

MAIN STREET QUARTERLY REPORT

Q2 2026

A LETTER FROM JASON

This summer, small businesses across America are facing an interesting reality. The economic headlines are mixed, consumer confidence remains uneven, and many business owners are navigating higher costs and tighter budgets. Yet despite those challenges, the businesses gaining momentum this summer aren't necessarily the biggest or the cheapest. They're the ones creating experiences, telling authentic stories, and giving people a reason to connect.

One of the strongest trends we're seeing is a continued shift toward experiences over possessions. Travelers and consumers are prioritizing road trips, local destinations, events, and memorable outings. Research shows domestic travel remains strong in 2026, with many Americans choosing shorter getaways, day trips, and visits to small towns rather than expensive, long-distance vacations. At the same time, America's 250th anniversary is driving increased interest in heritage travel, road trips, historic sites, and communities with authentic local stories.

For small businesses, that presents a tremendous opportunity. People are looking for places that feel real. They want unique coffee shops, locally owned restaurants, historic downtowns, family businesses, and experiences they can't replicate online. The businesses that are winning are those that clearly communicate what makes them different and give customers a story worth sharing.

Another trend is that consumers are becoming more intentional with their spending. Inflation concerns remain high, and many households are carefully choosing where to spend their discretionary dollars. When customers do spend, they expect quality, hospitality, and value. Businesses that create great customer experiences and build relationships are outperforming those that compete solely on price.

As America celebrates its 250th birthday, I believe small businesses have an opportunity to lean into what has always made our communities special. Share your history. Tell your story. Celebrate local traditions. Partner with neighboring businesses. Create events and experiences that bring people together.

The businesses that thrive this summer won't just be selling products or services. They'll be creating memories, building community, and reminding people why they chose to spend their time and money locally in the first place. That's not just good business. It's part of the American story.



Jason Duff

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BELL HANKINS: MOVING AGENTS, MOVING RESULTS



Real estate is about far more than buying and selling property. At Bell Hankins Realty Group, it's about earning trust, building relationships, and helping clients make informed decisions with confidence.

Founded by Kimberly Bell and Jeremy Hankins after successful careers with local brokerages, Bell Hankins Realty Group was built around a simple philosophy: put the client first. That commitment has shaped every aspect of the company, from its innovative business model to the way its agents approach each transaction.

Unlike a traditional brokerage, Bell Hankins Realty Group operates as a mobile real estate company without a brick-and-mortar office. By embracing technology and allowing agents the flexibility to meet clients where they are, the team can focus less on maintaining an office and more on delivering exceptional service. Their full-time agents serve clients across residential, commercial, and land transactions, an essential combination of expertise in a rural market where every property is unique.

One of the company's greatest strengths is education. Rather than simply guiding clients through paperwork, the Bell Hankins team takes the time to ensure buyers and sellers fully understand the terms of a purchase contract and their obligations before making one of life's

biggest financial decisions. That proactive approach helps clients avoid surprises and move forward with confidence.

The team includes Julie and Scott Abraham, Chelsey Bailey, Heidi Baker, Kassadie Morgan, Stanleigh Penhorwood, Kimberly Bell, and Jeremy Hankins. Together, they have built a collaborative culture centered on communication, shared values, and a genuine commitment to serving others. Instead of viewing other brokerages as competitors, Bell Hankins believes maintaining positive working relationships throughout the industry ultimately benefits their clients by minimizing conflict and keeping transactions moving smoothly.

For Small Nation, that collaborative approach has proven invaluable. Realtor Heidi Baker has partnered with the team to list commercial properties through both the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) and Crexi, significantly expanding exposure beyond our own marketing channels. That added visibility has generated additional leads and demonstrated the value of working alongside an experienced real estate professional who understands how to maximize a property's reach.

The partnership extends well beyond traditional buying and selling. Bell Hankins Realty Group is uniquely positioned to connect people with

the right solution at every stage of their journey. Whether someone is purchasing a home, selling a commercial property, searching for a short-term rental after a home sale, looking for a self-storage unit during a transition, or needing flexible coworking space, private offices, or conference room access, their team helps connect clients with resources that meet their changing needs.

At the heart of everything they do is a belief that trust cannot be advertised, it must be earned. That philosophy is reflected not only in the relationships they build with clients, but also in the way each member of the team gives back to the Bellefontaine and Logan County community. While they don't seek recognition for those efforts, they believe meaningful service is simply part of being a good neighbor.

