

## Property Maintenance Program Addresses Residential, Business Blight Problems

Renewed efforts by township to clear up property issues netting success.



**Y**our next door-neighbor's home, now a rental property, has a gutter hanging loose and the grass has not been cut since mid-summer last year. Neighbors are complaining. What, if anything, can Columbia Township do about this situation?

This scenario and many similar ones are just a few of the problems faced by Columbia Township on a weekly basis.

One way the township handles exterior property issues is through its contract with Sycamore Township, which supplies Columbia Township with a property maintenance code inspector. The inspector works with businesses and homeowners who are in violation of the township's Exterior Property Maintenance Code and follows through the many steps that may be necessary before a property is cleaned up.

Columbia Township has had a property maintenance code since 2010, but Administrator Mike Lemon said the program was not as effective as desired since it was administrated by a part-time inspector. In January 2016, the township decided to contract the work with Sycamore Township and its Zoning Inspector, Harry Holbert, a decision Lemon says has speeded up the process by which property owners are notified and interacted with as the process plays through.

Connecting with Holbert has provided plenty of positives for the township, Lemon said, including new computer programs, advanced technology and more equipment for enforcement of the code. All the upgrades have come at a lower price than was paid previously.

"We do have a significant number of vacant homes and rental homes in Columbia Township," Lemon said. "Having someone handle all the details of notifying owners, contacting banks holding vacant properties and contracting for services has been extremely helpful in cleaning up non-complying properties."

Holbert said in 2016 he mostly dealt with residential problems, and many of the homes cited were vacant and owned by banks. "We work toward resolution and not prosecution," Holbert said. But working with banks can be time consuming and not as personal as working with a homeowner who might be more likely to do their job taking care of their home, he said.

In the first 11 months of the year, Holbert said there were about 40

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# 2016 Was Productive; Suggestions Sought in 2017



Chris Kritikos, Trustee

Hoping you are having a great beginning to 2017. We have a lot to be thankful for and I am proud of the progress made in the township in 2016.

I am writing to you after the completion of my first year as a Columbia Township trustee. Serving our community has been humbling experience that has brought me joy and a sense of accomplishment.

First off, I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to our administration, board members, and road crew for their commitment, professionalism, and dedication to our township.

One idea promoted during my campaign was improving communication from the township. We achieved great success in the re-launching of our newsletter, a redesigned website, online finance reporting through OhioCheckbook.com, and other tools that bring transparency to our residents. We are moving forward to insure residents are aware of public events, public hearings, issues and challenges facing us.

Construction and road projects were extensive throughout our community in 2016. They include the reconstruction of Edith and Blanley, resurfacing of Ridgewood and Cliffridge avenues (currently under construction), and receipt of a grant to reconstruct Roe Street this year.

In 2016, we saw several developments and new businesses that will have an economic impact on our community as well. This includes the arrival of 120 jobs with CBT headquarters on Ridge Avenue, the Good Shepherd Playscape in Madison Place, and implementation of gas aggregation.

Other noteworthy topics were a successful state audit, Madison Place drainage study, passage of the Ridge Fire District levy (77 percent majority), and rejection of the proposed Duke Energy pipeline through Ridgewood.

Most recently we hosted a holiday tree and street lighting ceremony in Madison Place on Plainville Road. There is interest in continuing this event as an annual tradition. The event brought enthusiasm to the residents and the businesses responded by getting into the holiday spirit with their own decorations and spirited participation.

What would really make 2017 the most successful year in Columbia Township history is getting your ideas. As we plan for 2017, your thoughts are very valuable. Please contact me, our administrator Mike Lemon, or any other board member if you have any ideas on how we can make our community better.

# New fiscal officer in Columbia Township



Columbia Township has a new fiscal officer- Caroline Heekin. Former Fiscal Officer Paul Davis submitted his resignation in late December, effective December 31, 2016. Heekin was appointed as the new fiscal officer and sworn in by Columbia Township Trustees on January 3, 2017.

Heekin, a Ridgewood resident, has a background in both small business and philanthropy. She currently serves as marketing director of Otto Printing & Entertainment Graphics. Her fiscal experience includes work in business administration and volunteer activities.

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## Property Maintenance Program



Harry Holbert

complaints, with 21 resolved. Some businesses that have been in violation also were cited last year, he said.

"Our property code is a little stronger than most," noted Lemon, who said the code was written by a committee of residents and business owners. "We explored codes from Ohio and from other states and what I found is that the committee wanted to be more stringent in

what we put in the code than what it would have been otherwise," he said. The code has served as an example to other communities, he noted.

