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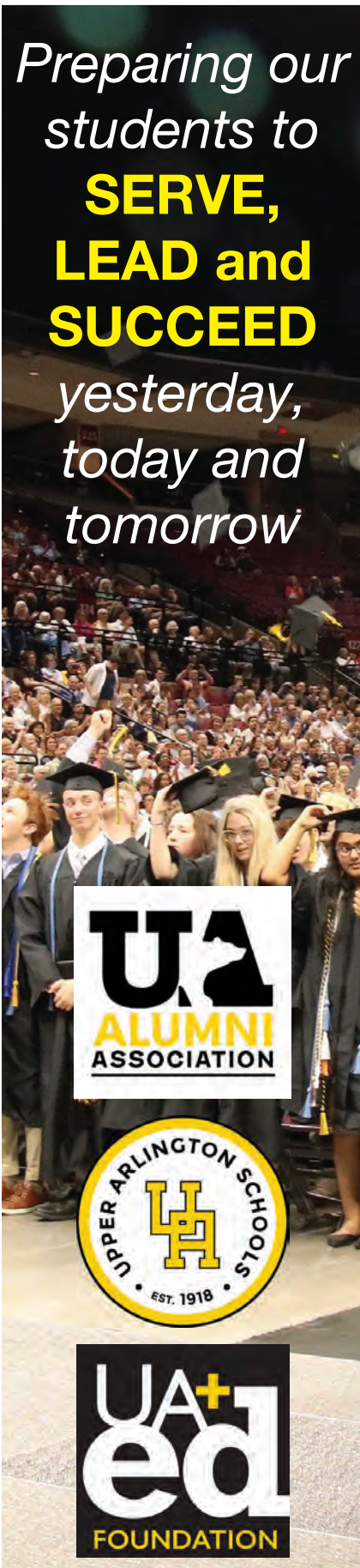
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We are building a first of its kind, six-story community center at the heart of our community. When it opens in spring 2025, the Bob Crane Community Center will provide UA with a new level of health and wellness opportunities. Just as importantly, it will provide a place for new and longtime residents to come together. We know that community isn't just build-ings, so we are partnering with various civic groups, led by the City's Community Relations Committee, on innovative initiatives to welcome new residents and support diversity within our community.

The city is not alone in investing in our community. The Upper Arlington Schools has transformed its facilities to match the exceptional academic, cultural and sports

opportunities it provides its students. The business community is thriving, with exciting redevelopment projects transform- ing our commercial districts— expanding housing, amenities, shopping and dining options within walkable, attractive commercial districts. Whatever the market, home prices are holding their value, and residents continue to demonstrate their confidence in our future by undertaking extensive home renovations and upgrades.

None of this new investment can work if we do not take care of the core functions of government. We are continuing to re-invest in our streets, sidewalks, parks, safety services and public facilities at record levels. UA is rich with opportunities for our community to gather, thanks to an extensive network of public parks and recreation facilities, and a busy calendar of special events and activities.

We believe this is the right time to reintroduce Upper Arlington to the region. If you don't know much about UA, we invite you to learn why our special community continues to have some of the most desirable ZIP codes within a rapidly changing region.

Sincerely,



Brendan King



Steve Schoeny

Brendan King,

President, Upper Arlington City Council

Steve Schoeny,

Upper Arlington City Manager

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**ON THE COVER:** Attendees at the UA Pride festival in June | Photo: Josh Rodstein



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A Columbus Monthly Suburban Section

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Children and adults gather at the Pride flag raising ceremony in UA.

PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

**FEATURE**

# EMBRACING DIVERSITY

**Upper Arlington is working to become a more inclusive and welcoming community.**

By Ashley Alt

**Upper Arlington** is no longer the town you remember. The community is changing, becoming more diverse and embracing inclusivity in myriad ways, from the diverse representation of community leaders to new initiatives that make the city a more welcoming place.

Ukeme Awakessien Jeter is the first person of color elected to Upper Arlington City Council. Coming to Columbus from Cleveland as a single mom of two young children, Jeter was looking for a place with a “community feel” and proximity to Downtown. “We are a super outdoorsy family, so we wanted sidewalks and parks, similar to Shaker Heights,” Jeter says.

Shortly after settling in UA, Jeter noticed “this feeling of ‘only,’” referring

to the lack of diversity in the community. That became most apparent when her daughter came home from school one day asking her mom if she could straighten her hair. “Seeing your 5-year-old do things differently in order to feel like she belonged at school was the reason I ran for City Council,” Jeter says.

Now in her second year on council (she was sworn in to office in January 2022), Jeter is making UA a more inclusive place. She helped bring in a third-party consultant to evaluate how the city is spending its money and whether the city is doing enough to attract diverse suppliers. In addition, she’s focused on attracting a diverse set of members to city boards and commissions, looking at gender, race, socioeco-

nomics and age. “Like Kamala Harris said, ‘Just because I’m the first doesn’t mean I’m the last,’” Jeter says. “The community voted for me—that in and of itself was a signal of change.”

Upper Arlington city manager Steve Schoeny says there is a “growing sense of diversity” in UA. As a result, Schoeny recognizes the community needs to “go out and reintroduce ourselves” to showcase the physical and generational changes that are occurring.

City Council formed the Community Relations Committee with the intent of discussing how UA can become more welcoming, open and diverse. “We work a lot with the schools, making sure they have a welcoming component to them,” Schoeny says.



