

### Why I'm a Proud Driver of Honda Vehicles



Honda has been a very important part of my life growing up and continues to be today. When Honda came to the community 40 or so years ago, what started out as a small investment in building a monocycle factory, turned into Ohio, and our community being a center and leader for automotive >> turn to page 2

Q2 2023

### **Union County Economic Development** and Housing Discussion

Economic Development and Housing were the topics of discussion at a speaker series hosted by the Union County-Marysville Economic Development Partnership in May. The event hosted guest speakers from the Chamber and area housing and development experts John Melchi, the Executive Director of the Building Industry Association of Central Ohio and William Murdock, Executive Director of Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

The event highlighted housing trends over the past 20 years, specifically the lack of housing in Union County and the Columbus region. Graphs, charts and data were presented on how our region compares to the State and other growing and competitive markets in the Midwest and beyond.

To have a healthy community, we need a variety of housing types for rental and

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ownership along with price points for affordable starter housing along with transitional options for families, luxury and retirees. A big theme of the night was how important it is to have a vibrant downtown and ways that Cities and communities can invest in placemaking within walking distance of local housing.

Thank you to Union County for hosting this great event!



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### How much is that stomach pump in the window?



I hope August finds you folks panting for a change of pace.

I know I usually write something light-hearted; but let's face it: life isn't all Skittles and toilet bowl water.

Think of this month's blog as a public service

#### >> turn to page 2

A little about Mac: Mac is Jason's 6-year old active Sheltie who loves veggies green beans to be exact, but he eats all kinds of other vegetables too. Mac is a little dog with a lot of confidence. He loves to play soccer and run outside, especially if he can corral other dogs in the neighborhood. He also enjoys stealing and hiding socks. Mac wanted to write a blog post, and we didn't have the heart to say no. We take no responsibility for the goofy things he comes up with. He does love to receive letters, though.



#### Why I'm a Proud...

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### Mac's Blog ...cont'd from Page 1

announcement for conscientious pet owners.

Enough beating around the bush -- and be very cautious around that bush while you're at it! My nerves are still on edge from reading an internet warning about plants that are toxic to dogs.

We're talking about seemingly innocuous greenery that should neither be planted around your house nor brought inside as potted plants or cuttings. (You might also consider learning to sing, "Hey, Garden Club, leave them pups alone!")

Some vegetation merely causes salivation or a tummy-ache; but, to my dismay, other species are downright life-threatening.

The list of nature's dangerous blessings is so long, if there's ever a remake of the 1989 Don Bluth movie, it will need to be titled All Dogs Go to Heaven – and Somebody Up There Is Trying to Accelerate the Timeline.

Seriously, this is some bad karma at work. After all the flowerbeds I've dug up, now I discover that the lilies are trying to bury me!

An alarming percentage of pet owners are just as clueless about these dangers as I was. Sure, they may hover over their twolegged children all day, micromanaging their diet (in terms of calories, dirt from the floor, spoiling mealtime, etc.), but when it comes to Fido? ("You'll be home alone all day -- with a smorgasbord of dicey flora. Don't gnaw anything I wouldn't gnaw. Ha ha ha.")

If you have questions about possibly toxic plants around your home or walking path, or if your dog is exhibiting symptoms of poisoning, avail yourself of advice from your local veterinarian, the PetMD website, or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center Hotline, which can be reached at (888) 426-4435.

(The ASPCA has long provided advice for taking care of dogs, cats, horses, and other animals. I think at one time they even indicated what dinosaurs shouldn't eat. Then there was that whole asteroid thing, so they put the pamphlets into storage.)

Don't panic, but do your homework (don't let the dog eat it!) and put an effort into keeping your environment safe.

Whatever resources you choose, don't take chances with the wellbeing of Man's Best Friend. It'll eat at your conscience forever.

manufacturing today. Over the many years that Honda and its suppliers have grown, my family business which sells stone, concrete and building materials, benefited from the business opportunities that Honda and all of its suppliers provided.

Also, Honda has provided many high quality and good paying jobs, not only building cars but also powering the creativity and development of the engineering of the vehicles too. This has supported other businesses in our region, such as the Transportation Research Center, which I recently had the pleasure to introduce and do a podcast with its CEO, Brett.

Additionally, Cars.com released its annual American Made Index, ranking vehicles on the amount of U.S. manufacturing and parts that go into them. Honda had five of the top 10 vehicles in the report.