Examples of violations of the code include junk vehicles, high grass and weeds, unsafe properties, defaced properties, garbage and rubbish on the properties, peeling paint and more.

To report a concern, contact Harry Holbert at 792-7256 or email at [columbia@sycamoretownship.org](mailto:columbia@sycamoretownship.org)



# Meet The Woman Who Makes Things Run in Columbia Township

If there is laughter, a smile, a complaint, a disgruntled resident, an organized mess, or maybe even a central command station in Columbia Township, that location must be at the desk of Kimberly Gray, administrative assistant of the township.

From this desk at the township offices at 5686 Kenwood Road five days a week, for the past 18 years, Gray has helped keep township government on track. She notes that she is experienced in sorting through chaos, and identifying and implementing systems to reduce stress. Despite continuous multi-tasking and never-ending phone calls, she makes the job look easy.

Admittedly, keeping township government manageable is a diverse task due to the scope of problems and questions that come in each week. How does she do it? "There are so many people who have inspired and encouraged me in so many ways to be a better public servant, to work smart and to set and follow higher standards as I perform my job. I don't pretend to know everything," she said. "I'm just a good listener and I'm good at getting things done."

Gray came to the township as a part-time assistant in 1998 while she still was working for Star Bank. In 1999, she was offered a full-time position. She met the challenge head on and has stayed, while



a series of township administrators came but soon left.

Since 2001, she's been working for current Township Administrator Mike Lemon, who calls her "ombudswoman" and "Superwoman."

"Kim is the gatekeeper for our human resources needs, computer network, website, taxes, insurance and much more. The amount of output produced by Kim and the huge responsibilities she has are often overlooked due to the smoothness of the operation," Lemon said.

"She also is a great ambassador for the township, helping residents with problems or need for information,

as well as lost motorists looking for directions. She has been an incredible resource for all of us over the years and we don't express our appreciation enough for all she does," Lemon said.

Relationships and coworkers make the job enjoyable, she said. The job also "allows me to help people and satisfies my desire to always keep learning."

"When I first found out how the township was organized I was so confused," she said, referring to the disconnected status of Columbia Township. (Nine islands of township property, not connected.) "It took me awhile to be able to know whether I was in Columbia Township or not."

Gray knows sometimes her desk at the office on Kenwood Road, is the first face people see when they come in the door.

"I know when I pick up that phone, the majority of people have an issue with something. I have to be prepared," she said. When a member of public is unkind or hostile in their approach, Gray says she has learned to brush the attitude aside. "I know it is not personal. The bottom line is: I try to look at every issue with an open mind and restore the residents' faith in the township."

Providing timely and efficient services to all residents is her goal. "Every day I am either challenged by residents or inspired by residents and township staff," she said. "This gives me the energy and incentive to keep Columbia Township moving in the right direction."





# When There is an Emergency. Who Responds?

It's complicated: Columbia Township contracts with three fire departments for services.



Little Miami Joint Fire & Rescue on the scene of a fire.

**Columbia Township is in an unusual position compared to other townships that either operate their own fire departments or contract with one department to meet their fire, EMS and emergency response needs.**

Historically, the geographical segmentation of Columbia Township created the need to establish the Madison Place, Ridge, Silverton and Kenwood Fire Districts more than 50 years ago.

To provide localized fire protection and EMS services to residents and businesses with acceptable response times, the township contracts with three fire departments today, said Administrator Mike Lemon.

"If the township formed its own fire department, the cost would be prohibitive to provide such spread-out coverage while still meeting the timely needs of emergency responses," said Administrator Mike Lemon. "That's why it's complicated."

## Deer Park-Silverton Joint Fire District - 7050 Blue Ash Road 791-2500

The Deer Park-Silverton Joint Fire District has provided fire and paramedic service to Columbia Township since 1999. Prior to 1999, the Silverton Fire Department provided the same service to the township for more than 50 years. The fire district covers the area known as the "Silverton Fire District," primarily a residential area.

Nine full-time employees and 35 part-time employees operate out of one fire station at 7050 Blue Ash Road in Silverton. An average of 97 calls for service come in each year in the Columbia Township Silverton Fire District area, with requests for medical service amounting to approximately 80 percent of the calls.

Fire hydrant inspection and servicing plus plan reviews for fire alarm and suppression systems in new construction also are offered by the fire district. The department also conducts fire safety inspections at businesses located within its response area.

