

REVITALIZE OHIO

WINTER 2025 | A HERITAGE OHIO PUBLICATION

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REVITALIZE OHIO

Winter 2025

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ON THE COVER:

We cannot wait for you to join us in historic downtown Canton this fall for our annual conference on October 14-16. Look for more details this Spring for sessions and registration information.



Executive Director Note

And somehow, it's December. And what a year it has been!

In 2024, Heritage Ohio reviewed our scope of work, and made significant improvements and expansions to the programs and training we present. In 2023, we hired a full-time Assistant Director of Revitalization, giving us the capacity to work with more communities on their downtown transformation. We currently have 20 Affiliate, 21 Aspiring, and 5 Community Member Main Street communities. In 2024, we completed 6 DART visits. We also provided 12 pre-DART visits and technical assistance to 171 communities.

Using census data to track growth and prosperity in Ohio Main Street communities, we found the following from 2010 to 2020:

- OMSP communities saw an average population growth of 3.6%
- Median Household Income increased 30%
- Percent of families living below the poverty line decreased 12%
- Median Home values increased 5.23%

We've worked with building owners on upper floor redevelopment, to create worker and market rate housing in underutilized commercial buildings, to meet the critical need of employee housing.

We've worked with communities to adopt the appropriate tools (vacant property registration, alternative building code) to stabilize and save their downtown buildings, so that perhaps we'll lose less to demolition by neglect.

In 2024, we created a Preservation Assessment Workshop, which is a 1.5 day visit in a community that includes a two-hour public presentation on basic historic building maintenance and preservation guidelines, as well as on-site visits and building assessments of 4-6 historic structures, chosen by the community.

We've worked with building owners to assist them in finding financial tools to rehabilitate vacant and under-utilized buildings. In 2015, Heritage Ohio created a pilot program called Save Ohio's Treasures (SOT); a below market rate, revolving loan program. In August of 2024, our board formally approved SOT to be a standing program of Heritage Ohio, focused on preservation through prevention. We will invest in capital improvements that stabilize historic structures for redevelopment, and anticipate making our first loans in Spring of 2025.

We've worked with community entrepreneurs who locate new businesses in central business districts to create new jobs. During 2024, we directly reached over 774 local businesses through programs and events, to help them retain their

employees and businesses, pivot their business model, connect to lending and funding resources, and provide information on best practices for small businesses. We also negotiated an agreement with four Ohio Main Street programs and Placer.ai to get detailed information on spending, attendance, and marketing, to help their communities grow, and we're hoping to expand that with another four communities in 2025.

With funding from the Nord Family Foundation in Lorain County, we're doing a pilot project, using AI and technology to make monthly reporting easier and more streamlined, and collect data to improve the downtown district management for the directors in Elyria, Lorain, and Wellington.

In 2024, in partnership with Downtown Redevelopment Services, we administered a \$40,000 USDA Rural Communities Grant to produce Revitalization Roadmap and Property activation reports in Medina, Piqua, and Ravenna, resulting in a printed report with specific actionable items for district activation and property redevelopment.

Throughout 2024, in partnership with the State Historic Preservation Office, we continued to administer two Federal Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants through the USDA, bringing over \$1.3 million in bricks and mortar rehabilitation funding to historic properties in Cambridge, Coshocton, Marietta, Middletown, Millersburg, Painesville, and Ravenna,

Through 11/15/24, we've had 2,610 Ohioans attend our programs, events, and trainings. The webinars and film shorts we produce have reached 1,366 views on Youtube. We've had over 60 communities represented at our annual conference in Newark. Over 170 communities have been represented at our other events, trainings, and webinars, and we've directly reached 807 businesses through in person training.

We're looking forward to the coming year, and introducing some new preservation and revitalization programs to benefit Ohioans and save the places that matter, build community, and help people live better.



Matt Wiederhold,
Executive Director of Heritage Ohio



Stay Tuned for Upcoming Preservation Workshops in 2025

We're planning two informative workshop series for 2025, a continuation of our Preservation Assessment Workshop (PAW), and launching an Intro to Historic Real Estate Redevelopment.

What is a PAW? It's a workshop that consists of an evening presentation given by David Mertz, the former director of Belmont College's Building Preservation/Restoration Program, followed up the next day with one-on-one building assessments. Dave's evening presentation focuses on common building maintenance issues, and best practices for monitoring and resolving these issues. During the assessments, owners will have the opportunity to discuss potential problem areas and Dave will provide suggestions for the issues specific to their buildings.

We have a limited number of workshop slots available for communities to host a PAW. Thanks to funding support through the State of Ohio, we're offering the PAW for only \$500.

We're equally excited to launch our Intro to Historic Real Estate Redevelopment workshop series in the new year. Each workshop will consist of a full-day of learning the basics: from sizing the loan and calculating equity needs, to learning the dollars & sense of tax incentives.

State funding support is also assisting this workshop series, so the local commitment is only \$1,500. If your community would like to host a workshop, you can contact Frank Quinn at fquinn@heritageohio.org for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

BUILDING CODE BASICS FOR HISTORIC MAIN STREET

Webinar

January 29-30

SUCCESSFULLY RECRUIT BUSINESSES TO FILL YOUR DOWNTOWN SPACES WORKSHOP

Marion

February 18

KEEP OHIO BEAUTIFUL

Webinar

February 26

STATEHOOD DAY

Columbus

March 5

CHURCHES OF OHIO

Webinar

March 26

HERITAGE OHIO CONFERENCE

Canton

October 14-16

2025 Revitalization Series Workshop Schedule Announced

Heritage Ohio is excited to announce the dates and host communities for our 2025 Quarterly Revitalization Series Workshops. These full-day educational opportunities are designed to empower community leaders with tools and strategies for enhancing local vitality and economic growth.

The 2025 training schedule is as follows:

Tuesday, February 18 – Marion

Wednesday, May 7 – Van Wert

Tuesday, June 10 – Lorain

Tuesday, September 4 – Wellington

Each training session will feature workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities facilitated by noted subject experts, and tailored to support community revitalization efforts. Details on the final topics that will be presented at each workshop are still being finalized, but sessions on downtown redevelopment, small business support, placemaking, and property development are being planned. Attendees are invited to join us after the training for an evening networking reception in the host community.

Final workshop details and registration will be shared through the Heritage Ohio weekly email newsletter and on our website at heritageohio.org. Affiliate, Aspiring, and Community Member Main Street programs are encouraged to bring all interested board members and volunteers to the trainings. The Revitalization Series is paid for in part with funding from the Ohio Department of Development.



Featured Ohio Main Street: Kent Snow Day

Kent's first Snow Day took place in downtown Kent in 2024 and plans are in the works for the second annual Snow Day on Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025! The event had an incredible impact on businesses and the community, driving foot traffic and sales to the downtown district while lifting community spirits after the post-holiday blues and cabin fever kicked in. Attendees visited businesses to partake in family-friendly activities and were in the mood to shop and support local business, which helped lift spirits all around!

An outdoor, heated stage was home to live music all day at the Hometown Bank Plaza. Fire pits filled the plaza with warmth, the smell of a campfire, and most importantly, a place to cook s'mores! Free s'more packs were handed out to 750+ guests, including a vegan/gluten-free option. A scavenger hunt took people around town hunting for the next clue, and all who completed the hunt received a cake pop from Daisy Pops. There was an ice carving exhibition, a hats/mittens/scarves drive for the Neighborhood Bridges program, bird house making with Portage Parks, and crafts with Kent Parks and Recreation, all at Dan Smith Community Park; plus Polar Putt-Putt in Acorn Alley, and dozens of indoor/outdoor activities at downtown businesses. Face painting, axe throwing, a hot cocoa bar, snowball pong, and snowflake crafts are just a few examples of the fun things available at the inaugural Snow Day.

Business owners shared these comments with us, making this event even more meaningful: "Snow Day actually made my January payroll." "A much-needed busy day during the slowest month of the year." "Really well done, especially the first time out the gate! Heard lots of people talking about the s'mores and fire pits!" "We loved Snow Day! In addition to the steady day of increased business, everyone was happy and festive. We loved the warmth of this community in the dead of winter!"

