

Spring 2025

## The Canopy That Connects Us All

The Caras Park Pavilion is getting a much-needed refresh! The Caras Park Canopy Project will replace the aging canopy, re-paint the structure, and continue the build out of the Beartracks Underbridge Playspace—ensuring this downtown landmark remains a vibrant gathering space for years to come.

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Athena Photograph

## Sunny Days Ahead: Downtown Summer Activities

Missoula comes alive in the summer, buzzing with outdoor recreation and cultural events in Downtown and Caras Park. Kicking off the season, the 31st annual Garden City BrewFest on May 3 celebrates craft beer and community while marking progress on the Beartracks Underbridge Playground. That same weekend, the Clark Fork River Market returns to East Caras Park, bringing fresh local flavors downtown.

On June 4, the Out to Lunch Summer Series launches its 39th season, filling Wednesdays with live music and family fun through August. Thursdays heat up with Downtown ToNight, starting June 5, featuring over 30 local artists at the weekly art market. Collectively, these events draw 100,000+ visitors each year, fueling the energy and spirit of Downtown Missoula.

The season crescendos with River City Roots Festival, Missoula's signature celebration, on August 22-23. Be part of the action—volunteer or explore upcoming events at [www.missouladowntown.com](http://www.missouladowntown.com).

Thanks to dedicated donors and volunteers, Downtown Missoula thrives as a hub of culture, connection, and community.

## DRAW Project

Learn more about the new art installation set to go up this summer in Downtown Missoula.

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# From the President

## MDF Board President Rob Fleming: Synergy One Lending LLC



Spring in Missoula! Though we're not always sure it will stay, we are offered glimmers of hope and signs of new beginnings. This is the great shoulder season we grind through each year. Finding your balance can be tough, but who can beat mountain biking, skiing and enjoying Downtown Missoula all in the same weekend!

I joined the Missoula Downtown Foundation (MDF) Board of Directors three years ago and serve as President this year. It's an honor to work alongside amazing people who selfishly give their time to make our downtown the epicenter and heartbeat of our community. I have learned so much about how downtown Missoula "works" and what it takes to make it something we are all so proud of. Our downtown is a reflection of current leadership and past generations of hard working Missoulians with unbelievable vision.

A lifelong Missoulian, I've always loved downtown and felt at home when I cross the river heading north. I've had the pleasure of raising my two daughters in Missoula, and their lives have been shaped by downtown experiences, starting from their very first days at Dragon's Hollow and the Carousel.

As we celebrate the 50th year of the Missoula Downtown Association, we are gearing up for a very special campaign to replace the 28-year-old canopy on the Caras Park Pavilion, as well as a full repainting of the structure. It's impossible to imagine Downtown Missoula without the Caras Park Pavilion! This project will add to some wonderful improvements along Caras Park and the riverfront in the last two years, including the Beartracks Underbridge Playground, the new terrace at Brennan's Wave, the pavilion lighting and the awesome shade canopies. Along with wonderful murals and of course the flower baskets and holiday decorations, these represent just some of the projects we fundraise for that make our downtown what it is today.

There are many ways to help support downtown! Our Caras Canopy Campaign kicks off in April, you can also support Downtown via the annual Missoula Gives campaign May 1-2, or stop by Garden City BrewFest on Saturday May 3 where we will have a booth. Our giving season extends throughout the year, so if you would like to be in touch with us about a direct gift, we are happy to meet. It takes community to keep our downtown strong, vibrant and a place for all Missoulians. Thank you for your support, have a joyful spring and I'll see you downtown!



## CARRIE HARPER JOINS DOWNTOWN TEAM AS DIRECTOR OF GIVING



Carrie Harper joined the Downtown Missoula Partnership in March as the Director of Giving, bringing a background in education, nonprofit leadership, and fundraising. She leads donor development, capital campaigns, and fundraising efforts for the organization.

Originally from a military family, Harper earned a degree in Communication Studies and French from Hanover College (Indiana) before serving in the Peace Corps in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa. She moved to Montana in 2003 to pursue an M.S. in Environmental Studies from The University of Montana, focusing on community education.

