

Uniquely Gahanna



Inside:

A LABOR OF LOVE LEADS TO GAHANNA'S NEWEST RESTAURANT, HOW TWO SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS ARE SAVORING SWEET SUCCESS, GAHANNA ENERGY PLUS COMES TO THE CITY + UPCOMING EVENTS

This quarterly publication is provided by The City of Gahanna

Cover: Elsie Larson at CrossFit Gahanna

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Inside Gahanna



Letter From the Mayor

Interested in learning more about Gahanna Energy Plus? Town Hall meetings were held in October to explain the City's new energy aggregation program and answer questions from residents. If you were not able to attend but want more details, the meetings can be viewed on the City of Gahanna's YouTube channel, @CityofGahanna, or by scanning the QR Code below.



Throughout the past year, we have been celebrating 175 years of "Gahanna," sharing stories of the events, people, and businesses that have shaped the city we love today. As we prepare to turn another page in our city's unique story, this edition shines a light on the importance of honoring our past, celebrating the community spirit that defines us, and charting the path forward to a bright future.

In this issue, we celebrate a long-time resident whose story is deeply woven into the fabric of our city's history. His legacy reminds us of the enduring values, resilience, and sense of community that have defined our city for generations.

Just as we honor those who came before us, we also recognize the strength and vibrancy of our city in the present. From collaborative projects that are helping to improve our community for all, to a local community of people that helped to lift one of its own to recognition on a world stage, our city is alive with connection, collaboration, and a shared commitment to building an even stronger future.

This year, we welcomed several new businesses to our city, each adding a new chapter to our economic growth and bringing new opportunities for connection and innovation. Their success builds upon the foundation of hard work and entrepreneurship that has always been part of our city's legacy.

Our capital projects are not just addressing today's needs – they are shaping the future of our city. From modernizing infrastructure to enhancing public spaces designed to bring people together, these initiatives reflect our vision for a more connected, sustainable, and thriving community. Each project moves us closer to a future where our city continues to grow while preserving the qualities that make it special.

As we look ahead to 2025, I am inspired by the work of our residents and the promise of what is to come. Together, we will continue to honor our history, embrace our shared values, and shape a future filled with opportunity, resilience, and hope. Thank you for being part of Gahanna's ongoing journey – we're building something truly special, and I'm proud to do it with all of you.

-Laurie Jadwin

LAURIE JADWIN • MAYOR

In The Know

Gahanna Energy Plus Brings Sustainable Options to Our Community

Gahanna residents now have an option to reduce energy costs while taking steps toward a greener community.

Gahanna Energy Plus is the City's new energy community choice aggregation program. Under community choice aggregation, the City is able to leverage local purchasing power to buy clean electricity from a retail generation supplier certified by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. By combining, or "aggregating," all eligible residents and small businesses together into one group, the City can obtain utility rates that are competitive with those offered by AEP Ohio or other suppliers.

The legislation authorizing the City to implement an opt-out community choice aggregation program was adopted in 2000, when Gahanna voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot initiative that provides the City with the ability to negotiate with electricity suppliers on behalf of its citizens and small businesses.

Earlier this year, Gahanna City Council and the Administration held extensive meetings and informational sessions on municipal aggregation and other sustainability efforts. In July 2024, following a detailed process where proposals for an aggregation partner were sought and evaluated, Gahanna City Council voted to become a member of SOPEC – the Sustainable Ohio Public Energy Council. With this vote, Gahanna joined 29 other Ohio communities that partner with SOPEC for community choice aggregation programming.

Gahanna Energy Plus is an "opt out" program. This means that all residents who currently are standard AEP Ohio customers are automatically included in the new aggregation program. Residents were sent a joint letter from SOPEC, AEP Energy and the City which explained the program and outlined instructions for opting out of the program. Although an initial 21-day window was given to opt out of Gahanna Energy Plus, residents can choose to opt-out of the program at any time, at no cost. Residents who are already enrolled in an aggregation plan with their own energy provider are not automatically enrolled in Gahanna Energy Plus, but can join the city-initiated program at any time, at no charge.

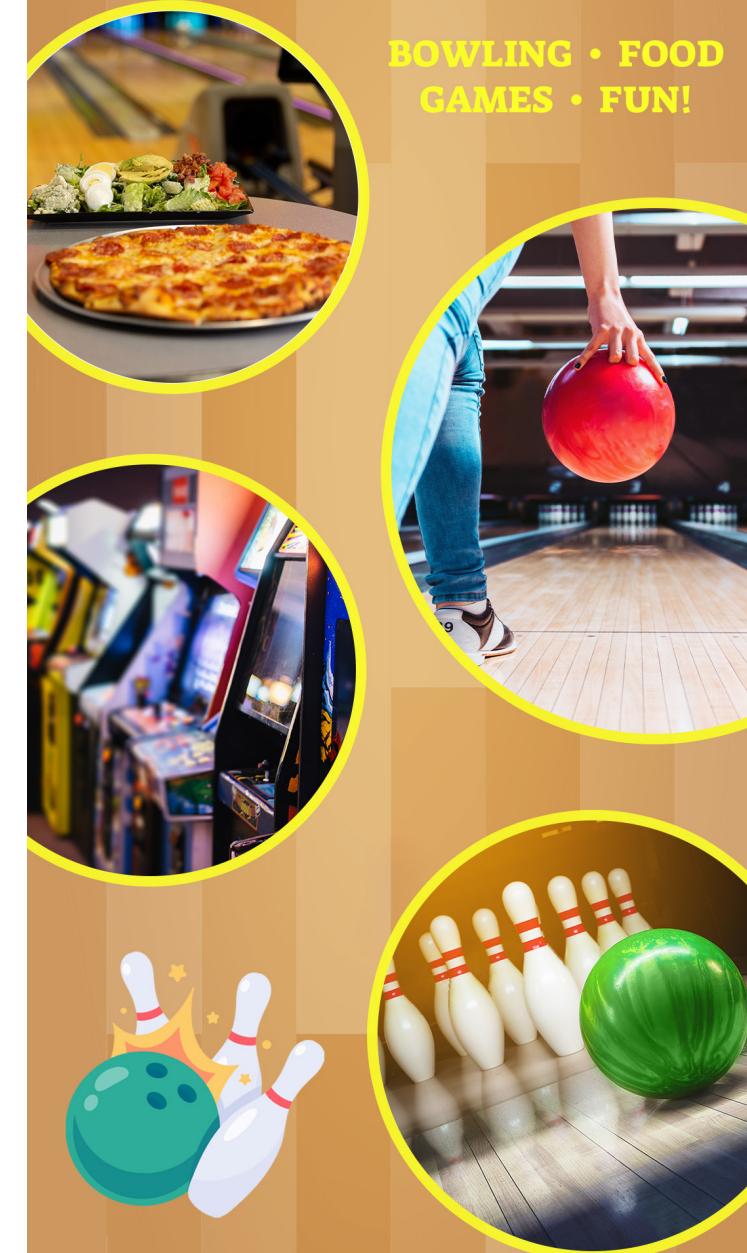
While the default option for Gahanna Energy Plus is 100% renewable energy, a "brown" fossil fuel energy rate is also available for Gahanna residents in the program. Residents can compare their energy rates at any time by visiting energychoice.ohio.gov.

