

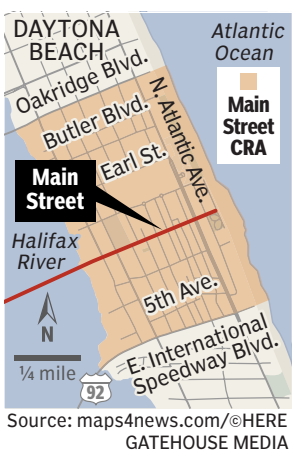


TARNISHED JEWEL: A FOLLOW UP

IN SEARCH OF MAIN STREET'S FUTURE



A bicyclist has the road to himself as he rides past empty storefronts along Main Street in Daytona Beach on Wednesday. Residents, business owners and government officials will begin the debate on how to revitalize the beleaguered roadway. [NEWS-JOURNAL/DAVID TUCKER]



Key questions: Are biker events still a good fit? What would replace them?

By Eileen Zaffiro-Kean
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DAYTONA BEACH — Helen Humphreys can take you on a fascinating journey back to 20th century Main Street. Humphreys can tell you about the afternoon Liberace burst into her small jewelry store on a mission to buy a huge, ornate candelabra. The flamboyant pianist was in town to play at The Peabody Auditorium, and suddenly there he was, in front of her with his well-coiffed black

hair and one of his over-the-top costumes. Mr. Showmanship raised his hands up to his face in excitement as he gazed at the candelabra and exclaimed, "Oh, I have to have it!" Then there was the time Evel Knievel called Humphreys and asked if he could rent the empty storefront next to her jewelry shop. The motorcycle daredevil, famous for jumping over the fountains at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, wanted to sell his T-shirts and movies

See MAIN STREET'S FUTURE, A6

ONLINE

Read more coverage from the Tarnished Jewel series, watch a video documenting the issues with Main Street and see more photos at news-journalonline.com

As DACA decision looms, Dreamers hold out hope

By Suzanne Hirt
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PIERSON — While the federal government mulls over her future, Brenda Islas Hernandez goes about her business as usual. She goes to class. She runs errands for her mother. She drives her younger brothers to school. And she waits. Brenda is a "Dreamer" — a beneficiary of Delayed

DACA thoughts

Watch video as Pierson resident Brenda Islas Hernandez, a Dreamer, talks about the cancellation of DACA: news-journalonline.com

Action for Childhood Arrivals, a 2012 executive order by former President Barack Obama known as the Dream Act, which afforded certain

immigrants who entered the country illegally as children the opportunity to stay here. And she's not the only one. Florida is home to more than 33,000 of the nation's 793,000-plus Dreamers, according to a June report by the Department of Homeland Security, and all of them may be in danger of deportation.

See DACA, A11



Brenda Islas Hernandez, 22, is studying massage therapy at Daytona State College. She attended elementary, middle and high school in Pierson, where she still lives with her mother Reyna, left, and three brothers. When Brenda first heard President Donald Trump was discontinuing DACA, she said she felt sick. [NEWS-JOURNAL/DAVID TUCKER]

LOCAL | B1

FLAGLER BEACH RESIDENTS SEEK NORMALCY AFTER FLOODING

SPORTS | SECTION C

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there during Bike Week and store one of his collector motorcycles.

"I was certain it was a kook calling," Humphreys recalled. "I was rather shocked to see him drive up on a big black Harley dressed in black leather with flags flying. He walked in the store and I said, 'Oh my gosh. You really are Evel Knievel.' I did learn some cuss words that I didn't even know existed."

Knievel wound up renting her vacant space for six years and became Main Street's most famous itinerant vendor, drawing long lines of people who just wanted to see the death-defying adventurer who once flew his motorcycle over 20 cars lined up side-by-side.

Humphreys, 83, has been working on the beachside corridor for nearly 70 years, starting as a 15-year-old hostess at a restaurant so popular it had to expand two times. Her Main Street tales reach back to the 1940s and describe a once-quaint street that hummed with grocery stores, pharmacies, banks, clothing stores, cafes, lawyers' offices, movie theaters, a gas station and dry cleaners.

Main Street patrons from decades ago would find today's corridor unrecognizable. The artery through the middle of Daytona Beach's oceanfront neighborhoods is now dominated by bars, vacant shops and empty lots. The street's emptiness is interrupted only a handful of times a year with biker parties and street festivals — including Biketoberfest later this month.

Now, a growing number of locals — everyone from beachside residents to Main Street business owners to government leaders — want to create a modernized version of that charming yesteryear Main Street. Mayor Derrick Henry is one of those leading the community-wide conversation about rethinking Main Street's future.

