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Issue 3, 2021

EST

2021

Announcing

RETHOS POLICY INSTITUTE

ADVOCACY, PUBLIC POLICY, RESEARCH

on

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION,
BUILDING REUSE,
AND SUSTAINABILITY.



RETHOS[®]

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Thank You to Our Generous Sponsors!





The First Word

Executive Director
Heidi Swank

As my husband and I celebrated our first Thanksgiving in Minnesota, I reflected on what was happening a year ago. To my surprise, I realized that it was exactly one year prior that I accepted the position of executive director at Rethos. Had it really been a year since that phone call and the ensuing cross-country move?

I think much of what has been happening in the world and in Minnesota has brought many of us to reflect on the past year and all the changes we have experienced since January 2020. The pandemic has both brought us closer and created distance. The murder of George Floyd has ushered in a significant rethinking of how we go about our lives in many ways. Mixed in with the terrible events of the past two years have also been a smattering of joyful events. Here at Rethos, we have had some very happy events among our staff: a wedding, a completed master's degree, a daughter heading off to college, an acceptance and full scholarship to a graduate program, and I'm sure many others.

With all the last few years' events big and small, sad and happy, Rethos has launched into looking toward our future. Our staff and board hired the Dendros Group to assist us as we look forward. Over the past few months, we have taken several full days away from the office to gather and talk through what Rethos is today and where we would like it to be in the future.

Director of Development Paul DeGeest and Executive Director Heidi Swank chat with guests at the Rethos Policy Institute Launch Event



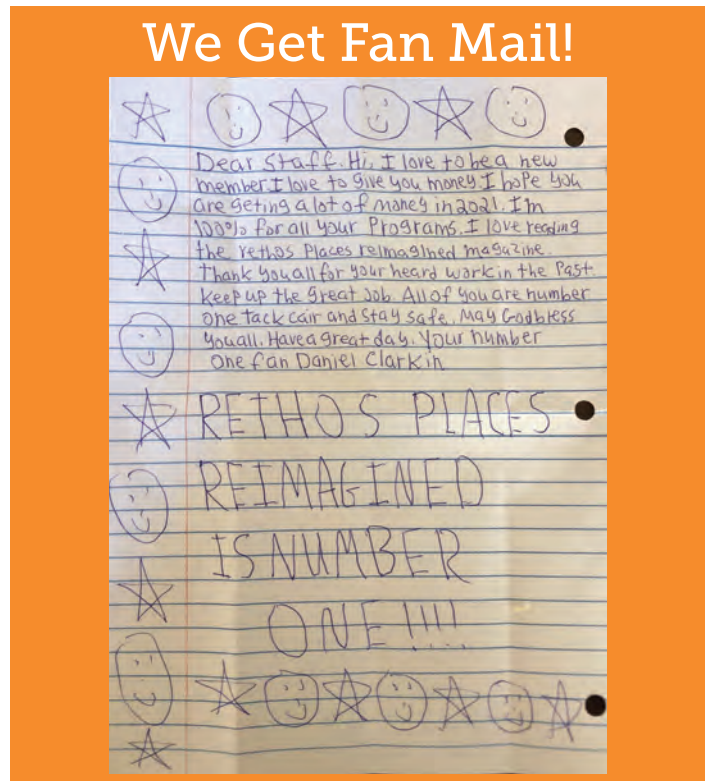
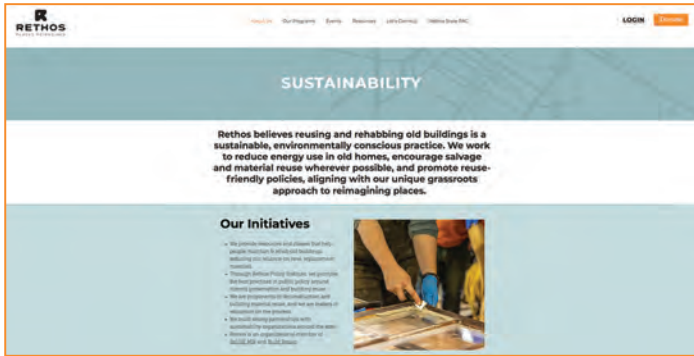
We have learned a lot about ourselves and our organization. To start, we had long thought that we somehow had become a siloed organization. Each division working on its own projects will little knowledge or interaction with the others. However, as we really dove into how we work, what we focus on, and what we do, we began to see that we weren't in silos. We were all part of a cohesive organization that, while our work all starts with older buildings, touches on people, their stories, communities large and small, and finds paths to ensure that our buildings are not just structures but places in which we enact our stories and our histories.

As we now head into the last phases of our strategic planning, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone on the Rethos Staff and Board of Directors for your investment in this planning process. I feel lucky to be part of such a smart and energetic group of people. The Rethos Staff has had so many brilliant ideas that have been built into excellent programs. The Board of Directors has provided outstanding oversight of the organization and made connections that facilitated the staff's work. Over the next five years, we hope to further amplify these programs and build in some new ones.

As we finish up our plan for the next five years and begin to enact it, keep an eye on us. We anticipate new ways for readers to engage with our organization. We want to see more of you and include you in our work. There is a lot of great work being done in Minnesota and surrounding states, and Rethos is excited to be part of it. We hope you will be, too.

