

The Art of Revitalization

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“Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” - Pablo Picasso

Beauty has the ability to change a life and redeem a soul. From the fresh flowers, to the fountain out front, the abundant light and world-class art inside, every detail about the design of the [Bidwell](#) Training Center in the inner-city Pittsburg neighborhood of Manchester is deliberate and intentional.

“It turns out that we may need beauty to survive, in the same way we need oxygen and water,” explains community activist, [Bill Strickland](#) in an [NPR TED Radio Talk](#). Strickland believes that the best things life has to offer - delicious food, the finest art, the latest technology, are for everyone in life to enjoy. These things help people understand that they have value, no matter what life has told them. Whether it is exposing children to throwing clay, incredible jazz, creating culinary delights or something as simple as sunshine and orchids; he believes that when people see beauty on a regular basis, it becomes part of their vocabulary, and their behavior and contributions to the world will rise to the same level. He created the center in the neighborhood where he grew up and serves the community in need. The successful Manchester training center has been replicated in other cities, including San Francisco, California; Cincinnati and Michigan, Ohio; and has affiliate programs in Cleveland, Ohio; New Haven, Connecticut; Brockway, Pennsylvania; Boston, Massachusetts; and Buffalo, New York.

Everyone yearns for a safe place to live, learn, work, and play; and the arts are widely regarded as a cure for a variety of related issues. A creative community can revitalize a neighborhood and improve quality of life outcomes for its community members. A Princeton University [working paper](#), on the impact of arts on community, explains “The arts revitalize neighborhoods and promote economic prosperity. Participation in the arts improves physical and psychological well-being. The arts provide a catalyst for the creation of social capital and the attainment of important community goals.” These bold claims are supported by research and real life examples can be found in cities across the country.

Wynwood, Miami

Tony Goldman, founder of [Goldman Properties](#), viewed himself as a “long-term investor in the revitalization of historic neighborhoods” as opposed to a [developer](#), successfully turned once-dilapidated neighborhoods into the hottest, most sought after locations; including New York City’s SoHo, Miami Beach, and up and coming arts-focused Wynwood, among others. Tony coined the term “[gentlefication](#),” to refer to his and his company’s values and commitment to allow for growth without pricing out original residents and preserving the original character of the area.

His daughter, Jessica Goldman Srebnick, who took the helm as Goldman Properties’ CEO after his passing, explained, “He was truly inspired by the arts and wanted to share that with everyone. He really worked to ensure that he understood the DNA of a neighborhood and built upon the history already in place.” The first sign of resurgence started in 1987, when a group of artists run out of Coconut Grove formed a nonprofit organization and purchased an abandoned bakery in the area, called the [Bakehouse](#). The [Wynwood Arts District Association](#) was also instrumental in the growth of the area, creating the monthly art walks. However, before the Goldman family started buying up property in Wynwood in 2006, the community was mostly a deserted warehouse district.

“When you are trying to make life better, to improve the community, I have found that everyone wants to help - public sector, private sector, nonprofits, police, commissioners - that is a sign of success,” says Goldman Srebnick. Gaining community buy in is instrumental in development efforts, under her leadership, Goldman Properties gives thoughtful consideration to maintaining a neighborhood’s unique and vibrant feel through the use of incentives, rent agreements, and cross sector collaborations. Srebnick runs the company while being mindful of everyone involved; she strives to truly make a difference and build a stronger community through job creation and education.

Fast forward to the community today, and [Wynwood Walls](#), an outdoor graffiti art exhibit that is a national draw “has seen over 50 artists representing 16 countries and...covered over 80,000 square feet of walls.” Children take field trips and are exposed to world renowned artists. Curations are timed to Art Basel, bringing art to the masses and bringing people from all over the world to Wynwood to soak in its artistic vibes. The mural, graffiti-filled neighborhood buzzes with color, feeling, and imagery; and is filled with art studios and galleries, boutique storefronts, and several super hip mom and pop bars and restaurants, including [Zak the Baker](#) and recent Food and Wine Magazine’s Best New Chef, Brad Kilgore’s new restaurant, [Alter](#).



Wynwood Walls, Photo credit: Andrew Meade

Jessica and her team work under the belief that the revitalization effort is a marathon, not a sprint; and strive for organic, slow, sustainable growth centering around the idea that the elements of our lives should be integrated - creativity, interesting architecture, food, music. All of these elements contribute to a thriving community.