

SUMMER 2025

Uniquely Gahanna



Inside:

SAVORY BOWLS AND SOULFUL EATS ARRIVE IN GAHANNA,
THE CITY'S NEWEST TRAIL RAISES THE BAR FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING IN THE AREA,
GLHS ALUMNI RETURN FOR ANOTHER BOW + UPCOMING EVENTS

This quarterly publication is provided by The City of Gahanna

Cover: The Ohio State University Drum Major Joshua Ford



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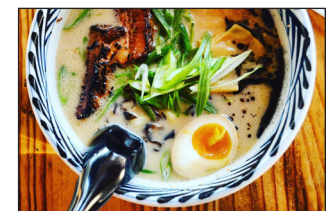
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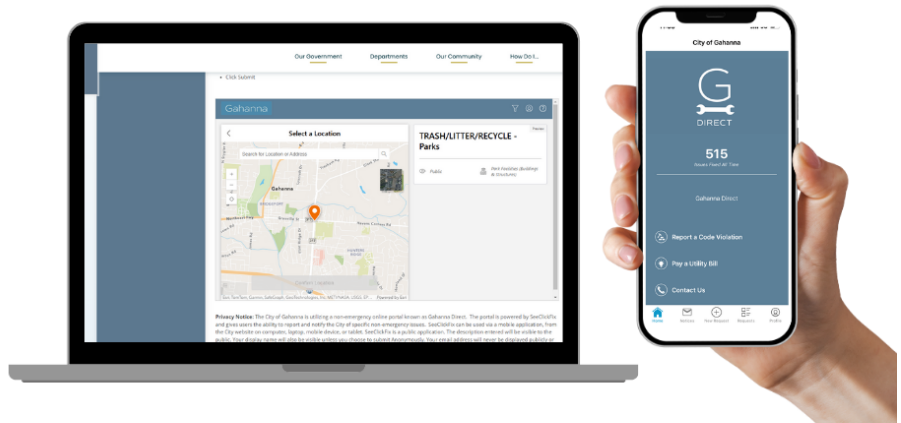
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Inside Gahanna

Letter From the Mayor



The second round of community engagement for the Our Gahanna Strategic Plan wrapped up this spring, and the third round is scheduled to begin in August. An update on the planning process was provided at the City Council meeting on Monday, June 9, which can be viewed on the City's YouTube channel (@CityofGahanna). For more information on the Our Gahanna Strategic Plan and upcoming engagement events, visit OurGahanna.com or scan this QR code.



Dear Gahanna Neighbors,
Thank you for taking a few moments to connect through a celebration of the people, stories, and spirit that make our city a remarkable place to call home.

This edition of *Uniquely Gahanna* brings to life the powerful themes of building, connecting, and supporting, with stories that reflect how, together, we are strengthening the fabric of our community.

Read about residents who recently took part in the Citizen's Academy, gaining a behind-the-scenes look at local government while building new relationships grounded in trust and shared purpose. Discover how two Community Liaison Police Officers and a dedicated Community Paramedic are working hand in hand to connect families with vital resources, demonstrating how collaboration can create safer, stronger, and more resilient neighborhoods.

From economic development to the arts, the Gahanna community shows its support in every facet of city life, lifting one another up in ways both big and small. That spirit is evident in the stories of several small business owners who chose to open new locations in Gahanna, drawn by our welcoming and encouraging environment for entrepreneurs. It continues to be seen in the story of GLHS alumni who are returning to the stage for a first-ever alumni musical – creating an opportunity to reunite through a shared love of the arts and to give back to their community through creativity.

Of course, community thrives not only through big moments, but also through small, meaningful connections. One Gahanna resident is building bonds by hosting weekly food truck evenings that bring neighbors together, while a local graduate has taken on the role of Drum Major for the best band in the land – crediting the strong support and encouragement from the Gahanna community as being key to his success.

Finally, we invite you to explore the newly opened Mountain Bike Trail – born from the vision of local residents and built to be accessible for individuals of all abilities.

Each story reflects the heart of who we are: a community that shows up for one another, celebrates together, and builds a better future side by side.

Thank you for being part of our Gahanna journey.

Warm regards,

-Laurie Jadwin

LAURIE JADWIN • MAYOR

In The Know

Strengthening Trust and Building Connections

Civics in Action: Residents Go Behind the Scenes at City Hall during Gahanna Citizen's Academy

By Dan Pearlman

"It was very informative. It was fun. It was interesting and really engaging. I would recommend it to any Gahanna resident."

Melanie Hill shared those thoughts moments after graduating from the second Gahanna Citizen's Academy in late spring.

The eight-week Academy provided residents with a behind-the-scenes look at how local government operates, how decisions are made, and how City funds are invested – ultimately giving those who participated the knowledge and connections to make an impact on the community.

"We really enjoyed being around other Gahanna residents, meeting people who live in different parts of the City and the staff in all the different city departments," Hill said. "They're really down to earth people."

The Academy began in March, with participants engaging with the Mayor, City Council members, and the City Attorney to learn more about their roles. It continued with them learning about funding decisions, capital improvement planning, and how economic development drives local growth, while also gaining firsthand knowledge about how the City's Parks & Recreation Department plans events and keeps our green spaces clean and vibrant.

