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New Shaker Heights
High School Principal
Isaiah Wyatt finds
promise in community
and collaboration

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ON THE COVER

Isaiah Wyatt, principal of Shaker Heights High School
Photo by Gus Chan

Stronger Together
New Shaker Heights High School Principal Isaiah Wyatt finds promise in community and collaboration.



Composting Made Easy
A unique partnership with Rust Belt Riders opens up a city-wide composting resource in each neighborhood.

What's Next
The inside scoop on how decades of planning and development led to new economic districts in Shaker.



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SHAKER LIFE

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SHAKER LIFE does not accept unsolicited editorial material, but story suggestions, comments, and observations from residents are welcome. Contact the editor at shaker.mag@shakerheightsoh.gov, or **SHAKER LIFE**, 3400 Lee Rd., Shaker Heights, OH 44120. We cannot respond to every suggestion but each will be given consideration.

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Browse the Archives



A Different Kind of Book Club

Fall 2023

Cook the Book is a book club that meets monthly at Shaker Main Library to discuss a cookbook and share a meal together. "I don't know what the secret to the group's longevity is," says Circulation Services Manager Jim Bagwell, co-creator of Cook the Book. "I just try to make people feel welcome. But the attendees, they make it what it is. There's just some sort of magic with this group that maybe they don't fully see."



Ice Skating at 30 Miles an Hour

Fall 2022

On the afternoon of Ryan Shane's Shaker Heights High School 2022 graduation, his life changed in still another significant way: the U.S. Short Track Speed Skating National Training Program publicly announced that he had been named to its 15-member team.



A Two-Century Voyage Back in Time

Fall 2024

Among its gravestones and plots, Shaker's Warrensville West Cemetery holds the early history of the City. Now, with the assistance of cemetery restoration expert TaMara Conde, it's getting much needed care to restore that visual history and return the space to its original meadowland.



Matthew Carroll Named Shaker's New Chief Administrative Officer

Career public administrator served 17 years with Cuyahoga County



Mayor David E. Weiss has appointed Matthew P. Carroll the City's new Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). City Council confirmed the appointment in August.

Carroll comes to the City from Cuyahoga County's Department of Health and Human Services, where he served most recently as senior advisor for strategic initiatives. He succeeds Jeri Chaikin, who retired in late September after more than 24 years of service as CAO.

"As a long-time, dedicated public servant, with leadership experience in many facets of city and county government, Matt possesses the executive and administrative training, experience, and judgement needed to oversee the day-to-day operations of Shaker Heights city government," Weiss says. "Matt's knowledge of and long ties to the Shaker community will enable him to meet the high level of service our residents have come to expect."

Carroll reports to the mayor. He serves as Clerk of Council, overseeing the development of City Council agendas and reporting regularly to the mayor and City Council about progress with City initiatives. He leads a management team of professionals representing 12 departments and is instrumental in the preparation of the City's annual budget of some \$64 million.

"I'm grateful to Mayor Weiss and the Shaker Heights City Council for this appointment to serve the City," Carroll says. "I recognize the excellence and high standards established by Jeri Chaikin in this role and will do my best to earn this opportunity. As a proud parent of two recent Shaker Heights High School graduates, I see all that Shaker has to offer as a community and I hope to add value wherever I can."

Carroll's tenure in county government includes four years as chief of staff to a prior county executive, seven years as chief economic growth and opportunity officer, and three years as manager of administrative operations for the County's Department of Health and Nutrition.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Brown University and a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center. Among many professional and non-profit affiliations, Carroll was the County representative to the boards of Say Yes to Education, Global Cleveland, and the Cuyahoga Workforce Funders Group. Carroll and his wife, Laura Kleinman, raised their sons in the Shaker Heights City School District, where they lived for 19 years.

When Chaikin announced her retirement in April, Weiss said, "Through her leadership position here in Shaker Heights, Jeri has worked tirelessly to promote efficient, effective government for the public good."



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Citizens Police Academy Hits 30-year Milestone

In the 30 years since its founding in 1995, Shaker Heights Citizens Police Academy (CPA) has attracted nearly 1,000 participants. How to account for its longevity and unwavering popularity?

“Citizens Police Academy opens the doors of the police department to our residents, giving them a firsthand look at the challenges and responsibilities we face every day,” says Police Chief Wayne Hudson. “More importantly, it fosters meaningful dialogue and partnerships. It’s one of the most valuable tools we have for building trust, transparency, and mutual understanding between our department and the community we serve.”

And clearly, it has been a valuable tool for residents interested in learning about their police department. Once they complete this 10-week program taught by Shaker Heights police officers, many participants recommend CPA to family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

Longtime resident Paul Landis was a member of the CPA’s 11th graduating class in 2002 and he attributes the program’s popularity to the excellence

of the police department. “It’s nice of the police to offer an opportunity to see how the department functions,” he says.

Resident Colleen Ward joined the CPA in 2019. “I found trust in the Shaker Heights Police Department by being a member. The training is so honest, and recently a virtual training component was added, which I found really fascinating.”

CPA’s purpose is to raise citizen awareness of police procedures and programs. The program is open to Shaker Heights residents and those who work in the City full-time.

While the Shaker program celebrated its 30th anniversary earlier this year, the idea of the CPA dates back to 1977 when the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in England started an eight-week series of meetings during which constables taught citizens about daily police operations.

In 1985, the idea was adopted by the Orlando (Florida) Police Department, and 10 years later, then-Shaker Heights Police Chief Walter Ugrinic sent then-Sergeant John Danko to Florida to learn firsthand about the Orlando program.

What I liked about Citizens Police Academy *Reviews from Recent Years*

“I’ve lived in Shaker all my life, but I learned more about Shaker Heights during the academy than I did my entire life. The time spent in the program was very valuable for a Shaker resident.”

“I was surprised by the depth of instruction. Would recommend to anyone.”

“I can’t say there was one topic or class that stuck out as the favorite – I loved every single one of them.”

“I am constantly recommending the CPA to all of my neighbors.”

“My ride-along with an officer was the highlight. He explained so much and answered my questions with great detail.”

“I learned a ton and gained new appreciation for the job that our police department does.”



The 2015 cohort of the Citizens Police Academy.

“Chief Ugrinic was the driving force behind starting a CPA program in Shaker,” recalls Danko, now retired. “He wanted the police department to be able to reach out to the community and for the community to be able to reach out to the police department to improve communications and to improve relationships.”

Ugrinic created a lesson plan for the Academy, and presented it to Danko. “I had some of the best officers in our department working as instructors. It was very well received from the start.”

George Gelehrter can vouch for that. A member of CPA’s first graduating class in 1995, he was hooked from the start and now serves as president of

the Shaker Heights Citizens Police Association, an outgrowth of CPA.

“I have remained involved because of the continued education regarding police work, being able to support the Police Department, and the great friendships I have with current and former Shaker Heights police officers and members of the Citizens Police Association,” Gelehrter says.

The association is a not-for-profit organization whose members are all CPA graduates and whose mission is to provide ongoing support and volunteer services to Shaker’s Police Department.

The CPA program, which caps attendance at 20 students, is offered once a year in the fall. Registration has now closed for the fall 2025 session but those interested may sign up to receive updates about future programs by contacting Alyssa Kastanis at 216-491-1248.



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Callie Cripps Named Executive Director of Shaker Heights Development Corporation

Urban planning and economic development professional Callie M. Cripps was appointed executive director of the Shaker Heights Development Corporation (SHDC) in March.

Cripps brings leadership experience from her roles as Economic Development Division manager for the City of Euclid and before that, director of corporate relations for the Downtown Cleveland Alliance, where she focused on commercial development, fundraising, and creation and administration of Special Improvement Districts.

The City established the non-profit SHDC in 1981 to enhance its commercial revitalization efforts in order to strengthen residential neighborhoods and diversify the tax base.

As executive director, Cripps is responsible for establishing a business improvement district; executing SHDC's new five-year strategic plan; and overseeing the organization's fundraising goals, commercial development, and real estate assets. In addition, she manages the Shaker Lee Development Fund, an Ohio LLC created and managed by SHDC to acquire, upgrade, lease, and manage vacant and underutilized commercial real estate properties in the Lee Road commercial district.

"I'm excited for the opportunity to bring my unique experience and knowledge in both suburban and urban environments to SHDC," says Cripps. "I believe my extensive involvement with board relations, and working daily with partners in the business community and municipal stakeholders, position me for success in all facets of the organization's activities."



DOAN BROOK RESTORATION AT HORSESHOE PARK, MARCH 2025 RENDERING

Work in the watershed

DOAN BROOK RESTORATION AT HORSESHOE PARK

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District is almost done with the design phase of this project. We hope you will continue to be a part of the conversation and the future of this important community space. neorsd.org/DoanBrook

LOWER SHAKER LAKE PROJECT

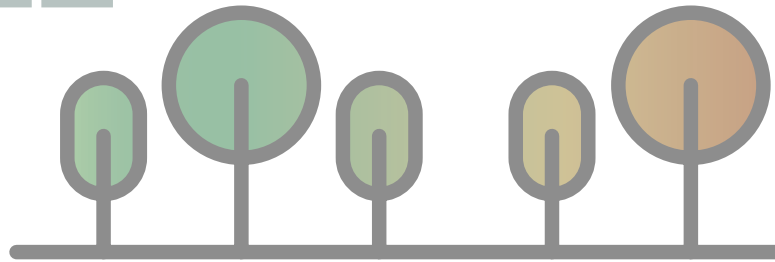
The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has determined that Lower Lake's Class 1 High Hazard dam is out of compliance with state safety standards. The Sewer District continues to work with the Cities to resolve this public risk. Learn more about our recommendation and what we've learned: neorsd.org/LowerLake



HELLO FALL

Leaf Season Begins October 15

It seems like only yesterday the trees were budding. And now we're on the cusp of another leaf collection season, beginning October 15 and continuing through December 15.



