

ASHTABULA COUNTY

**TUESDAY,
SEPTEMBER 20**

STAR  BEACON

2011 PROGRESS

WINE INDUSTRY ROOTED IN HISTORY

**Industry has
undergone
many
changes
over the
decades**

**PLUS ...
EDUCATION
INDUSTRY
RETAIL
FINANCIAL
PARKS &
RECREATION
ARTS &
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AGRICULTURE
REAL ESTATE
SOCIAL SERVICES
HEALTH**



2011 **PROGRESS** TABLE OF CONTENTS

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By CARL E. FEATHER n Staff Writer

Measuring progress in Ashtabula County

Welcome to our second Progress edition.

Progress is a tough thing to measure because its very nature means one journey to arrive. So most people think of progress as forward movement with an end in sight, or a goal. In reality that is an impossibility.

For most people in Ashtabula County progress certainly means creating more and better paying jobs. It certainly means having better quality schools today than yesterday. It also means helping our residents lead healthier lives.

This year we looked at ten areas, including real estate which was not in last year's edition. We chose these particular areas because we believe when residents look to progress they look to these categories. Besides real estate, they include: health, industry, social services, agriculture, retail, financial, arts and entertainment, parks and recreation and education.

It became no secret as Beacon staffers began to studies these areas they impact each other. For example, high unemployment and poverty — both of which are way too high in Ashtabula County — foster unhealthy lifestyles. Ashtabula County from last year to this year remains relatively unhealthy.

In Carl Feather's overall look at the county's health, he points out this county is 56th out of 88 counties in the state when it comes to mortality and morbidity.

This is not to say Ashtabula County in other areas has not improved. It has and those improvements some day may lift up our health ratings, and unemployment and poverty numbers.

If someone said to me pick one area that stands out the most when it comes to progress, I would choose education in the county. There has been meaningful progress in this area. It is standing ovation progress.



**NEIL
FRIEDER**

The Buckeye Local School District has attained something no district in the county has so far. It received an Excellent rating by the Ohio Department of Education on its annual report card. Unlike any other district in the county, Buckeye achieved this without the help of any new schools. Some of the district's schools are nearly 100 years old, and the district is having financial problems.

Four out of the seven county public school districts also improved on their ratings from 2010 to 2011. They all did this while facing severe financial restraints.

Schools are not the only shining stars in Ashtabula County. The county's wine industry is not just the most robust and full-bodied in the state, but it continues to grow and gain wider recognition.

When staff writer Ellen Kolman looked at the financial sector, she found very noticeable progress. Our locally owned banks and credit unions are growing. For example, locally owned Andover Bank is able to chart progress through the growth of its assets and the establishment of additional facilities.

Industry, which often has been considered the hallmark on the employment picture, does remain stagnant in Ashtabula County overall. However, pieces are being put in place, such as renovation of Plant C in Ashtabula Township, that should spur growth in the not-too-distant future. Also, the county's Economic Steering Committee has been hard at work helping to coordinate the efforts of our schools to train students for immediate jobs openings in area industries. n

ON THE COVER



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

THE DEBEVC family were pioneers in re-establishing wineries in Ashtabula County and, more recently, starting a new trend with a brewery. Tony Debevc and his wife Beth (right) convinced his mother Rose and late father Tony that the family should convert their Doty Road farm to a winery. Their son, Tony (left) went to the next level and seven years ago opened a brewery that, this month, started selling its ale in six counties. They are standing in a Riesling and Chardonnay vineyard.

Wine industry rooted in history 5

Industry has undergone many changes over the decades

INSIDE

Introduction

For many Ashtabula County residents 2011 is a repeat of 2010

4

Health

County's health ratings are declining

28

Real Estate

Experts predict better market for sellers

45

Industry

County continues trend toward diversity

13

Social Services

Social services help in hard times

35

Agriculture

From apples to soybeans — county grows it all

47

Retail

County retailers detecting improvement

23

Financial

Banks, credit unions continue to grow

40

Arts & Entertainment

County gains community theater, movie cinema

51

Parks & Recreation

Ashtabula County is full of parks and playgrounds for fun and recreation

55

Education

Ashtabula County school districts deal with tight budgets, new state initiatives

64



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2011 **PROGRESS** INTRODUCTION

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By CARL E. FEATHER n Staff Writer

For many Ashtabula County residents 2011 is a repeat of 2010

Are we better off today than we were a year ago?

That's the question behind our annual Progress edition, which looks at the successes and failures across our community.

For many residents of our county, 2011 has been a repeat of 2010: stagnant wages, declining real estate values and limited job opportunities as the recession departs at glacial speed.

The exodus of good-paying jobs that began way back in the 1970s continues as ESAB Welding Products announced plans to close its Ashtabula Township factory and move the production line to South Carolina. More than 100 jobs will be lost when that transfer is completed later this year.

"The tough thing we were up against on that was an extremely competitive package offered by South Carolina," says State Rep. Casey Kozlowski, R-Pierpont, who worked on the incentive package Ohio offered. "I learned that we are in a very competitive situation when we talk about economic development. It's a very competitive state of things out there right now, it's difficult."

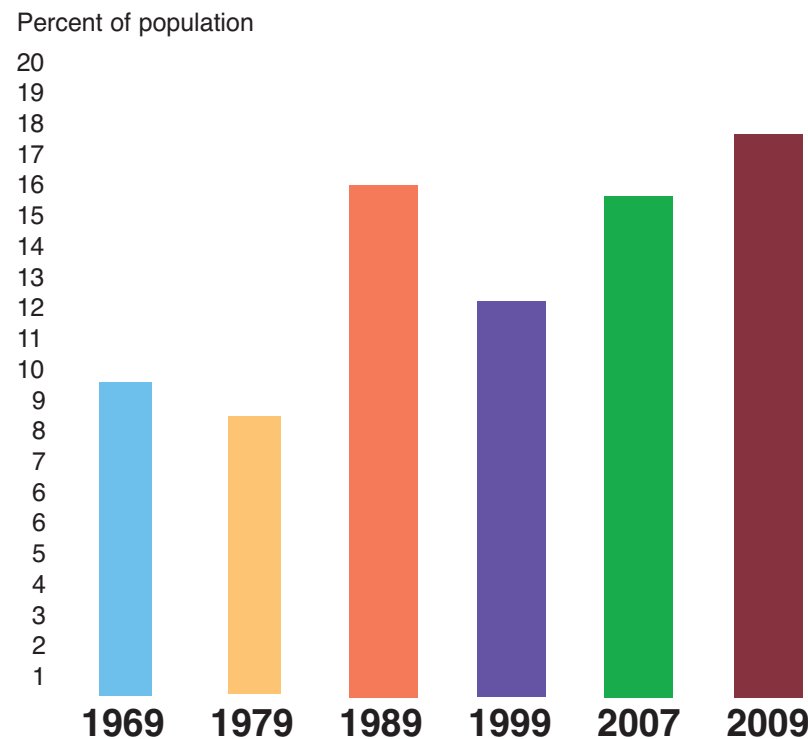
Overall, Ohio lost 525,000 jobs from 2000 to 2010. From July 2000 to July 2011, Ashtabula County shed 5,700 jobs.

Ashtabula County's unemployment rate has been edging down in 2011, from 13.1 percent in January to 10.6 percent in July, but it's not because more people are working. The county's labor force shrank by 900 from July 2010 to July 2011, and the number of residents working fell by 300 during that same period. The county's unemployment rate runs about 2 percentage points higher than that of the nation or state.

One flicker of hope: a survey of county employers conducted earlier this summer showed that 43.8 percent of those responding plan to increase the size of their workforce in the next 12 months. About the same percentage do not plan any increases.

Low median household income continues to stifle growth in the service and retail sec-

Ashtabula County poverty rates



Data source: *The State of Poverty in Ohio*, U.S. Census Bureau

tors of the county, boding poorly for long-term recovery. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Ashtabula County's median household income is nearly \$10,000 lower than that for the U.S. (2005-2009 estimate). State statistics suggest that figure was further eroded by the recession. The state figure stood at \$49,811 in 2006-2007, and fell to \$46,318 in 2008-2009.

Indeed, as states go, there is none worse than Ohio when it comes to disposable income growth. An analysis of data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

showed that over the last 50 years, the nation's disposable income grew at an annual rate of 7.1 percent. But not in the Buckeye State, which ranked 51st (the study included the District of Columbia) for disposable income growth.

The State of Working Ohio 2011, a report issued earlier this year by Policy Matters Ohio, states that one of every 10 Ohioans lost a job during the past decade and Ohio workers saw their wages fall by a larger amount than workers in any other state.

Kozlowski is aware of these challenges,

and says the Jobs Ohio program established by Gov. John Kasich is a good start toward addressing them. In his district, Kozlowski has been meeting with business owners during the summer to get their input on the issues they are facing. Kozlowski said the themes he hears repeatedly deal with taxes and the state's regulatory climate, especially that of the Environmental Protection Agency.

"It's very burdensome for them to operate a business or expand a business," Kozlowski said.

Meanwhile, the weak job market is taking its toll on the personal finances of many residents, who are finding themselves more dependent upon government services. The numbers suggest we are headed in the wrong direction, and despite success stories scattered across the landscape, they may be Pyrrhic victories because they can't replace the jobs that once provided a living wage, one sufficient to avoid dependence upon government supports.

Ashtabula County's poverty rate in 2007 was 15.5 percent. In just two years, it grew to 17.5 percent (2009 rate). Increasingly, residents are turning to food banks and the Ashtabula County Department of Job and Family Services to help make ends meet.

In July 2006, the department disbursed \$1,169,330 in federal food assistance. By 2010, payments had more than doubled to \$2,646,261. And despite the decrease in the unemployment rate, the pay out for food assistance grew to \$2,729,968 in July of this year.

In July of this year, there were 19,601 individuals and 9,375 assistance groups receiving food assistance. Both were increases over July 2010.

"Our case loads are up because of what's going on with the economy," Arcaro observes. "It's people coming off unemployment, it doesn't mean they are working." n

2011 PROGRESS COVER STORY

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By CARL E. FEATHER n Staff Writer

Wine industry rooted in history

Industry has undergone many changes over the decades

Grapes and wine. For Ashtabula County, they make for a success story that spans more than a century and improves with each passing year.

Drive down Harpersfield's South River Road this time of year, sniff the Concord-imbued air and observe the vineyard workers preparing for the harvest. Take one of the side roads and enjoy this harvest while chatting with winemaker Charlie Virant at his Atkins Road family winery or soak in the breathtaking vineyard scenery from the porch of an 1892 church building.

Hungry? Head to Ferrante's Old World setting and enjoy a meal enhanced with the fruit of this county industry while viewing the vineyards from which it originated, or stop by Tarsitano's in Monroe Township,

where owners Ken and Kelly Tarsitano blend tradition with organically grown grapes to produce unique wines.

The 2007 Northeast Ohio Grape and Wine Economic Impact Study estimated that nearly a half-million people visit Northeast Ohio winery and vineyard operations annually. These patrons spend more than \$13 million on wine, food and gifts sold by wineries in Lake, Ashtabula and Geauga counties. The lion's share is in Ashtabula County. The annual industry output was estimated at \$15 million, but that number most likely has grown significantly as the area's wineries have expanded their output and efforts to attract and retain patrons.

There are nearly two dozen wineries in the county, plus numerous vineyards that grow the grapes for the vino. While many of these are relatively new to the landscape, the industry itself is a case of déjà vu, for Ohio once held the distinction of being the top wine-producing state, and vineyards in the county's northwest corner have a history of making and selling wine that predates Prohibition.

BOOM AND BUST

Ohio's wine industry got its start in the southwest corner of the state, where Nicholas Longworth launched a legal career in 1803. Longworth traded his legal expert-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



ise for land and shrewdly amassed more than 350 plots of real estate.

At the age of 39, the land-wealthy Longworth turned his interests to wine making. He contracted with farmers to live on his land, plant vineyards and share in the harvest. Until this point, pioneers had used only the wild grapes they found growing along the rivers and streams to produce their wines. Longworth wanted a more-prolific manageable producer that he could establish on his real estate holdings.

He found that grape in the native Catawba, which possessed many of the characteristics a vintner requires. The drink was embraced by consumers — “While pure as spring, Is the wine I sing, And to praise it, One needs but name it; For Catawba wine, Has need of no sign, No tavern-bush to proclaim it,” wrote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in praise of the wine.

By the mid-1840s, Longworth farmers were growing enough grapes to produce 20,000 gallons of wine annually. In 1853, Cincinnati alone made 320,000 gallons, but the demand for Ohio’s wine still outstripped the supply.

Ohio’s 19th-century wine heyday came in the 1850s.

Sparkling wine from
Cincinnati was selling for \$1.50

a bottle and “still” wine for 40 cents. The city’s annual wine sales were around \$400,000.

Longworth, who became known as “the father of Ohio wine,” made the fatal decision to trellis his vines using the bow-and-stake method popular in Germany, where growing conditions were not as humid or hot as in Ohio. Hot, damp air thus became trapped in the canopy of Catawba vines, providing a nurturing environment for powdery mildew and black rot. Disease spread through the southern Ohio vineyards, greatly reducing the state’s output and giving California, where European vinifera grapes were grown, a leg up on the industry.

LAKE ERIE GRAPES

The bright spot in Ohio wine was in Ottawa and Erie counties on the Lake Erie shoreline, where the vineyards eschewed the bow-and-stake method and the Catawba flourished. Bolstered by the strong summer tourist trade, good access to markets and a 190-day growing season, the western Lake Erie islands dominated Ohio’s wine industry from 1865 forward. Even as late as 1909, Ohio ranked third in wine production among the states, thanks largely to the output of western Lake Erie, which provided for two-thirds or more of the production.

