ABBEVILLE — One of the reasons Abbeville is one of Acadiana’s most picturesque cities is a downtown area rich in historic structures and turn-of-the-century architecture.

Another reason is a community dedicated to preserving that historical ambiance, officials said.

Before 1994, preservation in the commercial and residential historic districts consisted of a hodgepodge of individual efforts, but over the past six years, the Main Street program has served as the focal point of a community-wide crusade to maintain the city’s special charm.

Main Street manager Charlene Beckett, who took over from initial manager Rochelle Michaud Dugas in 1996, has emerged as one of the state’s top Main Street stars, according to Patty Pitzer, state coordinator of the Louisiana Main Street program in the Office of Cultural Development.

“Charlene is one of the most active and effective Main Street managers in the state and was recently chosen as one of four Louisiana managers accepted to the National Trust for Historic Preservation Certification Institute,” Pitzer said. “Abbeville’s program is a model we use to encourage other cities.”

Pitser said Main Street links historic preservation to economic development, so the program not only makes good sense, it makes good dollars and cents.

“Through our facade program to maintain the look and integrity of old buildings, Abbeville has addressed no less than 35 buildings, has a net gain of 35 new businesses, 133 new jobs and has provided seed money for a public-private partnership that has pumped nearly $3.5 million into rehabilitation efforts,” Pitzer said.

“Anyone who wonders what Main Street does or if it is worth the effort the city puts out to support the program need only look at these numbers to realize the tremendous benefits of the program,” she said.

Mayor Brady Broussard agreed. “I’ve always been a big supporter of the program, and with the City Council’s help, we’ve been fortunate to see it grow into what it is today, we’ve seen the downtown merchants band together as never before, and we believe there are a lot more good things on the horizon,” he said.

Beckett takes such kudos in stride. She said she doesn’t have time to rest on her laurels because “we have too much work to do.”

“Historic preservation and economic development are dynamic forces that need to be constantly nurtured, she said.

“It’s not just the idea of holding on to what we have, it’s also developing and improving on that.”

There are 29 Main Street
Jonas Well Building — built in 1920 on Main Street in an area formerly known as Steamboat Alley, where paddle-wheel boats loaded and unloaded wares on the Vermilion River wharves. Well operated several cotton gins in the area. The building now houses law offices.

Wells Fargo Building — built in 1897 featuring double layer brick construction and decorative brickwork cornices. Used as Wells Fargo Express office from 1906-1915, then to store Steen’s Pure Cane Sugar after purchase by the Steen family in 1945. The building is now a private residence.

Old Masonic Cemetery — second oldest cemetery in the city, the oldest tomb is dated 1868 and the most recent 1954. Restored in 1999 by city, Main Street program, Chamber of Commerce and volunteers.

Riviana Rice Mill Complex — consists of packing plant, main office building and mill, the city’s first. The plant was designed by Honor and built in 1900, the mill in 1904 and the office in 1914. Riviana is one of the nation’s major rice millers and packagers.

Vermilion Parish School Board Building — designed by Honor and built in 1902 as the original Abbeville High School. Became an elementary school when the new high school completed in 1927.

Bob Theater — built in 1940, it was initially called the Rex. The Great Flood of 1940 destroyed portions of the building. It was remodeled in 1950, renamed the Bob and closed in 1960.

GET — adjacent to the square, it was built in 1921 as a service station and named for the first letters of the last names of its original owners, Claude Goch, F.D. Edwards and J.W. Theall. Present building was constructed in 1930, housed a restaurant, lounge, service station and apartments before being renovated into a private residence in 1990.

Magdalen Center — built as a wooden structure in the 1920s, it housed a succession of car dealerships until the mid-1980s, when it was purchased and renovated into offices, other office and a reception hall called Magdalen Place with a two-story central atrium and other features.

City Hall — former site of the Veranda Hotel built in the 1840s, which was razed in 1928 for the construction of the Audrey Hotel, which featured a roof garden for dances, wedding receptions and the like. Audrey closed in early 1960s, bought by the city in 1990 and renovated for first floor offices.

Abbeville Cultural and Historical Alliance Center — the W.P. Edwards Building was constructed in 1929 as law offices. The Edwards estate leases the structure to the alliance center in the heart of the city.

Hollier’s Drug Store — built in 1904 as a pharmacy and doctor’s office, it is still a drug store owned by the Hollier family since 1925. The city’s first neon sign was installed here in 1930. A distinctive winged, domed canopy with pressed tin underside is more than 90 years old and the last of its kind in the city.

Bollino’s Coffeehouse — built in 1900 as a combination furniture store and funeral home, which remained on site until 1930. Continued as a furniture store into the 1990s, a small outbuilding was used to store caskets. Coffee replaced coffins with the opening of Bollino’s, which features cappuccino, iced coffee and desserts.

CC’s Restaurant — built in 1914 as a candy shop and restaurant, it is one of Abbeville’s favorite breakfast spots and a handy lunch stop for workers from the nearby courthouse and downtown offices.

J.E. Schexnaider Office — the Beauxsis Building was constructed in 1904 after a 1903 fire destroyed the Courthouse Exchange saloon on the site across the street from the courthouse. A soft drink factory next door, also owned by saloon keeper Eli Erah, was destroyed as well. Now an engineering firm.

Kane’s House of Steaks and Seafood — built in 1900, it was a general merchandise store, then a grocery store and bar before becoming a restaurant, saloon, dry goods store and pool hall. Became Crescent Pool Hall in 1963, raised as a bookmaking operation in 1973, when it became the Crescent Lunch Counter. Has housed restaurants since then, when the owner was advised to go from bookmaking to cooking.
Historic

programs in the state. With eight
Admission and
Alabaster, Bessemer, Brownfield, Cullman, Clanton,
Dexter, Opelika and St. Martin.

Beckett said facade grants totaling about $600,000 have pro-
vided "bonafide" means to attract pri-
vate investment, which not only
preserves the appearance of the fac-
tures of our historic buildings, but
investments in the heart and soul of our com-
munity. We can make a city's future by
how well it preserves and honors its
heritage.

Some of the highlights of a visit to Alabaster downtown histori-
dated are:

- Magnolia Square - central town square designed by city founder Peter Milner. It now

- St. Mary Magdalen Church - designed by prominent architects in 1858, built in 1917. The church sits on the corner of High Street and Main Street. The building is a noted landmark. Two
- St. Mary Magdalen Cemetery - the oldest extant building in the county, the church is on the National Register of Historic Places. The cemetery is located on the corner of Fifth Street and Main Street.

- Black's Oyster Bar - Seafood Restaurant - built in 1950, features oysters, clams, shrimp, as well as fresh fish and other seafood dishes.

- Jones Wurst Building - built in 1924 on Main Street in an area formerly known as DeSoto Park, where 19th-century wharf docks and warehouses once stood. The building now houses offices.

- Wufti Fire Building - built in 1927 featuring a double-deck fire truck. Construction and Decoration of the fire building was designed by E. R. Pate, who also designed the Pate's Fire Building on Main Street.

- Rainbow Mill Complex - comprises of packing plant, office spaces, residences and a mill and a coal yard. The plant was designed by Hendee and built in 1905, and the office was built in 1887. It was one of the nation's major meat and oil producers.

- Lomax Park School Board Building - designed by Hendee and built in 1902 as the original courthouse. It was later converted into an elementary school when the new school complex completed in 1957.

- Bula Playhouse - was built in 1930 to provide entertainment to the public.