"We want it to be a place we can be proud of," Henry said.

"This is a defining moment for the community to decide on a vision," said Tony Grippa, chairman of the Beachside Redevelopment Committee that's putting together a list of suggestions to improve the area between the Halifax River and Atlantic Ocean.

Volusia County formed the redevelopment committee in May, a few weeks after The Daytona Beach News-Journal's publication of "Tarnished Jewel," a series that examined the challenges facing the core beachside area. Among the greatest challenges: the current state of Main Street.

"There's a good argument that how Main Street has been the past 20 years is not desirable to people in the community; otherwise they'd be there," Grippa said.

City Commissioner Aaron Delgado contends it's going to take a willingness to evolve into something different.

"We'll need a major paradigm shift," said Delgado, an attorney whose law office and home are both on the beachside. "It can't just be Mardi Gras, desert, Mardi Gras, desert."

Recapturing solid year-round business will have to come from efforts of locals, not a deep-pocketed developer who gallops in on a white horse, Delgado said.

"We've been waiting



Main Street's general emptiness is interrupted only a handful of times a year with biker parties and street festivals — including Biketoberfest later this month. [NEWS-JOURNAL FILE/JIM TILLER]

Come to The News-Journal town hall about Main Street

What does the future hold for Main Street, the iconic-but-worn road that cuts through the center of the beachside of Daytona Beach? Are there steps that can be taken to bring new commerce to the street? Should the biker events that take place there twice a year continue?

Those questions, and others, will be discussed at a News-Journal town hall meeting that the public is invited to attend Tuesday from 6-8 p.m. at the Ocean Center, 101 N. Atlantic Ave., Daytona Beach. The town hall will be in Room 101A, located at the southeast corner inside the Ocean Center.

The event is free, and citizens attending will be encouraged to share ideas and observations with the newspaper. Those attending can park for free at Volusia County's parking garage next to the Ocean Center; just bring your parking voucher to the meeting with you to get it stamped.

A panel of people with important connections to Main Street will also take part. They include Mayor Derrick Henry, Beachside Redevelopment Committee Chair Tony Grippa, and Phaedra Lee, managing partner and event coordinator for Main Street station.

We hope to see you there.
Pat Rice, Editor

for Prince Charming to come, but the reality is it's a Match.com world and we need to put ourselves out there," he said. "I don't think we're going to get outside investors unless we discover gold. I don't want to wait for magic."

'SODOM AND GOMORRAH'

Over the past 35 years, the city has poured \$120 million into the redevelopment area that includes Main Street, but the corridor linking the river and ocean is in some of the worst shape of its existence. There's disagreement about how to resuscitate Main Street, and whether it's time to get Bike Week and Biketoberfest off the road.

Those quandaries are being tackled by the new Beachside Redevelopment Committee and other local leaders, but there's not even a consensus on how Main Street devolved into what it is today.

Humphreys, who also

ran a bikini shop and men's clothing store on Main Street in the 1950s and 1960s, is certain the turning point toward trouble was the city's 1990 road project that tore up Main Street for nine months.

"They dug up the street, placed barricades and just simply said, 'Closed,'" she said. "All the side streets, or most of them, suddenly became one way exiting Main Street. So how would people ever reach the businesses?"

Humphreys rattled off the names of eight businesses she said went bankrupt or moved. She recalled one family that ran a beloved restaurant took out a second mortgage on their home to try to keep the business alive. It didn't work.

"It broke their hearts and it broke them," Humphreys said. "They ended up losing their house and their business."

As merchants went out of business, companies that profit mainly from Bike Week snatched up

the empty buildings, she said. But she doesn't blame Bike Week and Biketoberfest for Main Street's problems. For years the street still thrived in all the months between biker events, no matter how rowdy they got. As far back as the solid business years of the 1950s, she recalls annual motorcycle events being so raucous that firefighters deluged bikers with their humongous hoses to tame them.

Ken Peters, who has run the historic Main Street Barber Shop for 24 years, said the advent of shopping centers and malls in the 1970s contributed to Main Street's desolation. But he also heaps blame for the road's struggles directly on the shoulders of Bike Week, which takes place every March.

"Main Street is like it is now because of Bike Week," Peters said. "Bike Week has created this."

He recalled one Main Street bar run off by the city in the early 1980s "was worse than Sodom and Gomorrah."

He said the annual biker party that draws hundreds of thousands of motorcyclists has driven up Main Street rents so high that most entrepreneurs who want to take a stab at diversifying the corridor can't afford it. Humphreys said she's seen renters charged "unbelievable amounts of money."