New Sustainability Hub

Are you interested in learning more about the role of historic preservation in building a more sustainable future? Head to the new Sustainability page on our website (under “About Us” in the drop-down header). Learn more about our initiatives, upcoming events, clean energy grants, and more!



Main Street Spotlight: Wabasha



After months of hard work, downtown Wabasha's Community Roots mural is complete! Local artist Sue Mundy painted this beautiful piece, which is located on the West side of the Food Share, with the help of several devoted (and talented!) volunteers of all ages. The mural displays a quote from local poet Pamela Larson, which says, "We work together to nourish the common soil, cultivate deep root systems. We sow the seeds in a hard row and occasional drought, grow vines of connection. We share the bounty and harvest a healthy community."

Read more about the project on our blog, and head to Wabasha to see it for yourself!

October 23rd – Field Trip to Winona



On Saturday, October 23rd, Rethos staff took a field trip to our new Winona Office (located at 164 East 3rd Street Winona, MN) for a full day of strategic planning. We met several residents and business owners who spoke to us about the importance of revitalizing Main Streets, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on business, and how the city is preparing for future growth and development.

Rethos staff was also treated to a guided tour of Winona by our very own Emily Kurash Casey. We learned about the history of downtown Winona, key landmarks, and even got to stroll through the farmers market.

BADGER STATE LOFTS REIMAGINE A SHEBOYGAN LEGACY



Built between 1919-1921 (with additions over the years until 1973) in Sheboygan, WI, the Badger State Tanning Company was a major center of production for Wisconsin's leather. In the 1930s, it employed 700 workers who maintained a daily hide production rate approaching Milwaukee Tanneries. This tanning company was the longest lasting and last of its kind in the area, finally closing its doors after decades of contributing to both the skyline and economy.

This year, KCG Companies finished its restoration of the building. KCG partnered with Rethos' Historic Rehabilitation Loan Program and reimagined this industrial building, introducing 118 apartments and 8,000 square feet of commercial space as the Badger State Lofts. This project will help drive development in



the southerly portion of downtown Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

Warden's House

Over the past year and a half, our education team has experimented with new, virtual ways to teach you about old homes. We've hosted tons of webinars, built up our Rehab Resources webpage, and shared tips and tricks in our magazine and on social media. We're also starting to create instructional videos about various rehab, salvage, and maintenance topics.

This summer, Rethos teamed up with the City of Stillwater, Northern Bedrock Historic Preservation Corps, and the Washington County Historical Society to create a series of videos about window restoration. We gathered at the Historic Warden's House Museum in downtown Stillwater and filmed Rethos instructor Laura Leppink carefully demonstrating common repairs. Laura walks viewers through paint and glaze stripping, reglazing, repairing rotted wood, and painting. Northern Bedrock corps members assisted Laura and helped demonstrate proper techniques.

Our excellent videographer, Jacob White of White Pine Productions, edited the recording into four bite-sized videos. You can watch the videos as you prepare for your window repair projects, although you'll probably need to re-watch the videos *during* your project too! The videos each run four to eight minutes long, and you can view them all on our YouTube channel. Go to our "Rethos Places Reimagined" YouTube page to catch all our Warden's House content as well as gather other great rehab tips.



Welcome Kelly!



Hello there! My name is Kelly and I recently joined the Rethos staff as their Outreach & Education Coordinator! In this role, I'll be working to support and find collaboration opportunities between Rethos' Education and Minnesota Main Streets programs. After graduating from the University of Minnesota Morris with a degree in Environmental Science in 2017, I went on to lead camping and canoe trips with an outdoor education organization based in Minneapolis called Wilderness Inquiry. In 2018, I found myself at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency working as an underground tank inspector in their Tanks Compliance and Enforcement unit. At Rethos, I've been able to pursue my interests in sustainability and materials reuse, while simultaneously working to empower communities and embrace the historic buildings that make them so unique. Outside of work, you can find me camping, canoeing, or digging around in my garden!

Support Rethos, Reduce Your Estate Tax Burden, and Leave a Legacy: The Power of Bequests



Bequest

Bequests are the most common way to make a gift to Rethos through your estate. Simply add a provision in your will or trust designating either a specific amount, a percentage, or all or part of the residue of your estate to Rethos. You can designate your bequest to benefit a specific program that is meaningful to you or provide unrestricted support to help Rethos carry out its mission, now and in the future. Gifts of any size are appreciated.

Bequests provide flexibility in that they allow you to make a gift now by including a provision in your will or trust while preserving the right to make changes at any time in the future should your circumstances change. There are also potential tax benefits by including a bequest in your will or trust, which may allow you to make a more significant gift to Rethos from your estate while still taking care of family and loved ones.

Sample Language

Below is sample language that you can share with your attorney in drafting a bequest in your will or trust:

I bequeath to Rethos (Tax ID #41-1427970), a nonprofit organization located in Saint Paul, MN,

- the sum of _____ dollars; or
- an amount equal to _____ percent of the net value of my estate; or
- all the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate

If you would like to designate your gift to a specific program, you may also want to include additional language:

It is my request that this gift be used for the benefit of [specify program] delivered by Rethos as directed in my most recent statement of intent.