More details on Gahanna Energy Plus, including frequently asked questions and customer service contacts, can be found at gahanna.gov/cca. ♦



GAHANNA LANES

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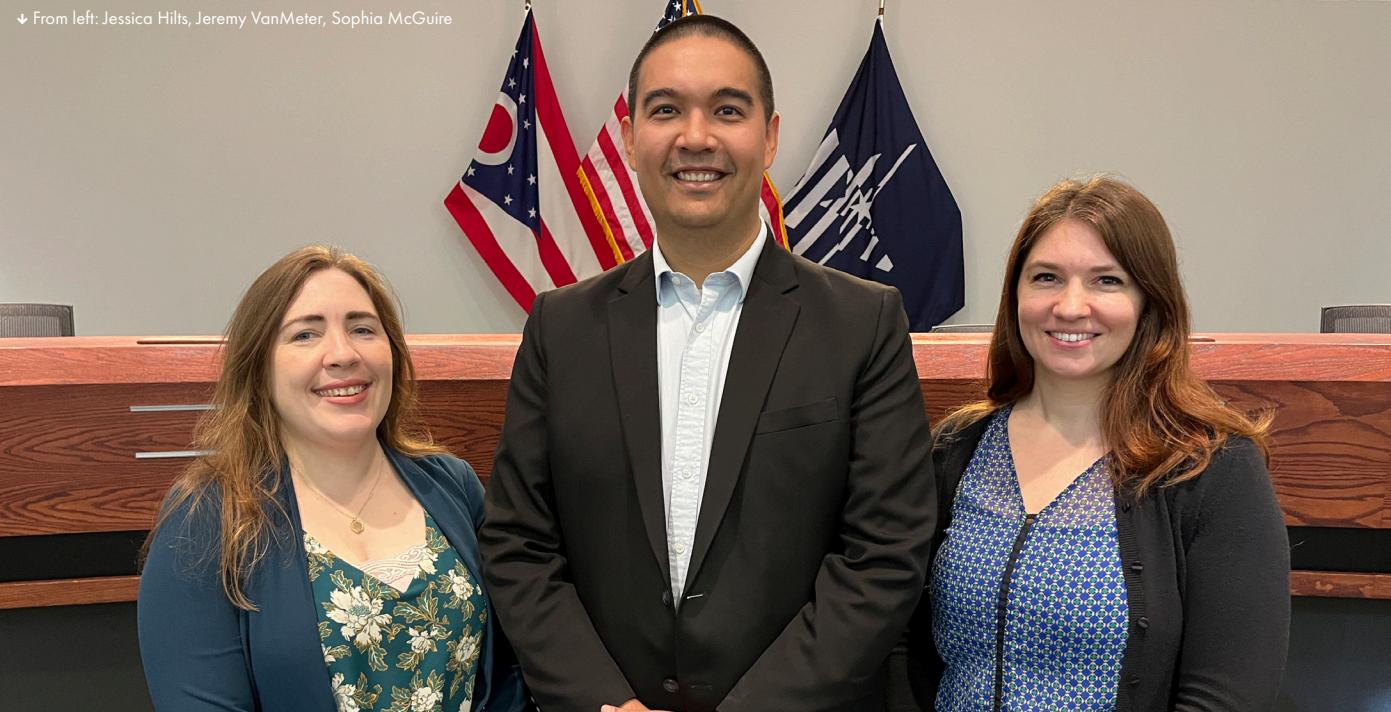


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Meet The City



City Council Office: Connecting Gahanna's Community with its Government

By Jessica Hilts

Walking down the hallway of City Hall, toward Council Chambers, a sharp turn left will take you to the Gahanna City Council Office. There you will find the staff that supports the seven-member City Council – Clerk of Council Jeremy VanMeter, Deputy Clerk Sophia McGuire, and Communications and Legislative Research Analyst Jessica Hilts.

The Office, led by VanMeter, connects residents with their elected officials and public records. Reporting to the City Council and working closely with the City Attorney and Mayor's Office, VanMeter and his team promote public engagement in the civic process. Additionally, the Council Office supports Gahanna's boards and commissions, including 40 community representatives who help guide the City's growth and development.

VanMeter oversees the Council Office's daily operations, which include preparing agendas for public meetings as well as proposed legislation. Most Monday nights, he manages Council meetings, assisting staff and residents and maintaining smooth operations.

VanMeter has always valued helping those around him. His career in public service started at the age of 19, when he served on his hometown's board of education. His advocacy for a wrongfully terminated teacher shaped his passion for fairness and collaboration, which he carried through roles as a Village of Sugar Grove Council Member, Clerk/Fiscal Officer, and intervention specialist at Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools. Appointed Gahanna's Clerk of Council in 2022, VanMeter maintains his passion for

fairness, equity, and citizenship, saying this is "what makes my experience in serving as the Clerk of Council for this community so intrinsically rewarding."

Joining the Council Office in 2023, McGuire, also a Gahanna resident, plays a vital role in supporting the Planning Commission. She also directs the City's records program, managing public records requests and document preservation. Currently, McGuire is working with city staff to prepare city records for the relocation of City Hall operations to 825 Tech Center Drive in early 2026. Her passion for records makes her an ideal fit for this role.

Through an Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board (OHRAB) grant, McGuire is leading a project to preserve and index Gahanna's historic Village Council records (1881-1970). These books include Gahanna's earliest ordinances, minutes, and resolutions. McGuire's goal to "elevate public records" is evident as she works to make historically valuable documents accessible to the public. As a

member of the Society of Ohio Archivists and an active participant in both local and national records groups, McGuire takes pride in connecting people with information and preserving those records for future generations.

"One of my favorite parts about my line of work is connecting a community to its history," she said. "The grant provided by OHRAB is helping in this endeavor by allowing us to capture high-quality images of the oldest records of Gahanna as a village. Our digitization project serves two key purposes: to ensure the longevity of Gahanna's earliest records, and to share those records with the community."

Hilts became the newest member of the Council Office in June 2024, where she conducts legislative research and manages the Council Office's communication platforms in collaboration with the City's marketing and communications team. She brings with her a decade of experience in public service, having served in the Office of Planning and Development in Westerville and later as a Clerk of Council. Like McGuire, she also is a Gahanna resident.

"When an opportunity became available to utilize my skills to serve the community in which I live, I seized it," Hilts shared.

