

Building a Future Together: Mayor Misty Wells' Vision for Caldwell

By Alyssa Manning

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In 2020, Misty Wells made history as the first female mayor of Caldwell, Ohio, stepping into a role that demanded resilience, creativity, and vision. While the village was fiscally stable at the start of her tenure, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic quickly shifted her priorities, challenging her to lead Caldwell through an unprecedented time. Despite these hurdles, Mayor Wells has guided the village toward remarkable growth, focusing on infrastructure, tourism, and revitalization efforts.

Tourism became a key focus as Mayor Wells sought to revitalize Caldwell's economy, which had been struggling following the closure of its largest manufacturer in 2009. She spearheaded an initiative to transform downtown into a Hallmark movie set during the holiday season, an idea that resonated deeply with residents and visitors alike during a time when connection was sorely needed in the midst of the pandemic. The project's success brought statewide recognition, earned Caldwell a tourism award, and evolved into a nonprofit organization called *Small Town, Big Dreams*, run by a growing volunteer group. This effort has not only drawn visitors from across Ohio but has also become a sustainable legacy for the village.

Under her leadership, Caldwell has achieved significant milestones, including becoming a designated Historic Downtown in 2022 and securing \$4 million in ACGP funding through the Vibrant Communities program to revitalize the downtown area. Infrastructure improvements have also been a cornerstone of her administration. The village completed multiple phases of a sewer separation project mandated by the EPA, expanded its water capacity to support housing and business growth, and launched its first JobsOhio project by forming a Joint Economic Development District.

Much of Mayor Wells' ability to accomplish these goals stems from her collaborative leadership style and her commitment to engaging with resources like the Mayors' Partnership for Progress (MPP). When she first learned about the MPP through a mailing she received; and encouragement from the Buckeye Hills Regional Council, she eagerly joined, attending nearly every meeting in her first year. The group has been an invaluable resource, providing technical assistance and support for small communities like Caldwell.

Mayor Wells credits the MPP with helping her navigate key initiatives, including the establishment of a village administrator position and accessing critical funding opportunities. It was through the guidance of fellow mayors in the MPP that she successfully applied for the state

capital budget, securing funding for the first time. Additionally, the MPP has assisted Caldwell in mapping its cemetery using GIS technology, a project that has brought modern solutions to the village's planning efforts. "For someone with a small village, the MPP has been an immense help," Mayor Wells says, emphasizing that the group is her go-to resource for advice and support. She credits the connections and knowledge gained from the MPP as pivotal to the village's success.

As one of Caldwell's youngest mayors and its first female leader, Mayor Wells has faced unique challenges in carving out her leadership path. Her historic election marked a turning point for the village, and her success has inspired many to believe in the possibilities for Caldwell. Her deep ties to the community have also fueled her dedication. Her father served as the youngest mayor in Caldwell's history, her grandfather was the water superintendent, and her uncle was the sewer superintendent. These generational connections to the village strengthened her commitment to making Caldwell a better place for future families to call home.

Navigating challenges such as the pandemic and skepticism about long-term investments, Mayor Wells has remained steadfast in her vision. Her leadership helped fill five empty storefronts in the town square during a time when much of the state was shut down during the pandemic. She also implemented structural changes in local government by hiring a village administrator, bringing more organization and efficiency to operations.

Looking to the future, Mayor Wells is focused on addressing housing shortages, updating the water plant, and continuing to enhance the village's quality of life through beautification projects and infrastructure improvements. She is determined to ensure that Caldwell remains a vibrant and welcoming community for generations to come.

Reflecting on her tenure, Mayor Wells encourages other leaders to embrace opportunities, no matter their age or background. "Get involved, show up, and inspire others to believe in the potential of their community," she advises. Through her collaboration with groups like the MPP and her unwavering dedication to her hometown, Mayor Wells is building a legacy of growth, connection, and resilience in Caldwell, Ohio.