On that same note, the Upper Arlington Civic Association's Neighbors Night out event was launched as part of the Community Relations Committee's UA Welcome series, which aims to have a monthly event or program that includes welcoming activities for new residents. In fall of 2022, the Upper Arlington Schools also hosted an event called "The Longest Table," which facilitated conversations about diversity, a top concern of UA residents. When asked in the city's 2022 Community Survey to identify the most important problem facing Upper Arlington, 26 percent of respondents cited a lack of diversity, an increase from 3 percent in the last survey. In general, survey feedback affirmed a need to help new and diverse residents feel welcome and a desire for increased diversity.

To bring UA residents together in a less conventional way, Schoeny and city attorney Darren Shulman started a podcast called *Won't You Be Our Neighbor*. Every two weeks, Schoeny and Shulman interview an interesting person from Upper Arlington; past participants have included restaurateur Cameron Mitchell, Jeni Britton of Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams, Dino Tripodis of radio station Sunny 95 (WSNY), and Ohio State men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann. Conversation topics include volunteer work, what they love about UA and what they would change, and of course, their careers. "More diversity in the community is a fairly common theme that comes up on the podcast," Shulman says. "We make sure we capture the history of UA, and the other piece is acknowledging that it's changing."

"Upper Arlington is a family-focused community," Schoeny says. "We want our kids to be exposed to and prepared for the wider world. And when you see your community not reflective of the wider world, that's an issue. We want everyone to feel like they are welcome here because that is the right thing to do."

Kathy Adams is another excellent example of the evolving UA. In November 2021—the same year that voters elected Jeter—Adams became Upper Arlington City Council's first LGBTQ+ member. Speaking on why she decided to talk about her sexual orientation as she ran for office, Adams says "it happened organically." She continues, "I got more comfortable with it over time because I thought it was important to make myself vulnerable to make other people feel comfortable to come out as well."

Adams explains "things have changed so much" from when she was in school, and even on a national level, as there were no role models or examples of how to have a family if you didn't fit the historical, cookie-cutter mold.

As the first-elected LGBTQ+ member of council, Adams aims to ensure businesses in UA reflect the new Upper Arlington, representing women-owned businesses, LGBTQ+-owned businesses and minority-owned businesses. "I have been having meetings with the CRC, also meeting with different Black-owned businesses around town and capital providers in that space," Adams says, asking them questions like "What would interest you in coming here?" and "How can we do better with our image?"

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Pups show love at the UA Pride festival, too.

PHOTO: JOSH RODSTEIN





PHOTO: COURTESY ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A group of artisans at St. Mark's Culture and Artisans Fair.

The Pride event is another important way to change the community, Adams says. "Anecdotally, so many kids identify as part of that community," she says of Pride. 2023 was also the first year UA had a Cherry Blossom celebration, a tradition in Japanese culture, semi-related to the Asian Festival, which celebrates the largest minority group in UA.

As for new initiatives being put into place to encourage diversity, the city recently hosted a Minority Business Enterprise procurement fair, dedicated to making new connections with organizations committed to diversity efforts. Community leaders are also in the process of implementing sensitivity training by Equality Ohio, an LGBTQ+ advocacy organization that Adams co-founded.

UA's Pride festival features entertainment, resources, booths and LGBTQ+ vendors like coffee shops and bakeries. "It's about letting the students of UA know that the community supports them and is here for them," Adams says. The

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Pride festival also includes a family-oriented event with a panel of speakers guiding parents on how to support their LGBTQ+ student.

“Our 2022 community survey really backs us up in taking even more steps,” Adams says. “It’s really important for people to partner with people in the schools as kids can be bullied,” Adams adds. “I would love to have community speakers and facilitations to try and create a safe space for kids, where they can share their negative and positive experiences.”

Another Pride supporter is the Rev. Vicki Zust, who recently celebrated her two-year anniversary as the rector at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church on Dorset Road. Zust says she was attracted to the church because “it has something for everybody.”

In addition, Zust was drawn to the church’s promise to “strive for justice and peace and respect for every human being.” Diversity, equity and inclusion



UA residents celebrate Juneteenth.

### A New Campaign

The city of Upper Arlington is launching a campaign to bring the community together in a fun and interesting way. The “We Are UA” campaign, an outgrowth of the *Won’t You Be Our Neighbor* podcast, will begin sometime in 2024. The campaign will feature targeted snippets of video, highlighting interesting people in the UA community.



Arts on Arlington festival this past summer

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efforts are not something that are carried out “because it’s nice to do,” Zust says. “This means we work hard at things. We are a sponsor for the Pride festival. We respect the dignity of Pleasant Litchford. You have to tell the truth of who we are and how we got here.”

(Pleasant Litchford was an enslaved, master blacksmith who purchased his freedom in 1828, settling in what later became Upper Arlington and accumulating 227 acres. Less than a century after his death, the Upper Arlington school district began to build a school on top of a Black cemetery on his former land, uncovering 25 sets of human remains. Wanting to preserve Litchford’s history, Upper Arlington City Schools, the city of UA, Equal UA and others are sharing more about Litchford’s life and the impact he and his descendants had on Central Ohio.)

Zust spearheaded a new community event this year, the Culture and Artisans Fair, that showcased the works of immi-



Ukeme Awakessien Jeter

grant artists. She got involved initially through a church-sponsored family seeking asylum in the United States.

