

I have been around the Marshall downtown business community since I was 11 years old, being raised in a business owning family. I've invested 42 years of my life to running and preserving our hometown movie theater. I am the second-generation owner of the Bogar Theatre and I have also created other retail businesses in our downtown over the years. For twelve years I owned and operated The Toy Barn. In 2014 I created TrailBlazers and in 2018 I took over Pawfitters.

As a person who has made investments and worked in those businesses, I can attest to the difficulties of being a small business owner in Marshall. Our downtown business owners work a lot more hours than people realize. As a matter of fact, many of them have more than one job to make ends meet. I've gone through our city's loss of large companies like State Farm and Eaton Corporation. I have felt the downturn in business with the loss of those jobs and the loss of population that followed. I've also been through recessions, downtown business evolutions and we all recently felt our economic fragility due to Covid. While our downtown appears healthy and successful, it is a fragile system that could see several businesses throw in the towel with a bad economic downturn. Downtown business owners aren't getting rich running these businesses.

I do what I do because I love this town and I love what I do. Striving to make our beloved city the best that it can be, I have donated my time and money to the betterment of our community. Anyone who knows me knows my passion for Marshall. I raise my family here and do business here because of my love for our town. I could pick up and start a life and business anywhere. I CHOOSE MARSHALL.

Thus, when I see a company like Ford want to come to our town and to have that level of investment injected into the city, I don't see how this could be bad for the community. My belief is that this would bolster our struggling businesses and empower new entrepreneurs to take the risk and invest in our town. A healthy and vibrant downtown will help preserve our historical heritage, making Marshall a more beautiful place to live, work and visit. We have all seen many downtown business districts full of empty buildings. Marshall's downtown has luckily avoided that outcome. But without being proactive, our community could at some point succumb to a deteriorating downtown business district.

I would like to believe we are blessed to have this opportunity in our town. An investment like this can create decades of progress in our community. Firekeepers did not destroy Marshall, as some predicted, and this plant won't erode our historical small-town charm. With my business experience I believe Ford partnering with our community will create a better Marshall.

Sincerely,

Michael Lounds – OWNER Bogar Theatre, TrailBlazers & Pawfitters