Main Street Kent and the City of Kent look forward to bringing Snow Day back to Kent on Saturday, January 25, 2025, with even more exciting activities! Get ready for frozen turkey bowling, a winter-themed story walk and a fun day in Kent. Stay tuned for updates at [https://](https://mainstreetkent.org/events/full-calendar/)

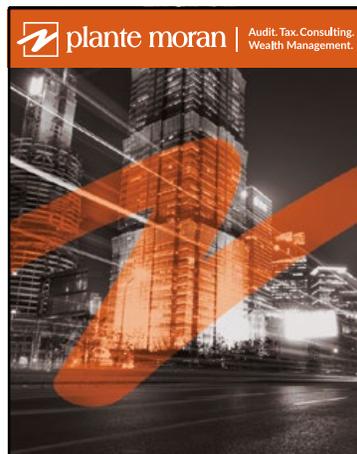
mainstreetkent.org/events/full-calendar/ Visiting from out of town? Stay at our boutique-style hotel in the heart of downtown Kent. <https://kentstatehotel.com/>



GBX Group does more than preserve the nation's historic structures. Together with our investors, development partners and members of the historic preservation community, we transform neighborhoods, stimulate economic growth, and protect the cultural and historic fabric of communities.



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In Memory of Mayor Tom Johnson 1956-1924

Reflections by Joyce Barrett, former executive director of Heritage Ohio



Tom Johnson was the mayor of Somerset and there was not a harder working mayor in Ohio. His style had a slow, considerate pace, belying his years in New York City, and a career in international banking that had taken him to every corner of the world.

Tom died in an automobile accident October 30. He was known throughout the region for juggling A LOT of projects, and that man was **persistent**. He knew good times weren't going to magically roll into town, it was going to take work by a lot of people. And because Somerset doesn't have a lot of people, he had no hesitation in recruiting anyone that had the skill set he needed to make a project happen.

I first started working with Tom almost 20 years ago when he wanted to bring more historic preservation resources to Somerset. The Village was established in 1807, and it has a lot of historic buildings, which Tom viewed not as just as an asset, but the primary asset, giving Somerset a distinct advantage.

By no means was that his singular focus, he worked on improvements leading to major transformations in: healthcare, mental health and substance abuse, economic and business development, parks & recreation, downtown redevelopment, and streetscapes. His pop-up shops program was the best I had experienced. Somerset would become

stronger as the whole of Appalachia became stronger.

Mayor Tom served on many boards: Ohio Arts Council, Hocking College (chair), and Buckeye Hills Regional Council. He was an Executive in Residence at Ohio University. He pushed for redevelopment and improvements to Buckeye Lake. He worked to see that every county in Appalachia had a community foundation to provide long-term financial support. He actively supported politicians at the State and Federal level who would support a stronger Appalachian Ohio agenda.

I was drawn into several of Tom's projects, and somehow it always seemed to serve Heritage Ohio as well. It was Tom's idea to start the successful Appalachia Heritage Luncheon, now in its 13th year. Tom pushed to engage and study how Virginia focused their CDBG money in rural regions. When Tom assembled a panel to present at the National Appalachia Regional Commission meeting in DC, of course he also recruited ARC Chair Gayle Manchin to have dinner with the Ohioans.

The last time I saw Tom in September, he gave us a tour of the Builders Club, a makerspace on the square in Somerset. He told us about his new endeavors in AI and partnership with Intel, he was collaborating with Hocking College for a Symposium which was held October 30th. He followed up by copying me on an email thread with Intel (copied in Arabic) how rural Ohio was embracing AI technology. He was preparing to leave for a sister city trip to Ukraine and Poland. Did I mention he was always juggling A LOT of projects?

He was one of those irreplaceable people. Multiple people are going to have to step up to fill those shoes.





State Senator Kirk Schuring

A Tribute to Senator Kirk Schuring

By Steve Coon and Jonathan Sandvick

State Senator Kirk Schuring represented the entire state on both sides of the aisle. That was his strength, and actually, a kind of magic in that he could accomplish many things across the state regardless of party affiliation. He mastered the art of bringing everyone together for the common good of Ohio.

Kirk always had the mindset that leaders lead and the rest will follow. He had a great understanding of how legislation worked. Kirk would relate this to making sausage—messy and a lot of times uncomfortable, but in the end it tastes very good!

Kirk was the primary champion for the State Historic Tax Credit Program that has had such a dramatic impact on the State of Ohio by its creation of many thousands of jobs. The Credit focused on converting vacant and dilapidated, historically significant buildings back to glory, with new uses such as housing, hotels, offices, and retail spaces, thus creating billions of dollars of new development in communities large and small across Ohio. This created the basis for enormous local tax revenue increases, as well as dramatically improving the economic vitality of these communities. Amazingly, the program was designed and has demonstrated the ability to pay back the State of Ohio the full amount of the tax credits.

Kirk would often say that when people fully understand the historic tax credit and what it actually does, they will

support the program. In explaining the program, he would say that it will pay back the state over 30% before the State pays out a penny, and completely pays it back 100% within 10 years. Cities and towns all across Ohio win! Kirk's vision of economic development was successful in most cases because of the State Historic Tax Credit.

Kirk was a brilliant legislator, and his legacy will be felt for generations to come. Some of his accomplishments include:

Serving three decades in the Ohio General Assembly; sponsoring dozens of bills including economic policy, sports gaming, and healthcare; multiple leadership positions in the General Assembly; creating joint economic development districts; named Legislator of the Year numerous times; an excellent negotiator and advocate for Canton, Stark County, and all of Ohio, graduating from Perry High School and attending Kent State University; serving as President of the Stark County Young Republicans, President of the Canton Jaycees, and President of the Canton Urban League.

His greatest accomplishment was his family, including his wife, Darlene, two children, and six grandchildren. Kirk will truly be missed, and we are all fortunate to have been part of his life and accomplishments.

2024 Heritage Ohio Annual Conference Recap



Upper Sandusky and the path that lead to Ohio's first UNESCO World Heritage Site at the Newark Earthworks.

In the afternoon, we hosted Sara Bronin, Chair of the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation. Bronin discussed the recently published *Report and Recommendations on the Application and Interpretation of Federal Historic Preservation Standards* and stressed the importance of saving America's historic places.

On Wednesday evening, we hosted our donors at the Legacy Circle Reception and offered behind the scenes hardhat tours of the Newark Arcade. Just down the road, the Main Street Networking was held in the very cool Newark Station, a massive adaptive reuse project that formerly held the Pharis Tire & Rubber Company and the Westinghouse Electric Company.

Over 250 fellow preservationists and revitalizationists joined us in historic downtown Newark for an amazing three days at our annual conference this past October.

We kicked off the festivities with the Heritage Ohio Annual Awards on Tuesday evening at the historic Midland Theatre in the heart of Newark. 11 of Ohio's best persons, places, and projects in preservation and revitalization were honored. You can learn more about the awards on page 9.

Wednesday morning, we welcomed our guests to Newark and received a very moving and personal opening plenary from Chief Billy Friend of the Wyandotte Nation. Later in the morning Chief Friend also shared his expertise in sessions on the preservation of the Wyandot Mission Church in

During the conference, we had the opportunity to tour several historic sites around Newark, including the Newark Earthworks, Octagon Mound, the Louis Sullivan-designed Home Building Association Bank, the soon to be opened Newark Arcade, and the historic Dawes Arboretum on the city's southside. If you missed out on these tours, make sure to head back to Newark this summer and check them out!

Heritage Ohio thanks all of our attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors that truly made this an amazing conference. A special thank you goes out to Mayor Jeff Hall and Fred Ernest for their incredible work and dedication to making the Newark conference something everyone will remember.

THANK YOU!

To our sponsors, partners, and attendees for making our 2024 Conference a success

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2024 Heritage Ohio Annual Award Winners Announced

At the historic Midland Theatre in downtown Newark, 11 individuals, organizations, and projects were honored for their contributions to Ohio's preservation and revitalization movement.

Best Main Street Committee Project Award

The Buoy Tree
Vermilion



Public Art Vermilion, a program of Main Street Vermilion, launched The Buoy Tree in June 2023. The goal was to create a 12-foot-tall, community-driven "tree" made of nautical buoys to honor Vermilion's maritime history. The tree was displayed downtown from December 2023 through the Ice A Fair event in February 2024.

