



# MIDDLETOWN NOW

## CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

**MEET THE GRANDPAS BEHIND MIDDLETOWN'S PREMIER HOLIDAY EVENT**

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**MIDDLETOWN, OHIO**  
Butler & Warren Counties

One Donham Plaza  
Middletown, Ohio 45042

[www.cityofmiddletown.org](http://www.cityofmiddletown.org)





## Letter from the City Manager

# NOW IS THE TIME TO DREAM BIG



**NATHAN E. CAHALL,**  
**MPA OCED**  
Acting City Manager

Middletown,

It is my distinct honor to serve as your acting city manager at this juncture in Middletown's history – an exciting moment for growth and opportunity. As you saw in the first edition of Middletown NOW this summer, Middletown has made significant progress in economic development, public safety, communication to residents, and improving our neighborhoods. In the weeks and months since, city staff have worked tirelessly to build upon these successes and create additional opportunities for revitalization and prosperity.

In June, the City officially broke ground on the transformational Renaissance Pointe project on the east side of town. This project will stimulate the Middletown economy through new restaurants, Class A retail and office, hotels, and a regional event center that will bring tens of thousands of people into Middletown annually.

Just across the highway, the City recently purchased the Towne Mall. City Council's bold leadership action will enable the City to plan and better control the long-awaited revitalization of such an important and strategic node of the City's interstate interchange area. While plans have not been finalized, the City is excited for how the two east end projects will complement each other and be a boom for our local economy.

It's not just the new that the City is celebrating. Middletown had several businesses achieve historic milestones in recent months. Cohen Recycling was honored at the Ohio Challenge for 100 years in business in the City of Middletown. It's not often a business is open for a century, let alone in the same city. Central Pastry Shop also celebrated a big milestone – 75 years. It is the City's goal and aspiration to have many more businesses celebrate 75 and 100 years of business in Middletown in the next years and decades to come.

Additionally, it's the basic municipal services that affect your day-to-day life that the City is most proud of. The City has continued its local street paving project, now having paved dozens of miles of streets in Middletown over the last few years. The City is continuing to invest

in its park system, most recently approving renovations and improvements to Sherman, Oakland, and Goldman Parks. Community events have significantly ramped up again while streets and neighborhood are being cleaned up.

Improving the lives of every Middletonian is at the heart of what the hard-working people at One Donham Plaza do every day. It takes a village to take care of each other, which is why the City invested back into the community with its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Those funds went to helping build businesses up through infusion grants, supporting seniors through the purchase of the Middletown Events and Senior Center, and providing a place for kids to create memories in the summer through a partnership with the YMCA to build an aquatic center. ARPA funds also helped the City clean up through Neighborhood Improvement Projects such as the Trash Bash event.

Finally, the City is investing in the Robert "Sonny" Hill Community Center. Nearly \$7 million was approved by your City Council to give the center a much-needed facelift and expansion. This project will help programs for Middletown children run and operate more efficiently, while providing a beautiful space for the Middletown community to come together. This project is years in the making, but it is finally happening.

There is a lot to be excited about and proud of in Middletown. The City is allowing for more investment, new innovation, and increased awareness of initiatives and information. The strong steel heritage of hard-working people who are passionate about the city in which they live is evident when we hear from citizens. You truly care about Middletown, which is why you picked up this newsletter to read.

You are what makes Middletown great. You are what makes Middletown a better place.

Let's do something incredible, together.

*Nathan E. Cahall, MPA OCED*



# PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES

## Earl Nelson Appointed Chief of Police

Earl Nelson was appointed from a pool of three candidates in August to the position of Chief of Police, taking the reins from Acting Police Chief Andy Warrick. Nelson, Warrick, and Deputy Chief Malcolm Tipton were all considered for the position, per Middletown City Charter.



Chief Earl Nelson

“It’s an honor to be selected for this position. I want to thank everyone for their support and encouragement,” Chief Nelson said. “I also want to thank all the people who took part in the selection process for chief. This was a tough decision because all of the candidates are exceptional leaders. This police department and city have the most dedicated employees in the area and I cannot wait to get to work.”

