

## History and Mission of the Ardmore Business District Authority

In September of 1993, Lower Merion Township established the Ardmore Business District Authority (now called The Ardmore Initiative) as a special assessment district according to the provisions of the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Act of 1945. This followed a successful three-year Main Street program (1990-1993) wherein a long-range planning process determined the continued improvements and programs desired by business and property owners within the district. The Authority was approved for five years in 1993 and renewed in 1998 for another five years. In the summer of 2003, Ardmore commercial property owners once again granted the continuation of the Business District Authority for another five years.

As a Business District Authority, our mission is to provide a balanced mix of businesses and services in a thriving commercial district. The Ardmore Initiative is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of 11 - 17 members. Board members are nominated by the Authority and appointed by the Lower Merion Township Commissioners. Day-to-day operations are coordinated by an Executive Director.

## Following Our Five-Year Plan

The five-year plan of the Ardmore Business District has the following goals, set at the time of our 2003 renewal:

- To continue ongoing planning and construction of streetscape amenities and related improvements for the district and to maintain our existing streetscape amenities.
- To continue to seek funding from public and private sources to implement ongoing and projected improvements and programs and to obtain and manage the use of funds already allocated from state, federal, and local sources.
- To continue programs designed to enhance the appearance of the district and to promote the district to shoppers, business owners, and investors.
- To continue to provide professional management for the district and advocacy on behalf of the district's property and business owners.

The following are some of the activities we have accomplished in 2005 toward these goals. As a result of our work in successfully continuing Ardmore's revitalization activities, we were recognized in 2004 by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development as a "**Main Street Achiever**" community, enabling us to priority in some grant programs. In 2005, the Authority was **accredited by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center**.

**Streetscape Improvements** The Ardmore Initiative has spearheaded numerous streetscape improvement projects with the goal of beautifying the town, calming traffic, improving lighting and safety, and enhancing the pedestrian experience. Since our inception, new sidewalks, brick pavers, curbs, trees, improved lighting, signage and on-street parking have been installed on Lancaster Avenue, Cricket Avenue, Station, Anderson and Rittenhouse Place.

All of our streetscape improvement projects have been coordinated and completed with the assistance of Lower Merion Township. We have leveraged our assessment income and annual golf outing funding to provide matching funds for substantial federal transportation dollars, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development grants, Montgomery County Revitalization grants, and funds and in-kind services from Lower Merion Township for these projects.

A major streetscape improvement project completed in 2005 was the enhanced pedestrian alley linking Lancaster Avenue to an underutilized parking lot on the north side. The alley, between **Past\*Present\*Future** at 15 W. Lancaster and **Merion Art and Repro** at 17 W. Lancaster, was repaved, painted, and new benches, trash receptacles were added. Directional signage to parking and shopping was installed at the end of the year. The addition of banners and fencing to hide the dumpsters in the alley are expected to be installed in 2006. This project was partially financed by the Montgomery County Revitalization Program.

In 2005, the Ardmore Initiative continued to provide and maintain the many streetscape amenities that grace our town, such as our **gateway and seasonal banner program, our Historic District signage, Ardmore "A" lights, hanging baskets, trash receptacles, benches, and the Schuffele Plaza bus shelter**. In 2005, we added attractive background inserts to our community bulletin board, where residents and business owners learn about the



Ardmore Initiative's programs and upcoming events. Also in 2005, in a partnership with Lower Merion Township, the Ardmore Initiative purchased new "gateway" signs for the ends of Lancaster Avenue, in front of **Republic First Bank** at 233 E. Lancaster and **McConaghy Funeral Home** at 328 W. Lancaster.