Over 300 community members purchased and decorated buoys. Mediums used ranged from paint to decoupage, fabric to roping, beading, glitter and more. The project fostered creativity, community pride, and collaboration, paving the way for future public art initiatives in the city.

The award was presented to Main Street Vermilion.

Best Downtown Placemaking Award

The Ottawa EndZone
Ottawa



In 2022, the Village of Ottawa launched The Ottawa EndZone, a placemaking project on Walnut Street inspired by the community's enthusiasm for high school sports. Part of a broader

strategic plan, the EndZone aimed to reimagine downtown spaces and gather community feedback. Walnut Street, chosen for its historical significance and untapped potential, hosts this gathering space next to original brick pavement from 1898 and historic yet underutilized buildings.

With a \$5,000 grant from the National Association of Realtors, the Go Ottawa volunteer committee created four parklets featuring a street mural, lighting, and planters—marking the first outdoor dining spaces in Ottawa.

Since its October 2022 opening, The End Zone has become a vibrant public space, hosting events like summer music festivals, weekend live performances, and pep rallies. In 18 months, Walnut Street has seen about 1,000

additional visitors, with numbers expected to grow as the area continues to attract more activity.

The award was presented to Go Ottawa.

Best Residential Rehabilitation Award

The Moore-Knight House
Cincinnati



This historic home, located in the Price Hill Incline neighborhood, was saved from demolition. Constructed in the 1860's as the home of Robert Moore on land owned by the Price family,

it was purchased by the Knight family in 1926, the first African-American family to take up residence in Price Hill. For the subsequent decades, the house was occupied by African American teachers and scholars, eventually being converted into multi-family apartments in the 1970's.

The New Republic Architecture team was enlisted to reimagine this important Price Hill home for modern living. The initial design was confined to the historic home, but when the client required more space the architects designed a complimentary modern wing. The addition is meant to evoke a historic carriage house. The two structures are connected by a two-story glass and steel bridge that creates visual separation while respecting the historic architecture. A spiral staircase in the addition adds visual interest while an elevator provides additional access to the second floor.

In the transitional space, the original brick of the former exterior wall of the historic structure was left exposed to add character and texture. Historic fireplaces in the kitchen

AWARD WINNERS
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AWARD WINNERS

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and parlor were retained as accent features. A summer porch was returned to its original configuration, making it open air once again.

The award was presented to New Republic Architecture.

Best Commercial Rehabilitation in a Small Community Award

Rainbow Row
Bellefontaine



The Rainbow Row Arts District project transformed a long-neglected 8,000-square-foot building and resulted in five storefronts and seven upper-floor living units.

Purchased by Small Nation in 2021 for \$100,000, the property had been vacant and in disrepair for years. Partnering with Revival Design Collective, the project drew inspiration from Charleston's Rainbow Row, creating vibrant pastel-colored facades.

From start to finish, \$1.2 million was invested into the Rainbow Row Arts District project. The project continued the revitalization of the downtown community and showcases the possibilities when a single developer decides to invest in their downtown.

The award was presented to Small Nation.

Best Commercial Rehabilitation in a Large Community Award

Longfellow Senior Housing
Cleveland



The Henry W. Longfellow School, located at 650 East 140th Street in Cleveland, Ohio, was built in 1924 by architect Walter McCornack and served as a key educational

institution in the Collinwood community for over 85 years. After its closure in 2011, the building faced the threat of demolition, but the Cleveland Restoration Society (CRS) successfully had it designated as a national landmark.

The existing school building was rehabilitated to create 30 apartments, while a new building was constructed with 50 additional units. The design retained original features such as chalkboards, cabinetry, and 12-foot classroom windows, blending historic elements with modern amenities. The

auditorium was converted into a community space, and the gymnasium became a fitness center tailored for seniors. The project also included a health room and 3,000 square feet of social activity space.

Despite challenges in balancing historical preservation with modern requirements, the \$23.7 million project was successfully financed through a combination of tax credits, loans, and grants. The redevelopment preserved the building's rich history, while providing much-needed affordable housing for seniors.

The award was presented to Vesta Corporation and LDA architects.

Main Street Business of the Year Award

Barclay's Men's-Women's Clothiers
Piqua



Barclay's Men's-Women's Clothiers, a family-owned business operating for nearly 80 years, is an anchor of downtown Piqua. Known for

exceptional service and a loyal customer base, Barclay's actively supports the local economy by recommending and patronizing nearby businesses. Current owner Bert Harrison is highly involved in Mainstreet Piqua, sponsoring events like the Taste of the Arts and the Holiday Parade, and contributing to beautification efforts and fundraising. Both Bert and his wife Terri have served on the Mainstreet Piqua board, with Bert also having been board president.

The Harrisons are also committed to downtown revitalization, maintaining their storefronts. Their dedication extends beyond their business, embodying a spirit of community service and historic preservation. Barclay's Clothier is more than just a store—it is a landmark of Piqua.

Historic Theater of the Year Award

The Ariel-Ann Carson Dater Performing Arts Centre
Gallipolis



The Ariel Opera House, built in 1895 by the Ariel Oddfellows Lodge and designed by state architects Packard and Yost, originally featured two street-level

storefronts, a banquet hall on the second floor, and a lodge room on the third floor. After changing hands several times, the Gallia Masonic Lodge acquired it in 1919, adding another storefront, a ballroom, and expanded facilities in 1930. However, the theater portion closed in the 1960s and fell into disrepair until musician Lora Lynn Snow began efforts to restore it in 1987 for use by the Ohio Valley

Symphony. With community support, the theater was renovated, preserving much of the original architecture, such as golden oak woodwork and ornamental plaster. In 1990, the Ariel reopened.

In 2005, Ann Carson Dater purchased the building and donated it to the Ohio Valley Symphony. Subsequent renovations included installing an elevator, upgraded HVAC, energy-efficient windows, and a new marquee. An original 1930s carpet pattern was recreated for the theater.

In 2016, the Ariel Box Office was restored, recreating the original 1895 aesthetic. The Ariel Opera House is recognized as one of the top 10 restored theaters in Ohio.

Young Preservationist of the Year Award

Jack Newton
Cleveland



Jack Newton began his historic preservation career in August 2019 as a Project Manager at GBX Group. In his first year, he oversaw the acquisition of 14 historic buildings, including a former YWCA in Nashville that was converted into housing. Jack's role required close collaboration with non-profits focused on saving historic buildings, leading him to join GBX's Community Development team.

His most notable achievement has been organizing the inaugural National Summit on Historic Preservation Easements, where he coordinated speakers, developed content, and moderated panels, ensuring open community discussions. His success in this role led to an invitation to moderate at the National Alliance of Preservation Commissioners' annual conference in 2024.

Jack is also active in Preservation Action, where he helps shape policy and strategies for federal legislation and appropriations. Outside of work, Jack is involved with the Urban Land Institute, where he has taken a leadership role in the Redevelopment and Reuse Product Council, studying adaptive reuse practices in major cities like Toronto, Los Angeles, and New York City.

Main Street Director of the Year Award

Jennifer Tinkler
Marietta



Jen is in her third year of leading the downtown revitalization efforts at Marietta Main Street and is described by her nominator as someone who sits on almost every board in town, and is credited with growing great connections with the local Chamber, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Port Authority. Tinkler is a regular at City Council meetings, and has

grown the organization's partnership levels to a place where the board never thought it was possible.

Jen Tinkler worked tirelessly with Marietta City Council over the last year to ensure that Main Street received much needed ARPA funding (over one hundred thousand dollars after previously receiving zero funding from the city/local government), allowing the program to provide more grants for growing businesses and to update equipment they needed and grow their programming and have adequate financial reserves.

Jen Tinkler strives for excellence in all they do, and leads a very large board with differing viewpoints and personalities and does it all with grace and excellence.

Spirit of Main Street Award

The Reineke-Reinbolt Family
Tiffin



The Spirit of Main Street Award is presented to an individual that has shown outstanding leadership in revitalizing and preserving Ohio communities.

