



WINTER
2025

MAKING MIDDLE HISTORY



MIDDLETOWN, OHIO
Butler & Warren Counties

One Donham Plaza
Middletown, Ohio 45042

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J.D. Vance with Middletown friends on Election Night 2024 (Credit: Craig Baldwin)

HOW MIDDLETOWN SHAPED THE VICE PRESIDENT

By: Clayton Castle

“So tonight, Mr. Chairman, I stand here humbled and I’m overwhelmed with gratitude to say I officially accept your nomination to be Vice President of the United States of America,” then-Senator J.D. Vance said on stage at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisc. on July 17, 2024.

What now-Vice President Vance said next marked a historic moment for the City of Middletown.

“I grew up in Middletown, Ohio, a small town where people spoke their minds, built with their hands, and loved their God, their family, their community and their country with their whole hearts.”

Central to his story of his upbringing in Middletown were his grandmother, Bonnie Vance, and his mother, Beverly Aikins.

“It was surreal,” Aikins told Middletown NOW. “I was so proud of him and I just thought he gave a beautiful speech.”

Vice President Vance’s rise to prominence was catapulted by the release of his book, *Hillbilly Elegy*, where he recounted his childhood on McKinley Street in Middletown, the lessons learned from his wise “Mamaw” Bonnie while his mother battled addiction, and his overcoming hurdle after hurdle to graduate from Ohio State and Yale Law. The book was then turned into a Netflix movie, filmed in Middletown in 2019, that was directed by Ron Howard and starred Glenn Close as Mamaw, Amy Adams as Beverly, and Gabriel Basso as J.D.

Vice President Vance credits Mamaw for helping raise him while Beverly struggled with addiction.

“Mamaw raised me as my mother struggled with addiction,”

Vice President Vance said in his nomination acceptance speech. “Mamaw was in so many ways a woman of contradictions. She loved the Lord, ladies and gentleman. She was a woman of very deep Christian faith. But she also loved the F-word. I’m not kidding. She could make a sailor blush. Now, she once told me, when she found out that I was spending too much time with a local kid who was known for dealing drugs, that if I ever hung out with that kid again, she would run him over with her car.”

He also mentioned how despite her struggles, his mother never gave up on him.

“Our movement is about single moms like mine, who struggled with money and addiction but never gave up,” Vice President Vance said. “And I’m proud to say that tonight my mom is here, 10 years clean and sober.”

Bringing up his mother’s addiction on national television with millions watching across the world was not an easy decision. Aikins recalled the moment then-Sen. Vance reached out to her regarding that portion of the speech.



J.D. Vance with his mother in front of campaign plane (Credit: Beverly Aikins)

"He had called me earlier in the day and said and sent me that portion of the speech and said 'if you don't want me to say this, I'll rewrite it,'" Aikins said. "And I said 'J.D., everybody already knows I'm a drug addict and in recovery. I'm okay with it.' And he said 'Mom, probably a few thousand people know but they expect 46 million people to tune into this tonight. Do you care if 46 million people..' and I went 'well, they're gonna know eventually so go ahead and say what you need to say' and I just, you know, even the biggest day of his life and was still worried about embarrassing me. I mean, that's just his heart. I just wish people could meet him and spend 10 minutes with him because he's got the most genuine heart I've ever met."

That heart of service began early for J.D. Vance, a 2003 graduate of Middletown High School, according to Beverly.

"There was a time when he wanted to watch one of the presidential debates on TV and he was young, maybe 12 or 13 and I remember his stepbrother at the time, I was married at the time, and they wanted to watch WWE wrestling and J.D. was so upset that he wouldn't get to watch that debate and I remember we ended up going someplace so that he could watch the debate."

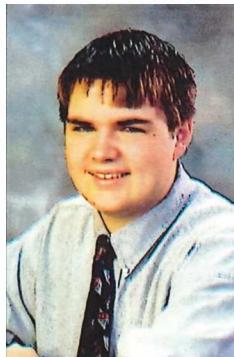
That continued passion for service led to his joining the military. During his high school years, America was attacked on Sept. 11, 2001. That was a pivotal moment in Vance's decision to serve the country. According to Aikins, he felt it was his "personal duty" to join the Marines and fight for the United States.

"I didn't want him to go, my mom didn't want him to go, especially not the Marines Corp. We thought that was the most brutal of all the armed forces but that's where he felt like he could do the best service," Aikins said. "He just wouldn't let it rest, he had to go into the Marines. My mother even threatened to shoot him in the foot so that he couldn't go. And she probably would've, but you know he was destined to go."

