



# *Craft &* **COMMERCE**

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**RIVERWORKS: MILWAUKEE'S CREATIVE DISTRICT**  
**2015-2016 BIENNIAL REPORT**



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Riverworks Business Improvement District #25 has changed over the past sixteen-years. Currently, over 220 businesses operate in the district while providing work for over 2,500 employees. Included in those numbers is a growing community of small, entrepreneurial businesses that are finding their way to Milwaukee's Creative District—THE RIVERWORKS CENTER.

Riverworks' legacy tells the story of major manufacturing facilities and brands that employed thousands and churned out products and services: like automobiles, electrical controls, flexible packaging, and appliances. As was the case in most American cities, the manufacturing environment changed and left behind buildings and spaces that have sometimes proven hard to repurpose.

Fortunately for Riverworks our blue ribbon location has allowed the district to flourish. The district offers ready-made access to transportation, population density, housing, retail options: We've got it all, really close, like no other district.

Small businesses, particularly those associated with small batch and craft manufacturing, are finding our real estate inventory to be affordable, right-sized, and convenient.

The district, at the direction of our board of directors, has maintained business friendly facade grants, beautification efforts, including graffiti removal, BID organized events and a strong relationship with our district fire and police services.

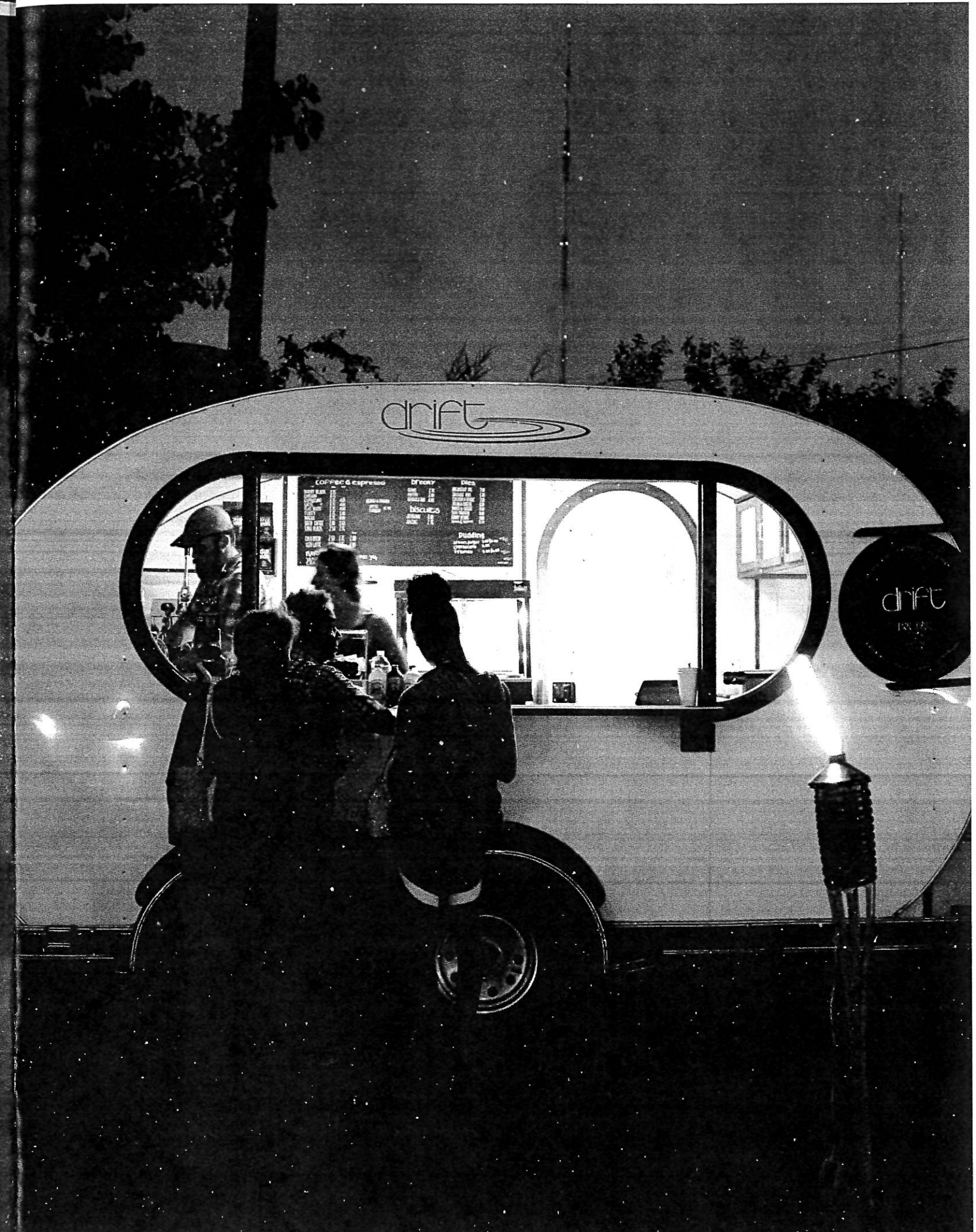
In the last two years, Riverworks has also taken the lead on developing a regional approach with Glendale, Shorewood and the City of Milwaukee to create strategies that consider the Capitol Drive corridor's future as an economic engine for growth.

