

U P T O W N
NORMAL
Changing the definition!

Annual Report 2015





Table of Contents

General Information - 1

Festivals & Events - 2

New Retail- 3

Other Projects - 4

Uptown Partners - 4

Marketing- 4





View of Uptown from 102 W. North St.

Uptown Normal experienced another year of fantastic progress in 2015. Solid business performance, low retail turnover and new developments all contributed to the ever increasing perception that Uptown Normal is the place to be for businesses, travelers and citizens.

A positive year for the many independent and locally owned shops and businesses in Uptown, 2015 saw reports of sales increasing or remaining satisfactory from previous years. Several businesses cited fluctuations in the nature of holiday shopping, noting that the season seemed to be extended, perhaps partially due to the mild weather. Multiple businesses also reported stronger performances during the summer than in years past, especially those businesses that rely primarily on student traffic. Shopkeepers noted that increased activity from events and activities, as well as a prolonged decrease in intrusive construction, is likely the source of the uptick in summer business.

rates lower, but was offset somewhat by a resurgence of State Farm project consultant bookings.

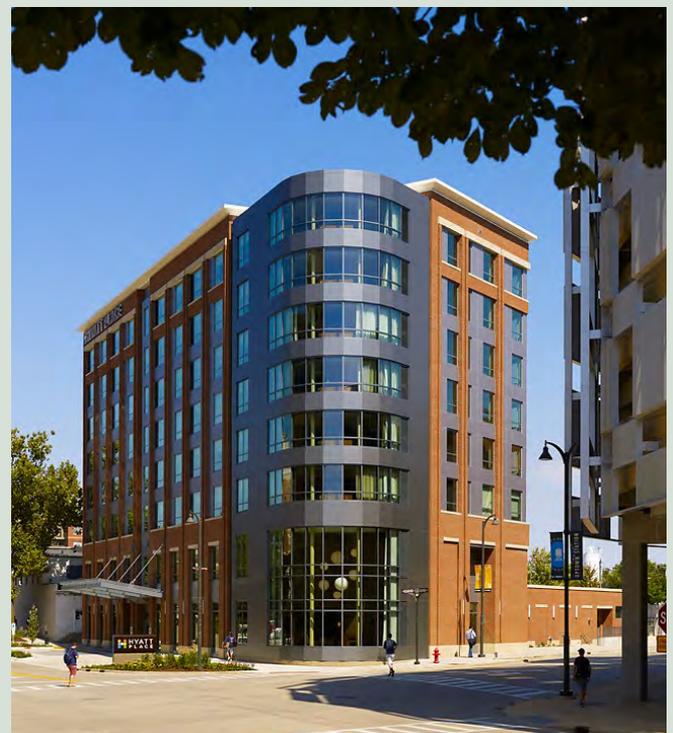
The neighborhood was further energized by the final construction and opening of the Hyatt Place Hotel. The new 8 story 114 room limited service hotel not only represents the long awaited development of a partially completed project that had been stalled for some years, it also pushes Uptown to the forefront of destinations in McLean County for visitors to stop and visit while on business or pleasure. Staff at the Hyatt Place have worked closely with the Marriott since before the property's opening to utilize both properties in seeking out larger groups and convention business. The hotel held a soft opening in late August, followed by a grand opening ceremony in September to much fanfare.



Customers learning about new products at the Garlic Press

The Marriott Hotel and Carol A. Reitan Conference Center continues to be an engine of economic activity in Uptown drawing recreational and business travelers to the area. After weathering a market correction in 2014 due to a draw down in room nights from State Farm consultants, the Marriott maintained revenue expectations for the year. The new supply added by the opening of an adjacent hotel property pushed

Hyatt Place Hotel





Merlin Kennedy with NAACP volunteers at Santa's Station

Festivals & Events

Festivals and events continue to be a primary mode of marketing Uptown Normal as a destination to shop, dine and play while simultaneously building community and enhancing quality of life. A "place making" strategy has been utilized to put Uptown at the center of activity for community events keeping the area fresh in the minds of citizens and visitors. The approach helps engrain the idea that the center of Town is a social and cultural hub of the community. With this concept in mind, staff accepts all requests for new events and accommodates those requests whenever possible, provided they will bring value to the neighborhood and community.