Chief Nelson has been with the Middletown Division of Police since 2005, when he began as a patrol officer. He was promoted to sergeant in 2017 and major/deputy chief in May of this year. Nelson succeeds Acting Chief Andy Warrick, who was appointed to the role earlier this year following the retirement of former Acting Chief Eric Crank.

## First Two Fire Stations To Open In January

The first two brand new fire stations will be set to open in January!

The new Fire Headquarters, located on Yankee Road, near University Boulevard, as well as the new fire station on S.R. 122 and Atrium Blvd., should be completed in late Fall 2024 with equipment and move-in happening in mid-to-late December, with full operations beginning in January. The City is planning a community celebration event when headquarters opens in January.

Four to five months later, in 2025, the other two fire stations will be completed and open in mid-2025. Those fire stations will be located on Sophie Ave. at Stolz Rd. and on Charles St. at Henry Ave.



## National Night Out Another Rousing Success

The Middletown Division of Police held its annual National Night Out over the summer – and it once again was a hit. Hundreds of people flooded Smith Park for the police event that is aimed at improving police-community relations, while also providing fun and food for families. Check out a few of the pictures!





# COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## RENAISSANCE POINTE

The City of Middletown broke ground on the transformational \$200 million Renaissance Pointe project on June 19, kicking off a construction project that will reshape the I-75 corridor in Middletown.

Renaissance Pointe will be anchored by an arena/event center with surrounding multi-use complexes for Class A retail, restaurants, and residential units. This exciting project will reimagine and revitalize the I-75 corridor in Middletown with a prime location between the metro areas of Cincinnati and Dayton.

Partnering with the City of Middletown on the Renaissance Pointe project



is Loveland Excavating and Woodard Development. The groundbreaking ceremony was hosted by Assistant City Manager Nathan Cahall with

remarks from Mayor Elizabeth Slamka and representatives from Woodard Development and Loveland Excavating.

## MIDDLETOWN CLOSING THE HOUSING GAP

The Roosevelt School site on Central Ave. will soon include nearly two dozen new homes that will help close the housing gap facing the City and the County. Brandon Homes, which has

also built houses along Rosedale Rd. in recent months, is constructing the homes on the site. Included in the project is a new street for access to the new homes, as well as a walking path connecting Central Ave. to Sunset Park.

Nearby at the former Lincoln School site, the City has entered into a pre-development agreement with Cristo

Homes that allows Cristo to assess the property and determine the necessary zoning changes needed to move forward with their plan. The plan calls for 59 dwellings, with a mix of single family and three-and-four-unit structures.

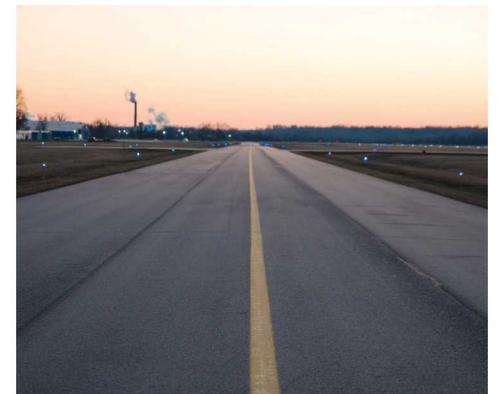
## BUTLER TECH AT THE AIRPORT

Butler Tech is investing in the Middletown Airport, thanks also in part to a \$1 million grant from JobsOhio's Ohio Site Inventory Program, by launching the Butler Tech Aviation Education Hangar project.

The \$15 million investment will build a hangar at the Middletown Regional Airport that will include classrooms and state-of-the-art labs for students to

learn about aviation, which will directly address the growing demand for aviation professionals in the Cincinnati and Dayton areas.

With Middletown ideally situated between the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, James M. Cox Dayton International Airport, and the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport, the City's airport positions itself as a natural hub for developing the future of aviation.