To learn more about giving to Rethos through your estate, by transferring shares of stock or other appreciated assets, or through other planned giving vehicles, please contact:

Paul DeGeest, MA (Philanthropy)

Director of Development, Rethos: Places Reimagined

paul@rethos.org or 651-293-9047

The federal CARES Act allows donors like you to deduct charitable gifts up to \$300 off their taxes this year (\$600 for couples married filing jointly), **even if you do not itemize**. Please consult your tax advisor for more details. Learn how you can help at <https://www.rethos.org/ways-to-give>.



CLASSES

All class registrations
can be made at
rethos.org/classes.
Classes are open to all.

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REPAIRING & RESTORING OLD WINDOWS

**JAN
2022**

6:30 PM – 8:30 PM | Hayes Window Restoration, 4439 Hiawatha Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55406

Do you have old wood windows in need of some TLC? Ready to practice window repair skills? Join window restorer Joe Hayes for a hands-on workshop all about windows. Joe will explain common window issues and demonstrate basic repairs. This class will focus specifically on glazing, paint prep, and painting. Participants will have their own station at which to practice these skills. You are invited to bring a window from home. We'll also have plenty of practice sash to use.

2-3

OLD HOME CERTIFIED DESIGNATION COURSE 12 CE CREDITS

**FEB
2022**

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM | Zoom Webinar

Most housing stock in the Twin Cities is over 50 years old. As an agent, how well do you know your product? With the Old Home Certified designation, you'll gain a marketing edge and serve your clients better with must-have info about the properties you work with daily.

Old Home Certified is a 2-day course and designation worth 12 hours CE developed by Rethos: Places Reimagined. Join us to enrich and leverage your knowledge of old homes. Dig deep to discover why they matter to your clients, your business, and your community.



12

REHAB LAB: PLASTER REPAIR

**FEB
2022**

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM | 753 Hague Ave, Saint Paul, MN 55102

This hands-on workshop introduces you to the materials, tools, and techniques to fix vintage walls. Participants will learn how to repair cracks and holes in plaster walls at a historic home in St. Paul. Taught by plaster and paint expert Anders Christensen, this class provides a unique opportunity to practice new skills in an old home with many of the same repair needs as your own. Come with questions, prepared to get messy!

24
FEB
2022

R

RACISM IN REAL ESTATE 2 CE CREDITS

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM | Zoom Webinar

Racism in Real Estate explores structural racism and the racial wealth gap as it applies to housing. We'll consider the role of the real estate industry in the history of racial housing discrimination and the consequences of this history on housing equity today. Recognizing that we cannot fix the issues and inequities of the present without understanding the past, this course intends to expose the racist policies and practices that shaped our cities.

This class was created with materials from the Mapping Prejudice project and other research by instructor Denise Pike. This course is approved for 2 hours of CE credit for real estate agents, and now counts for Fair Housing credit. It is open to all.

10
MAR
2022

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LEAD, ASBESTOS, AND RADON, OH MY! 2 CE CREDITS

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM | Zoom Webinar

In this 2-hour class, licensed architect Alissa Pier will demystify three substances often found in older homes: lead, asbestos, and radon. Alissa will provide context to the specific uses of each substance, explain their dangers, and walk through mitigation methods. Lead, radon, or asbestos can be scary for prospective homebuyers. Learn how to provide safe handling resources for removal of these substances and put your clients at ease!

This course has been approved by the Minnesota Commissioner of Commerce for 2 hours of real estate continuing education. It is open to all.

16
MAR
2022

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WHY OLD IS GREEN: SUSTAINABILITY IN OLDER HOMES

5:30 PM – 7:00 PM | Zoom Webinar

Beyond the buzzwords, this class breaks down the how and why of sustainability in homes. Instructor Alissa Pier, AIA, shows us how old homes are in fact green. Alissa's presentation talks about sustainability as it relates to materials, community, and quality of life. You'll learn how old homes can adapt to change and reduce cost of living, and you'll get a thorough introduction to traditional building materials, good design, and energy efficiency.

23
APR
2022

R

HISTORIC FINISHES: VARNISH, STAINS, DYES, AND WAX

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Southside Neighborhood Historic District,
St. Cloud, MN

This class, taught by Mark Johnston of Historic Design Consulting, introduces you to wood finishes commonly found in older homes. Mark will discuss the differences between varnish, stain, dyes, and waxes. He'll describe how to identify these finishes in your home and will demonstrate best practices for application, cleaning, and repair. You'll have the opportunity to practice these techniques during class.

Welcoming Duluth-Lincoln Park to Main Street



In 2020, as a pandemic raged and uncertainty loomed, the Main Street program was looking for unique localized solutions to the uncertainties. For well over a decade, Ecolibrium3 in Duluth, MN had been practicing their own version of creative local community development. With COVID lockdowns in effect, communities were forced to be their most resourceful and creative and it seemed serendipitous that the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Duluth would become the newest Minnesota Main Street community as Duluth-Lincoln Park.

