



# 2020 Annual Report



2020 Summer Intern Maskin Sidbu

2020 was another busy year for the North End Community Improvement Collaborative (NECIC), consider the following highlights:

## Mission Statement:

Our mission is to improve the quality of life and economic landscape of the North End Community.

## Funding Secured:

Richland County Foundation Fran and Warren Rupp Fund: \$300,000.00  
 Richland County Foundation NECIC Designated Fund: \$224,543.60  
 Richland County Foundation Grants: \$45,000.00  
 Richland County Foundation Carl and Annamarie Fernyak Fund: \$2,500.00  
 Richland County Youth and Family Council: \$12,397.00  
 Paycheck Protection Program: \$414,711.00  
 Area 10 Workforce Development Board: \$84,378.16  
 Donations: \$54,983.94  
 Donations (In Kind): \$17,155.49  
 Fiscal Sponsorships: \$24,908.27

Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging: \$5,573.00  
 IDEX Foundation: \$37,500  
 Ohio CDC Association: \$30,000.00  
 Schmidt Futures: \$105,000.00  
 OSU Pay It Forward: \$1,200.00  
 Akron Urban League: \$6,911.52  
 UMADAOP: \$15,500.00  
 Temp2Higher Revenue: \$917,829.32  
 Finance Fund: \$29,406.00  
 Interns: \$8,400.00

\*Reflects funding secured during the 2020 calendar year, January to December 2020

## Economic Vitality:

# North End Local Foods Initiative (NELFI)



### NECIC Urban Farm

The NECIC Urban Farm opened in 2019 on a ten-acre vacant industrial site in the heart of the North End. The Urban Farm is a social enterprise, community economic development initiative designed to “capture” local food dollars and keep them in the community. Moreover, the farm is the culmination of years of resident-driven planning. North End residents said they wanted vacant land reused and beautified, they said they wanted more jobs and economic opportunities in the neighborhood, they said they wanted key areas redeveloped, more community spaces and worker owned businesses, they said they wanted more educational opportunities and workforce development. The NECIC Urban Farm not only addresses all of these priorities and recommendations simultaneously, it is a wonderful example of public/private partnerships and epitomizes the spirit of community collaboration.

2020 was a big year for the farm. This year we acquired two additional high tunnels and expanded the available growing space in two others. Similarly, twenty outside beds were constructed creating an additional 5,120 square feet of growing space. A 20 x 30 steel structure was erected as a station for washing and packing produce in preparation for market, and a 10 x 40 steel container was acquired to securely store tools and equipment. Electrical infrastructure was installed in all the high tunnels and someone donated a much needed Ford 5000 Tractor. In fact, many of these improvements were made possible by generous donations.

**Last year the NECIC Urban Farm generated 4,944.25 pounds of produce in the period between April and December.** Crops included salad greens, beets, scallions, radishes, a wide variety of peppers, basil, tomatoes, baby spinach, and carrots



NECIC, and other local growers have come together to form a farmer’s cooperative. This cooperative, “The Richland County Gro-Op” is part of The Ohio State University’s micro farm food systems project. Out of nine farms that produced a total of 20,524 pounds of produce to the Gro-Op, NECIC contributed 24 % of the total produce sold.

## Economic Vitality:

# North End Local Foods Initiative (NELFI) (Continued)

### Raising Richland Community Garden Summit:

Unfortunately, the 2020 Summit (the 10th annual) was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to a time when the summit can safely reconvene. Stay tuned!

### North End Farmers Market:

Formerly held at the Blust Avenue Teaching Garden, the North End Farmers Market moved to the NECIC Urban Farm (311 Bowman St.) in 2020. Despite the pandemic, the market had a banner first year at its new location, generating **\$16,870.35 of economic activity** throughout the season. **Roughly 1,500 shoppers** purchased fresh produce from twelve vendors in 2020, and volunteers gave 113 hours of time to running the market.

By social distancing and following all recommended COVID-19 safety guidelines, the 2020 North End Farmers Market was a great opportunity to stay connected with our neighborhood community. Particularly with so many face-to-face NECIC programs suspended or changed to virtual delivery.

### Blust Avenue Teaching Garden:

In 2020, most of the garden's educational program delivery went virtual with online "how to" videos and updates, and through individual telephone and video consultations with residents.

**Over 3,000\* pounds of produce were harvested from the garden**, all of which was donated to North End residents, food pantries, and outreach centers. The 2020, harvest included corn, beets, cucumbers, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, onions, garlic, watermelons, and so much more. Last year, volunteers contributed 279.5 hours to planting, weeding, harvesting, and cleaning the garden.