Looking ahead, Bell Hankins Realty Group isn't focused on becoming the biggest brokerage. Instead, Kimberly and Jeremy hope to continue growing with professionals who share the company's values of service, integrity, strong work ethic, and dedication to clients.

In an industry built on relationships, Bell Hankins Realty Group has shown that success isn't measured only by the number of properties sold. It's measured by the trust earned, the people served, and the communities strengthened along the way. Learn more or contact the group at bellhankins.com or call 937-935-2450.

BRINGING BACK SOMETHING WE'VE BEEN MISSING: JUST U'NEEQ MERCANTILE IN DOWNTOWN BELLEFONTAINE



In Downtown Bellefontaine, there are businesses you discover and then there are businesses you grow alongside. Just U'NeeQ has been part of this community since 2017, quietly evolving over the years. And now, with its transition into Just U'NeeQ Mercantile, it's stepping into a version of itself that feels more intentional, more rooted, and more aligned with what it was always meant to be.

A STORE THAT FEELS LIKE HOME

When the owners of Just U'NeeQ began reimagining their space, they kept coming back to a simple idea, something many of us remember without even trying. The kind of general store you could walk into and instantly feel at home. A place where you could pick up what you needed, find something special you didn't even know you were looking for, and most importantly, feel connected to the people around you.

That feeling became the foundation for Just U'NeeQ Mercantile. Not just a store, but a space meant to be welcoming, meaningful, and deeply connected to the community it serves.

THOUGHTFULLY CHOSEN, DEEPLY LOCAL

Everything inside Just U'NeeQ Mercantile is chosen with intention. Not just to fill shelves, but to reflect a way of living that feels slower, more thoughtful, and more connected to where things come from. You'll find fresh, local foods like sourdough bread, fry pies, milk from nearby creameries, local honey, and syrup. Alongside that are pantry staples, small-batch goods, and trusted brands that feel familiar and reliable.

There's also a full mix of everyday essentials such as, magnesium, tallow products, eco-friendly cleaning supplies, and all-natural skincare. Pair that with home goods, candles, clothing, jewelry, floral, and pieces that make a space feel warm and lived in.

It's the kind of place where you can stop in for groceries... and leave with something you didn't expect, but somehow needed.

BUILT WITH INTENTION (AND A LOT OF HEART)

One of the things that stands out most about Just U'NeeQ Mercantile isn't just what they carry, it's how much thought goes into it. From the sourcing of products to the overall feel of the space, every detail is considered. Where it came from. How it was made. How it fits into everyday life.

This is a business built outside of normal work hours and run by people who are also balancing full-time jobs, choosing to pour their time, energy, and heart into something they believe in.

MORE THAN A SHOP - A PLACE TO GATHER

As Just U'NeeQ Mercantile continues to grow, the vision goes beyond retail.

There are plans for small markets, seasonal pop-ups, and workshops focused on things like baking, homesteading, and natural living. There's excitement around collaborating with local farms, bakers, and makers. They are bringing in fresh, rotating products that keep the space feeling alive.

Because at the heart of it all, the goal is simple: to support locals, build relationships, and create a space where community naturally happens. Just U'NeeQ Mercantile feels like that kind of place and like something Downtown Bellefontaine has been ready for.

If you're looking for a place to shop locally in Downtown Bellefontaine or just want to experience something that feels a little more intentional, this is one worth stepping into.

LIVE MUSIC IS THE TICKET TO BUILDING A DOWNTOWN DESTINATION



Successful downtowns are not defined solely by their buildings, businesses, or public spaces. Increasingly, communities across the country are recognizing that cultural experiences play an equally important role in attracting visitors, retaining residents, and creating a sense of place. Among these experiences, live music has emerged as one of the most effective tools for downtown destination building.

Unlike many forms of development that require significant infrastructure investment, live music creates immediate opportunities for connection and engagement. Performances activate public spaces, encourage foot traffic, support local businesses, and foster a cultural identity that distinguishes one community from another. In an era when people increasingly seek authentic experiences, a vibrant local music scene can become a powerful competitive advantage.