LEAF COLLECTION GUIDELINES

- > The goal of leaf collection season is to collect as many leaves as possible before the first snowfall.
- > Please rake leaves to the tree lawn and away from trees, hydrants, and street signs. Do not rake leaves into the street.
- > Please do not use yard waste bags in this timeframe.
- > Leaf collection is the top priority at this time of year. Please do not include brush (tree limbs, branches and woody cuttings from mature shrubs). Brush collection takes place AFTER leaf collection season ends in mid-December.
- > For more information about yard waste, please use the QR Code or go to shakerheightsoh.gov/198.



Jennifer Harris Named New CEO of Hanna Perkins Center

Shaker resident Jennifer L. Harris has been appointed chief executive officer of Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development after a national search. She brings to the position more than 25 years of experience in early childhood education, mental health and nonprofit leadership.

“Jennifer is a visionary leader whose entire career has been devoted to children and families,” says Mary Reed, president of the Hanna Perkins Board of Directors.

Harris most recently served as executive director of Rainey Institute, where she expanded programming, established new community partnerships, and led successful fundraising efforts in excess of \$7 million. She succeeds Karen Baer, who announced her retirement in 2024 after 13 years of leadership.

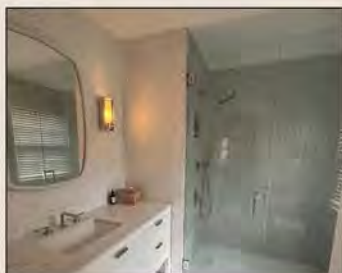
“Shaker is fortunate to have this worldwide recognized organization in its backyard,” says Harris. “Even as we serve the community through our core programming, we’re going to evolve to meet emerging needs; an example is the development of autism testing services that we are preparing to launch later this year. So as I come into this role, I look forward to building relationships and partnering with the City and community organizations in support of children and families.”

Founded in 1951, Hanna Perkins is located in the historic renovation of Shaker’s former Malvern School. The organization partners with parents, educators, and mental health professionals to help children understand and manage their emotions for success in school and life.

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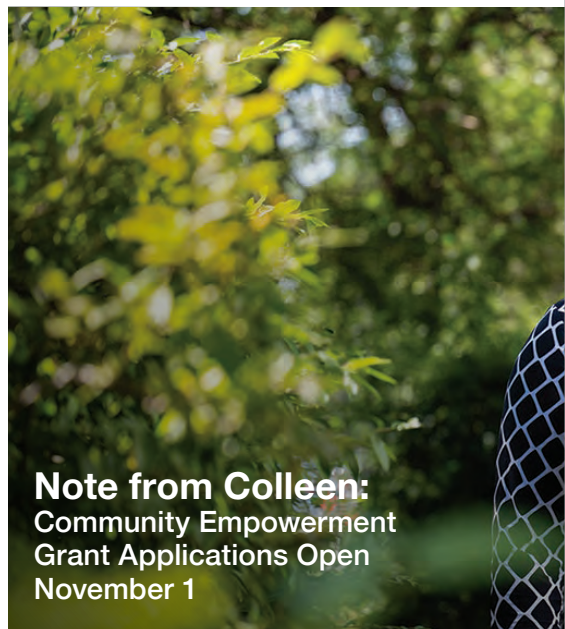
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Note from Colleen: Community Empowerment Grant Applications Open November 1

By Colleen Jackson, Chief Culture and Engagement Officer

Since 2024, the City's Culture and Engagement Committee has offered Community Empowerment Grants, micro-grants of up to \$2,500 available to residents, grass roots organizations, and local groups. These grants support initiatives that foster a sense of belonging, uplift and educate our residents, and encourage cross-neighborhood engagement in Shaker Heights.

To date, five grants have been awarded making possible a Skatefest and Community Workshop at Thornton Park Ice Arena with Kadari Taylor-Watson, U.S. Figure Skating's director of community engagement and impact; a youth lacrosse clinic; and a series of lectures focused on building community resilience and women's personal safety held at the Shaker Heights Main Library.

Earlier this year, the committee awarded a grant to the interior design firm Desired Designs for a Design Empowerment and Vendor Connection Day held in September. This event brought together Shaker Heights homeowners, renters, and minority-owned vendors for a day of design education and community building.

Another micro-grant awarded this year enabled the Shaker Heights Youth Center to plan a four-week program for local



youth titled THRIVE Together (for Teaching Holistic Resilience in Various Environments). The program focused on building resilience in youth by providing them with a dedicated safe space with opportunities to learn life skills such as cooking, emotional intelligence, and financial wealth building.

In 2024, the committee received only nine applications for Community Empowerment Grants. That number grew to nearly 30 in 2025, and we're expecting even more organizations to apply for the third round of grants in 2026.

A call for applications opens November 1, 2025, and will remain open through mid-December. Funded organizations will have the entire 2026 calendar year to put their micro-grants to use.

It's gratifying to receive applications for programs that benefit youth and seniors. We are fortunate to have so many knowledgeable and creative residents who care about the health, wellness, and general fitness of our neighbors. These grants were created to foster those connections and bring people together across neighborhoods.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at colleen.jackson@shakerheightsoh.gov.



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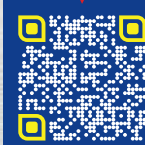


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Shaker Social



The Lomond Association

f Neighbor #1 Thank you to the organizers! What a wonderful Lomond and Sussex tradition. **Neighbor #2** This gives me hope. **Neighbor #3** #LoveLomond **Neighbor #4** This was so fun today thank you to all who came out!!! **Neighbor #5** Thank you for organizing as well as all the others who pitched in. It's not easy and the community appreciates it! **Neighbor #6** Xo it was so fun! You are welcome! **Neighbor #7** Great event. Thank you to the organizers!



Shaker Heights Police Department

f Neighbor #1 This is community... Happy Birthday beautiful... **Neighbor #2** Absolutely beautiful! Miss Banks you are a treasure **Neighbor #3** Happy birthday, Miss Banks! And what a nice gesture from the SHPD & SHFD. **Neighbor #4** I love it!!! Happy, Happy Blessed 100th Birthday!!!!

(Plus birthday greetings from almost 100 other neighbors.)



Living in Shaker Heights

f Neighbor #1 A Revolutionary War soldier rests in Shaker Heights. **Neighbor #2** Where? **Neighbor #3** I think it's the obscured cemetery on Lee that you access from the Heinen's parking lot. **Neighbor #4** How/when did he get to Shaker Heights? Was he a "Shaker"? Any more info on who he was? **Neighbor #5** James (Hogg) Prentiss: wikitree.com/wiki/Hogg-1351

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*Data based on 2025 Real Trends. 2025 RealTrends Verified lists are based on 2024 data for closed residential transactions and volume. Land, lots, Commercial property, rentals and referral production has been removed from published totals.

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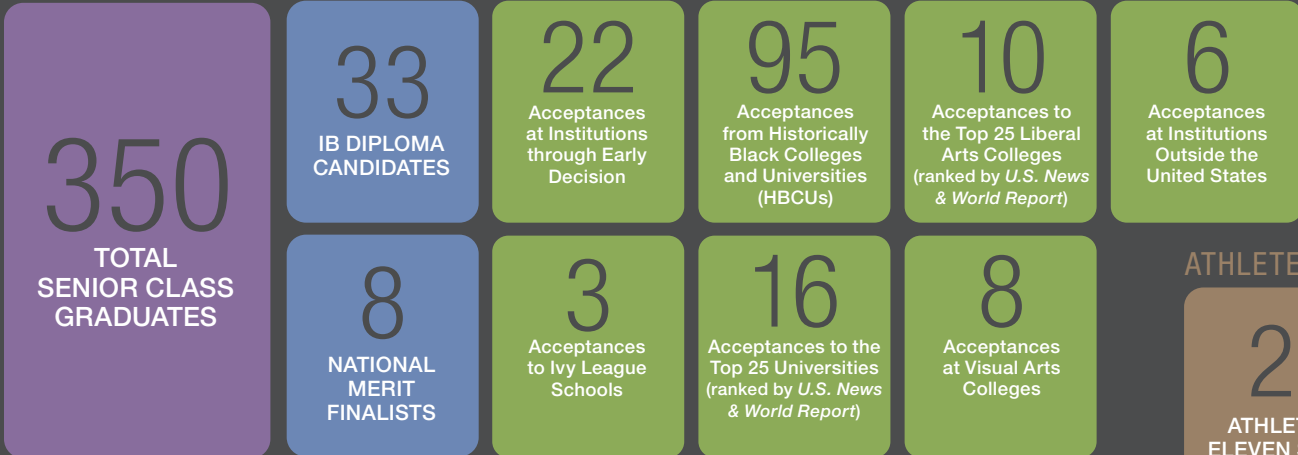
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Shaker Schools News

CLASS OF 2025 BY THE NUMBERS

The Class of 2025 has headed off into the world! Celebrate the accomplishments and achievements of these Shaker Heights School graduates.

