

2017 - Year of Wisconsin Avenue – Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21

Public Space - 2018 IDA Award Submission

Home to the breathtaking Milwaukee Art Museum's Quadracci Pavilion designed by Santiago Calatrava, Fortune 500 companies and world-class universities, Milwaukee's Wisconsin Avenue has long served as the State's civic and cultural "Main Street." Since 2014, 16 major properties located on Wisconsin Avenue have announced plans for new construction, reinvestment or repurposing. With \$194 million of economic development completed since 2005, and \$800 million of investment in recently completed or under-construction projects, Wisconsin Avenue's 21st century transformation is well underway.

Despite its unprecedented surge in new investment, Wisconsin Avenue lacked a vibrant and engaging pedestrian experience that other peer-city main streets exude. That is, until the summer of 2017. With a fresh, multi-layered approach to revitalize its public space, Milwaukee Downtown, Business Improvement District #21 declared 2017 as "The Year of Wisconsin Avenue" by rolling out a series of public art installations, a self-guided audio walking tour, an expanded trolley route, and a public relations campaign to reclaim Wisconsin Avenue as the community's living room. In addition, quality-of-life initiatives included Key to Change, a local campaign created to assist chronically homeless individuals, and Lighting the Avenue, an extensive lighting campaign to ensure Wisconsin Avenue's long-term success as a vibrant place to live, work, and play. Public relations of the Avenue surged with the new initiatives, totaling \$1,041,688.96 in earned local media coverage.

Sculpture Milwaukee

Garnering the most attention from national and local media was Sculpture Milwaukee, a new world-class public art installation featuring 22 sculptures by local, national and international artists, including Santiago Calatrava. Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 served as the administrative branch for the privately-funded, five-month public art exhibition, which included the energy of over 100 community volunteers and businesses. In addition, Milwaukee's philanthropic community generously supported the project by providing \$800,000 in sponsorships and grants. In return, VISIT Milwaukee estimated that the installation generated 131,044 total day trips, 2,845 overnight trips, and approximately \$8,118,232 in economic impact. Taking strides on the national scale, Sculpture Milwaukee was placed in 96 national media outlets helping earn \$840,000 in combined local and national media coverage.

Ongoing programming and educational opportunities ensured that community members and downtown stakeholders were actively engaged throughout the project's duration. Partnerships included public trolley and walking tours led by Milwaukee Art Museum docents, which accommodated 678 participants. Plus, a public ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by 750 guests, celebrated the community's burgeoning art scene with local performances. Above all, the project messaged to the world that Milwaukee has a deep appreciation for the arts, and downtown is a premier arts destination.

Utility Box Murals

While sculptures that ranged upwards of 40 feet offered grandeur, new utility box murals celebrated the Avenue's rich history of commerce, diversity of people and architecture, and its undoubtedly bright future, at a smaller scale. Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21, with guidance from the newly-formed Downtown Placemaking Task Force comprised of property-owners, stakeholders and representatives from the City of Milwaukee's Art Board and Department of Public Works, released a national Request for Creativity. After an extensive review process, the Task Force commissioned one artist to complete all 10 utility boxes. Milwaukee Downtown optimized its social media platforms to invite the public to watch and take part in the mural installation.

Three pop-up events were programmed over the lunch hour to feature a live DJ and art demonstration on the sidewalk, including its public ribbon-cutting ceremony which packed 175 people onto the sidewalk. The project generated \$50,005 in earned media coverage.

Self-Guided Audio Walking Tour & App

Perhaps one of the best ways to experience Wisconsin Avenue's history and landmarks is to take a self-guided audio walking tour utilizing Otocast. Launched in June of 2017, the free mobile app allows users to explore 14 different locations on West Wisconsin Avenue, with each point-of-interest narrated by unique storytellers. In August, Milwaukee Downtown hosted an "appy hour," to encourage its stakeholders and board of directors to utilize the app, with a group walking tour and, you guessed it, a happy hour. To date, the app has generated 2,836 downloads, 933 audio plays, and an average session of 15.1 minutes. In addition to Milwaukee, users have accessed from Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City, and Denver. The new audio-guide app generated \$13,600 in earned media coverage.

Milwaukee Trolley Loop

To ensure connectivity and accessibility between Wisconsin Avenue and downtown's attractions, the VISIT Milwaukee Trolley Loop received a new route to accommodate a larger portion of Wisconsin Avenue. The privately-funded, rubber-tire trolley loop offered visitors and residents the ability to hop 'n shop and wine 'n dine for only \$1, with 15-minute headways. With limited hours of operation between Thursday and Sunday, the trolley loop serviced 5,000 riders, with 64% of them being leisure travelers and 71% being first-time riders. The Milwaukee Trolley Loop generated \$36,333.49 in earned media coverage.

Avenue Advocacy

As an advocate for a higher quality-of-life for all, Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 continued conversations for ending chronic homelessness and led a new lighting initiative in 2017.

Launched in September of 2017, Key to Change is a public awareness campaign that features seven retrofitted parking meters on Wisconsin Avenue in its first phase. The parking meters, designed to resemble keys, raise awareness about the community's quality-of-life programs and collect donations. While replicating similar programs in cities across the country, the design of Milwaukee's Key to Change meters rise above rest. Fabricated locally by Flux Design, the golden keys have become symbolic in downtown's public realm. Donations are being collected by BID #21's Public Service Ambassadors to help fund initiatives like Milwaukee County's Housing First project and a Downtown Homeless Outreach Coordinator position. To date, over \$16,400 has been raised to support the initiatives and the project has generated \$101,750.47 in media coverage, plus social media postings from other BIDs across the nation.

In 2016, an RFP was issued for "Lighting the Avenue," a creative lighting installation that would add to the district's sense of place at night. The project is partially funded by a TIF district servicing West Wisconsin Avenue, and its initial phase will be a catalyst for future lighting improvements. Latent Design of Chicago was selected to lead the project design team. Physical constraints and infrastructure for installation were analyzed during the summer of 2017 with a pilot installation scheduled for February 2018.

Changing Perceptions

Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21's "Year of Wisconsin Avenue" garnered the attention from the media and greater community. The combined initiatives generated a total of \$1,077,600.14 in local and national media coverage and 1,375,876 impressions through Milwaukee Downtown's social media platforms.

Finally, we've presented our strategy to our city's 32 BIDs, and have discussed the project with cities across the country, especially after the project received a national spotlight in the Downtown Idea Exchange (Vol. 65, No. 1, January 2018). Plus, we've collaborated with the City of Milwaukee's Department of Neighborhood Services to encourage public art murals on traffic control and utility boxes throughout the city. In late 2017, Wisconsin Avenue was included as one of the country's most expensive commercial corridors by JLL, indicating the competitive advantages and attractive qualities of the Avenue.