

# Ohio

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# The Man with the Renovation Plan

JEFF MARTIN AND 3CDC ARE BRINGING OVER-THE-RHINE—AND CINCINNATI—BACK TO LIFE

BY JESSICA BALTZERSEN

**T**he renaissance of the Over-the-Rhine (OTR) neighborhood in downtown Cincinnati was first discussed in the 1980s, but the revitalization and concentrated efforts in the early 2000s truly kick-started the booming business and entertainment district to what it is known as today.

OTR, directly north of Cincinnati's central business district downtown, has suffered decades of disinvestment. As a result it was largely vacant and run down and consisted of rampant crime rates and low home ownership. Formed in 2003, the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC), a nonprofit real estate development organization, began with a mission of "bringing neglected buildings and spaces in our center city back into use." 3CDC joined other property developers at the time and secured hundreds of the most deteriorated buildings and abandoned lots in the area. They worked to repurpose the properties for residential and commercial spaces.

Jeff Martin, vice president of project management at 3CDC, has managed a panoply of renovation projects including some of Cincinnati's most iconic landmarks and public spaces—Fountain Square, Washington Park and Music Hall—all of which have increased community involvement and foot traffic from residents and visitors all over the country.

Martin's love for math and art harmoniously unified when he chose to major in architecture at Miami University, where he additionally pursued his master's degree. Working on renovations in the historically preserved neighborhood of OTR (home to

the largest collection of Italianate architecture in the United States), Martin has the opportunity to integrate the old with the new for a burgeoning district unique to the direction of the city. "One of the reasons that our development efforts have been so successful is ... because the building stock and scale of the neighborhood are perfect for urban revitalization. Many of the newer developments around the country have the scale all wrong—the streets are too wide, the sidewalks are too wide, and the commercial spaces are too large. Not in OTR," says Martin.

In his current role, he oversees the entire construction process: from the design, consultants, permits and zoning to the management of detailed budgets and intricate schedules associated with large-scale projects.

In 2005, as development officer, Martin oversaw a \$49 million renovation of Fountain Square, a downtown gathering space symbolically known as the city's nucleus. The project included the renovation of the Fountain Square North parking garage and the public plaza. As a result from the project and support from sponsors, the Square has free, programmed events all year long.

According to 3CDC's website, the renovation of the space has attracted record-breaking numbers of people back to downtown Cincinnati and, "has resulted in the investment of nearly \$403 million in additional private dollars in the Fountain Square District and Backstage District."

Martin also oversaw the \$48 million renovation and expansion of Washington Park that was reopened to the public in 2012. The private/public partnership among 3CDC, the city of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Park Board and the Cincinnati corporate and philanthropic community collectively worked to transform the once rundown 150-year-old, 6-acre park into an 8-acre retreat with a 450-space underground



Jeff Martin, vice president of project management at the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC)

parking garage. Other amenities include a performance stage, civic lawn, event plaza, interactive water features complete with lights and sound, a children's playground, a fenced-in dog park, pathways, and more.

"[Watching residents utilize the spaces] we renovate is the best part of what we do and quite honestly brings me the most joy. I love hanging out in the spaces and seeing the community enjoy them. My favorite project has to be Washington Park. I've never seen a place where literally every walk of life visits and gets along. It's awesome to see," says Martin.

Most recently, Martin managed the \$143 million renovation of Music Hall—a 256,600-square-foot theater and event space. The impressive venue, built in 1878 and designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1975, was in need of structural and functional upgrades. 3CDC partnered





**3CDC has managed the revitalization of many of Cincinnati's important landmarks, including Washington Park. Above, Washington Park before and after the renovation.**

with the city of Cincinnati to complete the necessary renovations and the project was completed and reopened to the public in October 2017.

"I enjoy the challenge of doing something new. Every project is different and something I've never done before. The process is similar, but the challenges and problems are always different," says Martin.

"Often on large projects there are many stakeholders involved. In order to manage any project successfully you need to be able to get consensus quickly and make decisions in a timely and efficient manner. Otherwise you risk delay and cost overruns," adds Martin.

He has managed countless other projects including the 2015 completion of the 84.51°

(formerly known as dunnhumbyUSA) building in the city's business district. The \$140 million project includes the construction of office and retail space, as well as a 1,000-space parking garage.

For today and in the future, Martin says 3CDC plans to do "much of the same thing that they've been doing for the last 12-13 years—restore the historic buildings, increase home ownership, populate with people, shops, restaurants and office spaces.

"Overall the community and the region have been very supportive of our efforts. The evidence is that downtown is booming and OTR is thriving." ■