown is the heart of a community, and when it’s healthy, it pumps vitality into the whole area. We see the downtown revitalization as proof that Janesville is getting stronger and stronger.”

Lark will be close to the site of the future town square, which will be located in an area bordered by Milwaukee Street to the north, Main Street to the east, Court Street to the south and River Street to the west. The project is part of the first phase of ARISE, the city’s plan to guide cleanup and redevelopment of sites along the downtown riverfront.

The town square will include amenities such as a pedestrian bridge, river walks that celebrate the Rock River, a “great lawn” gathering space and a festival street.

“I think it will be something that Janesville will have great pride in,” Langfoss said.

Beloit’s rebirth

If Janesville wants pointers on downtown revitalization, it needs to look no farther than its neighbor to the south.

A Main Street America accredited city, Beloit has transformed its downtown from a mostly industrial area into a thriving neighborhood filled with shops, art galleries and dining options, as well as a riverfront park and walkway.

A writer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation recently cited Beloit as having one of five most romantic main streets in the country.

“Beloit has Midwestern charm with an urban flair,” said Stacey Bodnar, director of marketing and public relations for Visit Beloit, the local convention and visitors bureau.

The Downtown Beloit Association formed in 1987 to manage and revitalize Beloit’s central business district.

“Our focus is to bring people to

downtown, keep existing businesses downtown and attract new businesses to downtown,” said DBA Executive Director Shauna El-Amin.

Although Beloit’s revitalization efforts have been going on for about 29 years, they got a boost with the transformation of the old Beloit Corp. into the Ironworks Hotel and Campus.

Besides a luxury hotel and Merrill & Houston’s restaurant, the campus also includes IronTek, a new business incubator for start-up tech companies, and Ironworks Golf Lab, an indoor golf complex. The Stateline Family YMCA will open there in June.

Many supporters of downtown Beloit credit local businesswoman Diane Hendricks with helping the city’s rebirth.

Hendricks’ company, Hendricks Commercial Properties, is responsible for the renovation of the Ironworks Hotel and Campus and the Phoenix Building on East Grand Avenue.

“We are very fortunate to have such a believer in our community,” El-Amin said.

Downtown Beloit hosts more than 50 days of events each year—from festivals to concert series—as well as a popular farmers market. Two downtown businesses, Bushel & Peck’s Local Market and Northwoods Premium Confections, began as vendors at the weekly market.

Held every Saturday morning May through October, the market features more than 100 vendors plus food trucks, live music and children’s activities.

Beloit events

Farmer’s Market

- Saturdays, 8 am - 1 pm, May through October, State Street and Grand Avenue.

Fridays in the Park

- Fridays, 11:30 am - 1:30 pm, May through September, State Street and Grand Avenue.

Art Walk

- Friday, May 12, 5 - 9 pm, various downtown businesses

Downtown Sidewalk Sales

- Aug. 4 & 5, Sales from 8 am - 2 pm Friday and 8 am - 1 pm Saturday

Street Dance

- Friday, Aug. 4, 5:30 - 11 pm, 300 block of State Street, cost \$5.

Janesville events

Downtown Open House

- Saturday, May 13, 10 am - 4 pm

Farmer’s Market

- Saturdays, 8 am - 1 pm, May through October, North Main Street

Spring Wine Walk

- Saturday, May 20, 1 - 5 pm, various locations downtown

On Top of Downtown

- First Thursdays of the month, 5 - 7:30 pm., Parking Ramp at Wall Street & North Parker Drive

Pals with a Passion



**Buying?
Selling?**

**Call Jayme and Laurie
at (608) 295-1973**