Following the release of the book, there was speculation for years as to whether Vance would return to his home state and run for office. In 2018, the Vance family settled in Cincinnati and in 2022, he ran for the United States Senate to replace retiring Senator Rob Portman. With an endorsement from President Donald Trump in hand, Vance coasted to a six-point win over Rep. Tim Ryan. Less than two years later, Sen. Vance stood on the stage of the Fiserv Forum to accept the Republican Party nomination of vice president of the United States. Then on Nov. 5, 2024, the kid from McKinley Street and Middletown High School was elected vice president of the United States of America.

Vice President Vance's rise from Middletown to the White House brought Middletown into the national and international spotlight. For the weeks and months following his nomination in July, media and reporters from across the globe descended up Middletown to learn more about Vance, his upbringing, and what the City is like now.

"I think it brought a light to Middletown and I think we have an amazing city," Aikins said of the spotlight on Middletown.



J.D. Vance's high school yearbook photo
(Credit: Middletown City Schools)

"I think the attention on Middletown was positive and I think it's good for the city."

Reporters from America, Canada, England, Sweden, France, Norway, and numerous other countries walked the streets of Middletown, asking residents about the City and their thoughts on Middletown's native son. It's an experience that Aikins hopes will unite those who disagree in the City.

"What I hope is that it brings the City together," Aikins said. "I hope that we can be diverse and live together and support one another and I'm always available. I just hope that my neighbors, not just my neighbors but my whole city, know that I'm here and you know we love this city."

Since the election, though, Aikins is living a new normal. In many ways, her entire world has changed. But in many other ways, nothing has changed at all. She's still living in Middletown and still working.

"I live a pretty simple life," Aikins said. "I work every day. I'm a registered nurse, I got my nursing license back."

Aikins is using her experience for good by serving substance abuse users. She celebrates 10 years sober in January 2025. She comes home to her dog and spends as much time as possible with her grandchildren. The only difference is now her son is vice president. Otherwise, she is still singing Middletown's praises.

"I love the people," Aikins said of Middletown. "I love that you can get on one of these Facebook chats and somebody reached out and asks for help and yeah, you're going to get some negativity and people saying 'get a job' or do this but you're also gonna have some kind people that are gonna try to help and I try to be one of those people that tried to help."

Helping people is at the heart of Beverly Aikins' Middletown life. And now, her son will be trying to help people from the second highest office in the land, proving that you can achieve anything in life and be from Middletown. From playing at Miami Park to being elected vice president, Vice President Vance embodies what a Middie can become.

The City of Middletown will honor Vice President J.D. Vance with signage across the city, welcoming people to the hometown of the 50th Vice President of the United States of America.



J.D. Vance with his mother and sister (Credit: Lindsay Lewis)

Letter from the City Manager

NEW YEAR, NEW BEGINNINGS

Middletown,

In 2024, Middletown made remarkable strides toward creating a vibrant and sustainable path for growth and opportunity! With hundreds of millions of dollars invested in economic development, we look forward to welcoming thousands of new visitors while offering local families exciting entertainment options to create unforgettable memories. Projects such as Renaissance Pointe, the Monsoon Bay Aquatic Center, the Robert "Sonny" Hill Community Center, and numerous park renovations have all begun, promising a bright future filled with fun and connection for our community!

Breaking ground is just the beginning; now, we move into the construction phase. The City's Renaissance Pointe project is making great progress on the east side of I-75, and we have started groundwork for the Towne Mall redevelopment project! In December, we wrapped up a community engagement survey and held the "Town Hall at Towne Mall" meeting to listen to residents' ideas and visions for the site. These two projects will complement each other, creating exciting and unique destinations for everyone to enjoy!

Exciting progress is being made in our beautiful city parks! In 2024, we completed a transformative renovation of Sherman Park, setting the stage for even more improvements. Soon, we will celebrate the grand reopening of Goldman Park, which features new playground equipment designed for ADA accessibility, enhancing the play experience for individuals with special needs. Oakland Park is also undergoing renovations, including new playground equipment, updated walking paths, curb repairs, two new basketball courts, and an added pickleball court. The Park Board is currently evaluating additional parks that may require upgrades. Our city's exceptional parks are valuable assets to the surrounding neighborhoods and are vital in promoting healthy and vibrant lives for all residents.

The future success of our projects relies on a strong public safety division. Thanks to the Middletown City Council's support, the 2025 budget will increase our community's safety with six additional police officers to patrol. This essential investment supports safety today and lays the groundwork for a vibrant and secure Middletown for years to come!

We are excited to announce that the fire department's first two newly constructed firehouses are now open and in use. These modern facilities will improve response times, offer healthier living quarters for firefighters, and enhance the operational efficiency of the Middletown Division of Fire. The Fire Headquarters, Station 83, is located on Yankee Road near Cherry Street, while Station 82 is at the intersection of Atrium Boulevard and State Route 122.