In Duluth, the Lincoln Park neighborhood was previously a struggling area with high vacancy rates, dilapidation, disinvestment, and flooding. After the neighborhood was flooded in 2012, local energy sustainability non-profit Ecolibrium3 stepped in to help with flood recovery efforts. From here the non-profit began thinking more about community development. These early considerations towards revitalization truly kicked off in 2015 when Lincoln Park Main Street Director Shannon Laing came on board. At the time, Lincoln Park consisted primarily of manufacturing and empty storefronts, making Shannon wonder how to change the perception of the neighborhood. Shortly thereafter she sought and received a grant from Neighborworks to assist with neighborhood stabilization and marketing.

Through the marketing component, Shannon began to consider how they could reinvent Lincoln Park and make it attractive to the community. Around the same time the Duluth Folk School had just started, Shannon convinced them to locate in the neighborhood and the idea of making Lincoln Park Duluth's arts and craft center had begun. Over the next few years Shannon continued to invite local craftspeople, businesses, and dreamers. Throughout this process, as well as other local meetings, Shannon asked three questions in order to get perspectives on the neighborhood:



What are the 3 best things about the neighborhood?

What are the 3 biggest challenges?

What are your ideas for the neighborhood?

Throughout this process, repeating themes of neighborliness, bad perception, opportunity, creativity, and others arose. Armed with this knowledge of possibility and perception, Ecolibrium3 continued pushing to reinvent the neighborhood, including an open house event that took place for three years. Having the neighborhood open with the ability to dream slowly filled the vacant storefronts. In 2018 a consultant hired in the wake of the floods returned to Lincoln Park after five years. What she saw was 50 storefronts that had been filled and a neighborhood transformed. It was this consultant who recommended joining the Main Street program due to the aligned values of community revitalization and to capitalize on the robust resources available.



For Shannon, the alignment with Main Street was obvious, but more importantly the model seemed to be in line with what she kept hearing their businesses wanted as the neighborhood became solidified. Upon closer inspection she saw the program as one that wasn't too rigid or prescriptive in its execution and would allow for the continued creative problem solving that helped revitalize the neighborhood. As the formal steps to becoming a Main Street community moved forward and were in their final stages, an unexpected roadblock popped up: the COVID pandemic and associated lockdowns. Utilizing the experience gained from the 2013 floods, Ecolibrium3 was in a unique position to actualize disaster relief efforts. Apart from disseminating information on resources and various loan programs Shannon set out to help the community by raising morale and culling

community resources. The result was multiple programs meant to strengthen relationships and solve unique problems:

- The Lincoln Park Coffee Breaks began daily virtual conversations with local businesses, during these events participating businesses received a mug by a local potter along with a pound of locally roasted coffee. The only parameters were to display the mug, promote the coffee, and everything else was up to the businesses. This led to intimate behind the scenes explorations of each business that strengthened relationships with residents.
- During spring break, when free lunches and breakfasts wouldn't be provided, volunteers partnered with restaurants and the Heritage Support Center to put together a week's worth of groceries, which were then handed out at bus stops.
- One local credit union that was set to open during the pandemic had a fund of marketing dollars dedicated to their launch. Since their opening had been put off, all parties involved brainstormed the idea of putting the marketing dollars into a micro loan program for small businesses. This process not only promoted the opening, but established a commitment to the community.
- In response to cutting budgets to adjust to lost revenue, the city was downsizing garbage collection and getting rid of downtown garbage cans. A partnership between Main Street, US Bank, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation funded a private hauler to take the cans as

Continued on next page

a short term solution, as well as sign printing and an adopt-a-can program. Thus far, the program has been wildly successful with every can accounted for, except for one that blew away in a blizzard! This partnership with US Bank and LISC also resulted in \$40,000 in COVID recovery funding.

- Finally, what Shannon considers the biggest piece, is companies clearing space to create personal protective equipment, PPE. One example is the Frost River Trading Company closing to create a PPE factory to facilitate the sewing of masks and stapling of face shields. Groups of 30 at a time came in to create the masks, adequately spaced with respect to local protocols. Coinciding with this a local gift card initiative focused on downtown businesses was set to launch. To maximize both initiatives goodie bags were created of masks, assorted local items, and the gift cards. By equipping the gift cards with expiration dates, they forced an immediate investment into downtown businesses while providing the community with the means to operate safely.

This broad array of projects ended up resulting in community involvement and investment at a time of utmost uncertainty. With over \$50,000 dollars invested in the downtown economy. Despite being a newcomer to Main Street, these efforts did not go unnoticed and Main Street



Lincoln Park was awarded with the Main Street Forward Award at the National Main Street America conference--Main Street NOW. For Shannon the award was a mixed bag, on one hand strange because they had not yet been officially designated as a Main Street community, along with the award being given at her first Main Street conference in

a virtual setting. Conversely, when the award was given a flood of congratulations poured in from other communities. Despite Lincoln Park being brand new, everyone was rooting for them. Overcome with emotion at the outcry of support Shannon cried as she realized what a great and uplifting community they had joined. This supportive and collaborative nature has been a huge benefit in the year since Lincoln Park has been officially designated. Being able to bounce ideas off of other communities and borrow from what's working in other places has strengthened Lincoln Park's Main Street efforts. With such a robust list of accomplishments already under their belt, the Minnesota Main Street program is thrilled to have Lincoln Park as part of the team. With the collaborative spirit of all the Minnesota Main Street communities there is no doubt that this partnership will yield positive results for Lincoln Park, all Main Street communities, and for the collective pride and progress of Minnesota as a whole.