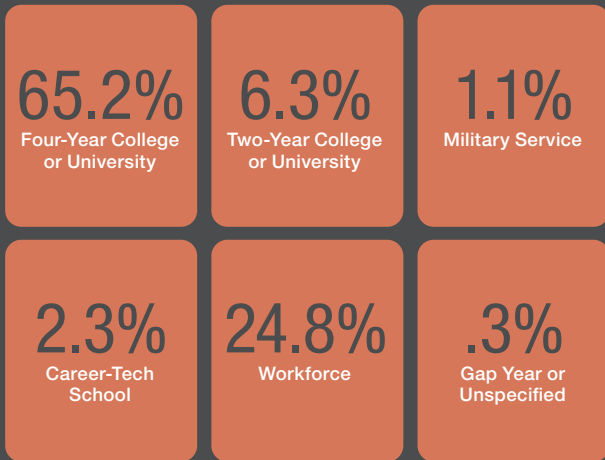
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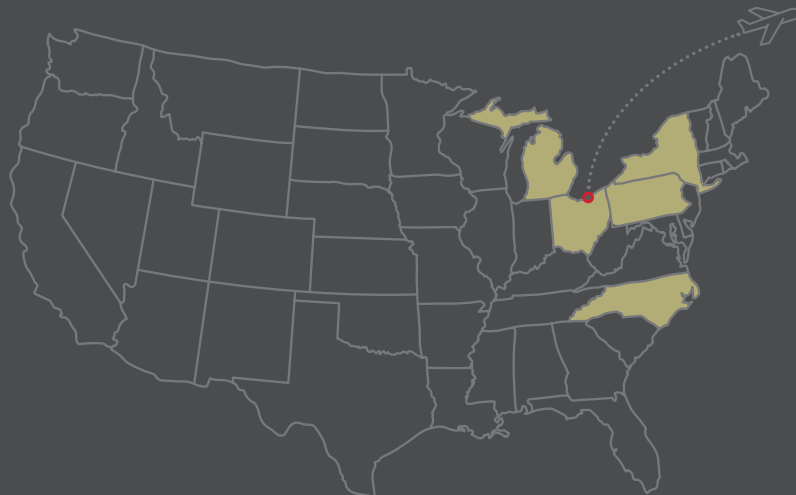


WHERE THEY'RE HEADED

A majority of the Class of 2025 is staying in Ohio, while

23%

of students will be going out of state, including one student who will be going international.



Sound Investment: MGK Helps Shaker Turn Up the Volume

New High School recording studio strikes the right chord



Shaker Heights High School students now have access to a brand-new recording and podcast studio, thanks to support from musical artist and SHHS alum MGK (Colson Baker, Class of 2008) and Marrow Fine Jewelers.

In fall 2022, the Shaker Schools Foundation received a \$43,450 donation from the sale of MGK's custom jewelry line with Marrow Fine—featuring diamonds from his Billboard Music Awards manicure. The story was even featured in People Magazine. Since then, Marrow Fine has continued to give back through ongoing sales of the “Colson Band.”

Located in the High School Library, the new Wenger SoundLok studio is fully equipped with mics, mixers, and editing software. Students will use the space across subjects like music, literature, and history, as well as for personal creative projects and hands-on learning in audio and podcast production.

A New Playground for a New Generation

Play begins here for our youngest learners



The Shaker Schools Foundation is grateful to the Shaker alumni, community members, and families who have generously donated to the Ludlow playground project. Their support has helped create a vibrant, welcoming space with tables, benches, bike racks, interactive playground

equipment, and engaging musical features for students and neighborhood children to enjoy.

Although Ludlow has not been a Shaker public school since the 1980s, the building has begun a new chapter. As it celebrates its 99th birthday, Ludlow has been transformed into the Ludlow Early Learning Center, welcoming Shaker's youngest learners – three- and four-year-olds.

Ludlow Principal Craig Caroff shared, “The playground, funded by the Shaker Schools Foundation and their donors, will be a place where our young students form friendships, laugh, and learn in the newly imagined outdoor space.”

The Foundation looks forward to partnering with the District to celebrate Ludlow's 100th anniversary in 2026. Ludlow alumni should update their information to be included in the celebration. Scan the QR code or visit shakerschoolsfoundation.org/alumnisurvey.



Shaker Grams

We See You Seeing Shaker.

- > H/T to those capturing the community.
- > Tag your photos to #shaker365.
- > You might just see them on these pages!



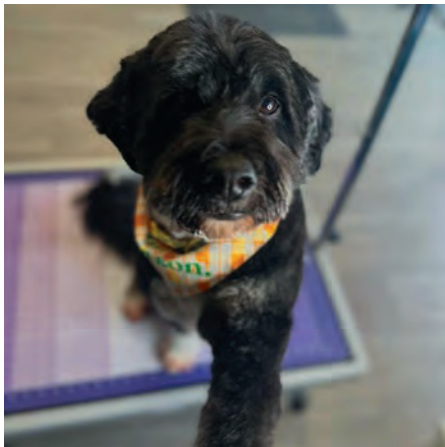
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@kilncle | Nature's bounty



@mfr.sontherapy_ | Spreading the health



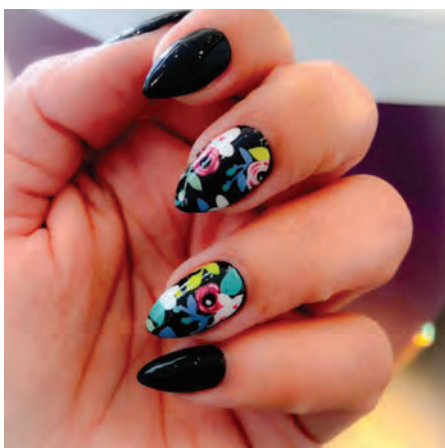
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Capturing the Personality of Shaker

2025 PRESERVATION MONTH PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Congratulations to the winners of the Shaker Heights Landmark Commission's 11th annual Preservation Month Photo Contest, whose entries depict what makes Shaker, Shaker.

This year, 11 photographers posted 25 entries to Instagram with the hashtag #PreserveSH25. Members of the Shaker Heights Landmark Commission then selected a winner and runners-up in each of three categories: architecture, community, and landscape and nature. In addition, the People's Choice award was given to the submission receiving the most "likes" on Instagram.

"Each of the finalists in the 2025 Landmark Commission Photo Contest has captured a special strength of our diverse community," says Landmark Commission Chair and City Councilmember Nancy Moore. "Whether it's a woman scaling a steep rock wall, or children chasing ethereal bubbles, or a co-ed team of firefighters responding in mutual aid, we can enjoy these award-winning photographs of Shaker Heights."

The Preservation Month Photo Contest, which is held every other year, was created in 2013 to amplify Preservation Month, celebrated each May by preservation organizations across the country.

All entries can be viewed at the Instagram hashtag #PreserveSH25.