"We didn't know some of the grand visions for the park system and the trail system, and I think it's really interesting to see how all that connects, because we love our parks and trails," said Todd Thomas, who moved to Gahanna last year with his wife, Shannon. "I don't think we knew necessarily how the City was funded, and it was exciting to learn about some of those things, where your tax dollars go, how that works, and how projects get decided upon."

Added Shannon Thomas, "You got a better understanding of how everything works, the opportunities to get involved, and who to contact for things. I think that it was a really great opportunity to feel like you just had a better idea of how all the mechanisms work behind the scenes."

As participants explored how the City operates and serves residents, many sessions featured interactive, hands-on experiences. During presentations by the Engineering and Public Service Departments, attendees learned how clean, safe water reaches our homes –



and even had the chance to climb inside a snow plow, gaining a new appreciation for the massive vehicles that are used to keep our roads clear during winter storms. The Gahanna Division of Police, in partnership with the Mifflin Township Fire Department, showcased their emergency response vehicles and equipment, and provided a behind-the-scenes tour of the 911 communications center.

On the final evening of the course, the class members had a special opportunity to become the first residents to see inside of 825 Tech Center Drive – the future combined home of three critical city operations – the new Police Headquarters, Senior Center, and City Hall. The exclusive look at the developing facility left the group energized and optimistic about the future of Gahanna.

"I think what's great about it is how sustainable it is," said Don Glass. "You know, 30, 40 or 50 years from now, that building is still going to be there. If you're a senior in this town, you are not ignored. That Senior Center is going to be twice the size as it is now. I'm so proud of living in Gahanna, and I can't wait for everybody else to see that, because I truly believe that's probably going to be, probably one of the best City Hall, Police and Senior Centers in the state of Ohio."

Dr. Bruce Massau, a member of the Senior Center, shared in that excitement.

"It was awesome," he said of the facility. "The functionality of every space has a reason and a purpose."

As many participants shared, completing the Academy allows them to be stewards of Gahanna – sharing information and insight with others who live or work in the community.

"When you go out, you can educate people in the community," Massau shared. "So, if they have a question, you can say, 'I attended the Academy and guess what? I've got a pretty good idea of what's going on.'"

Planning for the 2026 Citizen's Academy is underway now. If you are interested in being a part of the next class, keep an eye on Gahanna.gov, the City's social media pages and newsletters for more information. ♦

Meet The City

Bridging the Gap

How Gahanna First Responders are Building Trust, Care and Compassion with Residents

By Dan Pearlman

The Gahanna Division of Police and the Mifflin Township Fire Department have a strong history of working side by side, but a growing partnership is taking their collaboration to a new level. Community Liaison Officers Ann Jodon and Blair Thomas, together with Mifflin Township Community Paramedic Beth DeConnick, are leading efforts to connect residents with vital resources — bridging the gap between public safety and community support.

Together, the three public servants bring more than 55 years of experience as first responders to those they serve.

"I like the aspect of being able to help people as an officer," Jodon said.

DeConnick comes from a family deeply rooted in service — her father was the Mifflin Township Fire Chief, and her mother was a nurse. That legacy shaped her path.

"I grew up with the thought that you are here to help others," she shared. "That led me to the fire service, because you are always that person. When someone's in need, they always call you. I love that feeling of being able to give back and to be the one who is called."

DeConnick, Jodon, and Thomas communicate daily as they work together, sharing resources and information to better serve the community.

A typical day for Thomas and Jodon starts with reviewing calls that came in and identifying those that fall outside of what many would consider traditional police work. They mainly focus on mental health calls — connecting an individual or a family with resources both in Gahanna and throughout Franklin County that can help them. Providing continuity of care between first responders and available community resources is the core of their mission as a team.

"It's rewarding because we get to build relationships with community members, and you know you get to have an impact on peoples' lives," said Thomas. "It also lessens the response for

other officers, when it's maybe not a police-related function, so they are more able to focus on immediate emergencies, traffic details and crimes in progress."

Likewise, DeConnick's work frees other firefighters and paramedics to respond to more emergent situations, as she typically connects residents with medical resources that they may not have otherwise known are available.

"There's a whole array of things that people need, but they are in a long hallway full of doors, and they don't know which door to open," she explained. "I'm the one they can call, and I can point them directly in the door that they need to go in, whether they need financial assistance, housing assistance, medical assistance, or help with transportation. I'm a walking resource."

"There's a whole array of things that people need, but they are in a long hallway full of doors, and they don't know which door to open. I'm the one they can call, and I can point them directly in the door that they need to go in, whether they need financial assistance, housing assistance, medical assistance or help with transportation. I'm a walking resource."

All three first responders are "walking resources" who are also heavily involved in the community.



↑ L-R: Community Liaison Officer Ann Jodon, Community Paramedic Beth DeConnick and Community Liaison Officer Blair Thomas

Jodon and Thomas took the lead in planning the City's inaugural Gahanna Mind and Wellness Fair in May, which brought together 20 resource providers who shared information about their services with community members. All three first responders were there to greet attendees and take part.

