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BELLEFONTAINE’S HISTORIC OPERA BLOCK TO BECOME HUB FOR RURAL INNOVATION AND SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH

Project Will Anchor Small Nation’s Rural Development Education Center and Expand Local Business Footprint

Columbus, Ohio – The historic Opera Block in downtown Bellefontaine is set to receive new life through a \$2.17 million redevelopment led by Small Nation, with support from a JobsOhio Vibrant Community Grant. The project will transform 17,850 square feet across the Brandon and Empire buildings into a dynamic mixed-use space that includes retail, co-working, professional offices, a Rural Development Education Center (RDEC), and an event venue.

The revitalization project is backed by local and regional partners, including One Columbus, and builds on earlier efforts by Small Nation to re-energize Bellefontaine’s downtown with retail, dining, and co-working establishments.

“This is a transformative project for Bellefontaine and an important example of how historic preservation and rural development can go hand in hand,” said Jason Duff, founder of Small Nation. “The Opera Block will serve not only our community, but also small towns across Ohio looking to reimagine their own futures.”

The second and third floors of the buildings will house the RDEC, which will provide training and educational programming for community leaders and entrepreneurs. The first floor will feature retail or food and beverage tenants, expanding the commercial footprint along Main Street. Anchor tenant Small Nation will occupy more than 9,900 square feet and lead the development of the RDEC and related services.

“Ohio is proud to contribute to the restoration of Bellefontaine’s historic Opera Block,” said Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. “The ongoing revitalization of this area is focused on honoring and preserving this region’s rich history while simultaneously creating a modern environment for economic development opportunities.”

The project complements previous phases of development that brought more than seven businesses to the area and resulted in 100% occupancy of co-working space. Small Nation acquired the property in 2021 and completed emergency stabilization and initial renovations before planning this larger redevelopment effort. Construction will include demolition, structural upgrades, new plumbing, HVAC and electrical systems, and the addition of new outdoor spaces.

“Revitalizing our historic districts is essential to the long-term health of Ohio’s small towns,” said JobsOhio President and CEO J.P. Nauseef. “The Bellefontaine Opera Block project will preserve an important piece of the community’s history while serving as a launchpad for future growth.”

“This investment breathes new life into one of Bellefontaine’s most iconic spaces and creates real momentum for rural development in the Columbus Region,” said Kenny McDonald, President and CEO of One Columbus.

“It’s a smart, strategic use of resources that will serve both the community and the broader state for years to come. We’re proud to support projects like this that reflect the grit, creativity, and forward-thinking leadership we see across Central Ohio.”

With strong community backing from the City of Bellefontaine, Logan County, and the Logan County Chamber, the project reflects a united effort to build a more vibrant and economically resilient downtown.

About JobsOhio

JobsOhio is a private nonprofit economic development corporation designed to drive job creation and new capital investment in Ohio through business attraction, retention and expansion. The organization also works to seed talent production in its targeted industries and to attract talent to Ohio through [Find Your Ohio](#). JobsOhio works with seven regional partners across Ohio: [Dayton Development Coalition](#), [Lake to River, Ohio Southeast](#), [One Columbus](#), [REDI Cincinnati](#), [Regional Growth Partnership](#) and Team NEO. Learn more at www.jobsohio.com. Follow the company on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

About One Columbus

As the economic development organization for the 11-county Columbus Region, One Columbus’ mission is to lead a comprehensive regional growth strategy that develops and attracts the world’s most competitive companies, grows a highly adaptive workforce, prepares our communities for the future and inspires corporate, academic and public innovation throughout the Columbus Region. One Columbus expertly guides companies through the location decision process. Through strategic business outreach and customized research, the One Columbus team leverages public, private and institutional partnerships to grow the Columbus Region’s economy and strengthen its national and international competitiveness. Funding is received from more than 300 private organizations, local governments, academic institutions and JobsOhio. Learn more at ColumbusRegion.com.

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