

Lynchburg Liven's Up

The volunteer group Lynch's Landing leads the cheering section as this Virginia community rediscovers its downtown. By **Joe Rada**

Hard hats and bucket trucks don't exactly come with the territory for your typical civic booster. Yet Angela Hamilton, executive director of the nonprofit volunteer group Lynch's Landing—which promotes downtown Lynchburg, Virginia, any way it can—dons the former and climbs into the latter anyway.

Hoisted high into the branches of a tree, she strings some of the thousands of twinkling lights that brighten Morrison Garden for the holidays.

"When you direct an organization such as Lynch's Landing, you find yourself almost anywhere doing almost anything to support the cause," Angela says of this uplifting experience.

Downtown Rebound Getting things done could serve as a slogan for Lynch's Landing, a Virginia Main Street Program whose title reflects the town's beginnings. (Founder John Lynch established a ferry service here in 1757.) For nearly a decade the group has improved greenspaces, backed arts and cultural efforts, attracted new stores, hosted parties in a park it helped create, and more.

Devoted members write grants; pull strings; match developers with buildings in need of improvement; and put benches, bus shelters, and trash cans where needed. In general the group leads the cheering section for all things downtown.

Let's Count the Ways Lynch's Landing focuses on the downtown area from Fifth Street to U.S. 29, whose bridges across the James River form neat bookends, and from the river to Court Street (roughly



ABOVE, LEFT: Monument Terrace, a steep 139-step landmark leading up to the historic Court House Museum, looks better than ever thanks to a restoration coordinated by the Lynch's Landing group. **LEFT:** Executive director Angela Hamilton strings holiday lights in Morrison Garden, an inviting place that Lynch's Landing counts among its successes.

10 blocks by 5 blocks). Once pocked with empty storefronts and dilapidated buildings, today the place is far livelier. Restaurants, shops, a boutique hotel, loft residences, a farmers market, a children's museum, artists' studios, theaters, and more add to a sense of reawakening.

"Getting Monument Terrace fixed up is one of our biggest accomplishments," Angela says of a massive stairway lined

BELOW: A cobblestone portion of Ninth Street serves as a link between Amazement Square (right), a hands-on children's museum in a former warehouse; Riverviews Artspace (left), holding art studios, galleries, and more; and the Monument Terrace stairs.

with war memorials that climbs a hill to the historic Court House Museum. It allows a great view of cobblestone streets that lead to the river. "It just needed restoration. Lynch's Landing aided in the fundraising efforts to make it shine again."

The same goes for Morrison Garden, a cluster of trees, shrubs, and lawn formerly unnoticed by people streaming past in cars. "We pushed to make it more of a park and not just a glorified traffic triangle," Angela says. "Now it's a real gateway."

Taking Off "We've reached a critical mass, and it's unstoppable," says Marjette Glass, a Lynch's Landing board member and director of economic development for Lynchburg. "In the last four or five years, at least 50 buildings have been renovated. The number of restaurants opening and lofts being occupied and attractions coming online is incredible. Fifteen years ago, you'd be lucky to find a few people walking downtown. Now you'll see hundreds

on a normal day and thousands during an event. It really has taken off."

There's always another goal to progress toward, of course. "We're constantly asking ourselves what else we can do to make life better here," Angela says. "We want to make downtown Lynchburg a destination not only for people to visit but also for people who will want to make downtown their home." ●

Lynch's Landing: 1023 Commerce Street, Lynchburg, VA 24504. Visit www.downtownlynchburg.com, or call (434) 528-3950.

Come On Down

Lynch's Landing is best known for the fun events it organizes.

- **Holiday Carriage Rides:** Horse-drawn carriages weave through town in December.
- **Downtown Walkabouts:** Tours give visitors a close look at existing shops and available office or loft space.
- **Friday Cheers:** Friday evenings from May to August bring thousands to Riverfront Festival Park to eat, drink, and hear bands.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOSHUA CARPENTER

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