This summer, the officers will spend time visiting campers in the City's Summer Camps, continuing their commitment to community engagement. Similar to their involvement with the Starfish Assignment during the school year – where they visit classrooms, read to students, provide a copy of the book, and talk about their roles as police officers – these summer visits help to build positive relationships with youth in a relaxed, supportive environment.

"We are there to show them that we're a friend and we're here to help you," said Jodon. "It shows that we are human, and we can relate with the community. It builds that relationship as well."

Ultimately, the Community Liaison Officer and Community Paramedic roles – like those of all first responders – are largely centered on building relationships with the people they serve, both directly and indirectly. In continuing to work together, all three hope the younger generation sees them helping others and is inspired to follow in their footsteps by choosing to give back as first responders as well.

"I love what I do, because I get to interact with peoples' everyday lives," Thomas explained. "We're here for whatever they might need, and we get to spend extra time with them." ♦

Development News



Planted with Purpose:

Why Gahanna was the Right Place to Grow

An Entrepreneur's Story of Sugar, Success & Support

By Tia Ramey

When J'nez Thomas was searching for the perfect place to open her business, she knew she wanted more than just a storefront — she wanted a community. A veteran with a passion for healthy living and beauty, Thomas found everything she was looking for — and more — in Gahanna.

Today, her business Sugaring NYC-Gahanna, located in the heart of Creekside, is buzzing with energy. Her team of licensed aestheticians offers a revolutionary alternative to waxing, using all-natural, edible (yes, edible!) sugaring paste made from organic sugar, purified water, and organic lemon extract.

As Gahanna continues to grow as a hub for health, wellness, and eco-conscious living, it's no surprise the community has embraced Thomas' new business with open arms. Over the past year and a half, the City has welcomed a wave of new and expanding ventures in medical aesthetics, behavioral health, fitness, and holistic care, including Columbus Aesthetics & Plastic Surgery, Handcrafted Aesthetics, Skin & Sugar, Sunshine Beauty (under new ownership), Recreate Behavioral Health, Performance Therapy Fitness, and Performance Health Institute. Even mindfulness and movement have found a place, with the addition of Rasa Yoga — further solidifying Gahanna's reputation as a community that values whole-person wellness.

"Our team takes building relationships with the business community seriously," said Jeff Gottke, Gahanna's Economic Development Director. "We're proud to be a city where small businesses — especially those in the health and wellness sector — can grow, thrive, and feel truly supported."

So, why did Thomas decide Gahanna was the right place to grow her venture?

Originally eyeing Clintonville for the foot traffic, Thomas shifted her focus after learning more about Gahanna.

"I started thinking about the big picture," she said. "Intel, Honda, and all these major companies are investing in the area. That told me Gahanna is a city on the rise."

Gahanna's central location and free parking in the downtown, walkable Creekside District immediately stood out. But what sealed the deal was Gahanna's community vibe and diversity.

"I saw so many different people at the Creekside Live events and the [Creekside] Blues & Jazz Festival," recalled Thomas. "That made me feel like my business would be welcome here. And the accessibility here is incredible. Our location has ramps that are wheelchair-friendly, which means we can welcome customers of all abilities."

Opening a franchise is no easy feat, and Thomas faced her fair share of challenges, especially when an issue with a contractor stalled her project.

"I had to take over the construction project myself," she recounted.

Amid that chaos, she found an unexpected ally: the team at the City of Gahanna.

"I'd show up with my plans and ask about permits," she recalled. "The City team didn't just hand me the paperwork, they gave me real advice. Once they realized my situation, they said, 'we're going to help you get there.' And we did. We opened in September."

Many departments played a role in providing steady guidance throughout the process, offering solutions instead of red tape.

"I don't know if it's above and beyond," Thomas said with a smile, "but that's how they show up every day."

What truly sets Gahanna apart for small business owners, Thomas said, is the strong network of support throughout the

community. In addition to the support from the City, Visit Gahanna helped to spread the word about her business, while fellow Creekside businesses like The Fable Collection welcomed her with open arms.

The Gahanna Area Chamber of Commerce shared job openings and valuable resources, and partners such as Upper Cup Coffee and Bellapalooza amplified her launch through collaborations and pop-up events. Even the Residences at Creekside team got involved by promoting Sugaring NYC to their residents, demonstrating the community-wide commitment to helping new businesses thrive.

"The people here lift you up," Thomas said. "Neighbors, other business owners, total strangers — everyone wants to see you succeed."

What advice does Thomas have for those thinking about starting a business in Gahanna?

"Introduce yourself," she said. "People are friendly and helpful, but you have to take the first step. Build those connections early. This is a city where relationships matter, and people want to help."

When asked what she loves most about running her business in Gahanna, Thomas did not hesitate: "The people. Our customer base is beautifully diverse, and so is our team. Representation matters, and here, I get to show up for my community every day."

In Gahanna, Thomas found more than just a place to open a business — she found a network, and a thriving community that welcomes innovation, diversity, and bold dreams.

Are you thinking about starting your own business? Take it from Thomas: "Gahanna is where you want to be."

If you or someone you know is interested in opening or expanding a business in Gahanna, contact the City's Department of Economic Development at (614) 342-4020.



An Encore Performance

GLHS Alumni Unite for Musical in Beloved High School Auditorium

By Erick Starkey



Spanning across different generations, alumni from around the country are brushing off their dancing shoes as they prepare to return to Gahanna Lincoln High School for a first-ever alumni performance of *42nd Street* the weekend of July 25-27.