“One of the parishioners was connected to an organization that helps asylum seekers,” Zust says. “We asked what we could do that would raise awareness about immigrants and asylum seekers that would be meaningful to the community.”

Because there is such an appetite for arts festivals around Columbus, Zust came up with the idea to create a place

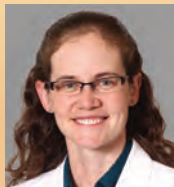
where asylum seekers could create and sell their wares. The parish needed help connecting with the artisans, so the city provided a \$1,000 community relations grant to support the first-time event.

“One of the artisans brought their Ethiopian coffee, but everything else was handcrafted,” Zust says, including a woman who made scarves, women from Afghanistan who made clothing, and a woman who was doing henna tattoos. “We hired high schoolers to play jazz for the day, people from UA and outside of UA came, and most importantly, most of the artisans made an entire month’s rent in that one day,” she says.

Hoping the Culture and Artisans Fair becomes a yearly event, St. Mark’s is aiming to hold this celebration the first weekend of May.

“The challenge, of course, is to create an environment where people feel welcome and safe,” Zust says. “The challenge for those of us established here is to remember that and work at that.”

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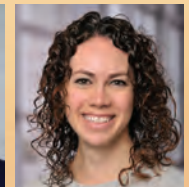
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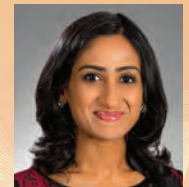
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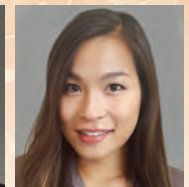
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**LIFESTYLES**

# TIGHTENING COMMUNITY BONDS FOR THE GREATER GOOD

**How UA city leaders, community groups and residents are working toward building a more welcoming and connected place**

By Mandy Shunnarah

**If anything good** came from the COVID pandemic, it's that the city of Upper Arlington realized just how important it is to strengthen community bonds and give residents points of connection. Through renewed efforts to welcome new residents, improve parks and recreation, facilitate more cultural events, and build community spaces, Upper Arlington used a time of turbulence and isolation to bring people together in meaningful and safe ways.

Local physician Dr. Jason Sayat is one of nine volunteers on the Community Relations Committee, which welcomes new residents by introducing them to all the resources and amenities UA has

to offer, as well as organizing a "buddy system" where longtime residents invite newer neighbors out to functions.

"We felt established organizations were a good starting point. For example, we have a group in town called Equal UA, which looks at diversity and inclusion, and we have the Upper Arlington Historical Society, the UA Civic Association and the UA Police Department. Those are the organizations that were involved during the first four months of the welcome series that came up with ideas for events specifically aimed at new residents," Sayat says.

But the welcome doesn't stop after four months—UA has too much to offer

after that.

"We have a monthly event or program put on by our groups, and that builds into the spring with our public library, Leadership UA, and a long list of groups who are now lining up to be part of this," Sayat continues. "We felt like one welcome event wasn't going to cover all the endeavors, as well as all the different perspectives that our various groups and residents bring to the table."

The CRC not only welcomes new residents moving to town but also works to ensure all residents feel included. The group recently launched a grant program for community organizers that has helped fund cultural events like UA Pride and St.





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Mark's Culture and Artisans Fair, which adds to the cultural fabric of the area and dovetails nicely with the city of Upper Arlington's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, which include programming for Black History Month, Pride Month and Juneteenth.

"The city wants to be inclusive of anybody who wants to come here and host any type of event with their organization," says assistant city manager Jackie Thiel. "I think it really brings awareness to different opinions and different ways of living, so when you bring that awareness to people who may not have experienced it before, it just helps us understand each other and make UA a more inclusive community."

In addition to welcoming new residents and inclusion efforts, the city of Upper Arlington is continually investing in infrastructure that helps foster connectivity. While lockdown orders were in effect during the pandemic and people longed to escape their homes for the outdoors, the city used this opportunity to continue increasing access to sidewalks and shared-use paths that connect residential areas to UA's cultural and commercial areas—including parks and schools, making it easier to bike to work and school—as well as revitalize the amenities at local parks.

Revitalizing local parks included updating UA's most popular park, Northam, which is next to the Main Library.

"Northam Park is central to community life in UA," says Debbie McLaughlin, director of parks and recreation. "Over the years, we've been making drainage improvements, grading the ball fields, replacing the playground equipment, and we put in a history walk for our city centennial in 2018."

While Northam Park may be the most visited park in the city, it's far from the only community outdoor space to enjoy.

"Each park is unique. Some are very active with athletic fields, playgrounds and shelters, then we have some very nature-based parks that have naturalized areas," McLaughlin says, describing the naturalized parks as an "oasis in the city."

Even more of an oasis are the community pools spread throughout the city,



Bike and scooter riding at  
Fancyburg Park's StoryWalk

which McLaughlin and her team are continuing to make improvements on. With the lap pools, toddler and baby pools and general swimming pools, it's easy to cool off in UA in the summertime.

The Parks and Rec Department works hard to create and maintain spaces for all to enjoy—and "all" includes any financially disadvantaged person who lives or works in the city.