In Ashtabula County, grapes were often planted as part of the larger overall orchard planting of general farms. Such was the case for the Anton Debevc farm in Madison Township, which the Yugoslavian immigrant purchased in 1916.

Rose Petrovic Debevc, the wife of Anton’s son, Tony P., said the grapes were converted into several barrels of

wine for the family’s use and the excess peddled to immigrant families on the east side of Cleveland. A freight car served as the caboose on the streetcar line that ran from Madison to Cleveland, and the grapes would be transported in that rear car and in a 2-ton truck owned by Debevc.

Geraldine Bishop Pekarski, whose family began farming in the township in 1850, says her father raised grapes and drove them to Cleveland in a Model T Ford and peddled them.

“It was mostly Italian people he sold them to,” says Geraldine. “He’d carry those half-bushel baskets into their basements so they could make their wine.”

Concord and Niagara were the primary varieties grown in this corner of the state. Concord rarely attains a high-enough sugar level to create the target alcohol content of 11 percent. The immigrants would have to add sugar, sweet juice imported from California or raisins to make their wine.

“Purple grape juice” and Concord are synonymous. The dark blue/ purple grapes are highly aromatic and are used in everything from jelly to juice, candy to kosher wine. The Concord grape was developed in Massachusetts in 1849 from wild *Vitis labrusca*; Catawba is suspected to be in its lineage.

Niagara, a white *labrusca* grape, was the second-most-common variety planted by these farmers.

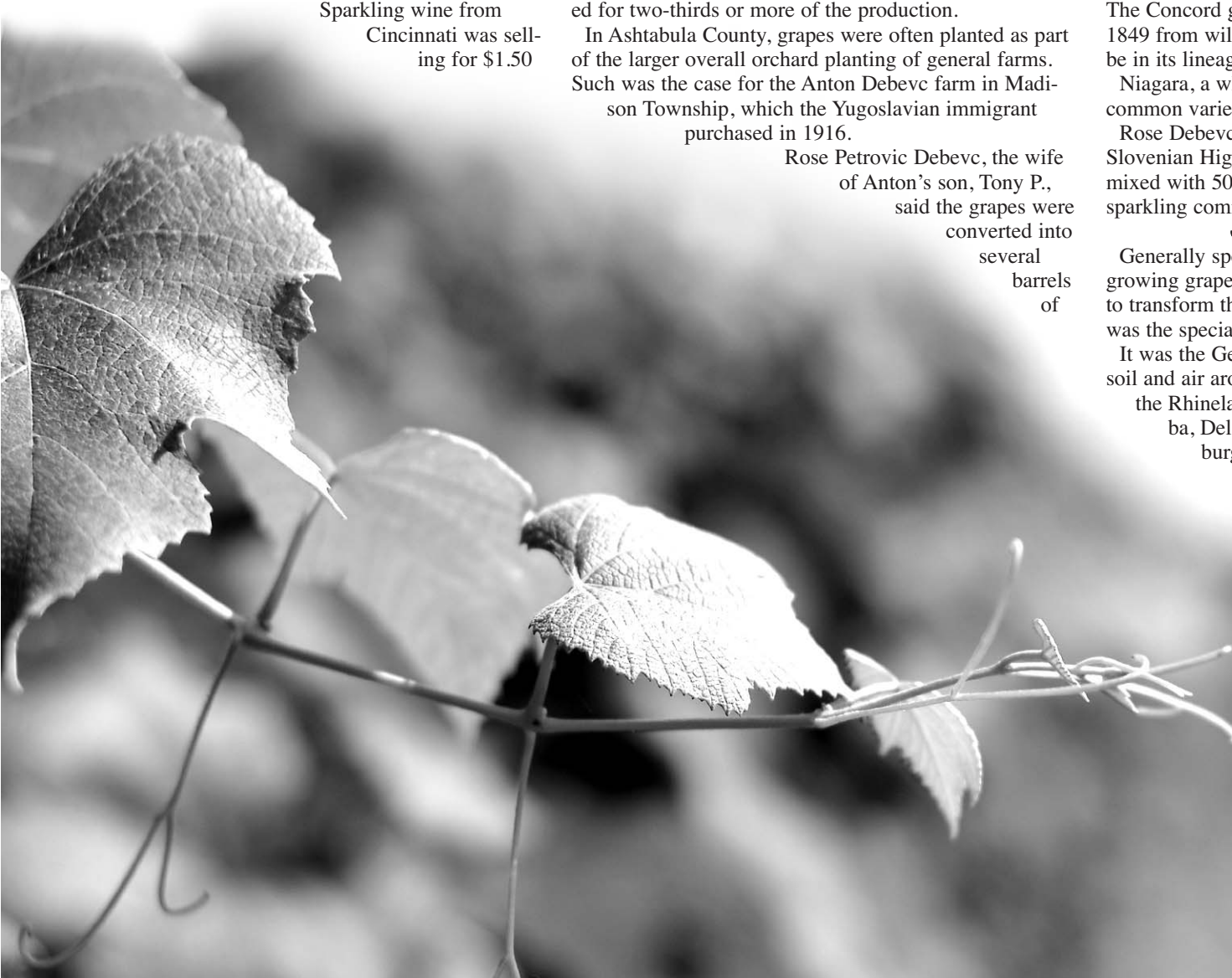
Rose Debevc recalls making what was known as the Slovenian Highball, a Concord-Niagara wine blend mixed with 50/50 soda. In the 1960s and 70s, a similar sparkling commercial product was sold as Cold Duck.

JEWISH INFLUENCES

Generally speaking, the hard work associated with growing grapes and possessing the knowledge and skills to transform them into an enjoyable profitable beverage was the specialty of European immigrants.

It was the German immigrant who found the climate, soil and air around the Lake Erie islands reminiscent of the Rhineland grape regions. Their work with Catawba, Delaware, Niagara, Baco noir and Johannesburg Riesling helped establish a flourishing industry there.

CARL E. FEATHER /
Star Beacon
A GRAPE
vine puts forth
new growth
in the
South River
Vineyard,
Harpersfield
Township.



In the 1880s, the Jewish Agricultural Society of America, funded by Baron Maurice de Hirsch, began to encourage a back-to-the-land movement among Jewish immigrants. Many of these urban Jews found fulfillment of the movement's promise, and unspoken hardships, on the farms of Ashtabula, Lake and Geauga counties.

According to Jacob Ornstein-Galicia, whose family found fulfillment of this movement on Thompson and Huntsburg farms, the Lake Erie shoreline around Geneva began to attract Cleveland-area Jews around 1909. They grew Elberta and Haven peaches, as well as Concord grapes. Despite the hardships presented by climate, disease and price fluctuations exacerbated by the Great Depression, these farmers survived and thrived.

"They were poor Jews, but they didn't stay poor for very long," says Jule Pealer, who moved to South River Road in the 1950s and knew several of the Jewish farmer families in the area. A photograph of a 1928 gathering of the Jewish Farmers Association of Geneva, Ohio, shows dozens of adults and their children who gathered for a three-day celebration centered around the visit of internationally renowned Reform Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland.

The Joseph and Rachael Golomb farm was in Cork, just south of Geneva, and had 200 acres. The Golombs arrived in Cleveland from the Ukraine in 1910. They cleared the Cork forest, planted a Concord vineyard and pastured horses and cows. The Ohio State University Department of Agriculture used the Golombs' planting as a model vineyard. Golomb and another Jewish farmer, Morris Broody, were the head of the grape cooperative that monitored prices. When grapes were abundant, a bushel might fetch only a few pennies; when a frost decimated the crop, a ton would bring \$100.

Morris Broody and his wife, Anne, had a 118-acre fruit farm on South River Road. He was a prominent fruit grower in eastern Ohio, and the Ohio State University used his orchards as a testing ground for insect and disease management.

Morris Chords, who operated a vineyard of 55 acres west of Geneva on the Ashtabula-Lake counties line, was perhaps the most famous of these Jewish grape farmers. A native of Lithuania, Chords built the Chords Winery and marketed his Concord wines in Ohio and beyond. They were the last of the Jewish agriculturists to leave their farm, and they did so reluctantly. Morris was 89 and his wife, Bessie, was 93 when they parted with their land in the 1970s.

At the peak of their market penetration, the Jewish farmers of the Geneva area were producing more than 60 percent of the area's grapes and a large share of the peaches and other fruit. Through their perseverance and passion, they demonstrated that grapes could be grown successfully on the county's high ridges. The Depression, and Prohibition, however, put these efforts on ice.

PROHIBITION

While grapes and other fruit were being raised and wine produced and consumed in the county, the farmers were content with handling only the growing side of the equation. Truck farming, hauling the produce to markets in Cleveland, was the norm. The county's wineries amounted to a small press in the basement, barn or garage where the family made a supply for their own use and perhaps an occasional bottle for acquaintances in Cleveland.

Ironically, wine consumption actually increased in the United States during Prohibition, 1920-33. A provision in the law allowed households to manufacture up to 200 gallons annually of nonintoxicating cider and fruit wines. Demand for juice soared, and California responded by planting vineyards and marketing its juice with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



a warning that cleverly gave consumers the basics for converting it to wine.

With Catawba prices at \$100 a ton, the Lake Erie grape growers benefited from Prohibition, as well. Overplanting occurred, prices plummeted, and by the end of the 1920s, the vineyards in the Erie islands were being abandoned for lack of a profitable market.

Geraldine Pekarski says there was plenty of wine being made in Harpersfield Township, as well as hard liquor, during Prohibition. One farmer in particular, John Whittine, comes to mind as Geraldine recalls those daring ventures.

"He had grapes, and I think he cooked (mash), too. My husband thought he had it in his barn," Geraldine says. "This John Whittine knew the (county) sheriff, and (the Whittine house) was a speak-easy. They had parties there, and the (Ashtabula County) sheriff would come but they'd have no fear. ... Of course, all I know is what I hear."

If a stranger showed up at a vineyard and requested a bottle of the contraband, he or she would be turned away, say Paul and Jule Pealer, who live on the former Whittine farm.

"If they didn't know you, they didn't



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

GERALDINE PEKARSKI recalls Prohibition in Harpersfield Township as a time an insider could get wine or hard liquor from any number of farms in the area, if he had the right connections. Even the sheriff was known to visit one of the "speakeasys," she says.

have any wine," says Paul, 83.

"Everybody had wine, whiskey," says Jule, 91. "That's the way they lived. They

used to get these Cleveland people out here and have a dinner."

The dinners were a front for the real

purpose of the visit: the consumption of wine and whiskey in home wineries.

"They were all making liquor. Everybody else around here used to make liquor, except the people in the house next to us (Burkholder). They came from the Amish country, and they never drank," Paul said. "They never made nothing. There were some Puritans around here," he said.

KING CONCORD

Prohibition put many of Ohio's wineries out of business. Idle for 14 years, the equipment became outdated or in poor repair. Wine-making skills were lost or diminished. California, well-positioned as a result of home-juice business, took the lead and left the other states in the dust.

There were a few small home-based wineries in the area following Prohibition, says Rose Debevc. One was on the property where Chops Restaurant is located on Route 534.

The Cohodas family also had a small winery in Madison Township.

"They quickly found out that it was a business, and it could be a headache," Rose says of the short-lived ventures.

World War II brought demand for a new kind of grape product: the 5-gallon can of

CARL E. FEATHER /
Star Beacon

LUSH VINEYARDS along South River Road are nearing the time of harvest. Concords have given way to Vinifera varieties as dry wines have grown in popular with younger wine drinkers.



juice for our troops.

"During the war, there was big money in grape juice," says Tony P. Debevc. The demand continued

many of the families who found the township's high ridges and excellent air drainage toward the Grand River to provide ideal conditions for grow-



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

JULE AND Paul Pealer recall the era when bootleg wine and hard liquor were produced at farms in Geneva and Harpersfield townships. Jule, 91, recently sold the last of her vineyards to South River this year. She sold to Welch's for 50 years.

through the 1950s, as grape juice became Americans' favorite juice.

Niagara, which often was planted in the county's Concord vineyards, presented a problem for some of the growers because it diluted the Concord output. Jule Pealer says if the harvest contained too much Niagara, the buyer could reject the whole lot.

Concord vineyards were planted all over the county as landowners saw the financial success of these growers and sought to tap into the boom. Tony Debevc says some of these vineyards were sited in locations that were poorly researched and failed to produce a profitable harvest. To this day, the old vineyards can be found scattered across the landscape as a remnant of that golden era of Concord grape growing.

Jule Pealer and her late husband, Edward J. Turk, heard about the grape-farming boom from relatives and relocated to South River Road in 1954. Turk was Slovenian, as were

ing grapes, apples, peaches and other fruit.

