

Downtown is
Calling

Good
Times
Await



May 2023

BD Bulletin


Riverside Downtown Business Improvement District

Show and Go Car Show Takes to the Streets Again

Riverside County's largest car show returns for 2023. The annual Show and Go Car Show for Charity is a cruising car show organized by the Riverside East Rotary Club and the Old Farts Racing Team, a group of more than 2,200 hot rod enthusiasts.

The event is a free family event that begins with a cruise on Friday, May 5th from 6 pm to 10 pm and continues on Saturday, May 6th with a pancake breakfast at 7 am hosted by local volunteers and then a Grand Marshall Parade at 12:30 pm. At 4 pm there will be a trophy presentation with trophies awarded in numerous categories. The classic cars, hot rods, imports, and motorcycles will cruise down Market Street and Main Street between 13th Street and Mission Inn Avenue.



Public admission is free. For more information and an event map, visit www.showandgo.org or contact info@showandgo.org or call 951-295-0534. 

In This Issue:

Downtown Events: Show and Go, Anime Riverside

Supervisor's Message: Kevin's Corner

Mayor's Message: A Welcoming Storefront Helps Your Bottom Line

Council Corner: Ward One

Arts Corner: Artist Spotlight

Parking Your Way is Coming to Downtown Riverside

Business Buzz: How Chatbots Can Help Grow Your Small Business

Security Corner: Reminder to Businesses - File Police Reports

Riverside City Council Approves Cannabis Business Ordinance

Join us for the RDP luncheon at Noon on Tuesday, May 23, 2023 at Avila's Historic 1929 featuring Mark Annas of Ready Riverside, RFD.


Call the RDP office at 951-781-7335 for reservations.



Anime Riverside Returns to Riverside May 27th and 28th!

Expect downtown Riverside and the Riverside Convention Center to be flooded with everyone's favorite anime and movie characters when Anime Riverside returns at the end of May. The first Anime Riverside convention held at the Riverside Convention Center last June attracted over 10,000 anime devotees, and this year's event is expected to attract 15,000. The event includes vendors, artists, exhibits, cosplay contests and more. Downtown businesses can participate in the 'Badge' promotion and offer a discount to attendees showing their badges – email janice@riversidedowntown.org for more information.



Visit www.animeriverside.com for more information and event details. 

Supervisor's Message: Kevin's Corner

Contributed by Supervisor Kevin Jeffries

We do a lot of work at the County, but I try to save this space for items that specifically impact the City of Riverside. This month, I wanted to highlight these items:

Residential Treatment Beds Re-open—After replacing our previous contractor, we are happy to report that The Arlington Recovery Community and Sobering Center has re-opened at County Farm Road, providing 54 beds for residential drug and alcohol treatment. This is a critical resource for the community and Riverside Police Department, providing a place for drug dependent individuals in the community (including the homeless) to get treatment and get them off the streets. This program is for temporary housing only, but allows the County to work with these individuals and hopefully stabilize them sufficiently that they can get into long-term assistance and permanent housing.

Warehouse Relief or State Meddling? Or Both? Several years ago, I pushed for a Riverside County Good Neighbor policy that sought to adopt stringent new warehouse standards largely to protect adjacent residential homes and neighborhoods from the encroachment of new warehouses. Unfortunately, my original Good Neighbor proposal which included mandatory buffers between warehouses and homes was significantly watered down and actually made optional. The State legislature now has several bills (AB-1000 & AB 1748) that would do what the local leaders couldn't or wouldn't do to help protect quality of life concerns. Now, does it irk the heck out of me that state officials are going to try and insert themselves (again) into local land use decisions? YES it does! BUT,

if local leaders can't or won't act to protect their own constituents, then we have no one to blame but ourselves when someone else steps in to try.