The downtown revitalization movement in Tiffin began in 2009, with Bill Reineke playing a key role in forming the Tiffin Tomorrow group, which developed a 124-item improvement plan. Bill and his brother Dan were pioneers, purchasing and renovating a downtown building to create high-end lofts, demonstrating the appeal of downtown living and spurring further investment. The Reineke-Reinbolt families have since invested in over 15 properties, each with unique features, preserving historical character while offering modern amenities.

The next generation also got involved, with Weston Reinbolt and his wife Suzie transforming a historic 12-unit building into popular rental lofts, while Dan Reineke II renovated several properties, including a former NAPA Auto Parts store, which now offers community meeting space. Dan and his wife Nikki renovated a four-story building that became the Tiffin Seneca Economic Partnership (TSEP) headquarters, supporting downtown's economic growth.

The family actively contributes to the downtown community by sponsoring Third Thursday events, organizing the St. Paddy's Day 5K, and encouraging employee participation in community efforts.

The Joyce Barrett Preservation Hero Award

Ben Sutherly
Troy

In early 2020, a tornado damaged the upper parapet wall of the Odd Fellows building in Troy, prompting the owner,

AWARD WINNERS

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and eventually the City, to call for its demolition. This led to a four-year struggle, led by Ben Sutherly and the Troy Historic Preservation Alliance, to save the building and the 1840s courthouse building to the rear of the Odd Fellows hall, which played a key role of national significance in the journey of the of the emancipated Randolph Freedpeople from Virginia to Ohio in 1846. Ben spearheaded a public campaign involving court cases,

inspections, and community engagement to halt the demolition.

As part of a court-mediated settlement agreement, THPA reached a deal to purchase and stabilize the building, raising over \$800,000 within four months, exceeding their goal. THPA's innovative "brick sponsorship" fundraising campaign contributed significantly to the success. Ben's relentless dedication and efforts ensured the preservation of both the IOOF building and the courthouse, which would otherwise have been demolished.

Ben's commitment to historic preservation is evident in the personal sacrifices he made, including leading a legal fight against the City and property owner, advocating at public meetings, and organizing a robust social media campaign. His dedication was symbolized by his act of physically blocking a backhoe to prevent the building's destruction. His unwavering passion saved two important historical landmarks in Troy.

Ohio History Connection Recognizes Preservation Achievements

11 outstanding historic preservation achievements in communities across Ohio were honored with the Ohio History Connection's 2024 State Historic Preservation Office Awards on Nov. 2. The State Historic Preservation Office Awards have been presented since 1983 to recognize notable contributions to historic preservation in Ohio. The awards are presented in two categories: Public Education and Awareness and Preservation Merit.

Public Education and Awareness Award recipients were:

- Ed Thellman and his efforts to preserve the history of the former Henry W. Longfellow Elementary School, Cleveland.
- "View from The Overlook," the journal of the Cleveland Heights Historical Society, Cleveland Heights.

Preservation Merit Awards recipients were:

- Weister Wood LLC, Ingle-Barr Inc. and Archall Architects for the restoration of the Canal Winchester Bank building, Canal Winchester.
- First Congregational Church of Claridon, Marous Brother Construction, Perspectus, Creative Process Studios and Frost Architectural Preservation for the rehabilitation of the First Congregational Church of Claridon, Claridon.
- National Trail Chapter No. 348, International Questers, for the preservation and rehabilitation of the Great Western School, St. Clairsville.
- Vesta Corporation and LDA architects for the preservation and conversion of the Henry W. Longfellow Elementary School into Longfellow Senior Housing, Cleveland.
- Edwards Company, Meyers+Associates, Designing Local, Ltd., Urban Five Construction, Blind Eye

Restoration and Coon Restoration for the rehabilitation of the Madison and White Haines Buildings, Columbus.



- Portsmouth Connex, Hilltop Initiative Neighborhood Association, City of Portsmouth, Scioto County Commission and the Scioto Foundation for the protection of ancient Hopewell mounds and amenity improvements in Portsmouth's Mound Park.
- 15 South Ontario LLC and Kraemer Design Group for the conversion of what was once the Overmyer grocery warehouse into apartments into what is now the Overmeyer Building, Toledo.
- Ohio Wesleyan University and Schooley Caldwell for the rehabilitation of Slocum Hall at Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware.
- Pepper Construction, Emersion Design LLC, CMTA, and Sullebagger Associates for the preservation and conversion of the Stearns & Foster Building into the regional headquarters of Pepper Construction, Lockland.

This article was provided courtesy of the Ohio History Connection.



DPO's Painesville Arts & Culture Council: A Creative Vision for Revitalization and Community

By Renee Fitzgerald-Palacio

In the heart of Painesville, art has always been more than just a form of expression. It has the potential to be a catalyst for change, a source of connection, and a vehicle for growth. Recognizing the powerful role that the arts can play in a community, the Downtown Painesville Organization (DPO), with support from the City of Painesville, local artists, and a wide range of community members, has created the Painesville Arts & Culture Council (PACC). This newly established council is poised to become a cornerstone of the city's revitalization efforts, responding to a growing local demand for more artistic programming.

The formation of PACC represents a bold step forward for both DPO and the wider Painesville community. The initiative was launched with the goal of enriching the area through visual and performing arts, supporting local artists, and cultivating a sense of pride among residents. Yet the council's ambitions extend beyond artistic expression. PACC aims to be a driving force behind beautification efforts, economic revitalization, and community building—all key priorities for the DPO's mission.

As PACC begins its journey, it reflects the community's desire to see the arts integrated into the city's future. It is poised to become a vital part of Painesville's transformation, enhancing not only its cultural landscape but its economic and social fabric as well.

Responding to the Community's Desire for the Arts

The creation of PACC comes in response to the voices of the Painesville community, which has long expressed interest in expanding opportunities for artistic engagement—both visual and performing arts. Residents have made it clear that they want the arts to be a visible and accessible part of daily life in Painesville, not just as a source of entertainment but as a way to foster personal and community expression.

Local artists are eager for more spaces to showcase their work, musicians and performers hope for venues to share their talents, and many residents have expressed their desire for public art that reflects the city's unique identity. PACC will address these needs by creating platforms for artists and performers, and ensuring that art is both accessible and reflective of Painesville's diverse population.

"We have so many talented artists in Painesville, and with PACC, we'll finally have a place for their work to shine," says a local artist and early advocate of the council. "It's exciting to think about what this will mean for our community."

The Role of PACC in Economic Revitalization

Looking ahead, PACC will play a crucial role in the economic revitalization of downtown Painesville. Arts and culture initiatives are known drivers of economic growth,

and PACC is prepared to leverage that potential to make Painesville a destination for cultural and historic tourism. By hosting events like Art in the Park, public exhibitions, and performances, the council will bring foot traffic into the city, benefiting local businesses and artisans alike.

Cultural and historic events will draw both residents and visitors, creating a ripple effect for nearby businesses. As Painesville becomes a hub for the arts, local restaurants, cafes, and shops are expected to see an increase in patrons, while artisans will have more opportunities to sell their work. PACC will be a driving force in this effort, positioning the arts as a key component of downtown revitalization.

"We anticipate a real boost for local businesses as more people come to Painesville for the arts," explains Executive Director, Renee Fitzgerald Palacio. "PACC's initiatives will help bring new energy and excitement to downtown, and everyone stands to benefit."

Beautification through Art

One of the most immediate impacts PACC plans to make is in the realm of beautification. Public art installations—murals, sculptures, and other visual pieces—will transform spaces throughout Painesville, bringing color, creativity, and meaning to the city's streets. These installations will not only enhance the visual appeal of the city but will also foster a sense of community pride and ownership.

PACC's approach to beautification will be inclusive and community-

driven, ensuring that the artwork reflects the diverse cultural heritage of Painesville.

Local artists will be engaged to create pieces that tell the story of the city—its history, its people, and its future. In doing so, PACC aims to make Painesville not just a city with art, but a city that lives and breathes art.



DPO'S

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DPO's

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Building Community through Cultural Events

At the heart of PACC's mission is the belief that art has the power to bring people together. The council plans to organize and/or support a variety of cultural events that will serve as platforms for connection and collaboration. From pop up art events to street performances, PACC's programming will offer residents and visitors alike opportunities to engage with the arts and with one another.