## ARE YOU READY TO VOTE?



The Ohio voter registration deadline for the upcoming 2024 General Election is **October 7**



Not registered to vote? You can register online at [olvr.ohiosos.gov](https://olvr.ohiosos.gov), or by picking up a voter registration form at the Butler and Warren counties board of elections, public libraries, public schools, and many other places. A full list can be found at [ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/register](https://ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/register)



Not sure if you're registered? Contact the Butler County Board of Elections at **513-887-3700** or the Warren County Board of Elections at **513-695-1358** or online at each of the Board of Elections' websites



Early Voting and Absentee Voting begins on **October 8**



Election Day is on **November 5, 2024**



# PARKS & RECREATION

## Middletown is making big investments in its parks!

The City of Middletown has made significant investments into the City Parks, thanks to strategic planning by the Parks Board for two parks, and the use of CDBG funds for another park.

In May, City Council approved a proposal from the Parks Board for an extensive \$374,867 facelift and upgrade of equipment for Sherman Park. This plan called for tree cleaning up, a new backstop for the field, and a paved walking path and gravel. There will also be new trash cans, picnic benches, a shelter, basketball court update and new signage.

As for the new equipment, the basketball court will be surfaced with a VersaCourt interlocking tiles system, which provides for a uniform and durable surface for intensive play. With its low maintenance and cleaning ease, the City believes it will save money in the long run compared to a cement court. The playground equipment was also upgraded for the first time in decades.

Goldman Park was also approved for similar renovations and upgrades. In addition to new signage, tables and benches, a new playground will include a DuraPlay Surfacing system that ensure high-quality safety for kids of all ages. There will also be playground equipment for children of all abilities and



accessibilities. This playground will be handicap and disability-friendly. The total estimated cost of the Goldman Park project is \$368,000.

Using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that were appropriated to the City from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, City Council also approved significant work to be done at Oakland Park. This project will include repairs to the sidewalk and pavement, the resurfacing of the existing basketball court, and the addition of pickleball courts. As with the other projects, the playground equipment is also being replaced for the first time in decades. There will also be a new sign, benches and water fountain.

These improvements to the Middletown parks will continue to place the City's parks among the best in the county and region. These shining jewels of City neighborhoods will improve lives for today's kids and for generations to come.



## Upcoming EVENTS

### October

- 5th** Bourbon, Beer & Bro's Festival (12pm-6pm) / Downtown Middletown
- 11th** Movie in the Park: WONKA (7pm-10pm) / Middletown Event Center
- 13th** Hocus Pocus Family Free Fun Festival (2pm-7pm) / The Windmere
- 19th** PAWS Zombie Walk & Furry 5K (10am-12pm) / Gravel Road Brewing
- 19th** Trick-Or-Trunk Car Show/Cruise-In (4pm-9pm) / Towne Mall
- 26th** 3rd Annual Family Fall Fest (12pm-5pm) / Sunset Park

### November

- 9th** Community Building Institute Turkey Trot 5K (10am-12pm) / Primo Italian Steakhouse
- 17th-23rd** Bowl Week – featuring Soups, Chilis and Stews / Local Restaurants
- 28th** Light Up Middletown Begins / Smith Park
- 30th** Very Merry Middletown Kickoff
  - 5pm - Santa Parade
  - 5:15pm - Christmas Tree Lighting
  - 5:30pm-8:30pm - Visit with Santa and Ms. Claus
- 30th** Horse and Carriage Rides (5pm-8pm) / Downtown Middletown

### December

- All Month** Holiday Whopla Ice Rink & Light Displays, Light Up Middletown
- 14th** Horse and Carriage Rides (5pm-8pm) / Downtown Middletown
- 21st** Blitzen Cocktail & Cookie Walk (6pm-10pm) / Governor's Square
- 21st** Horse and Carriage Rides (5pm-8pm) / Downtown Middletown





# 25 YEARS OF LIGHT UP MIDDLETOWN



## MEET THE GRANDPAS BEHIND MIDDLETOWN'S MOST FESTIVE EVENT

By: Clayton Castle

It's Fall and the leaves are changing colors. The sights and sounds of football are everywhere, just like the ads for the latest Pumpkin Spice Latte product.

And you may not know it, but a group of men are gathering in Smith Park for six to eight weeks in October and November, getting ready for the biggest holiday event in Middletown.

Meet the Grandpa Gang.

