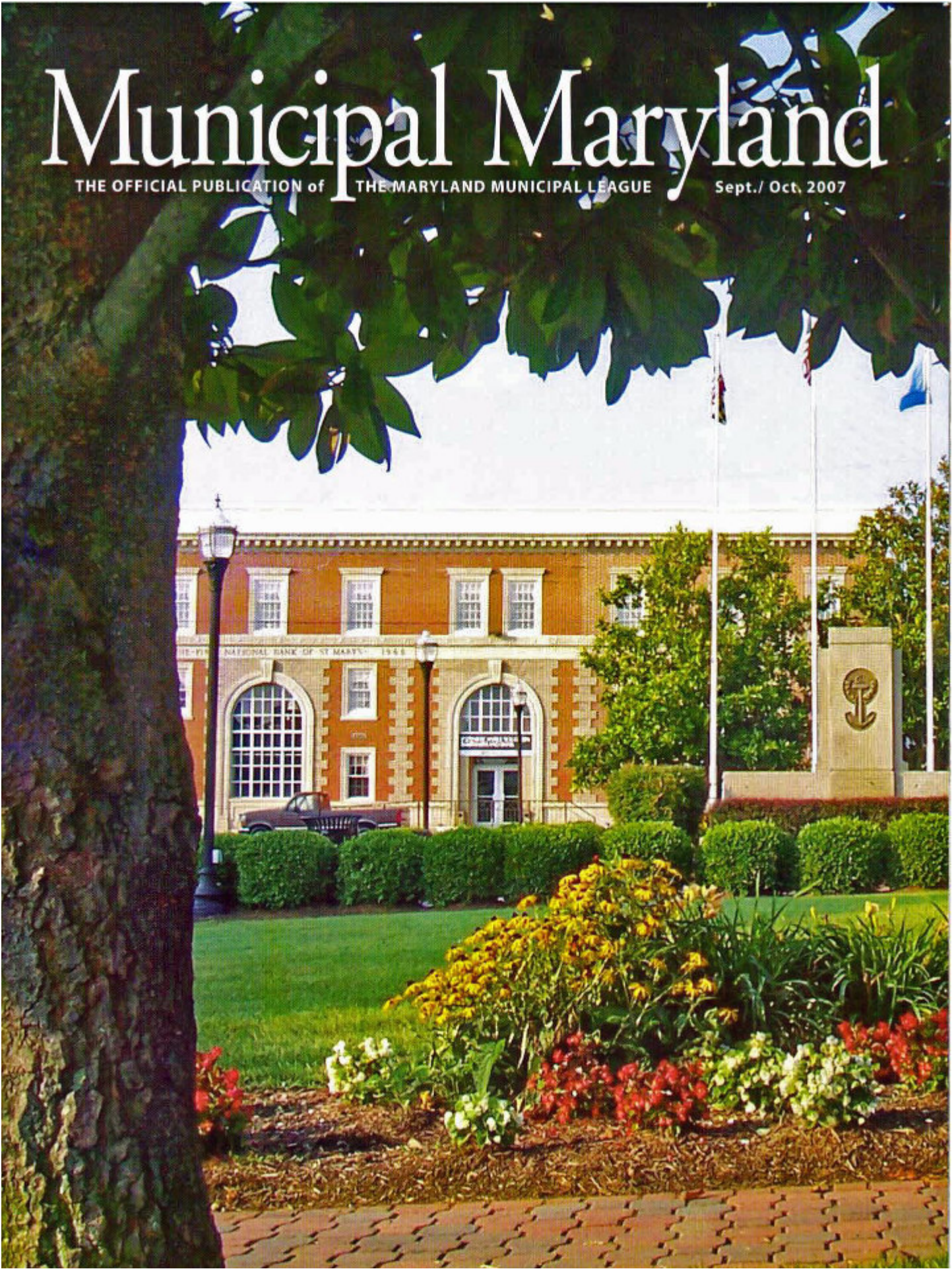


Municipal Maryland

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*A Maryland Town
Established
in 1708*

