

# OPINION

EDITORIALS, LETTERS, COMMENTARY

## What a downtown!



**Kay  
JOHNSON**

ARTS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR

### Hutchinson's downtown is a happening place with new development, new opportunities

One of my first jobs after returning to Hutchinson in the late 1980s was as the coordinator for the downtown Hutchinson Main Street program. It was a national effort to help revitalize older and historic commercial districts.

Back then, we formed an association to work together to market the area and create events — all with the purpose of drawing people to downtown Hutchinson.

It's been a hobby of mine since those days to keep my eye on Main Street. There's nothing I enjoy more than driving around and checking out what's happening. I believe our downtown is the heart and soul of Hutchinson, with such gems as the Carnegie library in Library Square, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and across the street — the historic State Theatre.

#### SAVING HUTCHINSON HISTORY

We can thank Miles "Red" and Linda McMonagle who took on the project of restoring the 1937 movie palace, once called "one of the finest playhouses in Central Minnesota." The couple purchased the property in 2003 and after extensive renovations, reopened the historic property in September 2005. Not only is it an ongoing business, but it's a showcase for local historic preservation.

Among Historic Hutchinson's restoration efforts is the Great Northern Depot at the intersection of Washington Avenue and Adams Street. The once derelict building is now home to the year-round Hutchinson Farmers Market. It's also available for rent for special events. This year's outdoor market will open 8 a.m.-noon Saturday, May 14.

Joining the depot as another of Historic Hutchinson restoration projects is St. John's Episcopal Church at the northeast corner of Second Avenue and Hassan Street. The church's first service was conducted in 1867. The building's cornerstone was laid in 1892. In a private-public partnership, Historic Hutchinson has joined with the city in revitalizing the building. Improvements have included pulling out the old carpet, refinishing the wood floors, installing a new furnace, straightening the chimney, waterproofing the building and repainting the exterior.

Last year, a fundraising campaign raised more than \$51,000 to repair the beautiful stained glass windows. During this past holiday season, I felt such a feeling of joy when I saw the windows lit for the first time in years.

The city and Historic Hutchinson have also partnered in the restoration of the Harrington-Merrill House, 225 Washington Ave., which like the library is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The site recently made the news with the discovery of the property's original barn within the confines of Franklin House, which served as a group home for McLeod Treatment Programs since 1976. After months of research, the original barn structure was confirmed, and with no small effort by members of Historic Hutchinson, the barn was lifted and returned to its home, where it is now waiting to be fully restored.

#### MOVING FORWARD

While it's all well and good to preserve our past, it takes forward-thinking folks willing to make serious investment to revitalize our



STAFF PHOTOS BY KAY JOHNSON

From this view, you can see the three apartments facing Library Square. I remember when 101 Park Place at the corner of Main Street and First Avenue was the S&L store What has always stuck with me is the cash carrier that zipped across the store. It was a pully system to carry customers' payments to a centralized cashier, who would return it with change and a receipt. The S&L chain went out of business in 1990.



Hutchinson's Great Northern Depot, at the intersection of Washington Avenue and Adams Street, was built in 1887. It was used until July 2000 when Dakota Rail shut down. The depot is the last of the three railroad depots the city once had. Renovations started in 2013 with the slight moving of the building to make way for the Farmers Market Pavilion, which is pictured to the right of the depot. The site is also home to a Little Library and a stop on the city's annual Sculpture Stroll. The Luce Line State Trail also passes by the depot.



Thanks to the Hutchinson Economic Development Authority's Jump-Start Downtown business plan contest in 2021, two businesses tied for first place — Flank Steakhouse, 14 Main St. S., owned by Vincent and Amanda Maertz, and Gold Coin, a proposed Thai restaurant is expected to open later this year in the updated Gold Coin building, 45 Main St. N. The two winners split a package that included \$15,000 in start-up capital, \$2,000 for a new sign or awning, business coaching and mentoring, a free website with one year of hosting, advertising, logo design, business cards, letterhead and envelopes.

present and future. The good news is, that investment is happening right now, in real time. To find out more, I reached out to Miles Seppelt, director of the Hutchinson Economic Development Authority.

