



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Kendall Whittier Main Street Earns National Revitalization Award**

**Tulsa (October 30, 2020)** – Kendall Whittier Main Street (KWMS) in Tulsa is one of three winners of the 2020 Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA), which recognizes communities for their excellence in comprehensive preservation-based commercial district revitalization. Selected by a national jury of community development professionals and leaders in the fields of economic development and historic preservation, Kendall Whittier Main Street (KWMS) is being recognized for turning an area of decades-long blight into a lively hub for arts and culture. KWMS is Oklahoma's 6th GAMSA winner.

“Kendall Whittier exemplifies the power of the Main Street Approach to truly transform a district,” said National Main Street Center President and CEO Patrice Frey. “In just 10 years, Kendall Whittier Main Street has radically changed the perception of their neighborhood and become the center of community life for its residents.”

Kendall Whittier was a bustling shopping district from the late 1920s through the 1950s, but when a highway bisected the neighborhood in 1967, the area struggled to recover. By the early 2000s, the neighborhood was known as Tulsa’s red-light district– home to vacant storefronts and adult-oriented businesses. When KWMS got its start in 2010, the district had a 35 percent occupancy rate. Thanks to community-led business recruitment and retention efforts, occupancy has grown to 100 percent today. Kendall Whittier is now home to a mix of galleries, breweries, restaurants, and non-mainstream retail. In all, KWMS has seen a total of 350 jobs created and \$158 million private dollars reinvested.

To overcome its perception as an unsafe area, KWMS developed a façade grant program to both beautify the neighborhood and reward private investment. They also grew an events calendar from one public event in 2013 to more than 20 events annually. From art walks and outdoor concerts to yoga and food truck festivals, KWMS aims to offer free or low-cost programming that appeals to everyone in the community. Kendall Whittier is among the most diverse

neighborhoods in Tulsa, and a multicultural artisan market provides authentic outreach to the neighborhood's large Hispanic population.

KWMS's robust partnerships have also been key to developing the area, including a public art project that saw five new murals created to add to the vibrancy in Kendall Whittier. Local foundations have added to the district's success by launching a new food hall, entrepreneurship hub and affordable housing.

"For the last decade, Kendall Whittier Main Street has been working hard to transform a historic neighborhood back to its early days as Tulsa's first suburban shopping district," said Jessica Jackson Seay, Executive Director of Kendall Whittier Main Street. "Through listening to residents, thousands of volunteer hours and quite a bit of elbow grease - and, of course, the proven Main Street Approach - Kendall Whittier is now a funky little place for Tulsans to gather with other creatives and to feel a sense of community and support locally-owned businesses."

Even after COVID-19 forced many businesses to temporarily shut their doors, no businesses in the district have permanently shuttered due to the pandemic. KWMS credits a Rent Relief Program with making all the difference. Funded by the National Main Street Center's Grills Fund for Main Street Revitalization, local foundations, and private donations, KWMS gave out \$36,200 in rent relief from May to July.

KWMS has been so successful that it inspired a citywide Main Street program modeled after their approach. In January 2019, the City of Tulsa launched a "Destination Districts" program in partnership with the Oklahoma Main Street Center to revitalize commercial districts throughout the city. The program focuses on powering the economy and creating new opportunities for Tulsans, with a focus on expanding equity across the city.

"We are very proud of Kendall Whittier Main Street for receiving the 2020 GAMSA," said Buffy Hughes, Director of the Oklahoma Main Street Center. "The turnaround of this district has been miraculous but not without concerted, concentrated effort by the program's board of directors, volunteers, residents, and Tulsa city leaders. We look forward to continued progress within Kendall Whittier."

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### **About the Great American Main Street Awards**

Each year, Main Street America, a program of the National Main Street Center, celebrates the country's best examples of comprehensive commercial district revitalization. Winners are selected from a nationwide pool of applicants by a national jury based on successful and innovative uses of the Main Street Approach.<sup>TM</sup> Criteria for winning include: overall community transformation; strength of community engagement; entrepreneurship development; approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion; commitment to historic preservation; implementation of model partnerships, and demonstrated success of the Main Street Approach.<sup>TM</sup>

### **About the National Main Street Center**

The National Main Street Center has been helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts for 40 years. Today, its network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. The organization is a nonprofit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, visit [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

### **About Kendall Whittier Main Street**

Kendall Whittier Main Street supports the ongoing revitalization of the historic Kendall Whittier commercial district and fulfills its mission to promote and restore Kendall Whittier as a thriving, walkable and welcoming community for living and working. The 501(c)3 nonprofit organization started in 2010 when volunteers and staff rolled their sleeves up and got to work to transform the seedy “red light” district of Tulsa. KWMS is one of four Tulsa Destinations District, seven Certified Cultural Districts in Oklahoma, a member of the Oklahoma Main Street Center and is accredited by the National Main Street Center. For more information, go to [visitKendallWhittier.com](http://visitKendallWhittier.com).