

## Façade Improvement Program Helps Historical Downtown

By Nancy Bowman  
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When Tanya Brown thinks of the downtown Tipp City Façade Improvement Program (FIP), she recalls the positive reinforcement received while enhancing the building that houses her small business.

When Kevin Guigou thinks of the FIP, he focuses on the catalyst role he said the program plays. When Heather Bailey thinks of the program, it's of the Urban Stewardship Fund created to support exterior maintenance and property upkeep in the downtown. The program is in addition, often in conjunction with, the FIP.

With spring in the air, activity associated with the Façade Improvement Program offered through the Downtown Tipp City Partnership is picking up, and supporters hope, continues to grow. The basics of the FIP is it can provide up to \$1,000 in matching funds for projects within the city historic downtown in addition to offering owners and proprietors free design consultation on elements such as colors, signage and remodeling. Proposed projects need to focus on building façade construction, renovation, repair or maintenance.

The project area is generally described as Main Street from the railroad tracks to the canal and approximately two blocks north and south off Main Street.

The partnership has a \$5,000 budget for the program with added funding potentially available through the Urban Stewardship Fund.

“We are giving them options. We have approached and, so far, nobody has turned us away,” said Heather Dorsten, executive director of the Downtown Tipp City Partnership. “We can help by filtering through what is a good project, what isn't.”

Guigou, the DTCP design committee chairman, is a licensed architect in Ohio but works full time in ministry.

“A lot of what we do isn't necessarily grants. It is talking, consulting,” Guigou said. “The grant is a seed money, a catalyst, not control,” he added.

The partnership's FIP program was initiated in 2008.

Local residents Heather Bailey and Frank Scenna to help maintain the city's architectural charm through exterior maintenance and property upkeep established the Urban Stewardship Fund in 2009 through the Tipp City Area Community Foundations.

Guigou and Dorsten emphasized they respect what other organizations, such as the city Restoration Board in working with historic district building owners.

“We want to throw a match on the fuel and watch it burn. Success breeds success,” he said of the downtown. “We are not the answer. We believe the answer lies within the individual business and building owners. If we can clarify their own vision for why they own this building, or the business owner’s vision, we can help take obstacles away, give them a hopefulness.”

Tanya Brown said the partnership and Guigou approached her as she contemplated improvements to the building housing her Living Simply Soap on East Main Street. “They said they heard we were doing improvements and said they could help us with that,” she said. “We sat down and worked together. I shared what we wanted to do. He (Guigou) offered his recommendations and initiated my (program) participation.”

With plans approved by the Restoration Board, Brown said she filled out the application for funding assistance.

“Their assistance was wonderful in creating the design and the positive reinforcement I got from them was encouraging, uplifting,” she said.

The project has helped create a more professional appearance for her business, celebrating its fifth year in June, and drawn many compliments, Brown said.

“I would definitely encourage people to work with the program. It is just such a positive program,” she said.

Bailey said the guidance and practical ideas have enhanced the program, and will have an impact for years to come.

“Façade improvement projects are not Band-Aids for broken buildings. Instead, they are thoughtfully planned approaches to the long-term stability of buildings,” Bailey said. “With proper care like we see taking place, these buildings are successfully withstanding the decaying effects of time. This means that the downtown has the chance to remain the vibrant city center for decades to come.”

As for the program’s future, Guigou said the partnership would like, among other goals, to increase the potential maximum amount of matching grants and serve as a catalyst for larger scale renovations

“We would like to offer support and encouragement to the end that every downtown building is fully physically maintained, guarded from disrepair, and fully utilized as a home for commercial, retail, professional or residential entities,” he said.

For more information on the program and other downtown partnership efforts visit [www.downtowntippcity.org](http://www.downtowntippcity.org) or call 667-0883.