"We have a considerable amount of activity downtown," he said. "I'm not aware of any other community that has this much going on."

Among the many projects that are happening is the revitalization of 101 Park Place, at the corner of Main Street and First Avenue. We can thank Jim and Linda Fahey for this investment.

According to Jim, the top floor will be mixed use with three higher-end apartments facing Library Square along with two professional offices. The main floor will be a combination of professional services and retail. They are exploring opportunities for the basement level to serve the community as well. "Hutchinson has a unique story to tell," he said. "With the development of Art's Place, the hotel, Flank and River House, along with all the specialty shops, our family believes downtown Hutchinson is a huge asset to marketing Hutchinson as a great place to live, work and visit. We believe in Hutchinson."

Then there's River House Kitchen + Drinks at 122 Main St. S. Eric Labraaten and his partner Ray Zeuli are bringing the new bar and grill to life in the former Hutch Cafe building. All you have to do is look at social media to know people are excited about it.

According to Zeuli, it's going to be a breakfast place with lunch and dinner plus there are two levels with a bar on each level. And for fans of outdoor dining, there will be a second-level patio.

If you've been watching the

rebuild as I have, they ended up gutting the whole building only keeping the original second floor.

And if you're looking for a job, River House is hiring. There's a billboard along State Highway 7 East and information is posted at [tinyurl.com/mryhuu4y](http://tinyurl.com/mryhuu4y). When completed this summer, the new downtown eatery will offer a new vibe with its huge windows overlooking Main Street. I can't wait.

Hutchinson Economic Development believes in maintaining a strong downtown. To do this, it has a variety of opportunities available including the sign and awning grant program, the facade improvement program and the commercial rehabilitation loan program.

When I asked Seppelt if there was any new downtown news, he admitted one of the challenges of his job is that he has all these great secrets and can't tell anyone.

What he can share is this:

- There's a plan to redevelop the Jorgensen Hotel.

- Gold Coin will be coming back with authentic, award-winning Thai Food later this year.

- Work is being done on a plan to redevelop the site of the old medical clinic on the north end of Franklin Street.

- The city is looking at the development of a splash pad on the site of the old Cenex Fertilizer Plant (Third Avenue Northwest).

"If everything comes to fruition, 2022 and 2023 should be very exciting years for downtown and the community as a whole," Seppelt said. "Back in April 2013 the city completed the 'Imagine Hutchinson — A Downtown Vision & Action Plan' — now we're seeing the fruits of that planning effort. As they say,

### Meet Dan Jochum

#### What is your job title and what do you do?

My job title is Planning Director. I manage the Planning, Zoning and Building Departments for the city. This department handles everything from issuing building permits to review and approval of new subdivisions/developments in Hutchinson.

#### How long have you worked for the city of Hutchinson?

I have been with the city almost 12 years.

#### In your job with the city, what accomplishment are you most proud of?

One of the biggest accomplishments I am proud of is working with local builders, appointed and elected officials, residents and other city staff to develop the vacant lots that had been platted in Hutchinson prior to the Great Recession. When I started with the city, there were more than 350 platted lots that were vacant. In the past eight years there has been about 230 new homes built in Hutchinson. Many of these subdivisions needed to be re-platted or redesigned to meet current housing market needs. A lot of credit also needs to go to the building community and appointed and elected city leaders to be flexible to meet current housing market demands. Another thing I am proud of is the approximately 275 units of multi-family/senior housing that has been developed in Hutchinson over the past five years or so. Prior to

recent apartment construction, there hadn't been an apartment built in about 20 years or so. Again, credit the building community and city leaders for making these projects a reality.