The Fire District provides free smoke detectors to district residents. For guided tours, contact the fire station, Check the Fire District's Facebook Page or website for details about upcoming fire district-related events.

"It is a privilege for me to be a part of, and serve such a great community," said Fire Chief Denny Meador. "I am lucky enough to have a long-standing history in this area, starting my career

as a volunteer on the Silverton Fire Department in 1997."

"The long history between Columbia Township and our department demonstrates the benefits of communities working together to provide high-quality emergency services to our citizens," Meador said.

For further information, connect with the Deer Park-Silverton Joint Fire District on Facebook, via the web at [www.dpsjfd.org](http://www.dpsjfd.org), or call 791-2500.



Deer Park-Silverton Joint Fire District

## Little Miami Joint Fire & Rescue - 5800 Wooster Pike 271-3636



Little Miami Joint Fire & Rescue

Little Miami Joint Fire & Rescue started as Fairfax/Madison Place Joint Fire & Rescue on January 1, 1996. The two departments were both an all-volunteer department operated out of the Madison Place station on Murray Avenue. Today, Little Miami Joint Fire and Rescue works out the Fairfax

station on Wooster Pike.

The department consists of nine full-time personnel and 20 part-time personnel, working a 12-24 hour shift, seven days a week. The department has two engines, two medic units, one Advanced Life Support chase car, one pickup truck, and a chief's car.

Fire inspections are conducted on all commercial buildings once a year and fire hydrants are checked twice a year. Child safety car seats can be checked on an appointment basis; CPR classes also can be scheduled. Call 271-3636 to arrange these services.

## Golf Manor Fire Department - 6450 Wiehe Road 531-2022

The Golf Manor Fire was established in 1940 as an all-volunteer department providing fire protection to the Village of Golf Manor and the Ridge Fire District of Columbia Township. In 1958 the department purchased its first ambulance to meet the growing needs of the community. This service was expanded in 1979 with the addition of paramedics.

In the late 1990s it became clear that part-time, on-station personnel were needed to augment the diminishing volunteer ranks, said Chief James Puthoff. This trend continued and today the station is staffed with four firefighters around the clock, Five firefighter/paramedics and 25 part-time personnel are employed with the department which utilizes two fire trucks, a quint (ladder/pumper) and an engine (pumper/rescue), an ambulance and an Advanced Life Support unit.

"The department is proud to provide fire protection, Advanced Life Support EMS, fire prevention and education and fire investigative services to the citizens of Golf Manor and Columbia Township," Puthoff said. Emergency Medical Services also are provided to the southern half of Amberley Village as well.



Golf Manor Fire Department

## Trustees Thank Ridge Fire District Residents

The Board of Trustees wishes to thank the residents of the Ridge Fire District for your overwhelming support of the 3.4 mill Ridge Fire District levy on the November 8 ballot. The vote was: 520 in favor – 154 against. Your vote assures we can continue to work with Golf Manor Fire Department to provide fire and EMS services for the district and to keep the response time low.

We appreciate your commitment to excellence and your continuing support of township services.

David Kubicki Susan Hughes Chris Kritikos



# Columbia Township Rates High in Recycling Success

Columbia Township boasts the second highest residential recycling rate for townships in Hamilton County, second only to Anderson Township.

That's the news from the Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District, which compiles yearly rates of recycling to provide awards for communities with high rates of recycling.

**Columbia Township contracts with Rumpke to provide waste collection once a week for all residents. Recycling bins are provided at no cost to residents.**

Columbia Township contracts with Rumpke to provide waste collection once a week for all residents. Recycling bins are provided at no cost to residents. To receive a "toter" style recycling bin on wheels, contact Kim Gray at the township office at 561-6046. The bin will be delivered to your home at no charge.



## 2015 Recycling Rates per township

|   |              |        |
|---|--------------|--------|
| 1 | Anderson Twp | 15.83% |
| 2 | Columbia Twp | 15.66% |
| 3 | Symmest Twp  | 14.26% |
| 4 | Sycamore Twp | 13.01% |
| 5 | Green Twp    | 9.62%  |

Information from the Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District

Columbia Township's recycling rate climbed a bit over the past year. In 2014, the township picked up 1,512.83 tons of waste, while recycling 265.9 tons of materials with a recycling rate of 14.9 percent.

In 2015, the township landfilled 1,408.72 tons of material, with 261.50 tons recycled with a recycling rate of 15.66. Anderson Township's recycling rate was 15.83 percent.

