

2025 ANNUAL REPORT





## Letter FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It amazes me how much MidTown has changed since our family moved here. There has always been a particular vibe in this district, a pulse that comes from living in the heart of our community. There are always new businesses to frequent, revitalized spaces to explore, and plenty of excuses to get the neighbors together for a party.

It also amazes me that for the past seven years, I've had the opportunity and honor to serve here as the executive director, welcoming those new businesses, beautifying shared spaces, playing drums at the MidTown GetDown! During this time, I've had the privilege of seeing projects come to fruition and, in recent years, have had the chance to work with many of you on new projects from the ground up. Those experiences have been priceless to us.

MidTown kicked off last year wrapped in packing tape and buried in boxes as we moved into our new office. That momentum carried forward through the rest of the year, from building snowmen on the lawn last January to sipping hot cocoa with Santa in December. It was a year when the rubber really met the road, and a lot of the things we set in motion last year will come to fruition in the next, which will also mark our 20th anniversary.

There is so much to look forward to, and I am grateful for your support, your involvement, and the many ways you help keep MidTown moving forward.

“I couldn't be more excited for the efforts and investment being poured into the beautification and enhancement of MidTown.

This continued growth and renewal build upon the already strong sense of pride that makes MidTown the heart of our city and a vibrant, welcoming hub for our entire community.”

—Tyler Pritchard, Board President 2025-2027

Julio A. Portillo, Jr.  
Executive Director



## STRATEGIC Directions

- 1 Neighborhood Enhancement & Sense of Place**  
Enliven and strengthen neighborhoods and promote MidTown's distinctive character and convenience
- 2 Economic Development**  
Actively encourage economic development opportunities as a catalyst and facilitator
- 3 Business Support**  
Support and promote MidTown businesses
- 4 Organizational Capacity**  
Sustain the organization to realize our mission through projects and programs
- 5 Active Transportation and Connections**  
Encourage active transportation options, celebrate community places of pride, and work to better connect people and places
- 6 Comprehensive Campaign**  
Support all strategic initiatives, achieve our mission of sustaining & enhancing neighborhoods & business within MidTown to make MidTown EVEN better

## MIDTOWN HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 MidTown Alliance & Map
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- 16 MidTown Mingle

## Community & Economic Development

In 2025, MidTown was on the move. New doors opened, overlooked spaces received loving attention, and more neighbors chose to invest right here. Our Community & Economic Development work focused on helping businesses and property owners move from good ideas to concrete progress, whether that meant making a connection, clearing a hurdle, or celebrating a ribbon cutting.

Through the MidTown Business Association, we promoted local businesses, hosted mixers, and welcomed new members into a network built on visibility, collaboration, and hometown pride. We also worked with city leaders and community stakeholders to support improvements that make MidTown easier to navigate and better to enjoy, from walkable corridors to public spaces and private businesses. Each opening, upgrade, and partnership is one more step toward our 20th anniversary, and the bigger projects now coming into view.



In 2025 MidTown began beautification efforts to enhance one of its gateways at the intersection of Wynnton Road and Hilton Avenue.

## ON THE COVER

### MidTown Mural

Mural artist Chris Johnson painted MidTown's seventh public art installation through our partnership with Regional Prosperity Initiative and the property owners of Extra Space Storage at Cross Country Plaza. The mural features local landmarks like the Sarling Fountain, Dinglewood Pharmacy & Gifts, and our neighbors at The Columbus Museum.



## MIDTOWN Neighborhood Alliance

The MidTown Neighborhood Alliance reflects the daily experience of the people who call this district home, and in 2025 the Alliance brought neighbors, businesses, and community partners together to share ideas, address concerns, and create space for practical next steps. The MNA strengthens communication and trust and helps coordinate the nuts-and-bolts work that shapes quality of life: walkability, traffic, safety concerns, public art, and beautification.

Just as important, it serves as a steady listening post for MidTown, Inc., helping us stay connected to what residents value most as the district grows. In a year defined by motion, the Alliance helped make sure progress remained people-centered and community-focused. As we head toward our 20th anniversary and the larger projects coming into view beyond it, the Alliance helps ensure MidTown keeps moving forward in a way that includes everyone.



## MNA In Action

### Neighborhood Watch Groups

This initiative continues to take root and flourish, as neighbors work hand in hand to activate or revive watch group efforts across MidTown. The purpose of these groups isn't solely about reporting suspicious behavior and infrastructure issues. It's about fostering a shared sense of care, trust, and responsibility. In MidTown, you know your neighbors have your back.