Over the years, I've been a proud owner and driver of 3 different generations of Honda CRVs and most recently purchased an Acura MDX. I love the vehicle and especially appreciate that it's one of the most American and Ohio-made vehicles you can buy.



# Hilliard Downtown Business Association Meeting

Small Nation was in Hilliard in May. We joined the downtown Hilliard business association, speaking at their breakfast. Downtown Hilliard is a community that, up until 3-4 years ago, really wasn't on the map. However, the town has taken off with the opening of Crooked Can in 2019 and many other businesses since then.

Jason spoke to the group a lot about our Small Biz Success Blueprint – how Small Nation recruits and supports tenant businesses to lead them to success. The blueprint provides every possible solution to help businesses thrive, from creating the perfect location to strong marketing and operational guidance. As towns like Hilliard grow, like many growing downtowns, they are figuring out how to help businesses open and grow, get everyone on the same page, and create a cohesive community.

The City of Hilliard recently launched its new 8-point strategic plan, Hilliard by Design. This plan focused on growing inward, creative mixeduse, walkable places, and more people-focused solutions and strategies. This is a seriously impressive plan that all communities can learn from as they try to balance revitalization, growth, and the needs of different businesses and business owners.





# T-Mobile Hometown Grant



T-Mobile has committed \$25 million to small-town development over the next five years with its Hometown Grant Program. Partnering with Smart Growth America and Main Street America, they are awarding up to 100 communities a year with community development project funding, up to \$50,000 per project. These grants are specifically for small towns and rural communities of 50,000 people or less.

At Small Nation, we try to be a resource for our tenant businesses, partner organizations and client communities to connect them to exactly this kind of resource. Grants are considered on community need, community impact, partners, engagement, and resources leveraged for the project. Feasibility Letters of support are also great to have.

The application deadline for the current quarter's funding is September 30, 2023, so there is plenty of time to check out the requirements and what assets are needed to submit a really nice proposal. The projects are all over the place, so there's no reason not to apply for this opportunity.

# **Small Nation Team Golf Outing**



Small Nation retreat day went to a new level. Golfers and non-golfers met for a scramble the last Friday before the holiday weekend for some team bonding. After an update on recent and upcoming projects, we split into groups of four for the scramble.

Congratulations to the team of Jason, Dale, Nick D., and Nick B. on winning the first annual Small Nation Open!

The Small Nation team is a giving, caring and talented group of people, even on the golf course.

## Six Hundred Manager Wins Gold at World Pizza Games, Team Attends Pizza Expo



At the end of March team members from Six Hundred Downtown Pizzeria in Downtown Bellefontaine, OH, traveled to Las Vegas, NV, to attend the International Pizza Expo & Conference and compete in the World Pizza Games. The expo, which is the largest pizza show worldwide, had a record-breaking year with over 10,000 attendees coming from around the globe.

Six Hundred Manager Nathan Wilson's performance highlighted the trip with a gold medal in freestyle acrobatic dough tossing, an event he's competed in four times prior, placing as high as second place. Nathan's win moved him to the masters division, where he competed against four other of the top acrobatic competitors in the world.



Nathan also brought home a secondplace finish in the fastest dough stretch, taking five medium pizza doughs and stretching them to full size. He previously has won twice in the largest dough stretch. "This is a very proud moment for me," Nathan said. "I'm so proud to be able to represent Six Hundred and the Downtown Bellefontaine community in Las Vegas and bring this award back to them. Much love to everyone that's been with me on this journey."

Manager Daulton Cornell competed in the International Pizza Challenge, baking his own non-traditional pizza recipe. He has previously won gold in this division for his Mad Hatter recipe, a pizza available on the menu at the restaurant.

Owner Brittany Saxton partnered with 20 other pizza chefs in a pizza baking party to raise funds for the Slice Out Hunger organization, raising money for hunger relief efforts in the United States. As a member of the World Pizza Champions team, Brittany also worked with the Make-A-Wish Foundation to raise over \$42,000 for the

non-profit at the expo. The World Pizza team has been able to grant 10 kids' wishes over the last year.

"Working with Slice Out Hunger and Make-A-Wish has been such an honor, being able to give back by doing what I love most – making pizza," said Brittany. "The Pizza Expo is the week pizza people wait for, and I loved getting to spend it with these two amazing organizations.

Later this month, Brittany and the team at Six Hundred will partner with local food banks

to hold their own Slice Out Hunger events. Six Hundred provides over 150 slices of pizza to each organization each year to help with local hunger relief.