*\*It is important not to compare yields between the Teaching Garden (~3,000 lbs.) and the Urban Farm (~5,000 lbs.) without considering the following. First, the Urban Farm is growing for quality over quantity and is growing according to a specific market demand, while the Teaching Garden is growing without these restraints. For example, the garden yielded pounds of softball size beets, while the farm grew silver dollar size beets specifically for the market. Similarly, the garden yielded a much wider variety of crops than those grown at the farm, particularly heavier crops like watermelons, corn, and potatoes for example.*

### Community Gardens:

NECIC has supported community gardens from its inception in 2007. 2020 was the first year since 2013 that we didn't receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to support our community garden grant program.

Despite this set back we found ways to assist community gardeners by starting seedlings in the Blust Avenue Teaching Garden hoop house and by getting donations from other sources in the community. Moreover, we continued to connect gardeners with the appropriate entities to meet their various needs. In 2020 we put an emphasis on cultivating more of an online presence by doing short workshops via Facebook Live, creating prerecorded videos, and hosting zoom calls. This kept us connected to our community garden network as we continue our food access efforts in the North End and beyond.

## Economic Vitality:

### Temp2Higher:

Now entering its fifth year, NECIC's alternative staffing service, Temp2Higher, has proven to be what we affectionately call a living, learning lab. This service has given us a much deeper perspective of the challenges facing our local workforce from our jobseekers and employers. Simply put, our job, as always, is to identify opportunity and assets and support and connect the two.

Despite the challenges that arose in 2020, Temp2Higher successfully shifted our entire operation to the web with online applications and communication. **We had 617 registrations and placed 238 temp associates with twenty six employers. Last year Temp2Higher invoiced \$917,829.32.**

In 2020 we also continued our ongoing focus on targeted workforce development efforts. For example our partnership with the Area 10 Workforce Development Board to specifically target African American male job seekers and minority owned businesses to connect them with resources like those provided by OhioMeansJobs centers and other workforce development partners.

As of November 2020, NECIC was working with 28 African American men with 14 on job assignment, two of which have been offered permanent full-time employment.

Transitioned/reskilled one young man who started a clerical position that led him to a full-time work from home customer service job that increased his hourly income by \$5.

To qualify for training with our community education partners, two of the men not on assignment are completing qualifying paperwork with Ohio Means Jobs (OMJ) /Jobs and Family Services (JFS), and Richland Chamber Career Tech scholarships.

Any data collected will be used to identify barriers to employment of hard to hire populations (felonies, welfare to work, inner city populations, and minority workers). This data will help companies and community partners understand what they can do to improve their systems. Moreover, how we all can support the local educational system, working together to create industry credentialed education, that will provide career sustainable (living wage) employment. All while supporting and training local small businesses.

Local employers can be great community problem solvers. Recently the Warren Rupp Co. took a very hands-on approach to meeting local needs when they donated \$32,500 to connect jobseekers to training and eliminating barriers to employment. The funding also covers supplies needed for work or training, and can be used when other community resources are not available.

Following much deliberation, NECIC's Board of Directors will be changing the name of our staffing service, from Temp2Higher to NECIC Staffing in 2021.

After five years in the staffing industry, we realize how important our asset-based philosophy is to workforce development, which is foundational to NECIC's mission. We take a holistic approach in assisting our jobseekers and address their barriers with an eye towards long-term economic stability. We continue to assess and respond to the needs of our ever-changing workforce, and add services to support their success as needed. We also strive to exceed the expectations of the local employers we serve.

## Letter From The Board President And Director

It's hard to believe another year is behind us, and oh, what a year it's been! 2020 required that we, along with the rest of the world, modify how we do things. Working from home for what we thought would be a few weeks, stretched into months. We were personally affected as several staff members, their families, and many of our program participants battled the disease. Our elders were the hardest hit and we lost several of them due to COVID-19. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those families.

However, even in the face of a global pandemic, we were able to keep things moving along. We moved nearly all of our programs to an online platform. Our board and staff met virtually. We staggered work schedules and at various points nearly all of the staff worked from home. We significantly increased our safety measures for meetings in the office and adhered to all COVID-19 protocols. For our community elders, we modified our program to have pick up/delivered meals, activity and wellness kits, and daily phone calls from the staff the entire year.

In March, we increased the size of our board to seventeen members and established new committees. A new Resident Affairs Committee was established and began reviewing small grants, and added in-depth discussions about neighborhood issues and priorities. The 2020 Board Officers were: President Annamarie Durtschi, Vice President Paul Kemerling, Secretary Dr. Phil Mazzocco, and Treasurer Julianna Akuchie. This was a year of heavy lifting for our organization and many board members dived more deeply into the work than ever before.