"To allow people to participate in our organized programs, we started a financial assistance program last year called Play UA," McLaughlin says. "On most of our financial transactions, like registering for a program or purchasing a pass to the pool, we charge a \$1 transaction fee that goes into our Play UA fund. Then people who qualify for assistance receive an automatic 50 percent discount on their programs and membership fees."

Since then, the department has seen more people joining and participating thanks to the assistance program. And UA officials expect even more individuals and families will be eager to take part in fun activities when the new Bob Crane Community Center is complete in 2025.

Not having a community center never stopped UA Parks and Rec from offering an abundance of programs, though it did force them to get innovative.

"Our staff has been very creative in creating partnerships with different businesses. We've had dance classes at local dance studios and cooking classes





PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

at businesses that have kitchens. We utilize school facilities gyms, and park shelters, so we're all over the place. But that does make our classes limited because if we can't find an appropriate facility for a class then we can't offer it," McLaughlin says. "So, bringing everything together under one facility is going to change everything. Families will be able to plan activities for everyone. If someone wants to work out in a fitness area, their child can be in another program, and all their activities can take place concurrently."

The community center was made possible, in part, thanks to the Upper Arlington Community Foundation's fundraising campaign, which brought in \$8.1 million from UA residents to contribute toward the cost. With this project, the foundation has truly come full circle—at the time the foundation was established in 2007, it was created in lieu of a community center. While the Bob Crane Community Center is the foundation's largest project to date, it's far from the only way the organization supports initiatives that bring the people of UA together.

"We love helping to elevate our local nonprofits, like our libraries. We made a lead grant to their early learning play areas, and we made a grant to Tri-Village Chamber and Rainbow UA for some DEI training for local UA businesses," says Upper Arlington Community Foundation executive director Jessica Grisez. "It's all those smaller initiatives that really make

## A New UA Gathering Spot

The UA community has been considering the community center issue for 40-plus years. Next year, that dream will come true. Currently under construction and expected to be complete in 2025, the \$85 million project will house a plethora of amenities in addition to being adjacent to the senior living facility, providing seniors with a way to stay active and combat loneliness. (There are several options for older adults in UA including the Coventry, First Community Village and Sunrise Senior Living.)

"We'll have two gymnasiums with hardwood floors, a third gym with a rubberized surface, a walking track, other indoor fitness, a swimming pool and then a variety of different meeting rooms," says Debbie McLaughlin, director of UA's Parks and Recreation Department.

"The water slide will even have a virtual component so you can see how fast you're going," adds assistant city manager Jackie Thiel. "There's going to be an indoor playground and indoor cafe space that's free to the public, so you don't have to be a member to enjoy it."

More than anything, the Bob Crane Community Center will be a much-needed gathering space. Parks and Rec's programming is so popular that spaces tend to fill up. The community center is designed to change that.

"It'll be a great opportunity to get people together and meet their neighbors they may not otherwise see because everybody is doing things individually," McLaughlin says. "We know there's demand and interest for our programming, so we're looking forward to having this great facility so we can really meet the needs of our community."

When it comes to fundraising, Upper Arlington Community Foundation executive director Jessica Grisez says, "It takes a village," which is illustrated in the wide range of donations that the community center project drew, from lemonade stand funds to a lead gift of \$2 million.

"It's a testament to this community," Grisez says. "People gave to this community center and really came together, coming out of the woodwork for such a monumental project, which is what a community center is meant to do."



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UA home.”

The Foundation is also in charge of the Good Neighbor Fund.

“We’re really proud of that because [the fund] supports local residents with financial assistance for living expenses, medical bills, etc. We want to show people that there’s a safety net in UA, and it’s neighbors helping neighbors,” Grisez adds.

Overall, making UA a great place to live and work requires the city and its community partners to actively listen to residents—a task the community takes seriously. In a 2022 survey, the city asked how welcoming residents felt UA was. Knowing the next city survey will be coming in two years, the city and community groups, especially the Community Relations Committee, are buckling down and working to improve the sense of welcome in Upper Arlington.

Community leaders hope the next survey will show some measurable



Walking path at Northam Park

PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

improvement.

As Upper Arlington grows and changes, city leaders are more committed than ever to meeting the needs of all its resi-

dents, and the people are at the heart of every initiative and decision. Grisez says it best: “We’re making leaps and bounds for the community.”



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The Arlington Gateway project is expected to be finished at the end of 2023.

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**BUSINESS**

# BUILDING A HEALTHY BUSINESS COMMUNITY

**UA is thriving economically, from commercial districts and retail to redevelopment projects and restaurants.**

By Peter Tonguette

**As one of Central Ohio's** signature suburbs, Upper Arlington has no shortage of things to recommend about it.

"Upper Arlington benefits from a variety of significant factors," says community development director Chad Gibson. "Our location is tremendous. We have fantastic city services. Our safety forces are wonderful; our schools, our neighborhoods."

To pay for all of these unique features, however, requires a robust business base. "Income tax is the city's lifeblood in terms of our budget," says Gibson, who notes that, during shifts in working habits that took place amid the pandemic, employ-

ees who have been able to work from home have enhanced the city's income tax revenue.

Yet brick-and-mortar businesses remain a vital priority to the city still widely associated with the likes of such former residents as Woody Hayes, Jack Nicklaus and Beverly D'Angelo. Without room to grow in terms of geography, however, city leaders recognize they must grow in other ways.

"As a landlocked, inner-ring suburb, we've got to do everything we can to maintain quality of life for our residents and our businesses," Gibson says.

