

# Community Heart & Soul®

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**Name of CHS Project/City, State:** Mt Blanchard Heart & Soul, Mt Blanchard, OH

**Population:** 485

**Challenge:** Low resident involvement and a lagging economy

**Focus:** Outreach and engagement, economic development, meeting/gathering places, involvement of community

**Key Tool:** Engagement activities and outreach, story gathering, metrics, and Community Network Analysis

## **Brief Description/Summary of Community:**

Mt. Blanchard, located 13 miles southeast of Findlay, Ohio, is a village of friendly people with three parks, including Island Park with a pool, playground, and picnic sites. The Hurricane Pub and the Corner Dairy Bar are local favorites and on the first Saturday in December, Mt. Blanchard transforms into a magical Christmas town during *Christmas in the Village*.

## **Mt. Blanchard “By the Numbers”:**

- 1834 - Johnny Appleseed recorded a property deed on a lot in Mt. Blanchard
- Over 200 stories collected
- 2500 data points collected
- 130 different events were held throughout the 2 years of Community Heart & Soul
- Two summits attracted over 350 people

## **Local Conditions:**

Helping people understand how decisions in the community are made and how they can have greater input are reasons Mt. Blanchard applied for the second round of the Community Heart & Soul grant through the Findlay Hancock County Community Foundation. The Heart & Soul leadership team was elated when they discovered they were to be awarded the grant.

The leadership team realized that the same people could not make all the decisions and the Mayor and Village Council agreed. It was time to engage with the community for the economic and future development of Mt. Blanchard. They hoped that Community Heart & Soul would strengthen the community and bring back a sense of pride and positive energy that seemed to have dwindled.

## **Volunteer and Community Response:**

The community loved the name, “Community Heart & Soul”. Positive outreach became the rallying cry as the leadership team worked to connect residents and bring the community back to life.

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The team was creative, organizing porch parties, village meetings, pool parties, festivals, open houses, and boy scout meetings. To gather ideas for action, they created *Mondays in Mt. Blanchard* and held an Ice Cream Social. These events touched over 200 households.

To involve everyone in community planning and engagement, the team made sure to include all demographic groups... Two summits were held and attracted over 150 people at each event.

## Heart & Soul Outcomes:

The Village Council listens more to community members than previously because of the Mt. Blanchard Heart & Soul process. Council members are more willing to talk to the community about their ideas instead of making plans without community input, and future planning is a more inclusive process than in the past. Many projects that have been completed or are being worked on since Mt. Blanchard Heart & Soul are included in the Mt. Blanchard Heart & Soul Action Plan, including Heritage Trail improvements, outdoor and recreational sporting projects; family activities and concerts; town clean up days/opportunities; a food cabinet in Town Hall, and many others.

Multiple grants were awarded in 2020 for activities including the *Summertime in the Village Series* through Visit Findlay; food for kid's lunches and food pantry through Walmart; and an interpretive study for the Heritage Trail through the Ohio Humanities Council.

During Heart & Soul conversations, team members were told that the restrooms at Island Park needed refurbishing. The Village Council received funding from a Regional Planning Grant, \$10,000 from the Hancock Park District, \$10,000 from an anonymous donor, and funding from The Community Foundation to complete this project. The Mt. Blanchard Fund was established through The Community Foundation. Interest earned from the fund will be used for future community projects.

