

## Entrepreneur Lynnell Cox pins her future to Brockton's downtown

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BROCKTON — At a time when state and federal offices are looking to move out of downtown Brockton, Lynnell Cox has found a niche on Main Street.

She opened 'Your Local Office,' hoping to provide services to lawyers and other professionals, but found a much greater need.

"I didn't realize when I opened how much public work I would be doing," said Cox, 38, of East Bridgewater.

Cox believes in downtown and says it has the potential to be a vibrant city center once again.

From her shop at Main and Crescent streets, she serves as a resource, directing people to nearby services, providing translation, courier services and more. Next, she is partnering with a Spanish-speaking tax man, offering tax preparation services.

"If everyone takes a chance together, I think we can build downtown Brockton," she said. "I don't think one person buying a building will do it. It's the power of numbers."

Mayor James E. Harrington, the City Council and Downtown Brockton Association are on board.

They have watched the city's primary business area diminish through the years, the thriving retail area evaporate as shopping malls grew. But they're fighting the latest move, the loss of government offices.

The Social Security office went to Christy's Drive across from Westgate Mall; the Internal Revenue Service is said to be moving to another Brockton location, and the Plymouth County district attorney also may have plans to go to Christy's Drive. City leaders are trying to keep them downtown.

The mayor hopes to use federal stimulus money to return two-way traffic to downtown, also with the goal of spurring more commerce along Main Street.

John Merian, president of the Downtown Brockton Association and a Main Street merchant, said the state may be listening more closely than the federal government.

"The governor's office and the lieutenant governor's office are paying attention to this," he said. "They're very sensitive to make sure these state offices remain downtown."

Jon Bryan, professor of management at the Bridgewater State College school of business, said lots of times the decision is purely political.

"If the mayor and city council have good connections with the state, a lot of times they will get their way," Bryan said.

He cited the move last year of the New Bedford office of the Registry of Motor Vehicles to that downtown area, despite limited parking.

The departure of the Social Security office 18 months ago has cut traffic and revenue at the municipal parking garage, said David Farrell, executive director of the Brockton Parking Authority that operates the garage.

The move of the IRS would take more foot and vehicle traffic out of the core of the city.

"We had 80 to 90 percent occupancy, now we have 65 percent," Farrell said. Translated to money, he expects to finish the year at \$275,000, down from over \$300,000 at the garage, which has 440 parking spaces.

The potential loss of the IRS would be another hit for downtown said Athina DiOrio, owner of the Cafe Gourmet, at Main and Belmont streets.

She's been in business for 12 years, serving gourmet lunches to regulars from the district attorney's office, IRS, Social Security, city offices and more.

"They're taking everything from downtown, everything we worked so hard for," said owner DiOrio. "How is business going to survive?"

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