For decades, the General Motors facility was a fixture in downtown Dayton. The site employed thousands and occupied 40 acres on the north side of downtown on the banks of the Mad River. When the facility shut down in 1995, Dayton was left with a large blighted area contaminated with solvents, plating materials, and petroleum.

In short, GM’s departure left the site looking like a poster child for the Rust Belt. To remediate the site, the city successfully competed for two CORF grants. Today, the site is home to more than 35 new tech-oriented businesses and is the catalyst for surrounding developments, which include: the Water Street Project (hundreds of market rate housing units, restaurant, gym, hotel, and brew pub); a job placement firm; office space; a coffee house/bar with 3D printing; renovation of a historic building for the Air Force Research Lab; and the conversion of the old Steam Plant into offices and event space.

The Clean Ohio Program

Between 2002 and 2013, the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund (CORF) program invested $400 million in catalytic funds to assist communities in the environmental testing and cleanup of brownfields across the state. Local investments were oftentimes made to complement state investment. The program contributed to the redevelopment of more than 7,600 acres of contaminated land around the state, and placed Ohio as a national leader in brownfields redevelopment. Local communities were given the flexibility to define the best possible reuse of these sites.

Montgomery County received eleven Clean Ohio Fund Revitalization grants over the life of the program. Other projects included the University of Dayton - River Campus, (former NCR site) and the Miami Valley Goodwill-Easter Seals building.
The Tech Town Vision

As Dayton’s industrial employment declined, area leaders searched for a new approach to economic development that would foster entrepreneurship and competitiveness in high technology sectors. The Dayton Entrepreneurs Center opened in 2000, across the street from the abandoned GM plant. The Center successfully incubated high tech startup businesses. Several years later, city leaders announced a more ambitious plan: a “Tech Town” campus with multiple buildings that would foster entrepreneurship on a much larger scale, and would become a magnet for the redevelopment of downtown. The former GM facility provided an outstanding location. With 40 acres of heavily contaminated land, however, this would be a huge challenge.

Leveraging Public & Private Resources

In order to access CORF investments, GM turned over the property to the City of Dayton and CityWide Development, a public-private agency, that led the redevelopment and finance assembly. In 2005, the city received two CORF grants of $3 million each and other state grants totaling $5 million. A third source of redevelopment funds came from General Motors, as the state of Ohio received $5 million as part of the corporation’s bankruptcy proceedings during the recession. Construction financing from the federal government helped open the 40,000 ft$^2$ creative accelerator in 2009.

Tech Town Fosters Commercialization

In 2011, another Tech Town building opened, offering more than 52,000 ft$^2$ of space. By the end of 2017, the three Tech Town buildings had 36 tenants and were 97% occupied. Collectively, the tenants employed over 400 individuals. These companies include a wide array of technology-based startups, consulting firms, and related trade associations and venture capital firms. One of the largest tenants is the University of Dayton Research Institute’s Sensor Division. Another tenant, Ascend Innovations, works with hospitals to commercialize medical technologies.

Today, CityWide Development is working to attract a tenant for a planned fourth building, and is partnering with local governments to create a central park and bike path on the Tech Town Campus.

Twenty years after the original GM facility was closed, Tech Town is leading Dayton’s high technology renaissance, which will power the region through the 21st Century.