From finance and medicine to retail

and restaurants, businesses are flocking to—and staying put in—Upper Arlington like never before. In large part, the business boom is attributable to a visioning exercise the Upper Arlington City Council undertook more than two decades ago, Gibson says.

"It takes good leadership to get us where we are today," he says. "How do you reinvent yourself as a landlocked community? We essentially designated seven areas of the city as planned mixed-use districts that allowed significant density and walkability."

Lane Avenue continues to be one of the most striking examples of the city

adopting the mixed-use model. Years ago, Upper Arlington annexed the land at the southeast corner of Lane Avenue and North Star Road for economic development purposes. In time, that annexation resulted in the development of the soon-to-launch Arlington Gateway. Instead of the Half Price Books, Pizza Hut and retail strip mall that once sat on the site, a huge complex will rise in its place.

Among the most notable specs in

Arlington Gateway are 139,000 square feet of office space, 225 apartments and 27,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space—space that will include a new home for the much-loved Half Price Books.

In all ways, the project promises to be a thoroughgoing overhaul of the area. The apartments diversify the city's housing stock, which is top heavy with single-family homes, and the commingling of office

space with retail establishments and restaurants follows larger trends.

"We recognize that, in many cases, stand-alone office parks are not as desirable as they once were," Gibson says.

Among the new Arlington Gateway tenants drawn to the mix of businesses and residences is First Merchants Bank, which is currently headquartered on Olentangy River Road.

"It's a beautiful building that has really nice signage," says regional president Jennifer Griffith of the bank's present location. "It's served us well [as] a focal point—as people are driving up and down [Route] 315, they can recognize it as the First Merchant building." Yet, after First Merchants was acquired by an out-of-state bank, its needs evolved. It began looking for new space in the area but held off until the opportunity to become part of Arlington Gateway presented itself.

"It's a fantastic location," Griffith says of the new space. "The amenities of the city and the location—the access to



COhatch on Lane Avenue

PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

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restaurants and shopping and groceries and sidewalks and common spaces; the ease of doing business in a vibrant neighborhood.” To hear Griffith describe it, workers at the bank will benefit almost by osmosis from the atmosphere around them in Arlington Gateway.

“The commercial tower at Gateway is full of really thriving companies and highly successful professionals,” she says. “The ability to retain and recruit top-tier talent at Gateway is what our future looks like.”

Residents, visitors and workers in Upper Arlington will immediately take note of the new project, which is expected to serve as the home to 700 office workers and more than 275 residents, says developer Frank Kass.

“As you come on to Lane Avenue, this’ll be the first Upper Arlington building that you see as you’re coming down that stretch of commercial from Lane to Northwest Boulevard,” says Kass, chairman of Continental Real Estate Cos. “It’s transformative, but it’s transformative

in terms of the number of well-paid office workers and apartment dwellers that want to be in Upper Arlington and near the university and so forth.”

Similar work is ongoing and adjacent to Henderson Road. That’s the location of GOSH Enterprises, the parent company of BIBIBOP Asian Grill, Charley’s Philly Steaks and Lenny’s Grill and Subs. The company, owned by entrepreneur Charley Shin, acquired a building that had once served as home to CompuServe and later Time Warner but had been tied up in litigation when a private school fought to establish itself in the space.

“The city prevailed, and shortly thereafter GOSH Enterprises purchased that property ... and had since put several million dollars into the building as a renovation,” Gibson says.

Also in the Henderson Road corridor sits the headquarters of National Church Residences, a nonprofit organization that operates senior communities in 22 states. For decades, the company has



GOSH Enterprises owner, Charley Shin

PHOTO: JONATHAN QUILTER

been based in Upper Arlington. “They have been a great home city for us,” says company official Matt Rule.

Yet its home campus is starting to show its age.

“Conceptually, we know what our employees want as part of their corporate office experience,” Rule says. “They want to be in a facility that is up-to-date and is adapted for the new work environment. They want flex spaces that don’t look like a 1970s conference room.”

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A rendering of Ohio State's Carmenton innovation district

Aware of National Church Residences' interest in overhauling their campus, the city examined the zoning in the area.

"We came up with a PMOD [Planned Mixed Office District]," Gibson says. "If you hit a certain threshold, and that threshold is 10,000 square feet per acre of office [space], then you get to do other fun stuff. You get to do residential; you get to do retail."

Such a mix is appealing to Rule and his colleagues at National Church Residences.

"We don't know exactly what the future holds, what this office park wants to look like in the future, but we do know that our employees want something that is a more active and livable experience," Rule says.

In many ways, the template of these and other transformations can be found in Kingsdale Center, which, about 10 years ago, began with the construction of a huge Giant Eagle Market District grocery store in lieu of what was once a small Big Bear store. The blue-bricked, historic—but long-ailing—former Lazarus (then Macy's) also went by the wayside for new and exciting developments in its stead.

"We have a new senior housing project called the Coventry that's opened," Gibson says. "We have a new, market-rate apartment building [with] 350-plus units that's going to open in 2024. And, of course, our crown jewel: the community center, which is going to open in the first half of 2025."

Upper Arlington is also benefiting from development just outside of its city limits: Ohio State University's nearby Carmenton district consists of about 10 million square feet of space squarely focused



The Coventry Senior Living entrance

on innovation, research and technology. Issues being tackled by researchers in the facilities range from the opioid crisis to cancer research.

