

Revitalization work draws to close

by JODI DEAL • Staff Writer
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POUND — Downtown buildings are painted, outfitted with new awnings and signs, and situated along new sidewalks.

Streets are freshly paved and striped. Beneath them, water pipes and other infrastructure have been replaced.

A few finishing touches need to be put on a handful of buildings, Mayor Sarah "Jackie" Gilliam said Thursday, but for all intents and purposes, the construction phase of Pound's downtown revitalization project is finished.

However, Gilliam hopes the real revitalization is just getting started.

LONG-TERM PROJECT

The town won a \$700,000 community development block grant to fund the project in 2007. In the years since, it has won other grants and low-interest loans to fund work on water and sewer systems alongside improvements to streets, sidewalks and storefronts.



Downtown revitalization projects like the one in Pound, and others underway in nearby communities like Wise, aren't just about fresh paint, pavement and pipes. When the project began in earnest, consultants helped the town create a new logo and slogan, and worked with citizens to identify local strengths to play up.

The idea is to stimulate a struggling downtown's rebirth by eliminating blight — ugly, run-down buildings — while focusing on getting customers to shop there, and bringing visitors to town through events.





So far, Pound has had success with a weekly jam session at town hall called "Pickin' In Pound". Each Thursday night, musicians from around the region show up for a little music and food. Gilliam says she's seen as many as 10 musicians at a time, not just from Virginia, but also Kentucky and Tennessee, improvising on stage together.



Pound Heritage Days saw good turnout this year, Gilliam said, despite heavy downtown construction.



"We weren't even finished yet, but people came together and had a good time," Gilliam said, noting that more people than ever volunteered to help with the event this year. New people are getting involved in community events, she added, which is key to keep the revitalization ball rolling.

PHYSICAL UPGRADES

Gilliam is pleased as punch with the attractive facelifts buildings have received, and says townfolk are, too. People enjoy the new sign on the Masonic lodge, a colorful barber shop and the fresh look of HRW, which is right in the heart of the 17-storefront project area.



Does she see the project as a success?

"Absolutely," Gilliam said, without hesitation.

When the project began, three of the storefronts that got new facades were empty. Now, five are. Businesses have come and gone during the project, Gilliam said.



"I just hope and pray people will want to come to Pound and invest in the town," Gilliam said. She noted that the bleak economic picture in recent years,

not just in Pound but across the United States, may have hurt the town's chances for that kind of investment.

However, there's hope, as she sees it. Gilliam points to Clisso's Deli in the old Saba building as a success story. The business closed down at one point during heavy revitalization construction, but is now experiencing booming business. The same goes for the Pixie drive-in, she added.

On the other end of town, a rundown former garage has been spiffed up and turned into an indoor yard sale business. That was a big improvement, and it was undertaken by private citizens, not the revitalization effort.

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