

down  
town  
OAK PARK

ANNUAL REPORT  
2021

# A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

May 2022

2021 was a year of renewal. Businesses welcomed customers back into their shops and restaurants without any restrictions. Community gathered on Marion Street once again. The heart of our downtown district was back!

Following a year of adapting to a changing world, we watched as merchants began a new journey. We witnessed merchants face both challenging and joyful moments with resilience and grace. Because of this, merchant support was a primary focus this year. We developed a job board on our website, provided signage and photography services, offered public relations support, and partnered with local agencies to share important funding opportunities.

Restaurants and locals were excited for the return of Thursday Night Out. The weekly event brought a vibrancy back to our downtown district. Our See You Saturday event series replaced Oaktoberfest to offer an open street environment, which provided a family-friendly experience downtown. Live music, group gatherings and open business doors reflected an evolved downtown district.

Internally, our board of directors worked with staff to refine our strategic plan to support the organization's current needs. It was decided marketing and events were our primary areas. The board created a map for 2022 event programming, as well as outlined a public relations and educational marketing campaign.

Our new We Are DTOP campaign will bring us into 2022 with a clarity of who we are and what we do. The campaign will also focus on merchants and property owners and communicate the importance of membership. Most importantly, the campaign will provide a strong, unifying message that together, we are DTOP. With this new campaign, the stage is set for our merchants and stakeholders to thrive over the coming year.

On a personal note, I have had the privilege of working closely with DTOP's exceptional team during my first term as Board President. Our executive director and staff are second to none. They are enormously talented, hard-working, and caring. On behalf of an appreciative board of directors, I want to thank everyone on DTOP's staff for their efforts in making our downtown district a better place for us all.

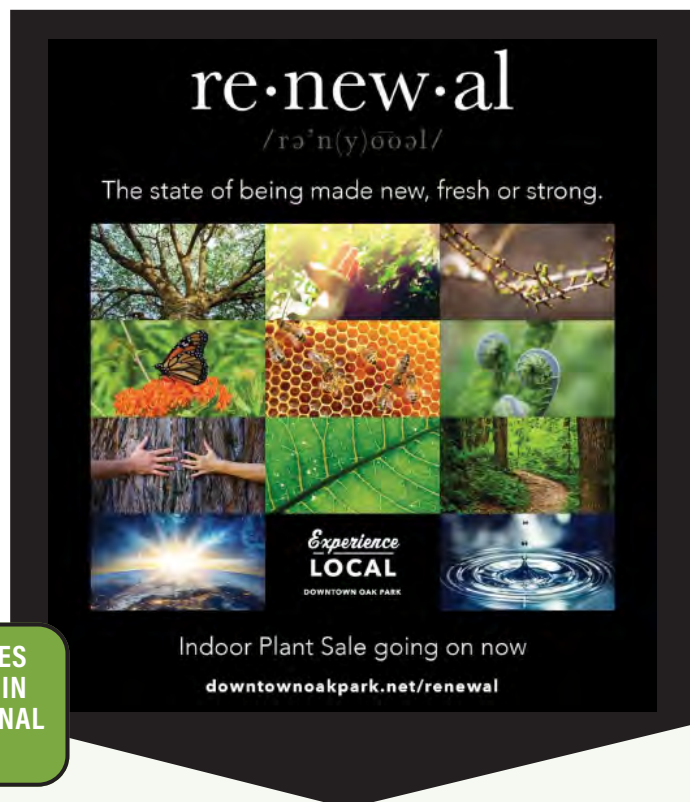
Eric C. Wagner  
Board President, Downtown Oak Park  
President & CEO, Visit Oak Park

## RENEWAL PROMOTION

We introduced our Renewal promotion in March 2021. The promotional campaign welcomed spring, as well as showcased an alive downtown district with lifting Covid restrictions.