Six Hundred Downtown opened in Downtown Bellefontaine in 2011. Their world-famous and awardwinning pizzas are baked in old-world brick ovens at 600 degrees. Learn more at https://600downtown.com/.



MAIN W STREET



### Small Nation Founder Jason Duff to join Winans Chocolates + Coffees Board of Advisors



In May, Small Nation Founder and CEO Jason Duff accepted an invitation to join the first-ever Board of Advisors for Winans Chocolates + Coffee. Winans is a handcrafted chocolates and coffee company based in Piqua, Ohio. They currently have 19 locations around the Dayton and Columbus areas.

Winans originally had their start in Bellefontaine when, in 1954, brothers Max and Dick Winans opened their pastry and candy shop in the downtown. In 1961 they opened their carriage house candy store in Piqua, which became their main location when the Bellefontaine bakery closed in the early 1970s.



Winans tapped Jason for his expertise in real estate development, marketing, talent recruitment, experience in family business, and leadership skills. The advisory board will help guide Winans' owner and CEO, Wilson Reiser, in guiding the company's strategic direction through the next stage of growth. Joining Jason on the Advisory Board is John Lowe, former CEO of Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams and current board member of Jeni's and White Castle. As CEO of Jeni's, John grew Jeni's from four stores to a company exceeding \$100 million in revenue in just 13 years. The board will see the addition of at least one more member in the near future.



Winans' CEO Wilson Reiser with Jason on the Small Nation Podcast.

"Winans is a company that is rooted in small-town America and sees these revitalizing communities as premier opportunities for its growth," said Wilson, who is the fifth generation of family ownership. "Jason is a nationally regarded expert in small-town development and will help strategize Winans' growth into these markets."

The company has recently expanded its manufacturing efforts and roastery in Piqua. Last fall, Winans celebrated the ribbon cutting of a newly-redeveloped 8,500-squarefoot building for their office, gift department, and fulfillment center. They also expanded into a 6,000-square-foot former mechanic's garage for a large expansion of their coffee roastery. Winans has plans to grow in a vigorous but calculated manner with the goal of reaching 50 locations by 2030. "I am excited to continue to work with Winans and help them expand and grow," Jason said. "Winans is passionate about and is working in the same small towns around Ohio that Small Nation is. By me joining their board and collaborating together, we can create win-wins for small town revitalization and future Winans customers."

The first board meeting will take place this Wednesday in Columbus, Ohio. To learn more about Winans Chocolates + Coffee, visit their website at winanscandies.com and follow them on Facebook. Learn more about Wilson's journey into leadership of the family business on episode 37 of the Small Nation podcast https://podcasters.spotify. com/pod/show/smallnationpodcast/



# Seven New Short-Term Airbnb Rentals in Downtown Bellefontaine



In June, seven new short-term rentals became available in Downtown Bellefontaine. Julie "Julz" Greene, along with her husband, Dr. Norman "Norm" Greene, opened these innovative rental properties on the second floor of Rainbow Row Bellefontaine on West Chillicothe Avenue. Originally from Kingston, Jamaica, the couple moved to the United States for college. Though Norm had always expressed an interest in owning rental properties, Julz wasn't immediately sold on the idea, not until the concept of staying in a "home away from home" as opposed to a hotel clicked into place for her.

"Being able to personalize a space where guests can feel at home was the appeal to me," she said. "For Norm, it was customizing off-campus housing until COVID hit. We were forced to pivot and take notice of the Airbnb format, which worked perfectly for us both."

Norm and Julz's first Airbnb property, which she described as a "labor of love," was in Youngstown, Ohio.

Recounting the process, Julz said, "We flipflopped on the idea of either renting to the entire





public or being intentional on only making the property available for the healthcare travel industry. Norm travels for work, and when I tag along, the

hotels, while quite nice, are very restricting. I hate to cook, but not having a kitchen to make a piping hot cup of tea can be a bummer."

It was a conversation with Keyne Strickland, Property and Leasing Manager for Small Nation, during which he expressed his preference for Airbnb lodging to a hotel, that Julz made a decision.



"Our conversation led to me sharing my intentions of seeking out property for Airbnb arbitrage, and Keyne provided a possible solution," Julz added. "He later reached out to share more information on the renovation project at the end of the block. The project turned out to be 'Rainbow Row Bellefontaine' aka 'The Charleston Flats' or 'The Flats' for short. Our prayers were answered in not only being able to rent one but seven units for Airbnb arbitrage. Jason Duff, the property genius, had already researched the need for housing in Bellefontaine, especially where the healthcare travel industry is concerned. We were sold!"

