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From the Dayton Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/dayton/news/2019/09/27/women-of-the-dayton-arcade-restore-gem-city-crown.html>

COVER STORY

## Women of the Dayton Arcade restore Gem City's crown jewel

Sep 27, 2019, 5:00am EDT

In the heart of downtown Dayton stands the Dayton Arcade, the 114-year-old collection of historic buildings that have been vacant for nearly 30 years. After decades of peaks and valleys, the Arcade's two-phased restoration efforts are officially moving forward.

Among the project's pioneers are women, who remain a force essential to bringing the Gem City's crown jewel back to its former glory.

Many of the women have played key roles alongside the three developers leading restoration efforts. [Cross Street Partners](#), [Model Group](#) and [McCormack Baron Salazar](#) are taking aim at the nine historic buildings, totaling to more than 330,000 square feet. The buildings will be transformed into a mix of retail, offices, public space and housing.

The first phase of the project, the South Arcade, consists of a \$95 million public-private partnership that consists of an innovation center, 126 units of market rate creative housing, an art center, galleries, classrooms, restaurants and retail, event space and more.

The second phase, the Third Street Arcade, includes a culinary and kitchen incubator program, retail and restaurant space, co-working space and micro-loft apartments.

The Dayton Arcade revitalization project has been described as the most complex project the region has ever seen. If completed, it will be a beacon for the city core, bringing companies, jobs and downtown, and likely will spark more development around it.

Of the Arcade's network of partners are warrior women making this project a reality.

**Here are their stories:**

### 'The muscle'

[Frances Kern Mennone](#), development director at Cross Street Partners, joined the project in fall 2017. She was brought on to lead the closing efforts of the Arcade deal.



TOM GILLIAM

From left to right: Ashley Macy, a member of Aztec's demolition team; Teresa Olavarria, volunteer with Friends of the Dayton Arcade; Joanne Granzow, vice president of Friends of the Dayton Arcade; Dayton City Manager Shelley Dickstein; Frances Kern Mennone, director of development at Cross Street Partners; Jenn Wiley, lead interior designer at MODA4; and Annette Stevenson, partner at Novogradac & Company LLP. Not pictured: Evelyn Ordonez and Ivelisse Cortes, members of Aztec's demolition team.

“I like to say David (Williams) is the heart and soul of this project because he’s a Daytonian and he lives and breathes all of this (initiative),” she said. “I was the muscle that was brought in to get this done.”

When Mennone was brought on, the project’s funding sources were known, but not secured. To get the job done, she suggested the use of private Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing, totaling to more than \$15 million.

PACE financing is legislated at the state level and is private capital available to building projects at lower costs using utility, water or operations energy efficiencies.

Prior to the Arcade project, no one in Dayton had used private PACE financing before. Because of this, Mennone got plenty of grief for suggesting this move. Despite the doubts, she remained firm by vouching for the funding source’s legitimacy.

This strategy ended up pushing the deal over the edge.

Along with her push for PACE, Mennone and an army of lawyers led closing efforts to the finish line. She noted there were 54 people on the Arcade’s closing calls, in addition to 26 sources of funds that didn’t mesh perfectly, bringing even more complexity in the mix.

Mennone has worked on many projects during her career. Every time, she knew the answer to every solution, or at least worked her way to getting an answer when looking at all the details. The Arcade project was a much different experience.

Due to its large-scale University of Dayton tenant, number of partners and overall complexity, the Arcade closing had to settle on a ballpark number and essentially work backwards. Plus, the fact the Arcade has sat empty for the past 30 years left partners hesitant to invest.

“When I think back on the Arcade project, it’s not like we got handed a manual on how to do this,” she said. “It wasn’t getting done in any kind of conventional way. All hands on deck is what we needed for this project.”

Now that the financing for the South Arcade has been finalized, Mennone has aimed her sights at financing for the North Arcade, an approximately \$24 million project.

Mennone is currently extrapolating estimates, determining how much of an investment is needed to get the job done. The team also is preparing to apply for the state’s historic tax credit, along with bringing other funding sources into play.

Besides managing the finances, she also is managing partner relationships for the transaction, attracting part owners to the project.

Although financing has been secured and the project is officially in the works, Mennone stresses there’s still a lot of work to be done.