While pleased to be second, Administrator Mike Lemon says he

hope the township becomes the No. 1 township leading in recycling efforts. "The ease of recycling, provided through 64-gallon recycling carts and 18-gallon totes to all homes and Rumpke's willingness to sort mixed recyclable materials, affords us the opportunity to increase our level of participation with little or no inconvenience. We can reach new heights!"

# Reconstruction of Roe Street on 2017 Road Repair Agenda

Columbia Township residents will see road repairs on Roe Street this year, with reconstruction of the road running from Berwick to the Cincinnati corporation line.

The project cost is \$1,258,000 and will be covered with a grant of \$880,600 from Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC) and a loan of \$377,400 from OPWC. According to Administrator Mike Lemon, "The loan is a 30-year, interest-free loan which could not be a better proposition to the township for getting the street reconstructed."

The project consists of full depth pavement removal and replacement; curb removal and replacement; replacing storm sewer facilities; roof drain collectors and under drains; replacing driveway aprons as required; and seeding and mulching restoration.

Columbia Township will communicate plans and details to residents as they are developed. Good Shepherd School has been informed since Roe is a primary access way to and from the school, Lemon said.

Depending on finances, Lemon said other street may undergo repairs. "We may do repairs on Maphet/Ebersole or possibly Murray, between Plainville Road and Berwick. Or we may also look at a bridge over Muchmore Creek for a bike path along the Little Miami River, depending on how quickly the bike path development occurs," he noted.



# Community Spirit Shines on Plainville Road

Plainville Road was shining a little brighter during the holiday season, thanks to a new December event which included holiday tree lighting and Santa.





## Check your facts!

### History notes

■ **In 1970, Madeira annexed** a significant portion of Columbia Township. Many residents sought annexation as a way to become part of the Madeira City School District. The area annexed ran south on Kenwood Road from Euclid Avenue to the Cincinnati corporation line (south of Whetsel Avenue) and eastward to Hosbrook Road.

This annexation doubled the population of Madeira and reduced Columbia Township by one-third. The area annexed included the current township maintenance and administration facility at 5686 Kenwood Road where officials and employees now pay Madeira earnings taxes.

■ **In 1986, Cincinnati attempted** to annex the Ridge and Highland business district but failed. Subsequently, the city passed a moratorium on annexation.

■ **In 2012, the Village of Newtown attempted** twice to annex a portion of the township along Wooster Pike but failed both times, spending well over \$100,000 in its failed efforts.

### Important Phone Numbers in Columbia Township



Trustee President  
**David Kubicki**  
272-7870  
[dkubicki@columbiatwp.org](mailto:dkubicki@columbiatwp.org)



Trustee  
**Chris Kritikos**  
272-7871  
[ckritikos@columbiatwp.org](mailto:ckritikos@columbiatwp.org)



Trustee Vice President  
**Susan Hughes**  
272-7872  
[shughes@columbiatwp.org](mailto:shughes@columbiatwp.org)



Fiscal Officer  
**Caroline Heekin**  
272-7867  
[cheekin@columbiatwp.org](mailto:cheekin@columbiatwp.org)

### Township Administration

Administrator  
**C. Michael Lemon**  
561-6046  
[MLemon@columbiatwp.org](mailto:MLemon@columbiatwp.org)

Administrative Assistant  
**Kimberly Gray**  
272-7877  
[kgray@columbiatwp.org](mailto:kgray@columbiatwp.org)

JEDZ Tax Administrator  
**Jane Fette**  
272-9954  
[JFette@fairfaxoh.org](mailto:JFette@fairfaxoh.org)

Property Maintenance Code Enforcement  
792-7256  
[columbia@sycamoretownship.org](mailto:columbia@sycamoretownship.org)

### POLICE PROTECTION—Emergency- 911

Columbia Township—Non-Emergency  
825-2280

City of Cincinnati—Non-Emergency  
765-1212  
[www.cincinnati-oh.gov/cpd](http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/cpd)

Hamilton County- Non-Emergency  
825-1500  
[www.hcso.org](http://www.hcso.org)

### FIRE PROTECTION—Emergency- 911

The Little Miami  
Joint Fire & Rescue District-  
271-3636  
<http://lmfr.org>

Deer Park—Silverton Joint Fire District  
791-2500  
[www.dpsjfd.org](http://www.dpsjfd.org)

### Village of Golf Manor Fire Department

531-2022  
[www.golfmanor.org](http://www.golfmanor.org)