She continued, "Bellefontaine was not on our radar concerning building a business of any type. Our rental and Airbnb aspirations have always been in and around Youngstown, Warren, and

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no further than Cleveland. Rainbow Row was Jason's brainchild, and as far as properties go, we trust his expertise. We also love the Loft Above Airbnb owned by Jesse Lear of Epicurean Properties, so we became even

more motivated to move forward with the Rainbow Row project."

Next, Norm and Julz had to start wrapping their heads around the idea of managing seven Airbnb properties, including how to decorate and promote them.

"It all fell into place during a food shopping run at Wal-Mart. I spotted a set of Asian bowls with chopsticks and said to Norm, 'What about theming The Flats after the seven continents?' There was no arm twisting involved; he agreed immediately."

Each of the units loosely represents one of the seven continents.

"We took into account that the building housing the seven suites is the oldest in Bellefontaine, coincidentally right alongside the first paved road in the United States. The history is real, and it certainly adds to the special and unique charm of Bellefontaine."

The units became available for rent on June 9, 2023. The Greenes hosted an open house for the Flats on Friday, June 2, from 4:00 – 8:00 PM during the Pineapple Palooza.





#### SMALL MAIN V STREET

# Small Nation Takes Small Business Advocacy to Nation's Capital

Members of the Small Nation team took a trip to our nation's capital in mid-June to meet with business organizations and Congressional offices, advocating on behalf of small businesses in Bellefontaine, Ohio, and pro-small business policies that affect businesses nationwide. The trip was organized in collaboration with Karen Kerrigan, President and CEO of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council.



The Small Nation team with Karen Kerrigan, President and CEO of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council

Sullivan, Vice President of Small Business Policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Conversations centered around regulatory modernization and the Chamber's Prompt Pay Pledge that encourages big businesses to pay small businesses guicker.

Small Nation was also able to meet with representatives from the House Small Business Committee majority staff and the Chief of Staff for the Senate Committee



Small Nation meets with Karen Kerrigan and Tom Sullivan of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

After a briefing with Karen Kerrigan on key pieces of legislation, the workings of Capitol Hill, and how various business advocacy groups are helping small businesses, the team was joined by Tom on Small Business & Entrepreneurship minority, as well as representatives from House Majority Whip Tom Emmer's office. These committees are focused on regulatory reform, helping families, and creating a new Rural Opportunity Zone program. Small Nation previously used the Opportunity Zone (OZ) program created in 2017 for redevelopment projects in downtown Bellefontaine. While urban communities received 95 percent of OZ funding, this new program is specific to economic development in rural and struggling communities around the country.

Moving through the House Ways and Means Committee are a few tax relief bills to help working families and small businesses and restore American competitiveness. These bills help to strengthen small businesses amid price spikes, worker shortages, and supply chain failures.

"Several important bills are advancing through Ways and Means right now," said Jason Duff. "These bills are related to research and development tax credits, stopping attacks on gig workers, mortgage interest deduction provisions and more. It was valuable to provide our perspective to Congress on how these





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Small Nation team meets with staff from the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

#### policies affect Main Street."

"The Small Nation success story and how the team is helping small towns restore and revitalize their economies, and Main Streets made a big impact on Capitol Hill," said Karen Kerrigan of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. "The team met with top congressional committees and staff, where they shared how small businesses are navigating economic challenges and opportunities. Such advocacy and engagement will have a direct effect on informing lawmakers and policy staff about the policies that are needed to boost small business growth and competitiveness."

In addition to committees and House leadership, Small Nation also got to meet with Congressman Jim Jordan and representatives from Senator J.D. Vance's office. Congressman Jordan's district encompasses Bellefontaine as well as many of the small towns in Ohio that Small Nation is currently consulting in. He currently also serves as Chairman of the powerful House Judiciary Committee. "The Small Nation team's willingness to visit members of Congress and communicate what small businesses and Main Streets are facing is critical to our advocacy work in Washington, DC and makes all the difference in our success as advocates for entrepreneurs," noted Karen.

The trip wasn't all work, however, with half of the team taking their first trip to Washington, D.C. The team had the opportunity to tour the National Archives, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, and the many monuments and memorials around the district.

