

# 2020-21 BI-ANNUAL REPORT

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Dayton Emerging Fashion  
Incubator (DE-FI) LLC

# WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Friends and Supporters,

2020 began with the promise of revival. After years of reflection and rebuilding, Dayton Fashion Week was set to relaunch in March. Then, one week before the show, the world shut down. A global pandemic paused everything. But if you know anything about (DE-FI), you know we don't stop.

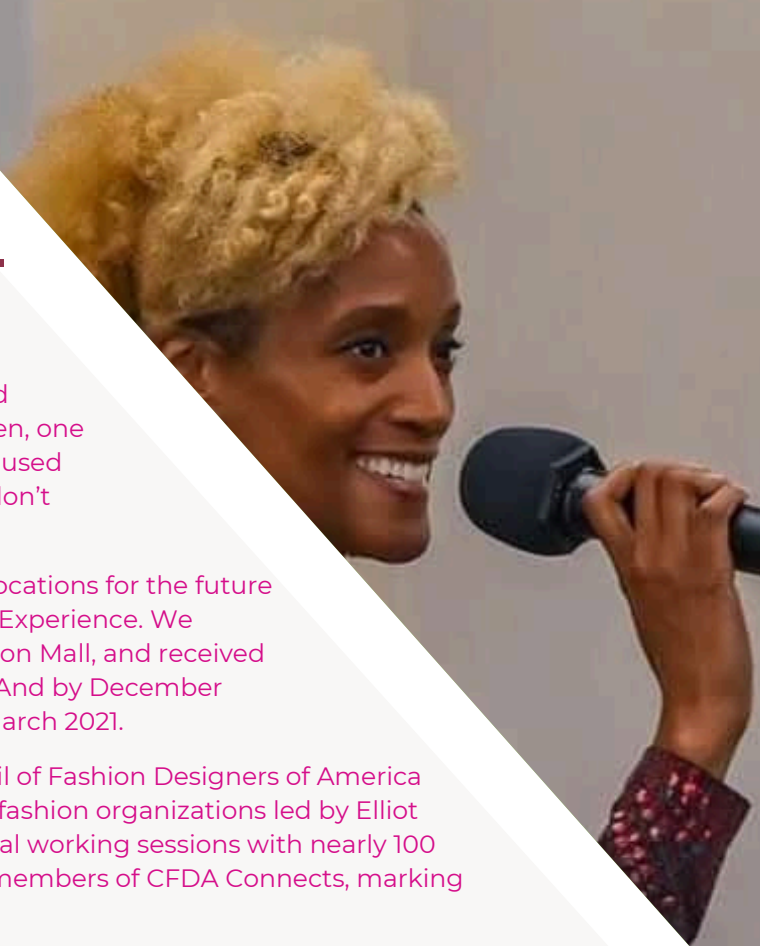
Throughout 2020, we remained focused on building. We scouted locations for the future home of The House of (DE-FI)ance: A Fashion & Design Coworking Experience. We pitched our vision to Washington Prime Group, owners of the Dayton Mall, and received enthusiastic support. We secured investors. We planned carefully. And by December 2020, we signed the lease. The grand opening was scheduled for March 2021.

That same month, I received an unexpected email from the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). They were forming a national network to support regional fashion organizations led by Elliot Carlyle, and invited us to take part. After participating in the national working sessions with nearly 100 regional organizers, (DE-FI) was chosen as one of just 12 founding members of CFDA Connects, marking a pivotal moment for our work and our region.

When the CFDA first reached out to me, I was so excited. I immediately turned to my core team, the same group who had been in the trenches with me since 2012, planning, organizing, and volunteering countless hours to build this movement. I shared the opportunity with them, asking for their help to complete the information CFDA needed, surveys from Vogue, the works. But I was met with silence. They saw the messages. I could literally see that they read them, but no one responded. And I haven't heard from them since. These were people I had supported deeply, sending them paid jobs, writing articles about their work, promoting their businesses without ever asking for anything in return. When I used their services, I paid full price. It was never a one-sided relationship. So to be ghosted at such a pivotal moment, a moment that I thought we all were working toward, really hurt.

We also continued to build meaningful impact in education. Two headlining designers from Dayton Fashion Week, Coral Wedle and Melissa Miller, who met via Dayton Fashion Week planning, launched the Fashion Design and Retail Merchandising Program at Hocking College, the first of its kind in Appalachia. I was honored to serve as an advisor for the program. At their debut show in 2021, I purchased a design by Jasmine Cruz, one of their students, and wore it to the official New York Fashion Week kickoff event at Gracie Mansion, invited by Anna Wintour, Mayor Eric Adams, and the CFDA. In the midst of it all, I was named a recipient of the Ohio Black Expo's Black Excellence Honors.