For 17 years, she has worked as an educator and program director in Missoula, with roles at Clark Fork School, Sussex School, and Learning with Meaning. In 2022, she founded the Montana Folk School, serving as its administrator for three years. She is also an experienced curriculum developer, fundraiser, consultant, and grant writer.

Outside of work, she enjoys trail running, gardening, crafting, and exploring Montana with her partner, Willis, her two sons, Isaac and Gabriel, and their two furry friends.

Harper can be reached at 406-543-4238 or [carrie@missouladowntown.com](mailto:carrie@missouladowntown.com). She is currently leading the Caras Park Capital Campaign to replace the pavilion canopy and repaint the structure.

# Giving in Action: 2024 Annual Report

## MDF 2024 Highlights

- Funded two new Downtown murals with the Arts & Culture Impact Grants: The **Dorothy Dragon** at 131 West Alder and **Free Flow** at 218 E. Main.
- Hung the 2021 MAM Teen Art Project on the northside of the Central Park Garage
- Served as the fiscal sponsor for Festival of the Dead, the Downtown Riverside Art Walls (DRAW) Project, and the Western Montana Santa Flyover
- Established a Downtown Merchandise program with branded apparel and gifts

**\$260,000**

generated from 406 license plate

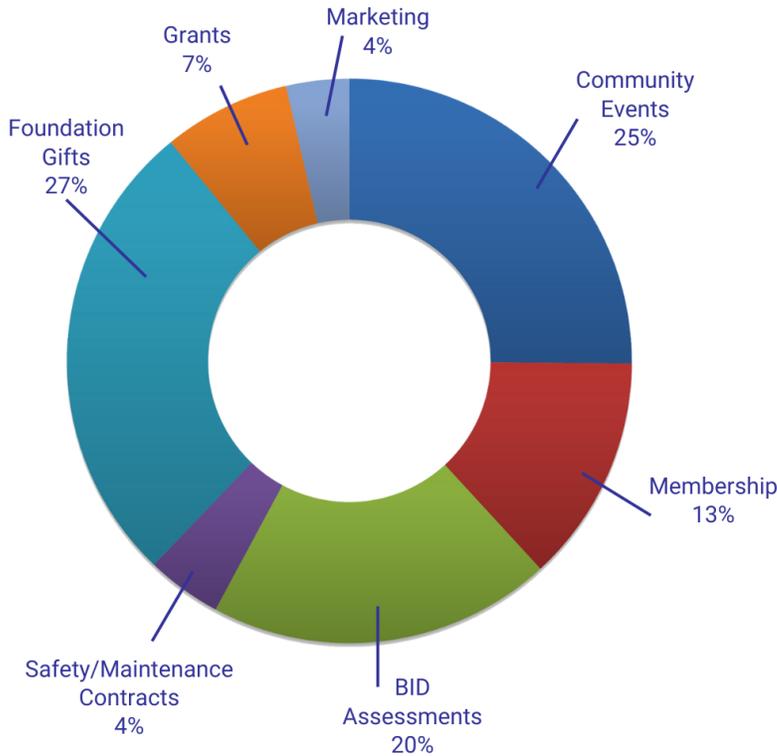
**\$235,000**

in donations to support  
Downtown Projects & Programs

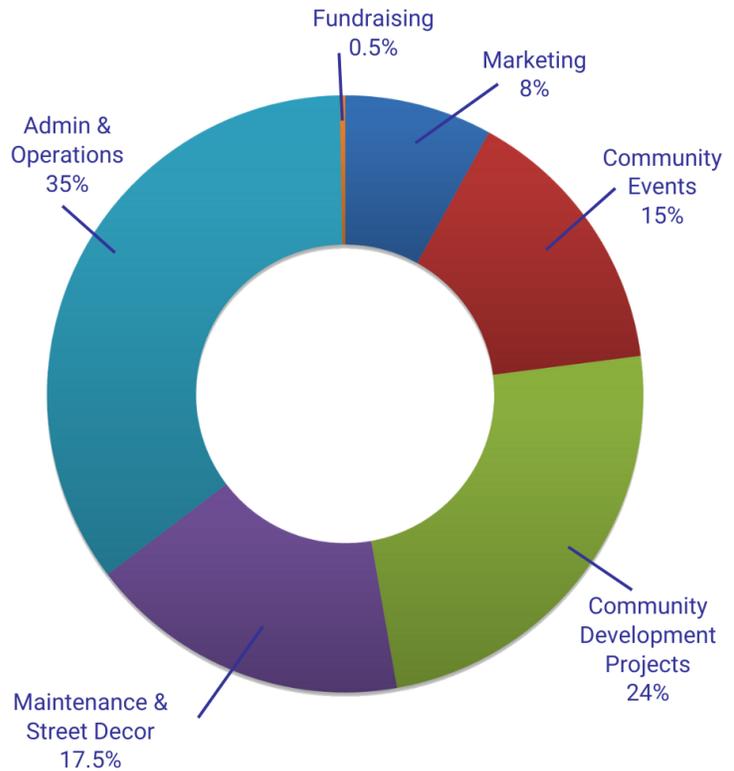
**\$35,000**

in grants for Downtown Missoula

## DMP TOTAL REVENUES \$2,234,674



## DMP TOTAL EXPENSES \$1,980,799



**MISSOULA  
DOWNTOWN**  
CONNECTING OUR  
COMMUNITY

DOWNTOWNMISSOULAPARTNERSHIP

# 2025 Caras Canopy Project

## Renewing the Heart of Missoula

As a landmark of Downtown Missoula, the Caras Park Pavilion has been central to Missoula's outdoor gatherings for over 40 years, hosting 500,000+ annual visitors since 1997. The Downtown Missoula Partnership contracts with the city to manage, maintain, and enhance Caras Park, the city's most treasured downtown park. After nearly three decades of use, the Caras Park Pavilion needs renewal to continue serving our community. The canopy, exceeding its 15-year lifespan at 28 years old, shows wear and tear. Assessments reveal canvas deterioration, reduced weather protection, and potential safety issues. The steel framework exhibits weathering and corrosion, requiring repainting. The Missoula Downtown Foundation is