



# DOWNTOWN DREAM

A film by Aaron Matthews

An Icarus Films Release

USA, 2013, 44 minutes, Closed Captioned

Trailer: <http://bit.ly/1dSt7OZ>

Contact: (718) 488-8900 [www.IcarusFilms.com](http://www.IcarusFilms.com)

**Serious documentaries are good for you.**



## SYNOPSIS

DOWNTOWN DREAM follows five people in a rustbelt town struggling to realize their dreams and answer one question: how do you make it in America today?

## ABOUT THE FILM

For decades, small town life in the United States has been slowly and quietly eroding. But there are overlooked stories amidst the talk of America's economic decline: the stories of individual men and women in the "Rust Belt" community in Lewistown, Pennsylvania. Once one of the country's largest steel manufacturing centers, Lewistown lost its manufacturing base and industrial might a generation ago and has since become a "ghost town." DOWNTOWN DREAM follows the lives of five dynamic men and women living in Lewistown who refuse to be counted out and instead struggle to reinvent their lives and their dreams in America's chilly economic climate.

Over the course of two years, in DOWNTOWN DREAM, viewers witness five dynamic personal journeys that also concretize the struggles of the town itself. Jon, a developer, reflects Lewistown's wistful remembrance of nobler days; Bernard, a pastor and one of 150 African Americans in Lewistown, embodies the town's potential resurrection; Pam, a would-be salon owner, reflects the can-do spirit that may be a remedy for Lewistown's business community; Barb, a recovering addict, and Katie, her daughter and an aspiring actress and singer, personify its potential physical rehabilitation. Lyrical and intimate, the film reveals typical Americans in a typical American place grappling with the question on everybody's lips today: How do you make it in America anymore?

After more than 40 years of decay, Lewistown is now at a crossroads. The town leaders have drawn up a comprehensive redevelopment plan, and it is taking shape. In order to beautify the deserted downtown, streets have been widened, trees have been planted and buildings have been razed. The centerpiece of the plan—spending \$250,000 in state funding to install a park in the town's center—is underway.

The situation in Lewistown mirrors the fate of the nation at this critical point in history. How do Americans make sense of economic and political forces beyond their control? Will they make a go of it and if so, how? In DOWNTOWN DREAM, Jon, Bernard, Pam, Barb and Katie reinvent their dreams in the face of devastation and decay.

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



Aaron Matthews is the award-winning documentary filmmaker of acclaimed movies including *The Paper*, *A Panther in Africa*, and *My American Girls*. His films has been broadcast on PBS's *P.O.V.* and *Independent Lens* series, The Discovery Channel, and The History Channel.

Mr. Matthews' projects have been supported by The Sundance Institute, The New York State Council on the Arts, The Jerome Foundation, The Brooklyn Arts Council, Latino Public Broadcasting, and the Independent Television Service.

Mr. Matthews is the founder of Look Alive Films, which produces television documentaries, and commercial and short form pieces for clients including Discovery, History, The Sundance Channel, as well as various non-profit organizations. Born in Venezuela, Aaron Matthews grew up in Brooklyn, where he currently lives.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In August 2003, I moved from New York City to Central Pennsylvania. I grew up in Brooklyn, so the move from city to small town life had its challenges, but mostly, I was ready to embrace the slower pace and majestic beauty of this part of the country. What I wasn't ready for was the blight that branded nearly every town I visited. I'd walk down deserted downtown streets, past the boarded up storefronts, and I always heard some version of the same story: "The jobs left in the 1970's when we lost our manufacturing base overseas—it's been downhill ever since." One person told me, "We've been in a recession for 40 years." These were the rust belt towns I had read about, but never spent any time in. These were the towns that had lost all sense of place and purpose.

Lewistown, a former steel town and mecca of Central Pennsylvania, was one of these towns. But its decades-long cycle of collapse and misfortune wasn't the end of its story. In fact, it was just the beginning. As I formed friendships in Lewistown, I learned of people's attempts to start over, to reinvent their lives and their town in the face of impossible decay. And I met Lewistowners who were striving to make sense of it all, people who were rekindling their hopes, reimagining their American Dreams.

I knew this was a story that had to be told. Hundreds of towns across America resembled Lewistown, but we were awash in only one-dimensional narratives of these places. The conventional storylines either romanticized or denigrated blue-collar towns, with no regard for how they fit into the fabric of our country. The story of Lewistown presented an opportunity to challenge these rote interpretations and explore the lives of the individuals most affected by America's widespread economic decline. Because of my big city roots I felt I could bring a fresh eye to this compelling story.

I set out to make a timely, personal and intimate film that focused on the embers in the ash. A film that looked at the fall and fledgling rise of a typical American town. Downtown Dream doesn't sugarcoat the on-the-ground reality. Life is hard for many people in this post-industrial town. But there are also people who are refusing to be counted out, who are mounting a resistance. My hope is that Downtown Dream provides a complicated, lyrical account of what it is like to live and dream in a place like Lewistown – an American place where people remain determined to persist in the struggle for better times.

## **FILM CREDITS**

Title: "Downtown Dream"

Release Year: 2013

Running time: 44 minutes

Director, Producer, Editor: Aaron Matthews

Director of Photography: Wayne De La Roche

Associate Producer & Story Consultant: Jennifer Mittelstadt

Editing Consultant: Richard Hankin

Original Music: John Whitlock

An Icarus Films Release

Download publicity materials

<http://icarusfilms.com/pressroom.html>

User: icarus Password: press

Icarus Films

32 Court Street, Floor 21, Brooklyn, NY 11201

(718) 488-8900 · mail@IcarusFilms.com · www.IcarusFilms.com