Though she has only been in her current role a few months, Hilts has expanded opportunities for the Council Office to collaborate with city staff on community communications.

"There is something special about being a member of the community that you serve. I'm grateful I get to do that every day."

VanMeter noted, "We're always looking for new ways to get residents involved and keep everyone informed about the work of City Council and our boards and commissions."

While the team takes great pride in the work that they do each day to serve Gahanna citizens, they also enjoy Gahanna's outdoor amenities in their down time.

As a father of four, VanMeter said, "My family loves exploring Gahanna's parks and trails, partaking in the tradition of Holiday Lights, and watching the Independence Day parade."

McGuire, both a mother and a runner, also enjoys the City's parks and trails, as does Hilts.

"I love walking in the parks and Creekside, especially Woodside Green," said Hilts. "It's great for birders, and my nephews love the playground. The parks are a perfect place to reset and relax with my husband and two sons."

The Council Office's commitment to public service and passion for civic engagement is evident. The team shared their main goal is to connect residents with their city leaders. By cross-training, they quickly respond to inquiries, making sure everyone's questions get answered. Whether through public meetings, communication, or managing records, the staff in the Council Office aims to keep operations transparent and accessible.

McGuire added, "There is something special about being a member of the community that you serve. I'm grateful I get to do that every day." ♦

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Development News



↑ Photo Credit - Alaina Short

A Modern Makeover

A true labor of love is taking place on Granville Street. Preparations for the opening of Three Creeks Kitchen and Cocktails have been underway, and the Gahanna community is already taking notice. Like the community, owner Joe Grundey is excited for the doors to open on his new restaurant later this fall.

Steaks, seafood, sandwiches, and burgers are a few of the items that will fill the menu at the restaurant. Working their magic in the kitchen will be two executive chefs, recruited by Grundey, who bring a combined 30 years of experience with Cameron Mitchell Restaurants to the new eatery.

Three Creeks Kitchen and Cocktails Adds to Gahanna's Culinary Scene

By Dan Pearlman

Grundey previously owned O'Toole's Irish Pub at 258 Granville Street – the same location that will soon house his new restaurant. In 2021, he closed O'Toole's for what he thought would be simple renovations to the bathrooms and kitchen.

"Well, my sledgehammer basically sledgehammered the whole place, gutting it to the studs, and I decided I was going to put it back together as something different," he explained.

From there, his interior decorators went to work, bringing in quality fixtures and incorporating modern features, including a Brazilian granite bar top, contemporary furniture and more, ultimately leading Grundey to decide that he would open a higher-end restaurant at the location.

"It's going to be a very unique place, and it'll have a beautiful patio with a wonderful setting along the Rocky Fork Creek," he said.

The new eatery will also be somewhat of a family-owned restaurant.

While Grundey is the main investor, his daughter, Payton, and his two executive chefs will have ownership stakes as well.

As soon as the doors open, Payton Grundey will do a little bit of everything outside of the kitchen, and she is excited for what is to come.

"It has been a long process," she said. "Originally, it was just going to be a bar

renovation to what he had before. I told him back then, 'I don't think that's what this is going to be. I already see it in your face that you just want to do something more.' Now, I just want to see both of us succeed and be able to do it together as adults."

"It's going to be a very unique place, and it'll have a beautiful patio with a wonderful setting along the Rocky Fork Creek."

Whether guests stop by for happy hour, dinner, a private gathering, or a larger party, they can expect a meal that is already drawing praise from the Gahanna community. In August, Grundey and his team participated

in Taste of Gahanna, presented by the Gahanna Area Chamber of Commerce, along with nearly two dozen Gahanna area eateries. Three Creeks' beverage offering was awarded Best Cocktail, and their crabcakes earned the honor of Best Appetizer.

"I definitely think Gahanna is a city that deserves a very lovely place to come, sit, have a good meal and be treated exceptionally," Payton said. "I'm just excited to offer that to our guests."

She is far from alone in her sentiment, as her father is also looking to the future as he grows his footprint in Gahanna.

"It [Gahanna] just got voted the [Hottest Zip Code in America] two years in a row," he said. "It has good schools. The homes are moderately and fairly priced. There's lots to do. It's not saturated with places like this. That's why I am hoping to succeed." ♦

For more information on Three Creeks Kitchen and Cocktails, go to ThreeCreeksGahanna.com.



↓ Photo Credit - Alaina Short

Moving Gahanna Forward

Your Guide to Capital Improvements



The following is an update on some of the projects underway in Gahanna to enhance our community and improve daily life for residents.

ACADEMY PARK MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL

Crews began construction of the new Academy Park Mountain Bike Trail in September. The Trail is nearing completion and is expected to be accessible for users before the end of the year.

GOLF COURSE DECK & CART PATH REPLACEMENT

The deck on the Golf Course Clubhouse was rebuilt with composite materials for durability and ease of maintenance. A full replacement of cart paths throughout the entire course was completed in early November.

GAHANNA WATER TOWER REHABILITATION

Work on rehabilitating and painting the City's 1-million-gallon elevated water storage tank, located near the Gahanna Woods State Nature Preserve, is nearly complete. The project is expected to be completed by the end of the year.



HAMILTON ROAD BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

ODOT continues its work on reconstruction of the Hamilton Road Bridge over I-270. The project began in July and is expected to last through late Summer 2025. This is part of a larger project by ODOT to rehabilitate seven bridges on or over I-270 between Broad St. and I-670.

WEST SIDE SEWER PROJECT

In August, a Town Hall meeting was held to update residents on work that has been underway to evaluate potential improvements to alleviate sanitary sewer impacts on Gahanna's west side and to discuss next steps. To view the Town Hall discussion, see Gahanna.gov/601/West-Side-Sewer-Evaluation-Improvements.

825 TECH CENTER DRIVE

Construction on the new home of the Gahanna Division of Police, City Hall, and Senior Center continues to move forward ahead of schedule and on budget. For latest updates and information on this project, including all public discussions and presentations, and latest details, see Gahanna.gov/825/.

SPEED AWARENESS SIGNS

Four speed awareness signs have been installed on major corridors into Gahanna to alert drivers of their speed and encourage them to slow down. The solar-powered signs do not take or store images of drivers, vehicles, or license plates.

COMMUNITY ALPR CAMERAS

During the summer months, 21 Flock Safety cameras were installed throughout the City. The cameras use Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPRs) that capture images of license plates and vehicles. The system automatically compares the plate numbers to a list of wanted vehicles that have been entered into a crime database. The ALPR cameras then provide real-time alerts to officers when a stolen vehicle or one associated with a known suspect is spotted. The cameras can also help to potentially determine what vehicles were connected to the commission of a crime. The devices do not include facial recognition abilities and do not capture personally identifiable information. Since their installation, the cameras have already led to the recovery of stolen vehicles, identification of criminal suspects, and the arrests of individuals wanted on felony warrants.