currently focused on securing funding for the Caras Park Canopy Project. This project, budgeted at \$500,000, includes replacing the canopy with durable materials to withstand Montana's climate, a full structural repaint with weather-resistant coatings, and additional play features to the adjacent Beartracks Underbridge Playspace. Local Missoula company, Fabricon, will oversee the new canopy fabrication and installation. Construction begins in October 2025, targeting completion by spring 2026 for the summer events season. The renewed Caras Park Pavilion will enhance Missoula's downtown experience with improved weather protection, modernized aesthetics, and increased functionality. This project helps to preserve our premier downtown park as a place to celebrate, gather, and play. Your contribution will help enhance the Heart of Missoula for many generations!

As of March 2025, the Missoula Downtown Foundation has secured \$250,000 in contributions from businesses and individuals, bringing us closer to our \$500,000 fundraising goal. We're halfway there and need your support to reach the finish line! You can contribute to this project in a manner that suits you through a one-time gift or a 3-year pledge. By supporting this project, you are investing in the economic, social, and cultural well-being of Downtown Missoula. Your donation will make a significant difference in preserving the charm and vibrancy of our community! To donate, visit: [donations.missouladowntown.com](https://donations.missouladowntown.com).

The Caras Park canopy is Missoula's canopy that connects us all.





Jake Treece

## THE EVOLUTION OF BEARTRACKS UNDERBRIDGE PLAYSPACE

What was once a dreary parking lot beneath Beartracks Bridge has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past two years, evolving into a vibrant community space brimming with activity, color, and creativity. Thanks to the generosity of donors the Beartracks Underbridge Playspace has become a welcoming hub for Missoulians of all ages.

The space now has a variety of activities, including a basketball hoop, picnic tables, bike racks, table tennis, and cornhole boards—elements that encourage play, connection, and a sense of community. Adding to the energy of the space, local artist Ann Karp of Sideways Gaze has brought it to life with striking artwork, covering the ground and pillars with bold, dynamic designs that infuse the area with vibrancy.