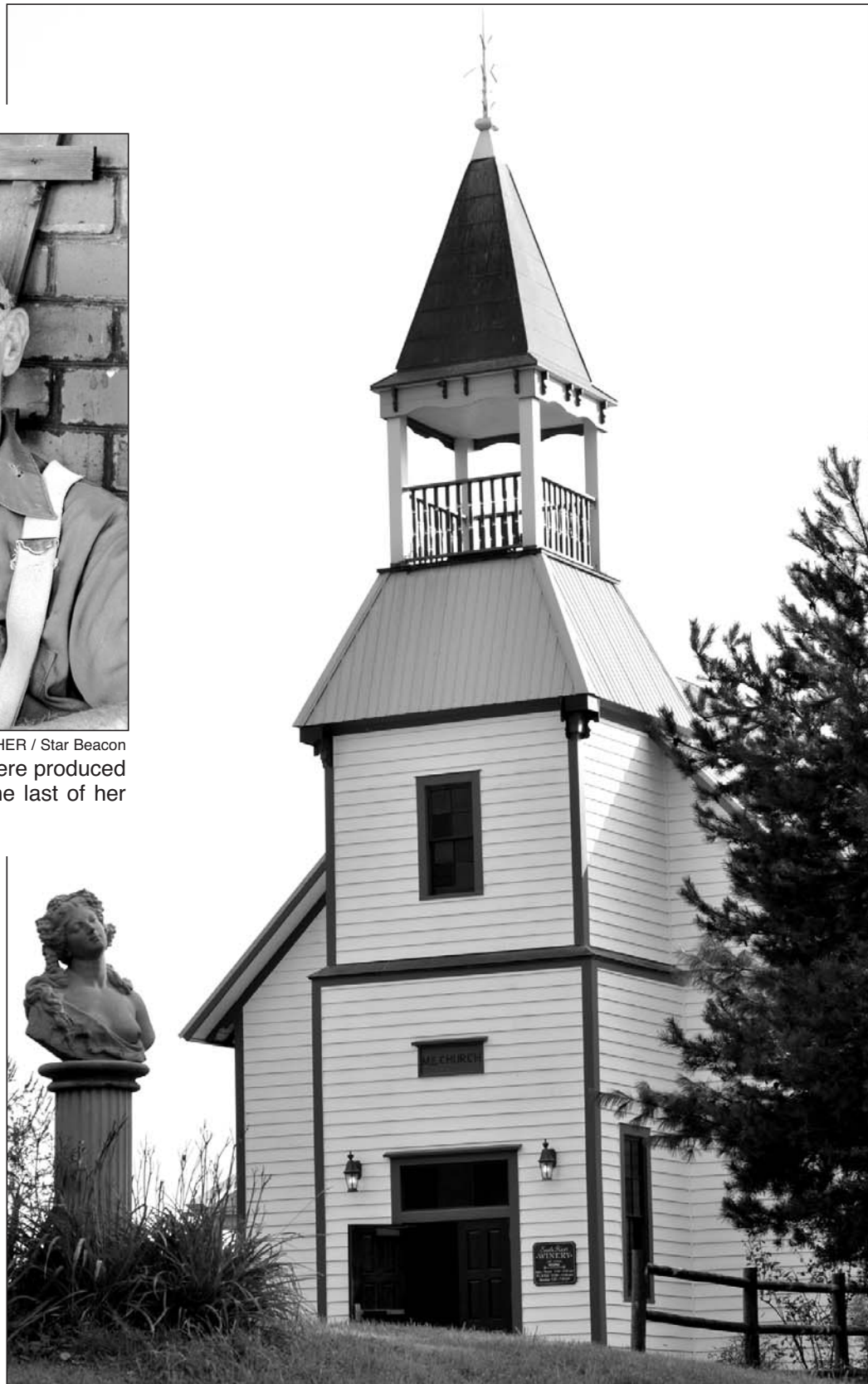
"If you can see the lake from your property, there's a good chance that you'll get good air drainage," Paul Pealer says.

Edward, who was from Parma, was drawn to Harpersfield Township by the glowing reports that his brother, who had a farm in the township, sent back home. Jule and Edward visited the countryside, were impressed with what they saw and purchased a 15-acre South River Road vineyard for \$15,000.

"They were all planted (in Concord). It was beautiful," Jule says. "The first year we made \$20,000 on the grapes."

Joseph Gruber Sr. was among the Geneva-area growers heavily invested in the industry. He and his brother Ray read about the tradition of grape festivals in other wine states and, in 1963, presented the idea for a festi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

ASHTABULA COUNTY'S wine country is more about just great wines. There is a culture that goes with the experience, which can be enjoyed in this vintage church repurposed as South River Vineyards' tasting room.

val to the Tri-County Grape Growers Association and Geneva Area Chamber of Commerce. The Grape JAM-boree thus was founded, a festival tradition held the last weekend in September.

Tony Debevc says there were several companies that purchased and processed the Concord grapes grown by the farmers. Initially, these companies would help the farmers get into the business by advancing payments on a crop. Fischer-Spiegel, a partnership between an attorney and Ed Spiegel, contracted with many of the Harpersfield Township growers. Spiegel became wealthy buying and processing these harvests, and his business eventually would become Geneva's Coca-Cola processing plant.

National Grape Co-op, which was operated by a board of farmers who invested in the project, purchased the equipment to process the Concord grapes. Welch's was created as a marketing arm of this venture and purchased the co-op's product. For more than 50 years, the Pealers sold their harvests to Welch's, whose experts educated their contract farmers on techniques to increase the pro-

duction from 1.5 tons per acre to 6 tons. The techniques involved intense use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, which drove up the cost of growing grapes to a point of unprofitability, even with the increased yields, Paul says.

"Nobody will buy a

Welch's vineyard today. It does not pay for itself; it's a lost cause," says Paul. They sold their last harvest of Concord grapes to the cooperative in 2010.

RETHINKING GRAPES

Tony P. Debevc says Concord grapes were toppled by the "big-O," the Interstate Highway System and a change in children's fashions. Youngsters stopped wearing denim in the 1960s and '70s and the lighter colors and fabrics that replaced the dark-blue cloth showed the inevitable grape stains. Meanwhile, grape-juice manufacturers tried to shift to white grape juice, but orange-juice television commercials featuring Anita Bryant and Lawsons' "The Ballad of the Big-O," which showed the tanker trucks barreling north on the interstate highways to delivery fresh juice to snowbound northeast Ohio, presented formidable competition to the more-costly grape juice.

Debevc was in college at OSU's horticulture program when orange juice topped Concord grape juice. When he returned home on weekends and in the summer, he observed his parents working long hours to produce a crop that cost more to grow and returned smaller payments every year.

"I said, 'There is no way I'm coming back to raise grapes because it is a dying breed,'" Debevc says.

While at the university, however, OSU received a

grant to help revive the wine industry in southeast Ohio, the historic cradle of grape production in the state. Debevc, who had the family heritage of making wine and studied fermentation chemistry as an OSU student, was encouraged by Roy Kottman and Garth Cahoon to revamp the family farm as a winery. Cahoon, an OSU professor emeritus, spent 10 years at the University of California-Riverside before returning to Ohio in 1963 to launch research on hybrid grape varieties at locations around Ohio.

Debevc served in the military after college and banked the hazardous-duty pay he earned jumping out of airplanes. When he was discharged, he offered that money to his parents to help them purchase winemaking equipment, build a small winery, and plant more vineyards. Tony says the only other wineries in the state at that time were a couple in southeast Ohio.

It was a huge financial gamble for Tony and Rose, who were in their 50s, but their son insisted that the timing was right to reintroduce wineries to northeast Ohio. The California wine craze had firmly taken hold in the American culture, and there was a trend toward agritourism. Family farmers were recognizing that in order to

survive the changing economy, they had to do more than grow stuff; they had to find a way to turn what they grew into



FILE PHOTO
ARNUFF ESTERER (second from left) discusses his vinifera grape plantings with a tour group in this October 1972 photo. Esterer pioneered the cultivation of vinifera grapes in the region, creating the foundation for a new wine industry. From left are James Gallender, Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center; Esterer; Harold Fuller, county commissioner; and Lawrence Anderson, county extension agent. The occasion of the visit was that Esterer had received his federal permit to make wine at his winery, Markko Vineyard.

a value-added product, like wine, and then sell it directly to the consumer, who could drink it on the spot.

Rose remembers applying for the permit to open the winery.

"When we went to get the papers, they were yellowed with age, it had been so long since anyone had applied for a license," she says.

Rose says Anton opposed the idea, and her husband, the senior Tony, continued to work the general farm with him, while Tony and his wife, Beth, and Rose pursued the winery concept. Tony's father put up the farm for collateral and borrowed \$50,000 from the bank. After working on the farm all day, the father and son built the winery, Chalet Debonné, a 4,500-square-foot building that is at the center of the winery today.

The winery used Niagara grapes from the family farms, plus purchased grapes from Morris Cohodas and Presque Isle Winery in Pennsylvania to make its first vintages. Tony says it ran out of money before it came time to bottle its wine. His father sold timber off several acres of their land to raise the \$20,000 it took to bottle the 250 gallons of wine. Neighbors helped them bottle the vino by hand.

The winery opened in 1971 and was an immediate success. At first, the family concentrated on producing wines that were familiar to northeast Ohio consumers' palates: sweet wines with a Labrusca-variety base. Their River Rouge, a light red semi-dry produced from Labrusca and hybrids, hit the spot with these consumers.

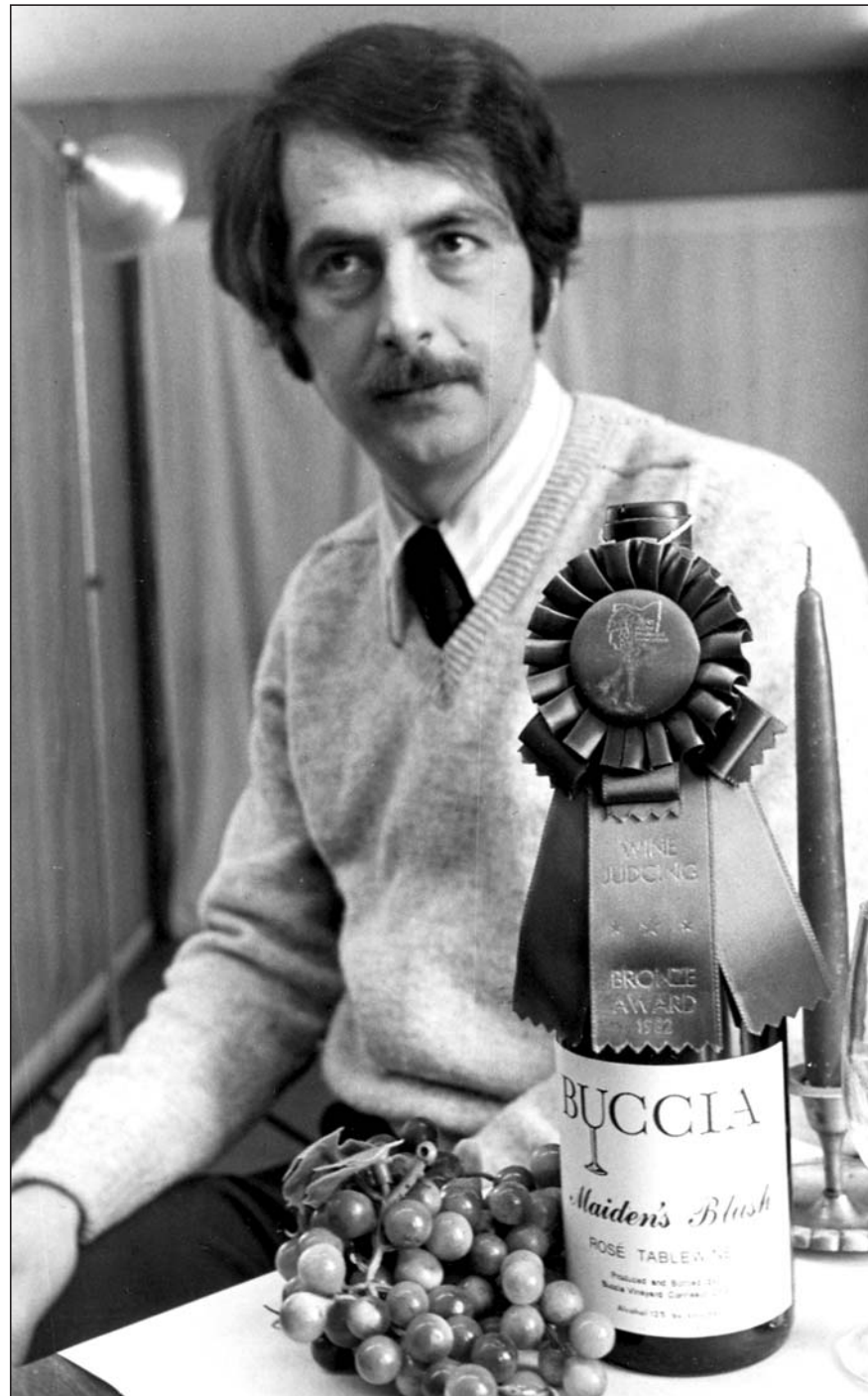
"It was at the right place at the right time," Debevc says. "It gave us a financial foothold to plant the first Riesling."

VINIFERA ARRIVES

The national trend, however, was toward dry wines, and Tony Debevc knew that if the wine industry in Ohio were to gain any recognition beyond its small cadre of local sweet-wine drinkers, he would have to expand into vinifera and French hybrids. On the eastern side of the county, an engineer by the name of Arnulf Esterer, was of a similar mind-set and already at work on the challenge.

Working at an area metallurgical factory, Esterer rubbed shoulders with many weekend farmers who grew American grapes. That got him wondering why this same land and climate could not be used to grow European varieties.

Esterer took a vacation to the Finger Lakes area of New York and spent a week



FILE PHOTO

IN CONNEAUT, Alfred Bucci began his Buccia Vineyard, in the late 1970s. Bucci used American grapes and French hybrids to produce his wines, which were soon winning awards.

studying winemaking with Dr. Konstantin Frank, a Russian immigrant who felt Americans should produce and drink good wines. Frank's approach was to let the soil and rootstock produce its unique offspring, a product unique to the region.