In 2020 we saw the departure of the following staff members, some of whom have been affiliated with NECIC for over a decade: Amanda Cooper, Robyn McNulty, Beth Reitler, Leona Smith, Cadisja Toppins, and Corey Ziegler. We appreciate their commitment to our mission and contributions to our work and wish them well in their endeavors. We also saw the end of AmeriCorps VISTA service for Christen Lee and Dr. Sabrinah White and thank them for their work. We were honored to have crossed paths with these wonderful co-workers.

As always partnerships were a huge part of our work in 2020. We'd like to thank The Ohio State University faculty and staff who work so closely with us in various ways. Of particular note is The Mansfield Microfarm Team which includes: Dr. Kip Curtis, Glennon Sweeney, Tannya Forcone, Dr. Mary Rodriguez, and Dr. Kareem Usher. We appreciate all of their interest in the North End as they not only helped establish a new local food system that keeps our dollars in the community, they also developed an in-depth survey that establishes baseline data to measure the impact of the Microfarm project on the neighborhood, to look at buying habits, and to help guide future work that will help us meet our mission *to improve the quality of life and economic landscape of the North End*. Along with that, we enjoyed working with our fellow

### NECIC

#### 2020 Board Of Directors

##### President

Annamarie Durtschi

##### Vice President

Paul Kemerling

##### Secretary

Dr. Phil Mazzocco

##### Treasurer

Julianna Akuchie

Chris Hiner

Jodie Perry

Loretha Cross

Loretta Norris

Valerie Harper

Aaron Williams

Jeff Jones

Sam Weiler

Jennifer Williams

C. Antoinette Daly

Braxton Daniels, III

Amanda Stanfield

Ken Dudley

## Letter From The Board President And Director

Microfarmers & the Ideaworks Entrepreneur's Kitchen who joined together to form the Richland Gro-Op Cooperative. A special thanks to Gorman Rupp for their support as well.

Dr. Norman Jones, Dr. Donna Hight, Cindy Wood and Dr. Kelly Whitney all worked closely with us during the year, helping in various aspects of our work. We appreciate all of your contributions and for you seeing value in investing your time and expertise in our work.

After reading about the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on the African American and Native communities, and two weeks later witnessing the murder of George Floyd by a police officer, NECIC's Board wrote letters to Mansfield City Council in support of declaring racism a public health crisis and to form a Task Force to address systemic racism in Richland County. Individual board members and staff were a part of a community groundswell of concerned citizens including former 6<sup>th</sup> ward Councilwoman and sponsor of the legislation, Jean Taddie. Dr. Donna Hight, Dr. Beth Castle, Crystal Weese, Tiffany Mitchell, Brigitte Coles, Renda Cline, Margaret Lin, Amy Hiner and Deanna West-Torrence and others began organizing and used *The Richland County State of the African American Community Report* to spark a number of conversations among local leaders by presenting factual data about the inequity in so many of our local systems. Unfortunately, the legislation failed, with council refusing to acknowledge the obvious. On a positive note, however, the report became the basis for funding new workforce development programming aimed at increasing the number of Black males in the labor force and to help support and grow minority businesses. Conversations took place amongst Richland County leaders, including council members, mayors, commissioners all of whom were presented with the report and who had very frank and honest discussions about the role of race and racism in Richland County.

We joined the rest of the world who watched in horror at the murder of George Floyd by a police officer. We later heard of reports of Breonna Taylor and others, who were also killed by police during 2020, and this sparked longtime local North End elder and civil rights activist, Wayne McDowell, to accelerate his efforts to form and lead the Black and Brown Coalition. Wayne convened members of the Black and Brown community at NECIC at various times in 2019 and 2020 including, but not limited to the following: the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward City Councilman Alomar Davenport, Lodema M'Poko, Carla James, Aurelio Diaz, Pastor Aaron Williams, LaTanya Palmer, Ms. Betty Palmer Harris, Crystal Weese, Alverta Williams, Pam Williams Briggs, Sallie Sylvester and Deanna West-Torrence. The Chief of Police Keith Porch, Assistant Chief Joe Petrycki, and Lori Cope, the City's Service Safety Director met regularly with members of the group to create a Police Community Code of Conduct. Following a public review period, a public signing occurred downtown at the Gazebo in September. Although the intent was to establish trust between the two, the ink was not dry on the document when a North End incident resulted in a minor being dragged by an officer. Unfortunately, on January 6, Wayne McDowell passed away, leaving a legacy of research, local black history, and civil rights activism. We are so honored to have been able to help Wayne complete what ended up being his final project.

