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Transforming Iowa Towns: The Impact of Hometown Pride

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In the heart of Clinton County, the small town of Delmar — population 542 — serves as a shining

example of the transformative impact of Keep Iowa Beautiful’s Hometown Pride program.

Just six years ago, Delmar faced numerous challenges, including a stagnant economy, dilapidated commercial buildings and a lack of new businesses for two decades. However, through the collaborative efforts of local leaders, residents and Clinton County’s dedicated Hometown Pride coach, Francis Boggus, Delmar has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis.

When Delmar joined the Hometown Pride program in 2017, they had three businesses and a collection of decaying commercial structures. Community leaders were motivated for change but uncertain about the path forward. The Hometown Pride program, with its five-year coaching model, provided the guidance and support needed to move forward with the town’s revitalization.

“Delmar has been a significant success story for the many improvements that have occurred in the past seven years since Hometown Pride was established,” Boggus said. “The stakeholders believed that their community was stagnant, and they were motivated to come up with a project that would serve as a catalyst for progress.”

The first major project chosen was the creation of a splash pad, a long-desired amenity for the community. Despite the intimidating \$110,000 price tag, Boggus, along with the local steering committee, rallied the community to raise the necessary funds. This initiative not only succeeded in bringing the splash pad to life in 2019 but also became a catalyst for further positive change.

The success of the splash pad project instilled confidence in the community and new businesses began to invest in Delmar.

Since the splash pad opened, the town has witnessed over \$2,000,000 in construction projects, including businesses, apartments and the restoration of old commercial buildings, among other development projects.

“When the (splash pad) project was completed in a year and a half, that success showed others that people working together could have an impact in the community,” Boggus said. “And that encouraged others to start businesses, such as the grill/tavern, the ice cream shop, the miniature golf course, the rehabilitation of a derelict building into a four-unit apartment and the renovation of the historic railroad depot.”

Scott Derby, owner and operator of the ice cream shop and miniature golf course, credits his confidence in establishing new businesses in Delmar to the success of the local Hometown Pride program.

“Hometown Pride has been a wonderful experience in Delmar, Iowa,” Derby said. “When I first purchased a project building in Delmar, within days everyone had introduced themselves and placed a very uplifting sign in the front yard that read Hometown Pride.”

The small gesture on behalf of Hometown Pride made Derby feel “immediately a part of a community who cares about its history and future.”

“While a simple sign may not seem like a big deal to most, it made all the difference for my family and businesses to continue investing and helping to do our part restoring an already-awesome town,” Derby added.



Derby's businesses weren't the only ones to make history in Delmar. The restoration of the old city hall, now a tavern serving alcoholic beverages and food, marked the first business to offer sit-down meals in Delmar in over two decades. The Delmar Hometown Pride committee has also led the renovations of the historic rail depot, restoration of a historic mural, and construction of a disc golf course. Successes like these are proof of the Hometown Pride program's impact, according to Boggus.



Miniature Golf

Ice Cream Shop

“The splash pad demonstrated to the residents of Delmar that a major project could be planned and implemented that would attract young people, adults and children to an attraction that has a tangible benefit to the community,” Boggus said. “This was the first new attraction in Delmar in over 20 years. People want to join and be part of an effort that is successful, and the splash pad proved that stagnation in the community was not permanent, and change was possible.”

Delmar's journey with Hometown Pride exemplifies the program's core goals: empower local leadership, inspire economic investment, build pride and bring new amenities to small towns. The collaborative approach, involving local government, businesses, volunteers and Keep Iowa Beautiful, has proven instrumental in achieving sustainable community development.

While Delmar's success is remarkable, it is just one chapter in the broader story of Keep Iowa Beautiful's Hometown Pride program. The program has worked with 107 Iowa towns since its inception in 2012, operating on the principle that the long-term cultural and economic vitality of a community is crucial for its survival and growth. Hometown Pride seeks to enhance communities through a five-year coaching commitment,

walking alongside qualifying Iowa communities and coaching them toward a more vibrant, stable future.



Apartment development

The Hometown Pride program operates on the belief that community transformation is a collective effort that begins on a local level.

“The Keep Iowa Beautiful Hometown Pride program gives the participating communities a chance to have a facilitator work with the residents and encourage them to work together and sets goals, objectives and timelines for community projects the residents choose to create,” Boggus said. “The program allows and invites all participants to gather and give their input on what is needed in the community, by residents, and not outsiders. The stakeholders decide what is needed for their community, and the HTP community coach helps in facilitating the committee in designing plans, funding and implementation of the project.”

Hometown Pride success stories, like that of Delmar, highlight the program's ability to empower communities to take charge of their future, fostering economic growth, community pride and a sense of unity while also developing local leadership.

“Residents learn by doing, and this gives stakeholders a chance to be part of the planning and promotion of the project,” Boggus said. “In Delmar, several younger people have stepped up to participate in HTP and run for city council because of the new energy that HTP has brought to the community. Leadership is developed by giving the stakeholders an opportunity to take ownership of the planned projects and direct the creation of the projects from start to finish.” <<

Keep Iowa Beautiful is currently seeking new communities interested in Hometown Pride. For more information about the Hometown Pride program or to learn how your community can become involved, visit keepiowabeautiful.org.