In 1969, Esterer planted his vineyard of

Vitis vinifera along South Ridge Road between Conneaut and Kingsville. The Romans had introduced vinifera to the French landscape centuries earlier. Esterer brought it to the Lake Erie shores, and 40 years later, it is well established: chardonnay, Riesling, cabernet sauvignon, pinot

noir. His wines have won numerous awards, and Esterer's work with Vitis vinifera is considered groundbreaking by those in the industry.

Debevc planted his winery's vinifera varieties on one-half-acre plots in spring 1971.

"I was driving the tractor on the farm (for the vine planting), and (my husband) said: 'See that tree? Head for that tree,'" Rose recalls. "We had no lines marked at all, but the rows were pretty straight."

The varieties took hold, and Debevc increased his plantings in the following years. The winters of 1977 and 1978, some of the hardest on record, wiped out many of those plantings, but Debevc persisted and discovered that once vines were in the ground five years or longer, they developed a hardiness that allowed them to withstand northeast Ohio's winters.

"The uniqueness of that planting gave us the inspiration to try it again," Debevc says.

Debevc also began testing hybrid varieties, which today account for about 40 percent of what is grown on the 117-acre Chalet Debonné estate winery, the largest in Ohio.

Whether the vintage originates from a vinifera or hybrid, the wine embodies the region's terroir. Indeed, the soil, climate, topography and growing techniques of the Grand River Valley are so unique, they have earned the region a subappellation. The region extends two miles in any direction of the river, up to 14 miles from the Lake Erie shores.

Debevc says that when a wine drinker accustomed to the taste of a California chardonnay first tastes one produced in Ashtabula County or Lake County, he or she is struck immediately by the difference. He says that is the whole point of what the growers are attempting to do here: produce wines that reflect the subtle but distinct characteristics of the region that produced it and conjures up the memories of the encounter.

"This is Ohio chardonnay, Riesling; it has its own unique character, flavor," Debevc says.

Unfortunately, that works against local wines in distant markets because a consumer may be reluctant to pay \$15 for an unfamiliar chardonnay. It is after they visit the region and take in the entire experience that they become dedicated consumers.

"They know the value of the wines, and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

they like the wine because they've been exposed to it here," Debevc says.

Today, there are 20 wineries in the county. Many of them grow much of the fruit that goes into their wines. Pioneers like Debevc, the Ferrantes, the Buccis and Esterer continue to work at their craft, winning awards for their products and recognition for the region. They strive to do more than just grow grapes and produce wine; they also create an environment and experience in which to enjoy the wines. From the jazz festival and hot-air balloons at Chalet Debonné to the firefighting decor of the Firehouse Winery at Geneva-on-the-Lake, the county's wine producers have built more than a new breed of agriculture. They have created a whole new tourism industry.

Debevc says this industry is an engine that drives a train whose cars include lodging, restaurants, other attractions and shopping. The county-owned Lodge at Geneva-on-the-Lake itself has become an economic engine, one that drives a train with wine as its tender. The lodge works with area wineries to provide packages and special events, sells locally produced wines in its gift shop and sells them in the lodge's restaurant.

There are new engines being added to this railroad, as well. Tony and Beth Debevc's son, Tony, launched Cellar Rats Brewery at Chalet Debonné seven years ago with a used three-barrel system. This month, the beer brewery

launched a six-county distribution of its Rat Tail Ale, brewed and bottled in a new facility, which represents an investment of nearly \$750,000. An experimental planting of hops this year is taking the vineyard in yet another direction, growing at least some of the ingredients for the brews.

Down the road from Chalet Debonné, Gene Sigel is investing in a new distillery that will take advantage of a pending change in Ohio law. If the legislation passes, small distilleries like Sigel's will be able to make and sell hard liquor on their premises. Some of the opportunities include a Concord vodka and other spirits made from the diverse region's fruits. Sigel sees it as coming full circle; the distillery is going in the old Whittine barn, where bootleg liquor was made some 80 years ago.

NEXT STEP

The Geneva Wine and Culinary Center is seen as the next step in this evolution of the county's wine industry. The center would provide a learning component, hands-on kitchen, classes and wine-related events.

A 2010 market analysis conducted by Boulevard Strategies, along with research conducted by Poggermeyer Design Group and Culinary Center committee volunteers, determined such a center would have an excellent chance of success. A Canadaigua, N.Y., facility similar to but smaller than the one proposed for Geneva, draws 75,000 annual visitors.

The center would be built in Geneva and tie into the overall revitalization of the downtown area and Route 534 Corridor. Geneva City Manager Jim Pearson says the center is just the "hook" the community needs to draw visitors to the region.

"From the beginning, it's been an effort to drive traffic to our downtown," Pearson says. "It's an economic driver for us, to keep our downtown vibrant. That's what our involvement here has always been."

Donniella Winchell Ohio Wine Producers Association executive director, said the center would provide education about wine and food while exposing these visitors to the variety of regional wines.

Pearson said a business plan for the center is nearing completion and the next 12 to 18 months will be spent researching funding sources. A opening date of 2014 to 2015 is envisioned.

Many offshoots have been proposed as well, like an art gallery focusing on wine and grapes. Tony P. Debevc thinks theater is the perfect pairing and would be a huge magnet for out-of-town visitors. Pearson said these are all great ideas but the core project must be built first, and he said the committee has been great about keeping the focus on that core.

Meanwhile, across the rolling hills of the Grand River and Conneaut Creek, the county's winemakers continue to make fine wines and history. n

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2011 **PROGRESS** INDUSTRY

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By CARL E. FEATHER n Staff Writer

Ashtabula County continues trend toward diversity

The face of industry is changing in Ashtabula County and throughout Northeast Ohio.

The word "industry" was once associated with plants belching noxious chemicals that made eyes water and sinuses burn, and heavy-manufacturing that left workers sweaty, filthy but better off financially at the end of the day. They were industries tied to the area's abundance of fresh water, labor and transportation arteries.

Lake Erie still supplies millions of gallons of process and cooling water to chemical factories in the Lake Road area, and about 1,200 of the county's better-paying jobs hinge on that water. Accordingly, the Ashtabula Port Authority sought and received a \$1.55 million Economic Development Administration grant to make upgrades to the plant and keep the water flowing. Work on the \$3 million project at Plant C is under way and should provide a future path to retain jobs and create new ones.

Cristal Global's Millennium Inorganic Chemicals is a user of that water. The company announced in April plans to grow its capacity during the next two years. The growth will be done through the addition of equipment and personnel, rather than expansion of the facility, officials said in April. The Ashtabula Township plant produces titanium dioxide, a white pigment used in products ranging from toothpaste to paint.

"This growth project is a 'debottlenecking' of our manufacturing assets and represents a 10 percent increase in our volume," said Scott Strayer, site director.

Room to grow

Chris Thompson, of the Fund for Our Economic Future in Cleveland, said the growing sectors for northeast Ohio industry include clean energy, medical devices and the oil-gas supply chain. Further, he feels Ashtabula County's agricultural assets

could be leveraged by tying them to the region's other agricultural assets.

Thompson also sees the county's ports as assets that can help connect these assets to the rest of the world. For example, if the biofuels industry were to take root here, the ports could play a role in shipping the pelletized product to European markets.

Thompson also sees opportunity in Ashtabula County and throughout northeast Ohio for the natural gas industry, as it focuses on extracting the resource from the Utica shale. The hydraulic fracturing method used to get at the fuel is controversial, however, and growth in that industry could bring environmental issues, as well as headaches for township trustees who must deal with the damage done to byways by the heavy equipment.

Despite the negatives associated with this industry, Thompson said it's already making a positive impact on the region's economy.

"We are already seeing manufacturing jobs tied to this sector grow, and the experience of Pennsylvania indicates we may see tens of thousands of jobs created in this area," Thompson said. Regionally, V&S Steel in Youngstown has seen tremendous demand for its products, and locally, Presrite in Jefferson, which supplies the industry with drilling heads, has added both production space and workers.

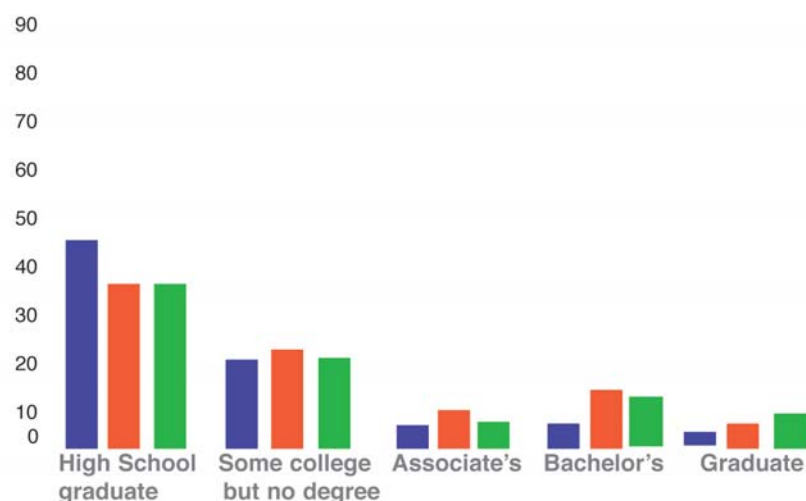
State Rep. Casey Kozlowski said the Jobs Ohio Program rolled out by Gov. John Kasich will provide many new economic development opportunities for the state in the months to come. In Northeast Ohio, Team NEO, of which Ashtabula County is a member, will be one of six regional economic development organizations to act as liaisons on issues like business attraction, retention and expansion. Overall, Team NEO is reporting good growth in companies that are well positioned with in-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

Higher-Ed attainment

Ashtabula County falls short next to neighbor, state

Percent of population 25 and older



Bar color key: Ashtabula County Lake County United States

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009

Economic Development Steering Committee goal is to prepare young people for existing jobs

By CARL E. FEATHER

Staff Writer

cfeather@starbeacon.com

JEFFERSON — The County's Economic Development Steering Committee is getting the job done.

Formed last year, the volunteer group is tackling a long list of goals that came out of a year-long study conducted by Governing Dynamics of Columbus. Among the goals was to form the steering committee itself and

convene an industry, business and education council. Such a council's task would be to make sure the vocational and academic training offered in the county is preparing young people for jobs that actually exist here.

This spring, county commissioners and the committee hired Governing Dynamics to develop the action plan.

"The stakes have never been higher," said Daniel Claypool, president of the commissioners. "We must do all

See JOBS, Page 15

demand products, while others remain worried about a double-dip recession and are holding onto their cash rather than hiring.

“Caution” best describes the overall atmosphere, say economic development experts.

GROWTH AHEAD

Brian Anderson, executive director of Growth Partnership for Ashtabula, said that based on his discussions with local industry leaders, the county is on the cusp of a significant growth spurt.

“It’s clear that (in) the next six to 18 months, there are going to be an awful lot of companies looking at making investments in their current operations in the county,” Anderson said.

His hunch was confirmed by a survey of some 400 county employers this summer. Forty-four percent of those responding said they plan to hire new employees during the next 12 months.

Anderson said local industries that weathered the recession used that slow time to investigate new technologies, markets and products, and they now are poised to act on that research. He predicts there will be significant investment in equipment and, in many cases, physical expansions as a result of companies doing their homework and finding new opportunities.

In general, Anderson has not observed any local industries that have gone backward in 2011.

“For the most part, their 2011 is tracking ahead of 2010, which, in general, tracked ahead of 2009,” he said.

Anderson predicted that pent-up demand for products that use plastics and fiberglass parts, particularly in the automotive industry, should bode well for many county industries in the short term. He said the disruption in the supply chain as a result of the Japan earthquake rattled the economic recovery, but he feels the industries already are rebounding



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

APEX ENERGY in August unveiled its plans for a wind farm in Ashtabula Township. The farm, constructed on industrial brown field land, would create only six or so full-time jobs once it was operational. John Arehart III, right, explains the farm to a visitor at the first public event to discuss the \$100 million project.

from that.

While Ashtabula County’s industry cannot help but rise and fall with the tides of national and global economies, its assets remain constant: fresh water, access to transportation, ports and plenty of land.

“I think industry still plays a big part in the county’s economy,” said State Rep. Casey Kozlowski, R-Pierpont Township. “We got so many assets. ... It really makes sense for industry to be here.”

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Thompson feels some of the problem is in the educational attainment of the county's workforce. The county lags behind its more-affluent neighboring counties in percentage of residents with higher education. For example, in Ashtabula County, only 14.6 percent of the residents 25 and older have a two- or four-year degree. In Lake County the percentage is 23.9 percent, and in Medina County it's 27.1 percent.

The previously referenced employer survey showed that while there is a large work force to draw from in the county, its quality is a problem for industries seeking to hire. Eighty-one percent of the employers said it is difficult to find the employees they need in Ashtabula County. County commissioners and the Economic Steering Committee have made it a priority to realign local training programs with employers' needs. They plan to revamp the existing Workforce Policy Committee into a more effective Industry, Business and Education Council.

'THERE SHE BLOWS'

There are also changes in the wind when it comes to the energy industry in Ashtabula County.

In August, Apex Wind Energy formally presented to county residents its plan to build a wind farm on 982 acres of industrial land, or brownfield, in Ashtabula Township.

During the six-month construction phase, 50 to 100 persons would be employed, said Tim Ryan, Apex senior executive vice president. Once the wind farm is up and running, however, the project would create a maximum of six maintenance and operations positions.

Costing upward \$100 million, the wind farm would produce enough electricity to meet the electrical energy demands of 20,000 households. Finding a market for that energy could be a problem, however, as a glut of electricity exists in northeast Ohio. However, Ryan points out that electric utilities that sell their product in Ohio must generate 25 percent of that power from alternative energy, thus creating a market for the wind energy.