March JPA Sunsetting—The March Joint Powers Authority was established in 1993 by the Cities of Moreno Valley, Perris, Riverside and the County of Riverside, to ensure the effective reuse of the former March Air Force Base, which was realigned from an active-duty base to a reserve base. Among the primary objectives for forming the March JPA was to prevent the loss of thousands of jobs and millions of dollars, ensure the long-term viability of the airport, and facilitate economic development within the region. Thirty years later, the vacant land on the old base property has been almost entirely developed or entitled (with one final large piece currently under consideration in the development process), and the partner agencies have now agreed to begin unwinding the JPA, replacing it with a smaller organization whose mission is simply protecting the base from encroachment. Under this agreement, the territory under the March JPA jurisdiction will remain within the county unincorporated area for the remainder of the period that debt service continues on the bonds (into 2041), and provides for sharing of revenues amongst the member agencies, rather than attempting to carve up the JPA boundaries through annexations. The County voted on Tuesday, April 18th to formally begin this transition. 🏛️



Mayor's Message - A Welcoming Storefront Helps Your Bottom Line

Contributed by Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson



Owning a business is a remarkable achievement and one of the most exciting—and challenging—ventures one can experience. Small businesses are the beating heart of a strong economy—especially in Riverside.

Businesses have been under immense pressure these past few years, but we are starting to see a glimpse of a local economy that is being reinvigorated

by loyal customers, tourism, and steady growth. One of the best ways to expedite this is by maintaining a clean and welcoming storefront. Many downtown businesses are housed in storefronts of historic and/or iconic buildings. Well-designed storefronts contribute to the identity of commercial districts, increasing your profits in the process. Improving storefronts is a straightforward means of upgrading the visual appeal of a commercial district, making it an attractive destination for all. A bustling street, activated by well-manicured storefronts, serve as the centerpiece of a desirable and flourishing community.

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MAYOR'S MESSAGE from previous page

Furthermore, in accordance with the Riverside Municipal Code (RMC), businesses and tenants are responsible for maintaining and cleaning the sidewalk, gutters, tree wells, and parkways in front of their establishments. Neglecting to do so not only constitutes a code violation, but also decreases foot traffic and negatively impacts the surrounding community—including your business.


The Riverside Downtown Partnership, the Raincross Group, Keep Riverside Clean & Beautiful and others recently came together to discuss the importance of a clean and thriving downtown. From this meeting it was my direction that Beautify Riverside, through my office, begin working with Code Enforcement to enforce these ordinances. We believe it is vital that businesses maintain their storefront and immediate surroundings as outlined by our RMC. This work requires a real effort, action, and collaboration from all of us.

Here are a few of my favorite tips to ensure that your storefront is in compliance: pressure washing the front of your business and sidewalk once or twice a week,

picking up litter around your business, and cleaning windows and awnings regularly. These simple actions take minimal time and can go a long way in creating a more welcoming and attractive storefront for your customers.

In addition to maintaining your own storefront, we urge business owners to report other code violations to 311 as quickly as possible so all can be in compliance as our code requires.

I understand you have a lot on your plates as business owners but taking the time to maintain a clean and welcoming storefront can have a direct impact on your bottom line. Studies have shown that customers are more likely to frequent businesses that are clean and well-maintained.

So, let's all do our part to make downtown Riverside a cleaner and more welcoming place. By working together, we can ensure that downtown Riverside remains a vibrant and thriving community for all Riversiders. 

COUNCIL CORNER

Ward One Council Update

Contributed by Councilwoman Erin Edwards

Grand openings, clean ups, blasts from the past, and more are headed to Downtown this month. The Museum of Riverside will host a program on Spanish style architecture on May 5th from 6:30 pm to 8 pm at the Main Library. On May 8th, Downtown will celebrate the grand opening of the Mulberry Villages, 10 tiny homes built by Habitat for Humanity on Mulberry Street. Volunteers will show Downtown and the Fairmount Park Rose Garden some love during the Great American Clean Up with Keep Riverside Clean & Beautiful on May 13th. Join the Old Riverside Foundation for their annual Vintage Home Tour on May 20th; you can sign up for the tour at oldriverside.org.


This month, look out for the following topics at the City Council Dais*:

- City Council will receive an update on the Mission Inn Hotel and Spa 30th Annual Festival of Lights on May 2nd at 3 pm.

