Heading Home: The Chamber is Moving Back to Main Street

Main Street in Westminster is gearing up for a homecoming – one that's been nearly a decade in the making.

The Carroll County Chamber of Commerce is returning to Main Street September 1, 2011. The organization is moving into the storefront at 9 E. Main St. formerly occupied by Locust Books, which closed more than a year ago. "The Chamber needs to be on Main Street in the county seat – the heart of business," said Chamber president Mike McMullin.

The Chamber has resided on Main Street in Westminster several times in its 87 year history, most recently until 2002 when it lost its lease and moved to its present location in an office park on Corporate Center Court near the airport. The lease at the office park is up at the end of August, and McMullin saw the opportunity for the Chamber to get back to its business roots and relocate to an area that is more visible to the public and is surrounded by and within walking distance to local businesses. He said the new location will also allow the Chamber to be more visible with community events such as the Westminster Flower and Jazz Festival, Westminster Fallfest and the many holiday events that occur along Main Street between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The move is also a prudent fiscal measure for the organization. The space will be about 40% smaller, and the rent will be considerably less per year. Two offices and a meeting area in the existing 2,200 square foot office space are currently unused. The new space, at 1,340 square feet, will have offices for the three full-time chamber staff and a small meeting area. Many of the chamber's more than 400 members have large meeting and conference spaces that can be called upon for larger meeting space needs, such as board or committee meetings.

Main Street merchants are excited to see the Chamber return. Bill Schroeder, owner of Guilianova's Groceria next door to the new location, said there's not a downside to the Chamber coming back to Main Street. "The bookstore was a destination. People went out of their way to come to Main Street who would not normally come to Main Street," he said. "The Chamber will be a destination and will bring people downtown who wouldn't normally come downtown."

Main Street Westminster businesses have struggled the past few years as chains along the Route 140 corridor have commanded much of consumers' attention. Schroeder hopes the Chamber will be proactive about the struggles of Main Street businesses and that other businesses will begin to see downtown as a good place to locate. "We're really excited about it," he said. "We really are."

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