

Be careful, you might have to practice what you preach

Okay, imagine this. With my head in my hands, I mutter to myself the question, "How do I get myself into these things?" It is clear that I'm outside my element. I need help. That's where you come in. Let me explain.

Last November I attended the Williamsport Main Street Vision workshop. Main Street is a national movement to resuscitate the ailing business districts of small towns across America. Designed to make downtowns more attractive to shoppers, the program is largely a volunteer effort. The Main Street Vision workshop invited the public to weigh in on the future of Williamsport. Participants identified problems, offered solutions and generally discussed the condition of Williamsport's downtown business area.

In "An African-American Perspective" a monthly newsletter that I publish, I have accused the Black community of being too passive and too apathetic regarding civic matters. I exhorted that Blacks needed to be more engaged in community affairs. I chided Blacks to sit boldly at the table of



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policymaking decisions. Well, my words came back to haunt me. (What was I doing? How could I point a finger at someone else?) Not wanting to be hypocritical, I attended the Main Street Vision workshop. Of the roughly 100 people in attendance, as far as I could tell, I was the only African-American in the room.

I sat and listened as people expressed their concerns and listed goals for the city and the region. The focus was to find ways to get more shoppers into the Williamsport downtown area. Finally, I said that, occasionally, I found the service of some downtown merchants less than congenial. In one case, a store clerk's behavior was rude and disrespectful. I did not feel welcomed in the store. I attributed the behavior to prejudice and racism.

Another member of the audience

said that it wasn't racism. I bristled at his counter explanation. Anyway, I did my part. I spoke my piece and "represented" the Black community. Some may argue with my hubris as a self-proclaimed spokesperson for 4,000 Black souls in Williamsport. To that, I say, I am guilty.

With my deed done, I thought I could get away clean and slip out but Josh Trego, the new Williamsport Main Street manager, asked me to become a volunteer. What could I do? After reviewing information about the Main Street organization, I joined the Promotion Committee. (I figured I could offer my skills as a graphic artist in the revitalization of the city. I could design a brochure or something and meet some new people in the process.)

Well, as fate would have it, I've been selected to be the Williamsport Main Street Promotion Committee Chairman! (Yikes! I'm the type of guy that sits in the back of the room and finds fault with the leader. I'm the quiet analytical observer.) I hadn't counted on this. I felt a little bit overwhelmed. However, Josh assured me that everything would be fine.

Therefore, I need your help. I ask you, "How can we, the promotion committee, do a better job of promoting the city? How can we persuade customers to shop downtown? How can we assure people that center city is clean, safe, friendly and ready to do business?"

Also, how can we attract new businesses? How can we encourage existing storeowners to spruce up their aging facades? (The Main Street organization has grant money available for exterior renovations.)

Our local Main Street Organization is broken down into two main groups, regional and city. The regional group consists of volunteers from 5 towns: Hughesville, Jersey Shore, Montgomery, Montoursville and Muncy. Becky Fought is the Main Street Regional Coordinator. (If you live in the towns listed above, contact Becky at 447-6252 or bfought@williamsport.org.)

The city group covers Williamsport. Josh Trego is the Main Street Williamsport City Manager. Each town has subsets divided into four committees; they are, Organization Committee,

Design Committee, Economic Restructuring Committee and Promotion Committee. Each committee has specific tasks to reinvigorate the core business districts of each town.

So, if you want to help preserve Williamsport's historical architecture and assist in the building of Williamsport's future contact Josh at 320-4211 or JTrego@williamsport.org.

Now you know the whole truth, this is a shameless call for help. Specifically, we need additional volunteers. Please help me in promoting the best that our city has to offer. Help me to be the best Promotion Committee Chairperson that I could be. Help Williamsport to become Northcentral Pennsylvania's crown jewel again.

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