

A renaissance is occurring in Portsmouth, corresponding with a surge of citizen involvement and activity. Located in the southern region of the state on the confluence of the Ohio and Scioto Rivers, Portsmouth is an Appalachian community that has endured tough economic times and suffered the brunt of the opioid epidemic. Citizens had lost faith in their local government to address or solve the issues facing the community. Today, that is all changing.

After moving from council/manager form of government in 1990 to a fulltime mayor, Portsmouth switched back to council/manager form of government and hired its first city manager in January 2014. In the first three years of this change \$8.8 million of documented savings were realized, employee numbers were reduced through attrition, service levels were maintained or increased and the municipal organization stabilized. These actions have resulted in fostering a level of trust with the public.

With the positive results emanating from city hall, citizens and community groups are now willing to participate in joint ventures and partnership projects. These groups now have a belief that private financial contributions would be invested wisely and that volunteering for projects to improve the community will not result in frustration and resistance from city hall. These were not the typical civic groups like Main Street Portsmouth, Portsmouth Rotary or Kiwanis. These were a new breed of citizen groups.

Last year Portsmouth Connex, a cycling advocacy group, purchased bike racks that were installed across the city. This year they coordinated with the city in applying for a grant from Yay Bikes which the City of Portsmouth received. In addition, they plan to financially contribute to a bike trail project along the Ohio River set for construction this summer.



Shawnee State University's new President Dr. Kurtz has advocated greater student involvement in the community and several college students have approached the city's community development director to assist in applying for grants for the city's park system.

Late last year Shawnee State University students were instrumental in participating with other Portsmouth citizens in a contest hosted by State Farm Insurance called the State Farm Insurance Neighborhood Assist grant. This program was geared to community causes as supported by our neighbors in a community. Through the contest the community won \$25,000 toward repairs to

Spartan Stadium, a former National Football League stadium that was home to the Portsmouth Spartans (moved to Detroit in 1934 and became the Detroit Lions).



A group of passionate citizens formed a non-profit organization called Friends of Greenlawn Cemetery to raise funds and to make improvements to historic Greenlawn Cemetery. This group immediately made plans for beautification projects, volunteer activities, and fund raising. This group is also working to digitize the cemetery records for online genealogy research and to create an app for your phone that will educate cemetery patrons of the life story of several interesting and important people buried in the cemetery.



The Mound Park Pickleball League approached the City of Portsmouth about converting four of the eight tennis courts to pickleball courts and as a group had raised \$20,000 toward the conversion of half of the tennis courts into pickleball courts. Through the efforts of the pickleball group the city matched their contribution and is going to also rehabilitate the remaining tennis courts. Without this citizen initiative the city would not have moved forward with this project. However, because of the group's contribution the city knew there was community investment and citizens willing to make sure that not only their investment but the city's investment is maintained.



Mound Park is a cultural asset due to the preserved earthworks Indian mound from the Ohio Hopewell culture. Due to financial constraints, the park over the years had only been moderately maintained at best. Citizen groups were interested in revitalizing the park but struggled to become unified in the effort. This year the city of Portsmouth has taken the leadership and has worked to coordinate these efforts. As a result long anticipated investment is coming to the park from the city and from the community.

As city leaders we should not fear community participation or involvement from citizens or community groups. Our ability as leaders to coordinate their efforts and to align their vision will not only benefit the municipal organization but it also strengthens the community.