Another major maintenance project completed in 2005 was the **repainting of our ornamental shepherd's crook light poles and bollards**, most of which were originally installed in 1996. The Ardmore Initiative also purchased **new logo banners** for the district, as our seasonal ones were beginning to show signs of wear. Another successful initiative begun in 2005 was our partnership with the **Junior League of Philadelphia** to sell Ardmore FameBricks to Junior League members to commemorate their new store and headquarters at 25 W. Lancaster Ave. FameBricks continue to be a way for residents and business owners to acknowledge loved ones and special events.

**Ardmore Redevelopment and Retail Strategy.** Since the Ardmore Redevelopment process began in 2002, Ardmore Initiative staff and Board members have been active participants. Unfortunately, since that time, miscommunications and misunderstandings about the goals and processes of redevelopment have pitted neighbor against neighbor. The Ardmore Initiative will continue to be an active force to revitalize the downtown district for *all* of our businesses and to provide the best possible shopping environment for our surrounding residential base.

This past year, the Ardmore Initiative received a **\$25,000 DCED grant** for a market analysis of our district. Lower Merion Township, in a separate initiative, hired Economics Research Associates/Downtown Works to conduct a retail strategy study of downtown Ardmore. So that efforts were not duplicated, the Ardmore Initiative, with permission from DCED, chose to use that grant towards the Township's study. In return, the Township has agreed to share the cost with the Ardmore Initiative of a part-time Retail Coordinator. A major recommendation of the ERA/Downtown Works study was to hire this coordinator to actively recruit appropriate businesses to our downtown district, following the retail strategy plan. In the summer of 2005, the Ardmore Initiative hired **Heidi Tirjan**, a Gulph Mills resident, as our part-time Retail Coordinator. She started work in September and has been meeting with Ardmore property owners and business owners, as well as traveling the area prospecting for new businesses.

Another recommendation of the retail consultant was that the Ardmore Initiative move to a new storefront office to be accessible to visitors, residents, and potential investors. The "retail office" is intended to be a more visible example of how retail spaces can look in Ardmore and a showcase for recruiting new retail prospects. In December 2005, the Ardmore Initiative moved to a new larger space at **56 E. Lancaster Avenue**. The Board chose a new name to replace *Ardmore 2000* and the new Ardmore Initiative was born. This transition was also marked by a change in Executive Directors. **Colette Speakman**, the Executive Director since 1999, left the organization in the fall of 2005 after the birth of her second child. **Christine Ottow**, who was hired in the summer of 2005 to be the Assistant Director, replaced her and served as Executive Director for the remainder of 2005.

**Fundraising.** Our primary fundraiser, the Annual *Ardmore Swings!* Golf Outing has raised thousands of dollars towards the completion of the Ardmore streetscape project, as well as future improvements to downtown Ardmore. The Third Annual outing was held on September 19, 2005 at the newly renovated White Manor Country Club. **Fred Beans Ford/Lincoln/Mercury of Wynnewood** was our lead sponsor. Other major sponsors of the event were **Suburban Square, Bryn Mawr Trust, Wells Fargo Mortgage Company, Firsttrust Bank, Armen Chevrolet/Buick/Saab, Martin Main Line Honda, Hillier Architecture, Sovereign Bank, Raynes McCarty Trial and Appellate Lawyers, Mahoney Realty, Beneficial Savings Bank, King's Collar Shirtmakers, Kenneth S. Gross Investment Group, Axis Construction Services**, as well as a generous anonymous donor. As in our first two years, many Ardmore businesses, small and large, participated in some way, with sponsorships and raffle prize donations. Over \$34,000 was raised from the 2005 outing.