Downtown Bellefontaine has experienced this firsthand through the growing number of venues investing in live entertainment and artist development. From intimate acoustic performances to



JUNE 29

PETE MOSS LIVE

5:00PM-8:00PM

www.brewfontaine.com

nationally touring acts, music has become an important component of the downtown experience, creating opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the community in meaningful ways.

A recent example can be found at Wrock Bottom Bar, which launched its new Wrock the Lot concert series with an album release celebration for local country artist Tucker Munz. The event attracted hundreds of attendees to Downtown Bellefontaine, demonstrating the ability of locally driven cultural programming to generate significant community participation.

Munz's story illustrates the importance of creating opportunities for emerging artists within their hometown communities. A 2021 graduate of Benjamin Logan High School, he began teaching himself guitar during the COVID-19 pandemic and has since developed a growing regional following. Drawing inspiration from artists such as Tyler Childers, Zach Bryan, Flatland Cavalry, and Sam Barber, his blend of folk, country, and rock has resonated with audiences across Ohio. The release of his debut album, Little

Cabin, represents not only a personal milestone but also a reflection of the creative talent developing within Logan County.

Beyond hosting concerts, Wrock Bottom continues to invest in the local music ecosystem through open mic nights, karaoke events, sing-alongs, and regular performances from regional artists. These programs create accessible entry points for aspiring musicians while helping cultivate an audience that values and supports live entertainment.

The Syndicate has similarly expanded Downtown Bellefontaine's cultural offerings through performances on its Citizens Federal Stage. Throughout the summer, the venue hosts a diverse lineup of artists ranging from local favorites such as SaMaX and Lowest Point to touring performers with growing national recognition.

One of the most notable upcoming performances is Gareth Unplugged, a rare acoustic appearance by Nashville-based singer-songwriter Gareth. Originally from Northern Ireland, Gareth has accumulated more than 25 million streams,

secured a publishing agreement with BMG, earned representation through UTA, and made his Grand Ole Opry debut. Bringing an artist of this caliber to a downtown stage reflects the increasing ability of Bellefontaine's entertainment venues to attract talent that might traditionally be associated with larger metropolitan markets.

Brewfontaine has further contributed to the growth of the local music scene by regularly hosting live performances that create intimate and accessible audience experiences. While larger concerts often serve as destination events, venues such as Brewfontaine play an equally important role by providing consistent opportunities for musicians to perform and audiences to engage with live music on a regular basis. These recurring experiences help establish music as an integrated component of community life rather than an occasional attraction.

At the center of Downtown Bellefontaine's performing arts landscape stands the Holland Theatre. Originally constructed in 1931 and recognized as one of the nation's few remaining Dutch-style atmospheric theaters, the nearly 700-seat venue serves as both a



historic landmark and a cultural anchor. Over the years, the theater has welcomed acclaimed performers including Girl Named Tom, Don McLean, CeeLo Green, and numerous other nationally recognized artists. These performances draw audiences from across the region, generating economic activity for nearby restaurants, retailers, and hospitality businesses while reinforcing Bellefontaine's reputation as a destination for arts and entertainment.

Research on placemaking and community development consistently highlights the role of arts and culture in creating vibrant, resilient communities. Live music contributes to this process by activating spaces, fostering social interaction, supporting creative talent, and generating economic impact. More importantly, it creates



shared experiences that strengthen community identity and cultivate a sense of belonging among residents.

When visitors attend a concert downtown, they rarely experience the performance in isolation. They dine at local restaurants, visit nearby shops, explore public spaces, and often discover reasons to return. In this way, music functions not simply as entertainment, but as an entry point into a broader community experience.



As Downtown Bellefontaine continues to evolve, the investment being made by venues such as Wrock Bottom, The Syndicate, Brewfontaine, and the Holland Theatre demonstrates how arts and culture can serve as foundational elements of destination development. Together, these organizations are helping create a downtown that is not only economically active, but culturally vibrant - a place where people gather, connect, and experience the unique character of the community.

BILLBOARD SPOTLIGHT: OAK & EMBER LUXURY LOUNGE



A new landmark is lighting up the roadways around Ottawa, Ohio, and it's inviting visitors to experience something extraordinary. COMSTOR Outdoor is proud to partner with Oak & Ember Luxury Lounge, helping showcase this one-of-a-kind destination through impactful billboard advertising.