- City Council will review CDBG funding allocations at the May 9th City Council Public Hearing at 3 pm.
- On May 16th at 3 pm, City Council will discuss a car share program and the 2023/2024 fiscal year amended budget.
- A COVID-19 Recovery Grant for Small Businesses is on the way. On May 18th at 3 pm, the Economic Development Committee will review a contract with Community Connect to assist with administrative services related to the program.



I always look forward to hearing from you--contact me with your questions and ideas at 951-783-7811 or EEwards@RiversideCA.gov.

*Keep an eye out for the master meeting calendar at <https://www.riversideca.gov/cityclerk/government-meetings> 

Arts Corner - Riverside Artswalk - Artist Spotlight: Chris Perez

Chris Perez is an illustrator, painter and self-proclaimed “Jack of all trades” hailing from Tucson Arizona. He has a passion for customizing and adding his creative touch to everything from painting, illustration, photography, woodworking, sewing & sculpting. He’s always been creative and talented in the art department, but it was not until high-school when he developed an interest for graphic design, photography, and web development at that point he quickly decided he would pursue creative work as a career. He moved to California to work with clothing companies as an in-house artist and web developer and shortly after was laid off during the 2008 recession which pushed him to freelance. He was able to work with various record labels, musicians, apparel companies, dispensaries, and festivals during this time.

His experience as a freelancer gave him a behind-the-scenes look at various industries which really got his gears turning. “The way I see it. I could spend time working on building other people’s brands up, or I could start watering the grass on my lawn so to speak.” After honing his design and illustration skills for over a decade, he started a collaboration with Chelz Franzer in 2017 to start “The Paint Sesh” a company that instructs

painting events throughout Riverside and Southern California. This gave him the freedom to work from home when he wasn’t instructing as well as some extra time to focus on his personal art endeavors.

This free time is what led him to creating his own art under Higher Blend. It’s an eclectic mix of his various illustration styles which he makes stickers, metal pins, buttons, trays or prints out of. He’s even recently taken up sewing to bring his illustrated pieces into your everyday life with bags, coin pouches and lanyards. In his free time, he likes taking on collaborations with other artists or brands to bring his art to the masses. Some of his other hobbies include bike riding, hiking, and the art of bonsai.

For more information visit Chis at higherblend.com, www.etsy.com/shop/higherblend, or [@higherblendart](https://www.instagram.com/higherblendart) on IG 



Parking Your Way is coming to downtown Riverside *Free, affordable, accessible, and convenient downtown parking programs*

Prior to City Council approving the new downtown parking program on April 18, 2023, the City of Riverside’s Parking Services Division conducted public surveys, hosted townhall community meetings, and interfaced with downtown stakeholder groups over a 9-month period to determine what the public expected from the downtown parking program.


The result was a complete rebuild and refocusing of the downtown parking program, with three specific deliverables:

- 1) Stabilize the Public Parking Fund so it’s fiscally sustainable to support the downtown parking operation and support future parking needs.
- 2) Align the parking programs to compliment the expectations of the downtown community and to encourage more downtown patronage.
- 3) Provide quality-of-life services in the garages by improving public safety and security, increasing facility cleanliness, and addressing deferred maintenance.

On July 1, 2023, an innovative parking program called, Parking Your Way, will be introduced to make parking more affordable, more accessible, and more convenient. It will utilize a web-app where patrons can mix and match free parking up to 90-minutes in aggregate each day. The program will offer free 30-minute parking in an on-street metered space and free 60-minute parking in a public parking lot or a public parking garage. The

web-app is very simple to use, yet sophisticated, allowing patrons to conveniently manage their parking experience via their smart phone. Patrons will automatically receive free parking, can pay for parking, extend parking, validate parking and pre-pay event parking.