Architecture

o WINNER All About the Details by Sarah Ezzie Haines



RUNNER-UP A Little Saint Dominic Church Snow Globe by Doug Tayek

Community



o WINNER Van Aken Bubbles by Paul Markowicz

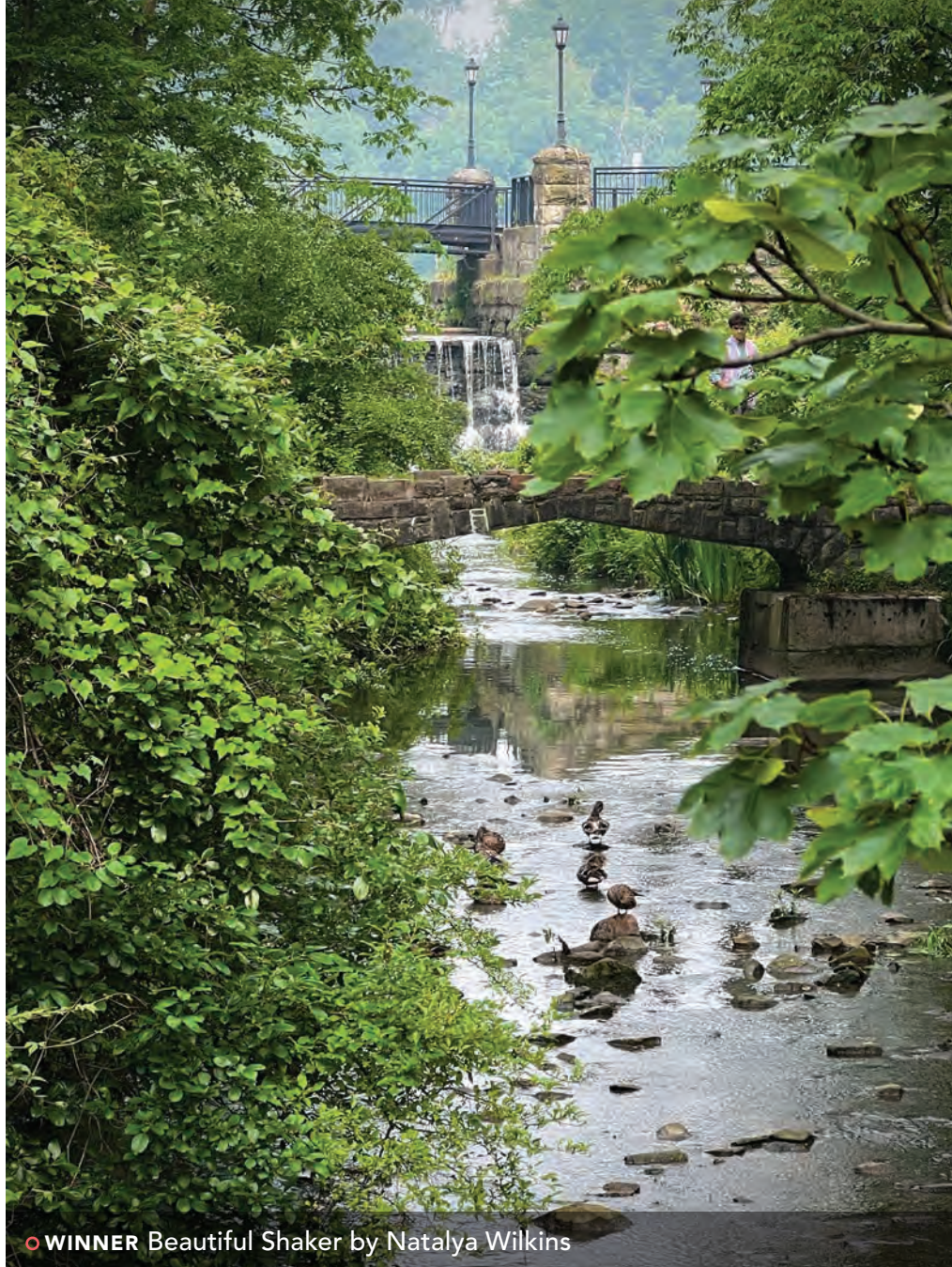


RUNNER-UP Firefighters by Doug Tayek



RUNNER-UP Shrocks on the Wall by Anne Richman

Landscape & Nature



○ **WINNER** Beautiful Shaker by Natalya Wilkins

RUNNER-UP Floating Island by Anne Rogerson



People's Choice

o **WINNER** Female Cardinal by Doug Tayek





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Shaker Library News

Smith Succeeds Brodar as Shaker Library Deputy Director

Shaker resident Jessica Smith has succeeded Maureen Brodar as Shaker Library Deputy Director.

Brodar retired from her post at the end of August after serving the library for 20 years, first as a librarian and manager before transitioning to deputy director.

In her most recent role, Brodar oversaw the library departments that provide customer service. “Her keen eye and sound judgment were crucial through two building renovations and closures due to COVID,” says Shaker Library Director Amy Switzer.

Smith began as deputy director on September 8. Before starting as Youth Services Manager at Shaker Library in January 2023, Smith held positions at Cleveland Public Library, Euclid Library, and Morley Library. She brings to the role a passion for great customer service and a demonstrated history of implementing positive customer service changes across public-facing departments.

Last year, Smith enacted a plan to train all public services staff in Restorative Practices, an approach where workers proactively build relationships with

customers before someone violates the Code of Conduct. If that happens, staff meet customers with healing and accountability rather than punishment. “Restorative Practices was something we talked about for a long time,” says Brodar. “Jessica made it a reality.”

Smith led the way, but she brought along with her coworkers from other departments who say her training has made connecting with the teens accessible.

Says Circulation Manager Jim Bagwell: “My rapport with the teens is so much better now. She models how to put them at ease and be silly with them. It makes me think, ‘Oh, wow. I can do that too.’”

Smith has also supported staff in revamping and transforming teen programming. As a result, participation has skyrocketed, up 80% from 2023 to 2024.

“The energy, creativity, and passion that Jessica has brought to the Youth Services Department have been infectious, and we’re excited to see how she’ll support services for all ages as deputy director,” says Switzer.

Smith, who lives with her husband and three children in the Mercer neighborhood, says she loves working where she lives. “I’ll see a customer here at work, then I’ll go to my kids’ sports games and see them in the stands. It’s not an anonymous transaction, it’s community,” Smith says.

Smith was drawn to library work after watching her mother make a difference as a librarian in Holmes County (south of Wooster), where she managed several library branches and two bookmobiles. “My mom always said I was going to be a librarian. I always had a book in my face. When I played pretend, I was a librarian,” Smith says, laughing. Despite the obvious signs she should take up librarianship, Smith studied political science in undergrad and worked in politics before making the leap into libraries.

“I realized that what I liked about politics was helping people get connected with the right agencies and organizations,” Smith says. “So when I was looking to change careers, I found a job in libraries – and I never looked back.”



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days

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programs

participants

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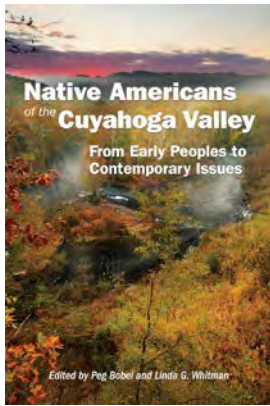
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Visit shakerheightsoh.gov/fair-housing to learn more or hold your mobile device's camera over the QR code and tap the link.



City of Shaker Heights
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Authors to Speak at Main Library This Fall

If you've ever looked around our city and wondered who lived here before the Shakers, *Native Americans of the Cuyahoga Valley* is an important read.

On November 12 at 7pm, join editors Linda Whitman and Peg Bobel for a discussion of their book, which chronicles the deep history and ongoing presence of Indigenous communities in Northeast Ohio, revealed through archaeological findings, oral histories, and contemporary perspectives. Copies will be available for purchase.

Shaker Library News

Friends of the Library Fall Book Sale Slated for Nov. 12-16

Mark your calendars – The Friends of the Shaker Library are hosting their Fall Book Sale on the second floor of Main Library the second week of November. With the holidays right around the corner, find a great read for everyone in your life at unbeatable prices, some as low as 50 cents. The sale offers thousands of books in well-organized categories, and all proceeds fund library programming for all ages, including Summer Reading.

Friends Preview Sale

Wednesday, Nov. 12, 4-8pm

Regular Sale Hours

Thursday, Nov. 13, 10am-7pm

Friday, Nov. 14, 12-4pm

Saturday, Nov. 15, 12-4pm

Bag Sale Sunday

Sunday, Nov. 16, 1:30 - 3:30pm

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CONNECTING THE DOTS

Animal visits and humane education help young Shaker Library users expand their horizons, grow as readers, and develop a deeper understanding of the story.

Written by **Lyndsey Brennan** | Photography by **Robert Muller**



On the day of the Summer Reading Midpoint Party this July, a group of children and their adults form a line in the hallway outside of the Main Library Boulevard Room, tickets in hand.

Some of the kids titter with excitement. Others squirm impatiently, bouncing at their caregiver's side.

What are they here for? The opportunity to meet a miniature horse.

I meet the eye of the little boy at the front of the line, swinging his father's hand. He looks about six.

"Is this your first time meeting a horse?" I ask. His nod and body language are shy, but his eyes are bright and excited. He knows today is a special day.

A little girl bravely steps forward to tell me she is almost four and has horse stuffed animals at home. In a few minutes, she'll enter the room, meet therapy horses Stella and Dimples, and develop affection for the real-life versions of her toys.

The girl giggles with the other children when the horses yawn or sneeze. She takes her turn walking Dimples around the room using a bright pink lead, her shoes softly clapping next to the horse's sparkly ones.

When the session ends, her mom asks if she's ready to go home.

"No," she says quietly, lingering near the horses, giving Dimples one last pat.

It's a testament to the new bond she's made: She doesn't want to leave.

Build background knowledge for reading

Over the past two years, Shaker Library has hosted a parade of animal visitors in its Children's Room: A hen owned by a local library user. A turtle from the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes. Licensed therapy dogs for the library's longest running children's series, Read to a Dog. Snakes, frogs, and other reptiles and amphibians handled by a local animal educator.

What draws families to the library for these visits, some parents told me, is the novelty – seeing an animal you wouldn't expect to see in the library – and the chance to give their child an experience they wouldn't have otherwise.

Shaker resident Antoinette Hillian, who has lived in Mercer with her family since 2011, brought her six-year-old son Harrison to the therapy horses event. "I try to expose him to as many different experiences as I can, to show him what's possible and figure out what's good for him. It was great to see Harrison so energized after the visit with the horses," she says. "When he returned home, he excitedly told his dad about leading Dimples and playing with her hair."

Shaker Library's Deputy Director Jessica Smith says the library tries to bring in experiences that kids might not be able to participate in because of their living situations or location.

"For a kid living in the suburbs to be able to see horses – that's not something everyone has the opportunity to do," Smith says.

While not every animal visit has a therapeutic component, every experience builds on a budding reader's background knowledge.

"We know from the research that the more exploration of the world a child has, the easier it is for them to visualize what's happening in a book," says Smith.

"So if a child is reading about an iguana, and they've seen one in person, their brain connects the dots a little better than a child who has never seen one. That's what makes these animal visits equalizing opportunities," she says.

In an era when kids don't consume the same media, celebrate the same holidays, or navigate the same social spheres, a shared experience creates a connection point, promotes a sense of belonging, and forms lasting memories of the city and community.



Previous page and above: Attendees at the Summer Reading Midpoint Party meet miniature therapy horses from Tender Touch Equine, a non-profit organization in Valley View, Ohio, that brings therapy horses to meet-and-greets in hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and more.



Why read to a dog?

One of the longest-running programs for kids at Shaker Library is Read to a Dog, developed and launched by Youth Services Associate Nicolette Petrone in 2011.

School-age children can sign up for a 15-minute timeslot to read to a certified therapy dog, who won't mind if the child needs to slowly sound out a word or repeat the same sentence over and over.

Because learning to read can sometimes be a challenging and stress-inducing task, reading to a therapy dog while petting its coat can counteract any anxiety brewing in children and lower their stress level and heart rate.

Petrone, who went through the therapy dog licensing process with her dog, says she regularly sees the positive academic impact reading to a dog has on students.

The data backs this up. One 2017 study conducted by the Animals & Society Institute found that reading to therapy dogs tended to increase children's scores when reading aloud, more than reading with a peer.

Other studies found that reading to a dog increased students' sense of achievement, enthusiasm, and motivation, and in certain instances, decreased problematic behavior.