TAYLOR STATION AND CLAYCRAFT ROADS ROUNDABOUT

Construction of a new roundabout at Taylor Station and Claycraft Roads is now completed. The \$2.9 million project was funded in part by a \$999,999 grant from the Ohio Public Works Commission and was completed 23 days early and more than \$100,000 under budget.

STREET AND SIDEWALK PROGRAMS

Construction has been completed on 7.9 miles of roadways and sidewalks, and the program has transitioned to focusing on restoration and workmanship items.

UPPER MCCORKLE PARK & PLAYGROUND

In June, work was completed on the full rebuild of the Upper McCorkle Park & Playground on the City's west side, updating park amenities and making the recreational area more accessible for residents.

Growing in Gahanna

Your Insider Scoop to Business News in the City

NOW OPEN

Bubbles Tea Company

121 Mill St.
BubblesTeaCompany.com/Gahanna-Creekside-Plaza

Cantina Sports Bar and Grill

101 Mill St.
CantinaSBG.com

Foot and Ankle Specialists of Central Ohio

680 N. Buckles Ct.
OhioFootandAnkle.com

Handcrafted Aesthetics

760 Morrison Rd.
HandcraftedAesthetics.com

Musicologie

960 N. Hamilton Rd.
MusicologieLessons.com/Gahanna/

Ohio Ophthalmology

680 Buckles Ct. N.
OhioOphthalmology.com

Optum Primary Care

680 Buckles Ct. N.
HealthierCareBetterLife.com

Orthopedic ONE

605 Crescent Pl.
OrthopedicONE.com

Recreate Behavioral Health of Ohio

349 Olde Ridenour Rd.
RecreateOhio.com

Sugaring NYC Gahanna

121 Mill St.
SugaringNYC.com

Trillium Surgery

680 Buckles Ct. N.

Vive Vascular

680 Buckles Ct. N.
ViveVascular.com

COMING SOON

Three Creekside Kitchen and Cocktails

258 Granville St.
ThreeCreeksGahanna.com

Speakeasy Bakery

121 Mill St.
SpeakeasyBaker.com

Numbers to Know

If you have any questions, or if we can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us directly:

City Attorney: (614) 342-4096

City Council: (614) 342-4090

City Hall (Front Desk): (614) 342-4000

Code Enforcement: (614) 342-4022

Engineering: (614) 342-4050

Mayor's Court: (614) 342-4080

Mayor's Office: (614) 342-4045

Parks & Recreation: (614) 342-4250

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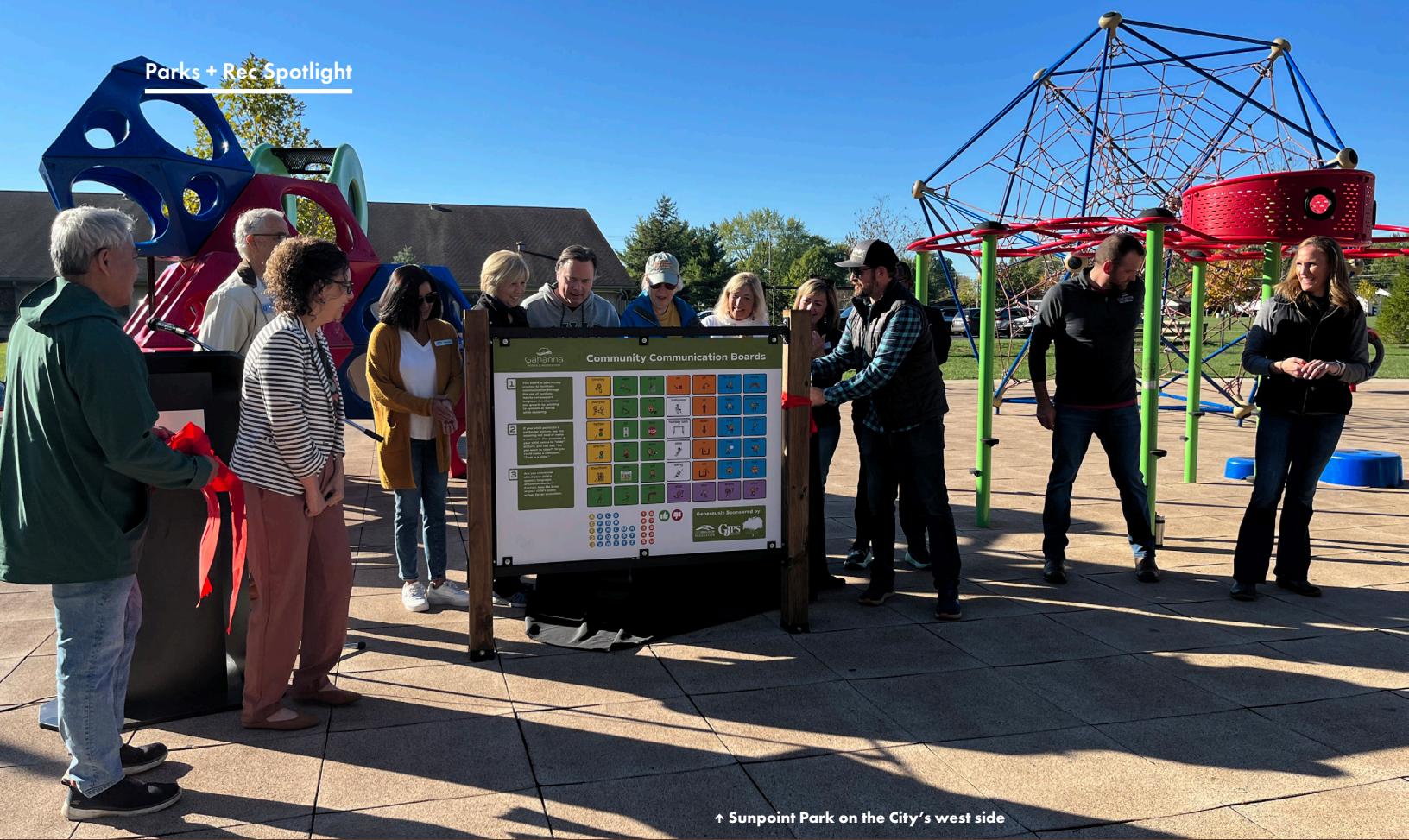
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↑ Sunpoint Park on the City's west side

Growing Connections

Gahanna Community Working Together to **Expand Park Accessibility**

By Dan Pearlman and Katie Person

August McClurkin is a typical 4-year-old boy. He loves art, music and especially visiting Gahanna's parks.

"If you name it, we've probably been there," said his mother, Casey McClurkin, of the City's park system.