Many of the parking programs being offered like the Downtown 24/7 permits and the Discounted Employee Permit Program (DEPP) will rely heavily on the new real-time self-service parking systems being installed in the public parking garages. The service kiosks will be located at the vehicle entrance/exit lanes and at the pedestrian access points. The computerized system will recognize a patron’s front license plate, if an account has been established, and will automatically raise the entrance and exit arms allowing for faster entry and exiting.

Public information on Parking Your Way, Downtown 24/7 permits and the DEPP will be forthcoming on the City of Riverside’s parking website, on social media and on the electric message sign off the 91 freeway. Downtown Riverside will receive changeable message signs along three thoroughfares and informational signage will be placed at pay stations, public parking lots and garages. City staff will be providing informational flyers and FAQs to downtown patrons and businesses during the first 30-days of the program to share about the new parking programs, to answer any question, and to direct them where to find more information. 

BUSINESS BUZZ

How Chatbots Can Help Grow Your Small Business

by Donna Fuscaldo

Chatbots are becoming ubiquitous. Learn how to use them in your small business to save time and resources.

- Chatbots are becoming more popular as e-commerce grows and evolves.
- Chatbots rely on artificial intelligence and machine learning to perform tasks typically done by humans.
- Your business can use chatbots to find quality sales leads, improve customer service and engage customers at different points in the sales journey.
- **This article is for small business owners who are considering using AI chatbots on their websites.**

Chatbots are much more than digital assistants. They can help your small business save money, close sales, and connect with customers in an increasingly digital world. Their popularity has grown steadily since early in the pandemic as many small businesses were forced to do more with fewer employees and resources. We'll explore chatbot uses and explain how to find the right chatbot tools to grow your business.

What is a chatbot?

Chatbots are an example of artificial intelligence (AI) tools transforming business. A chatbot is a software application that relies on AI to perform tasks humans typically carry out. Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri are popular examples of conversational bots. Other examples include ChatGPT, Facebook Messenger's chatbot, SMS chatbots and social media bots.

Chatbots learn from user behavior, becoming more realistic and efficient over time. They can perform various business tasks, including approving expense reports, finding sales leads and connecting with customers online.

"For sales [reps], chatbots are a useful tool for information gathering on prospects so they can be better funneled and identified as a qualified lead," said Jesse Wood, president and CEO of eFileCabinet. "For customer service, chatbots can be immense timesavers when a customer is looking for quick answers to simple questions, especially if they can do it right from the product interface." According to a Tidio survey, 62 percent of consumers would be happy to use a realistic chatbot online instead of waiting to speak to a customer service representative.

How are chatbots used?

You can deploy chatbots in various areas of small business operations and across industries. New applications for chatbots are emerging at a dizzying rate. For small businesses, chatbots are most commonly used in the following capacities:

- **Chatbots in sales:** Chatbots can gather information on prospects, identify qualified leads, and automate outreach and follow-up. A bot can chat with customers and offer instant replies to their questions. "Based on profile and context, you can automate tasks such as informational queries and personalized

recommendations," said Juergen Lindner, an advisor to early-stage startups. "This gives both customers and internal sales teams seamless access to information and processes through text and voice."

- **Chatbots in customer service:** Call centers commonly use chatbots to provide quick replies with default answers to common questions, thereby freeing customer service reps to tackle more challenging queries. "Certain chatbots can be customized in several creative ways, allowing for new forms of engagement with both prospects and customers," Wood said. "For example, chatbots can be programmed to bring up competitive analysis if the name of a competitor is brought up. Chatbots can also act as surveys, collecting feedback from customers on a regular basis."
- **Chatbots in marketing:** A bot can effectively interact with customers and upsell. Businesses can automate conversations with existing customers and potential new ones. They can also suggest items, provide information, and send leads to sales and marketing teams, all without human intervention.

What makes a chatbot effective?

A chatbot should reflect your brand and reduce the workload for your team.