Despite being a newcomer to Main Street... Main Street Lincoln Park was awarded with the Main Street Forward Award at the National Main Street America conference.

What's Up DOWNTOWN?

We know, it is hard to keep up with all the great work our Main Street communities are doing! But did you know that they all have Facebook pages where they regularly put highlights from their downtowns? Check out these quick updates below or dig more in depth on Facebook.



RED WING

👉 The “Art in the Heart of Red Wing” sculpture walk is a favorite pastime in downtown Red Wing! Right now, visitors can vote for their favorite sculpture online!



OWATONNA

👉 Amidst major construction projects to enhance downtown, Owatonna streamed live interviews with several local business owners on their Building Owatonna Tour!



SHAKOPEE

👉 “Rhythm on the Rails” summer concert series was Shakopee’s highlight of the season!



WILLMAR

👉 The city’s Public Works Department kindly volunteered their big rigs for this extremely adorable Touch-A-Truck event! Kids even got to write and color on a plow!



WINONA

👉 The Winona Main Street program is partnering with Minnesota State College Southeast’s welding students to create a giant holiday tree that will be placed in Peter’s Biergarten! A tree lighting event will take place in the winter season.

Shop Chalk



Whoever coined the phrase 'bigger is better' has clearly never been exposed to E.J. Klepinger's Artist on Main Street project, *Shop Chalk*. Throughout Two Harbors, Klepinger has been partnering with local businesses to create micromurals on storefronts. Consisting of urban wildlife and natural scenery, these murals create a sense of quirky unpredictability throughout the town.

Living on the north shore some 15 miles south of Two Harbors, Klepinger is an artist and teacher who is intimately familiar with the area. Although locally known for rock art where he uses a shamanic technique to see forms within stones and bring them to life, his practice extends from the teaching he does in Duluth and Willmar, MN, as well as his work across the ocean - as a book illustrator for European author Liane Carter. In his own art he celebrates the natural world and the animals that are a part of it, though he says the specific medium isn't important and instead should be chosen to celebrate the subject.

Through this holistic approach he created small-scale interventions in everyday life by partnering with businesses to place micro-murals on downtown buildings. Considering the caveat that most business owners don't own the buildings they occupy, the decision was made to create temporary murals out of watercolor and pastel chalks. The murals thus far have incorporated wildlife and natural landscapes into the built environment in natural looking ways. This method has allowed the murals to become surprising interventions that a passerby might not notice, creating a fun and unpredictable atmosphere with the businesses involved. Thus far Klepinger has done one micro-mural a month and plans to continue through December.



Despite the temporary nature of the murals, shop owners are already asking for the pieces to be permanent and expanded upon! This has been a pleasant surprise for Klepinger who was worried how the art would be received and potentially vandalized. Instead, the businesses are excited about expanding artistic offerings, forming new collaborative relationships, and the town at large is buzzing about all the art. Residents are posting the pieces on social media, inadvertently raising awareness for the businesses, and increasing foot traffic downtown.



Beyond his project, Klepinger credits all the Artist on Main Street projects with bringing a new awareness and energy surrounding the arts to the community. He shares that the collaborative energy has been infectious, especially as new relationships are formed between artists, business owners, and the city. In his mind, using art as a creative tapestry to bring new life into the built environment fosters a sense of pride in place that transfers to the community at large.

Mankato Sculpture Walk

In 2006 community leaders in Mankato drafted the Envision 2020 plan, a twenty-year course of action that prioritized revitalizing downtown as a major strategic priority. Fast forward to 2021 and many in the community believe that goal has been achieved, thanks in large part to the inclusion of public art in the downtown. Namely, the Mankato sculpture walk. With 2021 serving as the 10th anniversary for the revered community staple.

In 2011 city leaders brainstormed the project which became one of their first big initiatives in downtown. To pull off the sculpture walk multiple partnerships between government entities, private businesses, and local arts agencies all needed to coalesce. With the practice of creative placemaking not yet a proven cultural and economic driver these groups dove into a new collaboration with a sense of wonder about whether the community would turn out. The resulting success was undeniable as Mankato residents flooded the streets to see the newly installed sculptures. Thus began the legacy not only of the Mankato sculpture walk but of widespread artistic projects throughout the city.

Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, the walk has evolved into a juggernaut of a community institution. Boasting between 28-31 sculptures the event is installed every May and stays out until the following April. In addition to being displayed throughout downtown the sculptures also compete for awards based on people's choice, best in show (bronze materials), best in show (other materials), and the juror's purchase.

Taking 40 minutes to walk and 16 minutes to bike, the downtown tour has become a welcome amenity for locals and visitors as well as businesses downtown. With the walk staged around local businesses many receive foot traffic from people enjoying the sculptures thereby receiving a direct economic impact from the displayed artwork. Many of the businesses are so thrilled by the walk that they've made a direct investment and become sponsors, with around 50 local businesses sponsoring the sculpture walk.

Since the inception of the sculpture walk 10 years ago, the community has come to know the rotating artworks as an important local benchmark, a set of stoic and still neighbors, though their presence was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Speaking with Mankato Main Street Director Crystal Olson, she stated that the sculpture walk brought a sense of normalcy and comfort to the



community. With the sculpture walk taking place entirely outdoors, it became a safe activity in the era of social distancing and shutdowns. Seeing the new sculptures and being able to safely participate allowed people an escape from the turbulence and uncertainty of the world.