Given August's love of parks, the McClurkin family was present on Saturday, October 19, when city leaders and members of community organizations gathered to celebrate the unveiling of a new communication panel at Sunpoint Park—one of four communication panels installed in playgrounds throughout the City.

"The fact that they got these communication boards up...I know they're going to be a big hit with him," Julian McClurkin, August's father, said.

August is a speech-delayed toddler—one of the children who will benefit from the panels that will assist individuals with communication differences in expressing their ideas, needs, and emotions through visual symbols. Moments after the panel at Sunpoint Park was unveiled, August began to use it.

The new communication panels are the result of a collaborative effort between the City of Gahanna Department of Parks & Recreation, Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, the Gahanna Parks & Recreation Foundation, and the Gahanna-Jefferson Education Foundation.

The idea for the panels was first proposed by Missy Grimmett, Special Education Coordinator for Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools.

"What is so great about these communication boards is that they resemble a lot of the communication tools we use with some of our youngest learners in our District preschool program," Grimmett said. "Whether a student is in the classroom or at their local park, they can be familiar with the communication tool and know how to connect with others."

Added Sue Wiegning, Director of Special Education at Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, "These panels will provide an inclusive way for individuals with communication challenges to express themselves, ensuring that every voice in our community is heard and valued."

After sharing her idea with Wiegning, Grimmett was connected to Parks Superintendent Zac Guthrie and Recreation Superintendent Brian Gill-Huston, both of whom immediately embraced the idea. Soon after, the Gahanna Parks & Recreation Foundation and the Gahanna-Jefferson Education Foundation joined in their support for the project. Each of the Foundations approved funding for the project, with the Parks & Recreation Foundation also securing a \$10,000 grant from the City of Gahanna's Community Grant Program to bring the vision to life.

"It's good for all kids to have these communication panels, but these will definitely benefit kids like August. Any time organizations get together, and they're thinking about my kid—I just think that's amazing."

"The Parks & Recreation Board strives to support projects that will get people to utilize our parks and improve accessibility," said Kelly Law, member of the Parks & Recreation Foundation. "The Foundation Board supported this very quickly, and then we got the schools involved, so it was really just a grand slam of getting the Parks Department, the Parks Foundation Board, and the Schools all involved in something that will improve and increase the utilization of our parks."

Gahanna-Jefferson Education Foundation Co-Executive Directors Tricia Mueller and Dianna Bessignano added, "These new communication panels incorporate symbols and tools that are used within the Gahanna-Jefferson school system, and now these tools can be shared with the Gahanna community as a whole. This project was a great opportunity for us to partner with others around the community to make a difference in the lives of many of our GJPS students, not just in the classroom, but beyond."

In addition to the panel that is installed at Sunpoint Park, others can be found at Hannah, Friendship and Woodside Green Parks.

As part of the educational campaign accompanying the installation of the panels, QR codes on the signage link users to the City of Gahanna's website for additional information and resources. This feature provides an easy way for families and park visitors to learn more about the boards and their intended use.

The Gahanna Parks & Recreation Department will evaluate the possibility of installing communication panels in more parks in the future.

"The mission of the Parks & Recreation Department is to provide parks, trails, and recreation activities for all people in Gahanna," said Stephania Ferrell, Director of Parks & Recreation. "This project fulfills that mission by presenting an inclusive strategy that provides independence and joy to the park experience. We are proud of the community partnership in this project and the overall vision to continue these initiatives beyond community parks."

Speaking of pride—the McClurkins are among those grateful for the panels that August already is enjoying.

"It's good for all kids to have these communication panels, but these will definitely benefit kids like August," said Julian. "Any time organizations get together, and they're thinking about my kid – I just think that's amazing."

And that is a feeling echoed by Casey.

"Having something that he [August] can point at, touch and specify what he's interested in or what he may want to communicate to us is kind of life changing," she said. "He talks, but he doesn't talk much, so any access to communication or language that he can have just opens a whole new world for him." ♦

↓ August McClurkin





A Founding Family

Long-Time Resident Shares **Gahanna's History** through His Story

This year, as the City has been honoring the 175th anniversary of the founding of "Gahanna" along the banks of the Big Walnut Creek, we have enjoyed sharing Gahanna's "history" – stories of past events connected to this community and to the people who have brought it to life. One Gahanna resident has witnessed more chapters of its history than most.

If you attended the July 4th parade, then you may have noticed Theron Shull Ward proudly leading this year's parade as the Grand Marshal. If his name sounds familiar, it is because he represents one of the founding families of Gahanna.

"My mother was a Shull," Theron explained, referencing the names of Shull Avenue and Shull Park, a street and a park that stand as testaments to his family's contributions to the community.

At age 93, Theron embodies the spirit, resilience and warmth that have defined Gahanna since its founding. Through his memories of bustling main streets, familiar faces, and decades of growth, he offers a unique and cherished perspective on how far we have come, and the sense of community that remains at our core.

Sharing stories of our city's history, Theron's memories are filled with the names of families that helped to build Gahanna – many of which are immortalized throughout the City in often-traveled roadways, such as Agler, Styler and, of course, Shull.

Born in the early 1930s, Theron spent his early years on his family's farms along Johnstown Road and at Styler and Agler Roads.

"I remember when our house number changed," he said with a chuckle, recalling Gahanna's growth along roads that are now busy corridors through the City.

Added his son, Terry Ward, "I didn't know about the farm at Styler and Agler until I started working at Momma Nebbs Pizza. They had an old Gahanna map, and the front row of houses along Agler Road was called Ward Subdivision."

Theron also remembers when Granville Street marked the edge of town and how farmland stretched as far as the eye could see.

"It's amazing to see how much it's grown," he said.

The elder Ward attended the Old Gahanna School, a two-story schoolhouse that still stands today in the area now more frequently known as the Creekside District. Today, the building continues to serve community members as a business incubator and education space for local entrepreneurs. His high school years were spent at Gahanna-Lincoln High School, another landmark that also has evolved through the years.

Theron remembers the simplicity of life when he was growing up in Gahanna, sharing tales of childhood mischief with his friends, such as the time he and his friends turned off all the streetlights in town. At the time, Gahanna only had four or five streetlights that were mainly lit by electric eye and were turned on each night by the town's workers.

"We managed to shut off all the lights in Gahanna one night," he said with a grin. "One of my friends went up the light post and laid a flashlight against the electric eye, turning all the lights out - just kid stuff."

Recounting his memories of an early Gahanna, Theron's passion for storytelling shines through – a passion that he has long shared with our community. Alongside his friend, D. McNabb, he co-authored the *Gahanna Times*, a local newspaper that sold for just two cents in the 1940s. Their idea was to capture the spirit of the community, documenting events and sharing stories that connected residents.

In the early 1950s, Theron was drafted into the Korean War, where he served as a sergeant in the 40th Infantry. Upon his return from war, he found love, marrying Melanie Diamond, whom he met while she was working at Miller's Restaurant. Together they raised four children in west Gahanna.

