

**one bistro, Xenia**  
**President's Award for Innovative Practices**

One bistro Xenia is the most visible layer of a multi-faceted partnership revitalizing the Downtown Xenia Historic District through rehabilitating an historic retail space, establishing a community restaurant, and providing workforce development for adults with developmental disabilities. City-funded design, CDBG Program Income, private philanthropy, and investment by the nonprofit property owner were innovatively overlaid to accomplish this project.

Xenia's Community Development Coordinator Mary Crockett assembled a visionary team including one (our neighbors eat) bistro, a nonprofit socialpreneur venture using a "pay what you can afford" concept, Toward Independence, Inc., a nonprofit agency serving the developmentally disabled in Greene, Hamilton, and Montgomery Counties, and the City of Xenia. The team was enhanced by the addition of historic architecture firm Heritage Architectural Associates, and a female-owned local contractor, Unified Construction Services.

Over 48% of Xenia is comprised of low/moderate-income families -- a majority of its school-aged children qualify for free/discounted lunches. An annual \$80,000 CDBG allocation for a city population of 25,719 challenges Xenia in attracting quality restaurants to their small downtown, especially given that restaurants are faced with investing a minimum of \$225,000 up to \$1,000,000 to open in buildings valued at 1/3 of that investment. The private lending climate can't make traditional loans for Xenia's undervalued, under-improved downtown buildings. The one bistro project provided an innovative solution.

Crockett was responsible for assembling a creative funding package. A \$10,000 City of Xenia general fund Design Code Assessment Program grant paid for the design. CDBG Program Income provided a \$70,000 partial forgiveness/partial repayment loan for the rehabilitation of the space, and nearly \$10,000 was contributed by a local philanthropic organization. A substantial rehabilitation contribution was made by the property owner, Toward Independence. Under the leadership of its CEO Mark Schlater, Toward Independence partners with one bistro to provide opportunities for its clients to learn job skills and interact with the community through working at the restaurant.

Significant public investment and community partnerships coalesced in order to make this "first of its kind" project happen for Xenia. Those partnerships are now an established infrastructure and can ease future business ventures in vacant downtown properties. While one bistro is hard to replicate in food and mission, the beautifully rehabilitated facility would be very attractive to another restaurateur if one bistro moved or expanded elsewhere.

The project has provided multiple "wins." One bistro is feeding the hungry, Toward Independence receives the benefit of workforce development, downtown workers have a place to eat, and the City benefits by having a quality food venue that brings people into its historic downtown. The restaurant has already become a volunteer magnet for regional companies, institutions, and socially-responsible individuals. As Mayor Bayless remarks, "we have never seen such a worthwhile, inclusive program/business in this community and our citizens love it and support it!"

The model can be replicated within the City and is already generating interest from neighboring communities seeking to emulate Xenia by harnessing the small-town power of community partnership, public funding, and social capital to a delicious result.



TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