Beyond the pandemic, Olsen says the walk creates a sense of vibrancy and appreciation downtown. With the eye-catching sculptures sticking out from their surroundings and drawing community members in whether they're expecting it or not. As the viewer is drawn in they begin to notice other visual aspects of the community: planters, green spaces, flowers, businesses, and other interventions within the built environment. The result is a greater appreciation for Mankato as a whole.

The sculpture walk has a robust legacy that should be celebrated outside of its one-decade anniversary. Since breathing new artistic life into downtown, many credit the walk with jump starting other types of arts interventions within the community. Around town one can now find a variety of murals, decorated traffic and electric boxes, flood wall murals, and the revered silo art project. Conducted within the Twin Rivers Arts Council through partnerships with local government alongside support and participation from the community, the multi-partnership engagements have stayed true to the spirit of collaboration established at the beginning of the sculpture walk.

With one decade in the books, the sculpture walk is a valued community asset that boasts a legacy of community involvement, broader arts-based impacts, and being a catalyst of downtown development. With planning for 2022 underway, local partners are gearing up for another decade of arts interventions in the downtown landscape. While community members and leaders recognize the power of the arts in transforming Mankato aesthetically, there is also a deeper sense of connection at play, one that goes beyond historic storefronts and beautified spaces. This connection evokes almost indescribable emotions that give people a deeper investment in a place and a further recognition for the importance of community spirit and pride.

Voices from the Field: Laura Leppink

By Tyler McDaniel

At Rethos, the intersection of community and the built environment is central to our mission and programming. Through our education program, these two things meet in the most hands-on way possible. This meeting would not be possible without the help of our knowledgeable, community-driven teachers. One such teacher who has made a huge impact on Rethos over the years is Laura Leppink. If you've attended one of our classes throughout Minnesota, you may have interacted with Laura and experienced her reciprocal approach to teaching and knowledge building.

In 2019, while obtaining her Master's in Heritage Studies and Public History from the University of Minnesota, Laura joined Rethos as an intern. It was during this time that she first met Education Manager Natalie Heneghan. The two quickly hit it off and Laura began teaching classes. Despite her broad knowledge base, she admits that before her first class--a workshop on how to handle rotted wood--she was incredibly nervous.

While Laura's relationship with Rethos began in 2019, her experience with hands-on preservation trades began years before, stretching across many geographic regions. After graduating with an Anthropology degree from Lawrence University and looking for her next step, Laura began to consider the intersection of hearing stories, exploration, and a love of hands-on work that she developed in her high school shop class--a love that at one point had her considering a career in carpentry or attending trade

school. With these things in mind, paired with a recommendation from her twin sister to consider Americorps, she soon took an Americorps position with Northern Bedrock Historic Preservation Corps, based out of Duluth, MN. A Minnesota native, Laura felt like moving to Duluth would allow her to further explore her home state of Minnesota while learning more trades skills and further strengthening her bonds to place through the stories and relationships of others.

Laura was bitten by the preservation bug and wanted to expand her skillset further. After her time with Northern Bedrock, her itch for adventure took her west, to California, for a position with Point Reyes National Seashore Association. Laura worked around Point Reyes restoring a number of historic features, primarily focusing on windows. This time along the sea shore is credited as forming the basis of her knowledge for window restoration, skills that she would eventually bring to Rethos and spread throughout Minnesota. Sharing stories and experiences with fellow trades people along the shore led to a connection with the Western Center for Historic Preservation.

For her next move, Laura applied to the Western Center and soon found herself in the Grand Tetons of Wyoming learning at the Western Center for Historic Preservation. This also became her first experience with teaching. Leading groups from various historically Black colleges and universities, as well as volunteers from the Whitegrass Duderanch, refined her skills and gave access to a diverse array of stories and perspectives. Laura was enamored with the intersection of people, places, and the stories therein and, after a year spent refining her trade while expanding her skillset, it was time to return home.

Laura became immersed in preservation practice back in Minnesota, with graduate studies in progress, a burgeoning relationship with Rethos, and a place on the Northern Bedrock board of directors. It was also during this time that graduate school began to expand her perspective on historic preservation. Instead of viewing historic preservation as buildings, trades, and regulations, she shifted to considering historic preservation as a field or philosophy encompassing many subfields.





Combined with a love of stories and newfound focus on equitable representation, Laura's research began to drift into disability justice. She started fostering disability justice at every level of historic preservation practice, not only recognizing the importance of highlighting places and people who have contributed to the built environment but also incorporating a disability justice lens into the trades. Laura is seeking to reevaluate how we view those in trades and who we view as capable. At the same time, she's grappling with questions of what it means to have an accessible site and how accessibility fits into the often rigid frameworks of preservation regulation.

This inclusive community centered approach is one that Laura seeks to bring to her teaching with Rethos as well. Since coming on board as an intern in 2019 she has become a regular fixture of our educational offerings throughout Minnesota, teaching classes on window restoration, rotted wood, and more. What has kept her coming back to Rethos is what she describes as an organizational practice of public historic preservation: an approach that doesn't feel inaccessible, stuffy, or intellectual but is instead using historic preservation as a tool to uplift communities using their own resources. In classes, this translates to helping people feel knowledgeable while empowering them to make better decisions for their communities.

