



| CASE STUDY |

# PLACES TO GATHER

The value of event venues in small towns

Cover photo: The Syndicate

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Every small town has its traditions - high school football games, church socials, parades down Main Street. But in Bellefontaine, Ohio, something more intentional has taken root: a thriving network of event venues that have redefined what gathering looks like in a modern small town.

For years, Bellefontaine had restaurants and shops, but few formal spaces where people could come together to celebrate, host events, or enjoy entertainment. The lack of venues wasn't just a missed opportunity for community connection, it was a missed economic opportunity. Small Nation and its partners recognized this and began to rethink what downtown could offer, not just for day-to-day shoppers, but for weddings, fundraisers, private dinners, and cultural events.

From wine rooms to elegant halls to flexible restaurant spaces, event venues have now become an integral part of Bellefontaine's downtown economy, and a big reason why people are spending more time (and money) in town.

## THE MAXWELL: A HISTORIC CHURCH REBORN

The Maxwell is one of the newest and most exciting additions to Bellefontaine's gathering spaces—and its story is deeply rooted in local history. Originally constructed in 1890, the Grace A.M.E. Church stood for over 130 years as a symbol of faith, perseverance, and the city's African-American heritage. But like many historic buildings, it faced an uncertain future when it was put up for sale.

Rather than let it sit vacant or fall into disrepair, Small Nation partnered with Brittany Saxton, owner of Six Hundred Downtown, to acquire and reimagine the space. Together, they are transforming the former church into The Maxwell, an elegant wedding and event venue that opened in 2025. The venue is named in honor of Rev. W.T. Maxwell,

the pastor who led the church's original construction.

The renovation, led by Revival Design Collective, will preserve the church's architectural charm while introducing modern amenities, including a stylish front patio and a tented seasonal outdoor space. The City of Bellefontaine approved the use of the venue's adjacent parking lot for a tent structure for six months of the year, allowing The Maxwell to host larger events in the spring, summer, and fall.

But The Maxwell is more than just a beautiful space - it's an economic engine. With Bellefontaine's resurgence as a destination, there's growing demand for venues that support smaller, more intimate weddings and private events. The Maxwell fills that need while also creating new opportunities for local businesses. From caterers and stylists to florists, photographers, and short-term rentals like The Flats at Rainbow Row, an entire ecosystem stands to benefit.

"This project is about creating a space where history, community, and celebration intersect," says Saxton. "The Maxwell allows us to honor the past while building something meaningful for the future."

## BELLA VINO: FROM DREAM TO DESTINATION

Before The Maxwell, Brittany Saxton helped pioneer Bellefontaine's venue scene with Bella Vino Events & Wine Room. Tucked behind the award-winning Six Hundred



The Maxwell before renovation



The Maxwell after renovation



The Maxwell after renovation



The Maxwell after renovation



## | SMALL BUSINESS. BIG IMPACT. |

Small Nation's strategy began with a bold belief: event venues could be more than just gathering spaces—they could be catalysts for economic growth and community connection. By reimagining historic buildings,

underutilized spaces, and vacant lots into vibrant destinations, they've turned small-town charm into big-city impact, proving that intentional design and storytelling can transform how people celebrate and connect.





Bella Vino



Bella Vino

Downtown pizzeria, the space was once an underutilized storage area. But with vision and support from Small Nation, it was transformed into a boutique wine room with intimate stone walls, warm lighting, and a curated wine selection.

Bella Vino quickly became a local favorite for bridal showers, book clubs, rehearsal dinners, and networking events. The space's atmosphere and size make it a perfect complement to The Maxwell, and the two venues now serve different ends of the event spectrum - one for intimate gatherings, the other for large-scale celebrations.

Together, they demonstrate how adaptive reuse and thoughtful design can turn even the most unconventional spaces into unique and desirable destinations.

**THE SYNDICATE: FROM VACANT LOT TO EVENT ANCHOR**

While The Maxwell proved the demand for intimate venues, another need was becoming apparent: a space that could handle bigger crowds and more dynamic events. Brewfontaine's back patio had become a popular spot for casual rentals, but it wasn't scalable.

That's when the team behind Brewfontaine took a bold leap, turning a vacant adjacent lot into The Syndicate, a purpose-built event venue and restaurant. With sleek modern architecture, flexible indoor-outdoor space, and high-end finishes, The Syndicate opened in 2021 and immediately elevated Bellefontaine's social calendar.

