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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Nelsonville School Commons named
Best Residential Rehabilitation
in Heritage Ohio's Annual Preservation and Revitalization Awards**

Columbus, OH, October 30, 2018...Nelsonville School Commons in Nelsonville, OH, was named Best Residential Rehabilitation at Heritage Ohio's Annual Preservation and Revitalization Awards Ceremony held recently in Cleveland. The award recognized the \$9.6 million development led by Woda Cooper Companies, Inc. to adapt Nelsonville's historic but crumbling school complex into 33 affordable apartment homes for families, singles, and seniors who earn up to 60% of area median income.

Transforming Nelsonville School Commons combined the vision, commitment, and expertise of a number of partners and collaborators. After the local school district closed the facility in 1993, a small group of devoted graduates formed the Nelsonville High School Restoration Foundation (NHSRF) to save the school. The NHSRF did what it could to maintain the building complex, holding spaghetti suppers, writing small grant requests, and hosting other fundraisers to try to raise money for utilities and repairs. Over the years they rented the building to a gymnastics studio and maintained an archive of school historic items. But the building's restoration needs far outweighed their ability to attract funding and the building fell into major disrepair.

In 2013, the development team at Woda Cooper Companies spotted the historic building and worked with City Architecture of Cleveland to determine the feasibility for restoring the school and repurposing into affordable housing. In 2015, Woda Cooper Companies purchased the site from NHSRF and embarked on the redevelopment; a grand opening celebration was held March 2, 2018.

Woda Cooper skillfully restored two buildings into one cohesive facility with two historically sensitive additions. The design incorporated vintage architectural features with tasteful, contemporary and high-quality finishes, open living space design, handicapped accessibility, and energy efficiency.

The 1907 building, most recently used as a junior high school before being closed in the 1980s, reflects Classical Revival and Germanic Rundbogenstil design. Holes wore through the floor structure between the 2nd and 1st floor due to intense water intrusion. The roof, exhaust stacks, and brick chimney were in very poor condition and the mechanical systems had been removed. In 2015, the 1907 building was condemned by the City of Nelsonville.

“The years took their toll on both buildings at the property,” said Joseph McCabe, Vice President-Development, Woda Cooper Companies, Inc. “It was a major undertaking to bring the building back to life and develop a concept to mesh modern living with vintage features.”

The adjoining Classical Revival building was built in 1924 and was initially used as a high school and later a junior high before being closed in 1993. Noted architect William Mills, who immigrated to Nelsonville from England and maintained a highly regarded practice during the first half of the 20th century, designed the 1924 building. That building was later used as the gymnastics studio. It, too, was in bad shape when the developer found it, with broken and boarded windows, damaged flooring and walls, outdated mechanical systems, and general disrepair and decay.

The redevelopment restored the entire exterior for both buildings and rebuilt a major section of the 1907 building. The design allowed for retaining external appearance while maintaining its basic architectural integrity inside. The large windows and doors, grand central hallway, wide stairways, and many other original architectural features were maintained.

“This effort required superior expertise design from our architects at City Architecture, and careful attention to detail by our Woda construction team,” McCabe said.

One- and two-bedroom apartments were cleverly designed within the existing classrooms and offices. Decorative tin ceilings, original chalkboards, decorative millwork and built-in classroom closets in many classrooms were restored and repurposed. The original floors were refinished and used where possible and new historically-accurate replica windows and exterior metal cornices were installed throughout the building. New plumbing and electrical systems were also installed. The restoration also incorporated fire sprinkler systems and an elevator in a z-shaped connector between the two buildings. These were two crucial life safety and accessibility items the school gravely lacked during its years serving educational purposes. The apartments and common spaces are built with utility-saving green architectural features and universal design with several full ADA units.



The school's original auditorium was repurposed into a large community room with kitchenette, property management office, and a fitness center.

Nelsonville School Commons was funded in part through Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credits via the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) and State Historic Preservation Office; Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives via the National Park Service; and competitive housing tax credits through the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA). The Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing (OCCH) was investor. A bridge loan was made available through OHFA's Home Development Loan Program. Construction and permanent financing was obtained through Summit Community Bank (Moorefield, West Virginia).

"We appreciate the recognition from Heritage Ohio for our work to preserve an important part of Nelsonville, OH's history, while creating much-needed and high quality affordable housing for working families and seniors who live there today," said McCabe.

The award ceremony was held October 23, 2018, at the Allen Theatre in Cleveland. W. Kevin Pape, Board Chair, Heritage Ohio, presented the award. Accepting on behalf of Woda Cooper Companies were McCabe and Alex Keller, Senior Project Manager – Construction. Also present at the ceremony was Mathew Spencer who represented City Architecture.

Woda Cooper Companies, Inc. and its affiliates are experienced developers, general contractors, and property managers specializing in the design, construction, and management of affordable multi-family apartments, senior communities, and single-family homes. Considered leading experts in the affordable housing industry, the Woda Cooper team is known for producing and maintaining high quality affordable housing. *Affordable Housing Finance* ranked the firm 6th overall among Developers and 29th overall among Owners in its April/May 2018 issue. Woda Cooper Companies, Inc. has developed and currently manages more than 300 communities and 12,000 units, operating in 15 states. In addition to its Columbus headquarters, the firm has offices in Savannah, GA; Indianapolis, Indiana; Shelbyville, Kentucky; Annapolis, Maryland; Mackinaw City, Michigan; and Norfolk, Virginia.

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