

PRODUCERS' STATEMENT

Rebirth of Over-The-Rhine

In Over-the-Rhine, my roots go back a century. My great-great-uncle Henry Schmidt, like so many other German immigrants, started my family's Cincinnati story there in the late 1800s (and was soon joined by my grandfather and great-uncle). He became a successful masonry contractor, with enough money to build his own house in what is now Norwood. He and his wife were childless, so they sent word back to the village of Klosterholte, Germany for their niece—my grandmother, Elizabeth Schmidt—to come care for them in their old age. Elizabeth married and had three children—one of whom was my father.

As I grew up in Cincinnati, my first memories of Over-the-Rhine were in the 1970s. I remember the beauty and the decay, the boarded-up facades and the rich smells of Findlay Market. For me, the neighborhood embodied the most authentic strains of Cincinnati culture, from old-world traditions and architecture to African-American sounds and tastes. As I grew older, walking through Over-the-Rhine increasingly left me with feelings of melancholy and loss. It was a bittersweet feeling – one of the most remarkable and unique places in my city, a neighborhood that truly makes Cincinnati both historic and contemporary, was avoided by most and forgotten by many.

Over-the-Rhine hit rock bottom sometime in the past decade. Maybe it was during the riots of 2001, accented by issues of race and class. Or the depopulation that left it with about 7,000 people not long ago. Or its designation as one of the 11-most endangered places in the country by The National Historic Trust for Preservation.

But have you walked Over-the-Rhine's streets lately? There's a buzz, an energy: improved safety and security, renovated Italianate facades, new construction, new people, and new businesses. There is a widespread optimism and intent that I have never sensed before.

Yet change often brings challenges and fear. Long-time residents of the neighborhood worry that they do not fit into plans for a new Over-the-Rhine. And the efforts of others who have committed decades to helping the neighborhood wonder if their contributions and experiences will be taken into account.

That is precisely why my co-producer, Steve Dorst, and I are making this documentary film—to chronicle this ambitious effort to revitalize Over-the-Rhine. By following a number of innovative people who are breathing new life into the community, we'll reveal the tides of change. Some are daring to do the unprecedented, while others are looking back to Over-the-Rhine's distinctive roots to find a way forward. Surrounding them is a colorful cast of longtime residents, as well as members of the political, religious, social, and arts communities whose engagement is crucial for the neighborhood's success. Each of these groups has its own distinct vision of the future, yet all want to see a better Over-the-Rhine. Can they achieve a common success?

Most of all, Over-the-Rhine's journey is an American story, and I believe it will resonate on a national scale. Our production partners share this vision: CET, Cincinnati's PBS affiliate, has teamed up with us. The California-based Caticus Corporation has signed on to help support a national distribution plan and enable the film's nonprofit status. During its 26-year history, Caticus Corporation has sponsored more than two-dozen film projects with cumulative budgets of more than \$10 million.

Rebirth of Over-the-Rhine will show how a broad spectrum of Cincinnati's citizens is uniting to create a new Over-the-Rhine. Thank you for your support as we document this exciting transformation.

Sincerely,
Joe Brinker
Co-producer, *Rebirth of Over-the-Rhine*

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