"Everything I know is in Gahanna," Theron explained. "There was no reason to leave."

"Theron's story is Gahanna's story. His family is one of the founding families, and his own life has been spent in service. Even at 93, he's still willing to help whenever he can."

It was Theron's longstanding commitment to the City that earned him the honor of serving as the Grand Marshal for this year's Independence Day Parade.

"T

heron's story is Gahanna's story," said Crystal McCann, President of the Gahanna Lions Club. "His family is one of the founding families, and his own life has been spent in service. Even at 93, he's still willing to help whenever he can."

Today, Theron still lives in Gahanna where he is surrounded

by memories of the past and the progress of the present. That, as

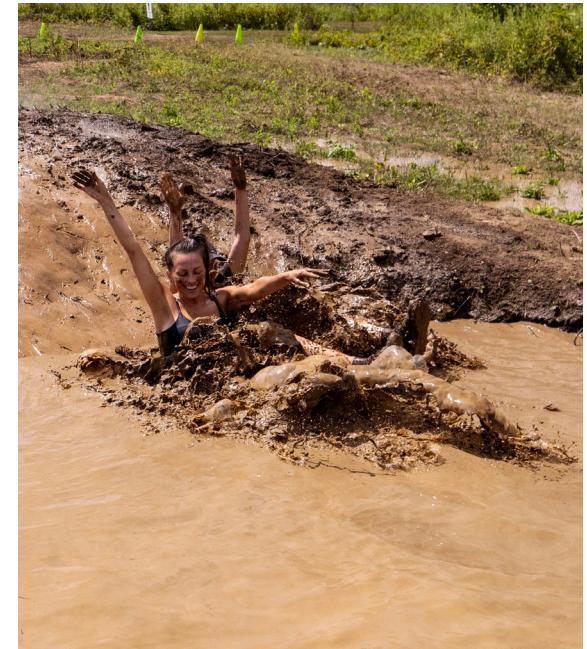
his family remains humble about their ancestors' contributions

to helping make Gahanna what it is.

"I think it's pretty neat," said Terry. "We don't make an issue of it. It's nothing that we try and brag about, but I do get a kick out of the Facebook pages when they talk about old

time Gahanna and they're talking about the 70s when I was in high school." ♦

GahannaGram



STRENGTH



IN NUMBERS

Gahanna's CrossFit Community Lifts One of its Own to World Recognition

By Dan Pearlman

161

While people around the globe were watching many of the world's top athletes compete on the Olympic stage in Paris, one local teenager was excelling in her sport on a different world stage. And she credits much of her success to her inspirational community at CrossFit Gahanna.

In September, 17-year-old Elsie Larson placed second in the world for her age group at the 2024 Teenage CrossFit Games in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In doing so, she topped more than 600 other athletes from around the world.

"It feels pretty crazy," Elsie said. "I didn't expect to be there at all, and second is pretty crazy."

Adding to the incredible story of her success is the fact that Larson has been training in CrossFit for less than four years.

A gymnast in her younger years, she suffered an injury when she was 13 years old and decided to try something new. That is when her gymnastics-turned-CrossFit coach, Garrett Plaza, signed her up for the CrossFit Open – an online competition tried by many CrossFit athletes.

"We've always done basic CrossFit movements with the kids, so she had that base-level knowledge which really helped," Plaza explained. "She's an incredible athlete, and she was back then."

**"IT FEELS PRETTY CRAZY.
I DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE
THERE AT ALL, AND SECOND
IS PRETTY CRAZY."**

That athleticism was on full display in the Open, where she finished in 44th place in the world.

"Seeing where I finished, it kind of lit a fire," Elsie recalled. "I wanted to get better, and I thought that if I was 44th then, I could train, move on and do better."

Do better? She certainly did.

Larson's success at the CrossFit Open ultimately led to her second-place finish at the CrossFit Games – the result of countless hours of training at CrossFit Gahanna where she perfected her craft.

"I literally just brought my hand to my mouth, looked at my husband, and started crying," said her mother, Melinda Larson. "Coming in second – all the hard work, all the driving back and forth to the gym – wow. She couldn't have been surrounded by better people."

To place second at the Games, Elsie competed in several events which included running, lifting weights, an obstacle course and more – all fitness activities that she has worked on over the last year and a half while training with Plaza and the team of supporters that he and her mother salute at CrossFit Gahanna.



↑ Garrett Plaza and Elsie Larson



↑ Elsie Larson



"I REALLY LIKE HOW YOU HAVE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AROUND YOU, PUSHING YOU AND HOLDING YOU ACCOUNTABLE."

"We are a subcommunity of Gahanna," said Plaza. "The people who have surrounded us have pushed themselves to another level even though they were not going to the Games. They were like, 'Elsie wants to do this. I'm a friend of Elsie's. I go to CrossFit Gahanna. I'm going to do this with her, and we're going to push toward this singular goal.' That's what's beautiful about CrossFit."

The CrossFit Gahanna community is made up of individuals of all ages. It is a safe and motivational community that helps to strengthen both the physical and mental health of those who participate. In many cases, like the Larsons', CrossFit provides for a family-friendly activity as well. Both of Elsie's parents and five of her siblings train with her when they are able.

"I used to work out by myself a lot, but now I have a lot of people around me who are pushing me and motivating me," explained Elsie. "It's been a lot of fun."

"The community is definitely the part that makes you stay," she added. "In the first week, you're going to be sore, but I love the diversity that CrossFit workouts have. You're always doing something different and challenging yourself in a different way. I really like how you have different people around you, pushing you and holding you accountable for what you're doing."

Now, the Larson family—and the CrossFit Gahanna family—will come together to continue supporting one another in their fitness journeys. In Elsie's case, the goal is to make it to the semifinals of the CrossFit Games in the main age division, which includes women between the ages of 18 and 35. While she focuses on that goal, she is hopeful that more children, teens and adults consider joining CrossFit Gahanna to experience the joy and camaraderie that it has brought her.

"I feel very blessed that I have been able to bring her to CrossFit Gahanna, because I wouldn't be in the shape I'm in if I wasn't here, too," added Melinda. "It makes it worth it, number one because it's a goal for her, and to watch her excel like that is just an amazing confidence booster as a young woman. That's going to stick with her for life. Also, it's been an amazing way to bring our family together."

CrossFit Gahanna is located at 145 South Styler Road. More information can be found at CrossFitGahanna.com.