The two premiere events of the season, the Sweet Corn & Blues Festival and the Sugar Creek Arts Festival both enjoyed another successful season. Community partnerships allow Uptown to host two large scale events, drawing literally tens of thousands of visitors each summer.

Many of the events that have swelled the calendar in recent years saw no major changes to their programming, only minor refinements and additions. Several notable exceptions include the expansion of the Loungeabout the Roundabout calendar. Staff experimented with smaller offerings on more dates in an attempt to activate performance space in Uptown Circle during as much of the limited Illinois summer as possible. Additionally, Rock the Block returned, but in a springtime version. Co-sponsored by the United Way, the event incorporated a relatively new tradition along with its lineup of live musicians, the annual Windy City Wieners Hot Dog Eating Contest. In spite of the volatile April weather, the event enjoyed mild temperatures and sunshine, helping to make it a smashing success.

Uptown also extended a hand to the Special Olympics, hosting a street party in front of the Normal Theater for athletes during the games. Several thousand grateful Special Olympics athletes and families gathered in the street to create a party atmosphere not often seen in Uptown, likely ushering in a new yearly event for the neighborhood.

Santa's Station continues to be a time consuming, yet rewarding endeavor. Attendance and participation was excellent again in 2015 and several important partnerships were developed. The utilization of volunteers continues to be the lifeblood of the effort, and the season offered many learning expe-

riences in that arena. A highlight of Santa's visit came in the form a partnership with the NAACP to sponsor several days of Santa's Station. NAACP volunteers filled all key positions and arranged for a visit from Merlin Kennedy, a local civil rights figure of note that was arrested for attempting to enter a Christmas parade as black Santa in the late 60's.

Uptown Normal also played a large role in the Town's celebration of its sesquicentennial. Branded Normal 1-5-0, the event combined history, entertainment and the arts into a year-long celebration of the Town's history and culture. Uptown staff were heavily involved in the planning and implementation of many aspects of the celebration and Uptown Normal served as host for the celebration's signature event on September 11th-13th. The weekend featured many excellent events and included headlining performers the Flying Wallendas, culminating with a high wire walk over Uptown Circle.

While many of Uptown's stalwart events enjoyed continued success, the Pooch Parade & Pet Fair fell victim to an outbreak of canine flu, forcing the cancellation of the event as a safety precaution. The tough decision was greeted by respectful thanks from those in the animal loving community for putting the good of the animals first.

Special Olympics Street Dance



New Retail

As businesses begin to reap the rewards of Uptown's redevelopment, turnover in leasable space has decreased indicating that business is strong for most shopkeepers. Four new small businesses opened their doors, and while they are a welcomed addition, all four occupy either Town owned incubation space or sub premium retail space that had been previously underutilized. East Beaufort Street saw the opening of Uptown's second tattoo parlor in a space previously used for private music lessons, and It's Poppin' into a small space next to the Coffeehouse & Deli, while Linden Street saw a small retail space converted into a trendy thrift shop. The one retail closing of the year, That's So Sweet, in a tiny Town owned incubation space on North Street gave way to Ohmfit Activewear, an excellent addition with offerings in a desirable product category.



Heather Young (right) owner of OhmFit Activewear

Other Projects

The previously mentioned Hyatt Place Hotel represented another victory for the neighborhood. Occupying a long vacant parcel sitting partially developed after the 2008 financial crisis, the hotel began construction in 2014 and completed in the fall of 2015. The grand opening capitalized on the Town's Celebration of Normal 1-5-0 and featured an appearance by Tino Wallenda. Even prior to opening, management at the Hyatt Place worked closely with the Marriott to attract larger scale bookings that were previously unsupportable by the number of rooms offered at the Marriott. The completion of the hotel also paved the way for development of the second half of the property with upscale market rate apartments, set to begin construction in 2016.

