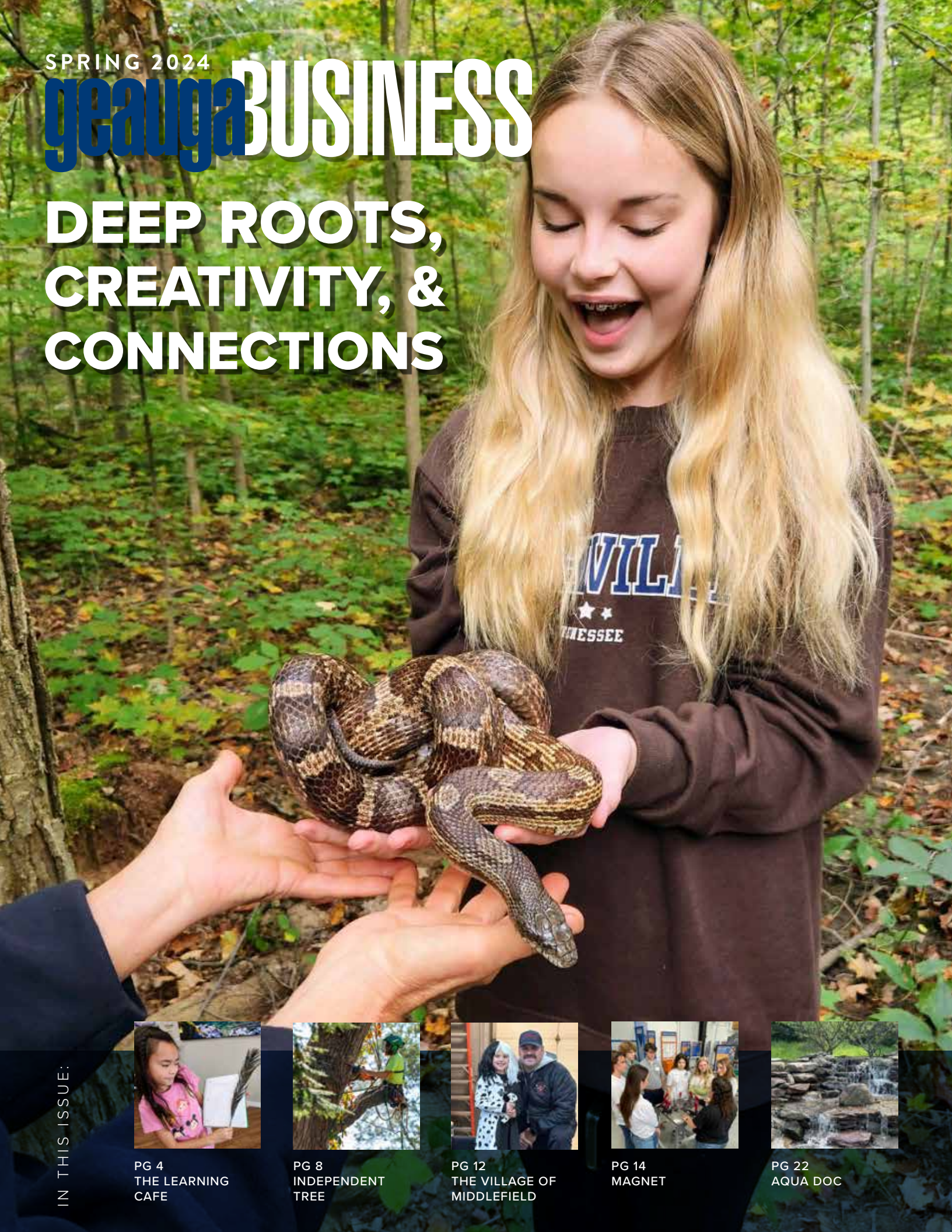


SPRING 2024

# geauga BUSINESS

## DEEP ROOTS, CREATIVITY, & CONNECTIONS



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# The Village of Middlefield: A Success Story



You've likely noticed the evolution and growth throughout the Village of Middlefield over the years if you're familiar with the community. While many small towns fail to do so, Middlefield has maintained a sense of that small town vibe even with added businesses, ongoing community improvements, and expansions / renovations. We were delighted to meet with Mayor Ben Garlich to hear more about the Village, what's changed and where it plans to go and grow.

Having lived in Middlefield his entire adult life, Garlich knew that Middlefield is where he planned to be forever. Prior to running for Mayor in 2012, he had the privilege of working in operations management at two great companies: Lincoln Electric and Dillen Products. He shares that his biggest takeaway from the roles is that "when you go into that place, one thing you learn is to contribute – when you contribute, you benefit", something he carries throughout his life.

paths to getting businesses operational instead of finding out how to prevent it – something all too common in small towns. This has led to growth year over year and interestingly, while the Village boasts a modest 2,700 residents, more than 10,000 people commute here to work every day, paying a village income tax to do so. This dynamic is uncommon to say the least and isn't taken for granted – it's a driving force behind the pro-business mentality that permeates the community.