*Like nature each spring, we renew & grow stronger.  
Experience re·new·al in Downtown Oak Park.*

- An **Indoor Plant Sale** encouraged shoppers to purchase plants online & pick-up at their favorite downtown businesses!
  - 19 businesses participated
  - Plants ordered from Good Earth Greenhouse in Forest Park
  - Plants sold on our new e-commerce optimized website
  - 15% off codes were given to residents of Vantage, Emerson, Albion & Oak Park Place
  - 403 plants sold, \$3,717 total
  - We bought 660 plants, The remaining \$2,022 worth of plants were given to the merchants to either sell or give away to their regular customers. A donation of \$500 was given to Seven Generations Ahead.
- **Quiz to win DTOP gift certificates**—Test your spring renewal & DTOP knowledge! Available on website, received 391 responses with email addresses collected



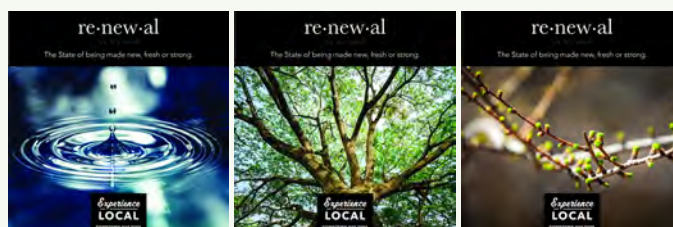
**11 MESSAGES  
FEATURED IN  
PROMOTIONAL  
MATERIAL:**

**Every aspect of nature works together in the spring to form a healthy ecosystem. Feel spring-inspired here.**

1. Breathing in deeply cleanses your body with fresh air. We're grateful you're here to experience local.
2. Like cells in the human body renew themselves, we become anew each spring.
3. Plants and pollinators work together to provide us with food. Grab a bite & don't forget to thank the bees.
4. Find a bench to experience naturally reduced stress levels among the plants & trees. Or stop to give a tree a quick squeeze.
5. Your dollars spent here are the seeds to grow a strong community. Spread your seeds!
6. Spending here allows jobs in our community to flourish. In return, we offer customer service you don't find elsewhere.
7. When you shop here, you support your friends and neighbors & inspire a place where diversity is encouraged.
8. Buying here allows local businesses to thrive in our vibrant community.
9. The heart of our shopping district sparkles when we work together.
10. As the trees bloom on Marion Street, the district renews with rain & sunshine.
11. Downtown is abloom with spring flowers, lush window displays, cheery merchants & renewing experiences—enjoy!

**The 11 messages were featured around downtown by the following methods:**

- 11 large window clings were displayed on vacant storefront windows
- Posters
- Marion Street kiosk
- Rental development lobby signage
- Wednesday Journal e-blasts, print & digital ads
- Toolkit for merchants & partner organizations
- Social media & E-blasts
  - FB Sponsored Post: 14384 reach, 1623 clicks, 211 likes, 33 shares
  - Facebook Ad Set: \$200 Spent, 23057 people reached, 1,215 clicks, 161 likes, 26 shares



## PROMOTIONS

### VALENTINE'S DAY GIFT GUIDE

Our Local Lovin' gift guide featured 16 business promotions with direct links to their websites & products. The e-blast & social media campaign—14 Days of Local Lovin'—highlighted Valentine's Day themed gifts and menu specials from DTOP shops & restaurants. We also did a Wednesday Journal e-blast for an additional reach.

### MOTHER'S DAY GIFT BOXES

- DTOP curated 2 Mother's Day Gift boxes to sell online featuring items from 9 DTOP businesses. We made 10 boxes total to sell & sold 7.
- *What better way to say "Happy Mother's Day" than with some local lovin'! Choose from our 2 gift boxes—The Luxe or Bee Natural—featuring curated products from Downtown Oak Park retail shops & boutiques.*
- It was fun to try out a new way to promote shopping locally utilizing our recently updated e-commerce capabilities.

