

# 15 things to be thankful for if you're from Cuyahoga County -- Charles Michener

By [Plain Dealer guest columnist](#)

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*By Charles Michener*

1. Cuyahoga County voters overwhelmingly endorsed change over business as usual: an overhaul of county government aimed at enabling the county to spend its annual kitty of \$1.5 billion more efficiently, accountably and -- in terms of economic development -- smartly.
2. Mayor Frank Jackson hosted a three-day summit of concerned citizens to lay the groundwork for a re-invented Cleveland by 2019 -- a city and region built around sustainable innovations in alternative energy, an attractive lakefront, a connective transportation network, locally produced food, safe neighborhoods and good schools. He shrewdly tapped David Cooperrider, Case Western Reserve University's renowned guru of "appreciative inquiry," to spur the troops to action.
3. The opening of the Gordon Square Arts District on the West Side signaled Cleveland's most exciting community transformation in years. It also demonstrated a model for the renovation of other beleaguered neighborhoods with its merger of government, cultural and business interests and the leadership of three civic lions who showed that they could still roar -- RPM International's Thomas Sullivan, Jones Day's Richard Pogue and Forest City Enterprises' Albert Ratner.
4. The efforts of Team NEO and other local economic energizers vaulted Ohio from the seventh to the fourth spot in Site Selection magazine's national rankings of the top states for doing business. Recognizing the assiduous work of BioEnterprise and similar go-getters, Business Facilities magazine ranked the state as the nation's fourth best for biotechnology.
5. The Cleveland Clinic and MetroHealth Medical Center announced plans to collaborate on a new regional network for the treatment of trauma casualties -- a sign that the area's long-balkanized health care giants are beginning to appreciate the benefits of partnership over pride.
6. The city's top charter and innovative schools -- among them, E Prep, Citizens' Academy, Ginn Academy, St. Martin de Porres, Intergenerational School, Urban Community School, Horizon Science Academy -- attracted national attention for their fresh approaches to preparing Cleveland's underserved children for advanced education and professional success.
7. At a time when the recession has devastated the finances of many premier institutions of higher learning, Case Western Reserve University reported that friends and alumni had contributed \$108 million to its coffers -- 5.2 percent more than 2008 and the second highest level of donations in the university's history.
8. The Cleveland Museum of Art opened its smashing new wing devoted to modern and contemporary art with a Summer Solstice wingding that had thousands of youngsters and oldsters dancing hip to hip under the stars, demonstrating that when high art gets off its pedestal, it can pack them in.
9. The Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Public Square, the nation's only Civil War museum housed inside a statue, prepared to open its great bronze doors to the public after a magnificent restoration that should attract thousands more visitors to the heart of downtown.

10. The Cleveland Orchestra, flush with international success, rediscovered its founding mission of spreading musical literacy in its hometown by giving East Side/West Side concerts at John Hay and James Ford Rhodes high schools under the baton of music director Franz Welser-Mst. More than 1,000 inner-city students who had never set foot in Severance Hall not only listened raptly to Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, but later wrote eloquently about the impact of hearing great music on their young lives.

11. The Cleveland Play House decided to vacate its no-man's-land home on Carnegie Avenue and relocate downtown to Playhouse-Square, giving that rejuvenated destination (an exuberantly revived Opera Cleveland, the beautifully updated Hanna Theater) a boost in continuity and creative oomph.

12. While the Indians stumbled and the Browns fumbled, the Cavaliers, despite a heartbreaking defeat in the playoffs, maintained their standing as not only the domain of the incomparable LeBron, but also as perhaps the classiest, most family-friendly, most *likeable* franchise in major-league sports.

13. More than 10,000 visitors came to University Circle's annual Parade the Circle, the spectacular Cleveland-style Carnival, organized by the art museum's Robin Van Lear. As more than 80 outlandishly costumed groups sashayed and stilt-walked along Wade Oval, one police officer was overheard to say: "I've been patrolling this event since it began 20 years ago, and there has never been a single disorderly moment."

14. With the opening of new restaurants by top chefs Zach Bruell, Michael Symon and Jonathan Sawyer, Cleveland enhanced its reputation as a terrific town for dining out. Meanwhile, the region's countless tucked-away treasures of ethnic and family specialties -- think Aldo's in Brooklyn, La Campagna in Westlake, Sokolowski's in Tremont, No. 1 Pho in Cleveland, Mekong River in Cleveland Heights -- continued to thrive, testifying to the fact that even as Clevelanders flock to the new, they still hold on to their own.

15. Despite climate-change anxiety over hit-or-miss rainfall, Clevelanders enjoyed a seemingly endless summer to remember: one brilliant sunny day after another, cool sleepable nights and scarcely a mosquito in sight.

*Charles Michener is a former senior editor at the New Yorker and classical music columnist for the New York Observer. He is working on a book about Cleveland, titled "The Hidden City."*