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Change is Blooming

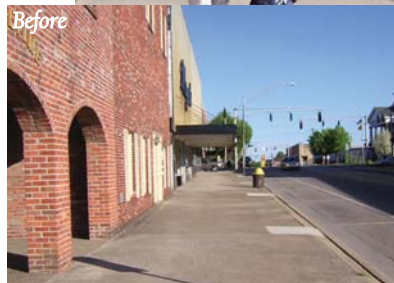
IN DOWNTOWN LONDON

Cobblestone sidewalks lined with flowerbeds, streetlights accented with hanging baskets, newly planted trees and redesigned fenced parking lots are just a few examples of what is taking place to bring London, Ky. to life and to transform downtown into a "Garden District."

"London Alive" is the theme the city has adopted to help reinvent the downtown district and make this charming community greener and more pedestrian-friendly. Getting back to the city's roots, local officials wanted to incorporate London's reputation as an agriculture and horticulture community into the plan for reinvigorating the city. They also wanted to stay true to their heritage: Main Street in London was a part of the Wilderness Trail that connected to the Cumberland Gap. Now, Main Street is a National Scenic Byway.

To become a National Scenic Byway, the U.S. Department of Transportation must recognize archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational or scenic qualities in a road. A road also must possess at least one intrinsic quality of regional significance. Main Street in London meets these criteria by being a part of the Wilderness Trail.

"It is important to bring the city of London into the 21st century. I am truly proud of our city leaders for seeing the importance of establishing a Main Street program," said Sherri Mosley, Main Street manager.



Above, an artist shows what London will look like with newly planted flowers, trees and hanging baskets, transforming the bare streets of downtown London into a garden district.

London Downtown Main Street Program is a nonprofit association that was established to enhance the economic environment of downtown London while remaining true to the character of the city's central business district and to promote London as an attractive place to live, work or visit. The London Downtown Main Street Program is a member of the Kentucky Main Street Program and the National Main Street

Center. The city also is a certified Renaissance City. Having this certification qualifies London for state and federal grant money that can be used for restoring facades and buildings, sidewalks and streetscapes.

"Everyone is excited about what is taking place downtown. We are all committed to the efforts that are being made because our downtown reflects the mood of our entire county. If anyone comes to London or Laurel County to live or start a business, the first place they are going to go is downtown," said Mayor Troy Rudder.

The "London Alive" project is expected to have two phases. The first, completed in March 2007, included the construction of new sidewalks, 28 new black Granville

streetlights with hanging baskets and banners, limestone columns with black wrought-iron fencing, cobblestone-lined garden beds, black wrought-iron benches and black trash receptacles.

The hanging baskets and sidewalk flower beds will be irrigated automatically, making London the only city in Kentucky to have this feature.

Phase two of the project will include more of the same upgrades.

The city has joined the nonprofit organization America in Bloom in its efforts to be a "garden city." The city will have access to the association's resources, and will be eligible to participate in an annual national competition that acknowledges beautification, landscaping, urban forestry, heritage and environmental efforts. London Downtown has already received a number of local, state and federal grants to fund the work and continues to seek more funding through various sources.

With the distinction as a garden city, London hopes to attract more tourism and industry, and plant community pride.

In addition, the project has some unique fund-raising ventures, including a purchasing project that allows individuals and businesses to buy personalized cobblestones. Thus far, more than 250 cobblestones, at \$50 each, have been sold and laid along Main Street sidewalks.

Local officials said one of the most rewarding aspects of the downtown efforts is the participation of citizens, including a 24-member downtown board comprised mostly of citizens and business people. The downtown board and other local groups have initiated a recognition program for homes and businesses that reflects the beautification efforts, city-wide clean ups and flower plantings along Interstate 75.

"I am proud of what is going on downtown, and I cannot wait to see the project finished. It is very true that beautiful places help economic development, and London will have something to showcase to people who come here looking to relocate," said Laurel County Judge-Executive **Lawrence Kuhl**.

London will continue to partner with America in Bloom for maintenance suggestions and to seek local business sponsors for help in funding

the upkeep. Most importantly, those involved in the London Downtown Main Street Program hope the beautification of the city will become a way of life for the people living there. It is already apparent in the City of London people are planting pride one seed at a time.

—NEW CITIES INSTITUTE STAFF



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London at a Glance

Mayor: Troy Rudder

Population: 8,500

Location: London, the county seat of Laurel County, is located in the eastern coal field region of Kentucky in the middle of the Daniel Boone National Forest. Just off I-75, London has many attractions for tourists and offers immediate access to attractions in neighboring areas. London is a

Preserve America Community and was the state's first "test city," testing products before they went into stores.

History: London was settled in 1826 and acquired its name from London, England. The settlement's location began on the Wilderness Road, just north of the Cumberland Gap.

Wilderness Road was used to gain access to central Kentucky, the

Cumberland Gap, and other areas including Barbourville, London, and Crab Orchard. It was an important access road during the Civil War. Camp Wildcat and the Civil War Battlefield are located just north of the London city limits. The first Union victory in the battle for Kentucky was recorded in October 1861 at Camp Wildcat, after the defeat of Confederate Gen. Felix Zollicoffer and his troops. The battle was also one of the first Union victories of the Civil War.

When the battles were over, London became a trade point for coal and timber. In December 1964, Interstate 75 was built through London and brought travelers and businesses, including Kern's Bakery, Griffin Pie Company and the Caron Spinning Company.

Attractions and Special Events:

The Mountain Life Museum is a great place to learn about the pioneer history of the Cumberlands, along with McHargue's Mill and McNitt's Defeat Memorial.

In the summer there are many activities for people of all ages to enjoy, including Thursday Night Live downtown concert series, Tour de London bicycle race, A Taste of London, and the Fourth of July Parade.

Levi Jackson State Park offers outdoor adventurers 800 acres packed with camping sites, hiking trails, fishing and miniature golf, picnicking and swimming.

The World Chicken Festival is held in London to commemorate Kentucky Fried Chicken, founded by London native Colonel Harland Sanders. The Kentucky Tourism Council voted this festival as one of its top 10, and *Kentucky Monthly* readers voted the festival as the "Best Festival in the State."

Natives of London: Adjutant

General Donald Storm, currently serving in Frankfort. He commands nearly 7,500 troops in the Kentucky National Guard.

London is also home to two former Miss Kentucky winners, Chera-Lyn Cook (1998) and MacKenzie Mayes (2003) Carl Hurley, America's Funniest Professor (see page 34), also calls London home.

For more information on London visit:

www.cityoflondonky.org

www.londondowntown.com

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