This group of retirees in their 60s, 70s and 80s is the body responsible for the design, set up and display of the annual Light Up Middletown – a drive-through Christmas lights display that is popular for Middletown residents and visitors.

Light Up Middletown is celebrating a historic milestone in 2024 – 25 years of entertaining families of all ages and sizes. This will also be the first full season without Flo Randall, the event's founder and longtime leader, who died two weeks into the event last year.

"We had All American Weekend back then, but Flo thought we ought to have something at Christmastime," Grandpa Gang member Barney Strassburger said. "So, she got together with Bronner's in Frankenmuth, Michigan up there. That's where we buy most of our stuff from now."

The 86-year-old Strassburger has been with the event from the beginning.

"Flo needed someone to do the grounds stuff and I had worked with All American Weekend from the beginning of that," Barney said. "But after 25 years, I can't get out of it."

The Grandpa Gang got its name from all the retired men who volunteer every year. However, Strassburger points out that most of the members are even great-grandpas.

The grandpas come from all walks of life, too. Bill Becker is the current chair of Light Up Middletown. But he may be better known as a former Middletown police chief, city manager, and city councilman. Becker says giving back to the city in this way is rewarding.

"That's why we're all here. Nobody's in it for the money or the pay. There is no pay," Becker said. "The neatest thing is Opening Night to see all the people's smiles and all the kids smiling. They get up in their sun roofs and that's what I think is really special. It's just a really rewarding experience."

While set up occurs in the fall, the planning for the next Light Up Middletown begins immediately following the previous one. After the take down of the lights in January, designs are made and the new displays are ordered in February for the following November.

The Grandpa Gang meets throughout the year in their barn at Smith Park, fixing up lights, receiving new displays, and just hanging out with each other. Middletown NOW caught up with the Grandpa Gang in the barn on a Monday afternoon in August.

Becker, Barney and his brother Bob Strassburger, and Don Owens gathered in a small room inside the garage. A light structure was in the middle of the room as they were making repairs to it in preparation for the upcoming season.

Barney then busts out the designs for the 2024 Light Up Middletown and compares it to one of his earlier design sketches – one from perhaps 20 or so years ago.

The contrast is stark.

"We began with about six or seven displays," Barney says. "Now, we're at about 60."

When the first Monday of October rolls around, the work in the park begins. It takes a lot of manpower to set up 60 displays in six weeks. That's where the Cleveland-Cliffs help comes in.

"A number of years ago, AK Steel started giving us people to help,"



Barney said. "I could get three Fridays that they would send, a couple times, 25 people out from the mill. We could get a lot done."

As great stewards of the Middletown community, Cleveland-Cliffs has continued the tradition.

"They put up a lot of the big stuff," Becker said. "And that's a big help."

Local small businesses also help out – whether through food, financial donations, time, or equipment donations.

"Some restaurants will feed us," Becker said. "We try to make it a point when we go to lunch, we try to do the local restaurants and support them. They've always been good to us. The community has always been great to this event. Everyone loves Christmas lights."

The displays have gotten so big, that a crane is required to help. The crane was also donated by a local business. And what isn't done by the Grandpa Gang or volunteers, the City helps out where it can.

"We would never get this done without City employees," Owens said.

"The park people – they're fabulous," Barney said. "All the trees are decorated by the park people. And anything else we need, they jump in and help us."

Donations are the lifeblood of Light Up Middletown. It's also what makes it unique from other Christmas lights shows in the region. Light Up Middletown doesn't charge anything – it simply asks for donations. People give what they can.

"In the City of Middletown, we would get people come through once every three years if we charged," Barney said. "We get some people who don't put anything in. We don't care as long as we get enough that we can buy new displays."

In recent years, other holiday-themed attractions have come to Middletown. Holiday Whopla provides an ice rink at the old Swallen's Lot for people to skate during the holidays. There's an annual Santa Parade and horse-drawn carriage rides. One can argue that Middletown is becoming a holiday destination.

One could also argue, though, that it all began with a Middletown Middies Athletics secretary with a hope and a vision. Flo's dream of bringing Light Up Middletown has created not just an event, but a must-see attraction every year.

"We're drawing over 100,000 people who come through every year," Barney said. "We feel like it's one of the big things that happens in Middletown every year."