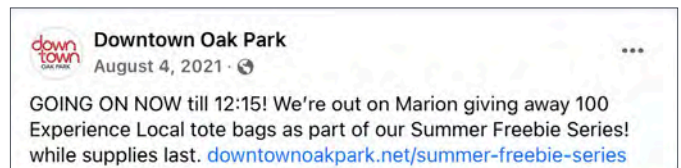


### SUMMER FREEBIE SERIES

We handed out "freebie" Downtown Oak Park \$5 gift certificates in different outdoor spots around downtown. We announced the days & times online in advance—*"We will be out on Marion Street today with freebies to say THANK YOU for visiting Downtown Oak Park! Limited quantity available."*

#### How many were redeemed:

- Summer Freebie Gift Certificates (8/1 Expiration)  
Given Out \$500; Redeemed \$195
- Summer Freebie Gift Certificates (9/1 Expiration)  
Given Out \$500; Redeemed \$215



## EVENTS

### THURSDAY NIGHT OUT

Downtown Oak Park's popular Thursday Night Out was back for 2021! The yearly event features a free music concert series and dine-around program. \$20 dine-around booklets were available to purchase at a tent located at Lake and Marion on Thursday nights from 5-9pm. Marion Street was closed to vehicle traffic, and we had tables and chairs set up each Thursday for the community. The event also featured a beer & wine tent hosted by Downtown Oak Park restaurants.

- 19 restaurants participated
- The program had an expected slow start due to Covid. A total of approximately 4,600 TNO books (\$93,320) were sold vs. approximately 7,400 TNO books (\$149,380) sold in 2019.

### SEE YOU SATURDAY

Downtown Oak Park's See You Saturday took place on four Saturdays in Fall 2021. Marion Street was closed from 10am-8pm to offer the community an Open Street environment. We showcased family-friendly music performances throughout the day, tables & chairs were set up for the community to lounge & gather. This event was meant to enhance a trip downtown. We encouraged people to meet friends, go out for dinner, stop by and listen to music etc. The event was sponsored by Byline Bank.

#### Activities included:

- Beer & wine tent
- Drum circle
- Kids musician
- Bags games, giant chess & checkers
- Balloon twister
- Kids' activities
- Bike decoration station
- Free yoga class at YogaSix
- Pet station at Scratch 'n Sniff



## HOLIDAY

### WINTERFEST COOKIE WALK

**Saturday, December 4, 3-6pm**

- We sold 500 \$20 Cookie tins online; sold out on November 21
- 35 businesses participated handing out an individually wrapped treat at their business.
- Cookies ordered from: Silverland Bakery, Sugar Fixé, Twisted Cookie, Sugar & Spice, Blackout Baking Co., Lea French Street Food, La Borra Cafe, Yoku Moku, Cougar Mountain, Ghirardelli, Lindt

#### Event Details:

- Catch a glimpse of Saint Nicholas.
- Enjoy carolers, choirs and Dickens Duo performing.
- Warm up inside the hospitality tent on Marion Street, south of Lake Street with free hot chocolate and coffee provided by Wise Cup.
- Participate in Downtown Oak Park's annual Cookie Walk—a \$20 participation fee includes a souvenir cookie tin and 25+ individually wrapped cookies to collect at participating businesses.
- Purchase \$20 (+ \$1 processing fee) Cookie Walk Participation online through December 3rd (or while supplies last).
- \$20 cookie tins will be sold at the event on December 4 inside the hospitality tent on Marion Street from 3-6 pm while supplies last. *Advance online purchase is recommended.*
- Byline Bank sponsorship \$1500, included their logo on cookie walk tin

Winterfest Revenues totaled \$14,600 from Cookie Tin Sales Merchant Participation Fees, and the Byline Sponsorship. Winterfest Expenses totaled \$25,599. (Major expenses: \$5,000 tins, \$7,000 tent & rentals, \$10,000 cookies)

### HOLIDAY WALK

**Saturday, December 11 & 18, 10am-2pm**

- Replaced Home for the Holidays & Horse Drawn Sleigh Rides for the year.