Thank you for being a part of our community! Our mission is to improve and enrich the city so that everything you need is right at your doorstep. I encourage you to engage and get involved, as your perspectives and ideas are incredibly valuable. By participating, you play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life and sustainability, helping to make the city an even better place to live, work, and play!

Middletown is an amazing place full of opportunities! I'm excited to start this new year with all of you, and I look forward to celebrating the wonderful achievements we will accomplish in 2025. Together, let's create a brighter future!

Sincerely,

Ashley N. Combs



**ASHLEY N.
COMBS**
Acting City Manager

PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES

Mike Davis Shop with a Cop

The Middletown Division of Police held its annual Mike Davis Shop with a Cop event on Dec. 14 at the Meijer on Towne Boulevard. This year, the event was able to provide Christmas for over 60 kids in Middletown!

More than a dozen police officers, police staff, and troopers from the Ohio Highway State Patrol were on hand to shop with the children, using money donated by Meijer, Grand Temple Pythian Sisters of Ohio, Homemakers Circle 9, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Hoff, and the Ohio Highway State Patrol.

The event is named in memory of former MPD Officer Mike Davis, who died in 2013. Davis was a school resource officers for many years and was instrumental in implementing safety programs for children, including the annual Safety Town. Due to his impact on the lives of children and the community, not only was Shop with a Cop named in his memory, but Mike Davis Memorial Way was dedicated in 2021 by the Middletown City Schools.



Homelessness Outreach Program Expanded Thanks To Grant

The Middletown Division of Police is able to expand its services for the homeless thanks to a OneOhio Recovery Foundation grant that will allow the City to purchase new vehicles to help transport homeless people to treatment centers and/or shelters.

Victoria Hensley from Hopeline works tirelessly with MPD to help those in need get the services they need. Often times, those people are found in homeless camps or through referrals by police. The \$76,000 grant will help continue the success of the program, which has connected 96 people with treatment and housing, just in 2024.



Middletown Fire Awarded with the Cardiac Save Award

At Middletown City Council's Dec. 17 meeting, members of the Division of Fire were honored with Atrium Medical Center's Cardiac Save Award!

This award was bestowed upon the department after crew was faced with an unconscious patient in a public area finding him with no breathing and no pulse on arrival. Several rounds of CPR, several cardiac defibrillations, and several minutes without a pulse finally changed after extensive advanced life support. The crew is being recognized for their actions and care that led to the successful resuscitation of the patient.

Those honored were Zachary Dapper (Paramedic), Emma Meyer (EMT), John Kuehnle (EMT), Bryce Nartker (Paramedic), and Zachary Pingleton (EMT).



Middletown NOW Survey

We want YOUR feedback regarding the Middletown NOW Newsletter! Go to www.cityofmiddletown.org – Survey can be found under "City News" on homepage!

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Tis the Season of Historic Groundbreakings!

SONNY HILL COMMUNITY CENTER

The first of the three groundbreakings happened in September when the City of Middletown, in partnership with Universal Contracting and Brandstetter Carroll, celebrated the start of the renovation and expansion of the Robert "Sonny" Hill Community Center. The \$6.7 million investment from the City and the Butler County Commissioners will allow for the center to undergo an

exterior face lift, as well as interior improvements and enhancements, while also adding a state-of-the-art gymnasium with bleachers and a scoreboard.

The project will double the square footage of the Community Center, which has seen generations of children walk through



its doors for recreation, entertainment, and education. Construction should be completed in late 2025 or early 2026.



MONSOON BAY

In October, the Atrium Family YMCA and the City of Middletown broke ground on the new Monsoon Bay aquatic center! The new center will include water features for all ages, while also emphasizing water safety and fun.

Funded through the City's American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds, Monsoon Bay will include 30-foot water slides, a new outdoor bathhouse, and a state-of-the-art pool on the site of the Atrium Family YMCA on Innovation Drive near the I-75 corridor. Monsoon Bay is expected to open in June 2025.

BUTLER TECH AVIATION EDUCATION HANGAR

Also in October, Butler Tech ushered in a new era at the Middletown Regional Airport when the school broke ground on the \$15 million, 28,000-square-foot Butler Tech Aviation Education Hangar, which will be a dynamic hub for aviation courses for area students wanting to learn more about careers in aviation

maintenance, piloting, and unmanned aircraft systems, such as drones.

In addition to the City of Middletown, Butler Tech also partnered with Butler County Commissioners, JobsOhio and REDI Cincinnati to fund the project.



Are you a small business in Middletown? Are you a member of the Middletown Small Business Alliance (MSBA)?