That effort originated from a Riverworks program called "The North Coast Summit", which is an innovative gathering of multi-jurisdictional public officials, businesses and community leaders eager to meet and discover shared opportunities.

Our recent branding of Riverworks as Milwaukee's Creative District has introduced many small business owners from Milwaukee's North Shore suburbs, Riverwest, East Side, and Harambee communities to know how accessible, safe, and productive it is to operate a business in our district.

Current projects being worked on include connecting customers to the district's growing community of sellers via events like Riverworks Week and the creation of new pathways for craft and commerce in "Milwaukee's Creative District".

Thanks for your support,  
**Darryl Johnson**, Executive Director



# RESOURCES & EVENTS

## GETTING TWISTED IN RIVERWORKS!

In 2013 Matt and Katie Wessel started Milwaukee Pretzel and soon after moved their company to Riverworks. Located in the multi-tenant creative enterprise campus called the Milk Plant, Milwaukee Pretzel has experienced rapid growth.

Along with the cost effective space, the Wessel's appreciate their business' proximity to the bus line which provides safe and convenient access to a ready-to-go local workforce. The young entrepreneurs also enjoy the less-than-10 minute commute from their home located in the North Shore.

Lloyd Levin, the owner of the Milk Plant, is an active member of the district's real estate community. He was an early adapter of the mixed-use concept and has a well-earned reputation for creating successful collaborative work spaces.

He is not alone, as the list of properties that have been developed to cater to small and emerging creative enterprises is on the rise in Milwaukee's Creative District. A number of buildings originally intended for single use occupants are converting to multi-tenant hubs dedicated to creative action.

Riverworks is hard at work with the real estate community to welcome our region's creative class of businesses and is starting to tackle issues of connectivity and commerce. The BID's favorable location and infrastructure present exciting prospects for the future.

Through partnerships, events, marketing and strategic planning the district is creating more opportunities for customers to secure products proudly sourced from businesses located in the district.

Like an authentic Bavarian pretzel, Riverworks brings a fresh twist to community and business development in Milwaukee's beautiful north east neighborhoods.

## FACADE AND SECURITY GRANTS

The BID continues to reward property improvements with our motivating \$5,000 Facade Grant program. The BID board has recently expanded the program to include security upgrade projects, including the installation of cameras and lighting.

## BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

The BID staff is available to assist BID businesses with technical issues relating to building codes, real estate matters, City of Milwaukee grant opportunities, and as a general resource for our business owners. Along with the Riverworks Development Corporation, the BID hosts quarterly community meetings featuring relevant guest speakers and networking opportunities.