"I've had kids come who were super shy, but around the dog, their personalities came forward," says Petrone.

When Shaker resident Harriet Miling brought her four children to Read to a Dog last summer, she had been looking at the library calendar for an activity they could all do together. This fit the bill.

"Our dog might sit for a story, but he's not a therapy dog. He's curious and can get distracted. He likes to run and jump, and it can take a while to get him calm."

Miling liked that Sochi, the therapy dog her kids read with, exuded calming energy from the get-go, which set the tone for the entire session. All four kids settled in to read and remained on task through the session.

She noticed her youngest child, who was a new reader set to start kindergarten that fall, felt confident enough to read aloud without embarrassment. And the oldest child felt that the activity was "cool enough" to participate in too.

"It's great that we have these opportunities" at the library, she says. "We need an abundance of them – maybe during testing weeks or another stressful time at school. If it was something we did more of, I think we'd see different outcomes."

The program's longevity speaks for itself, says Petrone. "It's still popular, well over 10 years later. And nowadays, with so many kids using devices, they're not interacting with the natural world as much. So any opportunity to interact with another living, breathing being is valuable."

Humane education

Shaker Library recently introduced a new series for school-age children called RedRover Readers, hosted one Monday afternoon per month by Petrone.

Even though Petrone has developed a reputation of being "the storytime lady" who specializes in early literacy, RedRover Readers is specially designed for school-age kids to teach them compassion for all animals and respect for their habitats.

During a typical session, Petrone will read one book with the group, such as *Buddy Unchained*, a powerful story told from the dog's perspective about being chained up without food or water, getting rescued by Humane Society employees, and finding his forever family.

Petrone leads the group asking guided questions about the illustrations, like "What do you think the dog's body language is saying here?" Or "What do you sense he is feeling in this moment?"

Afterward, the group participates in an activity based on the book, like drawing or describing a dog's best day. Or the group might meet an animal, as they did after reading *Hens for Friends*, when they met a hen named Goldie.

Not every book is as weighty as *Buddy Unchained*, but each offers the opportunity for attendees to think through scenarios and arrive at their own conclusions.

Petrone's desire to add a humane education series to the library's offerings stems from her belief that books are a powerful tool for helping kids develop empathy.

"Even if the kids who attend aren't 'animal people,' they will leave the sessions with an awareness of others. Other beings, human or not, have feelings. It matters how I treat others. Awareness and empathy are great tools for learning to live in community."

The next RedRover Readers sessions will be October 13 and November 10 at 4pm, at Shaker Main Library. Save your seat at events.shakerlibrary.org. **SL**

Lyndsey Brennan is the communications and marketing manager at Shaker Library.



Previous page: The Milling children interact with Certified Therapy dog Sochi, a Samoyed, at Read to a Dog. Sochi and owner Caroline Weingart are long-time volunteers with the program.

Above: Attendees at the Summer Reading Midpoint Party lead therapy horse Dimples around the room with the help of Tender Touch Equine owner Jill Chuha.

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DISCOVER

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Autumn Beauty Near Me | **SHAKER HEIGHTS**



New Shaker Heights High School Principal Isaiah Wyatt finds promise in community and collaboration

Written by Julie Hullett | Photography by Gus Chan*

On a frigid morning in February, Isaiah Wyatt introduced himself to members of the Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council (SSAC) at Shaker Heights High School. Wyatt had just been appointed interim principal of the High School. One by one, Wyatt called students up to stand with him, and locked arms to demonstrate his motto, “Stronger Together.”

Wyatt was selected as the permanent principal of Shaker Heights High School this spring, and is already making strides with his commitment to fostering a sense of community and collaborating with students and staff.

“I don’t come to the table with all the answers for everything, but collectively, we will have the answer,” Wyatt says.

*except where otherwise noted



Shaker Heights High School Principal Isaiah Wyatt prioritizes teamwork and collaboration. He is working to build the sense of community and school pride among high school students.

Fan the Spark into a Flame

Wyatt has been a rising star at Shaker Heights High School since he joined the District in 2023, as a high school assistant principal in charge of the Innovative Center (IC) for Personalized Learning. Wyatt immersed himself in the values and mission of the Shaker Heights Schools in a small, intimate environment where he could build close relationships with the students and staff.

Wyatt, a 2005 graduate of East High School in Cleveland, had his sights set on playing football at The Ohio State University, a dream that Wyatt's father instilled in him as a child. Wyatt played football his senior year of high school, then began his undergraduate degree at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) to meet OSU's academic eligibility guidelines.

Once he had a few college courses under his belt, Wyatt transferred to the University of Akron, where he thought he would be a walk-on for the football team. There, he learned the importance of being a student first, then a student-athlete. In the past, he completed academic assignments to receive the points, but did not learn the content. After a brief period on academic probation, Wyatt tried out for the University of Akron football team, with no callback.

"That moment brought me down to a level of reality," Wyatt says. "I needed to do the work to get the goal that I wanted." This lesson applied to academics and athletics. Eventually, he transferred to Malone University in Canton, where he played NCAA Division II football.

Pour Into Others as Others Pour Into You

Wyatt credits much of his success to mentors throughout his life, who have imparted their wisdom to him and guided him to reach his highest potential. Through his journey to Malone University, Wyatt realized that relationships were critical to his success.

"I learned what I needed as a student. I needed relationships. I needed classes where the teachers knew my name," Wyatt says. "At Malone, I was no longer trying to hide from my work. I wanted to do it because I valued my teachers and coaches, and they believed in me. Through relationships, I pushed myself more. I felt accountable to the people who believed in me."

Wyatt graduated from Malone with a Bachelor of Science in Education. He earned his master's degree in school counseling while also coaching football at Malone.

Hired at Canton McKinley High School as a school counselor, Wyatt went on to serve in several other roles, including assistant principal and dean of students. He notes many mentors throughout his education and career who have helped shape him into the man he is today, including Mark Harris of Raw Talent Sports; Dr. Susan Steiner, his graduate adviser at Malone; Football Head Coach Eric Hehman at Malone; and Principal Dr. Corey D. Grubbs at Canton McKinley.

Wyatt's lifelong experience with mentors led him to another one of his popular sayings, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."



Isaiah Wyatt enjoys spending his free time with his family, including his wife, April, and his three children, Zoe, 7, Ava, 5, and Isaiah II, 4.

A Move to Shaker

As Wyatt's family grew, he and his wife, April, were looking to move closer to their families in Cleveland. Wyatt began researching the Shaker Heights City School District and was pleased to find that its values were similar to his own. He joined the team at the IC and was named Interim Principal of SHHS in December and appointed as Principal in April.

Once joining the Shaker Heights Schools, Wyatt was paired with Dr. Felecia Evans, assistant superintendent of learning and teaching, as part of the District's mentoring program for new administrators. Evans says she has already seen tremendous growth since Wyatt joined the District in 2023.

"Principal Wyatt is very reflective in a positive way. He seeks feedback, not only from me as a supervisor and mentor, but also from his teachers, assistant principals

and students," Evans says. "We've seen communication increase, and there's promise that good things are coming for Shaker Heights High School."

Evans notes that Wyatt has not taken a traditional route to leadership and shares his story with the students at school assemblies. Wyatt is an exemplary model for students to see that academics may not be easy for everyone, but everyone still has a bright future ahead of them.

"Principal Wyatt worked hard and uses his journey as a reflection to make himself a better leader," Evans says. "He is open in sharing that with students and staff. That makes him unique, and it makes him a more empathetic leader."



Principal Isaiah Wyatt brings strong communication skills to his role. He seeks feedback from High School faculty, staff and students to improve the educational experience.



Building Community

At Shaker Heights High School, Wyatt is focused on building a sense of community through collaboration. He is working to bring an unprecedented level of pride and support to the school. School culture, Wyatt says, plays an important role in solving challenges that all schools face.

Wyatt strongly believes that every student can find their home. "There is something for every child, and there is a faculty or staff member who cares about that child and their interests," he says. "You will find family here in whatever pocket you have interest in. Everyone will accept and embrace you for who you are."

One challenge that Wyatt notes is the gap in participation and performance between different demographic groups. An improved school culture and sense of belonging are key factors in closing this gap. One of Wyatt's goals is eliminating systemic structures that may contribute to the achievement gap.

"I'm not sure if students have felt like they can own their school. Sometimes, they come to school thinking school happens to them, rather than us all doing school together," Wyatt says. "I'd like our leadership team to focus on what students and staff can do to impact their own experience at school."

As part of an International Baccalaureate (IB) district, Wyatt says Shaker Heights High School students receive a global-minded education that allows them to understand citizenship and give back to their community. "Attending an IB high school is a cool opportunity to learn in an inquiry-driven classroom setting," Wyatt says. "The IB way of learning allows you to think critically, problem solve, and challenge yourself in a way that lets you have ownership of your education but do it in a way to think bigger."



As Principal Isaiah Wyatt walks through the halls, it is clear that he knows the students and the students know him. He checks in to see how their day is going, what assignments they're working on, and asks what their weekend plans are.



Shaunna Bonner, chair of the School Counseling Department at Shaker Heights High School, says Wyatt's dedication to student success is clear. Bonner sat on the interview panel for Wyatt when he applied for the role of assistant principal, and she was impressed with his authenticity.

When Wyatt transitioned to interim principal, he advised Bonner that he would like to work closely with the counseling department. He attends department meetings when there are tough decisions to make and supports the department with complex tasks like scheduling. Bonner also notes Wyatt's strong communication skills.

"With staff, it's clear that he listens to understand. He has a way of de-escalating tough conversations. He does a good job of listening, providing direct feedback and keeping people engaged in the conversation," Bonner says. "With students, he seems real with them. He is willing to be vulnerable and meet them where they are."