One of the most unexpected yet delightful additions to the revitalization effort has been the transformation of the Caras Park dumpsters. Karp has reimagined these everyday objects, turning them into works of art with vivid colors and imaginative designs, proving that beauty can be found in even the most unexpected places.

The evolution of Beartracks Underbridge is far from over. Upcoming enhancements include colored lighting elements, a climbing bay, and a skate feature—each contributing to the ongoing growth of this dynamic community destination. As these improvements continue, the Underbridge Playspace stands as a testament to the power of creativity, collaboration, and community investment.

## Placemaking & Wayfinding Throughout Downtown Missoula



In alignment with the Missoula Comprehensive Wayfinding Plan finalized in 2013, Downtown Missoula has expanded its wayfinding system with six additional kiosks, bringing the total to ten, including those along the Missoula Legacy Trail. Strategically placed throughout the Heart of Downtown, these kiosks serve as both navigational aids and educational touchpoints, enhancing the sense of place for residents and visitors alike.

Each kiosk features an interpretation panel with historical information on one side and a detailed map on the other, helping people understand where they are and how their location connects to Missoula's rich past. These kiosks were designed with inclusivity in mind, aiming to reflect a broad range of stories and perspectives, shedding light on lesser-known histories that have shaped the city. Themes explored in the kiosks include everything from Missoula's automobile industry to its once-thriving red-light district, ensuring a diverse and engaging representation of local history.

The completion of this project in March 2025 marks another step towards making downtown more accessible, informative, and engaging. Whether you're a longtime local or a first-time visitor, these kiosks help create a deeper connection to Missoula's vibrant past and present.

# Downtown Riverside Art Walls (DRAW) Project

It's already been five years since Northwestern Energy presented their plans to upgrade the downtown electrical substation including the installation of 15' high concrete walls to replace the fencing.

Since then, the DRAW team members have been busy fundraising, curating, researching, writing and processing mural panels, and we cannot wait to bring this amazing project, focusing on local and culturally significant Indigenous art, to our downtown.

Participating artists are poets Debra Magpie Earling, Vic Charlo and April Charlo, and visual artists Frank Finley, Aspen Decker, David Dragonfly, John Isaiah Pepion and Rachel Two Teeth-Pichardo. Additionally, Cameron Decker is providing valuable historical research, and project partner Missoula Parks and Rec's Lucy Rummel has been indispensable with graphic design assistance.

Currently, the mural processing phase is in full swing! Fifty-six, yes 56, mural pieces for Phase 1 (S. Pattee St.) are being mounted onto paneling and coated to protect from UV exposure and graffiti. Potet Construction has been approved for the project and will begin installing panels this spring as a generous in-kind donation!

The DRAW Project is fortunate to have the support of our fiscal sponsor, the Missoula Downtown Foundation, and with continued fundraising, we hope to complete the project in 2025! If you would like the opportunity to be a part of this incredible, historical project, please make your contribution at [missouladowntown.com](http://missouladowntown.com).



## Meet Our New Foundation Board Members

Three dedicated advocates for Downtown Missoula joined the Missoula Downtown Foundation Board in January, helping to drive fundraising and community engagement for downtown projects.



**Kia Liszak** is the Director of Development for the UM College of Arts & Media. Formerly the Executive Director of ZACC, she led its relocation to the heart of Downtown Missoula. A Missoula native, Kia is passionate about arts, education, and community service. She is married to Doug, and they have a son, Silas.



**Matt Muhsam** owns Worden's Market, which he acquired in 2020. Raised in Bellevue, Wash., he moved to Missoula in 2015 and holds a degree in Hospitality Business Management from WSU. A lifelong entrepreneur, Matt enjoys outdoor activities and time with his wife, Courtney, and daughter, Bo.



**Todd Rahr** is the Community Relations Manager for NorthWestern Energy, overseeing Western Montana. Before transitioning to the power industry, he spent 32 years in professional and college sports, including as GM of Learfield's Grizzly Athletics office. Todd and his wife, Dina, have a son, Owen, along with two older sons and a daughter.

Kia, Matt, and Todd are excited to support Downtown Missoula's growth and success through their work with the Foundation.