## RIVERWORKS CLEANS

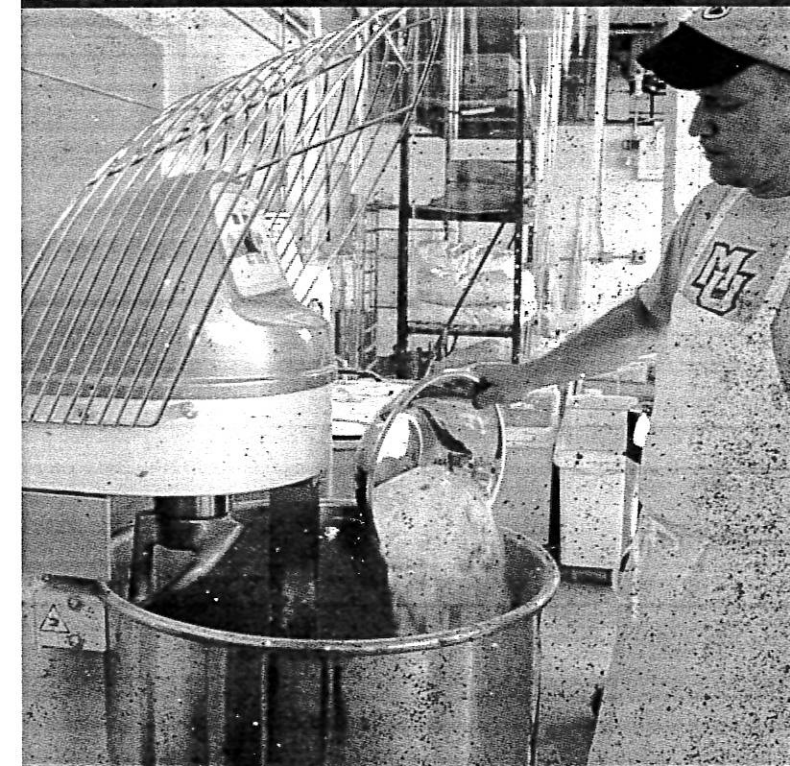
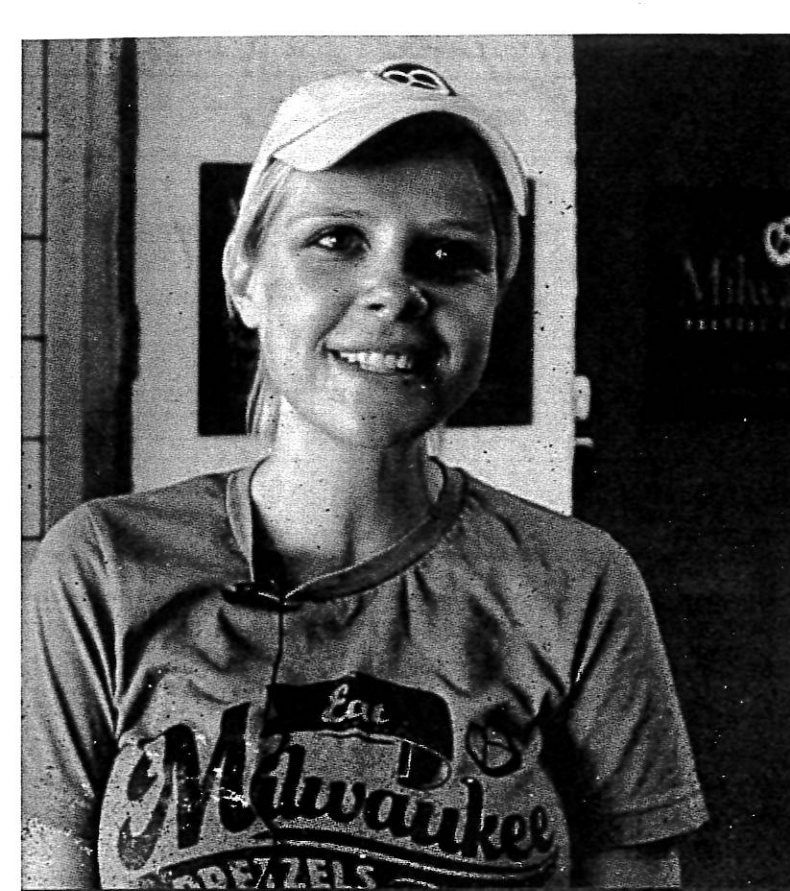
The BID contracts this social enterprise operated by our sister organization, Riverworks Development Corporation, to provide litter removal, graffiti removal, eyes-on-the-street security, and general maintenance for public green spaces.

## HOLIDAY STREET LIGHTS

During the holiday shopping season the BID decorates our retail corridors with lights and merriment to encourage safe holiday shopping with our merchants.

## COMMUNITY ARTS & CULTURE

The BID has secured grants from local and national funding organizations to implement public art installations and to promote the impact creativity and entrepreneurship has on economic and community development practices. The BID board has approved and has produced a number of mural paintings on outdoor facing walls.



# RESOURCES & EVENTS



## RIVERWORKS WEEK

Since 2014 Riverworks: Milwaukee's Creative District has been hosting a week of creative exploration. Designed to promote partnerships with the City of Milwaukee, the Greater Milwaukee Committee, City of Glendale, Village of Shorewood, non-profit organizations and our own active business community the week is programmed to showcase the ever evolving climate of our district.

**The Dolphin Pool** - a kinder, gentler Shark Tank competition - invites six entrepreneurs to pitch their business to a panel of expert judges and an enthusiastic audience. The goal is to build our small business community and change skeptics' minds about safety, utility, and convenience issues that too often are unfairly associated with urban industrial settings.

Similarly, the BID's **Milwaukee's Creative District Alive!** event breaks down artificial barriers between local residential and business communities by celebrating public, creative spaces in the district - primarily The Beerline Trail Extension.

**The North Coast Summit** was created to build a dialogue between our regional partners, Glendale and Shorewood, as we look to the future while informing our districts approach to sustainable development.

# RESOURCES & EVENTS



## THE BEERLINE TRAIL EXTENSION

The trail is a retired rail-line converted to a linear park/bike path found in our district. Work to attract real estate developers and small businesses looking to benefit from locating on or near the trail is ongoing.

This work has gained the support of many local partners, including the City of Milwaukee, the Greater Milwaukee Committee, Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and many others.

The project has also gained support from state and national partners including The Kresge Foundation, ArtPlace America, Wisconsin DOT, Fund for Lake Michigan and other arts based foundations.



**RIVERWORKS**  

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**CENTER**

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