The project was presented to the Ohio Power Siting Board last month. The board typically takes 10 to 11 months to work through applications. Ryan said Apex has not secured any investors for the project, which has a targeted operations date of the fourth quarter 2012.

There's interest in Ashtabula County's wind potential offshore, as well. Earlier this year, the county entered into an agreement with the Lake Erie Energy Development Corp. (LEED-Co), which allows the county to share in the submerged-land lease revenues for a demonstration offshore wind energy project in the lake waters off Cuyahoga County. LEEDCo and three other companies plan to build in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

PLANT C, owned by the Ashtabula Port Authority, provides raw water to several industries in Ashtabula Township. A \$1.55-million U.S. Economic Development Administration grant is funding the replacement of four pumps and other critical infrastructure at the former FirstEnergy plant. More than 1,000 jobs hinge on that supply of water.

County Port Authority moves forward on Plant C work

By **CARL E. FEATHER**

Staff Writer

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ASHTABULA TOWNSHIP — Engineering is completed for the \$3.1 million project at Plant C, which supplies raw lake water to industries that provide jobs for more than 1,000 workers.

A \$1.55 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Agency (EDA) is making the project possible. The work involves replacing the aging pumping infrastructure, which dates from the early 1950s and has been the focus of costly repairs. The Ashtabula County Port Authority owns the plant, a former FirstEnergy property that was used to generate electricity and supply the township's chemical industry with raw water.

The match is coming from loan proceeds the authority received

from the state when it purchased the facility. Praxair and Cristal Global, who draw water from the system, are repaying that loan.

The pumping station is seen as huge asset for the county. Authority Executive Director Sean Ratican said the authority has a permit to withdraw 200 million gallons daily. In practice, however, only about 12.5 percent of that capacity is being used.

"With three pumps going, we pump roughly 25 million gallons water a day," Ratican said.

If those old pumps were to fail or one of the large supply lines break, the impact to the local economy could be devastating as the damage would bring the chemical plants to as standstill and result in the loss of hundreds of jobs, either temporarily or permanently.

"That's why this EDA grant is so

See PLANT C, Page 17

Jobs

From Page 13

we can to prepare our workforce to meet the needs of our employers now and in the future. When we connect qualified, trained workers with Ashtabula employers effectively, we help strengthen our economy and improve the potential for job growth. This plan lays out a framework for doing just that."

A survey of county employers was sent out and a day-long planning meeting held with key players on July 9. One of the insights gathered from that questionnaire revealed that 81 percent of the employers have a difficult time finding the employees they require in the county. Sixty-five percent of the employers indicated their hiring challenges don't stem from a lack of applicants, but from a lack of qualified candidates.

A tall order has thus been delivered to the commissioners and steering committee. The industry, business and education planning committee identified numerous action steps for aligning training with job opportunities:

1. Improve the work ethic of the local workforce by developing a county-wide structured internship and mentorship program that engages employers in providing opportunities to students in their high school years;

2. Host quarterly roundtable discussions between business and education to discuss opportunities and challenges within the system;

3. Establish an industry, business and education council to facilitate communication and collaboration between the sectors;

4. Employers need to better define to educators what characteristics and capabilities they require from employment candidates;

5. Create a countywide job clearing house that connects all education and workforce development agencies with a comprehensive inventory of jobs, critical skills sets and available opportunities;

6. Higher expectations should be set with consequences to reinforce in school the desired workplace behavior, such as punctuality and professional behavior;

7. Encourage industry to form training consortiums to share resources and for new programs within education and workforce development agencies;

8. Re-brand the county to build a positive view of the community and encourage non-residents to consider the benefits of living and working here. n

Lake Erie a \$140 million project to demonstrate the commercial viability of wind energy in the lake. The project, scheduled for construction in 2013, would place five turbines on nine acres some five miles from Cleveland Harbor.

Ashtabula County joined LEEDCo last year, and County Prosecutor Thomas Sartini worked on the rev-

enue-sharing agreement with the other three counties to split the \$27,000 in annual lease payments. Ashtabula County will get about \$5,000 of that. The money is seen as secondary to the cooperative spirit embodied by LEEDCo and the regional effort to develop wind power.

**CONTINUED
ON PAGE 18**

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What Do You Need to Know?

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

PRESRITE IN Jefferson has seen strong growth in both sales and employment in the past year. The forge makes parts for Caterpillar, John Deere and other heavy-equipment manufacturers. Two additional 6,000-ton presses should be online by early 2011.

Presrite business up 400 percent from two years ago

By CARL E. FEATHER

Staff Writer

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As with many American manufacturers, 2009 was a slow year for Presrite Corporation's Jefferson Division. The company tightened its belt, got through the year and used that time to make alliances with manufacturers poised to roar back with the recovery.

Roy A. Stainfield, general manager of the Jefferson Division, had no idea just how strong the roar would be.

"We came out of it a lot faster

See PRESRITE, Page 17



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

ROY STAINFIELD, general manager for Presrite Corporation's Jefferson Division, hold one of the forged parts that the company produces for Caterpillar equipment. High demand for Caterpillar's products and other manufacturers that Presrite works with has driven expansion and employment growth at the South Cucumber Street facility. The new office addition in the background is part of that growth.

Plant C

From Page 15

important,” Ratican said. “It guarantees the availability of that highly valuable resource.”

In conjunction with repairing the pumping infrastructure, the port authority contracted with a diving company to clear debris from the two huge intake pipes. One of the pipes will be sealed off after the accumulation is cleared and held in reserve as a backup in the event the other pipe fails or becomes clogged.

The target completion date for the project is April 1, 2012. Ratican said the authority is still preparing the paperwork for the grant and no money has flowed

from the administration to the authority.

The authority has put on hold the concept of converting the former coal-burning boilers to biomass fuel. Authority members have considered scrapping out that portion of the Lake Road facility to take advantage of the strong market demand for scrap material. But Ratican said the board will probably remain in a holding pattern on that issue while the pump work is under way.

The county port authority also is sponsoring a \$25,000 grant which will be used to develop a Coastal Management Plan for public land use along the lake shore. The grant is being matched with \$25,000 of in-kind services from the Ashtabula County Planning Department.

The plan will pull together

er existing lake shore development plans of Ashtabula County commu-

nities and townships into one comprehensive document.

“It’s a really good project because it lays the groundwork for future develop-

ment along the coast of Lake Erie in Ashtabula County,” Ratican said. n

Presrite

From Page 16

than anyone anticipated,” Stainfield said.

He said it’s been a challenge to keep up with the post-recession growth that has resulted from Presrite’s relationships with Caterpillar, John Deere and other manufacturers with strong worldwide sales.

“Our business is up 400 percent since September 2009,” Stainfield said. “Our customers are doing well ... they are just booming.”

Late last year, a 24,000-square-foot addition that included new office space was completed. This fall, construction of an 80,000-square-foot addition is under way. The addition will allow the company to create two new product

lines in Jefferson and enhance existing operations.

Ashtabula County commissioners, Jefferson Village council and Jefferson Local and A-tech boards of education granted Presrite a 75-percent, five-year abatement on this project, pegged at \$2.2 million. Over the course of five years, the abatement will reduce the company’s real estate taxes by about \$159,000, said Brian Anderson, executive director of Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County. Presrite does not have to add new jobs to receive the abatement, just maintain the current level.

All told, about \$9 million is being invested in the Jefferson facility, Stainfield said.

Presrite’s Jefferson Divi-

See PRESRITE,
Page 19

COMMUNITY MATTERS



Millennium Inorganic Chemicals, a Cristal Company, has been a fixture in Ashtabula for more than 50 years, manufacturing titanium dioxide (TiO₂). Our employees participate in annual Community Day Celebrations, aimed at giving back to the community in which we live, work and play. In addition, our employees are coaches, Scout leaders and volunteers for many organizations. Giving back is what counts.

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The project faces huge technical and sustainability issues, however. Foremost on the technical side are building and maintaining these behemoths in a lake that often freezes over. The demonstration project should help drive the engineering and practices that will ensure durability under extreme conditions. The financial costs arising from these challenges could drive the cost of the power generated offshore far beyond what U.S. consumers and businesses are accustomed to paying. For example, in Denmark, a huge advocate of wind energy, the cost is 39 cents per kilowatt-hour. In northeast Ohio, Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co. customers pay about 12 cents per kilowatt-hour, and that includes distribution charges.

LEEDCo is discussing with several utilities the

purchase of power from the initial project.

While LEEDCo's project is the first U.S. Great Lakes offshore effort, Cape Wind, an offshore wind project, has been proposed for the coast off Nantucket island, Mass. In an article published last winter in "Regulation," author Jonathan A. Lesser of Continental Economics Inc. argued that the Cape Wind project will end up hurting overall economic well-being because of the heavy government subsidies that will be necessary. Lesser pointed out that these subsidized renewable-resource projects would have the effect of driving out competitive generators of power, leading to higher prices for electricity and reducing, rather than increasing, economic growth.

Donny Davis, LEEDCo spokesman, said that "at

this point, the only anticipated subsidy is the investment tax credit." However, on Sept. 8, LEEDCo announced that the Department of Energy granted \$500,000 toward the project. The grant will be used to assess offshore wind systems to optimize performance in the shallow-water environments like the Great Lakes.

Building a supply chain for offshore wind turbines may be more difficult than originally envisioned. Earlier this summer, manufacturers of wind-energy equipment met in Cleveland for the Making It Here conference. Panelists said there has been an onslaught of low-cost wind parts from Chinese companies, making it difficult for U.S. companies to compete. Wagner,

**CONTINUED ON
PAGE 20**

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



CARL E. FEATHER/ Star Beacon

THE BUFFET in the renovated Horizons Restaurant does a brisk breakfast business on a recent Friday morning. A \$225,000 renovation of the restaurant has helped generate more revenue for the county-owned lodge. Bed tax and gross revenue funded the renovation.

Horizons renovation expands lodge's dining revenues

By **CARL E. FEATHER**

Staff Writer

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GENEVA-ON-THE-LAKE — A \$225,000 makeover of the Horizons Restaurant in the Lodge and Conference Center at Geneva is helping boost revenues for the county-owned lodge.

The renovated restaurant was re-opened in time for Easter dining after being closed after Valentine's Day. The make-over included removing an elevated dining area that was not handicapped accessible, new carpet and wall treatments, the addition of a focal-point fireplace and new seating.

Operational inefficiencies were also addressed and a permanent buffet installed. General Manager Gannett

Petrolia said the buffet has helped drive new business to Horizons. The Monday night buffet has become a staple at the lodge and drew 268 diners in July. Petrolia said the lodge plans to add a Wednesday night Italian buffet, priced at \$11.99, starting later this month.

The renovated Horizons increased the lodge's July restaurant revenue by 6 percent in July, compared to 2010 revenue. The restaurant also marked an 18.3 percent increase in the evening-meal traffic, driven largely by the buffet business.

"The numbers have been really spectacular," Petrolia recently told the Convention and Facilities Authority members. "The restaurant renovation has

See HORIZONS, Page 19

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Presrite

From Page 17

sion makes many of the undercarriage parts that go into the heavy equipment made by Caterpillar and Deere. The product line also includes transmission gears and three-point hitch-

es. "Undercarriage parts, that's our biggest thing," Stainfield said.

The forge also manufactures drill or boring heads used in the gas exploration industry, which is also experiencing strong growth as a result of the "frack-

ing" method to reach gas deposits.

Presrite is a privately held company based in Cleveland. Stainfield said the company has been in Jefferson since 1978. When Stainfield started with the company nearly 30 years ago, there were but 15 employees.

Even up until two years ago the employment level was well below 100. This summer, it topped 300 and Stainfield estimates that 350 people will be employed once the new addition opens.

Stainfield attributes the company's success to its management's informed, aggressive approach to

choosing markets.

"It's just the vision of our corporate offices," he said. "They went out and picked the markets they knew were growing and partnered with companies like Caterpillar and John Deere, who knew the quality of our work."

He also credits the dedication of the workforce at Jefferson.

"The employees we have here are very dedicated. They know what the job is

and what is expected of them," Stainfield said. "We got a good group, especially the ones who have been here a year or more."

Hiring is done through several area agencies. Stainfield said there is a 90-day probation period before the employee is brought on as a Presrite employee.

Thus far, the local labor pool has supplied the company's need for both skilled and unskilled work-

ers.

"We're looking for people who are hard working. It's not the easiest business. It's hot and dirty at times," he said.

Forging is at the heart of Presrite's work. The Jefferson plant goes through up to 7,000 tons of rolled steel bar every month. The bar is 4 to 8.5 inches thick and is worked with presses ranging from 4,000 to 6,000 tons.

Presrite sources its steel

from Indiana and Ohio. It also contracts with several local tool and die shops to do specialized work for them.

Stainfield said the company probably is not done expanding in Jefferson. It recently purchased the former Glastics property and also purchased a 26-acre plot of land to the south of the factory.

"We're setting ourselves up for the long haul," he said. n

Horizons

From Page 18

definitely paid off."

Eric Frantz, assistant general manager of the lodge, said the restaurant began collecting diner's zip codes during the July 4th weekend to gauge local response. He said the results thus far have been surprising — 60 percent of the Monday night business is coming from local diners, and on some Saturdays, close to 50 percent of the business has been local.

"We were a little surprised by that," Frantz said. "It looks like we're getting a lot of special occasion business (birthdays, anniversaries, other family celebrations)."

The lodge also hired a new executive chef this year, Russell Siegel, who revamped the menu and incorporated locally grown choices. The Johnson and Wales University graduate worked at the Soldiers Field facility managed by

Delaware North Companies before taking the position with the lodge.

The outdoor dining area, which was added to the lodge two years ago, continues to pay dividends on that investment as it provides guests with a way to enjoy their meal, a favorite beverage or glass of wine while watching a Lake Erie sunset.

