

| CASE STUDY |

SMALL TOWN. BIG CITY EXPERIENCES.

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BELLEFONTAINE, OHIO

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Let's face it... when people plan a weekend getaway, small towns aren't always at the top of their travel list. There just aren't enough things to do, see and experience there, right? Wrong. Small towns are full of interesting things and if they tell their stories well, they can lure destination travelers with the same gusto as the big cities. They just have to invest in themselves.

Imagine a small town where big named artists play and people from all over want to stay. Can you see it? It can be your town too.

What turns a typical small town into a day trip destination? What makes people want to visit, shop, play and hopefully stay and do it again the following day? There seems to be an invisible force in some towns that draws visitors like a magnet. They become places that people don't only love to visit, but return to with their friends and family again and again.

That kind of community energy doesn't happen by accident and it's never just one place or one thing that creates the draw. Truly great places are strategically designed. The combination of businesses, destinations and experiences are planned, curated and consistently invested in. There is a variety in the mix that is inviting, and if it's done right, they all leverage one another's strengths for the greater good of the whole.

Bellefontaine is that kind of town. We love our inherent uniqueness and have become experts at telling our story to others. This community has worked together to create a true destination for visitors — one that rivals the experiences of our larger neighbors. We've worked together to preserve, renovate and improve our existing assets while bringing in the kind of businesses, experiences and energy that is alluring to out of town guests. Bellefontaine has cre-

ated reasons to visit and reasons to stay. And it has bolstered the local economy in more ways than one.

SMALL TOWN INTERESTING

Small towns are not boring by any means. Ask any local, and you're sure to hear in-depth stories about the interesting people, rich history, and truly unique places they are famous for.

For example, Bellefontaine is famous for two of her streets. Only 15 feet long, McKinley Street is officially the shortest street in America. Engineered in 1891 by concrete pioneer George Bartholomew, Court Street was the very first concrete-paved street in the country. We think it's pretty cool that our little town literally paved the way for more efficient travel in the United States. Turns out we've always been forward thinking.

Because our area has a deep, rich history in the automotive and transportation industries, we celebrate that fact in as many ways as possible. The Logan County Transportation Museum is a treat for history buffs, featuring real life examples of how people got around throughout the ages from the covered wagon era, to the planes, trains and automobiles of today. Fun fact: The famous Ectomobile that was featured in the movie Ghostbusters was made right here in Bellefontaine in 1959 at the Miller-Meteor plant!

But are a few streets and some cool history enough to drive consistent visitors to our town? Especially from our more



| SMALL TOWN. BIG IMPACT. |

Downtown Bellefontaine is the perfect day-trip destination!
Learn more at downtownbellefontaine.com.



The Syndicate



Mad River Mountain



Logan County Transportation Museum



Ghostbusters Ectomobile

Located in Logan County, Ohio, one of 11 counties in the greater Columbus Region, Bellefontaine is 35 minutes from I-75 and just 1 hour from downtown Columbus. Our action-packed town is just far enough away for an escape and close enough to home for the perfect day-trip!

- Columbus — 1 hour
- Dayton — 1 hour
- Toledo — 1 hour, 40 minutes
- Cincinnati — 2 hours



indianlake.com
syndicatedowntown.com
600downtown.com

skimadriver.com
thehollandtheatre.org
TheLoftAbove.com



urban neighbors like Columbus? Most likely not. Visitors — especially those who drive extended distances — want multiple options. We knew we had to look beyond Bellefontaine's borders, engage all that our region had to offer, then strategically fill in the gaps where things were missing.

Visitors want pleasant surprises from small towns. They want to be entertained and to explore. They want shops full of interesting things that can't be found anywhere else, and truly great food when they're hungry. And when the day ends, they want a unique place to stay.

Bellefontaine didn't always have this kind of energy. For a very long time, everything sat stagnant, and it wasn't a place anyone thought about visiting for pleasure. It took eight years of collaborative work to make our town a place people want to visit and stay, but today we have a completely different story to tell.

People still come to see the first concrete street in America, but while they're here they can catch some live music on the patio at The Syndicate. Built on the previous site of Jackson's News Stand, The Syndicate pays homage to Bellefontaine's history while serving upscale dinners and weekend brunch.

In the summer, folks can spend the day at Indian Lake, one of Ohio's largest inland lakes in neighboring Russell's Point, then head back to town and enjoy a truly unique, artisan pizza at award-winning Six Hundred Downtown Brick Oven Pizzeria.

They can check out the highest spot in Ohio in Bellefontaine, then head to the neighboring town of West Liberty to go subterranean at Ohio Caverns.

When the snow begins to fall, visitors don't stop coming. Instead they ski or go tubing at Mad River Mountain, a Vail Resorts location with a 1,460 foot elevation in the Logan county hills. After a day on the slopes, they can come enjoy a cold one at Brewfontaine, named Ohio's Best Beer Bar for two years running.

