



COLUMBIA CITY
CONNECT

2025

IMPACT REPORT



We are Columbia City Connect

Meet Our 2026 Board

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HANK WORKMAN
THE MERCANTILE

MICHELLE SLAVICEK
VINTAGE BLESSED GENERAL STORE

JEN PATRICK
WHITLEY COUNTY

COMMUNITY LEADER,

As I enter my fifth year leading Columbia City Connect, I'm proud of the growth and momentum we achieved in 2025, made possible by the dedication of our leadership, partners, businesses, volunteers, and staff.

This year, our Organization Committee secured grants from Indiana Humanities, Indiana Landmarks, and Indiana Arts Commission, expanded our Marketing Director's hours, and saw website traffic grow 311%.

The Design Committee advanced wayfinding signage and Windows into History, while the Promotions Committee launched Flower Crawl and continued favorites like First Fridays, Ladies Night Out, Walk of Trees, and Shop Small Saturday. Attendance across events grew from 15,500 to 22,986, with 849 business participations. Wheels of Whitley County became a successful standalone event in partnership with the Columbia City Lions Club.

Economic Vitality efforts brought \$289,600 in private investment, five new downtown businesses, and the launch of The Launchpad, a youth entrepreneurial market at First Fridays.

Our progress reflects the incredible efforts of our volunteers, board, staff, and partners. Thank you for your support. See you downtown!



NIKI KEISTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT



2025

BY THE NUMBERS

Strategic investment, business support, community events, and beautification efforts drove positive momentum downtown in 2025.

Promotion



24

Columbia City Connect Programs & Events



22,986

People Engaged through Columbia City Connect Programming



849

Businesses Participating in CCC Events

Design

\$289.6K

Private Investment in Building Improvement



1.9:1

Private-to-Public Investment

8

Building Improvements & Rehab Projects

\$5.6K

Columbia City RDC Facade Grants

Marketing



295

2025 Community Calendar Events

2.6M

Social Media Views

Economic Vitality

GRAND OPENING!

5

NEW Business Openings

577

Employees/Jobs in the Main Street District



87/10

Commercial Spaces Occupied /Vacant

Community Engagement



77

Active Volunteers

1,184

Volunteer Hours Contributed

\$41.2K

Financial Value of Volunteer Hours Contributed



1,600

Columbia City Connect is one of 1,600 Main Streets nationwide dedicated to preserving historic downtowns as vibrant economic hubs.

Columbia City Connect 2025 Favorites



FIRST FRIDAYS

From May through October, downtown Columbia City came alive for our six-part First Fridays series. Music, pop-up shops, food vendors, steamroller art and special activities drew residents and visitors alike. The series remained a community favorite, fostering connections, supporting local businesses, and activating downtown streets all summer.

THE LAUNCHPAD

Launched in 2025, The Launchpad is a youth entrepreneurial market held at First Fridays. The program offered young entrepreneurs an opportunity to showcase their products, develop business skills, and actively participate in downtown's economic and cultural life.



WAYFINDING SIGNS

New wayfinding signage installed in downtown improved accessibility and navigation for residents and visitors. This initiative reinforced downtown Columbia City as a welcoming, easy-to-explore destination while highlighting its historic charm.

WINDOWS INTO HISTORY

In partnership with the Whitley County Historical Museum, this initiative celebrated downtown Columbia City's rich heritage by highlighting historically significant people and places. The 2025 series launched with a special tour, inviting residents and visitors to explore and connect with the city's unique character.



Downtown Columbia City is *a gathering place for friends.*

Columbia City Connect 2025 Favorites

FLOWER CRAWL

New in 2025, the Flower Crawl brought springtime energy to downtown Columbia City as a Mother's Day weekend experience. Participants visited local retail and dining businesses, collecting flowers and greenery to create hand-picked bouquets while exploring downtown.