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# WELCOME MESSAGE CONTINUED

The grand opening of The House of (DE-FI)ance was everything I dreamed it could be. We hosted sewing and knitting demonstrations, tested our Brain Dayton and Build-A-Brand experiences, and held editorial photo shoots that celebrated local talent. But just as we were hitting our stride, I was forced to pivot again.

In December 2020, I contracted COVID. While asymptomatic, it triggered inflammation in my jaw, which locked up, a complication from an earlier corrective surgery in 2016. By late 2021, I could barely close my mouth or eat, requiring a multi-step surgical process. But without my consent, my maxillofacial surgeon and dentist changed the plan and performed all the surgeries at once. What followed were months of painful and exhausting follow-up visits. The implant ultimately failed. In the end, I had to undergo a traumatic, anesthesia-free extraction due to their oversight. What took three hours to implant in a surgical procedure where I was put to sleep was pulled out accidentally in the longest ten seconds of my life.

In November 2021, we were honored to participate in Novel Night, celebrating the grand opening of the Dayton Metro Library's West Branch (Abbey Library), located just behind the historic Wright Brothers Airplane Factory. For this event, we collaborated with local designers, not necessarily from our incubator, to showcase their work in a unique, tea room-style fashion experience. There was no traditional runway; instead, our paid models walked among guests, offering an interactive presentation of each designer's work while passing out business cards and sharing the stories behind the clothing. It was an intimate, community-centered experience that reflected both our mission and our roots.

Despite being in constant pain and recovery, I still showed up for my team, our mission, and our community. Then in December 2021, Washington Prime filed for bankruptcy, and the mall has been sold.

In spite of it all, we once again began planning for yet another Dayton Fashion Week, which is set to return in 2022. Stay tuned.

With gratitude, and (DE-FI)ance,  
Caressa L. Brown  
Owner/Director of the Dayton Emerging  
Fashion Incubator (DE-FI) LLC





# THE 2020-21 EXPERIENCES

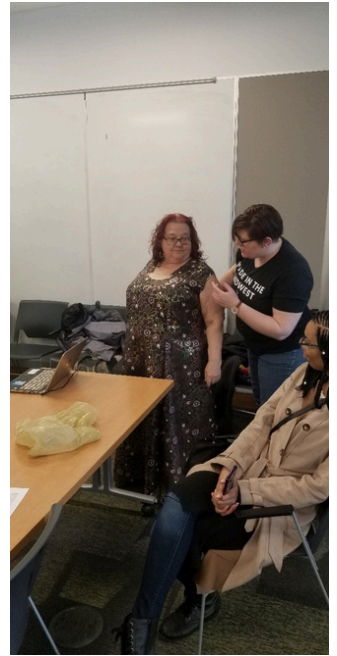
(DE-FI)<sup>®</sup>





# THE 2020-21 EXPERIENCE

(DE-FI)<sup>®</sup>



# THANK YOU

## 2020 Photography Team

John Flynn  
Lamar Pacley  
Chris Kuettner

## Advisory Board (2020)

Cindy Kirk Gabory  
Ed Dixon

## 2021 Photography Team

John Flynn

## Advisory Board (2021)

Cindy Kirk Gabory  
Ed Dixon

## 2020 Collaborative Partners

Shutter Eye Photo  
Industry Events  
Audio Etc.  
Creative Images  
Circle of Vision Keepers Re-Entry and  
Recovery Program  
Cloverstorm photography  
Edward A. Dixon Gallery

## 2021 Collaborative Partners

Industry Events  
Audio Etc.  
Creative Images  
Cloverstorm Photography  
Edward A. Dixon Gallery

## 2020 Leadership & Core Team

Owner/Director: Caressa L. Brown  
Director of Logistics: Sybil Martin  
Director of Photography: Lamar Pacley  
Director of Web Dev & Graphic Design:  
Jason Penix  
Director of Beauty: ShaTerra Jenkins  
Model Coordinator: Danielle Pinion  
Administrative Executive: Danielle  
Simpson

## 2021 Leadership & Core Team

Owner/Director: Caressa L. Brown  
Administrative Executive: Danielle  
Simpson

## Contact Us

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