"I am so incredibly proud of this team and the work accomplished hitting the hill this week," Jason added. "We met key legislators and leaders who are advancing policy for small businesses. A special thanks to Karen and the grit and dedication she and the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council are doing every day to be a voice for entrepreneurs and small businesses everywhere."



Small Nation Founder Jason Duff talks with Congressman Jim Jordan.

# About Reliant Mechanical, Inc.

You can spend days, weeks, and even years trying to find examples of companies in the mechanical arena that are excellent in residential, as well as commercial and industrial segments. Yet, there is only one company in West Central Ohio you can depend on today— and not just today, but right now!

When it comes to heating, ventilating, and air conditioning services, rely on Reliant—Reliant Mechanical, Inc., to be exact!

Established in 1986, Reliant proudly and conveniently offers commercial, industrial, and home services. Simply put, no job is too big or too small for this skilled, professional, and friendly team. There are myriad reasons why you should consider working with Reliant, but we've narrowed it down to the top three. Take a look!

To start, Reliant always offers its clients smalltown character and a positive attitude. Built in East Liberty and Marysville, this team is proud of where it came from and provides focus, care, and passion that is not always attainable in larger cities.

Though, just because Reliant comes from a small town, that doesn't mean its capabilities are limited. Specifically, over the last 40 years, the team has expanded its reach and dexterity, proving that, as stated above, no job is off-limits. With Reliant Mechanical, Inc., clients get the best of both worlds: smalltown values and big-city proficiency. Finally, Reliant is able to supply its high-quality services for less than what is typically expected. That's big-city service for a small-town price. Of course, it's also important to note that the Reliant team can be relied on for 24/7, emergency service.







Today, Reliant is recognized as one of the top mechanical firms in Ohio, performing residential heating and cooling services, commercial mechanical construction projects, mechanical maintenance support, quick and effective emergency response services, and much more! From its foundation, a team, which now includes 98 driven employees, was created to serve the needs of the public—and that it does.

If you are in need of Reliant Mechanical, Inc.'s services, you can call (888) 313-8805 or visit the company's website by clicking here. Don't forget to check out Reliant's stellar reviews and amazing Better Business Bureau rating—you won't be disappointed!

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# About Renée James Jewelry

When you feel like your life is lacking sparkle, there's only one solution: jewelry! After all, can anyone really ever have enough jewelry? We don't think so. If you're unfamiliar with Renée James Jewelry, your world is about to be rocked and we mean that in a great way.

Created by Logan County native Lauren Duff Major, jewelry designer and Gemologist, Renée James Jewelry is known for its custom engagement rings, wedding bands, and redesigns. Major, an Indian Lake graduate, furthered her education at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, before focusing on jewelry and design at GIA (Gemological Institute of America), the world's foremost authority on diamonds, colored stones, and pearls, in Carlsbad, California.

Major's sole passion is to provide clients with one-of-a-kind heirloom pieces—and she doesn't disappoint. Specifically, at Renée James Jewelry, Major takes great pride in creating custom pieces, going above and beyond to produce jewelry that individuals fall in love with and can cherish for a lifetime.

Are you yearning for a custom piece of jewelry? In most cases, custom orders take around six to eight weeks to complete from start to finish. During this time, Renée James Jewelry ensures transparency, keeping clients informed and updated



throughout the entire process. Though, if you're in a rush—for whatever reason—your piece can be expedited for an extra fee, resulting in a four-week turnaround.

So, are you ready to bring your vision to life? Eager for that extra sparkle? You know who to call!

Major can be reached via her website, reneejamesjewelry.com, by email, customservice@reneejamesjewelry.com,







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and by phone, (937) 539-2371. You can also join Renée James Jewelry's bi-monthly newsletter club—click here—to get the first look at new arrivals, seasonal favorites, and birthstone pieces. By joining the newsletter club, you'll be immediately alerted of current deals, sales, and store events.

Yes, in addition to offering custom designs, Renée James Jewelry, also provides original pieces, which can be viewed and purchased at the following location: 9101 State Route 117, Huntsville, Ohio 43324. You're always invited to stop by and take a look around. But, be warned ... It will be hard to walk away empty-handed.



### **About Small Nation:**

Small Nation develops places, spaces and dreams for small towns and small-town entrepreneurs across the country. They create revitalization concepts and plans for towns, business concepts, brands, and workforce solutions, then market it all in the name of small-town success.

To learn more about Small Nation, visit www. smallnationstrong.com or follow them on social media at @smallnationstrong.

#### TRUSTED BUSINESS PARTNERS



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