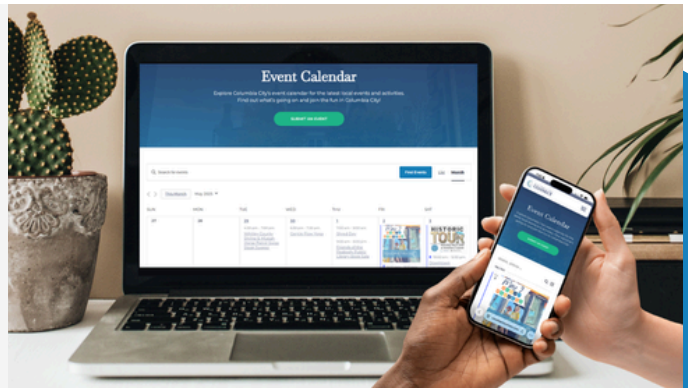


DOWNTOWN CLEAN UP DAY

Volunteers came together to help beautify downtown, demonstrating community pride and stewardship. From litter pickup to planting and general upkeep, this annual effort strengthened public spaces and enhanced the downtown experience for residents and visitors alike.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Columbia City Connect's Community Calendar featured 295 events in 2025, providing a central resource for residents, businesses, and visitors. By highlighting a wide range of activities, the calendar strengthened engagement and showcased Columbia City as a hub of culture, commerce, and community life.



WALK OF TREES

A cherished holiday tradition, the Walk of Trees attracted thousands of visitors in 2025. The Clugston lobby showcased creatively decorated trees donated by local businesses, offering families and community members an opportunity to celebrate the season while engaging with downtown's vibrant spirit.

Downtown Columbia City is

full of history and beauty.

Columbia City Connect Downtown Impact

Columbia City Connect works to **improve the downtown and quality of life** within its boundaries by supporting existing businesses, attracting new businesses, promoting the downtown through events, and working to beautify our downtown.

INVESTING IN A STRONGER COLUMBIA CITY

COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Cabin Fever
- Flower Crawl
- Six (6) First Fridays
- Movie on the Square
- Wheels of Whitley County
- Ladies Night Out
- Holiday Open House
- Shop Late Thursdays
- Shop Small
- Walk of Trees

COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT PLACEMAKING

- Windows into History
- Wayfinding Signs
- Downtown Clean-up Day
- Historic Tour
- Where are We Wednesday



COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT PARTNERSHIPS

- City of Columbia City
- Whitley County EDC
- Whitley County Historical Museum
- Columbia City RDC
- Brightpoint
- Columbia City Lions Club
- Indiana Landmarks
- Indiana Humanities
- Indiana Arts Commission

COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Business Seminar
- Business Resource Guide
- Shopping & Dining
Downtown Map
- Business Website Listings
- Christmas Shopping Guide



Downtown Columbia City is *where neighbors feel like family.*

Columbia City Downtown Voices



Investing in People and Place: BABE in Downtown Columbia City

After 18 months of dreaming, planning, and renovation, BABE of Whitley County proudly opened its doors at a new, permanent home in downtown Columbia City on Thursday, June 26, 2025.

“This move has been a labor of love for our team,” said Executive Director Laura Tucker. “It’s more than just a new address. It’s a fresh start, a bigger space for connection, and a stronger foundation to serve local families for years to come.”

The road to BABE’s new home began in 2023 after the organization’s previous lease was unexpectedly terminated. Andy More, President of More Farm Store Inc. and former board member of the Community Foundation of Whitley County, stepped forward with a generous offer. More had recently purchased the former Redman Plumbing and Heating building on West Van Buren Street and offered it as a long-term rental home for BABE.

“BABE is truly an asset for families here in Whitley County and needed a new location to expand their services,” said More. “The renovation of the old Redman building helps restore a piece of Columbia City history while also helping the families BABE serves.”

“We would not have been able to do this without the support of our donors and partners,” Tucker said. “This show of generosity has been incredible, and we are so excited to share this new space with the community.”

Downtown Columbia City is *a great place to grow a business.*

Thank You to Our Partners and Sponsors

We wouldn't be where we are today without the support of our community. Thank you to our 2025 Partners and Sponsors for making this work possible!

Generous Amount
Donated

\$50,258

Generous Amount of
Sponsorships Given

\$43,700

Generous Amount of
In-Kind Donations Given

\$9,216

Thank you to our donors



City of Columbia City
Community Foundation of Whitley Co.
Bowen Center
Morsches Builders Mart
ProFed Credit Union
Ruoff Mortgage
Olivia Hinen, State Farm
Scientific & Regulatory Consultants
Indiana Landmarks
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Whitley County Historical Museum
Indiana Arts Commission

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Columbia City Optometry
Micropulse, Inc.
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46 Graphics

Columbia City Connect