An empowerment-centered approach is central to Laura's approach as teacher, but she doesn't want her status as teacher to take precedence over the exchange of ideas. An exchange of ideas is the most important part of teaching to her, and even as a teacher, she is constantly learning from those in attendance. Laura has learned that anyone can learn these things and it's never too late to start. All in all, she hopes that her classes communicate that we are all learners figuring it out together for the betterment of the individual, but more importantly for the community.



Photos top, bottom this page, lower left previous page by Brian Fisher

What is Historic Real Estate Development?

Ever wonder how historic tax credits benefit a real estate development project? Ever wonder how these projects make it to closing? The National Development Council, a community and economic development nonprofit, offers Historic Real Estate Development certification courses each year that helps address these questions for historic preservation professionals across the country. The two-part series takes up two weeks of the year with intensive class periods, case studies, and opportunities to connect with others along the way. Thanks to the Main Street America Institute and the 1772 foundation, the classes are made affordable for Main Street organizations across the country.

Each week covers critical information for historic rehabs. The first week looks closely at the commercial real estate finance process. It answers questions like what does an appraisal do for the project? How much debt can the project hold? And what are the three major benefits of owning real estate? The course uses real case studies for students to work through about how historic tax credits made the project feasible.

The second week takes all of the knowledge from the first week and puts it into the context of a community. You'll work through problem-solving techniques that help work through how you might negotiate a deal, with special attention given to each stakeholder's negotiation power and motivation. Overall, the courses dovetail nicely to provide the necessary insight for real estate development newbies.



Rethos' Real Estate Manager, Ethan Boote, recently completed the Historic Real Estate Development Finance certification this September. The certification, although long in its abbreviation (HREDFP), will be helpful to the evolution of Rethos' real estate division. It helped provide a deeper understanding of the full context of a historic rehab and is a helpful tool for anyone interested in helping facilitate historic tax credit rehabs in their communities. Hopefully next year the class will be offered in person for further networking opportunities and hands-on learning!

Historic Rehabilitation Loan Project update Otterbein Apartments

The Otterbein apartment complex is a creative adaptation of a former church and school annex. Located in the central Iowan town of Toledo, the project addresses rural housing using Iowa State Historic Tax Credits. The building itself was built for the First United Brethren Church in 1946, however, the congregation had first organized in 1872. As a major community institution in Toledo, the 1946 church echoed these values with a modern structure.

The Mid-century annex was added in 1957 and speaks to the growing importance of the building as a community space. The original construction had become too crowded with the religious and recreational programs that utilized the space.

This reutilization of the space preserves this long-standing community center, giving it a new life and helping provide new housing opportunities in Toledo. Historic Tax Credits help make projects like the Otterbein Apartments feasible, benefiting the broader community through new businesses and housing while also maintaining the historically impactful local buildings.



Novogradac Conference

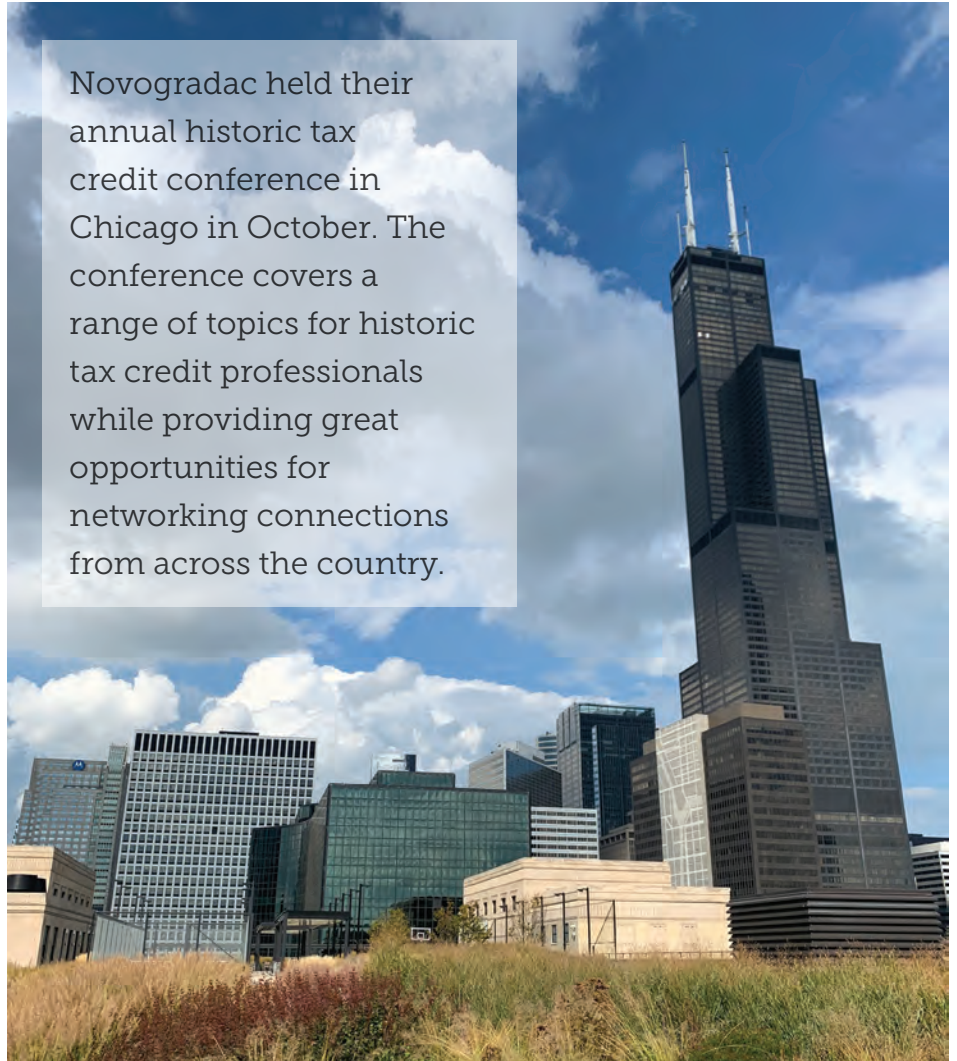
Heidi Swank and Ethan Boote from Rethos attended this year's conference together. It was great to get out of the office and into the field again to forge new connections. This was done safely, too, as the conference required proof of vaccination and masks when not eating or drinking.

