

A beautifully restored and thriving downtown - hasn't it always been so in our beloved port city of Brunswick?

The answer, of course, is no. The thriving downtown Brunswick of the '50s and '60s had disappeared by the 1980s, as outlying malls became fashionable places to shop and the new social hub of the community. The downtown district fell into disrepair and disuse. But along came a new visionary, 24 years old, fresh from

college with the youth and energy to turn downtown around.

Cuffy Hise Sullivan was hired as Brunswick's Main Street Manager in 1989. Now active in the historic preservation activities of Savannah, Hise Sullivan talked with Golden Isles Magazine about the beginnings of Downtown Brunswick's revitalization.

Hise Sullivan: "I was thrilled with the

raw materials available – a fantastic and compact core commercial district, a grid plan with thoughtfully provided pocket parks and public gathering spaces, and grand mostly Italianate commercial buildings. The Main Street Board of Directors - a fantastic group - were my allies.

"The Brunswick Main Street program had gone through a difficult transition before my arrival. The former manager, who was a skilled event coordinator, had run a rather promotion-heavy program. After a disastrous festival, a great deal of money was lost, and community support of the program had crashed. Files and office equipment were dumped in the then unrestored Old City Hall, and I was brought in to 'save the day.' No pressure! However, after the longest first day on a job in the history of the world, I got out, met the business owners, talked to people, and began rebuilding a balanced program."

The Main Street approach utilizes four broad areas to encourage economic revitalization in historic commercial districts. These areas include organization (having a board and staff to focus resources on the downtown), design (ensuring best practices when it comes to structural revitalization), economic restructuring (providing small businesses with the resources to succeed) and promotion (instituting a campaign of events and advertising to help bring customers back downtown).

Hise Sullivan was instrumental in bringing some of the features to downtown that make it so enjoyable today – Lunch in the Park, a program of free noontime concerts in Brunswick's squares; an incentive program to install fire suppression sprinklers in downtown's historic buildings; a loan program to encourage facade make-overs; and an economic plan for recruiting new businesses. But her favorite projects are also the ones that define downtown as we know it today.



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