#### The Holiday Walk featured:

- Hot Chocolate Walk inside participating businesses
- Visit from Santa on December 18
- Live music inside six restaurants
- Free Movie at Lake Theatre
- Carolers & choirs

**Business feedback: "Better than we could have imagined. We had a record day."**

### HOLIDAY GIFT CERTIFICATES

#### Promotion Details:

- Purchase \$100 in Downtown Oak Park gift certificates between November 25 and December 25 & get a \$25 gift certificate free!

#### Rules:

- Two free \$25 gift certificates maximum per household.
- Promotion available while supplies last. (\$5,000 budget)

#### Miscellaneous:

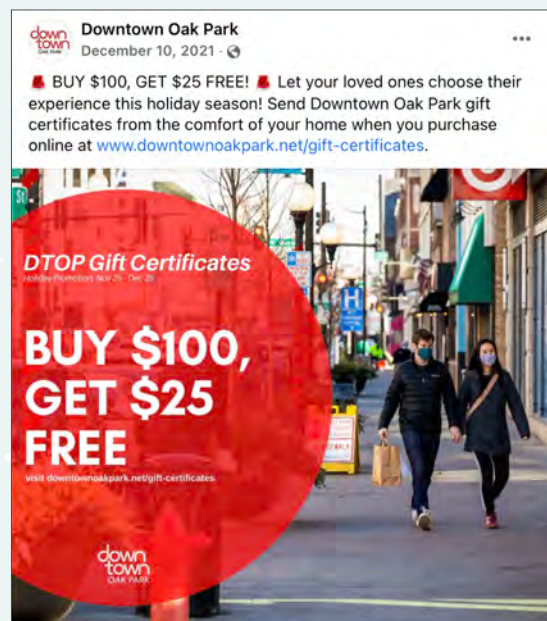
- The \$25 bonus gift certificate must be used between January 1, 2022–March 15, 2022.
- \$4,600 worth of Holiday Bonus Gift Certificates were given away between Thanksgiving and Christmas, compared to \$5,475 last year.

### SHOPPER'S REWARD PROGRAM

#### Promotion Details:

1. Save your receipts when you support a Downtown Oak Park business between November 1 and December 25, 2021. Pick up your Shopper's Reward envelopes at participating DTOP businesses to keep track of collected receipts. It has never been easier!
  - Take-out & delivery receipts accepted—don't forget, you might have to ask for your receipt
  - Online shopping email receipts accepted
  - Gift Certificates receipts accepted (excluding Downtown Oak Park gift certificates)
2. Receive \$50.00 in Shopper's Reward certificates by spending \$25.00 or more at at least seven participating businesses with a grand total of \$500 or more.
3. Spend your Shopper's Reward certificates at participating businesses. Reward certificates must be used between January 1 and March 15, 2022.

A total of 1213 books with a value of \$60,650 were given out in 2021, compared to 887 books with a value of \$44,350 given out in 2020.



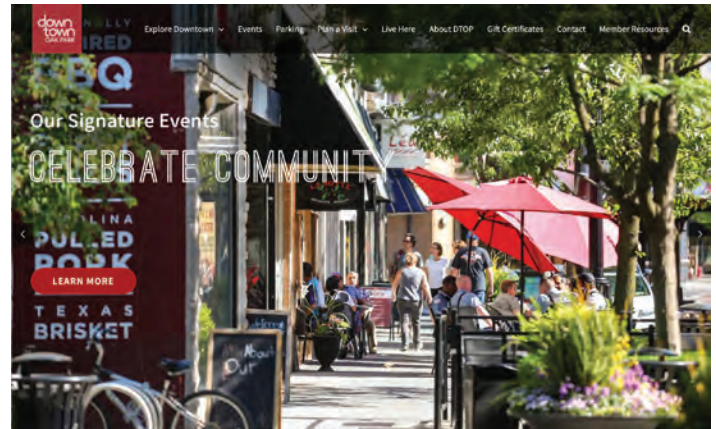
## WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

### NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED MARCH 2022

- Featuring a solid, reliable, state-of-the-art, feature-rich foundation. We are able to easily create world-class custom content and pages without any HTML or CSS. Entirely optimized for long-term future use.