### Beautify MidTown

This program provided funding for projects that visibly enhanced shared spaces across the district, from beautifying pocket parks and installing new lighting and planters, to adding illuminated signage at the Wynnton/Hilton gateway. These efforts helped bolster pride in neighborhood gateways and green spaces, making MidTown more beautiful and welcoming at every turn.

### Community & Business Grants

Over the past year, MidTown, Inc. awarded funds to support block parties, neighborhood-wide yard sales, free public concerts, and other unique boutique events. Whether it was neighbors gathering and grilling out in Hilton Heights, musicians jamming on the Tiny Stage in Lakebottom Park, outdoor enthusiasts taking in the scenery along the Witches Bike Ride, or music lovers losing themselves in the festival vibes of JarFest, these grants bring neighbors together, strengthen community bonds, and remind us why life in MidTown is always an adventure.



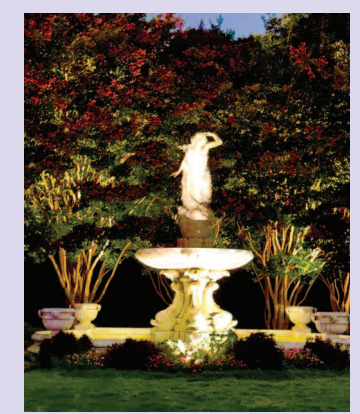
- #### SCHOOLS
- 1 Hardaway High School
  - 2 Clubview Elementary
  - 3 Richards Middle School
  - 4 Lyda Hannan Academy
  - 5 St. Elmo Center for the Gifted
  - 6 Columbus High School
  - 7 Rainey-McCullers School of the Arts
  - 8 Wynnton Arts Academy
  - 9 Rigdon Road Elementary
  - 10 G.W. Carver High School
  - 11 J.D. Davis Elementary
  - 12 Thomas H. Brewer Elementary

- #### PARKS
- A Lakebottom/Weracoba Park
  - B Linwood-Tillis Park
  - C MidTown Children's Bicycle Playground
  - D Little Wildwood Park
  - E The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park
  - F Boxwood Park
  - G Theo McGee Park
  - H Ewart/South Lawyers Lane Park

- #### RECREATION CENTERS
- I Michael Fluellen Recreation Center
  - J Marianna Gallops Senior Center
  - K Ardahlia Mack Recreation Center
  - L Columbus Muse

--- Bicycle Lanes  
 --- Dragonfly Trail

In 2025, we added color-changing submersible and exterior accent lights to the Sarling Fountain.



## THE MIDTOWN Business Association

The MBA is a membership-based program of MidTown, Inc. built to help local businesses get seen, get connected, and get supported. Members benefit from marketing and storytelling through social media and newsletters, networking opportunities, ribbon cuttings, local media support when available, and placement in our online business directory. Just as important, the MBA helps businesses meet each other, share customers, and collaborate, strengthening the economic health and neighborhood-scale charm of MidTown's commercial corridors.

## 6 NEW MEMBERS

- \* The Office of ALJ
- \* Balthazar 7 Properties, LLC
- \* Ker-Fox Photography
- \* The Little Village on 13th
- \* Ruffined Pet Wellness Club
- \* Sustainable Nutrition Counseling

### PROFILE

#### Ruffined Pet Wellness Club A MIDTOWN "PET PROJECT"

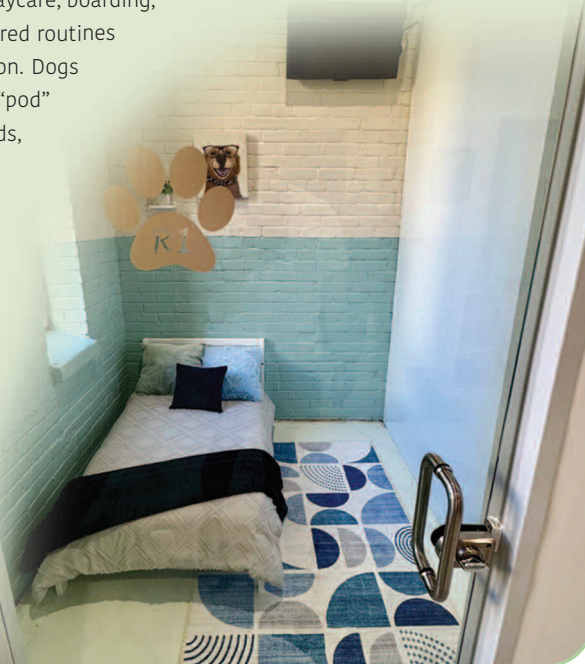
Wassel and Jarnetha Lewis didn't set out to start a business. They simply sought to find the perfect place to care for Sidon, their 120-pound Great Pyrenees. In their search, they discovered a community need: the quality of care for larger dogs felt less like care, and more like containment. Big dogs deserve big dignity, and the Lewises transformed that belief into the business that became Ruffined Pet Wellness Club.