The show grew from an idea by Cindi Macioce, former theatre teacher at GLHS for 28 years, and Jeff Shellhammer, who retired after 25 years directing the GLHS bands. The pair worked on countless shows and musicals together during their time as colleagues at the high school, and they are now putting their time and

talents together for a musical celebration for all the alumni who have gone through the arts programs in Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools.

"You always know something's up when he says to you, 'Let's have lunch,'" Macioce said of Shellhammer. "It has since snowballed into hoping to do a big thing beautifully and give back to our community."

Since that lunch, the pair has worked on putting a team together to achieve their goal of an alumni show this summer. There is a production team, largely comprised of alumni or former educators,

including Macioce and Shellhammer, who will serve as director and musical director, respectively, to lead the cast, crew and orchestra. Approximately 80 alumni will be part of the show, with 41 taking on stage roles, 21 playing in the pit orchestra, and at least 15 serving as the stage crew. These alumni, representing decades of students, are returning to a place where they shared memories to work together again.

"It is a joy to be working adult to adult and finding out more about where they have gone, what they have done and what they have experienced,"

“Siri and I have been performing together for the better part of half our lives: middle school talent shows, high school and college musicals and concerts and all sorts of choral singing since. But this one’s different. This space and this community played a big role in bringing us together. So getting to share the stage here, now, feels full-circle in the best way.”

Shellhammer said of reconnecting with his former students. “We just enjoy the time together with what they bring to the table.”

The show has been cast and everyone is preparing for their individual parts to make the performances a success. Still being local to Gahanna was not a prerequisite for being in the show. Some performers are able to collaborate in person regularly, while others will only be in town the week of the show. To help everyone get on the same page, the team is using a combination of in-person and virtual meetings. For the on-stage numbers, current GLHS students have been enlisted to stand in as characters for out of town alumni to follow and know their roles better.

Ben Bratton, GLHS Class of 2022, will be coming in for the show from Florida where he is a student at Florida Southern College, studying to get his degree in Technical Theatre with a focus in Lighting Design. Not only will his role in the show offer him an opportunity to reconnect with his alma mater, but it will also prepare him for his future.

“Going from Florida to Ohio, trying to do as much prep work as I can, will help me be successful for the show,” he said. “This is a learning experience, this really being the first non-collegiate show that I’ve been the lighting designer for. I’ve taken multiple lessons that I’ve learned from different shows, both from here in college and in high school.”

According to Shellhammer, *42nd Street* was chosen because it is pure, traditional entertainment. It is a show that is open to families – and it was also scheduled to be the show in 2021, when it was canceled due to the pandemic. For some alumni, *42nd Street* also provides more meaning.

“*42nd Street* was one of the musicals I played in the pit orchestra for while I was a student at Gahanna in the

early 2000s, so it feels like a ‘full circle’ moment to be doing it again, one final time,” said Ann Marie (Toledo) Dunnington, who will be playing the flute and the piccolo in the pit orchestra.

For Jace and Siri Nguyen, regardless of which show was picked, they knew that this summer’s performances would be special. The pair met through the arts in GJPS and are now married and both teach high school choir in the area. *42nd Street* is now providing them with the opportunity to return to the stage they shared during their formative years together. Jace will be playing the role of Billy Lawlor and Siri will be Peggy Sawyer.

“Siri and I have been performing together for the better part of half our lives: middle school talent shows, high school and college musicals and concerts and all sorts of choral singing since,” said Jace Nguyen, who will also be flanked during the summer show by some additional family members who are GLHS alums. “But this one’s different. This space and this community played a big role in bringing us together. So getting to share the stage here, now, feels full-circle in the best way.”

The musical will have four showings from July 25-27. Proceeds from the show will benefit the Gahanna-Jefferson Education Foundation, which is the featured sponsor, with an additional donation being made to Gahanna Residents in Need (GRIN). Tickets have officially gone on sale and are available at GLHSAlumniMusical.com/Tickets/, with a 7:30 p.m. show on July 25, two shows on July 26 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and a matinee show on July 27 at 2 p.m.

“It’s going to take on a life of its own and at 7:30 on July 25, it’s their show,” Macioce said. “It’s the community’s show. We’re hopeful that everyone enjoys the experience and creates some more good memories in that space.” ♦

Growing in Gahanna

Your Insider Scoop to Business News in the City

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Bowl Boba Gahanna

366 S. Hamilton Rd.
BowlBoba.com

Burns & Scalo Roofing

1070 Tech Center Dr.
BurnsScaloOhio.com

Cloud9 Cabinetry

309 Stoneridge Ln.
Cloud9Cabinetry.com

Evexia Medical Weight Loss

146 Granville St., Suite D
EvexiaMedicalWeightLoss.com

Performance Health Institute

788 Morrison Rd.
PHStrength.com

Molar and Friends Pediatric Dentistry

1110 Beecher Crossing North, Suite C
MolarandFriends.com

Performance Therapy Fitness

358 A S. Hamilton Rd.
PerformanceTherapy1.com

Rosebud Dental & Wellness

610 Taylor Station Rd., Suite C
RosebudDental.com

Royal Moon Reptiles

128 Granville St.
RoyalMoonReptiles.com

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East African Coffee House

4359 Morse Rd.
EastAfricanCoffeeHouse.com

Ohio Gastroenterology

722 Buckles Ct. N.
OhioGastro.com/Gahanna/
Office Opened March 3, 2025
Anticipated Opening of Center (Procedures) Late 2025

Resch's Bakery

150 N. Hamilton Rd.
ReschBakery.com
Anticipated Opening Summer 2025

SGT Coffee Co.