### ECOMMERCE

- New e-commerce capabilities with Shopify Lite with an online shopping cart + DTOP can now accept PayPal, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and every major credit card.
- Includes giving members the option to purchase membership & street banners online.



## MERCHANT DEVELOPMENT & RESOURCES

### PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER & VIDEOGRAPHER

We offered members a chance to get a photo library with 5-10 professional photo—plus a free professional marketing video featuring the photos. Photos & videos could be used for social media, website, marketing etc. Downtown Oak Park also featured these photos and videos in our promotional content.

### PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPPORT

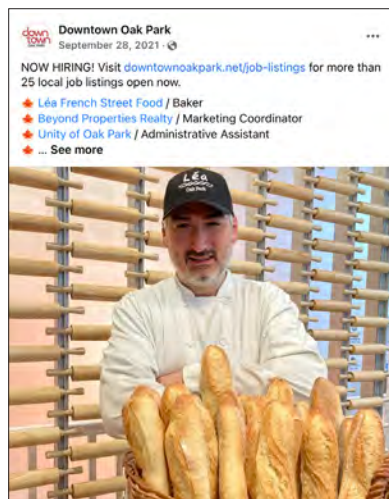
- DTOP re-hired Public Relations Strategy specialist, Jenny Shepherd to help bring visibility to DTOP merchants post-Covid shutdowns. In 2021 she helped land print articles & television segments with ABC7, NBC5, FOX32, Good Day Chicago, Wednesday Journal and the Chicago Tribune.
- Showcased stories included Classic Cinemas Grand Re-Opening and Small Businesses Received Boost as Wedding Industry Sees Boom featuring Sugar Fixé Patisserie & Fitzgerald's Fine Stationery.

### JOB LISTINGS ON WEBSITE

In response to a growing need to assist merchants with finding employees, DTOP created a job listing board on our website. Merchants are able to upload or update available positions. We also curated a list of local area job boards to assist merchants with sharing their job opportunities with the community.

- We continued to push the Job Listings resource page out to the community through a variety of channels including:

- Mom's Mail
- E-blasts
- Social Media
- Wednesday Journal digital ad
- Wednesday Journal classified print ad



### UPDATED MEMBER RESOURCES INFORMATION

The member resources web page & membership packets were updated with current information including: member benefits, purchase membership capability, awning grant, outdoor heater grant, Executive Director email updates, organization information, by-laws, budget, annual report, articles of incorporation, meeting minutes and more. Allowing an up-to-date digital experience for merchants looking to learn more about the organization.

### COVID SUPPORT INFORMATION

- We coordinated a Zoom Q&A with Sassetti—Public Certified Accountants to overview the new PPP (PPP 2) & ERT with interested merchants.
- We offered members complimentary Covid signage for their business. Merchants could select from four customizable signs.
- We shared funding information, as well as partnered with other local organizations to relay current information.

### MERCHANT MINGLE

Our popular Merchant Mingles were brought back in 2021. DTOP invited staff & merchants to gather at the Little Gem Cafe for Happy Hour in August 2021. Merchants were excited to gather with one another to chat about 2020, meet new merchants & have a fun evening out.



## STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

### GOVERNANCE 2021

- Implemented new board member orientation policy and packet Roles and Responsibilities of Board members and Officers as well as the basic requirements form for incoming board members to sign. These documents are a huge step in our final governance documents and will serve us well in recruitment of new board members and officers.
- A Board orientation packet was created as part of the governance. This procedure was implemented in 2021 with our new board members. It is an integral part of governance and preparing new board members for success. Below is a list of documents that were included.
  - Annual report
  - Event/Program calendar
  - Brief history/fact sheet on the organization
  - Mission and vision statement
  - Board member bios
  - Basic board meeting procedures
  - Copy of 2021 budget and an overview
  - By-laws
  - Organizational chart
  - Committee's and descriptions
  - Strategic plan outline
  - Board member and officer roles and responsibilities
  - Board member letter of agreement

### STRATEGIC TASK FORCE COMMITTEE

The Strategic Task Force Committee was created to assist staff with navigating the “new normal” and to secure a plan to guide the organization forward.

Strategic Task Force Committee Members:

- Eric Wagner**, Visit Oak Park
- Eric Mazelis**, Oak Park Economic Development Corporation
- Susie Goldschmidt**, Byline Bank

The committee met twice. The first meeting was to refine the strategic plan. The 2022 New Strategic Plan will include Marketing, Events, Advocacy & Governance. Advocacy will incorporate homelessness, parking improvements, and business support.

Marketing and Events are our primary focus and it was decided that it is the best way for the organization to attract more people to shop and dine which leads to visibility and ultimately profitability for the businesses.

Following the direction of the Strategic Task Force Committee to explain “Who is DTOP.” In December 2021, we began to develop an educational, public relations campaign to increase member & community engagement. The “We Are DTOP” public relations promotional campaign launched in April 2022.

In 2021, a strategic map was created for 2022 event programming. After 2 years of canceled events, the committee proposed the following 2022 event calendar to align with the current landscape:

- Jazz Thaw
- Thursday Night Out
- Oaktobfest
- Winterfest
- Home for the Holidays

### MERCHANT SURVEY RESULTS

- In October 2021, we surveyed merchants to find out what worked well in our 2020-2021 support efforts and what they would like to see continued into 2022.
  - Survey findings included:
    - Continue offering custom signage & professional photography offerings
    - Continue creating Merchant Spotlight content
    - Continue our Holiday Gift Certificate Promotion launched in 2020



## GROUNDS AND MAINTENANCE

### LANDSCAPING

DTOP contracted with Woodlawns Landscape Company for the fourth year in a row to install eye-catching summer planters. In May, 95 planters were filled with Cordyline Red Sister, Alocasia Portadora, Strobilanthes, Coleus Redhead, Coleus Inferno Begonia Big Bronze leaf Red and Scaevola Brilliant Blue showcasing an attractive and innovative mix of seasonal annuals and perennials.

### SNOW REMOVAL

Snow removal is a primary responsibility to the members of Downtown Oak Park. In 2020 we re-negotiated a three year snow removal contract with McAdams Landscaping. The contract is based on a percentage of snowfalls within a winter season; the less snowfall the less we pay. We were fortunate this past season have had a light snowfall.

DTOP contracts for snow removal along all sidewalks in our district and for the creation of “cut-throughs” along Lake Street, in snow embankments between parking stalls and curb lines, so as to further improve accessibility to pay terminals.

### HOLIDAY DÉCOR

The Holiday season came to life in DTOP as we lit 18 trees on Marion, Westgate and North Blvd with soft white lights. We also lit all the boxwoods on Lake St with soft white lights. 91 small globe poles and the archway on Marion was adorned

with gold ribbon and lights. The large holiday décor pieces were installed on Lake St. again this year adding to the ambiance since the new Lake Street trees could not be lit. The 12 tall light poles were installed with custom lighting. Lastly, 99 pots and 5 beds were enhanced with fresh evergreens and gold accents.

### FALL DÉCOR

- Soft white café lights were installed up and down Marion Street and Westgate to add the ambiance of the See You Saturday series.
- Fall corn stalks were installed on all lamp posts the first week of October and stayed up through early November.

