

environment for startups, thanks to attributes that include a cooperative spirit among small businesses, with one helping another; good access to city and corporate leaders; and an affordable cost of living.

Paul Reeder, executive director of Ohio State University's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, said the city's diversity — including the African-American, Latino, LGBTQ and multiple immigrant communities — enriches the variety of entrepreneurial businesses.

“Too often, ‘entrepreneurship’ is associated with young 20-somethings and an app,” Reeder said. “In Columbus, the most impactful entrepreneur is Les Wexner. He certainly is not a 20-something anymore. Les Wexner was curious, he saw an opportunity, he created an impact and he still does that. This is a mindset and you don't have to be young to have that mindset.”

Michael Watkins, 50, has taken his Watt 1 Electrical Services to the next level.

The Northeast Side electrician went into business for himself in 2000 and still does traditional electrical jobs, but he also trained to become a certified solar contractor. Now he installs residential rooftop solar panels, as well as charging stations for electric vehicles parked in garages in New Albany, Dublin, Powell and elsewhere.