“Back to Our Roots”
Ithaca Flower Planting
10 Years (2001-2011)
-Connecting Youth & Community
-Creating a Sense of Place

Region 4
Community Excellence Awards
June 1, 2011
Background Information

• Established: 1855
• Population: 3,000
• Gratiot County Seat

• Economic Characteristics:
  – *Diverse City tax base*
    • 50% Residential
    • 30% Industrial (3 industrial parks)
    • 20% Commercial (strip & downtown)
  – *Surrounded by Agriculture*
    • Reflected in skill-set of many area residents
A Gateway to the North

- Spurs strip development
- Impedes downtown

1987: Fire wipes out ¼ of downtown

- Some stores re-build
- Still leaves a big hole
1999/2000: Identified the
Problem / Opportunity

- 1 mile from off-ramp to Downtown
- Many visitors only see gas stations and/or fast food restaurants
- Core downtown beginning to “fade”
- Needed a “pathway” to Downtown
Flower Project is Born

- Plans drawn to line Business Route with petunias
- City roto-tills flower beds
- Flower funding to be raised through year-round fundraisers
  - Ithaca Hometown Fun Fest is born
    - Golf outing, weekend events raise over $10,000, becomes annual event
First season brings challenges

• Irrigating flowers proves to be a logistical nightmare
  – Local industrial business steps up to supply free labor/truck for several years

• Local inventor / innovator tapped to improve irrigation technology
  – Former Ithaca Rescue truck converted to water truck with custom automatic sprayers
Project evolves

• Local churches, service clubs, banks adopt sections of flowers to plant and maintain (weeding, etc.)
• Ithaca High School Agriculture class raises flowers at school greenhouse
• Elementary students plant sections of flowers by class
Where are we now?

• Over 60,000 all-pink petunias
• Both E Center St and N Pine River St (Approx. 2.5 miles) + Gratiot All Wars Memorial
• All plants raised by IHS students
• Over 450 elementary students planted flowers (19 classes in one afternoon)
• Community Plant morning/evening
Annual Planning Process

- Confirm flower count/budget
- City DPW tills flower beds
- Coordination with IPS staff for class planting sign-up / section assignment
- Lane closures / safety issues
- Apply weed preventer
- Seasonal DPW crews irrigate
Downtown Wow Factor

- 1890’s Architecture largely intact
- 1987 fire location now home to new building w/ winery-brewpub, real estate office, gift shop, gym, salon
- Memory Park / Planters / tables added
Latest News

• Downtown poised for $450,000 in planned investments
• Local innovators working on new auger system to expedite planting
• Exploring a rainwater irrigation solution
Why this is all important

- Heart & soul project connects generations, business owners & residents
- Integrates local skills & heritage
- Re-invigorated downtown sense of place
- Provides an identity / brand for promotional materials
- Created huge annual Ithaca Fun Fest, community volunteer mentality
Thank You!

Questions??