The Horizons renovation was funded with \$125,000 from the Convention Facilities Authority, which oversees the lodge's portion of the county bed tax. The balance came from the lodge's capital renewals and reserve account, which is funded by a percentage of the gross revenue.

Plans for 2012 improvements include an \$80,000 spa project. Also on tap is renovation of all guest bathrooms.

The county-owned lodge opened seven years ago and has annual revenues in excess of \$5 million. The county's debt on the lodge stands at just below \$19 million. n

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————— SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS —————

Conneaut Telephone completing fiber optic line in Ashtabula County

By **CARL E. FEATHER**

Staff Writer

cfeather@starbeacon.com

Sometimes, the key to economic development is buried several feet underground.

That's the case with a new fiber optic backbone line that is nearing completion this fall along the northern tier of Ashtabula County.

The \$2 million line owned by the Conneaut Telephone Company is already in use by Buckeye Local and Conneaut Area City schools, as well as several manufacturers in the corridor. The cable, which contains 288 fibers, follows Route 20 west from the Conneaut Telephone Company's industrial park location and gives the company's customers reliable, broad-band access to the world.

"We were at the mercy of Windstream and the rest of the carriers to connect to the Web," said Ken Johnson, general manager of Conneaut Telephone in explaining the reason for the investment. He said a relationship with another Internet provider based in Cleveland completes the connection and also creates a synergy that opens new markets for Conneaut Telephone.

Conneaut Telephone received state funding for a portion of the backbone line; the balance is an investment in the future of the company and Ashtabula County.

Information technology infrastructure is increasing important to attracting jobs. Many data-intensive companies, when they go looking for locations in which to relocate and bring new jobs, want buildings that are already wired for fiber optic connections. The line owned by Conneaut Telephone should better position the county for businesses such as call centers, which are data intensive.

Johnson said the company recently fielded two technology-review questions from parties that were looking at the former Fisher Big Wheel building in Conneaut. He said the line could also be of interest to Pennsylvania firms because it could give them a connection to carriers in that state.

Installing the line has been a huge project that has involved boring under driveways, streets, util-

ity lines and culverts. When drilling under the latter, the line has gone down 24 feet or more. Johnson said three conduits were placed in the ground but only one of them is carrying cable at this time. The additional conduits will give the company plenty of capacity for expansion. Johnson said the infrastructure should have a life span of 25 years or more.

The cost per mile ranges from \$50,000 to \$75,000 along the North Kingsville stretch to more than \$150,000 in Ashtabula Township.

The work should be completed by the end of October. The last leg of the project is to connect Kingsville Elementary School to the line at Route 20 and 193. A special deep-boring rig will be brought in to clear the Windstream lines and a pond-drainage pipe between the school and Creek Road in Kingsville Township.

Eventually, Conneaut Telephone hopes to connect all of the county's school districts in a network ring that will tie them to the Educational Service Center in Jefferson and the Warren-based Northeast Ohio Management Information Network, which serves schools in Ashtabula and Trumbull counties.

The fiber optic backbone project, in conjunction with aerial cable strung by Conneaut Telephone's Cleveland partner, could open up several communities in the area for Internet, cable television and telephone service over the fiber optic network. Conneaut Telephone is this month conducting door-to-door surveys in Geneva, Ashtabula, North Kingsville, Jefferson and Rock Creek to gauge interest in this service.

Johnson said the 114-year-old Conneaut Telephone Company continued to grow its information technology services in the past year. The company provides these services to Ashtabula County, Buckeye Local Schools and numerous small businesses that do not want to absorb the expense of hiring and paying a full-time technician.

Conneaut Telephone employs nearly four dozen people and serves 5,000 telephone line and 3,000 Internet access customers, plus operates a cable television system in Conneaut. n

speaking at Profiles Breakfast earlier this month, said the supplier for the offshore turbines will ultimately be the one that is most competitive.

Davis said the blades for the turbines in the demonstration project will be approximately 60 meters long and most likely will be manufactured in Brazil or Denmark. The towers, which would rise 300 feet above the lake surface, probably would come from domestic manufacturers. Davis said it is unlikely any Ashtabula County manufacturers would be part of the supply chain for the demonstration wind farm.

"For the initial project, the supply-chain benefit to Northeast Ohio will come largely from the actual construction, installation and service of the turbines," Davis said in an e-mail. "In fact, the direct employment in the offshore wind energy industry will come more from the 'doing' than the 'making.'"

General Electric is supplying the turbines, but Davis notes that the company specifies the source of its components, and they come from all over the world. Nevertheless, he said one of LEEDCo's core missions is to develop a Northeast Ohio supply chain to serve the industry.

Wagner said LEEDCo's goal is to get 1,000 megawatts of production in the lake by 2010. The group feels that number is a tipping point at which manufacturers would become interested in putting up facilities onshore to make the parts that will go into these behemoths.

THERE SHE GOES

This fall, Ashtabula County's industrial base will take a 100-job hit with the relocation of ESAB Welding Materials to Union County, S.C.

The long-rumored exodus was announced in the spring after several weeks of fervent work by Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County, county commissioners, the Ohio Department of Development, and city, township and state officials.

State Rep. Kozlowski said that despite the offer this team put together, the ESAB jobs are going south.

"The tough thing we were up against was an extremely competitive package offered by South Carolina," Kozlowski said.

The competition pulled out all the stops, including customizing a facility to the company's unique needs and a tax-incentive package worth millions. Kozlowski said he could not put a figure on the value of Ohio's offer but it definitely fell short of Union County's enticements.

"I think we are in a very competitive (situation)," Kozlowski said, summing up the lesson he learned from the ESAB deal.

Nevertheless, the local economy will take a payroll hit of about \$7 million annually when the last ESAB's employees hit the unemployment line.

TOURISM

Although the numbers won't be in until August 2012, the anecdotal information points to continued strong growth in the tourism industry, which employs one out of every seven county workers and brings in \$34 million to the local economy, according to Mark Winchell, executive director of the Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Winchell said there is just one word to describe this year's tourism season: "fantastic."

"I truly believe this is a breakout year for Ashtabula County and this region," Winchell said.

He's basing that observation on reports from hospitality-business owners and the license plates from counties and cities that are a 2.5 to 3-hour drive from here. Winchell said the Visitors Bureau has made a special effort to market to this segment because there's a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

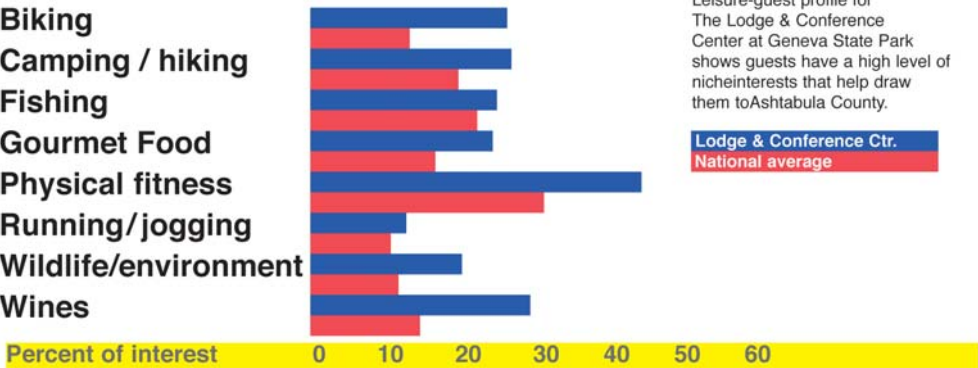
MARK WINCHELL, executive director of the Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau, feels Ashtabula County tourism still has lots of room to grow. Nurturing niche markets and providing visitors with a comprehensive experience of locally produced wines, food and entertainment can help continue the last decade's annual tourism growth of 4 to 7 percent.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

STEELHEAD TROUT fishing guide John Clouser displays a steelhead he caught in the Ashtabula River. Niche interests provide tourism opportunities for Ashtabula County communities.

Niche interests provide tourism opportunities



Source: Lodge and Conference Center survey of guests



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

DENISE LITTON owns the Deja Vu Boutique on Lake Road in Geneva-on-the-Lake. Niche businesses provide tourism opportunities for Ashtabula County communities.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

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greater chance they'll stay a night or two if they have to drive that far. The average day-trip tourist spends \$102, but if they stay overnight, they contribute \$249 to the local economy.

"We're seeing more from Columbus, Akron/ Canton and Pittsburgh than we've ever seen before," Winchell said.

The season got off to a rainy start, but Winchell said the summer months have provided visitors with plenty of sunshine for enjoying the lake, wineries, state parks and museums.

What happens after Labor Day, when the family vans return to shuttle service? Winchell said the shoulder season, September to April, is receiving special attention from the Visitors Bureau, as are niche tourism markets. In many cases, they go hand in hand.

For example, bicyclists who spend \$10,000 on a touring bicycle and do cross-country rides are more likely to do so in the fall or spring. Fly fishermen who spend thousands on a rod and reel combination arrive with the steelhead trout in October and March.

Winchell said the Visitors Bureau is testing these niche markets by using social media like Facebook to share Ashtabula's unique assets that appeal to these niche markets. That approach will be tested Nov. 10-11, when the Fly the Alley wine and fly-fishing event comes to the Lodge at Geneva-on-the-Lake. The event caters to devotees of steelhead trout fishing. The "alley" refers to the streams in this area to which the fish return every fall and stay until spring, when they head out into Lake Erie.

Surveys of lodge guests show that 23.3 percent of them have an interest in fishing, slightly more than the national lodging profile. Lodge guests also exceed the national profile for interest in biking, camping/ hiking, gourmet food, physical fitness, running/ jogging, wildlife/ environment and wines.

The lodge and the Visitors Bureau are looking at ways to market the county to these niche areas. While these are small markets, their devotees typically have more disposable income than the family who comes to Pymatuning State Park for a weekend camping trip. For example, the average income of a lodge guest is \$75,000, according to a lodge survey.

"When people have an affinity, they spend money on it," Winchell said. "They are niche, and they will never supplant what we do in the summer. But the small affinity groups can help us make money in our nontraditional tourism seasons."

Winchell says there is plenty of opportunity for growth in local tourism, and he

one of the Visitors Bureau's projects will be to develop research on the subject, which entrepreneurs can consider. For example, Winchell sees a perfect opportunity for a bicycle-rental business along the Western Reserve Greenway Trail. He's also seen the market open up for high-end vacation home rentals, charging \$2,000 or more per week.

Developing tourism as a whole depends on recognizing the county's strengths and unique assets, including its wine and culture and history, and then marketing that as a comprehensive brand that surpasses even tourism. As Winchell points out, the things that make for great tourism also make for an excellent quality of life, which can be used to attract that next entrepreneur or professional to make a home in the county.

"We're a tourism-heavy area, and the important thing about it is that it is a growing industry, 4 to 7 percent annual growth over the last decade," Winchell said.

That growth is being felt at the county-owned lodge, which is besting other state lodges on a number of important performance benchmarks. For example, through July, the average revenue per room for all state lodges (Geneva excluded) was \$37.51; for Geneva, it was \$69.35. Strong occupancy helps drive that number: The lodge had 96.7 percent occupancy in July.

Lodge General Manager Jeannette Petrolia said festivals, like the Wine and Wall-eye event in Ashtabula at the end of August, really help fill the lodge.

"When people go somewhere, they don't want to stay in their room 24 hours a day. It really helps when you increase the number of events that are available to them," she said.

The lodge had a slow start to 2011 because of the rainy spring, and it is struggling to match the stellar performance of the prior year. Petrolia said "the stars were aligned" for the lodge in 2010. While 2011 has been more difficult from the lodging side, the renovation of Horizons Restaurant and the addition of a buffet have helped replace lost lodging revenue. Unfortunately, while revenues have increased, less is going to the bottom line. The projection is for \$105,860 to be returned to the county as a net profit before debt service.

Petrolia said the lodge is perceived as a great value and, thus, is well positioned in market driven by value-conscious consumers.

"We're in a fairly inexpensive area," Petrolia said. "People feel like they are owed a vacation, and we are a very economical way for them to reward themselves." n

2011 **PROGRESS** RETAIL

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By MARK TODD n Staff Writer

Ashtabula County retailers detecting slight improvement

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

THE LIFT BRIDGE Association is giving Bridge Street a lift with a marketing study funded by a Community Development Block Grant.

Group gives a 'lift' to Ashtabula Harbor

By MARK TODD

Staff Writer

mtodd@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — An event that could have proved a retail disaster has served as an excuse to godsend for a neighborhood in Ashtabula's harbor district.

In 2008, the lift bridge over the

Ashtabula River that provided quick access to the city's waterfront from the east was closed for repairs, a project that would span many months. To prevent an economic stranglehold, merchants — especially those on Bridge Street — became united in one common goal.

Three years later, the Lift Bridge

Community Association and its 70-plus members are working to make the harbor district a shopping and dining destination in northeast Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania.

"The best thing came from the worst thing," said Shelly Mullen, LBCA spokesperson and Bridge Street busi-

See HARBOR, Page 24

For the first time in a few years, retailers and retailing experts in Ashtabula County are detecting a little more jingling in cash registers over the past year.

The sound isn't deafening. Customers aren't lined up out the door, their fists clutching wads of cash. But no major setbacks have been reported, and in some cases slight gains have been detected.

"There's a sense of optimism," said Jim Timonere, president and chief executive officer of the Ashtabula Area Chamber of Commerce.

A good barometer of local spending, the county's permissive sales tax collections, indicate modest gains over the past year. After a retreat at the end of the year, monthly tax sales numbers the first half of 2011 have improved compared to the same time frame in 2010.