Did you know Logan County had castles? Mac-A-Cheek (1871), and Mac-O-Chee (1879) were built by the brothers Donn and Abram S. Piatt in a gorgeous Gothic style, and are open for public tours. What better thing to do after touring the Piatt Castles than to explore an antique shop? Bellefontaine has three, and they're surrounded by plenty of other boutiques and retail stores.

A BIG CITY EXPERIENCE

One of the most unique and interesting places in Bellefontaine has been here for over eighty years, but has just begun a new life as a center of our community's renewed energy.

The Holland Theater is a local performing arts venue that is quite literally like no other. Built in 1931, The Holland is the only Dutch-style atmospheric theater in the entire United States, and perhaps the only one existing in the world. The interior auditorium was originally designed as a convincing representation of a 17th-century Dutch cityscape. Unfortunately the Holland was constructed at the peak of the atmospheric theater trend of the 30's, so it's glory was short lived. Over the years, beautiful auditorium structures like the Holland were replaced by simplified multiplexes and performances were replaced with film. After many years, the building went into decline and was put up for sale in 1998.



CeeLo Green at The Holland Theater



Six Hundred Downtown



The Loft Above



Indian Lake



Downtown Bellefontaine



First Concrete Street

In December 1999, The Historic Holland Theatre was purchased for the Logan County Landmark Preservation, Inc. and since that time has undergone a several million dollar renovation, bringing it back to its original glory from the 30's. The Dutch cityscape has returned, complete with candlelit windows, animated windmills and a sky with twinkling stars and gently moving clouds.

The investment in the Holland's restoration has been a catalyst for a renewed sense of energy in the community, and has become a draw for visitors and entertainers alike. Big names in the entertainment industry like Judy Collins and Cee-Lo Green have visited our small town playing shows to a packed house. The theater also brings groups from around the world with a variety of musical styles, from Indy rock to jazz trios.

Music and performance cultural centers are typically perceived as a big city experiences, but not in Bellefontaine. Here, the investment in The Holland is a testament to preservation of historic structures in small towns. It has elevated the overall experience of our city, and created a reason for new visitors to have a truly unique experience and have an overnight stay.

ELEVATED ACCOMMODATIONS

With more people visiting Bellefontaine for the amazing shopping, restaurants and late night entertainment, we knew one thing was certain: They were going to need more places to stay. Like many small towns, Bellefontaine does have a few large-name hotels, but let's be frank... in small towns hotels are rarely elevated experiences. They're a place to lay your head, and nothing anyone would want to rush back to for a return stay.

If people are were visiting Bellefontaine because of the unique experiences they had here, they should have a place to stay that was as unique as the town itself. But how would we do it?

Vacation rental marketplaces like AirBnB allow small towns to take control of their options for overnight stays. While some may view independent home rentals as a "basic" alternative to a hotel, if the spaces are strategically designed, an overnight stay can actually enhance the brand experience of the town itself.

In 2019, Small Nation invited Jesse and Chelsea Lear of Columbus-based Epicurean Properties to visit one of our upper floor properties on Detroit Avenue. Once a yoga



studio then a meeting space, The Loft Above was already equipped with a full kitchen and bathroom, was filled with natural light, and had space for two full bedrooms. Jesse and Chelsea already loved Bellefontaine, and saw promise in the growing businesses, evening foot traffic and overall allure the town had generated in recent years, including the buzz surrounding the newly renovated Holland Theater. They had confidence that luxury lodging could not only work, but thrive in a smaller community. Bellefontaine became the location for their first small market rental property, and the reservations began pouring in.

Today, The Loft Above has created an 'experience' in Bellefontaine — one that combines the comforts of a well-designed home with the amenities of a high-end hotel that you might find in a larger city. The spacious, open floor plan gives guests the feeling of a presidential suite, complete with contemporary furnishings, a dining table for six with lucite chairs, and a giant crystal chandelier sparkling in the window.

Luxury touches like a bottle of wine, Fiji water and Godiva

chocolates await new guests. Imported Frette linens, Turkish towels, and white bathrobes provide a level of elevated comfort that few hotels can compete with. And best of all, The Loft Above is only steps away from the restaurants, shops, bars, coffee shops and entertainment that is now available downtown.

By elevating the overnight experience beyond the typical, spaces like The Holland and The Loft Above create new incentives for people to not only visit, but make the decision to spend the night. By thinking beyond the expected and bringing new experiences to existing spaces, small towns can be great day trip destinations, with unlimited potential for growth.

Small towns that are successful manage to strike a balance between their inherent authenticity — what has always existed in the past — with new and exciting things that look toward the future. We've managed to seamlessly weave our history with our future. That's what creates day trip destination magic.

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

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NATION**

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

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