140 N. High St.
SGTCoffee.co
Anticipated Opening Summer 2025

Soul 2 Go

134 N. Hamilton Rd.
Soul2GoOhio.com
Anticipated Opening Summer 2025



Numbers to Know

If you have any questions, or if we can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us directly:

City Attorney: (614) 342-4096

City Council: (614) 342-4090

City Hall (Front Desk): (614) 342-4000

Code Enforcement: (614) 342-4022

Engineering: (614) 342-4050

Mayor's Court: (614) 342-4080

Mayor's Office: (614) 342-4045

Parks & Recreation: (614) 342-4250

Police (non-emergency): (614) 342-4240

Public Service:

General: (614) 342-4005

Trash, Recycling, and Water Bills: (614) 342-4440

Streets, Streetlights, and Potholes: (614) 342-4425

Senior Center: (614) 342-4265

Save the Date Our Gahanna: A Sweet Celebration

August 26, 2025 Creekside, 4-7 p.m.

Join us, **August 26th**, for a sweet celebration and the exciting reveal of the Our Gahanna draft strategic plan! You've helped shape the vision by sharing your thoughts—now it's time to see the results. Be part of the next step in building Gahanna's future together.

Stay tuned for more event details at OurGahanna.com!



James Malhame on the
new Mountain Bike Trail at
Academy Park →

RESIDENT LED,

RIDER

APPROVED

Gahanna's Newest Trail Raises the Bar for Mountain Biking in the City

By Dan Pearlman

Nestled in the woods at Academy Park, Gahanna's newest addition to its expansive parks system is ready to ride. The City's new Mountain Bike Trail is already drawing riders of all skill levels and making a strong first impression.

"The [other] trails nearby are very fun, they're good trails, and I was expecting this to be on par with them, but riding there is just a lot of fun," said 15-year-old James Malhame. "It is way above my expectations."

Malhame, a Gahanna resident, is nationally ranked in the top 15 for mountain bike riders by USA Cycling. A rider since he was 4-years-old, he is no stranger to having to travel at least 20 minutes from his Gahanna home to train. Now, with the new addition to Academy Park, he and many others can hop on their bikes and hit the new trail for training in a matter of minutes.

Malhame's love for mountain biking comes naturally, as he and his father, Kevin, founded the Columbus Academy

mountain biking team. Kevin Malhame serves as a coach for the team, and he is equally thrilled with the ability to now enjoy the terrain on two wheels, close to home.

"I can't overstate how grateful I am to have the Trail in the community," Kevin Malhame said. "It's one thing to just have a random trail through the woods that you can go ride, but to have a purpose-built trail in such a great location – for me, it feels like a huge asset."

That asset began coming to life more than seven years ago, when a group of local residents who shared a passion for mountain biking began talking about opportunities for a trail in Gahanna. The residents – Kevin McGinn, Chris Irvin, and Hugh Ralston – eventually approached the City's Department of Parks & Recreation with their idea and vision for a mountain bike trail at Academy Woods.

Working with the residents, the City began the process of evaluating the topography and environmental conditions of the site, visiting other mountain biking trails in the region,

researching the site, and gathering input from other organizations as to how the trail could be developed.

To assist with the project, the City also explored options for outside funding sources, ultimately securing a grant from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) to provide an environmental assessment of the area, which helped move the project forward. Capital funding, generated from Issue 12 dollars, was approved by City Council in 2022, enabling the Administration to move forward with the final design and planning of the nearly three-mile trail.

"The Mountain Bike Trail is the result of years of collaboration, vision and passion from both our community and our team here in the City," said Stephania Ferrell, Director of Parks & Recreation. "We are proud to now offer this trail that not only meets the needs and desires of riders of all skill levels, but also highlights the natural beauty of Academy Park."

Added Harvey McCluskey, who serves as a board member on both the Gahanna Parks & Recreation Board and the Central Ohio Mountain Biking Organization, "I think it's fabulous. I think it's wonderful. Having been a coach in Gahanna Junior League sports and knowing that those trails are behind some of the diamonds at Academy Park, walking some of them – I think it's wonderful that that space has been repurposed and just made so that everyone in the community now has access to it."



James Malhame on the new Mountain Bike Trail at Academy Park ↓



Riders enjoying the Mountain Bike Trail at Academy Park ↓

The Trail features a variety of elements such as humps, hills, banked turns and more.

"I feel like they did a great job of packing a lot of trail into a very small area," said Kevin Malhame. "I think most of the other places you would go to mountain bike around Central Ohio – there's just a lot more acreage and a lot more terrain to work with. This feels much more like this cool urban project."

It is a project that will benefit the team at Columbus Academy, as those middle school and high school riders are sure to practice there for years to come.