"You'll have 20,000 or more people there learning, working, living," Gibson says. "It's essentially a city on its own dropping out of the sky on our eastern border."

Although Carmenton is not part of Upper Arlington, the city is happy to bask in its neighbor's glow—and benefit from all the advantages of having such a district so close to home.

"It's going to benefit our businesses with additional revenue [from those who work at Carmenton]," Gibson says. "It's going to impact our housing, with increased value. Folks are going to want to live near Carmenton, and those neighborhoods that are nearby are already experiencing significant value increases due to their walkability [to Carmenton]."

Taken in total, there's no better time to make a home in—or do business in—Upper Arlington.

"Our quality of life and our residents are benefiting from all of these fantastic programs and initiatives that the city has undertaken," Gibson says.

PHOTOS: TOP/COURTESY OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY; BELOW, COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON



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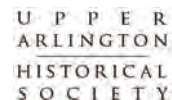






PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

Town homes in the heart of Upper Arlington

**HOUSING**

# HOMES FOR ALL STAGES OF LIFE

**Upper Arlington is making room for young professionals, established families, seniors and everyone in-between.**

By Andrew King

**For as long** as most in Central Ohio can remember, Upper Arlington has been one of the area’s most desirable places to live. The city is situated just west of Ohio State University and is close to just about everything, from Downtown offices and nightlife attractions to medical centers and the John Glenn Columbus International Airport.

“Upper Arlington has won the lottery from a location perspective,” says Mark Braunsdorf, owner of Central Ohio builder Compass Homes and an Upper Arlington resident. “It’s right next to Ohio State. It’s

very close to Downtown. You want to get to the airport? I live on the far west side of Arlington, and even if I leave by 5 p.m. at rush hour in a rainstorm, I can be at the airport in 15 minutes. That blows my mind.”

Those factors mean that demand for Upper Arlington housing is off the charts. Last year, for instance, *Travel + Leisure* magazine named Upper Arlington the most expensive suburb in Ohio, with a median home sale price north of \$540,000, according to data from Zillow and Redfin. But to generate that kind of

property value and desirability, you need more than just a great location.

UA community development director Chad Gibson says demand to live in Upper Arlington comes from “a combination of core components” that include city services, location, schools, neighborhoods, events and more. He says the city aims to provide extraordinary quality of life, which is made possible by a well-rounded community with unique amenities.

“We’ve got the walkable areas of Lane Avenue and Kingsdale, we’ve got neigh-



borhood gems like the new Littleton's Market going in the Tremont Center, we've got the Upper Arlington Farmers Market, and we're close to everything," Gibson says. "So we have the convenience factor, and our property values are some of the best in the entire region just because of all those factors. People know that if they invest here, that their investment is safe, and they're going to get services that are on par with the investment that they're making."

That combination of demand and Upper Arlington's status as a "safe" investment comes at a higher degree of difficulty due to the community's size and landlocked nature. The city is less than 10 square miles, with a population around 37,000, according to the 2020 census. That means unlike communities like Westerville, Hilliard or Dublin, there aren't opportunities for widespread housing developments or new community projects. Prospective builders in Upper Arlington need to be aware of that dynamic, and the city needs to toe the line between protecting its limited space while also inviting projects that keep the city vital with the correct mix of housing.

For single-family housing, that means builders largely need to either renovate existing units or find creative ways to repurpose the few remaining spaces within city limits. Craig Tuckerman, owner

of Tuckerman Home Group, says his company only builds around 10 homes a year, and has the luxury of choosing which communities to work in. For builders like Tuckerman, Upper Arlington doesn't represent the absolute easiest job, but it can still be an excellent opportunity. He says his team quickly realized that standard plans used for other cities don't apply to Upper Arlington, and turned toward being a "pure custom builder" for projects within the city. Now, they specialize in work that he says "improves the housing stock of their community" by working on projects that start as vacant lots or "distressed" properties.

"Many of those homes are 50, 60, 70, 100 years old," Tuckerman says. "You know, a lot of the homes that we've torn down literally had dirt floors in the basements, were hoarders' homes, raccoons living there, just like what you'd see on TV. ... So we're taking a home of that quality and turning it into a brand new, energy-efficient, architecturally pleasing home that's going to be there for another hundred years."

The other single-family housing option comes in the form of remodeling rather than starting from scratch. Bryce Jacob owns Element One, a design and remodeling studio with a Central Ohio focus. He says Upper Arlington has seen a steady increase in remodel projects



A remodeled home in Upper Arlington

PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

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Restaurants are part of the walkable mixed-use Westmont at the Lane project on Lane Avenue.

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A stone home in Upper Arlington



over the years, especially post-COVID, as people look to make additions that give them more space for rooms like home offices that compensate for spending more time at home. While projects were once largely focused on areas like the kitchen or living space, Jacob is starting to see both “long-term owners and new buyers” make larger-scale additions to their homes, especially for the increasing number of Upper Arlington residents who have moved from a part of the country with higher home values, giving them extra money to spend. But no matter the type of remodel, Jacob’s customers want their home to still feel like part of Upper Arlington.

“We work with some people who have been in their home and love its character, so we’re modernizing while keeping it

in that character,” he says. “One of the things we emphasize is that we’re not going to make your addition look like an addition. We’re going to make it look like a continuation of a home. We don’t want people to drive by your home and say, ‘That’s a nice addition.’ We want them to say, ‘That’s a beautiful home.’”