“I think what made the Arcade happen was putting all of our community eggs in one basket, and we gained community support,” she said. “But there’s still a lot to be done. We still need a ton of support.”

### **The master of design**

On the interior side of the project, breathing new life into old spaces is the key focus. Jenn Wiley has been leading this initiative by bringing the Arcade’s anchor tenants’ vision to life with her design efforts.

Wiley is the lead interior designer at MODA4, a bustling design and architecture firm assigned to fit the Arcade's anchor tenants' space — University of Dayton and The Entrepreneurs Center. This space also includes the Crotty Center, the Institute of Applied Creativity for Transformation, the university's art and design department and UD Flyer Enterprises' student-run bistro.

She's been on this project for the past three years, designing the entire look and function of the space. From the layout to the lighting, and environmental design to furniture direction, Wiley has done it all.

Wiley also collaborates with key players, including contractors; the shell architect; the mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineers; and MODA4's internal design team.

When she was first brought on, she began space planning for the anchor tenants. Unlike other projects, she had to lead this task without knowing what the final Arcade product was going to look like.

During this time, the Arcade was still in shambles — graffiti, soaking wet carpets and shattered glass were scattered throughout the space. For her, it was difficult at times to even comprehend what this space was going to transform into.

"Walking into the building before any demo even happened, you couldn't really see what was going on early into design. It was like we were designing into the void," she said. "This whole project was backwards. We started at the end of design and worked to get to the beginning."

To add another complexity to this mission, the project's timeline was very "stop-and-go." One moment, Wiley would be rolling out her designs and busting forward with tasks. Another moment, the team would have to pause due to other project delays. Wiley said things got quiet for about five months during the timeline, leaving the team to wonder if the project was even happening.

In addition to the random spurts of movement, the tenants' occupancy space kept changing. Wiley said the space plan changed about 20 times. With large-scale projects like this, she expected at least 10 versions of designs.

As the project inched closer to the finish line, the stops and starts were less frequent. Now, Wiley says she can walk through the whole Arcade design with her eyes closed.

Currently, the key focus has shifted to the construction document phase. The team has completed all drawings for permit and bid, and everything has been sent out for bids.

Once bids return, the design team will re-evaluate and see where they are in terms of budget.

Looking ahead to the Arcade's completion, Wiley is eager to bring new elements into this historic Dayton hub. She now hopes people support its return.

"There's a lot of elements that come into play that need to keep the Arcade alive once it comes back," she said. "I hope people support and appreciate the new outlook it's taking. It's not going to be exactly what it was before. It's adapting to what is needed now."

### **The construction women**

Within the project's construction crew stands three women that play crucial roles in demolition efforts.

Ashley Macy, Evelyn Ordonez and Ivelisse Cortes are subcontractors for Aztec Services Group, an out-of-state construction company assisting with the project.

Cortes works with a cutter to trim piping within the structure and has led efforts to restore the elevators. She also makes sure all supplies are ready to use for the team. She's worked with Aztec for the past three years on projects and is a key motivator for the team, according to Macy.

Ordonez is a utility player, taking on multiple positions to get the job done. Right now, her main role is using her asbestos and lead licenses to handle the project's containment area.

As for Macy, she was recruited onto the project in May. Aztec reached out to local halfway houses and transitional housing to recruit workers for this project. Macy said this project is a way to get back on her feet to support her family.

Macy's daily routine consists of laying out tools, leading the "daily huddle" morning meetings to remind workers of safety protocol, taking inventory and making sure breakrooms remain tidy. She's also active in the demolition efforts, often tearing down walls and breaking down the first level flooring underneath the rotunda with a jackhammer.

Although each of the women have specific roles, Macy says no day is the same while at work.

"Whatever the team needs me to do, I do it," she said.

When asked what the job's biggest challenge was, Macy said all of the work is physically demanding. Sometimes, she even doubts her physical abilities to get the job done. Despite the heavy undertaking, she said she loves her role in this project and wouldn't change it for anything.

Macy is most excited to see the Arcade's end product once the project is complete.

"I love historic buildings and I can't wait to see what it's going to become," she said. "It's exciting to know I was part of history."

**Elizabeth Kyle**

Data Reporter

*Dayton Business Journal*