- **Chatbots must reflect your brand.** If your chatbot is confusing or doesn't reflect your branding, it could damage your business's reputation and lead to lost sales. "If the company's brand is fun, the chatbot should be fun," said Jason Junge, CEO of PointerTop. "If [it's] serious and professional, the same [goes] for the chatbot. It's also important that the chatbot be succinct and to the point. ... Otherwise, visitors will feel that their time is being wasted as most do today with automated phone answering systems."
- **Chatbots must lessen the workload.** An effective chatbot should also reduce, not add to, the range of tasks your team must perform manually. They should handle typical inquiries, thus empowering your sales staff to deal with more challenging interactions. "Chatbots are all about business productivity and efficiency gains," Lindner said. Small businesses operate with limited resources, which makes utilizing data, automation, and digital interactions so important. Applications like chatbots can free small business owners and their staff to focus on their core business."

What are some effective strategies for chatbot replies?

Here are some examples of tactics and styles small business owners can employ with their AI chatbot responses:

- **Chatbot sales replies:** Chatbots can provide sales reps with solid leads. However, according to Junge, they should focus on qualifying questions and capturing contact information simultaneously. The responses should lead the prospect to the correct sales funnel.

continued on page 6

BUSINESS BUZZ from page 5

- **Chatbot customer service replies:** When you're using chatbots for customer service, keep the chatbot reply messages short, clear, and concise to prevent the customer from exiting the conversation, Junge advised.
- **Chatbot marketing and engagement replies:** Your chatbot's responses when performing marketing functions will depend on your specific goals. If you want to direct users to a particular page of your business website, use the chatbot to invite them to learn more. If you want to generate buzz, the chatbot can offer a discount or deal in exchange for an individual's email address.
- **Chatbot survey replies:** Customer surveys are a great way to get customer feedback or glean ideas for new products and services. Chatbot responses can vary. "The format varies depending on the length and subject matter of the survey," Junge noted.

What should I look for in a chatbot?

Chatbots are becoming ubiquitous as the world becomes more digital. Chatbot software prices are decreasing, presenting many opportunities for small business owners to implement this technology. But which software is right for you? Keep the following considerations in mind:

- **Choose a chatbot solution that solves a problem.** Experts recommend focusing on programs that solve a particular problem or are designed for a specific business use case, such as customer service. These chatbots are trained to respond to defined patterns or use machine learning to detect patterns and evolve based on the data and interactions. "It's best to implement a chatbot with a singular goal, whether that's to improve customer service, generate leads, etc.," Wood said. "Program chatbot responses with a singular goal that will better funnel customers to the desired destination — for example, to a live demo or conversation with sales."
- **Choose a data-savvy chatbot solution provider.** Lindner recommended purchasing solutions created

by a vendor that understands data. Choose chatbots that provide "white-box" or explainable AI over "black-box" solutions in which you hand over your data to algorithms that are difficult to understand.

- **Choose a chatbot vendor you're comfortable with.** Junge advised comparing the price; functionality; look and feel; ease of use and integration; and support levels offered by chatbot solutions. It's imperative to work with a vendor with whom you feel comfortable entrusting your data.
- **Choose the level of chatbot functionality you need.** Evaluate your needs. You may need a straightforward solution or more robust chatbot functionality. "Chatbots can be intimidating for small businesses to consider; however, some are very simple to use and install, where the more complicated ones can be installed by your own web developer, the chatbot company itself, or with professional assistance," Junge said. "It will take time and work to build the chatbot conversations, but once installed, the chatbot will prove of great benefit."

The best live chat apps — including LiveChat, Tidio, HubSpot Live Chat, and LiveAgent — include integrations with the best Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software, multichannel support, analytics reports and management tools

Chatbots are more than the future — they're here now

What might have once seemed like the future — outsourcing some of your most menial and most significant work to chatbots — is here now. While you can't (and shouldn't) source all of your tasks to bots, implementing them can save you valuable time while streamlining the customer experience. Look for a chatbot that addresses your exact use case, and you'll be well on your way to leveraging a tool that makes all the difference.

<https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/16018-chatbots-for-growth.html>



SECURITY CORNER

Reminder to Businesses: File Police Reports

To get the appropriate police presence in downtown garages, the level of crime happening needs to be statistically demonstrated. Please share this with anyone who needs to submit a report for smash and grabs, trespassing, loitering, graffiti, vandalism, etc. A report can be submitted using these multiple paths.