Historic tax credits are a strong marketplace. Because the policy has bipartisan support in Washington, people feel strongly for the future of historic rehabs. Investors are interested in the benefits of historic tax credits for the opportunity to offset their income tax liability, while developers see the potential for historic building rehabilitations and strategic partnerships with these investors in order to get equity for their projects.

This trip also helps Rethos spread our name. Rethos is planning to expand its state historic tax credit work in 2022. Our Historic Rehab Loan program is a great tool for real estate developers working in a state with an active state tax credit, and the more people that know about it, the more we can expand our network and mission into new places.

Heidi and Ethan made a final stop at the Old Post Office, a recently rehabbed 2.5 million square foot historic post office in downtown Chicago. The Telos Group and Gensler, the same developer and architect as the Dayton's Project in downtown Minneapolis, headed up the project. Similar in concept to the Dayton's project, there is community retail and restaurant space, combined with office space. The kicker is the 3.5 acre rooftop with a .25 mile track, basketball courts, native plantings, and beautiful views of the Chicago Skyline. Located on the river and literally on top of a highway, its location will sell itself, while the history of the post office is incorporated as a major theme of the interior design.

Novogradac held their annual historic tax credit conference in Chicago in October. The conference covers a range of topics for historic tax credit professionals while providing great opportunities for networking connections from across the country.



Rethos Policy Institute, A New Resource for Community Leaders

In November of this year Rethos launched its new Policy Institute, a resource for elected leaders, local and state government officials, active community members, and everyone interested in promoting the best practices in public policy around historic preservation and building reuse.



Rethos has been doing this work for decades, but we have now organized our public policy research, advocacy, and education into this single program,

which will be the venue for leading change in all the areas in which preservation is relevant: equity and inclusion, sustainability and environmental justice, and economic revitalization.

“We are excited to be offering ways for communities to learn from one another,” said Rethos Policy Institute director Erin Hanafin Berg. “Historic preservation is an undervalued resource to promote better outcomes like affordable housing, vibrant downtown businesses, and of course, reusing older buildings to meet current community needs.”

Public policies, whether in the form of legislation, zoning ordinances, or recommendations from civic advisory boards, form the basis upon which our shared historic preservation goals and ambitions become realized. Forward-thinking communities are always looking for the most relevant and useful policy ideas and research-informed practices to help guide their work. It is the objective of the Rethos Policy Institute to be a resource for community leaders, ensuring the best outcomes for the people and places we hold dear.

To learn more and to stay current, please visit www.rethos.org.



We are excited to be offering ways for communities to learn from one another.

*Rethos Policy Institute
Director Erin Hanafin Berg*



From left: Board Vice-President Chris Sherman, Rep. Cheryl Youakim, Institute Director Erin Hanafin Berg, Rethos Executive Director Heidi Swank



Welcoming new friends and old at the Rethos Policy Institute Launch Event



Marvin Roger Anderson - Board Chair, Reconnect Rondo



Education Program Manager Natalie Heneghan, making new connections for Rethos while explaining the benefits of old homeowner education



Institute Director Erin Hanafin Berg addresses the Launch Event attendees

Honoring our 2021 Legislative Champions

At the launch of the Rethos Policy Institute, held at the historic Canopy by Hilton, we had the opportunity to recognize four Minnesota legislators as our 2021 Legislative Champions. These four individuals have shown a commitment to preserving historic buildings and a deep understanding of the economic, environmental, and societal benefits building rehabilitation has for Minnesota. Please join us in thanking them for their ongoing and vital support of our work!

Legislators of the Year

Rep. Cheryl Youakim & Sen. Jeremy R. Miller



Rep. Cheryl Youakim



Sen. Jeremy R. Miller

Legislative Champions

Rep. Kaohly Vang Her & Sen. David H. Senjem



Rep. Kaohly Vang Her



Sen. David H. Senjem

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