8 WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED WITH YOUR CITY

- 01 Visit Gahanna.gov for news, event details, job opportunities and more.
- 02 Follow City of Gahanna on **Social Media**—Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- 03 Sign up to receive monthly **City E-Newsletters** in your inbox.
- 04 Review the **City Newsletter** in your monthly water bill.
- 05 Pick up the most recent **Explore Guide** for seasonal Parks & Rec activities.
- 06 Watch live council meetings and other public meetings on the **City of Gahanna YouTube channel**.
- 07 Use **Gahanna Direct** to submit service requests and receive updates.
- 08 Check your mailbox for **Uniquely Gahanna**, a citywide magazine.



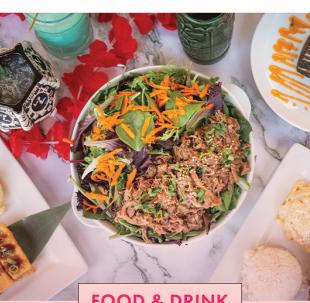
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↑ Photo Credit - The Peach Cobbler Factory

Sweet Success

The **Peach Cobbler Factory** Continues to Grow in Popularity in Gahanna

By Dan Pearlman



↑ Jamie Middaugh at the Senior Expo

Two Gahanna small business owners are savoring the success they have found in Gahanna, and now they plan to grow their business both in the City and throughout central Ohio.

Jamie and Larry Middaugh, Owners and Operators of The Peach Cobbler Factory in the Stoneridge Plaza, purchased the business last year after the former owner moved out of state. Since buying the business, they have been focused on building name recognition as well as strong relationships in the Gahanna community.

Their hard work has been paying off. Out of approximately 100 franchise locations throughout the country, The Peach Cobbler Factory in Gahanna is now one of the top ten performing stores in the U.S., ranking alongside stores in larger cities such as Detroit, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C.

"Gahanna has been good to us," Jamie Middaugh said.

That success can be attributed to the quality of the products served and to getting involved in the community. Jamie works with the Gahanna Senior Center to donate cookies every month for members celebrating birthdays. She ran a booth at the recent Senior Expo, and she and her husband partner with other local businesses and organizations to sell and distribute their products at events. Most recently, they participated in Taste of Gahanna, where The Peach Cobbler Factory won in the dessert category after highlighting its peach cobbler and banana pudding – two customer favorites. Having a presence at local events has proven to be fruitful for them.

"In the past year, we have marketed, become involved in the community at events, and just put our name out there—also growing our Facebook page and social media pages," Jamie explained.

People outside of Gahanna have certainly taken notice as well. Jamie sees customers from Dublin, Hilliard, Grove

City and elsewhere, many of whom ask her to open stores in their communities.

"I have brand new customers walk in the door six days a week," she added.

Currently, Jamie is helping her daughter open a store in Canton, and while she plans to expand in central Ohio, specific locations have not been determined. Additionally, she plans to grow The Peach Cobbler Factory's catering business with the goal of serving their popular treats at birthdays, bridal showers, baby showers, weddings and other special events—all of this thanks to the success the Middaughs have found in Gahanna and the welcoming nature of the community.

"Gahanna has been good to us."

"It's such a friendly town," Jamie said. "It seems like a small town, but it's not. It has a small-town vibe. It's neighborly. I haven't run into anything in Gahanna that I don't like."

That is why she is excited for what the future holds, not only for The Peach Cobbler Factory but other business owners who she hopes decide to grow in Gahanna as well.

"They [the community] will love you," Jamie said for those looking to build their business in the City. "They will love you if you're bringing a good product or a good service to Gahanna. They will support you." ♦

The Peach Cobbler Factory is located at 4691 Morse Rd.



↑ 2024 Community Grant Recipients

Community Grants Empower Local Nonprofits to Grow Their Support

Gahanna non-profit organizations are making an even bigger splash in our community after receiving grants through the City of Gahanna's 2024 Community Grant Program.

In late June, the City awarded a total of \$100,000 to 15 Gahanna-based non-profit groups through the Grant Program, with the goal of not just providing funding but building a stronger, more connected community.

Eligibility for participation in the Program was limited to Gahanna-based non-profit organizations, with the requirement that 100% of the funds awarded be used to benefit Gahanna residents. Grants focused on what matters most to our community — helping neighbors meet essential needs like food and clothing, expanding access to mental health services, and supporting creative and sustainable projects that bring people together and make Gahanna's shared spaces even better.

One of the grant recipients in the 2024 Program was Gahanna Neighborhood Bridges, a charitable organization that links community resources to drive direct support in providing basic needs and removing barriers for children and families in need. By working closely with Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, Neighborhood Bridges identifies needs, which are then published and distributed to community members who respond with donations of items or money to help fill those needs. Through their grant of \$15,000, Neighborhood Bridges was able to ensure that a Gahanna student received emergency dental care and oral surgery that was needed to prevent further complications.

"The Community Grant Program has been a lifeline for our local non-profits."

Ron Smith, Area Director for Gahanna Neighborhood Bridges, noted that this was only one of the many ways that the grant dollars have been put to good use to help those in need in the Gahanna community.

"As a result of the grant given to us, we have been able to create a strong, strategic relationship with the School District, and meet with principals, social workers and counselors to help students in need together," Smith noted. "We have already impacted many students and families as a direct result of the collaboration."

Gahanna's Community Grant Program was established in 2023 using federal funds that the City received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). That year, nine Gahanna non-profits received a combined total of \$50,000 in grants through the Program. While available grant dollars doubled to \$100,000 in 2024, so did interest from non-profit organizations, as 20 applications were received from 19 different entities for

the 2024 Program, representing a combined request of more than \$312,000.

Corey Wybensinger, Senior Deputy Director of Administrative Services for the City, has overseen the Community Grant Program since its inception. He has seen firsthand the impact that the grant dollars have had on Gahanna residents.

"The Community Grant Program has been a lifeline for our local nonprofits, enabling them to provide essential services in areas like mental health, food security, and community welfare," said Wybensinger.

As the free shop-through food pantry that serves families in need in Gahanna, GRIN (Gahanna Residents in Need) relies heavily on donations from the community to purchase food supplies and other items needed to operate. In 2023, the organization received a grant award that enabled them to purchase walk-in coolers. With the purchase, GRIN has been able to add to the amount and type of food items that are available in the pantry.

Brenda Johnston, GRIN's Executive Director, expressed her gratitude for the Program and how the grant has helped transform their ability to address food insecurities.

"Thanks to the City of Gahanna's Community Grant Program and other donors, we were able to purchase this game changer [walk-in cooler] that has helped us serve hundreds of thousands of meals to more than 21,000 individuals," she said.

With a grant award of \$12,500 through the 2024 program, GRIN will now be able to add storage lockers that will be placed outside of the pantry, creating 24/7 access for food pick up and expanding the pantry's ability to meet demands outside of operating pantry hours.

Another one of the 15 Gahanna non-profit organizations that received grant funding through the 2024 Program was the Gahanna Historical Society. With their grant of \$2,600, the Historical Society was able to host educational programs that connected the community to the City's early settlers.