Ruffined opened in September at 2210 Wynnton Road, Suite 113, tucked toward the back of the renovated Wynnton Building. Built around a wellness-and-enrichment model, the facility offers daycare, boarding, and grooming with structured routines and individualized attention. Dogs can settle into cage-free "pod" suites with orthopedic beds,

spend their days in group play or customized activities, and take advantage of water play and a spa-like grooming environment, with additional programming planned as the business grows.

MidTown walked with the Lewises through the full arc of opening, from landing in the right location to early planning, network connections, and a ribbon cutting that introduced Ruffined to the community. Ruffined also benefited from support through the Economic Redevelopment Loan Fund, which helped move the vision from concept to opening day. It's a strong example of what we want more of in MidTown: locally-rooted businesses, thoughtfully designed, built to serve real needs in real life.



#### LITTLE VILLAGE ON 13TH

Little Village on 13th opened in August 2025 and became a favorite gathering spot for families with children. As Columbus's first soft play café, it's designed as a "tiny town," where kids can move from a supermarket to a veterinarian's office to a school, getting absorbed in pretend play in a calm, safe environment that encourages imagination and exploration. Created by Angie and Mike Maldonado, Little Village offers play passes, tiered memberships, and birthday party packages, with perks that make it easy for families to return often and build community.



#### KER-FOX PHOTOGRAPHY

Led by award-winning photographer Neely Ker-Fox and brings world-class visual storytelling to MidTown with a distinctly human touch. The studio is known for emotive, documentary-style portraits that honor real life as it happens, and its work spans family, motherhood, birth, underwater, and commercial photography, serving clients locally and beyond. It's the kind of creative home base that helps MidTown look like itself, and helps our community tell its story well.



#### THE OFFICE OF ALJ

The office of ALJ brings a grounded kind of excellence to MidTown's business community: serious advocacy delivered with clear communication and steady support. Founded by Anthony Johnson, Esq., the practice focuses on criminal defense and personal injury work across Georgia, standing with clients when the stakes are high and the path forward can feel uncertain. The firm's tone is straightforward, the preparation is serious, and the goal is simple: work hard, communicate clearly, and treat people like people.



# PAVING THE *Path*

## MIDTOWN Partnerships & Initiatives

Progress takes people, and MidTown has some of the best folks around. In 2025, community collaborations moved long-planned ideas into measurable growth, from cleaner waterways and healthier green spaces to safer routes that knit neighborhoods together and public spaces that stay active with real participation. It's hard, honest work with visible results, powered by neighbors and partners who keep showing up. Plans are people in motion, and to every partner who lent time, talent, and resources to this year's initiatives, thank you for helping keep MidTown moving.



## MIDTOWN Children's Bicycle Playground

This project has been years in the making, built around a clear goal: give kids a safe place to learn bike skills they can carry onto neighborhood streets and local trails. But like most MidTown projects, it's bigger than the execution of a plan. It's about building confidence and independence in future generations. It's about families staying active together. It's about building something that will still be useful when today's kids are the ones teaching someone else to ride.



In November 2025, we celebrated the playground's groundbreaking, a major milestone made possible by steady collaboration between staff, donors, and community partners who worked through design, logistics, and funding to keep the project moving. As the bicycle playground takes shape, it will strengthen MidTown in multiple directions at once: health and activity, family-friendly amenities, and a stronger sense of place, especially for the next generation of MidTowners.



### MIDTOWN CHILDREN'S BICYCLE PLAYGROUND

Shovels hit the ground in November at Dinglewood Park, marking the start of the MidTown Children's Bicycle Playground – a \$587,000 community gift offering natural trails, skills features, pump tracks, and a one-of-a-kind place for kids to build confidence on two wheels.