Looking forward, we have our work cut out for us. We had a most productive year, despite the challenges, and hope for an impactful 2021. To all who have supported the North End and NECIC's work in whatever way you have, we thank you and wish you a happy and healthy 2021!

Sincerely,

*Annamarie Durtschi*  
Board President NECIC

*Deanna West-Torrence*  
Executive Director NECIC

## Economic Vitality:

(Continued)

### Microbusiness Development Program:

NECIC Microbusiness Development courses successfully transitioned from in person classes to distance delivery via teleconferencing software in 2020. Overall, **seventy-three classes were held serving twenty-five entrepreneurs in 2020**. Among those, six new businesses were launched including:

- 3rd Life Upcycling LLC
- Vel's Produce LLC
- Eugenia's Healthy Home Cooking LLC
- Sunrise Road LLC
- Stark Fresh Mobile Market
- A licensed real estate agent

### Minority Business Assistance Center (MBAC):

Since 2019, NECIC has partnered with the Akron MBAC to bring business counseling services to Richland County. This includes assistance with business certifications like Women Business Enterprise (WBE), Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Veteran Business Enterprise (VBE), etc. **In 2020, NECIC's MBAC Business Counselor provided 170 hours of business counseling to forty-eight clients.** 2020 highlights:

- Three businesses launched their websites
- Food truck business opened in early November 2020
- An urban farmer sold over \$1,000 in produce this summer season, broke even, and secured an SBA loan
- A mobile market was launched
- One person became a licensed real estate agent and joined the Holden Company
- Three people secured business relief grants (\$10,000 + \$7,500 + \$2,500 = \$20,000)

## Youth

### The Open Table

2020 created new challenges for The Open Table mentor program and like so many other programs moved to online delivery via teleconferencing software. Eight recruitment sessions and ten table meetings/trainings were held in 2020. Overall, three tables were launched with seventeen trained members (mentors), and two friends (mentees) were recruited. NECIC worked with two referral partners in 2020.

### Summer Manufacturing Institute

In partnership with the Regional Manufacturing Coalition and EPIK, NECIC led the 3rd annual Summer Manufacturing Institute (SMI) Camp in 2020. SMI is part of Senator Sherrod Brown's call to engage Ohio youth with local manufacturing activities and opportunities in their home counties. Twenty two Richland County kids registered for the five day virtual camp.

## AAI

### *The Richland County State of the African American Community Report*

NECIC began 2020 with the release of *The Richland County State of the African American Community Report*. As the title implies, the report is a study of current public data relating to the quality of life of African Americans in Richland County. With the help of local media and the tenacious efforts of citizen advocates who helped share its findings and recommendations with a large audience, the report has catalyzed renewed energy around the elimination of systemic racism in our community.

Following the report's release several key events occurred.

A coalition of concerned citizens came together to create a task force focused on the eradication of systemic racism in Richland County. The group is gathering data on the effects of racism in education, housing, employment, business, mental health and health care. Their overall goal is to analyze this data and develop approaches to address any racial disparities.

Trailing the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police in May 2020, wide scale global protests erupted demanding police reform. Protests were held locally in Mansfield, Ontario, Shelby, Mt. Vernon, and Bellville. Moreover, many communities across the United States including the City of Columbus and Franklin County declared racism a public health crisis.

In June 2020, 6<sup>th</sup> Ward representative Jean Taddie sponsored a resolution in Mansfield City Council "strongly supporting the recognition of racism as a public health crisis". However, this formal and public recognition that systemic racism exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was too much for councilors Burns, Falquette, Lawrence, Mears, and Van Harligen. The resolution was defeated 5 to 4 when put to a vote.

If systemic racism doesn't exist in Richland County explain the following:

(\*Key findings from NECIC's Report\*)

- The greatest number of African Americans reside in a census tract that has the lowest number of housing units and contains two correctional institutions and an airport that doesn't conduct passenger flights.
- African Americans are lagging in every indicator of prosperity: median household income (\$29,913), poverty (35.6 percent below poverty), food stamps (32.4 percent of households), home ownership, employment (18.1 percent unemployment rate), and, most concerning, labor force participation rate (40.5 percent).
- Only 3.8 percent of owner-occupied housing units in Richland County were owned by African Americans.
- The difference in the percentages of the population **out of** the labor force, when sorted by gender, is staggering. Specifically, 67.8 percent of black men, 33.0 percent of black women, 26.1 percent of white men, and 29.3 percent of white women in Richland County are out of the labor force.
- Black men have the lowest rate of educational attainment at both the pre- and post-secondary levels (74.1 percent with a high school diploma or higher; 5.6 percent with a Bachelor's degree or higher).
- Black boys and men are struggling significantly. They have the lowest employment figures and rates of educational attainment compared to black women and white men and women.