But the tightrope walk of Upper Arlington housing isn’t just about single-family homes. Community leaders know they need to offer some multifamily options, and a variety of recent projects have added diversity to the city’s housing stock in the form of apartments and independent- or assisted-living spaces, while also bringing amenities like retail and restaurants that create a distinctive community feel.

For instance, the Kingsdale mixed-use project features a seven-story senior housing complex with 142 assisted- and independent-living units, a seven-story apartment building with 325 one- and two-bedroom units and structured parking, along with eight two-story townhomes. The Arlington Gateway project is a visible bit of construction at the entry to Upper Arlington on Lane Avenue that will include office space and structured parking in addition to the apartments, shops and restaurants.

Frank Kass, partner and chairman of Continental Real Estate Cos., is involved in both of those development projects. He praises Upper Arlington’s “conscious decisions” to develop projects that fit the character of the community while providing it the housing it needs. And while some may associate Upper Arlington mostly with single-family homes, Kass emphasizes the importance of building the next generation of demand through these mixed uses.

“Having 500 or 550 high-quality urban apartments close to shopping, restaurants, single-family homes and the community center cements Upper Arlington because, if [residents] want to live there as a 24-year-old or a 32-year-old, they’re going to want to live there after they have a kid or two in Upper Arlington schools,” he says. “There’s not a lot of land, so you’re not going to find a developer to come in and put a subdivision in with 75





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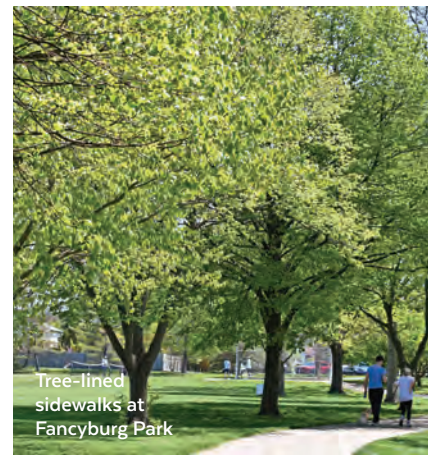
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Tree-lined  
sidewalks at  
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PHOTO: COURTESY CITY OF UPPER ARLINGTON

homes. So what you do is cultivate the customer for their single-family homes and their school district by bringing in young people who just love Upper Arlington and would like to stay there as they grow into a family.”

But demand alone isn't what makes Upper Arlington development run smoothly. Braunsdorf, Tuckerman and Kass all praise the city's efficiency and working relationships with builders. Kass calls Upper Arlington “tremendous” partners, and Tuckerman says their approach represents “a monster difference.” Gibson says it's “absolutely” important for a small community to cultivate that reputation. He says the city's continuity and streamlining of processes have “paid dividends.” For instance, Gibson is in his 20th year on the job, and works with chief building official Roger Eastep, a veteran of 30 years, and senior planner Justin Milan, who has been there nearly 20 years.

Between the city's vision and goodwill with developers, the continued growth of Ohio State, an overall lack of housing stock in Central Ohio and the impact of the massive Intel project just down the road, it seems unlikely that demand for housing will decrease in the short-term future in any part of Central Ohio, let alone Upper Arlington.

“There are not a lot of ‘for sale’ signs out there in any jurisdiction that we're building in, and days on the market for homes are still incredibly low,” Tuckerman says. “So certainly Arlington is a place that we foresee ourselves spending a good amount of time continuing into the future.”





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## EDUCATION

# TRANSFORMED FACILITIES

## Upper Arlington Schools are adapting to meet modern needs.

By Peter Tonguette

When **Windermere** Elementary School principal Julie Nolan meets with parents, she often has the urge to say, “thank you.” Along with Wickliffe Elementary School, Windermere was one of two elementary schools in Upper Arlington that were rebuilt from the ground up as part of an ongoing facilities master plan to improve and modernize the facilities in the school district. In the first phase of the master plan, Upper Arlington High School was also rebuilt, and the district’s other elementary schools underwent significant renovations.

To provide the overwhelming majority of the money to execute this phase of the master plan, Upper Arlington residents passed a bond issue in November 2017 that contributed \$230 million for the assorted rebuilds and renovations. An additional \$7.5 million was contributed to the efforts thanks to the private contributions of about 400 donors.

In light of the community’s clear commitment to transforming its school buildings, Nolan finds herself full of gratitude when she encounters moms and dads during the school year.

“I’ve said this every time I get in front of parents: a huge thank you for supporting the bond and the levy years ago, because it does make a difference,” Nolan says.

What kind of difference have the improvements made? Just ask Bob Hunt, the recently hired superintendent of Upper Arlington Schools who, upon coming onto the job, encountered fresh, gleaming buildings that catered to the needs of learners and those who teach them. The usual problems



Parents and students wait to enter a grand opening celebration at the new Upper Arlington High School in 2021.

PHOTO: BARBARA J. PERENIC

associated with aging school infrastructure were absent.

“I’ve spent a career not only chasing down what we can and should be doing from a teaching and learning standpoint, but also hunting down HVAC problems and roof leaks [before coming to Upper Arlington],” Hunt says. “By and large, across the district, a lot of those issues do not exist [in Upper Arlington]. Really, it allows me to promote and provoke conversation about what’s happening in the schools from a teaching and learning perspective.”

