

5,200 Businesses Have Received Main Street Bounceback Grants

Written by Evers Press Wisconsin

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Gov. Evers announces City of Stoughton will also receive \$76,100 to support redevelopment of historic downtown building.

STOUGHTON — Gov. Tony Evers announced today that more than 5,200 businesses and nonprofits have been approved to receive a \$10,000 Main Street Bounceback Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to move into previously vacant commercial spaces throughout the state.



“Our Main Street Bounceback grants are helping transform downtowns from Stoughton to Superior and everywhere in between,” said Gov. Evers. “Since we began awarding these grants last August, more than 5,200 businesses have moved into empty storefronts or expanded their operations, and it has been great to see our Main Streets, small businesses, and their innovation thrive in communities across our state, including here in Stoughton.”

Gov. Evers has allocated \$75 million for 7,500 businesses to receive the grants, which are being awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis through WEDC’s regional development

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partners. Grants have been awarded to businesses in all 72 counties.

“Downtowns are so vital to making our Wisconsin communities attractive to residents and newcomers,” said WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. “There’s a sense of excitement as new businesses open and existing businesses grow, because when local businesses expand the entire community benefits.”

The governor provided an update on the Main Street Bounceback figures during a visit to Stoughton, where he also announced a \$76,100 Community Development Investment (CDI) grant from WEDC for the city of Stoughton to help rehabilitate the long-unoccupied Doughboy Building and open Grand Inspired, a home furnishing gallery and woodworking space which will help bolster Stoughton’s art scene.

The CDI grant supported necessary work to the Doughboy Building, including HVAC installations, window replacements, and a new roof to accommodate Grand Inspired. Aesthetically, the building remains mostly unchanged from its original 1972 look with glass siding on its East Main Street and South Sixth Street facades.

“There’s a lot of positive synergy right now, a lot of momentum with this sort of revitalization,” said Stoughton Mayor Tim Swadley. “We’re really trying to preserve our historic buildings downtown and expand our arts and entertainment district.”

Owner and developer Joanne Grassman had long sought out such a project. The opportunity presented itself in the Doughboy Building, which has been unoccupied and blighted for about eight years.

“I love the sense of history and groundedness that restoring historic buildings brings to a community,” said Grassman. “I think that’s an important part of a community, especially one like Stoughton which has always prided itself on its heritage.”

The Grand Inspired Artisan Home Gallery displays and sells what Grassman describes as “functional art,” including wood furniture, ceramics, metal products, and home goods. It offers a program called legacy gifts, which allows engaged couples to custom-order a table and have wedding guests contribute toward the cost. The gallery will also host a monthly pop-up shop focused on traditional art, with four to six artists’ work displayed on a Saturday afternoon.

Under the same roof is the Grand Inspired Woodworkers’ Maker Space. Widely tailored toward all types of visitors, the space will offer lessons for beginners as well as equipment for experienced, professional woodworkers. Visitors can make products ranging from bowls to tables, some of which will be sold at the Artisan Home Gallery. Gallery visitors can also watch the creation of some of the products.

“As shoppers comes into the gallery they’ll get an interactive experience with the maker space,” Grassman said. “We hope this builds an appreciation of the time, talent, and skill that goes into making these handmade products.”

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“The name—Grand Inspired—it really is that,” said Swadley. “This will be one of the things separating Stoughton from other communities, and I think other communities will see this and be inspired to do similar work.”

WEDC’s Community Development Investment Grant Program supports community development and redevelopment efforts, primarily in downtown areas. The matching grants are awarded based on the ability of applicants to demonstrate the economic impact of the proposed project, including public and private partnership development, financial need, and use of sustainable downtown development practices.

From the program’s inception in 2013 to date, WEDC has awarded nearly \$34.8 million in CDI grants to 166 communities for projects expected to generate more than \$517 million in capital investments statewide.