### HELP FOR THE HOMELESS

DTOP remains active on the Homelessness Coalition. The Coalition is made up of community stakeholders, Village staff and police working together to bring Homelessness to an end in our community. The coalition also handles issues around panhandling and best ways to help eliminate the problem. In 2021 the Coalition worked together to secure 4 sponsorships to pay the \$1600 dollars to cover the cost of 2 port-a-potties and their maintenance for 3 months. The port-a-potties were placed in DTOP along the train line on North Blvd and were used successfully by those in need. This was approved by the Downtown Oak Park Board of Directors.



## 2021 FINANCIALS

<b>Income</b>	<b>Jan-Dec 2021</b>
Special Service Area Funds	\$700,000
Program Income (Events)	\$22,650
VOP Plant Agreement	\$0
Holiday Lighting/Décor	\$5,000
Member Dues	\$3,400
Street Pole Banners	\$2,550
Interest	\$64
Miscellaneous	\$609
Better Lake Street Rewards	\$0
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$734,273</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Marketing	\$211,413
Operating & Administration	\$318,111
Grounds	\$174,988
Member Services and Programs	\$12,902
Better Lake Street Rewards	\$6,000
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$723,514</b>
<b>Net Revenue</b>	<b>\$10,759</b>
<b>Byline Bank Balances as of 12/31/21</b>	
Operating Accounts	\$84,693
Reserve Account	\$201,318
Snow Reserve Account	\$60,055
<b>Total Cash</b>	<b>\$346,066</b>

## 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Eric Wagner**, President, Merchant Director

**Mike Fox**, Vice President, Owner Director

**Judith Lalor**, Secretary, Merchant Director

**Jeff Long**, Treasurer, Merchant Director

**Tammie Grossman**, VOP Representative

**Jimmy Chen**, Merchant Director

**Mary Ludgin**, Owner Director

**John Linton (Woody)**, Owner/Merchant Director

**Dave Schrodtt**, Counsel

**Susie Goldschmidt**, Merchant Director

**Eric Mazelis**, OPEDC Representative

## DTOP STAFF

**Shanon Williams**, Executive Director

**Anna Kosowski**, Marketing Director

**Jeff Eng**, Finance Manager

## COMMITTEES

### MERCHANT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The MAC is comprised of Merchant Members and makes recommendations to the Board of Directors in general regarding promotional activities and grounds maintenance in SSA #1.

**Michelle Vanderlaan**, Sugarcup Trading

**Erin Van Buskirk**, Jayne Boutique

**Jonathan Kaufman**, Wells Street Popcorn

**Steve Qi**, Sushi House

**Lita Selmon**, Einnim

**David Fletcher**, Wheel & Sprocket

**Jimmy Chen**, Poke Burrito

### FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Finance Committee meets quarterly. This group oversees and manages the finances for the organization as well as the annual audit. They meet annually with the Village Manager to present the budget for approval.