These events will be designed to strengthen community bonds and celebrate the diversity of Painesville. PACC will prioritize inclusivity in its programming, ensuring that people of all backgrounds and identities feel welcome to participate. This commitment to inclusivity will be reflected in a wide range of performances, partnerships with local schools, and collaborations with organizations representing different communities.

One of the cornerstone initiatives will be Art in the Park, a summer event that invites people to explore downtown Painesville, check out local artisans work, engage in public art, and take in live performances. By making the arts an accessible and integral part of the community, PACC aims to foster a strong sense of belonging and unity.

Forging Partnerships and Collaborations

Collaboration will be central to PACC's success. The council will work closely with local schools, businesses, nonprofits, and city officials to ensure that the arts remain a priority in Painesville's development. From the beginning, PACC has recognized that revitalizing the city through the arts will require a collective effort, and it has already begun building strong partnerships.

Lake Erie College, Painesville City Local Schools, and area arts councils are expected to be key collaborators in PACC's initiatives. These partnerships will help expand the reach of the council's programming and create opportunities for residents of all ages to engage with the arts.

Additionally, local businesses will play a significant role by sponsoring events, providing venues, and promoting art exhibitions.

PACC's collaborative approach will ensure that it becomes a leader in Painesville's arts and culture scene, while also

building a network of supporters who share its vision for a thriving, creative community.

Looking Ahead: The Future of PACC

Though PACC is just beginning its journey, its long-term vision is ambitious. The council plans to expand its programming over the next several years, with a focus on establishing permanent public art installations, increasing opportunities for local artists, and making Painesville a recognized hub for arts and culture.

A major goal for PACC is to create more opportunities for youth engagement in the arts. By partnering with local schools and youth organizations, the council will provide young people with the chance to explore their creativity and develop their talents. This emphasis on youth engagement will help cultivate the next generation of artists and cultural leaders in Painesville.

Additionally, PACC plans to develop a series of signature events that will draw regional attention to Painesville. These events, such as a potential art festival and cultural celebrations, will solidify the city's reputation as a destination for arts and culture.

With the support of the community and its partners, PACC is poised to become a driving force in Painesville's revitalization, creating lasting change through the power of art.

Conclusion

The creation of the Painesville Arts & Culture Council marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the Downtown Painesville Organization. Through its commitment to the arts, beautification, economic revitalization, and community building, PACC will play a key role in shaping Painesville's future. As the council's initiatives unfold, the city will see not only a transformation in its physical landscape but in the connections and collaborations that make it a vibrant and resilient community.

PACC represents a vision of what Painesville can become—a city where art is at the heart of daily life, where creativity fuels progress, and where people come together to celebrate all that makes the community unique. To turn this vision into reality, PACC invites businesses, individuals, and organizations to become supporters of this vital initiative. By making a financial contribution on our crowd funding page, you can help bring public art, cultural events, and educational opportunities to Painesville, ensuring that the arts continue to enrich and inspire our community for years to come.



Saved, Threatened, Demolished

SAVED

Medina War Bond Building



The Medina War Bond Headquarters was built in 1942, on the west side of the public square in Medina. There, the Women's War Bond Committee sold

war bonds, war stamps and stamp corsages during World War II. Once the war was over, most war bond buildings were decommissioned, with many being destroyed, sold or repurposed. Medina's War Bond Headquarters was placed in storage until it was transferred to the property of Dr. Frederick Fri, a World War II Purple Heart recipient. The building remained on his property when Medina General Hospital took over the property in 1997. In 2022, the rare survivor was moved to property owned by the Medina County Historical Society, and the building was restored in 2024.

THREATENED

The Octagon, Tiffin



Constructed in the 1850s and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, The Octagon's history is tightly woven into the story

of Heidelberg University and the City of Tiffin. Although the property has been vacant for decades, university leadership has signaled its willingness to invest in the building's rehabilitation. Local preservationists hope to support preservation efforts to insure the former home's survival well into the 21st century.

DEMOLISHED

St. Anthony School, East Dayton

The historic 1915 St. Anthony's Catholic School in East Dayton was demolished in October. The school was closed in the spring of 2024 after the Archdiocese of Cincinnati said that it would have cost more than \$13 million to repair the building. Visit Save St. Anthony! on Facebook for neighborhood thoughts and photographs of this former community centerpiece.



9 Honored at Appalachia Heritage Luncheon



On December 17th, the 13th annual Appalachia Heritage Luncheon honored 9 individuals and organizations that have embodied the essence of Ohio's Appalachian region and culture. The luncheon was hosted by Ohio's Hill Country Heritage Area and Heritage Ohio, and sponsored by AEP Ohio.

Invisible Ground

Based in Athens, Ohio, Invisible Ground is a multimedia project utilizing audio, augmented reality, visual elements, and place-based storytelling to engage people in the history of their communities. Invisible Ground and Southeast Ohio History Center are collaborating on a series of nine Immersive Historic Markers in Athens County, Ohio. The project focuses on the diverse and rich

LUNCHEON

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LUNCHEON

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history of the region, with an emphasis on the history of Black/Indigenous/People Of Color communities, labor history, and the stories of the everyday people, places, and events of southeast Ohio. The accompanying Invisible Ground podcast allows these stories a spotlight through an engaging documentary storytelling format. The markers are a perfect partner to the podcast, providing an immersive opportunity to experience history through augmented reality and place-based audio storytelling.

The Valley Gem Sternwheeler

Fifty years ago, Captain James “Jim” Sands had a dream, and the river called his name. Yearning for a life that allowed him to be with his family more and tired of the construction life, Jim, along with his wife Peggy, risked everything to start the Valley Gem. The first Valley Gem began operation in 1973, carrying 98 passengers. As demand grew, they realized they needed a bigger boat. Jim spent two years designing and redesigning the new Valley Gem, which took 18 months to build with the help of family members and local experts. In April 1989, the new Valley Gem launched, accommodating 290 passengers.

The Valley Gem has evolved significantly since its inception. Awnings, air conditioning, food service, brochures, websites, and ticketing have been added or improved over the years, enhancing the experience for visitors. Jim’s dream lives on through his son, continuing to contribute to tourism in Marietta and Southeast Ohio.

The Buffington Island Battlefield Preservation Foundation

The Buffington Island Battlefield Preservation Foundation was founded in 2008, is dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of the Buffington Island battlefield in Portland, Ohio. The Battle of Buffington Island, fought on July 19, 1863, was the most significant engagement in what is officially called Morgan’s Indiana-Ohio Raid. The Foundation works to educate the public about Morgan’s Great Raid and Ohio’s largest Civil War battlefield.

In 2022-2023, the Foundation partnered with the American Battlefield Trust to purchase 118 acres of battlefield, and

represents the largest single piece of battlefield land preserved within the 1,230 acres identified by the American Battlefield Protection Program as “core battlefield” land.

Continuing efforts will be made to preserve additional acreage associated with the battlefield as well as some of the remaining houses that served as headquarters and field hospitals associated with this historic event. The BIBPF is also a partner of the Meigs County Historical Society and of the Portland Community Center, which maintains the Buffington Island Battlefield Museum.

Dirty Girl Coffee, Jane Cavarozzi

Jane Cavarozzi is the owner of Dirty Girl Coffee, a small batch coffee roaster with a social mission to promote women’s economic progress in Appalachia. Dirty Girl Coffee has invested in downtown Glouster with the renovation of their historic building, located at 82 High Street. They offer responsibly sourced coffees, including the largest selection of women produced coffees supporting pay equity in growing regions. Their mission is to chip away at those long enduring barriers to economic progress and help women find their voice, their power, and make the world a better place.

She is also a founding member and president of the Glouster Revitalization Organization, a founding board member and current board chair for the Ohio Women’s Coalition, and board member of the Athens County Foundation. In these roles, she is able to pursue her passion for women’s economic progress. As president of the Glouster Revitalization Organization, she is the project manager for their renovation of another historic building, located at 106 High Street, to create an indoor food market where local folks looking to start a food business can incubate, as well as developing a “pocket park” for the community, that continue to help drive downtown revitalization.