Owned by Tom Giesken, Oak & Ember brings an elevated bourbon bar and speakeasy-inspired experience to downtown Ottawa. From its stunning chandeliers and intimate atmosphere to its carefully curated collection of bourbons and premium spirits, Oak & Ember offers guests a place to slow down, connect, and create memorable moments.

To help spread the word, COMSTOR Outdoor worked with Oak & Ember to place a bold, eye-catching billboard that reaches travelers and local residents alike. Outdoor advertising provides businesses with a powerful way to build awareness, attract new customers, and reinforce their brand throughout the communities they serve.

Whether you're launching a new business, promoting a special event, or growing an established brand, the COMSTOR Outdoor team works closely with clients to create billboard campaigns that deliver results. We're excited to help share Oak & Ember's story and introduce more people to this unique destination in Ottawa.

Share your message and learn more about how COMSTOR Outdoor can help your business at comstoroutdoor.com



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WAGS BAKERY & GROOMING CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING IN DOWNTOWN BELLEFONTAINE

Downtown Bellefontaine welcomed a new destination for dogs and their owners as Wags Bakery & Grooming celebrated its grand opening on April 16, 2026.

Located at 118 N. Main Street, Wags Bakery & Grooming opened its doors with a unique combination of fresh-baked dog treats, professional grooming services, and a boutique retail experience designed to provide personalized care for pets and their families.

The business was inspired by owner Suzanne Williams' dog, Buckeye, who became seriously ill with Blastomycosis. During his recovery, Williams began making fresh treats at home to help administer medication and support his healing. What started as a way to care for her own dog evolved into a business built around the belief that dogs deserve the same level of care, quality, and attention that people expect for themselves.

"Wags was built from a desire to create something special for dogs and the people who love them," said Williams. "Every service, product, and experience is designed with care and personalization."

In addition to full-service grooming, Wags introduced an in-house bakery where treats are made fresh daily. The

bakery offers handcrafted biscuits, cookies, bones, cupcakes, and specialty cakes, all prepared with a focus on quality ingredients. Every grooming appointment includes a complimentary bakery treat, reflecting the business's commitment to creating thoughtful experiences for every pet that walks through the door.

The grand opening also highlighted the broader vision for Wags. Beyond grooming and retail, Williams created the business to serve as a community hub for pet owners. Future plans include dog-themed events, educational classes, fundraising efforts, shelter partnerships, adoption-focused activities, and other opportunities that bring together local dog lovers.

Guests attending the grand opening enjoyed giveaways, fresh treats, and special activities for both dogs and their owners while exploring the new downtown business.

Wags Bakery & Grooming is located at 118 N. Main Street in downtown Bellefontaine and offers fresh-baked dog treats, personalized grooming services, and a curated selection of pet products. For more information, visit www.wagsbakery.shop or call 937-505-0554.

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A QUIET PLACE TO RESET: WELCOMING DEE MASTERS MASSAGE THERAPY



A new wellness destination focused on recovery, relaxation, and personalized care has opened inside the Main Street Marketplace in downtown Bellefontaine. Dee Masters Massage Therapy officially began welcoming clients this spring, offering therapeutic bodywork in a private, appointment-only setting.

Owned and operated by licensed massage therapist Dee Masters, the practice offers therapeutic, results-driven bodywork designed to help clients recover, relax, and improve their overall well-being.

Masters brings experience from working in a sports clinic, where she helped clients manage chronic tension, injury recovery, physical strain, and everyday stress. That background shaped a treatment philosophy focused on helping people feel and function better through personalized care and evidence-based techniques.

“Life is a contact sport” has become a guiding principle of her practice, reflecting the belief that our bodies require ongoing care, recovery, and support to keep up with the demands of daily life

Dee Masters Massage Therapy offers a variety of customized services, including therapeutic massage, sports massage, cupping therapy, lymphatic work, facial cupping, and biomagnetic therapy. Each session is tailored to the individual client, with a focus on reducing pain, improving mobility, supporting recovery, and promoting long-term wellness.

Located within the Main Street Marketplace, the studio provides a calm and private environment that allows clients to step away from the pace of everyday life. The quiet setting was intentionally created to support both physical recovery and mental relaxation, whether clients are seeking relief from chronic

tension, recovering from activity, or simply taking time for self-care.

In addition to massage services, Masters plans to offer a selection of wellness and self-care products, allowing clients to continue their recovery and relaxation routines at home. She also looks forward to becoming an active part of the downtown business community through collaborations, educational opportunities, and conversations focused on wellness, recovery, and body awareness.