Twenty-five years is a long time. Now, those who were kids when it started are now bringing their kids to see the magic that happens in Smith Park holiday season.



"It's become generational," Barney's younger brother Bob chimed in. "We have families that it's a Christmas tradition."

And it's all thanks to the hard work and dedication of a group of grandpas and great-grandpas who do it for the joy and cheer of the holidays.

"It really is a good group of guys," Becker said. "We have fun when we get here. It's work, but it's also that camaraderie and it's just a bunch of good people."

Whether it's a church bus coming through on a mild night after Thanksgiving, or a young family with the kids sticking their heads out of the sunroof in the chilly December air, Light Up Middletown encapsulates all of the magic of Middletown – in just a matter of 25 minutes at five miles per hour.

Light Up Middletown runs from Thanksgiving Night through New Year's Eve.

Light Up Middletown is just one feature of the holiday season in Middletown! Residents and visitors can also find the return of the Holiday Whopla Ice Rink and Interactive Light Displays, the Santa Parade on Nov. 30, and Downtown Middletown Inc.'s Blitzen Cocktail and Cookie Walk on Dec. 21.

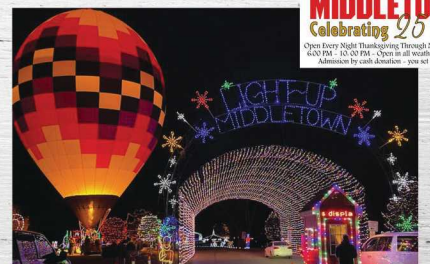
## Very Merry Middletown

Located in Historic Downtown | Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> to Jan. 20<sup>th</sup>

**Featuring:** Holiday Whopla Ice Rink, Holiday Whopla Larger-Than-Life Interactive Light Displays, Light Up Middletown Drive Through Light Extravaganza, Downtown Holiday Events, Santa Parade, Carriage Rides



Middletown  
Holiday  
Whopla



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# HEALTH MINUTE

By: Jackie Phillips Carter, Middletown Health Commissioner

## FALL MEANS START OF FOOTBALL... AND FLU SEASON

Due to the scare of the pandemic, people always want to know if they have COVID! But it is respiratory season. That means viruses and bacteria can spread through the acts of coughing, sneezing, touching your mouth, and wiping your eyes and nose after touching contaminated surfaces. YUK!!!! Some of the common respiratory infections are the common cold, influenza, pneumonia, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and Covid.

Symptoms of these infections include: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache and fatigue.

Since these are conditions of the upper respiratory system, you will usually see head, neck and chest symptoms. However, it is not uncommon to get muscular skeletal symptoms such as body aches and gastrointestinal systems such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. This is important when the first thing to do is to treat your symptoms.

- **Fever** = fever reducer (*example: ibuprofen, acetaminophen*)
- **Pain** = pain reducer (*same as above*)
- **Nasal congestion** = decongestant

You get the idea. If symptoms become worse and or do not go away, you may need to seek medical assistance for medication.

Antibiotics are used for bacterial infections and antivirals for viral conditions. Most antivirals are used for the flu and should be taken within the first 48 hours of illness to be most effective. The same goes for Covid medication, the sooner you start your antivirals the better. Following your medical professional instructions is very important.

**Prevention** is the key. Some simple ways to protect yourself:

All of these conditions except the common cold have immunizations to protect us.

- Get vaccinated
- Practice good hygiene by washing and/or disinfecting your hands
- Keep hands away from your face, especially eyes, nose and mouth
- Get plenty of sleep
- Stay hydrated (drink plenty of water)
- Nutrition (eat leafy greens and colorful fruits and vegetables)
- Cover your cough and sneeze (in an elbow so as not to contaminate your hands)

These illnesses may be milder on some individuals than others so we always want to be considerate and think of the most vulnerable people amongst us. Infants, toddlers, seniors, and those that are health compromised.

**So, stay away from others if you are sick, not feeling well, feverish, sneezing, coughing, etc.!!!**

**Sharing is not always a good thing.**

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**Councilmember** ..... Steve West  
**Councilmember** ..... Jennifer Carter

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