

"What's Up Downtown" Meeting Gives Updates on Alton Businesses and Events

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - On Aug. 29, the nonprofit Alton Main Street sponsored their quarterly “What’s Up Downtown” meeting, an information exchange about local businesses and developments in Alton.

Featured speakers included muralist Robert Fishbone, who will be painting a mural downtown starting next month, and Vicki Hake, who is renovating a former pub into a retail space in downtown Alton. Mac’s Downtown owner Rob Lenhardt spoke on the restaurant’s expansion, and Madeline Eades shared information about the grand opening

of her boutique Coco+Oak. Wendy Adams told the audience about the new ice cream shop That Good, and representatives from Argosy Casino dished on the River Side Grille in the casino. The night ended with information from Ashley Magruder with the Alton Dispensary.

Jacoby Arts Center, located at 627 E. Broadway in Alton, was packed with community members and business owners. Sarah McGibany, the executive director of [Alton Main Street](#), introduced the speakers and explained the organization's goals for the City of Alton.

“We’re a nonprofit that aims to keep downtown on the map,” McGibany said. “We do so through all kinds of special events to bring people downtown to shop and dine and be entertained.”

Robert Fishbone immediately garnered excitement with his presentation about the mural he will be painting downtown starting in September. Fishbone has painted nearly 200 murals over the past 50 years with [On the Wall Productions](#).

“Every mural brings life to its location, each one differently,” Fishbone told the crowd.

The Alton mural will be located at 136 Front Street. Fishbone was commissioned by Alton Main Street, and the project is sponsored by several donors, including the [Audubon Center at Riverlands](#) in West Alton, Missouri. The Audubon Center specializes in rehabbing birds, and so the mural is bird-themed.

Vicki Hake took the stage next to talk about her property at 230 E. Broadway. She spoke about the building's history and her plans to turn it into a commercial retail space. The building was previously a grocery store, a drug store and, most recently, a pub.

Hake and her husband have spent the past several months cleaning and renovating the building. In October, the space will reopen as [Strangelovely](#), a vintage furniture and clothing shop owned by Kim Tanner. Strangelovely also has a storefront in Godfrey.

Rob Lenhardt from [Mac's Downtown](#) spoke about their project at the corner of 4th Street and Piasa Street. The business has transformed the parking lot into an entertainment space, where they plan to host festivals, car shows and live music. He voiced his hopes that these events will benefit downtown Alton by drawing in “anywhere from 800 to 1,000 people.” He also announced that Mac's Downtown will be building new public bathrooms, which elicited a cheer from the crowd.

Madeline Eades plans to open her business [Coco+Oak](#) at 9 a.m. on Sept. 8. She started the boutique online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she will now have a storefront

at 219 Williams Street in Alton. She promised “something for everybody,” with clothing, houseware and furniture as the main sellers. The store will also have a build-your-own-hat bar.

Wendy Adams took to the stage to introduce [That Good](#), an ice cream shop that opened at 1300 Central Avenue in July. She explained that the shop has always been a dream of her business partner, Alvin Elliott. They sell shaved ice, hand-scooped ice cream and “bubble wraps,” which are warm waffles with ice cream. Adams added that they’re appreciative of people who have donated, which allows them to give ice cream free of charge to kids who don’t have the funds.

Michael Kipper and Ashley Johnson spoke about River Side Grille at [Argosy Casino Alton](#), a new dine-in restaurant that opened last month on the boat. The restaurant specializes in comfort food. Kipper added that they have been “revitalizing” the casino with new machines and an expanded music hall, and they invited community members to stop by.

Ashley Magruder was the final featured speaker. She talked about the [Alton Dispensary](#) and their offerings, including strains to treat Crohn’s disease and other illnesses. Although the dispensary is a recreational facility and does not have a medical license, Magruder said they take off 30% for people with medical cards.

As the night wrapped up, the audience passed around the microphone so community members could share about other businesses or upcoming events. “What’s Up Downtown” is a quarterly meeting; anyone who wants to know more can contact Alton Main Street at their [official website](#).

“I think the pride Alton used to have, we still have that now,” Hake summarized. “ make Alton better one building at a time.”