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Eagle River Revitalization Program wins AARP Small Dollar, Big Impact grant

EAGLE RIVER, WI – A proposal by the Eagle River Main Street Program to revitalize and liven up a section of the downtown has been selected to receive an AARP Wisconsin “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant.

“We’re trying to create a ‘third space’ in an empty lot downtown where people can sit and relax for a while,” said Martha Geiseman, Executive Director of the Eagle River Main Street Program. This \$1,000 grant will help the group purchase a permanent electrical box so that music – including bands and DJ’s – can hook up their speakers, while cart vendors can access the electrical power they need to serve refrigerated drinks.

“Having power there will help us to utilize this area for events throughout the summer season and provide a beautiful winter display for the Christmas Holiday as well,” Geiseman said. “We are grateful for this opportunity.”

Small Dollar, Big Impact grants are being awarded once a month throughout the year to projects across Wisconsin that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age.

Judges selected this project for a \$1,000 grant after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state. A comment from the judges said, “Smart project with focus on a third space. Electric service is key.”

“Our board is thrilled that we were awarded this grant,” Geiseman said. “We thank AARP. We know this will help us move forward with our goal.”

“This project fits perfectly with the spirit and intent of the grant program, said AARP Wisconsin State Director Sam Wilson. “Our goal is to support communities

as they make positive changes that inspire long-term progress on livable issues. This project hits that nail right on the head.”

The Eagle River Main Street Program has been a part of the Eagle River community since 1999. “We employ the National Main Street model of Organization, Design Promotion and Economic Vitality to support existing businesses, attract new entrepreneurs, invest in community improvements and promote special events,” Geiseman said.

In this case, the Eagle River community reached out to council members with written letters of praise on what was done for Christmas. There are plans to have a community fund to help purchase items for this area.

“There have been picnic tables with umbrellas added to the area along with beautiful flowers. At the present time we have craft shows lined up and an afterparty for our Wine Walk,” Geiseman said. “This will be unique to our community because it will be the only area where there is a park-like atmosphere in our downtown.”

After completing this project, the group will keep trying to develop this lot with funds from donations into their community fund as well as budgeting for items every year until it is complete.

AARP Wisconsin’s launched its “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant program in 2020 and is now in its second year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state. All projects must be completed within 60 days from winner announcement.

“These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have remarkable impacts on the shaping of neighborhoods and cities,” said Darrin Wasniewski, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin.

“There are so many great ideas and proposals for making life better in communities across Wisconsin. We know how impactful \$1,000 can be. This is our way of extending some seed money to get these projects off the ground.”

The grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit www.aarp.org/WIsdbi

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