But it is not just those who love mountain biking now who can enjoy it, as both Malhames look forward to the sport growing in the Academy Park woods.

"I'm super excited to be able to ride it for the next four years before going to college," said James Malhame.

Kevin Malhame added, "The town of Gahanna will have people who get interested in mountain biking that would probably never have been curious about it, and just the accessibility makes a big difference." ♦



A RECIPE FOR *Neighborhood Connection*

Local Resident Serves Up Community Spirit, One Food Truck at a Time

By Tia Ramey

In a time when packed calendars and digital distractions often take priority over face-to-face connection, it is easy to feel like the sense of community has taken a back seat. But residents like Cris Ferrante are a reminder that building community is still possible with a little effort and a lot of heart.

Through Bryn Mawr Park Food Truck Nights, Ferrante is helping to ensure Gahanna remains a place where community spirit thrives and small-town charm endures. In the heart of his neighborhood, he is serving up more than just great food – he is creating space for connection, kindness, and a sense of belonging, one Thursday evening at a time.

What began as a casual idea has grown into a cherished weekly tradition. From April through October, residents of Bryn Mawr Estates and surrounding neighborhoods gather every Thursday night to enjoy food, laughter, and fellowship. The simple act of sharing a meal has blossomed into something much bigger: a celebration of community.

At the center of it all is Ferrante, a neighbor with a vision and a deep love for bringing people together.

“The first party had a band,” Ferrante recalled with a smile. “We had 380 orders that night. 45 minutes in, the food truck had to send for more food! By the third year, we had over 500 people showing up, with live music and a good time all around.”

Now in its eighth year, the event has become more than a seasonal gathering. It is a symbol of Gahanna’s neighborhood pride – a place where neighbors step outside, reach across fences, and commit to building something meaningful together.

“A connected community is a safer community,” Ferrante said. “And it’s a happier one, too.”

That belief was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic. With large gatherings on hold, Ferrante pivoted. Instead of pausing the tradition entirely, he invited one food truck and one dessert truck each week, offering a safe, simple way for neighbors to stay engaged and connected. Today, there is a waitlist of food trucks hoping for a spot, eager to experience the Gahanna way of community collaboration.

“I was really worried about the lack of social connection,” Ferrante explained. “Human beings are supposed to engage. It was not about the food. It was about keeping people connected.”

Bryn Mawr resident Bill Warner recalled the isolation he felt during the pandemic and hailed the neighborhood get-togethers as a blessing.

“I’ve made a lot of friends from them, and the neighborhood has decided that this camaraderie that we now have is something special that other people don’t have,” he said.

Visit on any given Thursday, and you will see exactly what makes this community special: kids playing in the park, teens biking by, neighbors clustered in chairs sharing a laugh, and the inviting aroma of fresh street food in the air. Ferrante credits the warmth of the neighborhood for the event’s lasting success.

“If we see a neighbor with a pile of mulch in the driveway, we ask if they need a hand,” he said. “If someone needs to borrow a tool, we’re happy to help. We’re about taking care of each other here.”



↑ Chris Ferrante

Over the years, Ferrante has watched the community grow not just in numbers, but in spirit.

“Our neighborhood has become more diverse, and everyone is welcomed,” he said. “That’s what makes it special.”

The ripple effect has been powerful. Local news outlets have highlighted the events, and some new residents say they were drawn to the area specifically because of the welcoming, inclusive culture Ferrante helped foster.

What is his advice to those hoping to spark something similar in their own community?

“It only takes a few people to get out there, knock on doors, and introduce themselves,” he explained. “Start something small – once a week or even once a month. It might be hard to find a neighborhood like this, but you can build one.”

“It’s a great opportunity to get to know everyone,” said Colleen O’Connell, a regular attendee since 2020. “It’s easy to forget how important community is.”

Ferrante has shown that community is not something that just happens, but it is something we create. With a little initiative, a lot of heart, and maybe a food truck or two, we can all craft space for our neighbors to feel seen, supported, and celebrated.

Because when we choose to connect, we choose to care. That is what makes Gahanna unique, and that is how Gahanna continues to grow, together. ♦



← Joshua Ford

A DREAM FULFILLED IN SCARLET AND GRAY

A Gahanna Native is Set to Strut
into The 'Shoe

By Dan Pearlman

Just before the Ohio State Buckeyes begin the defense of their national title, a twirling baton will fall from the sky above Ohio Stadium.

The moment it lands in Joshua Ford's hands, a dream will come true – a dream that began growing in Gahanna several years ago.

"I have enjoyed marching band, and appreciated everything that they do, from the time that I was walking," Ford said.

A native of Gahanna, Ford is the new Drum Major for The Ohio State University Marching Band – holding one of the Band's most prestigious positions.



← Joshua Ford



← Joshua Ford

"Knowing how much work I had spent over the past eight years to get to this position, it was really just like – OK, I finally did it," he explained. "This has just been a goal for me to hold this position."

Ford's passion for twirling is deeply rooted in a family legacy of marching band excellence. His interest began to take shape when he watched his sister perform in the marching band at Gahanna Middle School West. Inspired by his sister's performance, he initially picked up the trumpet. But everything changed when he saw Gahanna's Drum Major in action. In that moment, he knew that he didn't just want to be in the band – he wanted to take on that iconic role himself – just as his uncle did at both Gahanna and Ohio State.

