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Main Street, Mount Holly.

## Where Main Street Thrives

Investments and revitalizations make South Jersey a good place to call home.

by **JoAnn Greco**

Walk the classic main streets and tree-lined residential blocks of Southern New Jersey, and old notions of the Garden State — a place of malls and traffic circles — quickly fade from memory. Instead of skyscrapers and tunnels, residents here enjoy surroundings of lush rolling hills and still-thriving farmlands.

“You can be in Philadelphia in 20 minutes, yet you live in a totally different world,” says Lisa Morina, executive director of Gloucester County’s department of economic development. “It’s still agricultural in many parts, and there’s a real sense of history, of legacy along the Delaware River.”

Downtown streetscape improvements and major housing and residential projects are underway to keep South Jersey up to speed.

An affordable cost of living, along with old-fashioned charms such as main streets studded with mom-and-pop stores, are here to stay. “We have great parades, just like a typical small

town, but we also have a couple of really good restaurants,” says Megan Reeves, who works in Philadelphia but resides and plays in Maple Shade in Burlington County. “And,” she adds with pride, “we have the [Maple Shade] Custard Stand. All of South Jersey comes to Maple Shade for our ice cream.”

Maple Shade is just the newest of several communities in the region to be accepted into the state’s Main Street program, part of a nationwide movement to encourage the revitalization of centuries-old county seats and college towns.

Burlington’s county seat, Mount Holly, has always boasted “good bones,” says Lynn Scowcroft, executive director of Main Street Mount Holly. “We’ve learned how to stage events like reenactments and historic house tours — and how to attract new businesses.” One such success, Mill Race Village, is situated on a picturesque creek, its formerly dilapidated 19th-century wood

buildings now filled with crafts shops and galleries.

Developers in Gloucester County’s Glassboro are hoping for a similar hit with Rowan Boulevard, linking Rowan University’s campus with the downtown via a retail corridor of 125 shops and restaurants, extensive university housing, Class-A office space, and a 100-room Holiday Inn Express.

Other downtowns leverage other assets. A dozen Burlington County towns along the Delaware River lobbied for a light-rail line that links the towns from Camden to Trenton. Darlene Scocca, the county’s economic development representative, says the rail’s presence has encouraged \$2 billion worth of investment along the corridor.

“Our downtowns are our heart,” says Scocca. “If the main street dies, the town around it decays. These river towns and main street communities understand that a vibrant downtown offers the quality of life that people are looking for.”