The changes are far from superficial, however. Officials describe new or reimagined facilities in which space has been maximized.

“I don’t believe our square footage is that much different than the old building,” Nolan says, comparing Windermere’s updated and outdated spaces. “It’s just the way this building was created for students to utilize every inch of space.”

For Hunt, the goal of creating open, collaborative spaces reflects

the school district’s approach to “developing the whole child.” “We understand that there are really critical skills that we need to develop in young people,” he says, pointing to creativity, communications and problem-solving.

“Your ability to do that and pull that off really is supported by the space,” he says. For example, in the new, 400,000-square-foot Upper Arlington High School, an entire area revolves around STEM, computer science and robotics. Other spaces are tailored for the arts or athletics.

The rich history of the school district is also honored in the new building.

In addition to areas that recognize alumni, as well as past achievements in academics and athletics, Hunt says, “There’s a room dedicated to our education foundation, where people can come together and work on how to support our schools.”

Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility has also been enhanced in all of the rebuilt or renovated sites.

Leaders see the transformed



facilities as essential. In the final analysis, however, most speak of them as merely a vessel for the educators and students who spend their days there.

"If you walk through our buildings, there's a genuine care about each individual student," Hunt says. "We are a public high school where students come from all different backgrounds, and we want to create environments in which they feel welcomed and supported and free to be who they are," says Hunt, adding that the school district is discussing ways to strengthen its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Upper Arlington's dedication to learning extends to its vibrant library system, which is the 18th largest in Ohio by circulation and has returned to, or eclipsed, pre-pandemic usage. Library officials see it as complementary to the school system.

The Upper Arlington Public Library—with branches on Tremont Road, Lane Road and in Miller Park—sees itself functioning as "a child's first school," says library director Beth Hatch.

"It's [a child's] first opportunity to be socialized with other parents and other children," Hatch says. "We have a baby time, so parents bring their babies in and it's their first foray into that socialization." Numerous programs, including art activities, scavenger hunts and story times, keep young readers coming back to the library as they grow up. "There's always something going on at the library," Hatch says.

And, through a special partnership with Upper Arlington Schools, the library offers exclusive cards for teachers to borrow materials for their classrooms.

Meanwhile, the school district is looking confidently to the future. Enrollment has grown over the last decade, and projections suggest the growth will continue, says director of communications Karen Truett.

"A family raises their children here, and then at some point, they sell that family house and a new family moves in with three kids," Truett says. "Maybe

## Private School Options in UA

Upper Arlington boasts a number of private schools, several of which have made their own recent improvements to their facilities or additions to their programming.

The Wellington School, serving preschool through grade 12, has 695 students and a student-to-teacher ratio of 8-to-1. "Families enjoy a diverse and authentic community that is deeply committed to the well-being and belonging of each individual," says head of school Jeff Terwin. "In and out of the classroom, students have the freedom and resources to explore interests that spark their curiosity, all while being appropriately challenged and building a solid academic foundation to power their next steps."

For some Wellington students, those next steps include stepping across the globe. Last year, the school introduced the Wellington International Student Experience, which offers a global engagement class taken during a student's sophomore year that is then followed by an international travel experience. "This year, students are preparing to travel to Zimbabwe, Norway and France," Terwin says.

Within Wellington's walls, a new early childhood and middle school wing opened in January, adding more than 40,000 square feet of learning space and collaborative commons to the campus, Terwin says.

St. Agatha School, with 209 students from preschool through eighth grade, offers all the benefits of a religiously informed education. "Parents choose St. Agatha School because they know their children will learn about their Catholic faith and how to incorporate it into their everyday lives," says principal Veronica Stemen, whose school recently completed a renovation of a gym, including a new wooden floor. Classrooms boast smart TVs and make use of the Juno PA system, she says.

Those modern tools leave students equipped for their future educational goals. "Our students excel when they go on to high school," Stemen says.

St. Andrew School, also offering preschool through eighth grade, inculcates students in the Catholic faith in a modern setting, including the 2013 completion of a two-phase renovation that included updated classrooms and a new multipurpose room.

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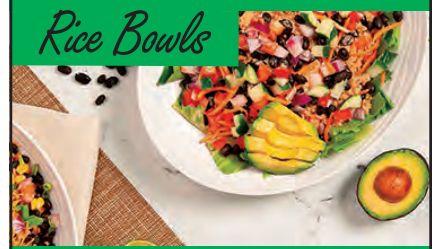
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People explore the new Upper Arlington High School at an open house in 2021.

PHOTO: BARBARA J. PERENIC

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we haven't had any students coming out of that house for five or 10 years, and then suddenly we have three students going out of that house."

To that end, future plans will address the facility needs of three schools that were not part of the first phase of the master plan: Burbank Early Childhood School and the district's two middle schools.

"Those three buildings were identified as phase two of the facilities master planning process," Truett says. "That would be something that the district and the community will work together on in future years to identify how any needs in those buildings will be addressed."

From the perspective of Nolan, the principal of Windermere Elementary School, having great facilities promotes, fosters and results in meaningful learning that will last a lifetime.

"The best compliment I and our staff get is that [the students] love school and that they love coming to school here and to all of our buildings," Nolan says. "The facility is an important piece, but how our community embraces it is even more important."



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