Butte's Open Air Small Business Incubator

GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

The Butte Farmers Market and Open Air Small Business Incubator Program work in tandem to support entrepreneurs who have the potential to become viable storefront operations.

- The incubator program reimburses entrepreneurs' rent for up to three months (up to $700 a month) upon presentation of their payment receipts.
- In addition to serving as a "test market" for local vendors, the farmer's market provides fresh produce and a social networking opportunity from May to October.

POPULATIONS SERVED

Residents and vendors located in Butte and southwestern Montana

MAJOR PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

Mainstreet Uptown Butte, Inc., Economic Mill Levy Fund, and local and regional vendors

MAJOR OUTCOMES

- Participating vendors generate $200,000–$250,000 of commerce for vendors and surrounding businesses over a 20-week market season. Several have gone on to occupy vacant storefronts in the downtown area. This, in turn, has helped to improve the health and vitality of our business district.
- Provided increased opportunities for physical activity by creating a pleasant environment that encourages walking and bicycling past vendor tables.

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

The key is to get to know vendors and learn their ambitions and business acumen. One must always be on the lookout for a business ready to make the move from being home-based to being a storefront operation. The incentives we offer, such as rental assistance, help to make this transition go more smoothly. Business owners win, property owners win, and we win by accomplishing our goal of getting viable businesses into previously vacant storefronts.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

"Street events, festivals and fairs can foster community and individual well-being. These activities bring residents out into the fresh air and into the company of their neighbors, which is a direct health benefit in a time of growing isolation and social media."

— George Everett, Mainstreet Butte, Inc.