Steve Zarate

Steve Zarate began playing acoustic guitar and harmonica and writing songs at age 15 in 1976, emulating summer camp counselors in Columbus, Ohio. Inspired by watching them play and sing around summer evening campfires, he taught himself as a teen to play favorite songs on the guitar. He’s since learned and performed music by hundreds of other artists, while also writing *nearly 300 original songs of his own*, including “A Wonderful Place to Go,” a lovely song written to celebrate the Athens Farmers Market’s 50th anniversary. While earning degrees in Telecommunications, Political Science and Journalism from Ohio University between 1978 and 1991, Steve grew to cherish Athens and the surrounding countryside.

In early 1992 he released 18 original songs on a cassette called Athens Solstice. He’s since put out four CDs, most recently 2019’s *Patchwork Of Light*, and in 2003, nationally known vocal trio The Local Girls included Steve’s song “Jewel Of The Hocking” on a multi-artist musical celebration of Athens and Ohio University called *Four Year Heaven*. Performing professionally throughout southeast Ohio since 2006 he has entertained at dozens of events and venues, gaining a reputation as a talented musician and request specialist with a vast repertoire.



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Tales of Southeast Ohio YouTube Film Series

Southeast Ohio YouTube Film Series produces and presents video features all about the stories, legends, music and lore of Southeastern Ohio. Tales of Southeastern Ohio is a production of D & R Studio and Hometown Productions. The project was conceived by Dave Norris and Ron Mash who play in a band together. They started the film series a number of years ago, and have worked with historical societies, heritage organizations and individuals throughout a several county region of Appalachian Ohio, to create a resource of regional information about Coal Mining, Canals, Wreck of the USS Shenandoah, Brick Industry, local businesses and festivals. The film series self-funded, and Dave and Ron have purchased all of their own equipment and pay all of their own expenses to offer the videos free to the public.

Scioto County Heritage Museum

After participating in a Local History event at Portsmouth High School in 2019, residents with collections of area historic items saw the need for a museum of Scioto County history.

While Portsmouth has an art museum, a military museum, and a historic house museum, there was no repository for material pertaining to Scioto County history as a whole. The Scioto County Heritage Museum opened its doors in 2022 in a borrowed space in an unoccupied building owned by the City of Portsmouth. Later that year, the building was sold to a private business which no longer desired to host the museum. During the search for a new space, the Scioto County Heritage Museum was offered two historic buildings on adjacent properties in Downtown Portsmouth, free of charge. Scioto County Heritage Museum has pledged to restore the buildings and hold them in public trust as priceless examples of Portsmouth's heritage.

In its short tenure, the Scioto County Heritage Museum has already brought awareness to area heritage through Community partnerships. The Museum engages in outreach activities like Heritage & Innovation Day in 2024 at the Main Street Portsmouth In Bloom Farmers Market. Though hours are limited during this first phase of building restoration, the Scioto County Heritage Museum is open for group appointments and encourages area students to explore their history and unique sense of place.



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Pictured: the Carlisle Building in Chillicothe, OH



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Blue Eagle Music Store

Blue Eagle music Store has been serving the southeastern Ohio region from the same Athens location since 1971, when it was founded by Roger Johnson and Saul Chait. Frank McDermott bought the business in 2006. Blue Eagle music is a very unique music store, located in a 140 year old downtown building with 17' ceilings that puts Athens Ohio on the map. Its authentic, small business approach provides a musical connection and inspiration to people of all ages. While they are primarily a guitar store, they offer an impressive selection of new and vintage instruments, as well as music lessons and instrument repair.

According to customer, Matt Box, "Blue Eagle is not only one of the best stores of its kind that I've ever been to, it's also one of the longest-running businesses in Athens. A fantastic selection of gear for musicians of all ages, abilities, and musical tastes. This place helps maintain the unique music scene of our wonderful little town!"

Grady Smith Sam Jones Model Citizen Award

Grady Smith is an industrial arts teacher at Marietta High School and has always considered himself an educator. In the 1990s, Grady started volunteering with the Cass Scenic Railroad/Mountain State Railroad and the logging historical association. While the Cass Railroad is not located in Ohio's Hill Country Heritage Area Grady has been a volunteer citizen from Ohio's Hill Country helping to preserve this Appalachian heritage resource in a neighboring state.

From 2015 to 2023, Grady served on the board of the historic Harmar bridge company connecting Harmar Village to Marietta via this historic Railroad Bridge. He helped with the early development of grant funding that successfully rebuilt the bridge and returned it to its original turning position. Grady was also part of preparing the bridge for inspections.

Grady also serves on the Marietta Shade Tree Commission, and is now one of the longest serving members of this volunteer commission that oversees and guides the planting and care of the city public trees. Grady has been a great asset to the tree commission in helping bridge the gap between advisory and administrative duties and the physical work that needs to happen to keep a city forest, healthy, and productive.

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The Odd Couple of Historic Buildings & Solar Panels: Dos and Don'ts According to the Standards for Rehabilitation

Did you know that one of our more historic US residences, the White House, first had solar panels installed on its roof in 1979? Certainly, if America's most historic house can boast renewable energy generation without ruining its historic appearance, shouldn't the same be allowed on any building, historic or not?

As with most Standards questions, the answer may begin with an "It depends..." and the successful strategy may require creative problem-solving to incorporate a new source of energy generation while preserving the historic character of a building.

Visibility

One reason the White House installation worked was due to the panels' low visibility. Installed on a relatively flat roof bordered by a parapet, the panels were basically invisible from many vantage points. That makes the installation of panels on the roofs of commercial buildings, typically flat/low-slope with a parapet surrounding it, a good location, since they are shielded from view by anyone at ground level. However, install those solar panels on the roof of a Gothic

Revival home, and everyone in the neighborhood will see the full extent of your solar energy efforts.

Complicating the issue may be roof materials. Slate and metal roofs are historic treatments and quite often contribute to the character of the building. Commercial buildings, on the other hand, are often roofed with non-historic rubberized coatings, so placing panels on its surface isn't damaging to historic materials.

Finally, location of the visibility comes into play, as placing panels at the front of a building may be a prohibited treatment, while placing panels on a secondary elevation that is shielded from view may be an allowed treatment.

If you're interested in learning more about the fine art of achieving sustainability with historic preservation, I'd recommend further reading such as:

- ITS Number 52: Incorporating Solar Panels in a Rehabilitation Project
- Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings

A 2024 Wrap Up and the New Year with Young Ohio Preservationists

With 2024 wrapping up and 2025 on its way, Young Ohio Preservationists – the statewide organization that connects young professionals in the historic preservation field – are looking towards their goals for the New Year.

In 2024, Young Ohio Preservationists experienced great success in networking across the state of Ohio. The group

toured various Rehabilitation Tax Credit projects, both in progress and completed, got a chance to see how stained-glass art is made at one of the oldest continuously run glass studios in the country, and expanded their knowledge and training at multiple conferences across the country. Additionally, members of the Young Ohio Preservationists Organizing Committee had an outstanding year making strides in the field.



Abigail Rosenow, a Projects Review Manager with the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, participated in a HistoriCorps project at the Blue Bend Pavilion in the Monongahela National Forest in October. HistoriCorps is a nonprofit that provides volunteers with a hands-on experience preserving historic structures on public lands across the country. Contributing to the Blue Bend Recreation Area Historic District, the pavilion was built between 1936 and 1938 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Abigail and the other volunteers camped in the Appalachian Mountains for a week, working to replace the cedar shake roof, remove and

PRESERVATIONISTS

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replace deteriorating purlins, and repair sections of logs that had been damaged in the 2016 flood. “Our HistoriCorps project was located within a valley of the Appalachian Mountains, so our only way to connect with the rest of the world was to drive thirty minutes up the side of a mountain to a beautiful lookout. The temporary disconnect was a wonderful way to really experience the historic district and understand its significance.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to learn these techniques and to contribute to such a great project.” - Abigail.



