



CONTACT:

Alex Weld – Wheeling Heritage | aweld@wheelingheritage.org | 304-232-3087

Jenna Temkin – National Main Street Center | jtemkin@savingplaces.org | 312-939-5567

Wheeling Heritage Receives Great American Main Street Award

SEATTLE – March 25, 2019 – Wheeling Heritage has been named a winner of the 2019 Great American Main Street Award by the National Main Street Center. Wheeling Heritage received the award at the National Main Street Conference on Monday, March 25, in Seattle. The national award recognizes communities for their excellence in comprehensive, preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

Selected by a national jury of community development professionals and leaders in the fields of economic development and historic preservation, Wheeling Heritage was chosen for its success in making the community an exciting place to live, work, play and visit, as well as its commitment to historic preservation and its ability to create strong partnerships. The organization was named a semifinalist for the award in August of last year.

“In only a few years, Wheeling Heritage has changed the narrative around what is possible for their downtown,” said National Main Street Center President and CEO Patrice Frey. “Wheeling Heritage has brought significant economic opportunity to their Main Street, harnessed the historic character of their downtown, and helped residents believe in the future of their community.”

When Wheeling’s Main Street program was launched in 2015, the downtown vacancy rate stood at 32 percent. Now, after generating nearly \$50 million in total investment downtown, the vacancy rate has decreased to 15 percent and 124 buildings have seen improvements. The increase in the state historic tax credit, spearheaded by Wheeling Heritage executive director Jake Dougherty, has led to many more redevelopment projects in the works and in the pipeline.

Thanks to a growing downtown shopping, dining, and arts scene, anchored by the iconic Capitol Theater and Centre Market Historic District, more people are living in downtown Wheeling than ever before. Over the past three years, downtown Wheeling has added 37 net new businesses.

“We’ve been successful because we are cognizant of the ever-changing nature of our community. While we’ve taken great strides, our work isn’t done,” said Alex Weld, Project and Outreach Manager at Wheeling Heritage, who oversees Wheeling’s Main Street program. “We continuously evaluate and adapt our programming to address pressing needs in the community, which we feel is the best way to help Wheeling continue to flourish.”

Wheeling Heritage has also worked to cultivate a strong small business community. From launching a live community crowd-funding event for new business ideas called Show of Hands, to bringing an international entrepreneur-training program to assist new business owners, Wheeling Heritage has been creative in their approach to community-based economic development.

“It's an honor to receive national recognition for the impact of our work,” said Dougherty. “While all of us here in Wheeling see the progress the city has made, it’s always nice to see people outside of the city recognize our progress and potential. Although we were selected for work that has been done in the past four years, this is built off decades of work by many people.”

Main Street West Virginia Coordinator Nikki Martin echoed Dougherty. “Wheeling is an outstanding example of how West Virginians can work together to achieve downtown revitalization and improve quality of life. Under the leadership of Alex Weld and Jake Dougherty, and with phenomenal support from the board, volunteers, businesses, community, and local government over the years – you see the amazing results that come when people come together to love their downtown.”

###

ABOUT THE GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

Each year, Main Street America, a program of the National Main Street Center, celebrates the country's best examples of comprehensive commercial district revitalization. Winners are selected from a nationwide pool of applicants by a national jury based on successful and innovative uses of the Main Street Approach.™ Criteria for winning include: strength of the Main Street in creating an exciting place to live, work, play and visit; commitment to historic preservation; implementation of model partnerships, and demonstrated success of the Main Street Approach.™

ABOUT NATIONAL MAIN STREET CENTER

The National Main Street Center has been helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts for more than 35 years. Today, its network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. The organization is a non-profit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, visit mainstreet.org.

ABOUT WHEELING HERITAGE

[Wheeling Heritage](#) is a catalyst for the revitalization of Wheeling. Through historic preservation, community development, and the arts, we help to tell Wheeling’s story and shape its future. We seek to improve the quality of life in Wheeling by preserving and investing in our city, collaborating with others, and engaging the citizens of Wheeling in our work.