The new bicycle playground is located at Dinglewood Park at the intersection of Warren Williams Road and 13th street.



## COLUMBUS Witches Ride

MidTown turned a fall evening into a moving celebration, with costumes, candy, and neighbors lining the route. The ride brought people out to enjoy the neighborhood together, while raising funds for a local children's cause, proof that a little fun can do real good.



## MIDTOWN Art Ride

In September, riders rolled out on a casually paced, police-escorted tour of MidTown's public art, starting and ending at The Columbus Museum. This collaboration with Bicycle Columbus was part bike ride, part gallery stroll, and fully MidTown: active, creative, and best enjoyed together.

MidTown board, staff, and community partners break ground on the Children's Bicycle Playground at Dinglewood Park in November 2025, celebrating a \$587,000 gift to Columbus six years in the making. Pictured Left to Right: Pam Hodge (Deputy City Manager), Holli Browder (Director of Parks & Recreation), Councilwoman Joanne Cogle (District 7), Councilman Travis L. Chambers (District 10 at-large), Julio Portillo (MidTown, Inc. Executive Director), Blake Melton (Chair, Standing Boy, Inc.), Cameron Bean (MidTown, Inc. Immediate Past President), and Tyler Pritchard (MidTown, Inc. President)



**END BLIGHT** Revitalization Revolving Fund

Last year, our work leaned into revitalization and beautification, and in 2025 we kept that same spirit and pushed it further by advancing a key strategic goal: ending blight in areas of critical need. Through the End Blight Revitalization Revolving Fund, we are building a pilot model designed to be both replicable and responsive, enhancing and returning it to productive use in the community.



Partnership is essential to this work, and few examples are more inspiring than River of Life, a five-day mission project hosted by Wynnton Methodist Church that brings together students along with 20-plus churches from across Alabama, California, Georgia, and Texas, to serve as the hands and feet of Christ right here in MidTown. Volunteers assist local homeowners with minor construction, painting, wheelchair ramps, landscaping, and other small repair and improvement projects, with a particular focus on residents who cannot physically or financially afford to renovate their homes. In 2025, more than 200 volunteers revitalized 20 properties in the Briarwood neighborhood, with ongoing search and assessment of additional residential and commercial properties in the future.



**WERACOBA** Creek Trash Trap

Healthy neighborhoods depend on healthy waterways. Last year, MidTown partnered with the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper to install a trash trap at Dinglewood Park as part of the Bicycle Playground project, supporting the health of Weracoba Creek. Since installation in July 2025, the trap has collected 57 pounds of trash, the equivalent of 2,850 empty plastic bottles, keeping litter from moving downstream and breaking down into microplastics. "This was Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's 17th trash trap installation, and all together, they're preventing thousands of pounds of plastic from reaching the river and breaking down into microplastics," said Alan Rothschild, Columbus Outreach Manager for Chattahoochee Riverkeeper.



By year's end, Riverkeeper hosted 39 cleanups and removed more than 72 tons of litter with the help of 2,500+ volunteers, a reminder that stewardship is an ongoing endeavor, not a simple, one-time fix.

"We're grateful for the opportunity to work with MidTown to protect Weracoba Creek and Dinglewood Park from trash that unfortunately makes its way into the waterway."

-Alan Rothschild, Columbus Outreach Manager for Chattahoochee Riverkeeper



**WIDE OPEN SPACES** Our Open House

Last year, we moved our offices into the Scarbrough house, an English Vernacular Revival-style home located between the Columbus Museum and the Ressayre Wellness Center building. Built in 1926 by Claude G. Scarbrough, the property features landscaping by W. B. Marquis of the Olmsted Brothers firm. Prior to us, this space was also used as a photography studio, so check the family portraits in your parents' homes, they may have been photographed in ours!



# PAINTING A *Picture*

## MURALS at Peach Little League & Cross Country Plaza



Progress has a way of sneaking up on you. Public art helps us pause long enough to notice, giving us a moment to celebrate our shared history and inspiring us to keep moving our community forward.

When Will Barnes saw the big blank side of Extra Space Storage at Cross Country Plaza, he didn't see a brick wall. He saw a canvas. In 2025, MidTown, Inc. helped bring that vision to life by commissioning mural artist Chris Johnson to paint the district's seventh public art installation.

Chris' mural is a bold-lettered celebration of what makes MidTown feel like MidTown. Inside each letter you'll find a landmark or local favorite, from the Sarling Fountain to Dinglewood Pharmacy & Gifts, a wink to The Scrambled Dog, and our new neighbors at The Columbus Museum.