Town of Leonardtown

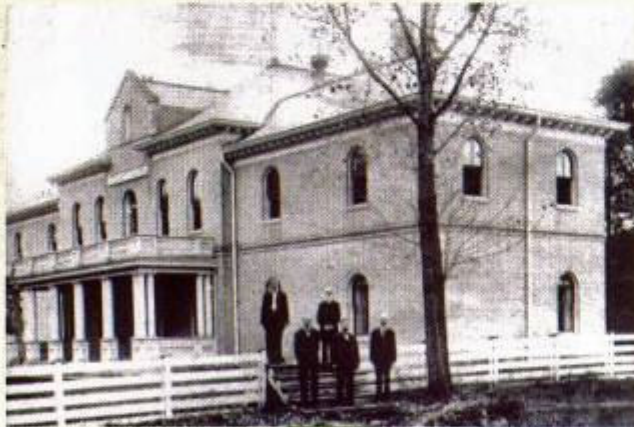
Economic Development: Are We All We Can Be?

By Laschelle Miller, Administrator, Leonardtown

As with most small towns across the country, Leonardtown has met with its share of survival challenges over the last 20 years. Threats come in many shapes and sizes as do the pressures of development demands. In the late 1980's a bypass was constructed around Leonardtown's business district and downtown businesses began to close their

doors. Much of the County's development was occurring in the Lexington Park area due to its proximity to the Patuxent River Naval Air Station. The Navy, along with supporting industry, accounts for approximately 80 percent of the economy of St. Mary's County.

One day as current Mayor Chip Norris drove into town and looked around, he saw boarded up buildings, cardboard boxes being used as shelters by homeless people in the middle of the town square and a generally declining downtown. There was even a move to disincorporate the nearly 300 year old town. He realized that someone needed to do something or the town would be lost forever. He was born and raised in



1901 St. Mary's Courthouse.
Located in the same location
since 1708.

St. Mary's Circuit
Courthouse Today



Leonardtown and had previously been on the Town Council, and decided that maybe he should be the one to do something. He ran for mayor and with the help of the town council laid out a plan to begin the revitalization of Leonardtown.

What was needed was to help Leonardtown return to its roots. What was the reason Leonardtown became a town nearly 300 years ago? One large reason was the waterfront that brought steamships to Leonardtown until the 1920's. The courts were another major factor. The current Circuit Courthouse has been in the same location since the 1700's.

Over the last decade the town has fought hard to keep its governmental anchors, such as the Circuit Court and the Post Office, in the downtown

In the late 1990's the County Commissioners were looking for a permanent site for the St. Mary's branch of the College of Southern Maryland. The Town Council purchased a vacant girls school site with \$200,000 being put aside for a town hall and donated the site for the college. Today the Leonardtown campus is the fastest growing campus for the College.

Leonardtown Square 1910



The town square, one of a few still in tact in Maryland today, was a major gathering place for residents of St. Mary's County. Investment in public infrastructure in the town square has been completed, such as brick pavers, decorative street lights and landscaping. The leadership has worked with key anchor businesses to stay in the downtown.

Leonardtown Square Today



Currently the waterfront, Leonardtown Wharf, is being redeveloped through a public/private partnership for a mixed use development. This redevelopment will bring recreational amenities, jobs and tourism opportunities to the entire region.

Other signs of success include tremendously popular events held in the town regularly. These events are held in partnership with the Leonardtown Business Association (LBA). The LBA is an organization of over 50 local businesses

Turn of the Century Leonardtown Wharf



1014 STEAMER AT WHARF LEONARDTOWN, MD. PUBL. BY JOHNSON & CO. Aunt Marnie is much better than Resu

Artists Rendering of the Leonardtown Wharf Project



Leonardtown Wharf Concept
Project Associates - Planning and Landscape Architecture - February 2002