As Garlich says, his experience in efficient operations instilled a "beat the competition, do it better than anybody else" mentality which is exactly what he brings to his efforts as Mayor in Middlefield – and boy has he delivered. As passionate as he is about being an active part of the community, he is twice as focused on improving the quality of life for everyone in The Village of Middlefield.

Garlich's focus on efficiency paired with his savvy business mindset makes him the perfect candidate to spearhead bringing these opportunities for businesses to life to benefit the community. Garlich works together with Middlefield's goal-focused and single-minded council as well as an effective administrator/ director of economic development to bring about effective change. In fact, in his first year in office, they changed the old-thinking on property annexation by developing a unique revenue sharing approach with a local township to bring a project to life.

Since 2012 when Garlich put the Economic Development Committee into place – the focus has been working with business owners to find

"When you go into that place, one thing you learn is to contribute – when you contribute, you benefit."

-Ben Garlich,  
*The Village of Middlefield Mayor*

## Where families grow strong. Where business gets done. Where government works for you.

The beauty of this is that it sets the precedent for future efforts, making it possible to expand into the townships and create a win-win situation for everyone involved. The vision that was set for the community – this “nucleus of business” creates a convenience that improves the quality of life for everyone in the community. Their proactive, business-friendly mindset continues to build positive relationships with businesses while protecting the interests of Middlefield and its residents.

In fact, when Garlich first came into office, there was less than 3 million in carryover for the Village. Now – there is 12 million in carryover plus a healthy budget for maintenance, upkeep and infrastructure improvements that happen year after year.

The truly interesting piece of this is the town’s commitment to supporting the businesses in maintaining their place within the community. One representation of this commitment is the Storefront Renovation Program, which was established in 2022. The initiative gives businesses throughout the Village the opportunity to submit for a grant of 50% of their storefront renovation, up to \$10,000. Twenty-eight local businesses applied to date for a total of \$100,000, ranging in amounts from just a few hundred dollars to the full \$10,000.

In the approval process, the town’s primary focus was to ensure that the work being done would improve the aesthetics of the properties, encouraging everyone in the town to take pride in their community. From signage to awnings to more extensive renovations undertaken by businesses like The Amish Family Market, Spidaleri Plaza, and Dairy Queen, the changes have made a big impact on the Village.

In 2023 alone, 9 new businesses have come to Middlefield and two businesses have expanded their operations – Flowers by Emily and Heritage Meats. The expansion of commerce in the community is a point

of pride. The Village is privileged to be home to many of the county’s largest employers. Many of these businesses have been here for years – Kraftmaid Cabinetry has been based in Middlefield since the 1980’s.

All of this coupled with the continuous improvements, such as the Walmart, Giant Eagle, and the Middlefield Bank Plaza, show the focus and determination that the leadership has on making this a thriving community. The partnerships here is what makes that happen, everyone has each other’s backs, and as a community they take care of each other.

With these businesses comes a thriving workforce, from the larger companies, which employ thousands of people in a variety of industries, to the small business that bring a unique character to the community and even a wide range of Amish owned businesses. The relationship that Garlich has built with the Amish community has brought more Amish businesses within the Village limits and thusly, Garlich, Bob Troyer, and other township trustees requested a buggy lane be integrated along 608 to build a better connection for their travel.

A community is built on its people, on its businesses, and on its education system – and Garlich knows that the educational aspect is equally as important as business in maintaining a well-rounded, thriving community. As he says, “People will drive for jobs, but they’ll move for a school” and ensuring Middlefield’s is one of the best is on his agenda.

So where is Middlefield headed? If it’s up to Garlich – it’s going to be good. While the market and economy are anyone’s guess these days and other parts of the state are seeing a rapid decline, Middlefield is still holding steady and they hope to stay that way. As he says “We can’t take the same club in the same swing and expect a better shot” – so Middlefield continues to find strategic ways to improve.

In 2012, where no housing was

happening – they created an “Impact Rebate” initiative. If builders hit a defined quota, the town would give them half of their impact. “You have got to incentivize what you want to grow. So if we get hit with challenges, we’re going to figure out how to fix them”, Garlich shared. After that initiative? Fifteen homes were built over the next three years.

All in all the record change, vast improvements, and hopeful forecast for the Village of Middlefield isn’t just inspiring, it’s an anomaly in a world full of change and challenge and the leadership is focused on maintaining that in the years to come.