In July, Ohio Gov. John Kasich — appearing on "Meet The Press" — said consumer spending in the state has climbed over the past eight months. Economists contacted by Politifact, the newspaper fact-checking service, generally agreed consumer spending — "when measured in inflation-adjusted dollars" — has risen over an eight-month span.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Ashtabula County's sales tax collections have yo-yoed over the past 10 years, according to figures from the county auditor's office.

In 2001, the county collected some \$7.6 million in sales tax. That number jumped by more than \$400,000 the following year, took a slight step back in 2003 before posting three consecutive years of gains that peaked with nearly \$8.8 million in collections in 2006 — the highest tally to date this decade.

The onset of the recession is vividly depicted in sales tax figures. In 2008, the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

Harbor

From Page 23

nessperson. "The bridge went up in 2008 and that was our shift (in thinking). We stopped looking at ourselves as individuals and we became a community." Initially, the focus was the

Bridge Street district, a series of decades-old buildings that adorn a slope that leads to the river. Over time, a variety of shops, boutiques, restaurants and taverns have filled the storefronts.

While some businesses come and go, it's rare that a building in the district stays vacant for long.

"We feel we're creating a 'place,'" Mullen said. "We're creating a healthy, welcoming environment, giving people a great place to eat, drink and shop."

The district is filled with eye appeal, from the hanging flower baskets to benches along the sidewalks. The bridge itself is bathed in colorful spotlights.

"We have been tremendously blessed with natural resources," Mullen said. "The river, Lake Erie, beaches. This area is chock full of potential. All it needs is someone to pay attention to it."

The LBCA has done just that, but now is directing its attention to a region, not just a street.

"Our commitment originally was just this corridor," Mullen said. "Now it's an entire district."

The association is looking at ways to pull a bunch of loose threads together, integrating Walnut Beach with an extension of the North Shore Trail and Ashtabula River. The result could turn a now-desirable district into a must-see travel destination.

"We feel we could really impact the area," Mullen said. "We could be an economic engine."

A special fund is available to entrepreneurs who have

good ideas but lack the necessary capital, Mullen said. The fund has helped people with a good business plan and are "coachable," she said.

"They can get a loan to help start or expand a business," Mullen said.

The district's zest is attracting interest and followers, Mullen said. People who had left the county to pursue their business dreams are returning to the lake.

"People are finding ways to move back home and support their life style," Mullen said. "We are attracting people with the same motivations, the same goals."

Others not directly linked to the harbor are also throwing their support behind the LBCA.

"Half of our members are not on this street," Mullen said. "The others are supporters. We are a movement."

Aided by government funding secured with the support of Ashtabula County's commissioners, the LBCA is poised to hire experts to help plot the district's future. The association plans to contract with a planning firm this year to map out the next phase of growth.

"They will help us push this movement even further," Mullen said. "We're right on the cusp, and we will get a consultant that will help us blast through."

The LBCA knows exactly what it wants in a consultant, Mullen said.

"We need a professional who can guide us," she said. "We want a firm that understands our motivations and goals. We want to work with them so that this tiny little corner of the world will be leading the way." n



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MONTH EARNED	MONTH RECEIVED	YEAR RECEIVED 2001	YEAR RECEIVED 2002	YEAR RECEIVED 2003	YEAR RECEIVED 2004	YEAR RECEIVED 2005	YEAR RECEIVED 2006	YEAR RECEIVED 2007	YEAR RECEIVED 2008	YEAR RECEIVED 2009	YEAR RECEIVED 2010	YEAR RECEIVED 2011	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 2010 & 2011	PERCENT CHANGED
NOVEMBER	JANUARY	\$596,218.82	\$658,209.66	\$638,597.04	\$584,794.55	\$684,951.81	\$642,395.37	\$647,947.34	\$673,485.59	\$621,839.86	\$679,452.47	\$663,447.11	-\$16,005.36	-2.36%
DECEMBER	FEBRUARY	\$619,815.17	\$644,548.79	\$562,181.21	\$729,473.94	\$696,295.43	\$793,517.33	\$658,296.90	\$687,122.34	\$651,227.68	\$673,850.95	\$706,934.26	\$33,083.31	4.91%
JANUARY	MARCH	\$739,302.79	\$782,836.83	\$787,594.36	\$855,059.04	\$858,160.98	\$887,069.57	\$906,335.37	\$885,311.09	\$784,229.75	\$822,678.12	\$835,513.73	\$12,835.61	1.56%
FEBRUARY	APRIL	\$420,422.17	\$483,722.10	\$510,061.85	\$562,066.14	\$557,367.95	\$649,123.64	\$571,966.50	\$584,911.54	\$538,601.65	\$607,234.61	\$613,406.53	\$6,171.92	1.02%
MARCH	MAY	\$610,086.79	\$550,988.52	\$606,123.28	\$575,142.99	\$595,612.50	\$590,460.61	\$604,410.99	\$606,753.28	\$602,641.93	\$612,073.01	\$660,381.95	\$48,308.94	7.89%
APRIL	JUNE	\$619,581.73	\$689,919.99	\$685,599.53	\$753,757.89	\$715,499.05	\$687,709.79	\$779,690.20	\$717,525.61	\$662,359.05	\$701,878.80	\$782,288.89	\$80,410.09	11.46%
MAY	JULY	\$700,546.99	\$809,095.91	\$621,496.32	\$696,442.14	\$707,970.37	\$697,733.75	\$636,368.43	\$687,173.36	\$603,002.47	\$656,547.66			#VALUE!
JUNE	AUGUST	\$588,797.82	\$692,915.82	\$681,366.93	\$683,584.35	\$739,265.82	\$690,900.48	\$752,982.24	\$745,308.06	\$684,317.89	\$733,308.77			#VALUE!
JULY	SEPTEMBER	\$740,505.74	\$800,496.70	\$786,533.01	\$772,184.38	\$857,982.05	\$863,826.16	\$880,052.22	\$874,948.28	\$717,527.30	\$822,016.00			#VALUE!
AUGUST	OCTOBER	\$742,017.35	\$758,828.07	\$635,702.14	\$757,306.06	\$850,164.30	\$706,185.17	\$731,241.53	\$716,657.50	\$637,225.09	\$762,574.05			#VALUE!
SEPTEMBER	NOVEMBER	\$595,933.95	\$726,027.09	\$709,496.81	\$722,467.96	\$724,696.46	\$769,852.72	\$690,308.61	\$782,954.92	\$710,080.13	\$699,456.09			#VALUE!
OCTOBER	DECEMBER	\$681,985.61	\$491,292.30	\$639,140.59	\$687,222.13	\$735,294.57	\$820,513.52	\$722,624.71	\$693,548.99	\$645,644.15	\$782,720.44			#VALUE!
		\$7,655,214.53	\$8,068,863.78	\$7,863,895.07	\$8,359,501.57	\$8,725,141.29 4.37%	\$8,779,268.11 0.62%	\$8,584,225.04 -2.22%	\$8,657,600.46 0.85%	\$7,858,696.73 -9.23%	\$8,553,790.97 8.84%	\$4,261,972.47	\$164,804.51	
												Prior	Y-T-D Difference \$4,097,167.96	
												Current	\$4,261,972.47	
												(Over) under	-\$164,804.51	
													4.02%	

county collected around \$8.6 million in sales tax. That number plummeted to \$7.8 million in 2009.

The picture brightened in 2010, as numbers rebounded to \$8.5 million. The trend seems to continue in 2011, with first-half collections nearly \$165,000 ahead of last year at the same time.

"The sales tax has held pretty steady," said County Auditor Roger Corlett.

"We're about 3 percent ahead of what we've budgeted. It's holding its own."

Nationally, recent figures show Americans may be a little less afraid to crack open the wallet. Consumer spending rose 0.8 percent in July, the biggest gain since February, according to data from the Commerce Department.

Despite the roller-coaster stock market, the consumer spending numbers could possibly ease fears the economy may be teetering on the verge of another recession, experts have said. At the same time, income grew 0.3 percent, according to the Commerce Department.

Ashtabula County's unemployment took a slight dip in July to 10.6 percent from

the 10.8 percent one month earlier. The county had a 12.4 unemployment rate in July 2010.

NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINES

For nearly 10 years, Vickie D'Orazio has enjoyed a commanding view of downtown Geneva from her shop, Victoria's Country Corner. Her store features a mix of merchandise, including alpaca clothing.

"It's an eclectic mix," she says.

D'Orazio sees a steady stream of customers, but most don't sport local addresses.

"The store is mostly tourist-driven," D'Orazio said. "We get more out-of-town people. I get a varied clientele."

That clientele, she said, seems to spending a few more dollars than in past few years, which is an encouraging sign. But running a store is a lot more than flipping on the "open" sign, D'Orazio said. Creative thinking has helped her weather the less-than-rosy economy. For example, D'Orazio rotates her merchandise, tailoring her ware to the seasons, which

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

VICKIE D'ORAZIO is the owner of Victoria's Country Corner in Geneva.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

CHRIS PUROLA, and his brothers Jamie and Jeremy, have added Bridge Street Pizza to their existing franchises.

Pizza-making brothers find success

By **MARK TODD**

Staff Writer

mtodd@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — Even in these tough economic times, Chris Purola and his brothers have proven they can still make dough — with hard work and creative thinking.

They own and operate four pizza shops in Ashtabula County, including their newest store on Bridge Street in Ashtabula. That store opened a little more than a month ago, and a grand opening is in the works.

Three of the shops are open under the Bruno Brothers banner, which could change in the coming weeks. There's a chance Purola Brothers could part ways with the Bruno Brothers, who are based in the Youngstown area.

Chris is assisted by brother Jeremy, a working partner, and brother Jamie, who lives in Columbus.

The Purolas got their start in 2004, when they opened a store on Bunker Hill at Jefferson Road in Ashtabula. A location in the Ashtabula Mall (now Ashtabula Towne Square) was next, followed by locations in Geneva-on-the-Lake and Saybrook Township.

The Saybrook address was closed to accommodate the shift to Ashtabula Harbor.

"I love the historic harbor," Purola said. "I wanted to be a part of something exciting. I love my Saybrook customers, but this is a great building. And it came with a wine and beer license."

The Bridge Street location will feature indoor and outdoor dining options and will soon boast a full menu and large salad bar, Purola said.

Keeping four restaurants afloat is no easy job. It requires a multi-tasker, an ability Purola possesses. While talking about his career path with a visitor, Purola was simultaneously working a meat slicer, carving turkey for dozens of sand-

wiches.

The restaurant business is nothing new to the 28-year-old, a member of the Harbor High School class of 2001.

"I started when I was 16," he said.

"There were always guys who said they wanted to open pizza shops, but I wanted to make it happen."

There's no secret to the brothers' longevity in the food service business. "Customer service and the quality of the food," he said.

The business also credits the support and help of loyal customers and supports, including employees — which include his parents.

"You've got to stay positive, which is easier to do when you're surrounded by good people," he said.

What's ahead for the Purola brothers? They plan to build at their GOTL location, and are also negotiating a new lease at Ashtabula Towne Square, Chris said.

"We hope to stay in the mall long-term," he said. n

encourages return visits from shoppers.

"I'm busy May through Christmas, then it may slow down a bit in January and February," D'Orazio said. "We try to have something timed all year along to give us a boost."

"The business is what you make of it," she said. "You have to work at it."

D'Orazio freely admits she would not be preparing to celebrate her 10th year in business if not for a big benefactor on Lake Erie a few miles to the north. The Lodge at Geneva-on-the-Lake has had a huge, positive impact by bringing new faces through town, she said.

"If it wasn't for the lodge, I wouldn't be here," D'Orazio said.

She expects the new SPIRE sports facility and the upcoming culinary institute to attract even more people. "I'm looking forward to good things happening in Geneva."

In Jefferson, Jim Hofstetter's jewelry store has been a "gem" in the village's downtown for many years. He also saw a glimmer of hope over the past year, especially compared to dark times not too long ago.

"It's an improvement over two years ago," he said. "It's still not huge, but our work boxes are stuffed and the retail end hasn't been too bad. I have no complaints."

People seem to be spending, but they are not flinging open their wallets in wild abandon, Hofstetter said. "People are being conservative."

Another retail stalwart is Bill Hyland, whose Outdoor Army Navy Store has done business on Main Avenue in Ashtabula since 1985 — and in business starting in 1947. Sales have perked up over the past year, he said.

"Things have improved for us, but we had to circle the wagons to survive it," Hyland said. "2010 was a tough year, but better than 2007-2009."

Hyland said some real soul-searching helped make a big difference. He examined trends to determine the products his customers made a point of buying, such as outerwear, and concentrated on those niche products.

"We took a good, long look at ourselves and asked 'What do we do best?'" he said. "We managed to reinvent ourselves."

Retailers must also dial down their

expectation in these tough times, Hyland said. "There's business out there, but you have to be realistic about it," he said.

EXPERTS ARE ENCOURAGED

Jim Timonere, president and chief executive officer of the Ashtabula Area Chamber of Commerce, makes a point of knowing how his member businesses are faring at any given time. Reports he has received over the past year indicate an ever-so-slight uptick in trade, he said.

"Things have been consistent, if not a tad bit better," Timonere said. "There's a sense of optimism."

Sales may have improved, but merchants are still very nervous, not entirely convinced consumers are ready to splurge on big-ticket items. For that reason, retailers have been reluctant to add employees, Timonere said.

"A lot (of businesses) see themselves getting busier, but right now they are still afraid to bring on staff," he said.