**Dan  
Jochum**

#### What makes you excited about your job?

Seeing Hutchinson continue to grow and evolve makes me excited about my job. I am fortunate to work with people at the city that are very good at what they do. The city of Hutchinson has amazing staff that take pride in the work they do.

#### What is the next big thing you'll be working on?

One of the big things I am working on is a Growth Planning Study to determine where the next phase of growth should happen in Hutchinson. There are less than 100 platted residential lots available for development at this time. We are looking at areas of the city where growth can happen efficiently and that make financial sense. This study should be completed this summer. There are also several exciting projects going on downtown and city staff is working on several more potential projects in the downtown area.

#### The best way for the public to reach me?

Either email or phone: [djochum@hutchinsonmn.gov](mailto:djochum@hutchinsonmn.gov) or 320-234-4258

### Meet Miles Seppelt

#### What is your job title and what do you do?

Economic Development Director. My job (and the EDA's mission) is to facilitate redevelopment, job creation and the success of manufacturing in the community.

#### How long have you worked for the city of Hutchinson?

Since 2002 (but I had a break 2013-2015)

#### In your job with the city, what accomplishment are you most proud of?

Working on the State Theatre project and helping raise support for the Center for Technical Excellence over at Hutchinson High School.

#### What makes you excited about your job?

I get to dream big, then work to turn those dreams into reality.

#### What is the next big thing you'll be working on?

Hutch Uptown Common redevelopment downtown. It is proposing an upscale apartment complex on the site of the former medical center. The townhome idea has gone away.

#### What's the best way for the public to reach you?

Call me anytime at 320-234-4223 or email: [mseppelt@hutchinsonmn.gov](mailto:mseppelt@hutchinsonmn.gov)



**Miles  
Seppelt**

### Meet Jim Fahey

#### With the sale of Fahey Sales to Jeff Martin Auctioneers, when will you and Linda retire?

We will be with the Martins through this year. We are done Dec. 31, 2022

#### How many years have you worked in sales?

I was 18 when I came to Hutchinson and I'm 63, so it's 45 years

#### Looking back on your long sales career, what accomplishment are you most proud of?

I think consolidating all our offices to one location in Glencoe and keeping our company moving forward to online sales

#### What are your post-retirement plans?

We're retiring from the auction business, but not the real estate business. We'll continue to work with Erika Kellen. We have a team that helps people with selling their businesses and ag land — that's what Edina Realty does, which used to be a Fahey Sales Office. We'll also do some traveling and spend time with our nine grandchildren.

#### As the founder of local preservation group Historic Hutchinson, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

That's a tough one because every one of them was so important. (Probably) the preservation of the Harrington-Merrill site (225 Washington Ave. S.W.) and now being able to complete that with the move of the barn, which will finish this year, that's a huge accomplishment. We're thankful for that.

#### What's next for local preservation?

The clock is being restored and that should be re-installed on Main Street before the end of the year and restoring the barn.

#### What's the best way for the public to reach you?

Call or text my cellphone: 320-583-8559



**Jim  
Fahey**

'plan the work, work the plan.'"

According to Dan Jochum, planning director for the city of Hutchinson, the total investment for 101 Park Place, River House, the new Hutchinson Police Station on the site of the former Econofoods building and Art's Place, on the site of the historic Nemitz Paint Factory, is \$6,519,498.

That number will increase with the additional developments Seppelt mentioned earlier. It's a credit to Hutchinson that we have progressive thinkers such as the Hutchinson Economic Development Authority, Hutchinson Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, Ridgewater College, Hutchinson Public Schools,

the city and local businesses that collaborate to build a better tomorrow.

While they work to get the ball rolling, it's up to each of us to support their efforts by heading downtown for shopping, eating out, going to a movie, taking a break in Library Square or borrowing a book from the library. It's been said there's #muchinhutch. To me, those words absolutely ring true.

When I was a kid, I remember Christmas shopping with my dad and having the downtown sidewalks packed with people. I'm not sure if those days will ever return, but what I do know is that I have pride of place and that place is downtown Hutchinson.