Another member, Jack Newton was honored with Heritage Ohio’s Young Ohio Preservationist of the Year award for his excellence in the Historic Preservation field. The Young Ohio Preservationist of the Year Award is awarded to an individual under the age of 40 that has shown outstanding leadership in revitalizing and preserving Ohio communities. Jack is the Manager of Community Development at

GBX Group in Cleveland. Among Jack’s achievements, he oversaw the acquisition of fourteen historic buildings through his work at GBX Group. Additionally, he worked to organize the inaugural National Summit on Historic Preservation Easements, is active in Preservation Action to help shape policy and strategies for federal legislation, and is a great advocate for historic preservation across the state of Ohio.

While looking back at the outstanding year that 2024 was for Young Ohio Preservationists, the group is now looking to 2025 with various tours, trainings, and workshops among the events they are organizing, including a cemetery preservation workshop in Columbus and a window restoration workshop in Toledo. Additionally, the group is partnering with the newly organized Cincinnati Preservation Young Preservationists group to organize a series of history tours to be set in multiple cities during Pride Month in June. These tours will highlight Ohio’s LGBTQIA+ history and discuss the impact that it had on the state today. More details for these events to come.

To stay connected, follow Young Ohio Preservations on Instagram at [youngohiopreservationists](https://www.instagram.com/youngohiopreservationists). For other young professionals in the field interested in being involved with this organization, contact Abby Marshall at amarshall@ohiohistory.org.

Meet a Main Street Director



Jeff Payne

Executive Director of Downtown Middletown

Hometown: Dayton, Ohio

What do you love most about your downtown?

The first time I visited downtown Middletown and surveyed its

streetscape I was genuinely impressed by the fullness of the blocks, and the multiple number of historic structures. The fact that so many block-faces remained fully or for the most part intact was very impressive. I see this as a major asset for the revitalization of our downtown community.

Favorite Main Street event:

That’s a hard one, because we have so many fun events. I guess I must settle on Dog Day Downtown. I have observed that we are one when it comes to pet lovers.

There is a special warmth and camaraderie that permeates the community on the day of that event. Folks are so very proud of their four-legged friends. They dress them up in all sorts of costumes, they carry them around in little strollers. No matter the size of the dog, everyone works diligently to get along. I think that the saying “Dogs are man’s best friend”, could also be changed to “Dogs make man best friends”.

Favorite building in your downtown:

Downtown Middletown has many wonderful and unique buildings, some redeveloped and some not. The Reid-Klop building located at the southeast corner of Verity Parkway and Central Avenue, currently vacant and underutilized is my favorite. It has impacted me from the day I started working for DMI. I’ve dubbed it Middletown’s ‘diamond in the rough’. It is strategically located as part of the gateway into our downtown. It has character and a presence that cannot be ignored. I have had the opportunity to tour the building, and the views from the upper floors looking out to the north and west literally take your breath away. Its eventual transformation will be a real plus for the downtown community.

Favorite place to vacation or dream vacation:

My dream vacation would be to tour the Mediterranean, and not do it in a rush.

Anything else you want to share?

I believe that humility, trust, and patience are essential character traits of successful community leaders. Main Street community leaders exemplify these characteristics. They forge partnerships needed to implement successful programs.

Early in my career, one of my mentors shared with me this bromide – “People don’t care how much you know, until

DIRECTOR

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DIRECTOR

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they know how much you care". He told me to always be willing to meet people where 'they are', hear their concerns, and together with them, you work to get them to see their potential.



Courtney Hendershot Executive Director of Main Street Delaware

Hometown: Delaware, Ohio

What do you love most about your downtown?

What I love most about downtown Delaware is the sense of community that truly feels like family. A quick coffee run can easily turn into a half-hour adventure because of all the incredible business owners, employees, residents, and even tourists you meet along the way. It's one of those places where it's hard to walk down the street without running into someone you know—or meeting someone new who's just as excited about what downtown Delaware has to offer. No matter the reason I am out walking, I always find myself smiling as I stroll through our amazing downtown.

Favorite Main Street event:

That is easy, Home for the Holidays weekend! I love watching the community come together to light out Christmas tree. Seeing their faces when Santa comes on the stage to the lighting, it really is Hallmark magical! The whole weekend is very family and community focused and it really just gets you in the holiday spirit - even though I am already in holiday mode November 1!

Favorite building in your downtown:

Two of my favorite buildings in downtown Delaware are Coffeology's building, 43 N Sandusky and 33 N. Sandusky. The Coffeology building draws me in with its stunning windows and storefront, not to mention its commanding presence on the corner. There's something about the large, open feel of the space that I really enjoy. You can also find me there pretty much any morning for a great cup of coffee and cozy environment.

But I also can't help but admire 33 N. Sandusky. The recent renovations upstairs have really brought out its charm. The second and third floors have these beautiful windows, and the scallop siding gives it such a unique look. Both buildings really showcase the architectural variety that makes downtown Delaware so special.

Favorite place to vacation or dream vacation:

My dream vacation, and one I am highly anticipating, is my honeymoon to Portugal. We are planning a two-week adventure along the beautiful coast, and I can't wait to dive into everything this amazing country has to offer. I'm really looking forward to exploring the different cities along the coast, immersing ourselves in the local culture, and enjoying the stunning architecture. Whether it's sightseeing

in historic towns or relaxing by the beaches, every moment promises to be a blend of excitement and tranquility. And, of course, I'm thrilled about savoring the incredible wine and food Portugal is known for!

What is the best advice you have been given as a Main Street director?

This goes way back to when I was an intern at Downtown PKB, Parkersburg, West Virginia's Main Street organization. My boss and director at the time, Wendy Shriver, taught me to never start my week off with a meeting or end my week with a meeting. Use Monday to prepare yourself for the upcoming week and let Friday be your day to catch up on any items and relax into the weekend.

Anything else you want to share?

I highly recommend getting involved in your community. Whether it's volunteering at an event, hosting your own, participating in downtown cleanups, or simply advocating for local organizations, your support matters. Downtown businesses—restaurants and retail shops—are the backbone of the community, and they rely on your encouragement and engagement. Getting involved doesn't have to require a huge time commitment or financial investment. It can be as simple as helping with setup or teardown, assisting with registration, joining a cleanup effort, or even sharing posts and experiences on social media. Just stay engaged and show your support!

2025 Heritage Ohio Annual Conference

October 14-16, 2025

Historic Downtown
CANTON





Washing the Sidewalks as Community Care in Delaware, Ohio

By Erin Barnes

As Main Street leaders, our jobs require creativity, deep listening, and the ability to bring people together through a shared love of community and place. I'm interested in the many ways that this love of community manifests itself: how do we show up to take care of the places we love? How do we motivate and inspire others to do the same? Sometimes this work takes a lot of inventiveness. But sometimes, the answers are right in front of us, in the memories of the elders in our community.

I met Frances Jo Hamilton, the former Main Street Director of Delaware, Ohio, who now leads Ohio's statewide Main Street program, in my first weeks on the job in Denver, Colorado. Frances Jo's decades of work revitalizing downtown Delaware is deeply rooted in her connection with her grandmother, a downtown business owner and fixture in Delaware. Frances Jo told me this amazing story about getting a team of volunteers to power wash the downtown sidewalks with fire hoses—something her grandmother had told her used to happen decades before downtown experienced its downturn.

It struck me as an amazing example of something we Main Street leaders do a lot: we take care of the places we love. When we love someone or someplace, we sweat the small stuff. We're very good at taking something seemingly ordinary, such as the cleaning of sidewalks, and using it as a practice to build trust, to build value, and to build community. I was particularly struck by how meaningful Frances Jo told me this power-washing tradition was to her volunteers. She had made lifelong friends this way! And this was no easy volunteer assignment—it required people being outside for nearly 24 hours, wielding heavy fire hoses in the middle of the night.

So I asked to sit down with Frances Jo to hear the whole story of how her grandmother inspired this unlikely tradition and how it became such a vital example of what can happen when we show up to care for the places we love.

How did you get involved in Main Street Delaware, Ohio?

I was born in Delaware. In 1999, I was living in Columbus but decided to relocate home and bought my second historic home here. The Delaware Main Street program

was just taking off. Some neighbors came across the street and said, "We understand you have some really cool stories about your grandma and the downtown—would you be willing to do some walking tours to introduce this new 'Main Street' concept?"

