Five things you can do tomorrow to improve your rural community

Every community has all the talent and resources it needs to be livable. We just need to invite them into public space and get started. Here are some simple ways to get started making your community better.
1. Host a community Walk and Talk of a place you want to make better.

Gather a few neighbors and invite an outsider to walk your neighborhood with you. We often focus only on the cracked sidewalk or old buildings in our towns. We need some fresh eyes to see the assets in our community. Focus on what can be quickly improved with paint or a scrub. Find something that is unique in your town and think of way to highlight it. The funkier the better. A pole with nothing on it? Hang a few bicycles from it. A wall with peeling paint? Paint a mural over it.

The cracked sidewalks will still be there, but places that have love expressed to them become ones that people want to invest in and towns take notice of issues.

WWW.AARP.ORG/LIVABLE-COMMUNITIES
2. Take note of how loud your street is.

On your smart phone, download a free decibel meter. Stand on the curb of your street for half an hour during peak times and see what the average Db is. Anything over 60Db is likely difficult to hear a conversation over. 85 and over and you will not want to be on that sidewalk too long!

Decibel is a simple way for you to convey to elected officials, merchants, and citizens why a main street is not functioning well. Noise is something that can be corrected. Most Better Block projects reduce Db to under 65Db with simple traffic calming and lane narrowing. Start your record of noise today and publish it on your facebook daily.
3. Organize storefront signage.

Two storefronts next door to each other in a small western town. One has paper and tape covering the storefront windows and another has everything neatly displayed. If it is not worth framing, don't display it on your business. Sure, put it on a cork board inside. Buy 10 frames and when you fill them, you can say that is it. no more room to display. Never use tape and paper to display anything in your store. Frame the note that says be back in 5 minutes!
4. Give it a name.

The first step to creating identity in your town is to name things. Name everything. Parking lots, corners, benches, ditches. If locals have a name for something, make a stencil and paint it on the sidewalk. Start naming things — the more local and funky the better.
5. Make fun of yourself (town).

Everyone has a story to tell and if you don't, make up a good one! In Dallas, we didn’t have a great story, so we decided to own a bad one. We created a bike ride called the Trail of Lee Harvey Oswald to gain attention for a theater we were seeking to save from demolition. Turns out lots of people wanted to learn more about the man and fell in love with the theater.

The bike ride allowed us to own our bad history and helped save the theater. It is bustling now and still pays homage to the man that was pulled from it and gave it life again. Own your story, make a t-shirt, host a bike ride and have fun with your history.