## AAI

### (Continued)

- With 84.5 disciplinary incidents in a school year per 1,000 enrolled students, black children were involved in the highest number of disciplinary incidents at school (2016).
- In 2010, more than 1 in 4 black people were in correctional facilities while the figure is roughly 1 in 50 for white people.
- Black households have the lowest rate of marriage (23.18 percent) out of all races.
- Based on the last three general elections, Mansfield Wards 4, 5, and 6 have some of the lowest voter turnouts in Richland County. These wards contain most of the census tracts in which the greatest number of African Americans live. That said, this does ***not formally prove*** that African Americans have low voter turnout, though it does warrant formal investigation of this hypothesis. Moreover, correlation is not causation.
- With a response rate of only 9 percent, African Americans were remarkably unresponsive to health surveys that were sent out for the 2016 Richland County Community Health Assessment.

As a direct response to some of these findings, in July 2020, the Area 10 Workforce Development Board issued a request for quotes to provide outreach services to minority owned businesses and African American male job seekers. The goal of the outreach is to engage minority owned businesses and African American male job seekers to utilize the services of the OhioMeanJobs Centers and other workforce partner agencies.

NECIC's quote was accepted and as a result, Recruitment Coordinator, Crystal Weese joined the NECIC team in the fall of 2020. Crystal joins Cheyla Bradley in working diligently to connect African American owned businesses and job seekers with all the appropriate community resources.

## Civic Engagement

### Community Organizing

#### Neighbor Up Night:

Neighbor Up Night (NUN) started strong in 2020, with well attended meetings in January, February, and March. Residents were engaging and connecting with one another; problem solving, working through a wide variety of community issues such as reusing vacant land, improving the local schools and economy, and improving the overall livability of the neighborhood. Unfortunately, in April 2020 NUN meetings were cancelled due to health and safety concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic and will resume when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, many of the most active participants in Neighbor Up Night remain connected to NECIC's work in other ways through the Elder Program, or the Urban Farm for example. Furthermore, some of the most active NUN participants are on NECIC's Board of Directors and stay engaged through the board's Resident Affairs Committee.

## Civic Engagement Community Organizing (Continued)

### North End Small Grants:

The North End Small Grant Program changed in 2019. The two most significant changes were accepting grant applications on a rolling basis with no quarterly deadlines, and by requiring attendance at Neighbor Up Night as a criterion for eligibility. Due to the suspension of Neighbor Up Night in April 2020, the program is being reevaluated and is currently being administered by the Resident Affairs Committee of NECIC's board. Despite all the challenges encountered in 2020 the group was able to award the following North End Small Grants:

- Neighbors Fix Ms. Clara's Porch
- American Legion Lady's Auxiliary Feed the Hungry for Thanksgiving
- Family and Friends Day at Johns Park
- Christmas Event at the Imani Center

### North End Elder Program:

The COVID-19 pandemic required NECIC to suspend the twice monthly Elder Luncheons in March of 2020. The North End Elders held five luncheons in the previous months with an average of 50 elders in attendance. In the interest of the elder's health and safety, NECIC and our partners worked diligently in 2020 to provide alternative methods of support for North End Elders including monthly check in calls with over 90 participants, and socially distanced grab and go events where NECIC, the Area Agency on Aging, and the Mansfield/Richland County Public Library distributed meals and a variety of "kits" to the group. Overall, 30 elders received regular meals at these events, and over 100 wellness kits, and roughly 140 activity kits were also circulated to the group. Wellness kits included things like hand sanitizer, face masks, and information related to the pandemic, while activity kits included things like puzzles, crafts, and adult coloring books. In several cases, NECIC and our partners provided emergency food and supplies to members, and in another case assisted an elder whose furnace stopped working in the middle of winter.

## Housing

### Housing

Housing development continues to be a long-term, albeit challenging, organizational priority. Throughout the city, our housing stock continues to decline with no significant investment in housing in the North End. The lack of schools and other anchor institutions present very unique challenges to housing investment in neighborhoods like the North End. In late 2019, the Board approved the submission of a rental project in Census Tract 6, the area near the News Journal building. Thankfully, the city and the Land Bank allocated HOME funding and made the property available. Unfortunately, the state funds were not secured and the project is being reconsidered. The housing work at NECIC is being done with the expertise of housing and community development consultant Doug Harsany of Harsany and Associates guiding the process, enabling NECIC to build its internal capacity as we work to improve housing in the North End.