**Grant Programs for Business and Property Owners.** Through grant funding from the Montgomery County Revitalization Program, Ardmore Initiative continued in 2005 to provide matching grants to business owners in our district for commercial façade improvements. The program receives 85% of compensation from the County, with 15% coming from the Ardmore Initiative. In 2005, grants or allocations were made for the following businesses to complete façade renovations: **Anthony C. and Co., Human Zoom Bikes and Boards, The Mud Room, Hawk Properties (for 5 E. Lancaster Ave. - Liberty Travel/Leisure Fitness /Peace a Pizza/Taglio/Ardmore Station Café) and MilkBoy Coffee**. At the suggestion of the Township's retail consultant, the cap for the façade program was increased to \$20,000 to encourage complete building renovations. MilkBoy Coffee and the owners of 5 E. Lancaster took advantage of this increase to complete overhauls of those facades. By the end of 2005, we found that our funds were depleted and applied to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for a **\$50,000 grant to continue the façade program**. (We learned in early 2006 that this grant was approved and the façade grant program is expected to continue in 2006).

The Ardmore Initiative also spearheaded an effort, funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the Montgomery County Revitalization Program, to encourage Ardmore property owners to convert vacant and under-utilized space above stores or offices for affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income households. As of 2005, this program is now administered by Lower Merion Township.



In 2005, the Ardmore Initiative also successfully applied for CDBG funding, administered through Lower Merion Township, to allow property owners to receive small grants to make their buildings handicapped accessible.

**Professional Management and Marketing** A major part of the Ardmore Initiative's responsibility to the business community is keeping it informed of events, new Township policies, new business openings, and other news. We do this through a **quarterly newsletter, occasional broadcast faxes, bulletin board postings,** and our **web site, www.ardmore-pa.org**. We also promote Ardmore businesses through **co-op newspaper and radio advertising** (with the Ardmore Business Association), **business directories,** antique guides, and restaurant guides, which are circulated to Ardmore customers and the community at no cost. In addition, we work closely with the ABA to plan events to draw potential customers to Ardmore. In 2005, these included the annual **Easter Egg Hunt,** and summer **Outdoor Movie Nights,** as well as sponsorship of the annual National Night Out held in Suburban Square.

In other management activities, the Ardmore Initiative funds and coordinates **landscaping work** each spring, **Green Machine operators,** and the **spray weeding** of sidewalks each spring. On behalf of the district, the Ardmore Initiative works closely with Lower Merion Township staff to address policy issues regarding transportation, code enforcement, parking and infrastructure. We assist new businesses with information about finding space and doing business in Ardmore, and with the HARB application process.

<b>The Ardmore Initiative Revenues and Expenses, 2005</b>		
Operating Budget	2005 Budget	2005 Actual
<b>Revenues</b>		
Assessment Collections	\$135,000	\$147,000
Golf Outing Income	\$48,000	\$62,000
Other	\$2,800	\$2,500
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$185,800</b>	<b>\$211,500</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Planning and Management	\$94,200	\$79,076
Golf Outing Expenses	\$26,000	\$26,027
Professional Fees	\$15,500	\$20,562
Economic Restructuring	\$20,500	\$16,814
Streetscape	\$90,500	\$48,970
Other Retail/Community Initiatives	\$2,000	\$18,130
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$248,700</b>	<b>\$209,579</b>

Operating Budget figures do not include 2005 grant income, including streetscape grants for pedestrian alley improvements, façade improvement matching grants, upper-level residential conversion program, etc.

The Ardmore Initiative assessment income comes from a 35 mill surtax on assessed value of property.

The Ardmore Initiative undergoes a complete financial audit each year.

**Welcome New Businesses in 2005**

Ardmore welcomed some exciting new businesses to the district this past year:

*Buckman's Ski Shop*  
*Eterna Bella Spa*  
*Janice Martin Couture*  
*Jeanne's Delicatessan*  
*Rae and Co. Salon*  
*Relax Massage Therapy*  
*Republican Committee of LM and Narberth*  
*Shanti Medical Spa & Wellness Center*  
*Study Smart, Inc.*  
*Sun Catchers Tanning Salon*  
*Swain Techs*  
*Taglio Hair Design*  
*Winger's*

Other businesses moved, expanded or renovated:

*Human Zoom Bikes and Boards*  
*John Henry's Pub*  
*Past \* Present \* Future*