



On the GO

NEWS FROM GREATER OHIO POLICY CENTER

Dayton: A Study of Innovation



Dayton, founded in 1796, has had a long, proud history of innovation. At the turn of the century, it was one of the industrial leaders in the state and one of its most prosperous cities. It's known as the birthplace of aviation and even landed on the international map in 1995 when the Dayton Peace Accords were held at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in 1995.

Despite some recent setbacks – the departure of NCR, a Dayton institution since its founding in 1880, and the December 2008 closing of General Motors' Moraine plant, which employed approximately 2,500 people at the time the closing was announced — Dayton in 2010 is a city that is still innovating.

Its strategy? Collaboration between the community and public and private sectors, and revitalization of its existing assets or anchor institutions, such as universities and research facilities. "Dayton is taking charge of leveraging all of its assets and capitalizing on them," said Nan Whaley, Dayton City Commissioner.

As manufacturing began to trickle out, Dayton looked at its still-thriving assets, including a technology base, anchored by two prominent institutions in the city – Wright-Patterson and the University of Dayton. And those institutions are among the stakeholders stepping in to fill the gap and pave the way for future growth.

Last fall, a few months after NCR announced it would leave Dayton for Georgia, the University of Dayton announced it would purchase the headquarters and 100-plus acres for its Research Institute (UDRI). Those research operations will be located between Wright-Patterson and Tech Town, a developing technology-oriented district and a former brownfield site. Together they form a technology corridor that Dayton city officials decided to capitalize on for the city's benefit.

Their efforts did not go unnoticed by the Governor, and in September the Ohio Department of Development named Dayton the state's first Hub of Innovation and Opportunity to capitalize on the

area's high-profile aerospace and technology assets and build a knowledge intersection connecting aerospace, technology and research operations. The city of Dayton recently approved funds to help the hub along; state funds will be forthcoming as well.

The hub is anchored by Tech Town, where one building has been built and a second will open soon; UDRI; and Wright-Patterson. The goal is to then further connect the hub with downtown, which Whaley called a "sector strategy."

"When the Department of Development announced its plans for a Hub of Innovation, we were ripe," said Debbie Feldman, Montgomery County Administrator and a member of Greater Ohio's Restoring Prosperity Steering Committee. One of the requirements to be designated as a hub is that a region must identify its core strengths and develop a strategic plan for urban revitalization. According to Feldman, Dayton already had an urban and technology strategy in place.

"Our best hope in the next five to 10 years is to see a real hub of technology companies that are developing commercial products that have an air and space core to them. And then within this concentrated area we'll have additional housing and gathering places," Feldman said.

A key part of the revitalization is recognition of the importance of a strong urban core, according to city leaders.

"The only regions doing well are those with strong urban cores where people can live, work and play," said Kristen Wicker, Dayton Downtown Partnership special projects coordinator.



Dayton is trying to take all of its attractive amenities – cultural arts, restaurants, housing variety, and technology base – and connect them through its Greater Downtown Dayton Plan, a partnership of civic, community and business leaders, which formed a year ago. Among the group's plans is the addition of several thousand new housing units within the next 10 years.

"The future belongs to those regions taking urban revitalization seriously," said Dr. Michael Ervin, co-chair of the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan and a member of Greater Ohio's Restoring Prosperity Steering Committee. "Those are the regions that are and will continue to attract high-value jobs, young professionals and the businesses and institutions that want to employ them. We believe Greater Downtown has the potential to be such a place."

To revitalize downtown, Dayton is enhancing its cultural arts amenities downtown. RiverScape, a riverside park development on the Great Miami River, featuring pathways, bridges, gardens and interactive fountains, is in its third phase. Soon to be added are a bike hub and a pavilion with a

stage and covered seating for festivals, community events and entertainment. In the winter, the pavilion will become home to an ice rink. Another success in the revitalization of downtown Dayton was the opening of the Benjamin and Marian Schuster Performing Arts Center in 2003. In addition the Oregon Arts District initiative was launched in March 2008, when five new art galleries opened in Dayton's historic entertainment district.

Goals include making downtown more pedestrian friendly, a place where walkers and bikers can navigate their way to work, home, restaurants and cultural arts events, and increasing and diversifying housing options. On the books is a project to connect all of the area's bikeways so residents throughout the city will have the ability to ride their bikes downtown.

"From a quality of life perspective, it is clear downtown must capitalize on its growing reputation as a destination place for people looking to live, socialize and be entertained," said Sandy Gudorf, president of the Downtown Dayton Partnership. "The Greater Downtown Dayton Plan establishes actionable, collaborative and results-oriented strategies for strengthening downtown Dayton's many existing assets while creating new ones to build a more vibrant city. This plan is a very tactical, deliberate game plan for the future of our downtown."

In addition to building its technology base, the city is also capitalizing on its central geographic location by focusing on logistics and distribution. Caterpillar Midwest and Payless Shoes have added distribution centers and jobs recently. A new interchange this year is expected to help make the area even more appealing to distributors.

Change is never easy. "It's been emotionally and economically hard to realize an era is gone," Whaley said. But Dayton is drawing upon its innovation history to pave a new path. This time the target is not a product or invention, but itself.