1. Filing an Online Police Report at <https://www.riversideca.gov/rpd/resources-forms/how-do-i/file-online-police-report>
2. Download the Riverside Police Department mobile app to file a police report. <https://www.riversideca.gov/city-apps>
3. Download the 311 Riverside mobile app to file a report. <https://www.riversideca.gov/city-apps>
4. Call RPD's (Dispatch) Non-Emergency Line (951) 354-2007. Note: If you observe a homeless person camping out in the garage, then:
 - a. Request that you speak to an officer (Dispatch has to transfer you to an officer)
 - b. Request that you want the person arrested (RPD will have to respond to your request)
 - c. If RPD says you are not the victim and cannot 3rd party a report, then ask for an incident number.

All of the above will generate the statistics needed to increase the police presence.

Thank you!



Riverside City Council Approves Cannabis Business Ordinance

The City Council approved cannabis as an allowed business on February 28th which sets a framework for permitting, licensing, enforcement, taxation, and legal operation of commercial cannabis storefronts with a prospective cannabis tax measure on the ballot in November 2024.

The decision reversed an earlier Council decision, which since 2017 had only allowed cannabis testing laboratories within the city limits.

Permitted business types include storefront retail, with or without delivery; manufacturing/distribution businesses; and testing laboratories. Permits would be valid for one year with annual renewal required.

Prohibited businesses include cannabis microbusinesses and cultivation; and non-storefront retail, also known as delivery-only.

The program allots up to 14 permits for storefront retail. There are no limits on permits for manufacturing/distribution businesses or testing laboratories.

City Council has been discussing cannabis business permitting in some form since November 18, 2021, when the Economic Development, Placemaking and Branding/Marketing Committee of the City Council first directed City staff to begin researching options. City staff worked with a consultant, HdL Companies, to incorporate direction from the Committee into the draft program presented to Council for consideration.

The Planning Commission previously approved the measure on January 19, 2023.

Development of the program, including a ballot measure, is expected to cost about \$385,000. Annual business taxes are projected to be \$1 million to \$1.5 million, and sales taxes are conservatively expected to yield \$250,000 to \$500,000 per year.

Permit holders would have to be at least 1,000 feet from public, private and charter K-12 schools, and at least 600 feet from licensed daycare facilities and community centers.

In addition to Cannabis Business Permits from the City of Riverside, businesses also will need required State licenses/permits, City business tax certificates, and any required Building Permits and Certificates of Occupancy.

“We have the time we need until the November 2024 ballot to create a program that is socially equitable and ensures voters are informed about what the tax measure will do,” Mayor Pro Tem Clarissa Cervantes said. “Riverside voters approved this measure years ago, and the Council voted to move forward with creating a pathway for safe access, and quality workforce opportunities.”

For example, the City Council must adopt criteria for an application review process, timeframes, requirements, scoring criteria and selection process for permit issuance; application fees; a Labor Peace Agreement; and a process for applicants to provide community benefits, which are yet to be defined.

Permit holders will be required to submit an annual financial audit; report gross sales receipts; pass background checks and submit a register of all owners, managers and employees; maintain an inventory control and reporting system; and report inventory loss, theft and security breaches.

Permit owners will be required to provide exterior lighting, access control, security cameras, alarm systems, on-site security personnel, and a security liaison who directly communicates with the City Manager and Police Department.

City staff will be working to develop the permit review and implementation process with direction received from the City Council as well as input from the committee. This process is expected to be presented for Council consideration sometime this summer.

City of Riverside Press Release March 1, 2023



RDP Welcomes New Businesses to Downtown

Abilities Pediatric Physical Therapy

Credit Union of Southern California

McGuire Athletics

Tikal Bakery

Wonder Village Studio



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Press deadline is the 15th of each month prior to publication.

For Downtown News Alerts email Janice@riversidedowntown.org

For Events email Janice@riversidedowntown.org.



RDP Facebook Page

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