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A Salute for Barracks Row Effort; Group Is Honored For Revitalization Of Eighth Street SE; [FINAL Edition]

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Barracks Row Main Street Inc., the booster group that has helped transform a blighted stretch of Eighth Street SE into a vibrant collection of restaurants and shops, has been named one of the best commercial revitalization organizations of its type in the United States.

Since 1999 more than 40 businesses have opened on Barracks Row, including trendy eateries such as Belga Cafe and Starfish Cafe and gift shops such as Hoopla Traders. More-established businesses such as Ellington's on Eighth Restaurant and Lounge, which opened seven years ago, have expanded their operating hours to accommodate the growing crowds.

The Barracks Row Main Street group identified available retail and office space and helped recruit tenants that would enliven the corridor, which lies on the southeastern edge of Capitol Hill, between Pennsylvania Avenue and I-395.

It worked to secure funding for 51 facade restorations and for new sidewalks, lighting and other streetscape improvements, and it organized street festivals and promotional events to draw residents and tourists.

On Monday the organization was one of five to receive a Great American Main Street Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has launched more than 1,800 Main Street groups in the past 25 years.

Other winners of the \$2,500 award were Main Street groups in Frederick; Emporia, Kan.; New Iberia, La.; and Boston.

Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D) called Barracks Row "one of the most desirable areas in the city for shopping and dining" in a statement and said the revitalization effort was a model for other parts of the city.

Richard Moe, president of the National Trust, called Eighth Street "a genuine reflection of the dedication and hope that resides within each of its merchants, volunteers and residents."

Barracks Row is a bridge between the high-end residential enclaves of Capitol Hill and the underutilized Anacostia riverfront, which itself is slated for massive redevelopment over the next 20 years. The commercial district is a few blocks from the Arthur Capper/Carrollburg public housing complex, which is being redeveloped into a high-density mixed-income neighborhood, and the booming M Street corridor near the Navy Yard. The future stadium for the Washington Nationals will be within easy walking distance, as is the Capitol.

The strip, which is among the oldest commercial centers in the District, takes its name from the 200-year-old Marine Corps barracks on the east side of Eighth Street behind a red brick wall. The neighborhood thrived until after World War II, when jobs at the Navy Yard dwindled and flight to

the suburbs began. Construction of the freeway in the 1960s, followed by years of neglect and poverty, took a toll.

In the early 1990s, merchants formed the Barracks Row Business Alliance to try to revitalize the area. That group eventually sought support from the National Trust's Main Street Center and became the city's first Main Street organization in 1999.

Three years later, the District government launched its own Main Street program; today, Barracks Row is one of 11 Main Street groups in the city.

The organizations combine marketing, urban planning and lobbying of public officials to try to revive commercial nodes and preserve their histories.

"Communities can do it," said Linda Parke Gallagher, a neighborhood resident and president of Barracks Row Main Street. "They can pull themselves up by their bootstraps."

She said development of the corridor has brought some growing pains. For example, the Main Street group is working with residents to limit the number of restaurants on Barracks Row that offer music and dancing.

"It's still a residential neighborhood," Gallagher said.

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