Wyatt says now is a great time to be a student at Shaker Heights High School. The faculty and staff are committed to providing the best educational experience for their students.

"We can create spaces to be vulnerable and learn from each other," Wyatt says. "Now is the time to be here. Our students will be part of creating something that is long-lasting."

When Wyatt walks through Shaker Heights High School, it is clear that he knows the students and the students know him. He repeatedly stops to check in with them – asking students how their day is going, what assignment they are working on, and what their weekend plans are. Students who know Wyatt from the Innovative Center are excited to see him and give him updates on their lives. These may sound like small moments, but they are the building blocks for a culture focused on trust and transparency. **SL**

Julie Hullett is the communications specialist with the Shaker Heights City School District

“There is something for every child, and there is a faculty or staff member who cares about that child and their interests. You will find family here in whatever pocket you have interest in. Everyone will accept and embrace you for who you are.”



COMPOSTING MADE EASY

Launched on Earth Day, the City's unique partnership with Rust Belt Riders opens up a city-wide composting resource in each neighborhood.

Written by **Sharon Broussard** | Photography by **Gus Chan** and **Steven Springer**



“The most important thing that made us bring composting to the City was the people of Shaker Heights.”



About seven years ago, some Shaker Heights residents who had learned about Rust Belt Riders (RBR), the local compost collection company, took to driving to RBR’s St. Clair Ave. office to drop off cracked eggs, moldy food, bones, and restaurant leftovers in the company’s bins.

In a circuitous way, it was that small band of dedicated Shakerites that gradually led to a full-fledged partnership with the city of Shaker Heights and RBR, which collects food scraps and turns them into deep rich soil used for gardening, says Zoe Apisdorf, the company’s hauling operations scope leader.

“The most important thing that made us bring composting to the City was the people of Shaker Heights,” says Apisdorf.

On April 22, 2025, Earth Day, RBR’s food waste collection service became available to all residents of the Shaker Heights City School District, thanks to Shaker City Council budgeting \$80,567 for its use. The 18 locked and clean waste bins – expect more during the holiday season when food is abundant – are at every City elementary school, the City’s main library, and at some city buildings in Shaker.

The shift to a free citywide service for all – before residents had to make their own arrangements with RBR – is appropriate for Shaker, which was the first suburb in Cuyahoga County to allow Rust Belt Riders to offer residential food waste collection services within its city limits and only the second city in Cuyahoga County to pay for citywide food scraps collection. Beachwood was the first.

RBR was started in Cleveland by Daniel Brown and Michael Robinson in 2014, and the community hauler is the only food scrap collector in Cuyahoga County. Food waste collection and composting are in their infancy in the U.S., with just a handful of cities and states, the city of New York and the state of California among them, requiring residents to separate their food scraps for collection. Shaker’s program is voluntary.

Steps

Meal Prep

Separate scraps from food

Store scraps in small indoor container

Dump scraps into your larger outdoor receptacle

Scrap Collecting Tips

- 1 Set up an indoor/outdoor system. Keep a small countertop or kitchen bin for daily scraps and dump them into an outdoor, covered receptacle periodically.
- 2 Freeze meat scraps, and then add them into your covered receptacle right before dropping off compost. If you have the room in your freezer, this is the best way to add these scraps without the smell of decomposing meat.
- 3 Repurpose brown bags as liners for your larger bin. Not only will this make drop off easier and keep your bin clean, brown material like brown bags, dry leaves, and sawdust add carbon to food scraps, an essential element in creating rich compost.

Transport to one of RBR's city-wide waste bins

All photos this page: Gus Chan

“We pay a lot of money for landfills so if we could divert it, it would be a win.”



DIVERTING FROM LANDFILLS

Composting is an important step to limiting methane, a greenhouse gas generated by food waste that contributes to global warming. Nationally, about 30 to 40 percent of food ends up in a landfill, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Some Shaker residents appear dedicated to changing those numbers. Since April, Shaker's paid municipal composting program has had about 946 sign ups and has diverted 33,197 pounds of food waste or 16.5 tons from the landfill.

“We pay a lot of money for landfills so if we could divert it, it would be a win,” says Michael Peters, the City's sustainability coordinator who worked closely on the project with City Councilmember Kim Bixenstine, chair of the Sustainability Committee.

Bixenstine, a longtime home composter, says residents have been enthusiastic. “I have heard nothing but positive remarks. A lot of people are using it. They are happy about it. They think the bins are conveniently located.”

She says the City's partnership with RBR started out slowly but steadily with a pilot program at Fire Station One on Chagrin Blvd. in 2021. Two years later, the City got a one-year special project grant for about \$15,000 from the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District for a compost collection program at Lomond Elementary School “that was very, very successful,” signaling that the project could work. (Fernway and Onaway Schools already had RBR composting programs paid for by their PTOs in a separate school program.)



“I have heard nothing but positive remarks. A lot of people are using it. They are happy about it. They think the bins are conveniently located.”



THE BEAUTY OF SCRAPS AND DIRT

Just how does the 11-year-old employee-run cooperative turn a stinky mess into rich organic compost?

Once a week – sometimes more if it is a holiday – the company’s trucks collect food scraps from 64 gallon plastic totes in Shaker, Cleveland, Beachwood, and several companies including Heinen’s and haul it to Kurtz Brothers-owned Earth n’ Wood, a composting company in Canton, says Robert Kurtz, the commercial solutions worker owner at RBR (no relation). Some of the waste is also processed by Rid-All Green Partnership, a farm and educational center in Cleveland.

RBR used to make compost at its site on St. Clair, says Apisdorf “but the volume of the material exceeded our capacity.” It plans to return to composting next year in a new facility.

Residents in Shaker, Cleveland, Beachwood, University Heights, and other cities aren’t the only ones that contribute food scraps to the totes. Miceli’s Dairy Products, all 19 Heinens, and Rocket Arena are just some of the 300 businesses that work with RBR, according to Kurtz.

Earth n’ Wood adds wood chips, leaves, and twigs to the giant mounds on the ground and allows microbes to eat the scraps, raising the temperature of the mound up to 160 degrees Fahrenheit, which breaks down the organic matter and turns it into compost. It takes six months for the mound to break down and become compost, prized by gardeners for its richness. The company adds amendments to make its own soil called Tilth, an Old English word, which means the quality of the soil. The company sells six different kinds of soil and compost. Enrolled members of any RBR program can get a 10 percent discount.



A Thoughtful Business Model

The bold words on the white board in the makeshift meeting room for Rust Belt Riders on St. Clair Ave. proclaim the company's organizational motto clearly: "No More Bosses."

It's a "cheeky way to put what we are trying to do, shift the dynamics to make sure everyone is well taken care of," explains Zoe Apisdorf, RBR's hauling operations scope leader.

It's also a great motto for this Cleveland-based company that started without any bosses – just two local men, Daniel Brown and Michael Robinson – who were so perturbed by the amount of food being tossed by restaurants that they rode a mountain bike and trailer around and started collecting food scraps and composting it. RBR now has 33 employees and will hire more as it expands. It is on track to divert 4,500 tons of food waste this year.

The 11-year-old cooperative has a non-hierarchical structure, meaning that their entry level employees start at the same pay, regardless of their role. People who engage in the work are considered experts in their field, so there is little need to consult a boss. "New ideas are always welcome," says Apisdorf.

For instance, one of their truck drivers was so frustrated by the amount of water left in his RBR truck after it was cleaned that he asked Apisdorf if he could find a better way to clean the trucks. Apisdorf gave him the cash to experiment and he's keeping the company up-to-date on the project. "It was self-prompted, self-directed," she says.

There's another perk: Workers can become worker owners who own a piece of the company if they work at least 3,000 hours on the job and pay \$3,000, with the help of a company payment plan. Currently, RBR has 14 worker owners.

They get an opportunity to join the company's seven member board of trustees and they can vote on new worker owner members. (Apisdorf is one of the board members). Profits are equally distributed as dividends or reinvested in the company, depending on what the worker owners choose to do, says Apisdorf.

It all shows that people can make decisions on daily operations, without being managed, she says. "At its core, they know the work best and they should be able to have the most impact."

RBR plans to move next year from its St. Clair location to a seven-acre site on E. 79th St. where the worker-owned company will have its new headquarters, including a composting site. The long-term plan is to create a "brown necklace" of composting sites in the county that would help reduce trucking costs and emissions, says Kurtz.

"It will be an asset to the community and put Cleveland in a leadership role in composting," says Kurtz.

"We want to talk tons, not pounds." **SL**


For more information on the 10% compost discount, email info@rustbeltriders.com or call 216-800-4651 ext. 2 to get the discount code.

Register for the free composting service registration form found [here](#).



An aerial photograph of a city neighborhood, likely Shaker Heights, is shown with a semi-transparent teal overlay. The image captures a dense urban area with various buildings, streets, and green spaces. The teal color is consistent across the entire page, creating a cohesive visual theme.

WHAT'S NEXT

The inside scoop on how decades of planning and economic development unfold in Shaker Heights, plus updates on Lee Road improvements and the new Arcadia development at Van Aken District 

Written by **Sharon Holbrook** | Photography by **Robert Muller**



Joyce Braverman, the City's director of planning, and Laura Englehart, director of economic development for Shaker Heights.

If you've been around a carpenter or other handy person long enough, you've probably heard the old saying: "Measure twice, cut once."

In other words, it's better to plan thoroughly than to make a hard-to-correct mistake.

When it comes to economic development and other major improvements in Shaker Heights, the City "measures" at least twice – if not three, four, or more times.