## Downtown Missoula Partnership Unveils Refreshed Branding

Following a year-long process, the Downtown Missoula Partnership (DMP) has unveiled updated branding to showcase the collaborative effort of its three organizations: the Missoula Downtown Association, the Downtown Business Improvement District, and the Missoula Downtown Foundation.

All three organizations, while functioning under one roof, were not officially defined as one collective partnership until the creation of the Downtown Missoula Partnership in 2014. The DMP was created to streamline internal processes and developed a way for staff to truly work as one team. The branding for the organization, however, was not overly cohesive due to the organizations being established at different times. Following strategic discussions, DMP staff realized it was time to have a brand that was unified and represented the collaborative efforts of the organizations.

Bonfire Brands, founded and led by owner Blake Nicolazzo, was

chosen to lead the branding redesign. Based in Missoula, Bonfire came to life in 2012 with the vision of delivering world-class design, communications, and marketing services in Missoula and Montana. Bonfire was selected due to its commitment to the community and their love for all things Downtown.

Throughout the design process, it was important to staff that the new branding be unique, represent Downtown, and not be cliché with buildings as part of the branding, something that a lot of Downtown organizations have in their logos. With the tagline 'Connecting Our Community', there's no better way to represent that than the river, which is a grounding centerpiece for Downtown, and the bridges that help connect all of us. After six months of design work, the river and bridges logo is an unmistakable visual representation of Downtown and the work of the Downtown Missoula Partnership.



## The Terrace at Brennan's Wave: Improving River Access, Health & Connection

The terrace project on the Clark Fork River at Caras Park got underway last winter, and the transformation at Brennan's Wave will be finished this spring. The river-facing rock seating, stairs, and ADA sidewalk ramp to the waterfront accomplishes three distinct goals of the Downtown Master Plan:

- Improve accessibility and connection to the river
- Improve safety for river, trail, and park users
- Reduce erosion in the urban river corridor

Dick Anderson Construction (DAC) completed the majority of the project last fall. This spring the team will complete the rock work, then install railings and finish off with landscaping. In January, DAC presented a very special gift of \$50,000 to the Missoula Downtown Foundation to kick off the 2025 Caras Canopy Campaign to raise \$500,000 to replace the canopy and paint the structure this fall. DAC is celebrating its 50th year of operations, as is the Missoula Downtown Association.

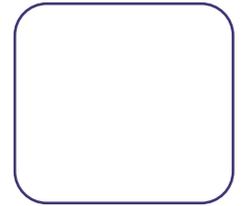
The terrace at Brennan's Wave was primarily funded by a \$1.2 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, along with significant matching funds from the Missoula Downtown Foundation, Missoula Redevelopment Agency, Open Space Bond Funds, and Missoula Park District Funds.

The end result is a safer, more accessible river access site that helps direct river users to exit at a designated site rather than creating their own trails throughout the corridor. One of the biggest benefits is that everyone – no matter their ability - can enjoy this beloved outdoor space in the Heart of Missoula. Community members will definitely enjoy the riverfront improvements at Caras Park for years to come.





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# MISSOULA DOWNTOWN

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## CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

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Kia Liszak	(406) 546-6844	kia.liszak@supportum.org	Todd Rahr	(406) 550-2145	todd.rahr@northwestern.com

### Support Downtown Missoula When You Register Your Vehicle!

Did you know, out of the over 200 sponsor license plates in the Motor Vehicle Department’s system, 10,836 people in 2024 registered their vehicles with the Missoula Downtown Foundation’s license plate? For the past eight years and counting, the Montana 406 outline with a heart for Missoula has supported Foundation efforts to improve Downtown Missoula from wayfinding, to flower baskets, to boulevard banners, to improvements to Caras Park and more! At \$25/plate, Montana citizens can register their vehicle with the Foundation to support these efforts, while also sporting the sleek black design of the plate. The plate is currently the fourth best-selling plate in the State with over 70,000 registrations with the design since 2017.

The License Plate is the easiest way to support Foundation efforts while adding additional flare to your vehicle. Next time you register your vehicles with the MVD consider supporting the Missoula Downtown Foundation with the purchase of this special plate.