The final version of the Uptown Plan Update, or Uptown 2.0 as it was dubbed, was also completed. Executed by Farr & Associates, the plan called for dramatic redevelopment of the area south of Uptown bisected by railroad tracks. A number of interesting recommendations were made including the placement of a new library, reconfiguration of traffic patterns, and the development of alternative types of housing not currently available in our market. Garnering the most headlines, however, was the strong urging to postpone imminent plans to construct a pedestrian overpass connecting Uptown Station to the south side of the tracks in favor of a much nicer, but more complicated underpass. The substantial plan paints a bright picture of the future potential for Uptown Normal.

The Flying Wallendas



Uptown Partners

Uptown Partners continues to serve as a conduit for businesses to become involved in the promotion and marketing of Uptown Normal. While a core group of businesses continually offer input and some energy, engagement is an ongoing struggle. The majority of members are content that their needs are being met and many cite a desire to become involved but a coinciding lack of resource to do so. The organization was helpful in providing input to Farr & Associates during the Uptown 2.0 plan development, but otherwise no major advocacy or policy issues have been of recent concern.



Doug Farr oversees public input for Uptown 2.0

Uptown Partners maintains a thriving internship program that not only offers experiential and educational opportunities to twelve students each year, but also serves as the lifeblood of the communication and staffing endeavors undertaken on an ongoing basis. Interns help run, staff and manage the extensive event calendar as well as distribute media and other forms of communication.

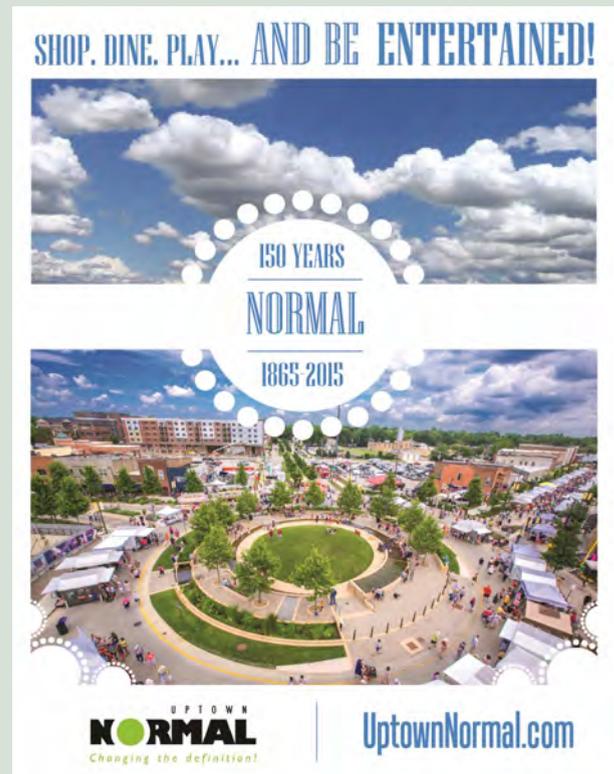


Uptown interns hard at work

Marketing

Marketing efforts in Uptown were divided between event promotion and cooperative advertising arrangements with member businesses. Several local and regional branding pieces were purchased to promote the brand of Uptown in various markets. Based on input from businesses, these efforts were imaged based, highlighting the beautiful streetscape and Uptown Circle.

The combination of Uptown's diverse target audience and an ever fragmenting media landscape, make precision marketing complicated for most promotions. Social media advertising drew an increasing share of budget dollars, while print media, especially local newspapers, drew less. Radio advertising remained a major promotion medium. Based on input from businesses, a larger share of advertising budget was spent on promotions during the fall and holiday seasons capitalizing on the return of ISU students and the traditional holiday shopping season.



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