Take, for example, the Van Aken District. The popular destination has been open since 2019, but its roots stretch back more than two decades. After multiple planning studies, over 60 community meetings, and a major multi-phase construction project, the VAD is still being expanded and enhanced.

This constantly evolving process of investment and development in Shaker Heights – on multiple projects

at the same time, over many years – is extraordinarily complex. (See sidebar on the steps involved for major development projects in Shaker.)

Many Shaker residents already know that Shaker Heights was built almost entirely as a residential community. Because this can create overdependence on residential property taxes, the City has long been working to diversify its tax base. Allowing thoughtful additions of more businesses and dense residential development brings more income and business tax revenue to Shaker. Not just any development will do, though: the City insists on development that offers the amenities that residents want and that maintains our city's unique character.

Let's check in on the status of two current development projects, the Arcadia mixed-use building at the Van Aken District and the Lee Road Action Plan, and what we can expect from these in the coming months and years.



ARCADIA

This summer, site preparation began for the Arcadia building at Warrensville Center and Farnsleigh Roads, on the site of the old Qua Buick dealership. A five-story apartment building with second floor office and street-level retail spaces is expected to be complete in 2027.

This wasn't always the plan for this parcel. In the mid-2010s, the Fresh Market grocery store from the old Van Aken Center was slated to move here. But when that company decided to retrench and ultimately closed more than a dozen stores in multiple states, the City returned to the planning process. This change opened the door for more dense, mixed-use development to complement the existing development at the Van Aken District.

"The more density and vitality that you add to the District, the more successful all of the local small businesses can be," says Laura Englehart, director of economic development for Shaker Heights, about the positive, multiplying effect that the City hopes Arcadia and each phase of VAD will bring.

Arcadia will cater to different residents than Upstairs (in the heart of the District) and RAYE (on Farnsleigh Road). Here, there will be 141 one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments. Twenty-five of the one-bedrooms will be set aside for "middle-income" renters. These apartments, although identical to the other one-bedrooms in every way, will have caps on rent that are tied to income.

Englehart anticipates that Arcadia's middle-income apartments will be within financial reach for households earning 80-100% of area median income as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "We wanted to be intentional about making sure that we were creating housing options for everyone in Shaker Heights, at all ages, at all stages of your life," she says of the variety of District housing options that Arcadia will join.

Columbus-based developer Metropolitan Holdings was drawn to the project because of its location in the Van Aken District and its walkability and access to transit and amenities. "Our goal is to build on the

All renderings for this spread courtesy RDL Architects



momentum already thriving in the Van Aken District and help carry it forward for years to come,” says Matthew Vekasy, Metropolitan’s CEO.

Arcadia has been designed to blend and connect with its neighbors. Both business and residential neighbors have been invited to multiple community meetings to give their input. As a result, the back of the five-story building will gradually step down to three floors to blend with its single-family neighbors on Helen Road. On Farnsleigh Road, brownstone-style entrances will provide a neighborhood feel. Residents will park in a hidden parking garage while customers and clients will use a small surface lot.

Up to three retail tenants – not yet selected – will anchor the first floor. Shaker Heights-based RDL Architects, which is designing the project, will occupy office space on the second floor of the building.

The Lee Road Action Plan, which focuses on enhancing the streetscape, commercial areas, and traffic patterns on this busy road, requires a somewhat different approach.

As with the Van Aken District, resident input and careful planning are at the center of the process. But here, there is no clearing of property and there are fewer opportunities to assemble land parcels to attract a developer. Instead, the City is working directly with residents, businesses, and other partners to enhance this commercial district.

View of the Arcadia from the intersection of Farnsleigh and Helen Roads. This view is of the building’s elevation change to three stories and dormers — elements that fit into the architecture of the homes on Helen Road.





LEE ROAD

Improvements to Lee Road will include road narrowing; friendlier spaces for bicycles and pedestrians; amenities like new benches, lighting, and trees; consolidated, more efficient parking at businesses; and later, an expanded Chelton Park for more community gathering space.

The whole length of Lee Road in Shaker, from the Cleveland border in the south to Cleveland Heights in the north, is slated for public infrastructure and traffic improvements, but commercial improvements will emphasize Lee Road south of Chagrin Boulevard.

Commercial improvement efforts are focused on enhancing existing buildings and businesses, but it's possible that some buildings could come down in the future if they are too deteriorated to save, says Englehart. That said, the City respects "the existing fabric of the neighborhood," she adds. Any changes to commercial properties or businesses along the road will be more incremental than anything at larger redevelopment sites like in the Van Aken District, for example. For now, the City

continues to work with property owners on Lee Road to set the stage for those incremental private improvements and developments to follow soon after the planned public infrastructure investments.

As early as 2012, early plans were made to enhance Lee Road. Before any formal plans could be made, a professional traffic study was conducted in 2021 to ensure that Lee Road could handle the removal of a lane for car traffic, says Joyce Braverman, the City's director of planning. Additional traffic analysis is being conducted before construction begins to make sure nothing has changed.

Beginning in late 2021, the City undertook a year-long community process of visioning, listening, and planning. At multiple meetings, participants weighed in on everything from how comfortable they feel crossing the street to what kind of businesses and public improvements they want. One common wish is for a diner or restaurant, which current zoning laws do not allow. The City has hired a zoning consultant to reconsider allowable uses on Lee Road.



This conceptual rendering, looking north, reimagines the approximate mid-point of Lee Road between Scottsdale and Chagrin boulevards with planned improvements including lane re-alignments, an off-road cycle track, seating, lighting, landscaping, and crosswalks. This new infrastructure will set the stage for future private development.

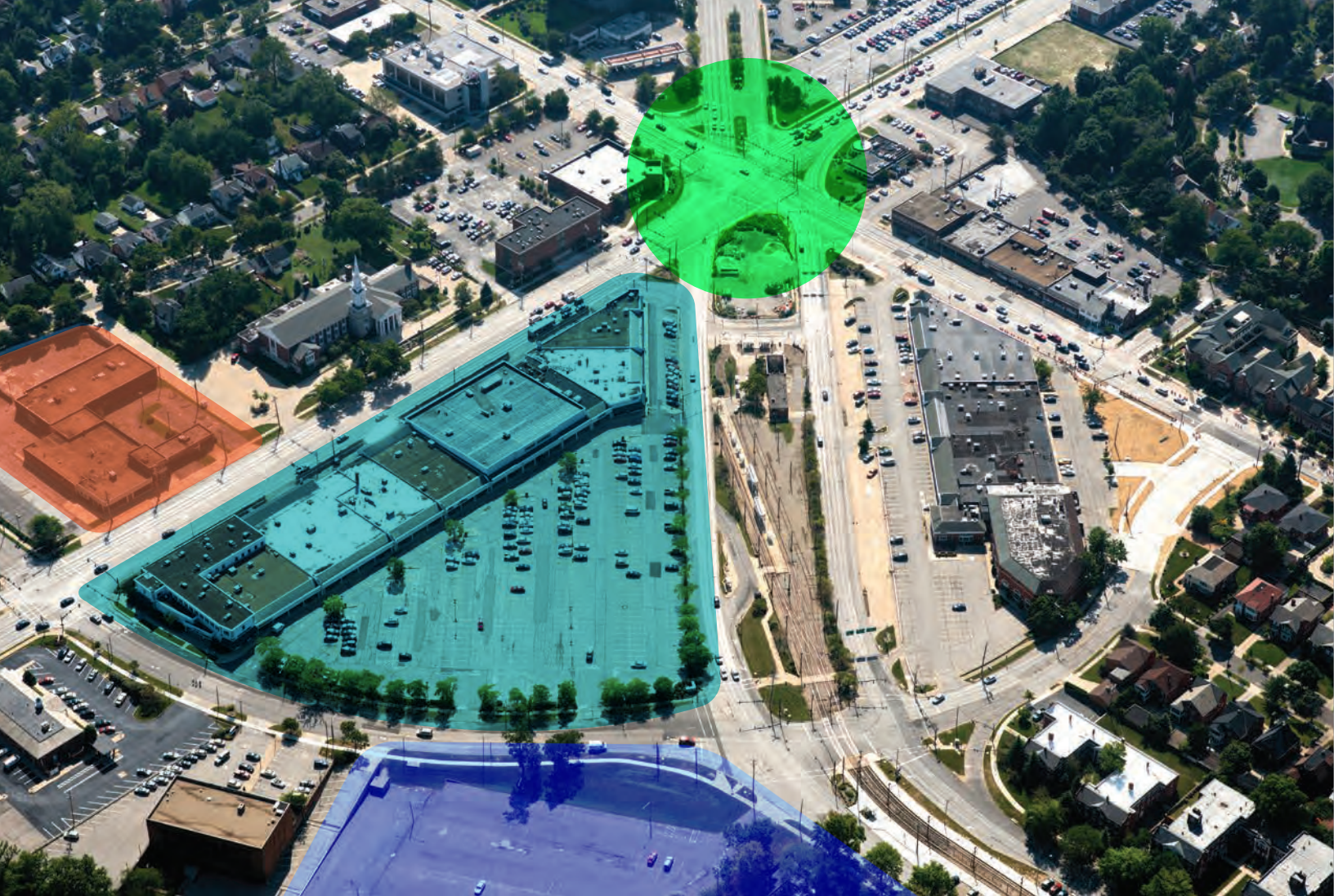
The Planning Department has secured \$24 million in funding commitments for Lee Road public infrastructure improvements, and the total budget is \$30 million. Right now, the City is partnering with Cuyahoga County on engineering and landscape design to fine-tune planning and to prepare for road construction. After selecting a contractor that understands the community's vision – likely in summer 2026 – road construction is set to begin by fall 2026. The city of Cleveland is coordinating on the Lee Road vision and is undertaking its own Lee Road improvements from the Shaker border south, and they are about a year behind Shaker in their process, says Braverman.