Peters thinks those rents are going to start sliding because the number of bikers coming every year has been dropping. The event used to draw 500,000 people every spring, but he doesn't think that many motorcycles have rolled into town for 15 years. Peters, 61, sees a lot more bald heads and gray hair than he did 20 years ago, and he predicts the event will die off with the Baby Boomers who seem to be the last generation that will embrace the wild street party.

He said bar owners, merchants and itinerant vendors are already telling him their profits have been falling over the past seven years or so. Peters predicts businesses are going to be forced to become year-round operations to survive, and he thinks that will happen soon.

"I believe the revitalization will happen of its own accord," he said. "It's an evolutionary thing."

THE BIKE WEEK DEBATE

Peters predicts Bike Week will gravitate to Daytona International Speedway, where vendors already set up and motorcycle races are held to coincide with that week.

Grippa said it might be more appropriate for Bike Week to be happening at the Speedway, in downtown Daytona Beach along Beach Street, and at the Destination Daytona facility in Ormond Beach built largely for that purpose.

"They're all good places and other areas that don't infringe upon neighborhoods," Grippa said. "It ought to be in places that can accommodate that type of festival."

His vision is for Main Street to become a more family-oriented place where people of all ages can find fun things to do day and night, year-round.

"Events there should reflect what everyone wants," Grippa said. "We shouldn't let those three weeks define us."

He added that Main Street in its current state is "killing the Ocean Center" because people who attend conferences and events there don't feel safe on Main Street.

Paul Zimmerman, who has lived most of his 68 years on the beachside, believes it's time to stop itinerant vending on Main Street and stop easing up

on the city's rules during motorcycle events.

"We've got to stop turning the core tourist district into a fair zone," said Zimmerman, who is also a member of the Beachside Redevelopment Committee. "Why do we do that? It benefits a couple of people on Main Street, and they're holding the rest of us hostage."

Zimmerman worked at Humphreys' men's store in the early 1960s, and he remembers a Main Street so busy "you couldn't find a parking place." He believes Spring Break and biker events slowly eroded Main Street beginning in the 1970s.

He said all the "unsavory activity" pushed out many homeowners on both sides of Main Street, and landlords subdivided those houses and turned them into low-rent apartments that have received little maintenance. Zimmerman, a school social worker, said he's seen kids who live in those beat-up beachside rental homes forced to clear out during special events so their landlords can make more money off tourists.

Nonetheless, he doesn't see the need to get rid of Bike Week and Biketoberfest. He just wants to see the events better managed, and he wants the city to spend less of its redevelopment dollars on fireworks and street parties and more on practical upgrades.

"If you look at Main Street now, it's in worse condition than when the community redevelopment area started" in 1982, Zimmerman said.

Some of the people most impacted by Bike Week and Biketoberfest, the ones who live a block or two away, say they don't want the event to die.

Amy Pyle, a City Commission candidate who lives on Grandview Avenue a short distance south of Main Street, said biker events won't hamper progress "if the rules are smartly created and fairly applied."

"How can two weeks out of a year pull down a neighborhood?" asked Pyle, a member of the city's Beachside Redevelopment Board. "Common sense would tell you it's more likely the other 50 weeks out of the year are the problem. With good planning, a festival-type event can be a boon to an area, bringing in hundreds of thousands of dollars of spending and showcasing the area to possible return visitors or even future residents."

Elizabeth Murdoch, who lives just south of Pyle, also wants to keep Bike Week and Biketoberfest.



A lone man in a wheelchair heads west on Main Street in Daytona Beach. [NEWS-JOURNAL/JIM TILLER]

Continued on A7

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"We all knew it was here when we moved in," Murdoch said. "We hear bikes, but you can't change the bones of a town. What makes anyone think it would be better without it? Do you think a magic street will pop up?"

She does think, though, that the buildings that rent out to temporary vendors should be required to have other commerce going on the rest of the year.

"They're just killing everybody the way they're doing business," said Murdoch, a retiree and artist who sells her creations at flea markets and festivals. "At least sublet those spaces out during the rest of the year."

Mayor Henry also wants to keep Bike Week.

"You don't change part of a region's heritage," Henry said. "It was part of Main Street when Main Street was successful. I'm very leery of making changes that impact people in business."

Henry does, however, want to re-examine the city rules that surround Bike Week and Biketoberfest.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

A lot of the resistance to moving or changing Bike Week and Biketoberfest has to do with money. Many hotels, bars and restaurants make good money, and Main Street property owners have charged itinerant vendors as much as \$30,000 for a 10-foot by 10-foot space in their empty lots. Even the scantily clad "tub girls" who sell beer outside bars rake in thousands of dollars.