At that time, I was taking speech courses at the community college to try to get over my deathly fear of public speaking, so I thought it was really serendipitous to be asked to talk in front of other humans. So I said sure, let's call it trial by fire. We did these walking tours for a couple of years, twice a month. Each tour was a tight hour—thirty minutes of history intermingled with little cute stories about my grandma and then thirty minutes of an introduction to the Main Streets concept. We followed up with folks after each tour, and every six months, we would invite them all to a big breakfast and ask them for money. That was how we got our Main Street program off the ground.

I volunteered with Main Street for years. I chaired the design committee, then joined the board, and in 2006 they were looking for an executive director. I was doing lighting and electrical design for an architect. This was the beginning of the housing market crash, and work was getting slim, so I threw my hat into the ring. I was Executive Director of Main Street Delaware for almost ten years. When the Ohio Coordinator position came open, I took the leap from helping one community to sixty. I often say that I fell ass-backwards into it—I'm one of those really lucky people that got to turn my volunteerism into a paying gig.

What was it like when the program first got started?

When we started our Main Street program, the downtown was more than fifty percent vacant. Nobody was patronizing the downtown businesses and they were really suffering. Big box stores like Kmart and Big Wheel had popped up all around the outskirts. Downtown buildings were flushing toilets with buckets of water—it was kind of a nightmare.

WASHING SIDEWALKS
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WASHING SIDEWALKS

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So, we started First Fridays in 1999 before anyone knew what a First Friday was, and for a while, it was the same twelve people every month wandering around in our dark downtown. It was an uphill climb for sure, but now we're almost a hundred percent occupied on the ground floor. And most of the buildings have undergone some sort of renovation—it's just going like gangbusters. I think there are twenty-six eateries downtown—you can get everything from hot dogs to sushi in nine square blocks. It's been really awesome to be on the front lines of that.

I always tell communities now, make sure you take that terrible photo when nobody shows up. You're going to want a "before" photo when your efforts really start to take off. I have a Christmas tree lighting photo where there are maybe ten of us, and I put it next to a picture from fifteen years later where we had to close the street because everyone was pouring out into the road. So take the "before" photo—you'll be grateful you did.



Left: The first Christmas tree lighting in Delaware only had seven attendees. Right: 10 years later, attendees at the event filled the downtown streets. © Frances Jo Hamilton

Your connection to Delaware comes in large part from your grandmother—can you tell us about her?

My grandma was a fixture in the downtown. She was a really progressive woman who knew everyone and did everything in Delaware. Grandma and Grandpa owned the last stag bar in downtown Delaware. My grandma bartended at a men's only bar! She took really good care of all her customers, but at the same time, I watched and saw how hard it is to own a small business and how much that can take out of a family.

Grandma always felt it was important to support local businesses. I would come and spend a week or two with her in the summer as a kid, and for one meal a day we got to pick a place downtown to eat. She used to give me money when I was so small that I couldn't even see over the pizza counter. It was really important to her for us to learn how to talk to store clerks, and to be able to interact with grownups downtown.

How has your grandmother inspired your work with Main Street?

She and I were talking one day, and I was complaining about how grimy some of our sidewalks were getting. She said, "When I was a little girl, the fire department would come downtown and flush the fire hydrants once or twice a year. And while they were flushing the hydrants, they would hook up fire hoses and power wash all the sidewalks. I just don't understand why they don't do that anymore."

When conversations like this happened, I would leave Grandma and immediately call the person who I needed to talk to about that problem. So I called the fire chief and told him I'd been talking to Grandma, and Grandma said that you all could use fire hoses to power wash the sidewalks! Amazingly, he agreed, and so for years that's what we did.

It was an almost 24-hour process. We would start in the morning with the business owners sweeping all the debris to the curb. Downtown Delaware has what I affectionately call the "Suck Truck"—it would come along and pick up all the debris from the gutters. Then we would clean out all the flower planters, use Murphy's Oil Soap on all the storefronts, and wipe down all the windows. One of our local bars would feed all the volunteers dinner. And starting at 10:00 p.m., we went out and started power washing sidewalks. We wielded fire hoses all night long. Chief Donahue and a couple of other firefighters were there to supervise; you can put out a window or flood a basement pretty easily with a fire hose.

We washed everybody's patios, trash cans, and fencing, and if anybody wanted their patio furniture washed, we did that too. Then at 6:00 a.m., that same bar owner fed all of the volunteers breakfast. By that time, everyone would be pretty tired and cold—this usually happened in March. But we'd all have breakfast together, and then everyone would go home.

Why did you feel it was so important to take care of the sidewalks?

I can't tell you the number of communities where I walk by trash cans that stink and are filthy; it's clear no one has touched them in years. Ongoing maintenance is not built



Washing the sidewalks in downtown Delaware. © Frances Jo Hamilton

into our historic downtowns because it's often considered private property. It's kind of like a strip mall, and the City's not going into a strip mall and scrubbing their trash cans. So there are all of these little gaps left. And when you start caring for these little things, it can instill a great deal of pride of place in the community with residents and business owners. They see that volunteers are willing to come in and spend that large amount of time and effort on the downtown. Those are the little things that add value to the business owners who wonder, "What's Main Street doing for me?"

Then there's the benefit to the volunteers themselves. My biggest takeaway was the camaraderie created when people spend that time together. Making grown-up friends is really hard, but we form friendships by doing things together with like-minded people. I found that everyone who participated wanted to do it again and again, and would feel like they're missing out on a special opportunity if they didn't. Some of my closest friendships have come from those experiences. And those are people who will absolutely never walk by another piece of trash on a downtown street without picking it up.

How has this project and others like it changed Main Street's relationship with the City government?

Local municipalities are used to people coming with their hands out, saying you're the ones who should do this! Instead, we're just stepping up and making it happen. It changes the dynamic so that they see us making sure the sidewalks and trash cans are cared for, not just complaining. It took a long time for the City to buy into Main Street Delaware, but now they give them a third of their budget. When you do that kind of cleaning in the downtown area for several years in a row, the city starts to rely on it, and they see the value. It is easier to ask for continued financial support when the city can count on the program for that return.

How would you describe your job?

My short answer is that I create parking problems. I want every single community in Ohio to have a parking problem. Saying it that way immediately tells people where I stand. I don't want to hear anyone complain about how there's no parking. If you're concerned with where to park, I can give you a list of communities where you can go and park anywhere you like any time, but of course there's no reason for you to park there.

At the state level, when I help hire executive directors for Main Street organizations, I always tell them this is a personality job. We can teach the skills needed to do this job, but you must have the personality. My primary role as an executive director for a Main Streets program was the care and keeping of my volunteers. Giving them kudos on everything, making sure that they're really well taken care of, that they get breaks, that they get fed. If you want a really well-run nonprofit organization, you can't continue to abuse the usual suspects. Keep your meetings short, then let people go home. Set clear guidelines and notice when

somebody's weary, exhausted, or frustrated. That noticing goes a long way.

To this day, there are people I will text out of the blue and say, "Hey, do you remember that night we spent scrubbing sidewalks?" Or, "Do you remember that cold day we took down all of those Christmas decorations? I was just thinking about that, and I really appreciate it." Sometimes, I think people appreciate those thank yous even more ten years later.

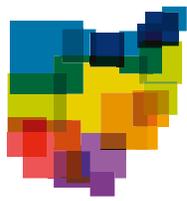
Key Takeaways for Main Street Leaders

- **Don't be afraid of "difficult" or time-intensive volunteer opportunities.** Recognize that some people are looking for a meaningful experience of connection. You create meaning by giving people an opportunity to take care of a place they love.
- **Volunteer relationships are built on care and gratitude.** Pay attention to what people are looking for and what they need. Your volunteers are your greatest asset.
- **Listen to Grandma.** Elders in your community might have memories and ideas for past traditions and practices that you can give new life.
- **Reliability matters.** Basic things like regularly cleaning sidewalks and caring for plantings can demonstrate incredible value for your organization and build trust with businesses and the government.



Frances Jo with her grandmother (Ellen Gruber), daughter (Frances Marie Hamilton), and mother (Emma-Jo Gruber). © Frances Jo Hamilton





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