Kari Hawk, Vice President for the organization, shared that the support has been transformative for their group.

"Grants turn ideas into reality," said Hawk. "They make it possible to connect with more people, grow our membership, and increase engagement in local activities." ♦

Events Calendar

These events are tentative and subject to change. Please confirm event details in advance.

Now through Sunday, January 12

HOLIDAY LIGHTS DISPLAY Creekside Park & Plaza

Make plans to visit Creekside Park to see the more than 300,000 lights that will make up the incredible Holiday Lights Display. The lights will be on daily from 5 to 8:30 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and from 5 to 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

Now through Wednesday, December 25

SANTA HOTLINE

Presented by Visit Gahanna in cooperation with FutureCom Technologies

Santa has opened up his phone lines for Gahanna kids of all ages! Just dial (614) 478-1061 to hear a special message from Santa and his friends at the North Pole.

Now through Tuesday, December 31

GIVE TO GAHANNA

Organized by a committee of the Gahanna Area Arts Council

Give to Gahanna, an official community campaign of GivingTuesday USA, is underway! Visit GivetoGahanna.org, and donate to local nonprofits working right here in Gahanna. 100% of your generous donation will go directly to the organization(s) of your choosing.

Saturday, December 7

THE SANTA RACE 5K AND LITTLE REINDEER DASH Creekside Plaza, 9 a.m. Presented by Visit Gahanna

Dress up in your most festive attire for the annual Santa Race 5K and Little Reindeer Dash! For event information and to register, visit TheSantaRace.com.

Saturday, December 7

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Gahanna Historical Settlement (106 S. High Street), 12 – 3 p.m.
Presented by the Gahanna Historical Society

Bring your family to this free, old-fashioned annual holiday celebration! Stop by the Log House to sit down with Santa, and don't forget to stop by all three houses on the Historical Settlement for holiday crafts, games, music and refreshments.

Friday, December 13 & Saturday, December 14

THE POLAR EXPRESS EXPERIENCE The Gahanna Sanctuary (82 N. High Street), 7 p.m. Presented by Make Gahanna Yours

Cozy up in your favorite pajamas under twinkling lights as The Polar Express comes to life on the big screen! You can enjoy steaming cups of hot chocolate and freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, just like in the movie. After the show, don't miss the chance to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus for a memorable photo op. Ticket and event information can be found on the Make Gahanna Yours Facebook page.

SAVE THE DATE

Thursday, January 16 GAHANNA AREA CHAMBER ANNUAL MEETING The Peak at Edison (781 Science Boulevard), 11:30 – 1 p.m.

Thursday, March 27

STATE OF THE CITY

Saturday, April 12 EGGS-HILARATING EGG HUNT Hannah Park, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Monday, April 21 - Friday, April 25 FREE TREE GIVEAWAY Gahanna City Hall, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Saturday, April 26

SHRED & E-RECYCLE EVENT
Gahanna City Hall, 9 – 12 p.m.



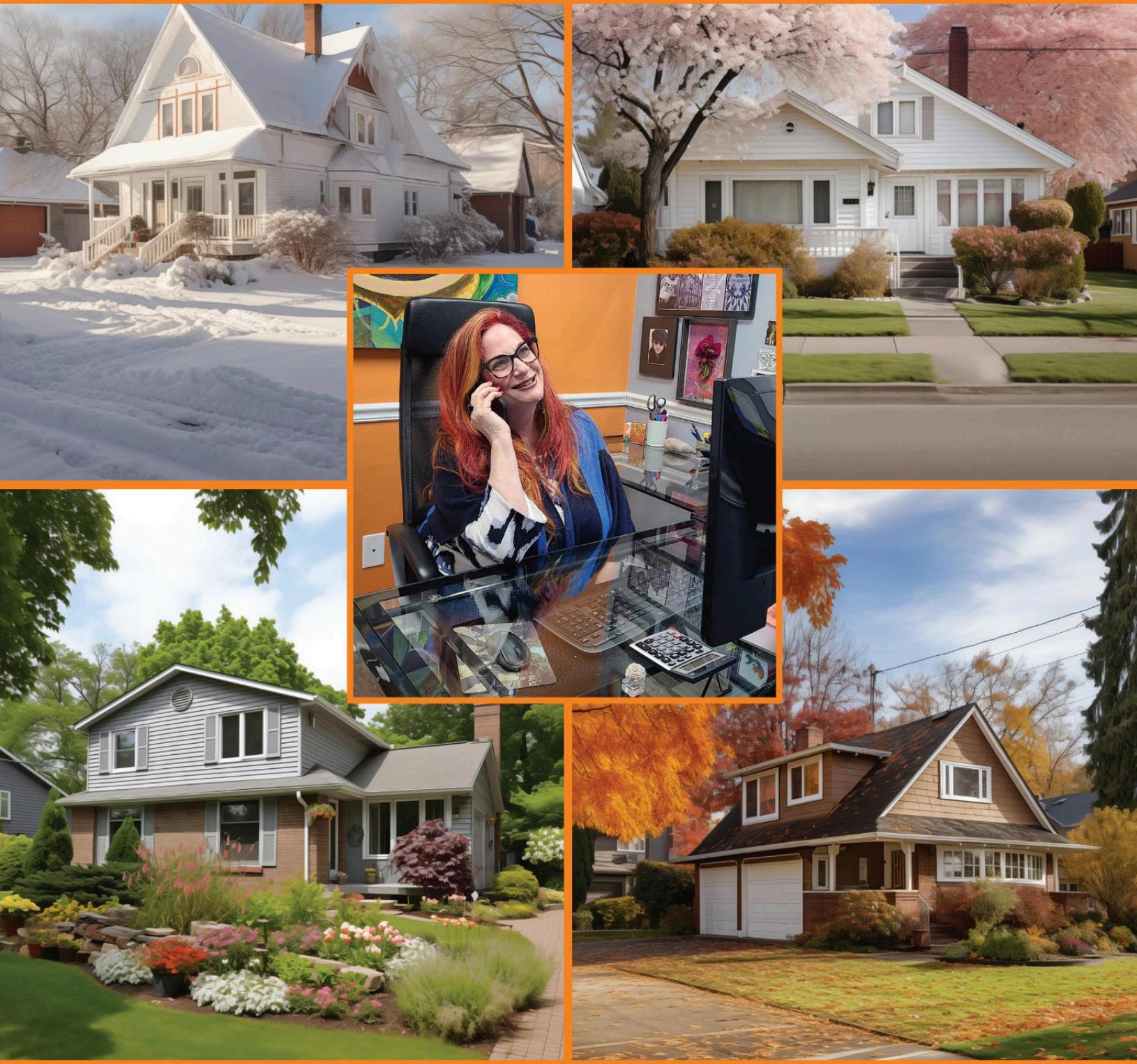
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