If not, it's not too late to sign up! MSBA is a no-cost membership program provided by Middletown Community and Economic Development focused

on promoting and expanding our small business efforts within the city while fostering growth, and enhancing the economic landscape of Middletown.

MSBA meetings are held quarterly in February, May, August, and November. Email business@cityofmiddletown.org with any questions or concerns or to join MSBA today!



PARKS & RECREATION

2024 Marked Historic Year for City Events!

City Events marked its best year yet with dozens of events in 2024 with high turnout and increased activity in Downtown and in Middletown parks. Five new events were added and a couple of returning events were expanded.

“2024 was an incredible year for growth and excitement for Middletown City Events,” Community Projects Coordinator Jeri Lewis said. “While 2024 was remarkable, I look forward to taking City Events to another level in 2025, bringing our community together for fun, education, and entertainment.”

Added in 2024 were Dessert Week, St. Patrick’s Day Parade and Bar Crawl, Kids Summer Arts in the Parks, Middletown Comic Expo, and Bowl Week. Food Truck Friday, Middletown Farmers’ Market, and Fall Fest were also expanded this year in anticipation of bigger crowds following 2023 success.

The City of Middletown also hosted Movies in the Parks once again, with churches from all across Middletown sponsoring a night by providing snacks and entertainment. The movies shown to the community were Transformers, The Little Mermaid, The Super Mario Bros. Movie, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem, and Wonka.

“Building community is at the heart of Middletown City Events,” Lewis said. “Seeing families coming out to be together, to bond, and to take part in everything the city has to offer is magical.”

Lewis looks forward to another big year for City Events. Coming up in February, Dessert Week returns to delight the sweet tooth of Middletown residents. St. Patrick’s Day weekend is sure to bring more people to Downtown Middletown, while a multi-day expansion of Middletown Comic Expo and Family Fall Fest are being explored.



In November, the City of Middletown cut the ribbon on the incredible renovation and makeover of Sherman Park! The new renovations include a new playground, shelter, walking path, basketball court, benches, trash cans, and so much more!

Middletown City Council was represented at the ceremony by Mayor Elizabeth Slamka, Council Member Paul Horn, Council Member Paul Lolli, and Council Member Jennifer Carter. There were also members of the Park Board on hand, including Chair Steve Lewis.



Upcoming EVENTS

January

13th Hometown Heroes Banner Orders Open

February

10th - 16th Dessert Week / Restaurants Across Middletown

March

1st Hometown Heroes Banner Orders Close

15th St. Patrick’s Day Parade and Pub Crawl

(Parade at 4 p.m., Bar Crawl After) / Downtown Middletown

HEALTH MINUTE

By: Jackie Phillips Carter, Middletown Health Commissioner

WINTER COLD ALSO MEANS TIME FOR WINTER BLUES

The weather outside is frightful, and the fire is so delightful. But how is your mental health? Let us know, let us know, let us know!

If your mental health is also frightful, you may be experiencing a common mental health condition called Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD or winter depression. Symptoms of SAD often appear in the late fall/early winter months and go away during the spring and summer months.

Signs of SAD, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, include:

- Sad and/or anxious mood or feeling most of the day for at least two weeks
- Pessimistic attitude
- Feeling hopeless
- Loss of interest in things and activities that typically bring happiness and joy
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Social withdrawal or “hibernating”

People most at risk of SAD are women, people living farther north (you're more likely to develop SAD in Middletown, Ohio than in Orlando, Florida), and people with already diagnosed mental illnesses (anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder). Some research even shows that SAD can run in families.

But what causes SAD and how can you combat it?

While research is limited on what exactly causes SAD, early studies show that people with SAD have reduced levels of serotonin, the hormone that affects a person's mood. Reduced serotonin levels can be attributed to reduced hours of sunlight during the winter months. Lower serotonin levels can also be attributed to lower Vitamin D levels, which are also improved with sunlight.

There are several ways you can combat or treat SAD:

- Visiting a mental health professional to discuss how you are feeling
- Getting as much sunlight as possible – when there's sun, go outside! Even if there isn't sun, your body still absorbs Vitamin D!
- Manage your stress
- Build in healthy behaviors, such as eating right, increasing your physical activity, and improving your sleep patterns
- Find joy in the smallest situations – did you wake up today? YAY!
- Some medications may help – talk to your healthcare provider about what options may be best for you!

This is also a good time remind each other that connectivity improves physical and mental health! Human connection can boost mental health and help people live longer.

So, when you are out for a walk, walk with a friend! Pick up the phone and call someone you haven't talked to in a while and check in on them. Go out to lunch or dinner with a group of people and have a good time!

Life is better when we live life TOGETHER!

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Vice Mayor Steve West
Councilmember Paul Horn
Councilmember Paul Lolli
Councilmember Jennifer Carter

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