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Groups look to fundraising to keep afloat

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IONIA - With once-fruitful funding wells drying up and precious dollars harder to come by, local downtown development authorities and Main Street programs are relying more and more on fundraising efforts to raise ever-important funds.

"We could not do the things we do without the support of the community," Linda Curtis, Ionia Downtown Development Authority Director, said.

Curtis is no stranger to the concept of garnering community support to raise money.

She recently developed the Buckaroo Ball, a fundraising program aimed at raising money for repairs and improvements to the Ionia Theatre - a location DDA officials call an anchor to downtown Ionia.

"Our community has been so generous with an outpouring of support with in-kind and material donations," Curtis said of the latest fundraising effort, which is expected to have silent auctions, virtual horse racing and other events to benefit the entertainment venue.

According to Curtis, these fundraising efforts are important to her and other communities because other sources of funding and revenue have become scarce.

"A lot of funds from other sources have been cut," she said.

Ionia isn't the only local community utilizing fundraising to bolster downtown programs and operations, as organizers in Portland also rely on fundraising to raise money.

Patrick Reagan, Portland DDA Director and Main Street Manager, said the upcoming Oktoberfest celebration is an event designed to raise funds for the Portland Main Street program.

"We need to have them come to help us revitalize the core of downtown Portland," he said of the event.

Like Ionia's Buckaroo Ball, the Portland event is aimed at providing fun community activities including entertainment such as live music, as well as activities for children and even a race on the Portland River Trail.

In its second year, organizers hope to have a more comprehensive event to raise money for the Main Street program.

"We're hoping to bring a lot of people down here and have a pretty good time," Reagan said.

In addition to raising needed funds for Main Street and DDA programs, these events also provide those in the community and areas surrounding it an idea of what is being offered, whether it be the Ionia Theatre for movies and live events or downtown Portland.

"We've got such a cool downtown," Reagan said. "We need people to know about it."

He said oftentimes, people get off of I-96 and consider stores there such as the gas stations and fast food restaurants to be downtown, however that is not the case.

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