**Jeff Eng**, Finance Manager

**Eric Wagner**, Visit Oak Park

**Jeff Long**, FFC Oak Park

**Mike Fox**, R.P. Fox & Associates

**Mary Ludgin**, Shops of Downtown Oak Park/Heitman

**Judith Lalor**, The Little Gem Cafe

## 2021 NEW BUSINESSES

**La Borra Café:** 1100 Lake St.

**Einnim:** 1020 Lake St.

**YogaSix:** 1006 Lake St.

**Stride:** 1004 Lake St.

**European Wax Center:** 1117 Lake St.

**Tacos El Tio:** 1115 Lake St.

## 2022 NEW BUSINESSES

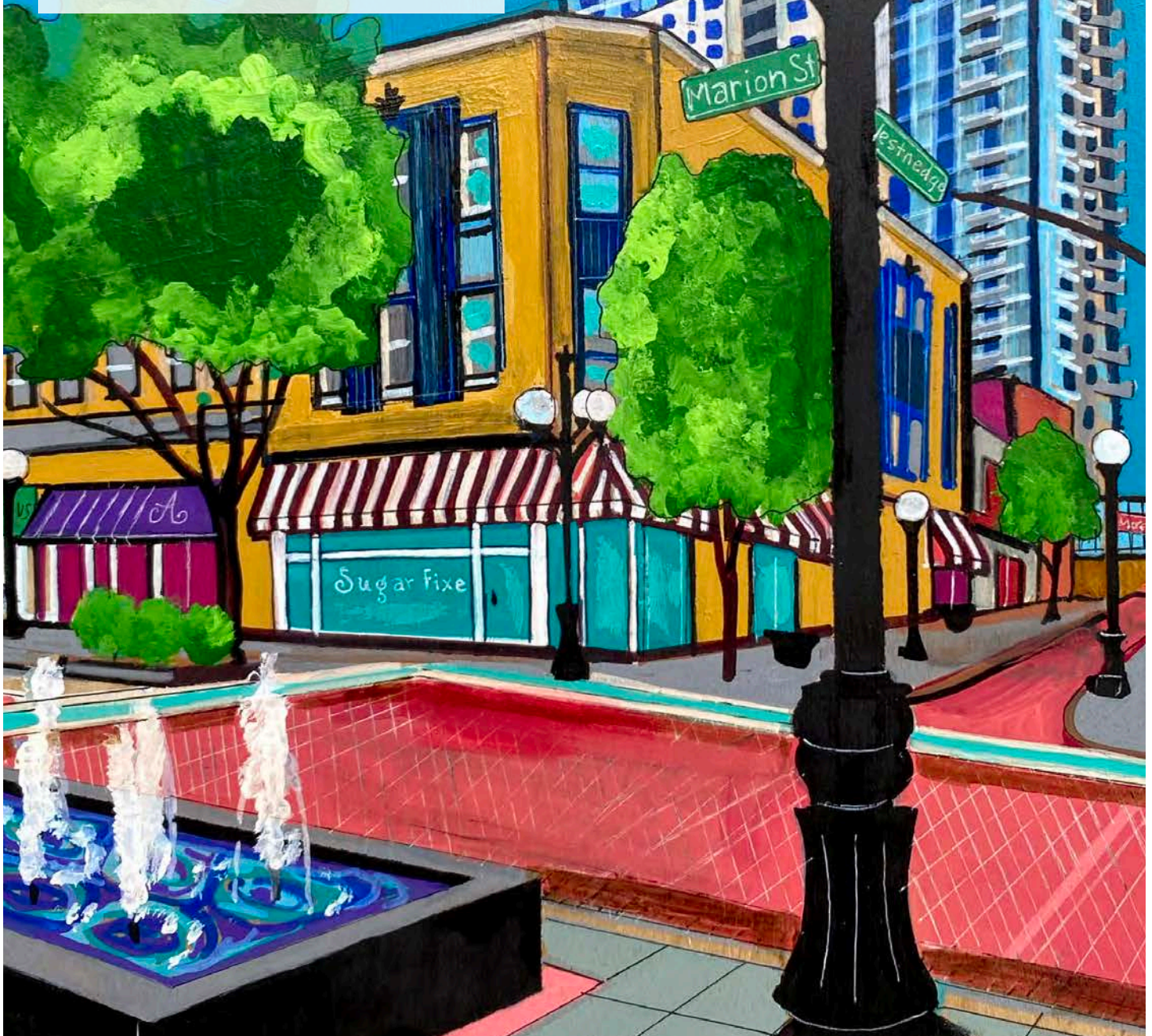
**My Salon Suite:** 114 N. Marion St.

**KYURAMEN:** 112 N. Marion St.

**Dollop Coffee Co.:** 149 Forest Ave.

**Encore! by Little Gem:** 187 N Marion St

**Harold's Shrimp & Chicken:** 1023 Lake St.



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