

The
SYNDICATE

| CASE STUDY |

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213 SOUTH MAIN ST.

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In 2017, Brewfontaine partners Adam Rammel, Jeramy Fitzpatrick, and Brian Wall were thinking about all of the requests to rent their space for private events. Their small, successful beer bar had limited space but huge potential for growth. The seeds were planted for an idea: What if tiny Brewfontaine grew into the biggest place in town?

When the public tells you what they want in your town... you should listen.

Over the years, we've learned a thing or two about what the market will bear in small towns, and those lessons were learned because we consistently ask them. At Small Nation, we use our social media channels as a tool for two-way conversations. When a building becomes available for redevelopment, we'll take to the cybersphere and ask the public one of the most important questions in our revitalization toolbox: "What does this town need?"

Small towns are full of great ideas, and if you listen closely enough to what they tell you, you'll be able to not only identify market gaps but gain ideas for their solutions. This is how Adam, Jeramy, and Brian knew: Bellefontaine needed a large event venue. Or so they thought.

Small towns are hungry for more places to gather, both large and small. They crave the kind of unique places that are typically only found in larger cities but with the familiarity of home. So that's exactly what we created with The Syndicate.

THE PAST CONNECTS WITH THE FUTURE

Once upon a time (before social media), the day's events in small towns could only be learned through newspapers. A community's movements, thoughts, growth, and events were captured and encapsulated through one very

powerful medium: The press.

In Bellefontaine, Jackson's News Stand was the place to get the daily news. For over 40 years, people gathered here to grab their daily paper, a magazine, and maybe a snack. This was the place to see your neighbors. This place brought people together in conversation. And it stood right next door to Brewfontaine, their current restaurant.

Today, The Syndicate is that place to gather. Rather than just expanding Brewfontaine's footprint, the team created a brand new space that paid homage to the newsstand's history. One of the first new construction projects in downtown Bellefontaine in almost two decades and named in honor of the newsstand, The Syndicate offers 5,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor dining and event space for the Bellefontaine residents who asked for just that. Here, they'll be able to gather, celebrate, enjoy a date night, catch a band on the patio, and even enjoy a mimosa brunch.

Today, this spot has connected the past with the future. It's still a space where local events are shared... but now in real-time.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

The Syndicate opened its doors in August 2020 after two full years of careful planning. It was important to the team that The Syndicate not only gave a nod toward the town's newsstand history but embraced it fully in the expression of the brand. The newsstand now lives on throughout



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Destination venues are so much more than a space for celebration. They have the potential to be a real economic driver for small towns.

How? By expanding a typical venue into a place that offers unique choices for the community, traffic, commerce and benefits increase for all. Learn more about The Syndicate at syndicatedowntown.com.





the space at the Syndicate through the furnishings and finishes.

In the entry foyer, a huge neon sign welcomes guests with a “FRONT PAGE” message. The interior bar was custom-designed to resemble a New York-style newsstand, using glass transom windows salvaged from a local building. Bellefontaine newspapers from years gone by cover one wall, and the restrooms even reinforce the message that this place is “EXTRA, EXTRA” special.

The space is expansive and unique, with 28-foot ceilings and garage doors that open toward the Main Street front patio and the beer garden at the back. Named “Off The Record,” this space is a favorite gathering space for residents in the summer, complete with Adirondack chairs and cornhole.

THE BIG PIVOT

The Syndicate was designed to host large group events like wedding receptions, corporate parties, and other celebrations, but the doors opened in 2020, just as the COVID pandemic began full swing. The team had to pivot quickly, adjusting their business model as almost everyone in the hospitality industry did at the time.

People were not gathering for large group events, but the Syndicate’s design, with its expansive space, garage doors that allowed open-air flow, and huge back patio, could easily transition into a restaurant with ample room between tables.

Because the team had been listening to the community, they knew many people were leaving town and heading toward Columbus for a weekend brunch. They saw a gap and quickly filled it with typically big-city selections like authentic huevos rancheros and shrimp and grits, along with other comfortable favorites like biscuits and gravy and praline-pecan french toast with bourbon maple whipped cream. The Syndicate may not have been able to book out wedding receptions, but they certainly could serve mimosa flights and brunch cocktails to create a weekend experience for the community.

Special attention was given to the Syndicate’s back patio as well. The beer garden was amplified to encourage outdoor gathering, and a stage was constructed where, in partnership with Citizen’s Federal Bank, which sponsors many of the Syndicate’s shows, live entertainment is offered regularly and free of charge to customers.

Adam Rammel, co-owner of the Syndicate, said that while financially and emotionally exhausting, the pandemic may have been a blessing in disguise because it opened the doors to many opportunities they may not have taken





otherwise. With their pivot, they found additional revenue streams and a way to connect with the community.

Today, the Syndicate's "Off The Record" beer garden has become a community gathering place from the beginning of the warm weather months through the end of autumn, thanks to patio heaters and special events. The Syndicate is also open for dinner service, combining a unique and relaxed ambiance with spectacular food and drink selections, many of which wouldn't normally be found outside of a larger metropolitan area.

The bar is well stocked too, with custom craft cocktails, forty whiskey choices, seventeen wines by the glass, and two ports. The team has created many special ticketed events, including bourbon tastings, wine pairings, an annual crawfish boil, murder mystery dinners, and a special battle of the local bands event. The Syndicate is bringing choices to their small town that have never been available before.

Why? Because small towns are hungry for unique choices. In the past, towns the size of Bellefontaine didn't even consider introducing an elevated dining experience to their communities, working under the notion that it wouldn't be supported. There's a problem in this logic, though. Small-town residents eventually get bored with the same old choices day after day and decade after decade.

When hungry for something different, they'll get in the car and drive to the closest city to spend their dollars on entertainment and food. Sometimes, they'll drive an hour or more. And the small town loses out on a very important part of local commerce.

It doesn't have to be that way, though. If there are choices within the borders of small towns, their residents won't have to leave. If there is an amazing entertainment and dining experience available in a small town, it will become a destination for visitors from out of town. Hospitality venues with a strong, authentic brand are a win-win for community members and visitors alike, which is why they are well worth the investment.

The Syndicate building is owned by Small Town Properties, a division of Small Nation. Construction of the new space took 16 months from start to finish, and over \$2M was invested in the upfit and startup, including furnishings, equipment, and supplies. We believe in hospitality businesses' power and ability to infuse the community with energy, additional foot traffic, and the civic pride that stems from variety and choices. The Syndicate is a model for what can be achieved by thinking beyond the typical approach to development. We look forward to many years of music, food, libation, and celebrations in the future.

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

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NATION**

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