The project came together through partnership with Regional Prosperity Initiative and the property owners, and it stands as a reminder that public art is a powerful way to tell the story of where we've been, who we are, and the things we care about most.



Peach Little League players show off their new mural, painted by Columbus State and USC-trained artist Christine Cannon of CannonArts LLC, with support from MidTown, Inc.



August 28, 2025 marked the completion of MidTown's newest mural, honoring a vision started with the late Will Barnes.



### ARTS IN THE PARK Returns

Walls aren't the only place MidTowners celebrate the Arts. We also celebrate them in our parks. Arts in the Park returned to Lakebottom for the first time in seven years, and it was a beautiful day filled with artists, vendors, demonstrations, and live music. Families wandered booth to booth, neighbors caught up between stops, and the park buzzed with the hum of creativity, a reminder that art isn't just something to experience, but something to share.



# TAKING THE *Stage*

We all love packing up the occasional go-bag and jaunting off to the nearest amphitheater to listen to some of your favorite tunes, but there's nothing quite like getting to do the exact same thing, right from your own backyard. Each year, MidTowners roll out their picnic blankets and unfold their lawn chairs to bask in the sound of live music at the MidTown GetDown and our collaborative Tiny Stage Concert Series.



*in Motion*

## THE MIDTOWN Getdown

Last year, MidTown, Inc. got the band back together at the Lakebottom bandshell for one of our most rocking GetDowns in recent memory. Our very own MidTown Dad Band opened the show, with Dean Tovey bringing together members of Skydog Gypsy, Moonshine Still, and Ancient Harmony for a set of original songs, as well as covers by bands like The Allman Brothers Band, Grateful Dead, and Talking Heads.

There are many signs in MidTown that the future is moving in the right direction, but none cuter than the MidTown Diaper Derby. This year's diaper drive was coordinated with Wynnton Neighborhood Network, so not only was it for a good cause, it was a fascinating display of athleticism from our next generation of leaders.

And of course, we couldn't achieve the necessary festival vibe without Ralphabetz rolling up with his technicolor van for all the kids to paint, a fitting flourish in a celebration of creativity.



A van becomes a canvas at MidTown GetDown, where local legend Ralphabetz brought his technicolor ride for neighbors to leave their mark, one brushstroke at a time.



### TINY STAGE at the Red Frame

The Tiny Stage Concert Series at the Red Frame is the epitome of MidTown's cozy cosmopolitan vibes: world-class performances enjoyed from lawn chairs and picnic blankets beneath a canopy of leaves. In 2025, the season opened with a tribute to John Schley for his restoration of the Red Frame, and also featured Garrett Lee, with Frank Schley IV on hand displaying his beautiful line of Silvan Guitars. We then rocked on into summer with Southbound Dog before cooling off one August evening with the Columbus Jazz Society under the direction of Luther Smalls. We closed out the series with another show of love for our fur friends with St. Thomas's Blessing of the Pets, set to a soundtrack provided by The Viberations.



# SETTING THE *Table*



MINGLE SPONSOR



## THE MIDTOWN Mingle

In 2025, the 14th Annual MidTown Mingle returned to our little evergreen ballroom in beautiful Lakebottom Park with dinner catered by Country's Barbecue and music from the Three Hour Tour Band. The sealed-bid auction featured original artwork by Mallory Mize Norman, the year's featured invitation artist, alongside originals by Bruno Zupan and Howard Reiney, with raffles and centerpieces, including planters provided by Libbie Rothschild, adding to the night's MidTown character.

STREET SPONSORS



The Mingle is MidTown distilled. Raising funds for the ribbon cuttings, creek cleanups, public-safety conversations, concerts, and neighborhood gatherings that shape this district all year long, the MidTown Mingle is our sole fundraiser for operational expenses. For a few hours, our mission isn't just something we talk about. You can see it, hear it, and feel it in the same place.