The venue now hosts dinner and brunch service Thursday through Sunday, alongside live music, themed events, corporate rentals, and private parties. Seasonal programming includes Christmas brunches with Santa, dueling piano nights, and holiday-themed décor that ties into Bellefontaine's growing identity as Ohio's Christmas Capital.

In 2024, The Syndicate team transformed their beer garden into the Back Yard, a family-friendly outdoor space featuring artificial turf, fire features, games, swings, and gazebos for lounging. This reimagined area offers frozen drinks for both adults and kids and provides a more casual and playful vibe for warm-weather months.

**THE LUMINARY: A NEW CHAPTER FOR UPTOWN MARYSVILLE**

Just 30 minutes southeast of Bellefontaine, another small-town venue is writing its own success story. In the heart of Uptown Marysville, the lower level of BUILD Cowork + Space Marysville has been transformed into



The Luminary



Bella Vino



The Syndicate



The Luminary



The Syndicate



The Syndicate



The Luminary

The Luminary Event Space, a modern venue designed for weddings, corporate meetings, private parties, and more.

Located at 129 N. Main Street, the space carries forward the legacy of the Lamplighter Inn & Restaurant, a beloved gathering spot in Marysville that closed its doors in 1991. That spirit of hospitality lives on in The Luminary's sleek design, flexible floorplans, and top-tier amenities, including a Sonos commercial sound system, four smart TVs, Bluetooth-enabled tech, and a full catering kitchen.

The Luminary is fully accessible and offers a thoughtful blend of functionality and comfort, with booth seating, lounge areas, a bar, and dedicated event staff available for planning and setup.

Its location within BUILD Cowork connects it to a growing entrepreneurial hub, and its proximity to dining, shopping, and parking makes it an easy choice for both locals and visitors. The Luminary adds a high-end, high-tech option to Small Nation's network of gathering spaces and further demonstrates the regional demand for flexible, beautifully designed event venues in small towns.

## FUELING A DOWNTOWN ECOSYSTEM

Every event hosted in Bellefontaine or Marysville creates ripple effects for the local economy. A wedding at The Maxwell leads to hairstyling at Salon Platinum, makeup services from a local artist, overnight stays at The Flats at Rainbow Row, and brunch at Always Brewin' the next morning. A business workshop at The Luminary might include dinner at Leon's Garage or a walk through the Old Town Marketplace.

Event venues aren't just standalone businesses, they are catalysts that activate downtown from multiple angles. They bring new visitors into town, encourage extended stays, and create opportunities for other small businesses to grow alongside them.

That ecosystem includes florists, bakers, stylists, DJs, decorators, and calligraphers. It also includes photographers who book back-to-back shoots, caterers who expand their menus for off-site events, and boutique lodging providers who stay fully booked on weekends.

In Bellefontaine and Marysville, gathering spaces aren't just changing how people celebrate, they're changing how their towns function.

## DESIGNING FOR FLEXIBILITY AND STORYTELLING

Small Nation's approach to event venues is about more than construction, it's about creating stories. From architectural renderings to business modeling, branding, and market analysis, the team helps local entrepreneurs dream big and then deliver something exceptional.

The Maxwell's transformation is a powerful example of this. A historic church with decades of significance is now poised to host a new generation of celebrations, each one building on the legacy of connection and community that has always defined Bellefontaine. The Luminary, meanwhile, carries forward a beloved community restaurant's legacy and repurposes it into a bright future for Marysville gatherings.

Whether it's a corporate retreat at The Syndicate, a wine tasting at Bella Vino, a wedding reception beneath a summer tent at The Maxwell, or a business pitch in the modern glow of The Luminary, these spaces become emotional and economic backdrops to people's most important moments.

## SMALL TOWN STRATEGY, BIG CITY IMPACT

In any small town, event venues are seen as "extras" - something to think about after more pressing infrastructure and development needs are met. But in Bellefontaine and Marysville, they're essential.

By investing in venues like The Maxwell, The Syndicate, Bella Vino, and The Luminary, Small Nation has helped create not only a reason for people to gather, but a reason for people to stay. And in doing so, these towns have redefined what it means to build a thriving local economy.

For towns seeking to revitalize, event venues aren't just "nice to have." When designed strategically and supported by a local ecosystem, they become engines of growth, pride, and connection.

**For more info about these event spaces, visit their websites at the following links:**

The Maxwell - [themaxwellevents.com](http://themaxwellevents.com)

Bella Vino - [bellavinoevents.com](http://bellavinoevents.com)

The Syndicate - [syndicatedowntown.com](http://syndicatedowntown.com)

The Luminary - [luminaryeventspace.com](http://luminaryeventspace.com)

**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.