As always, development is an ongoing process for Shaker Heights, and there's always something to look forward to.



This conceptual rendering, looking north toward Scottsdale Boulevard, suggests a new vision for Lee Road, with the infrastructure improvements called for in the Lee Road Action Plan and concepts for future commercial construction.





BEFORE THE VAN AKEN DISTRICT

This image from 2004 is an aerial view of the intersection that is currently the home of the Van Aken District. The colored sections, described below, indicate main areas of development and improvement that have led to today's current VAD footprint.

Former intersection where Van Aken, Warrensville, Chagrin, and Northfield met. Northfield has been reconfigured at the intersection, and Van Aken now ends at Farnsleigh, resulting in a four-way, standard intersection.

Former home of Qua Buick, now site of Arcadia.

Former Van Aken Center strip mall and parking lot that is now the site of the Van Aken District.

Former city parking lot that is now home to the RAYE.

THE INVISIBLE STEPS TO A NEW CITY CENTER

Let's take the Van Aken District as an example to see how major development happens here in Shaker. Twenty years ago, the spot where Mitchell's Ice Cream sits was smack in the middle of a huge asphalt parking lot. That parking lot and the previous footprint of the Van Aken/Warrensville/Chagrin/Northfield intersection appear in the image on the left. It took four major steps to get from that sea of pavement to a place where you can walk, play, shop, and enjoy an ice cream cone or a meal.

...➔ **VISIONING** In 2000, Shaker Heights adopted a Strategic Investment Plan with a focus on prioritizing walkable, mixed-use areas. The car-centric, aging eastern end of Van Aken Boulevard was identified as a potential development site. This step is long-term goal setting – like looking around your own home and prioritizing what you'd like to remodel, even before you have the money or specific plans to do so.

...➔ **PLANNING** Here's where things start to get more detailed. The City starts gathering Shaker residents' input, considering a variety of plans, including the 2008 Warrensville/Van Aken Transit Oriented Development Plan, and applying for grants to defray costs to the City and taxpayers. In the complex case of the Van Aken District, six different plans were needed between 2000 and 2020 to address infrastructure (including reconfiguring the Warrensville-Chagrin intersection and the building of new streets); transit-oriented development to enhance Rapid and bus connections; economic development; public amenities; and more. The City's Planning Department spearheads this process, although the department also collaborates closely with the Economic Development Department and other city departments.

...➔ **DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS** Here's where the Planning Department passes the baton to the Economic Development Department, although it's still a tight partnership. Economic Development requests proposals from developers that fulfill development objectives set by City Council. They then choose the best fit for Shaker and the specific City development site under consideration, and negotiate agreements with the developer about everyone's obligations and what kinds of businesses and residences will be included in the project.

...➔ **CONSTRUCTION** In the first phase of actual construction, the planned infrastructure is now built – streets, utilities, and the overall layout are put into place. Next, the developer gets to work – first designing the project and then building it – and patient Shaker residents finally get to see the new amenities go up. If we're still comparing this to remodeling at your house, this is when the plumbing work is all behind you and you finally get to see some counters and cabinets go in.

And then ... it's done? Well, no.

There's ongoing stewardship of any development in Shaker Heights – the developers and the City each have contractual obligations for the Van Aken District, for example. Businesses also naturally come and go, and the Economic Development Department is always in touch with each individual business and helps identify new retailers as needed.

With a large project like the Van Aken District, the City may return to Steps 1-4 multiple times for different phases – like the recently completed RAYE apartment building and the new Arcadia building now under construction. In the years to come, look for the process to repeat for future parcels and buildings in the District.

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A Loss Becomes a Gain, with Flowers

Shared activities among neighbors can help build a tight-knit community, and community gardens do exactly that.

Written by **Nate Paige**

Photography by **Robert Muller**



Located at 3629 Rolliston Road, the Rolliston Community Garden celebrates 15 years of neighbors helping neighbors while further beautifying a residential street. It all started back in 2009 when a Rolliston Road home across the street from Andrea Nicola's house was torn down. Nicola's then-boyfriend suggested adding a garden to the empty lot and approached the City with the idea, but it wasn't approved.

Then a block party sparked new interest and plans. "We had a block party that year, and we asked neighbors if they were interested in gardening. We formed a small group to spearhead a community garden project. Soon after, we formed a nonprofit group, created a logo, and drew up plans," says Nicola. They presented their proposal to City Council and the Planning Commission, and it was approved.

The group became pioneers of sorts, as this was the first-ever community garden in Shaker created on City-owned property. In 2010, the garden became a reality, with 30 four-foot by 10-foot raised beds, and the response by residents was immediate. Gardening fees are \$35 per year and cover the cost of water. Participants are required to commit to at least six hours of service per growing season with garden upkeep, divided among the members, based on ability.



Andrea Nicola, left, and Gloria Vaquera-Little, founding board members of The Community Garden.



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Members range in age from teens to over 65. "Families are assigned individual plots and can plant whatever they want," says Nicola. "The only restriction is they can't plant anything permanent, invasive, or dangerous." The most popular plantings are tomatoes, peppers, kale, herbs, and flowers.

"We have approximately 25 people contributing to the garden from a variety of backgrounds," says Gloria Vaquera-Little. "It's a unique space where different people of all ages and races can come together and have conversations."

Some of those contributions move beyond planting. The garden is now adorned with brand-new signage, created by fellow gardener Connie Pieper. Marie Vegh devoted her 2023 Eagle Scout project to supporting gardeners with mobility issues. She designed, built, and installed planter benches for comfortable and beautiful seating after observing some of the aged members working in the garden.

The garden has remained at capacity since its inception, and there is currently a waiting list of gardeners.



Nicola and Vaquera-Little, the two remaining founding members, currently serve on the garden's board along with Dale Angney, Dawn McFadden, and Christine Vegh.

Of course, with any endeavor, there are always challenges.

"Getting volunteers to do the physical labor has been the biggest challenge," says Nicola. "There's always interest, but some of our gardeners aren't capable of doing the heavy lifting." Vaquera-Little's 14-year-old son mows the lawn and everyone keeps an eye on the wildlife, mainly deer and groundhogs.

In addition to annual fees, fundraising events are held every year. This year's goal is to raise enough money to purchase fencing.

"Our garden is still going strong and it's a perfect example of one of the many things Shaker does well," says Vaquera-Little. **SL**

Shaker Heights residents can apply to participate in the garden through the website at www.gardensofshaker.org



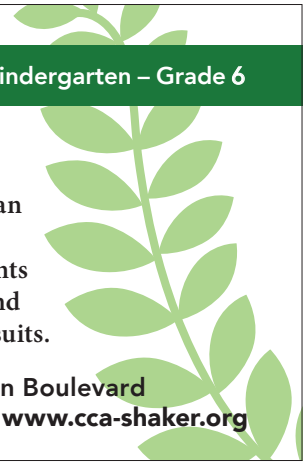
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Shaker Chronicles



Hornet's Nest School

Written by **Nate Paige**

The signs in front of each Shaker school building list the date that each was built, so you'd think it's just a process of elimination to find the oldest. But that's not the case. You have to travel back to the mid-19th century to a long-gone school, the Hornet's Nest School.

When what is now Shaker Heights was part of Warrensville Township, the Township supported a school system initially made up of four districts. District 1 consisted of Hornet's Nest School, a one-room brick schoolhouse, located at the corner of Lee and Kinsman (now

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Chagrin Boulevard), and across the street from the Warrensville West Cemetery. The land on which the school sat was leased to the district in 1834 by Daniel Warren, whose family members were the first permanent white settlers of the township.

While the exact year of construction is unclear, the school was likely built sometime in the mid-1850s, as it was included on an 1858 map of Cuyahoga County. One of the school's first teachers was Mary Litzel, who lived on a farm where City Hall now sits. By the late 19th century, the student body included children of one of the first Black families to reside in Warrensville Township.

As the area became more populated, a new, larger school, East View, was built behind Hornet's Nest in 1910. In 1926, the Moreland School was built and East View School was turned into a warehouse. Moreland School closed in 1987 and was later transformed into the main Shaker Heights Public Library.

So why the uninviting name? In 1933, Shaker resident, philanthropist, and former suffragist Selene Corlett submitted a letter to the editor of *The Cleveland Press* with her recollection. She explained the school was nicknamed Hornet's Nest on account of the students at that school who were notorious for fist fighting in the 1860s. "These boys fought each other to the degree that it was dangerous to permit them to go out at recess together," Corlett recalled. A hornet's nest indeed!

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Hornet's Nest School | continued

The following excerpt is a recollection from a letter by Priska Kubach Ellacott, published in the August 1970 edition of the Shaker Historical Society Journal:



“I remember when the old schoolhouse on Lee Road across from the Warrensville West Cemetery was just an old brick building with an old wooden floor and a potbelly stove that had to keep us warm. All grades were taught in this one room until a wooden addition was added in back of the brick structure, and then the grades were separated, the first four in the old building and the last four in the new one.”

If you've had a burning question about Shaker's beginnings, transitions, or unique landmarks, let us know at shaker.mag@shakerheightsoh.gov. We might not be able to answer all questions, but your curiosity will help us start the digging.

Shaker Life appreciates research assistance for this article from staff of the Shaker Historical Society and Shaker Heights Public Library.



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