Waterfront Promenade at Leonardtown

Leonardtown Bicycle Criterium



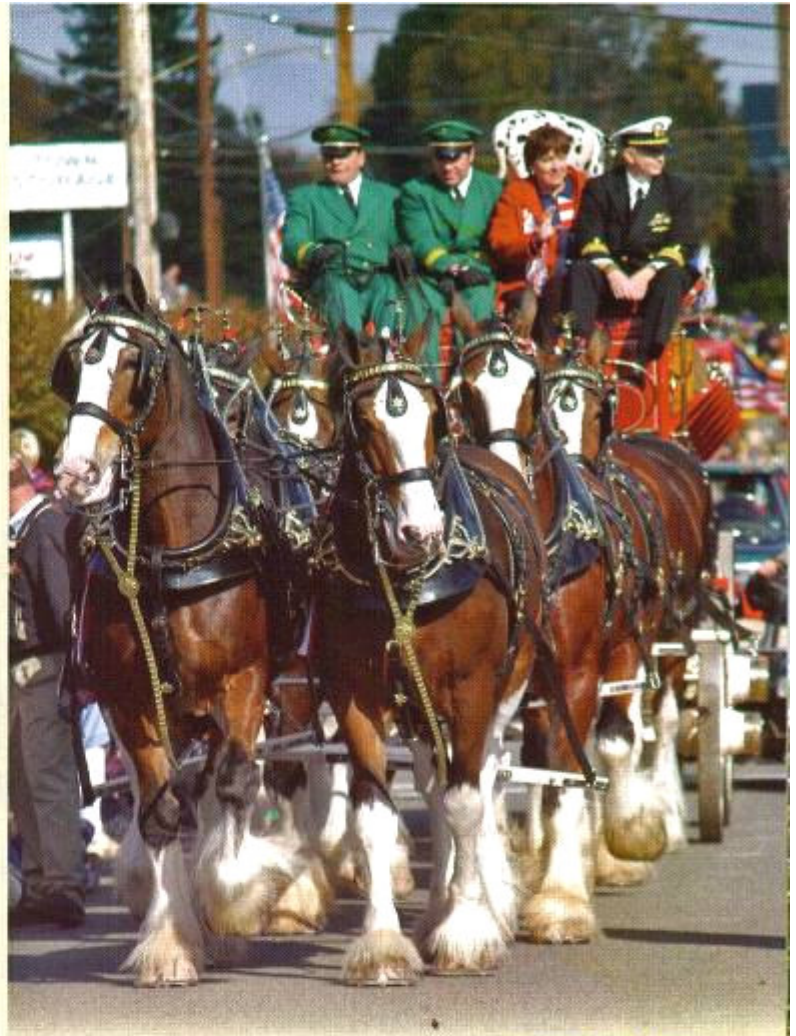
with a goal of drawing awareness to local businesses while promoting the economic, professional, cultural and civic welfare of Leonardtown. Two large neo-traditional housing developments are underway, and a resurgence of new restaurants and specialty shops are opening throughout the Town.

This success didn't happen by accident and certainly didn't take place overnight but was accomplished through small steps and careful planning. A number of partnerships have facilitated these changes. One of the best definitions I have found for economic development is the leveraging of

public and existing assets to attract more private sector investment. Many projects have been accomplished through grants and shared expertise with State agencies, sharing resources and developing joint projects with County government and public/private partnerships.

Many studies and plans were completed, and most were implemented to one degree or another, to make sure the correct path was being pursued. Leonardtown has worked with consultants to develop a Downtown Plan, Parking Strategy, Waterfront Plan, Water and Sewer Study, Development Design Manual and Planned Infill and Redevelopment tool. Most of these studies offer guidance and suggestions, helping to keep flexibility and an attitude of "how can we make this project happen," while keeping in mind that there is no perfect zoning regulation.

Another important aspect is getting the word out. Use media coverage to let people know who you are and what you are doing. Don't just attend conferences and conventions, participate, and share ideas with other municipalities. Communicate regularly with your residents. Leonardtown publishes an informative newsletter three times a year that keeps residents in touch with what is going on in their town. Apply for a variety of grants and designations. Think big and be creative.



Veteran's Day Parade

Incentives can be an avenue for encouraging participation. Incentives can include anything from grants, tax abatement or deferral, fee waivers or even technical support or help maneuvering through a process.

Beach Party on the Square



We can all be an economic engine to keep our regions strong. It takes a lot of hard work and planning to be the best our towns can be. As times change we have to reinvent ourselves, but holding onto the aspects that made us a town is very important. Come experience Leonardtown today or visit our website at <http://leonardtown.somd.com>. ■

Laschelle Miller has served as Leonardtown's Administrator since 2000.