The city and Daytona

Beach Regional Chamber of Commerce, which together oversee and run Bike Week, take in tens of thousands of dollars from various fees charged to people who participate in Bike Week.

Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Janet Kersey said her organization does net "a little money" from Bike Week, but she said she wasn't able to provide even a ballpark figure because her chief financial officer and chief executive officer weren't available to discuss that with her last week.

City officials said the cut they got from the chamber's Bike Week proceeds over the past three years ranged from \$35,000 to \$37,000 annually. That money is passed on to the mayor and city commissioners, and they donate the proceeds to causes, organizations and events of their choosing if a majority of commissioners approve their contributions during public meetings.

Everyone has different ideas to improve Main Street. Murdoch said residents need to patronize what's on the road now.

"We need to support those businesses, and bit by bit others will come," she said.

Shelly Rossmeyer Pepe, who has had a Harley-Davidson apparel and souvenir shop on Main Street for years, said the road needs more year-round business like hers.

"We're one of the few open seven days per week," said Pepe, general manager of Bruce Rossmeyer's Daytona Harley-Davidson.

Some businesses don't even keep regular hours, she said.

She likes an idea suggested by Delgado and



Main Street in Daytona Beach is nearly empty at noon Wednesday. [NEWS-JOURNAL/JIM TILLER]

Henry to have a Main Street czar, someone to keep an eye on the road and enforce the rules. Pepe would also like to see the business mix expand beyond motorcycle-related shops.

"Just a coffee shop would be good," she said.

But she concedes Main Street is a tough sell right now for new businesses.

"If you want people to come in and invest, you need a lot of money to fix up the buildings and it's not worth that now," she said.

Pepe said she's had trouble just getting nearby property owners to agree to get their buildings tented for termites so they can all be free of the problem.

"If we want to really revitalize Main Street, business owners have to be the first ones to say, 'I value my business and I'm willing to put some money into my property,'" she said.

She is not in favor of kicking Bike Week off of Main Street, which she said would seriously wound too many businesses. Destination Daytona, which her corporation owns, has everything a biker could

want with hotels, shops, restaurants and a concert venue. But she said she still struggles to lure motorcyclists off Main Street.

"They just want to ride down a road, show off their bike and see other bikes," Pepe said. "I think it would lose its luster for people to go somewhere where they can't do that."

Delgado would like to see a walkable promenade along Main Street, brick on the road instead of pavement, places to sit outside and have a cup of coffee, boutiques, outdoor art shows, green space, water features, benches and shade trees.

"The government will have to help," he said. "It will take a leap of faith by someone like Eddie Hennessy with the Streamline Hotel. We need to get the message out we're going to rethink things. Business by business we can fill things up."

Humphreys said she's been asking the city for years to put a kiosk at the corner of Main Street and Atlantic Avenue listing all the businesses on the road so tourists know what's along the corridor. She also suggests painting the gray cement planters with

a more cheerful color and filling them with flowering plants that can handle the salty air and ocean breeze.

George Anderson, who co-owns some Main Street property as well as other nearby beachside land, thinks lack of parking is a huge turnoff for investors.

"Without parking it won't bloom," Anderson said. "It's just the key."

HOUSING'S ROLE

Many people argue that the businesses on Main Street will never thrive if the housing in the beachside neighborhoods surrounding the street doesn't improve. Jake Jacobs sees that interconnection, and he's been buying up beachside apartment buildings and fixing them up since he moved from Illinois to Florida two years ago.

So far, the 29-year-old owns four buildings near Seabreeze High School, and he's in the process of picking up a fifth multi-family property less than two blocks from Main Street. He said he sees potential in Main Street, and the company he runs with his father, Beach

Rentals Corp., will continue to buy properties near the street in the years ahead.

"Main Street is going to keep developing," Jacobs said. "I want to get invested in Daytona Beach now. I think in the future it will get much more expensive. I think it will only get better down the road."

Jacobs said he has no interest in owning properties that are miserable to live in and look at.

"I want the best places so there's always demand," he said.

Many who think Main Street is underachieving haven't given up.

Grippa sees big opportunity with his former employer, insurance giant Brown & Brown Inc., planning to build a new \$25 million headquarters near the west end of the Main Street Bridge. About 600 new employees will work in that new riverfront building that will be a short jaunt from the beachside section of Main Street.

"The only thing that will stop us is if we are afraid of change," Grippa said.

Humphreys would like to keep Bike Week on Main Street. But she's willing to talk to people with different views.

"We need to sit down and not point fingers," she said. "It's a problem to be solved, but to me it's people coming together and looking at the positives and the potential for what's there and making it look interesting."



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