"Just seeing my uncle do it for so many years and then seeing someone at Gahanna doing it, I was like, 'This is an open door that I can take,'" Ford said. "After that, I told my

mom that I really wanted to start learning, and I got my first baton for Christmas that year."

After years of dedicated practice and refining his skills, Ford went on to serve as Drum Major for the Gahanna Lincoln High School Marching Band in his senior year.

Upon graduating from GLHS in 2022, he joined the Ohio State Marching Band, where he served as the Assistant Drum Major for two years before being selected as Head Drum Major in April of this year.

Being Drum Major of the Ohio State Marching Band comes with a significant amount of responsibility, including performing at a very high level. In addition to executing the traditional backbend at midfield, leading the band down the field, and tossing the baton over the goal post as part of the pre-game ritual, the Drum Major is the Squad Leader for D-Row - band members who hope to be the Drum Major themselves.



↑ Joshua Ford

**"THE FACT THAT GAHANNA
HAS HAD SO MANY
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MAKE THE OHIO STATE
MARCHING BAND AND HOLD
THESE POSITIONS, I THINK
IS JUST A TESTAMENT TO
THE BAND PROGRAM."**

As Ford mentors younger band members who dream of becoming Drum Major one day, he is also keenly aware that four other Gahanna alumni have gone on to hold that very title at Ohio State in the past 30 years – adding yet another legacy he is proud to be a part of and inspired to uphold.

"The fact that Gahanna has had so many different people this year and in years past make the Ohio State Marching Band and hold these positions, I think is just a testament to the band program," Ford said.

Rob Cebriak, Director of Bands at Gahanna Lincoln High School, is among those who are thrilled to know that Ford is Ohio State's newest Drum Major, continuing the long line of achievements of all Gahanna alumni who have continued their musical journeys in college.

"We have worked hard to create and maintain a culture of excellence and responsibility," Cebriak said. "As a band, we have a marching style that is similar

to Ohio State's, and we emphasize the importance of entertaining our crowds instead of competing for trophies. Our students are successful because they have become excellent musicians and because they are fine young men and women. It is an honor to work with them every day."

Now, it is Ford's honor to take what started as a dream in Gahanna to one of the country's biggest stages, knowing that when his baton floats through the Ohio Stadium air for the first time this season, his hometown will be watching with tremendous pride.

Thinking about that moment, he stated, "All the support I've gotten from Gahanna will definitely be something I'm thinking about – from my family, to my girlfriend and all of her friends and her family, to all of the directing staff, to all of the people who I was in band with who supported me and helped get me to the position that I'm in today." ♦

Savory Bowls and Soulful Eats

Two Fan-Favorites Bring Their Signature Dishes to Gahanna

By Dan Pearlman

As Gahanna's flourishing food scene continues to expand, two very popular restaurants are growing their businesses in the City.

Bowl Boba began dishing out its Asian fusion cuisine in Grove City in 2023. The restaurant's wildly popular bowls and beverages led to Simon Ren and Bowl Boba's other owners launching the search for a new location. Ultimately, they landed at 366 S. Hamilton Road in the Hunter's Ridge Shopping Center, opening their new doors to customers in February.

"Before we opened, I came here, looked around and talked to a few people," Ren explained. "I think we have a very friendly community here."

And the friendly community is already scooping and sipping Bowl Boba's offerings. The wide-ranging menu includes ramen bowls, rice bowls, poke bowls and stir fried bowls, as well as the boba teas that are brewed fresh every day.

"We have a big variety on the menu for you to choose from," Ren said. "There are many items on the menu that you probably wouldn't find at other restaurants. It's traditional and flavorful."

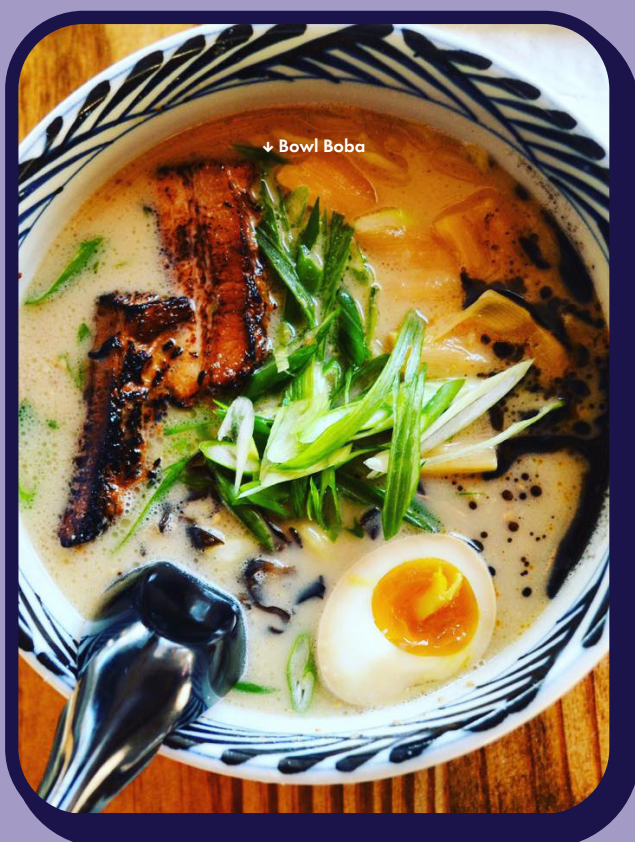
As Ren hopes to continue building his business in Gahanna, he noted that Bowl Boba's new location along Hamilton Road, within close proximity to John Glenn International Airport and the City's industrial area, played a big role in the decision to grow here.



