

  
**nest1896**  
VINTAGE • HANDMADE • LOCAL

| CASE STUDY |

# NEST 1896

Want to keep commerce downtown?  
Give them unique retail options they can't find online.

204 W COLUMBUS AVE.

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**Want to keep commerce downtown? Give them unique retail options they can't find online.**

**From rundown appliance repair store to raved up locally-supported retail boutique, Nest 1896 is a story of big changes, surprise and promise. Antiques aren't old and dusty anymore. Funky, eclectic stores filled with old things are changing the face of small town retail... and it's all about the experience.**

## **Bellefontaine called. It wanted its charm back.**

After an appliance repair business closed shop in the Reid & McMillen building of downtown historic Bellefontaine, Small Nation was swift to pick it up and dust it off. We had acquired multiple spaces on this block, which was in a state of real decline. It was the “bad” section of town, which meant it was in great need of improvement, and the real estate prices were more than affordable. We were able to purchase the three-story historic building for only \$10,000.

### **NEW & DIFFERENT**

Small Nation had been documenting the transformation of this block on social media for quite some time. Our renovations included the building that houses Hickory Medical Primary Direct Care and the corner space that is currently the home of Native Coffee. Our plan was to create a space for a specialty retail tenant that could serve as a traffic anchor for that block.

Kathleen & Darin Robinaugh approached us with a retail concept unique to Bellefontaine: a farmhouse-inspired collective offering vintage memorabilia, locally handmade items, and architectural salvage pieces. With Native Coffee just next door, we knew such a retail space would be the perfect ‘next-stop’ for locals and visitors on a leisurely stroll and a compliment to Bellefontaine’s history and

charm. It was the perfect fit for the space, and it was a business concept that engaged other local vendors who had a vision for growth.

### **DIGGING IN**

The Reid & McMillen building was a strong, proud structure full of Bellefontaine’s history. The ground floor was opened into one large retail space that could support expansive displays and large wares. The upper floor, comprised of 8 small rooms, 2 bathrooms, and a fireplace, was originally a sleep house for rail road workers. We took advantage of this unique layout, and rather than opening the space up, we left the rooms so they could be leased to other vendors in a booth rental format. This helped Kathleen & Darin financially support their unique vision for their own antique business while helping others get a start without a brick and mortar of their own.

In the belly of the building we ran into a truly unique challenge. We were planning to open this space up as a “rough room” for the Robinaughs to use as a space for bargain displays. Unfortunately there seemed to be a water issue downstairs, and the source wasn’t easily identified. After intensive inspection we learned that there was an underground spring that had come back to life, and the water was consistently finding its way into the basement space. We solved the issue with a trenched and plumbed sump pump system, which was a creative solution to a truly unique situation. Renovation and preservation of historic buildings

### **| SMALL BUSINESS. BIG IMPACT. |**

**It's a fact: specialty retail concepts offer high caliber products that, when properly positioned and promoted, attract locals and out-of-town visitors and inevitably power local economies.**





**How?** Unique spaces and products creates a positive visitor experience. A good perception of a small businesses experience is great for the perception of small towns. See how Nest 1869 does it at [nest1896.com](http://nest1896.com).





Working together to create a home for other small businesses has allowed Nest 1896 to grow and thrive. [nest1896.com](http://nest1896.com)

is most definitely a learning process. Issues tend to arise that are completely unexpected, but the end result is always worthwhile.

In total, we invested \$300,000 to preserve this important building. The renovation took 6 months to complete, and the result was a space for commerce that would allow growth and sustained activity in the community well into the next century.

### A BIG SMALL TOWN SUCCESS

After only 6 months in business utilizing the ground floor retail space, Kathleen & Darin were able to expand into the second floor of the building. With the support of over 50 vendors, Nest had already surpassed the point of profitability. In 2018, Nest had proven to be so successful that Kathleen & Darin opened a second shop, Twig & Feather, just down the street using a similar business model. It's been their diligent observations of small business infrastructures and commitment to market relationships that has delivered them to where they are. That's what we call a small town success.

Nest 1869 not only exemplifies the success of Small Nation's "Hustle Hard" approach to small town revitalization; it also

paves the way for other local small businesses near and far by demonstrating possibility. Small towns tend to struggle with visitor traffic and flow, but with unique specialty retail and the passion of talented local entrepreneurs, a small town can make for a big and unforgettable experience. While many leaders of municipalities look for big brand tenants to become anchors for generating traffic in a downtown area, the truth is, specialty retail small businesses are what truly help small towns differentiate.

Curious visitors and passersby don't go out of their way to saunter through a big box retailer for manufactured goods they could otherwise buy online; they come from nearly every corner of Ohio for the brilliant shopping experience stores like Nest 1869 has to offer. With 3 stories of antique furniture, repurposed home goods, and one-of-a-kind finds that promote local makers and collectors, everyone is sure to find something special. And because the walk-thru alone can tucker you out, the neighboring restaurants and coffee shops are right there to pick you back up. It's a collaborative, supportive approach to redevelopment and business that truly works for small towns. Smart city planners and municipality leaders now understand that big brands don't revitalize small towns; **small ones do.**

SMALL NATION develops places, spaces and dreams for small towns and small town entrepreneurs across the country.

**SMALL  
NATION**

We're here to show the world that small town and small business success is not only possible, but profitable. For everyone.

[www.smallnationstrong.com](http://www.smallnationstrong.com)