In its early days, the District was home to Eastern European immigrants of the West Side Colony. In the years following World War I, the area emerged as the cultural and commercial center of Dayton’s African American community.

Not unlike other urban communities, however, the erosion of residences and businesses resulting from interstate highway construction in the 1960’s, racial unrest, and other urbanization pressures had a devastating effect on the Wright Dunbar commercial district. Several buildings in the District were on the verge of being condemned and the roof of one building had collapsed into its basement. Fortunately, the Wright Dunbar Historic District is a treasure trove of architectural treasures, and since its inception in 2000, Wright Dunbar, Inc. has restored numerous architectural gems that were in disrepair, bringing new life, new jobs, and new tenants to the District.

Today, thanks to Wright Dunbar, Inc., the only nonprofit organization dedicated solely to a comprehensive approach to economic revitalization in the District along with its partners, dozens of people work, live and pursue their dreams in the District.
“Choosing to open my business in Wright Dunbar was an essential part of the legacy I want to leave in Dayton. Most of my family grew up right around the corner from here so in a sense it was like moving back home.”
—Jasmine Brown, founder and CEO of A Taste of De’Lish

The Wright Dunbar Business District is now home to over 20 legacy and new businesses, residential apartments, art galleries, Dayton’s first food hall, and soon-to-be market rate condominiums. The Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, the National Aviation Heritage Area, the Wright Brothers Bicycle Shop, and the Paul Laurence Dunbar House remain as key historical sites in Wright Dunbar. At the gateway to the Wright Dunbar Historic District, the spectacular Wright Flyer III sculpture now proudly sits in its new home at the intersection of West Third Street and Edwin C. Moses Blvd. A further enhancement to Wright Dunbar’s gateway and an extension of Wright Dunbar’s Walk of Fame, will be a Medal of Honor Memorial, honoring approximately 40 recipients of the highest U.S. military award for gallantry. It will be the centerpiece of a City of Dayton Park that will be renamed Honor Park in recognition of the over 100,000 veterans in the region. The Dayton Region Walk of Fame currently honors more than 230 individuals and groups for their creativity, accomplishments and contributions with granite pavers embedded in the sidewalks of Wright Dunbar.

Wright Dunbar is excited that Dillin Corp, who partnered with WDI for development of the W. Social Tap & Table food hall, has three other properties in Wright Dunbar that are being renovated for business use. Additionally, in the spring of 2024, Charles Simms Development will begin a $7.6M project to construct 26 three-story townhome condominiums on land once occupied by the Gem City Ice Cream building. The Dayton community is embracing and savoring Wright Dunbar’s reemergence. The District boasts a low crime rate and is gaining in popularity, becoming recognized as a diverse, vibrant, inclusive neighborhood that several community leaders call home.

To support its restoration and preservation work, Wright Dunbar receives grants from local governments, organizations and foundations, revenue from tenants, and contributions from the public. Wright Dunbar is proud that its buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but compliance with accompanying preservation requirements increases restoration costs. The deterioration of historic buildings in Wright Dunbar is a critical and ongoing concern. Two Wright Dunbar buildings (Rubenstein and Marietta Flats) are in urgent need of repair and restoration. Restoring these buildings will expand the District’s capacity for new, multi-use business development. Additionally, several other previously restored historic buildings and their adjoining infrastructure (lighting, parking areas, etc.) need repair and replacement funds. Wright Dunbar, Inc.’s capital needs are estimated to be $10M.

If you or your organization is interested in becoming a supporter of WDI’s redevelopment initiatives, please call 937-402-0529 for more information. Individuals may donate by writing a check to Wright Dunbar, Inc. and mailing it to Wright Dunbar, Inc., 1139 W. 3rd Street, Suite 200, Dayton, OH 45402. Credit card donations may be made at www.wright-dunbar.org

WE DEEPLY APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

Wright Dunbar, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. All donations are tax-deductible within the provisions of law.