← Bowl Boba



↑ Soul 2 Go



↓ Bowl Boba

"Customers don't have to travel to the other side of town to get this kind of food now," he added.

Gahanna's prime location and supportive environment for small businesses similarly played a role in the owners of Soul 2 Go selecting the City as the home of their newest location.

"We know that by opening in Gahanna, it definitely fills a gap in the footprint in the Columbus metropolitan area that we are trying to get – further east and northeast," Keith J.D. Hightower said.

Hightower, his brothers – Will and Kevin D. Hightower – and Jerome Ross, founded Soul 2 Go with a delivery and carry out location in 2021. Soul 2 Go's wide variety of soul foods and southern-inspired dishes were so popular that the business partners later opened a brick and mortar location downtown, before selecting Gahanna to be the home of their third and newest location at 134 N. Hamilton Road, in the same shopping center as La Navona and the soon to open Resch's Bakery.

"We're totally thrilled," said Will Hightower, who also carries the title of Soul 2 Go's Chef. "Gahanna is a good place to be."

The new location will have a handful of tables, but mostly cater to delivery and carry-out clientele – those looking to fill up on a variety of flavorful foods, including



crispy fried chicken, catfish nuggets, cornbread, peach cobbler and the ever-popular Signature Soul Food Bowl, which is comprised of fried chicken breast, mac and cheese, greens and candied yams.

"You'll be able to get a home-cooked meal to go, and that's kind of the unique thing about it," Will Hightower explained. "Everything is seasoned with love. It tastes like your mother, your grandmother or your great grandmother cooked it."

While Soul 2 Go and Bowl Boba are similar in that they love Gahanna's prime location in Central Ohio, the owners of both are also excited to build their footprints within the City – as both urge residents to keep an eye out for them at various community events and activities.

"You guys put on some good events in the community, and we definitely want to be a good community partner," said Will Hightower. "Anywhere that we can set up a table, a tent, have samples or any of that kind of thing – being new to the community, you'll definitely see us as a part of the community." ♦

For more information:

Bowl Boba – BowlBoba.com

Soul 2 Go – Soul2GoOhio.com

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Events Calendar

These events are tentative and subject to change. Please confirm event details in advance.

Wednesday, July 23
Wednesday, August 27
Wednesday, September 24

GAHANNA MARKET
Creekside Plaza, 4 – 7 p.m.
Gahanna.gov

Friday, July 25
Friday, August 8
Friday, August 22

CREEKSIDE LIVE
Creekside Plaza, 5 – 10 p.m.
Gahanna.gov

Saturday, August 2

PELOTONIA
Morrison Road/Taylor Road, 7 a.m.
Pelotonia.org

Saturday, August 2

VETTES, RODS, AND CLASSICS
Creekside District, 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Presented by Capital City
Corvette Club
CapCityCorvette.com

Saturday, August 2

**COLUMBUS JAZZ
ORCHESTRA: LIVE AT
HEADLEY PARK**
Headley Park, 5 p.m.
Presented by the Gahanna Area
Arts Council
GahannaArts.org

Tuesday, August 5

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT
Headley Park, 6 – 8 p.m.
Gahanna.gov

Sunday, August 17

MUDDY MILER
Gahanna Swimming Pool, 1 – 4 p.m.
Presented by Tina Wedebrook,
RE/MAX Connection
Gahanna.gov

Sunday, August 24

**28TH ANNUAL TASTE OF
GAHANNA**
Edison Brewing Company,
5 – 8 p.m.
Presented by the Gahanna Area
Chamber of Commerce
GahannaChamber.org

Tuesday, August 26

OUR GAHANNA REVEAL
Creekside District, 4 – 7 p.m.
OurGahanna.com

Saturday, September 6

**CREEKSIDE HOPS & VINES
FESTIVAL**
Creekside Plaza, 6 – 11 p.m.
Presented by the Gahanna Parks &
Recreation Foundation
GahannaPRF.org

Saturday, September 20

TOUCH A TRUCK
Hannah Park, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Gahanna.gov

Sunday, September 28

MILL STREET MARKET
Creekside District, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Presented by the Gahanna
Historical Society
GahannaHistory.com

**Thursday, October 2 through
Monday, October 6**

**THE VIETNAM TRAVELING
MEMORIAL WALL**
Veterans Memorial Park
Presented by Gahanna American
Legion Post 797
GahannaVets.org

Saturday, October 11

BASSETFEST
Pizzurro Dog Park, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Presented by Ohio Basset
Hound Rescue
OhioBassetRescue.org

Friday, October 24

**GREAT GAHANNA GOBLIN
FEST**
Academy Park, 5:30 - 9:30 p.m.
Presented by KEMBA Financial
Credit Union
Gahanna.gov

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