

# Main Street Cleveland: A Banner Sponsorship Program



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## Cleveland, Tennessee Case Study

**C**leveland is a beautiful town in the heart of the Ocoee Region in Southeast Tennessee. With a rich history but a forward-thinking mind-set, Cleveland wanted to improve itself as a draw for business and residential settlement while maintaining the town's charming character. As a member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation with an accredited National Main Street Program since 1991, town managers decided to use the Trust's Four-Point Approach for downtown renewal.

Cleveland rapidly covered the first two points: they had staffing and an organization in place and had successfully completed a promotional program to build local interest in the revitalization plan. Now up to the third point, design, town planners concentrated on improving the appearance of their historic downtown business district, including installing antique-looking light poles and planters.

Integral to Cleveland's plan for a visually cohesive and vibrant downtown zone was a series of banners for their new light poles imprinted with the town's new slogan "Think Downtown First" and the outline of one of their historic buildings. By this stage of their redevelopment, though, any funds from the National Trust, the State of Tennessee or the County were earmarked for other projects. The light-pole banner program would have to be self-funded.

Cleveland's MainStreet Executive Director had heard from other MainStreet managers about a method

developed by Project Graphics to fund light-pole banner programs through sponsorships from local merchants. Merchants could add their business name via an additional "slice" of fabric attached below the main banner, thus generating greater awareness of their business from passers-by, building local support for the banner program and creating a revenue stream to make the program self-sufficient.

Cleveland decided to start with an initial series of about 25 light poles. Each set of hardware, a one-



time cost, was \$66 and each custom banner was \$65. The slices added another \$30 each. The installation was handled by the town's public works department for free. Total program costs for the first stage were therefore \$161 per pole. They could choose to price the sponsorships so as to cover all costs up-front or wait for the recurring revenues of future sales. Since a cost to the businesses of \$150 semi-annually, or about the cost of a small ad in their local paper, more than covered the banner program's annual costs and the merchants were happy to gain a long-lasting point-of-purchase marketing tool, Cleveland went with the fully-funded option.

Project Graphics donated several sample banners to use as sales promotion items. The merchants could therefore see exactly what they would be getting. The initial phase sold out within a few weeks and the town decided to expand the program, including new banners with Halloween and winter holiday themes. More sponsorships were added and again sold out almost immediately. Over 50 light-pole banners created a unified look for six major streets in the downtown area.

Since the banner program produced surplus dollars from the beginning, Cleveland decided to use some of the sponsor positions for their own municipal marketing and fund several other events and initiatives with the revenues. Excess funds go into the general budget and help fund an annual Halloween block party, a Christmas party and tree lighting ceremony. Included with sponsorship of the Halloween block party is a sponsor slice.

Today, Cleveland has annual sponsorship revenues of over \$10,000 from the light-pole program. The town

refreshes the downtown look with three separate banner designs that are changed out seasonally and slices that help promote downtown revitalization as well as sponsorships.

Sharon Marr, Cleveland's Executive Director, has a number of plans for the future. "The banner program is so popular that available openings go quickly. With such an easy to manage cash influx, we can not only keep up our existing events, but we've also been able to help pay for a number of downtown improvements around our courthouse plaza. At first, we just wanted to tie together our downtown with an attractive graphic campaign that fit into our historic identity. It's ended up being so much more than that."



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