Thank you to all our attendees, sponsors, partners, vendors, committee members, staff, our board and everyone who made the evening possible,

FRIEND SPONSORS



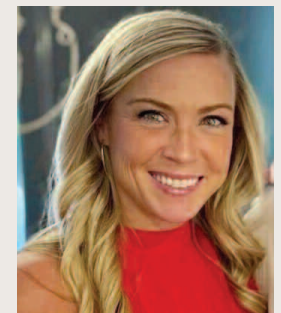
### MINGLE PARTNERS

Dr. and Mrs. David Antekeier, M.D.  
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Mr. and Mrs. R. Walker Garrett  
Grogan & Grogan, Family Law  
Hall Booth Smith, P. C.  
Donna and Kerry Hand  
Dr. and Mrs. Scott Hannay  
Mr. and Mrs. John Holt  
Kinetic Credit Union  
Mary Varner Real Estate Group  
Mr. and Mrs. Tyler J. Pritchard  
Robinson, Grimes & Company, P.C.  
The Bottle Shop  
The St. Elmo Shopping Center  
Truist  
Two Men and A Truck  
W. C. Bradley Co.  
Wildwood Gardens

### MINGLE PATRONS

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Dr. and Mrs. Jimmy Brooks  
Lucy Bowers\*  
Brock Jones Inc.  
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Collier Ezell Interiors  
Daniel Appliance Co.  
Fat Boys  
Mr. and Mrs. Jason Fober  
Golden Donuts  
Pet Cremation Services  
Hinson Galleries  
Matt Horne, Realtor  
Hughston Clinic  
Jarrell Pediatric Dentistry  
Knox Pest Control, Inc.  
Murray & Sharon Jones

\* In Loving Memory of Bess Dedwylder



### *In Memory*

MidTown Inc. fondly remembers Rudi Pierson for her loyal commitment, her bright encouragement, and her spirited personality, which she brought to the MidTown Mingle committee 2023-2025. Rudi cared deeply and worked diligently for many causes, and we are grateful the Mingle and MidTown neighborhood at large were among her passion projects.





Midtown Inc., Staff

## MIDTOWN INC. STAFF

- Julio Portillo, Executive Director
- Sara Carver, Officer Manager & Mingle Coordinator\*
- Bitsy Dedwylder, Special Project and Programs Coordinator\*
- Kelley Watts, Accounts & Finance Manager\*
- Molly Wallace, Community Outreach & Events Coordinator\*

\*Part-time

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS & ADVISORS

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- Amanda Baker**  
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- Pete Berry (Vice President-EC)**  
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(retired) Executive Director, Historic Columbus
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Deputy City Manager of Finance, Planning & Development, City of Columbus
- Tracey Herring**  
Small Business Manager, Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce
- Lisa Walters**  
Executive Director, Columbus Housing Authority

## IN MEMORY OF

- \* John Partin
- \*\* Christ Losonsky

## IN HONOR OF

- + Erin Trotter and Molly Wallace
- + Bitsy Dedwylder
- + Jennifer Adams
- + Mallory Mize Norman
- + David Benefield
- + MidTown Inc. Staff

## CONTRIBUTORS

### ADVOCATES \$10,000 +

- J. W. and Ethel I. Woodruff Foundation
- W. B. and Sue T. Turner Family Fund
- Mr. and Mrs. Tom Flournoy Regional Prosperity Initiative Inc.
- Bradley-Turner Foundation
- Next Generation Fund of the Bradley-Turner Foundation
- Mr. Kenneth M. Henson, Jr.
- Mr. Foy Kirven
- Mrs. Barbara C. Swift

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- Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan D. Stewart
- Ms. Judy Tucker
- Mr. and Mrs. William L. Tucker
- Mr. and Mrs. Tripp Upchurch
- Weracoba/St. Elmo Preservation Society+

## 2025 Statement of Financial Position

ASSETS	
Cash, cash equivalents & investments	\$ 1,013,679.48
Contributions receivable	\$ 27,750.00
Fixed assets	\$ 56,118.58
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 1,097,448.06</b>
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	
Liabilities	\$ 2,218.77
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$ 549,189.17
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	\$ 491,657.00
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 1,097,448.06</b>



*in Memory*

MidTown remembers board member Brian Waters, whose voice shaped Columbus radio for 35 years and whose servant's heart shaped this community far beyond the airwaves.

**THANK You!**

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to MidTown, Inc. in 2025. Your generosity fuels the programs, projects, and partnerships that make this district a better place to live, work, and gather. Every gift moves us forward, and because of your investment, MidTown grows more vibrant, more connected, and more beautiful with each passing year.

MAKING MIDTOWN EVEN BETTER.



MidTown, Inc.

1327 Wynnton Road | Columbus, Georgia 31906

[midtowncolumbusga.org](http://midtowncolumbusga.org)