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CONTACT: CINDY HICKS

515-233-3472 OR 316-871-0837
director@amesdowntown.org

Plaque unveiling at City Hall tells the tale of the building's beginnings

Ames, Iowa—Nearly every building in downtown Ames has a story to tell and a unique history to uncover. Now the first of several plaques that deliver those narratives will be unveiled at a special ceremony at the Ames City Hall, 515 Clark, on Tuesday, April 28 at 11:30 a.m. The plaques are the result of two years of planning and the collaboration between the Historic Preservation Commission, the Ames Historical Society, the Main Street Cultural District, and Iowa State University.

“Ames is different from many other communities because we have a reason to come downtown,” said Roberta Vann, Historic Preservation Commission. “We have shops, places to eat, churches, banks, the post office, and city hall.”

The plaques, made in Pella, Iowa, are crafted out of zinc and will measure 10 inches by 12 inches. There’s a design depicting an architectural aspect of the building on each plaque, along with a brief description of the history of the building. Two students from the history department at ISU helped with researching the backgrounds of some of the structures.

“There are many historical accounts of things and we wanted to make sure the plaques were as accurate as possible,” said Sharon Wirth, Ames Historical Society. “Because of this, the research is taking a considerable amount of time.”

The Main Street Cultural District (MSCD) has supported this project from the beginning.

“Our historic downtown is the heart and soul of the Ames community,” said Judy Gilger, co-owner of Gilger Designs. “It is imperative that we preserve the stories of its magnificent buildings for future generations before those stories are lost.”

Gilger, who is on the MSCD Design Committee, partnered with the Historic Preservation Commission and the Historical Society to help them make valuable downtown connections to business and building owners.

“She knows the people who do business in downtown and was really valuable in talking up the project and getting people excited about it,” said Wirth. “Historic preservation groups, partnering with downtown businesses, make for a very cool collaboration.”

All three women discovered in the process that the history of downtown buildings is not really well known. Right now there are 15 plaques set to be installed on downtown buildings, including the one at city hall. The organizers of the project hope to do many more. Once that project is off

the ground, the next step will be implementing a QR code tour of the plaques that will take you to the buildings and give you even more history about each one.

“You have to look up to see it, but the architecture in downtown Ames is incredible,” said Wirth. “Historic preservation in Ames started in a residential area and it has taken people a little longer to realize that we need to preserve the historic buildings in downtown and get economic development and historic preservation teams working together.”

If you would like to know more about the plaque program you can email questions to director@amesdowntown.org.

The Main Street Cultural District was established on January 1, 2004. Its mission is to advance and promote downtown as the destination district in the heart of our community. To keep updated on MSCD happenings, become a fan of the Main Street Cultural District on Facebook, bookmark www.AmesDowntown.org, or contact our office at 515-233-3472. MSCD is an affiliate organization of the Ames Chamber of Commerce.

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