“My goal is to help people feel more at home in their bodies and more supported in their everyday lives,” said Masters.

Dee Masters Massage Therapy is now accepting appointments at its private studio on the lower level inside Main Street Marketplace at 130 S. Main Street in Downtown Bellefontaine. To schedule an appointment, call 937-561-8714.

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Lease Rate: \$1,200 per month | Square Footage: 1,190 sq. ft.

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CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION

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THE TREASURE HUNT ECONOMY



I've been noticing something interesting happening across the small towns we work in, and I don't think it's temporary. In a time where inflation is still pinching wallets, customers aren't just spending less, they're shopping differently. They're hunting. Not just for cheap, but for value, uniqueness, and the thrill of the find. You see it everywhere right now. Packed thrift stores, vintage shops turning

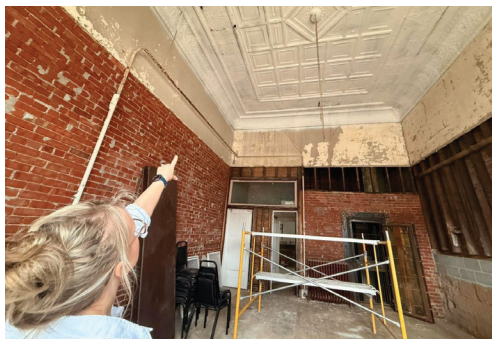
inventory weekly, overstock and pallet stores with lines out the door, and pop-ups and bin sales creating urgency and buzz. This isn't just about saving money. It's about experience and value colliding. I call it the "Treasure Hunt Economy."

Even the big players are leaning into this. Take Macy's, for example. They've introduced Macy's Backstage, a dedicated section inside their main

stores focused on discounted, overstock, and off-price items. Why? Because they know customers want the thrill of the deal, the unexpected find, and the feeling that they won the purchase. And here's the big takeaway for small businesses. You don't need a separate store to compete. You just need a dedicated experience within your store.

Here are a few simple plays I'm seeing work right now. Create a clearly defined "deal zone" with your best values, markdowns, or one-off buys. Rotate it often, because the magic isn't just the price, it's the change and the reason to come back. Mix in the unexpected, whether that's closeouts, local maker items, samples, returns, or vintage pieces, and make it feel like a true discovery zone. Make it visible and branded. Don't hide it in the back corner. Call it something fun that fits your space. And finally, price it to move. This section isn't about maximizing margin. It's about driving traffic, creating energy, and building momentum. In small towns, where word travels fast, that feeling spreads even faster.

SMALL TOWN SPOTLIGHT: LEETONIA



Recently, Small Nation spent time in the Village of Leetonia, a community that reflects the depth of Ohio's industrial roots. Founded around iron production, coal mining, railroads, and the well-known Cherry Valley Coke Ovens, Leetonia once played a meaningful role in the steel and manufacturing supply chain that powered the Midwest. Today, those preserved coke ovens remain one of the most unique industrial heritage sites in the state and a lasting reminder of the generations who built the region.

What stands out most is that communities like Leetonia already



possess what many places are trying to create. Authenticity, history, and character cannot be replicated. When those assets are paired with engaged local leadership and a forward-looking mindset, it creates real opportunity. From preserving historic structures to supporting small businesses and building destination experiences, the foundation for continued momentum is already in place.

Small Nation appreciates the time and leadership from Mayor Kevin Siembida, Hayley Taylor, and Roman Ferry. Their commitment to the



community is evident, along with the energy around what comes next. The visit also coincided with a celebration for Quaker City Concrete Products and their expansion, highlighting continued investment in the area.

Communities like Leetonia continue to reinforce an important point. Meaningful revitalization is not limited to large cities. It is happening in places with strong identities, historic assets, and people willing to invest in their future.

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**Ep. 102: Katie Neason,
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103 THE SMALL NATION PODCAST
Building a Healthy Community
Luciano Gomes

**Ep. 103: Luciano Gomes,
Owner of Legado Brazilian Jiu Jitsu**

We're casting for Season Three guests. Own a small business? Have a compelling story to tell? Know of someone who you want to hear from?

Reach out today to producer Ethan DeLeon at ethan@smallnation.com.

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