



Born to Rent

Tom Fortin

Story | Kristen M. Foley
Photo | Eric Wagner

As a child, while most of his family worked at Grandview's Fortin Ironworks, Tom Fortin became interested in his family's other business: property rental. He would happily spend his afternoons mowing lawns, cleaning hallways and chatting with tenants. "My mom would pay me \$2 to cut the grass [at the properties]," remembers Fortin. "Honestly, I just felt inspired because I was doing something by myself."

At 16, he bought his first property (a vacant lot) for \$150 at a foreclosure auction. "It was a learning experience and was also something I was doing on my own that was different from the family business," recalls Fortin. "I remember it quite vividly and I was just into it. It was this compulsive thing." Although his mom wanted her middle son to become the family's first doctor, he was secretly pondering how to buy other properties and sell them to his dad's friends. "That worked out sometimes, but not all the time," he laughs. "They just thought it was cute, but it was something that ignited me."

Fortin has come a long way since his vacant lot days; in fact, he's become somewhat of a silent powerhouse in the biz with such ventures as the downtown condo development Carlyle's Watch. His newest venture at 51 Gay Street, a once vacant photo store, will soon house the second location of the popular Short North ZenCha Tea Salon and Fortin also hopes to attract other social businesses to the location, such as dance, yoga and Pilates instructors.

"One of the issues facing our downtown is the fact that we suffer now from affordability and connectivity as it's actually about 40% higher ... to live downtown versus suburban locations," he says. "To help attract and retain people to live downtown, we really have to market and accentuate lifestyle amenities. As I build and redevelop properties into residential or retail spaces, I keep that in mind."

In that same spirit, during City Hop on June 14th, Fortin held a fundraising event at Carlyle's Watch featuring local artists and photographers. All proceeds benefited the Columbus Symphony.