One reason the retail sector may be perkier is the very thing that caused the doldrums – the economy. Many of the people who spent money in the county the past year are tourists whose vacation plans were altered by the economy, Timonere said. Long trips were shelved in favor of cheaper, one-tank destinations like Ashtabula County.

"Tourism is a economic engine here," he said.

The next challenge is to convince out-of-towners who enjoyed their county experience to consider putting down roots, Timonere said. "We've got to turn visitors into residents," he said.

Ashtabula Towne Square, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary next year, basically held its own over the past year, losing a few shops but replacing them with locally-owned stores. Rumors still persist that Kohl's is eyeing floor space in the Ashtabula Township mall, but nothing has been announced.

A retail giant like Kohl's would kick-start the economy at the mall or wherever it chose to locate, Timonere said.

"It would only take one big anchor store to spur economic development in county," he said. "We need that one business willing to take that leap of faith."

Until that day comes, Timonere said the businesses that continue to weather the storm are those who make shopping a pleasure and a positive experience.

"You've got to be creative and you've got to be competitive," he said. "If people have a good experience in a store, they're willing to pay an extra buck. It's all about the experience."

In Conneaut, Wendy DuBey, executive director of the Conneaut Area Chamber of Commerce, has seen several relatively new businesses become Chamber members, the majority of them retailers. Only one, a car repair shop, dropped out from the organization.

"I'm very pleased with the new businesses in town," she said. "I'm pleased with the growth."

HELPING HAND

Roy Bean's job is to give the area's business people – especially retailers – help themselves. As a consultant to the Ohio Small Business Development Center, Bean gives guidance on marketing strategy and suggests way to restructure debt. Bean has his fingers on the pulse of Ashtabula County's retail community, and he has seen some trends develop over the past year.

In the past, business start-ups dominated Bean's appointment calendar. Over the last 12 months, he now finds himself sitting down with owners of existing stores.

"Over the past year it's probably become 55 percent existing business and 45 percent start-up," he said. "The number of people who want to start a business has declined."

Bean isn't surprised, given how difficult it is nowadays to obtain loans.

"It's to be expected," he said. "It's tough to get financing for a start-up. Banks don't want to finance 100 percent of anything. Now it's existing businesses that are knocking on our door because they need help."

Many retailers have cash flow problems. "Sales and profits may have declined, but the debt is still there," he said.

Bean can also help merchants build their appeal to shoppers.

"I can give them fresh ideas, an out-of-the-box approach," he said. "You've got to become more creative and try innovative ideas."

In some cases, Bean has introduced businesses to unexpected customers – like the government. "We've helped some bid on government contracts," he said.

Some of the shops and stores in Ashtabula Harbor's Bridge Street neighborhood, as well as Geneva and Geneva-on-the-Lake, have benefited from assistance provided by the Ohio Small Business Development Center, Bean said.

"We've had our success stories," he said. n



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2011 PROGRESS HEALTH

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By CARL E. FEATHER n Staff Writer

Low incomes, lack of education drive down county's health ratings

According to the annual County Health Rankings, Ashtabula County is going in the wrong direction when it comes to the health of its residents.

The rankings are prepared by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The rankings look at a variety of measures that affect health, including the rate of people who die before age 75, high school graduation rates, access to healthier foods, air pollution levels, income and rates of smoking, obesity and teen births.

The ranking is established in two broad categories: health outcomes and health factors.

Health outcomes look at mortality and morbidity in the population. In the 2011 rankings, Ashtabula County ranked 56 out of 88 and lost ground against its 2010 ranking, 54. Morbidity, which uses indicators like low birth weight, poor physical and mental health days and "poor or fair health," drove the county into a lower position in the rankings.

The county ended up just five spots away from the bottom in the health factors rating, which looks at things like health behaviors, clinical care, physical environment and social and economic factors.

In 2010, the county ranked 75th in health factors, in 2011, it was 83rd.

Digging into the numbers behind the rankings, it's evident lifestyle choices are dragging us down. Thirty percent of the adult residents in the county smoke tobacco, compared to 15 percent nationally and 23 percent statewide. We're also more obese than the rest of the state or nation, 31 percent in the county compared to 25 percent the United States (that's the percent of adults with a body mass index of 30 or greater).

Our county's teen birth rate of 49 per 1,000 of female population ages 14-19 is more than double that of the nation. And

the county is starved for doctors, with only one primary care physician for every 2,104 residents. Nationally, it is one for every

631 Americans.

Ashtabula County Health Commissioner Raymond Saporito says that he, like many

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

ONE WAY to fight the epidemic of childhood obesity in the United States is by breastfeeding. Vicki Loomis is breastfeeding her baby, Katelyn, who was 2 1/2 weeks old in this image, and breastfed her daughter, Kallie.

Program improving breastfeeding initiation rates

By CARL E. FEATHER

Staff Writer

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Adult obesity rates in the Ashtabula County consistently weigh upon the county's ranking for the health of its residents. Fortunately, preventing the

problem in the next generation of residents is both simple and inexpensive — breastfeeding.

Multiple studies have shown that a history of not breast-feeding infants increases the risk of being overweight or obese in adolescence and beyond,

See PROGRAM, Page 30

of his peers, have some issues with the way the rankings are prepared.

"I'm not sure I agree with all the findings, but I know we need to improve," Saporito said. "I just think maybe we're not as low as they say."

THE POVERTY CONNECTION

If there is one thing the rankings show, it is an undeniable link between an area's poverty/unemployment levels and the health of its residents.

"Those communities with high unemployment, high poverty are not going to score well," Saporito said. "You can score well on your physical environment, but that's not going to conceal, to white wash, your other health factors like behaviors and social and economic status. In those, we have a long way to go."

Delaware, Geauga and Warren counties rank at the top of the rankings for best health factors. Unemployment in Delaware and Geauga counties (June 2011) was at 6.6 percent. In Ashtabula County, it was 10.8 percent. Warren County was at 8.1 percent.

An analysis of poverty rates and health that was published in the September, 2006, issue of *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that people living in extreme poverty tend to have more chronic illnesses, more frequent and severe disease complications and place greater demands on the health care system.

That analysis was conducted pre-recession, and the past several years of layoffs, wage reductions and rising health care costs have pushed even more families closer to the brink where health care and healthy habits take a back seat to surviving.

"From 2000 to 2004, the prevalence of severe poverty increased sharply while the proportion of Americans in higher income tiers diminished," Woolf concluded in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

2006 study. "These trends have broad societal implications. Likely health consequences include a higher prevalence of chronic illnesses, more frequent and severe disease complications, and increased demands and costs for healthcare services. Adverse effects on children warrant special concern. The growth in the number of Americans living in poverty calls for the re-examination of policies enacted in recent years to foster economic progress."

Woolf worked with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to create an interactive calculator that allows users to develop what-if scenarios for a given county. The calculator is online at www.countyhealth-calculator.org, and provides an eye-opening look at the impact the low wages that are prevalent in Ashtabula County have on health.

Using U.S. Census Bureau Data from the years 2005-2007, the researchers who developed the calculator determined that, in Ohio, 70 percent of residents have at least "basic income." A basic income is defined as 200 percent of federal poverty level or higher. For a family of two adults and two children, that's \$44,000 annually.

In Ashtabula County, only 59 percent of the residents meet that criteria. As a result, our mortality rate is 10 percent higher than it would be if 70 percent of the residents had a basic income.

What would be the impact on residents' health if percentage of those with a basic income matched that of Delaware County, 87 percent? In that case there would be a 26 percent reduction in the mortality rate, according to the calculator.

Just as there is a link between health and income, Woolf said there is also a correlation with education. The County Health Calculator reveals that just 39 percent of Ashtabula County's adults have some college education. Statewide, it is 49 percent.

What if the county's rate mirrored that of the state? According to the calculator, we would see the mortality rate drop by 10 percent. And if our education rate were mirror that in Delaware County, where 75 percent of the residents have some college education, the rate would be slashed by 32 percent.

A study released through The University of Michigan, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, showed that better-educated people have lower morbidity rates from the most common acute and chronic diseases. And those with a college education are likely to live longer than those who are less educated. While the mechanisms for

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

A YOUNG man waits for his turn to see the nurse at the Well Child Clinic held in the Ashtabula Municipal Building. The city and county health departments collaborate on the clinics, which provide physical exams, immunizations and other services to infants through 21 years of age on a sliding fee scale.

Well Child Clinics help Ashtabula County children get healthy start

PEGGY DUCRO, nursing director for the Ashtabula City Board of Health, conducts a vision test during the comprehensive Well Child exam offered by that department in conjunction with the County Health Department. The clinic provides the service on a sliding-fee scale, but no one is turned away for inability to pay.



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

By CARL E. FEATHER
Staff Writer
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Making sure Ashtabula County children get a healthy start on life and learning is the goal of the Well Child Clinic, a project of the Ashtabula County Health Department with cooperation from the city departments of health.

The clinics have been offered for more than two decades, but with the recession and resulting high unemployment rates in the county the past several years,

See CLINICS, Page 31

Program

From Page 28

according to the United States Breastfeeding Committee's chairwoman, Dr. John Younger Meek.

"Breastfeeding plays an important role in obesity prevention and improving overall health outcomes, and therefore is vitally important to public health," Meek observes.

Nationwide, 75 percent of new mothers at least try to breast-feed their newborns. But in Ashtabula County, the rate lags far behind both that and state rate, 66 percent.

The county rate is just 55 percent, said Lori DeVivo, a certified lactation consultant with the Ashtabula County Community Action WIC Program. Although still low, the rate has improved significantly since information and support services first became available through WIC about eight years ago.

"We are definitely seeing an increase,"

DeVivo said.

DeVivo said the initiation rate was just 27 percent when the pilot program began in Ashtabula and nine other Ohio counties. As a result of the pilot's success, breast-feeding education and support is now a part of WIC programs throughout the state.

Local statistics show that moms who do choose to breast-feed are not, as an average, sticking with it long enough. Both the World Health Organization and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend exclusive breast-feeding for the first six months and breast-feeding with appropriate solid food from six months to at least age 1. But in Ashtabula County, the average length of breast-feeding is under five months.

DeVivo said that number is slowly rising, but there are economic and social hurdles that prevent local moms for going the full year. She said there is a whole "lost generation" that came to view breast-feeding as unnatural, while formula, cereals and juice are seen as the "natural" way to feed infants.

"People still don't view it as 'normal,'" DeVivo said. As a result, new mothers don't get the support or knowledge they need from family members.

"Women who do the best are women who have had support from their family," said Sherry Snitcher, a lactation consultant with WIC.

The other challenge stems from the need for many mothers to return to the workforce within weeks of giving birth. They find that the challenge of pumping and storing breast milk for use in their absence to be too difficult or inconvenient, and abandon the practice.

Snitcher said the local program can help these moms with one-on-one support, pump rentals and the twice-monthly Breastfeeding Cafe, held at the Community Action WIC building, 3225 Lake Ave., the second and fourth Thursday of each month.

"Women, grandmothers (who use the resource), say constantly that 'I wish I would have had this help when I had my children,'" Snitcher said.

Peer Helpers from the program visit new

mothers in the hospital and talk with any WIC or breast-feeding mothers to make sure they have the resources they need to start and stick with breast-feeding. They point out not only the health benefits of the practice, but also the cost savings and positive environmental aspects. It's estimated that breast-feeding can save a family \$3,000 annually in formula costs.

Further, research has shown that women who breast-feed have reduced rates of ovarian and breast cancer. And the lactation consultants point out the emotional benefits for both the mother and baby, who bond through feeding.

"It's a health decision," DeVivo says. "You are making a health decision for the child's whole life."

Vicki Loomis breast-fed her first-born, Kallie, who was four months premature. She said there was no doubt she would also do the same for her second child, Katelyn, born in July.

"Breast-feeding is the best," she said. "It's free and it will give you the best nutrition in life." n

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Clinics

From Page 29

availability of the clinics has become increasingly important to families strapped for health care dollars.

Chris Kettunen, nursing supervisor for the Ashtabula County Health Department, said the services are provided to eligible county residents regardless of income. A sliding-fee scale is used to determine the cost, and Medicaid and other government program cards are accepted.

The clinics are offered for youngsters up to age 21. A physician, assisted by nurses, performs the thorough examination, which includes health history, physical and nutritional assessments, physical growth and development evaluations, anemia and lead poisoning blood tests, urinalysis, tuberculosis testing, health and safety education and assistance with referrals for identified needs/problems. The exam even includes vision, hearing and speech screening.

"This is not a place for sick people," said Katie McIntyre, a registered nurse with the Ashtabula County Health Department. "This is basically a health screening."

Kettunen said the department, working with the Ashtabula City and Conneaut City health departments, sees about 350 youngsters in its Well Child Clinics every year.

"We are trying to work together with our resources, as funding has been cut for everybody," said Margaret Ducro, nursing director for the Ashtabula Health Department. "We are pooling our resources to make sure we are meeting the needs of the communities."

The clinics are provided at locations throughout the county, selected to be convenient and minimize the transportation issues that exist for many low-income county residents. Locations include Jefferson, Ashtabula, Geneva and Conneaut.

"Linda" brought her grandson, Marshall, to the Ashtabula location on a recent Friday morning. She said he will be playing golf in the next school year and needed a sports physical as well as an update on immunizations. His mother has health insurance, but Linda said the deductibles are high and the clinic provides an affordable alternative.



CARL E. FEATHER / Star Beacon

WELL CHILD exams help 350 Ashtabula County residents every year. Provided through the county and city health departments, the exams screen for a number of health issues.

Through ongoing analysis of the county's health needs, the county department determined there are under-served populations among the Amish and the Hispanic populations. As a result, there is a clinic geared toward Amish children on the fourth Tuesday of each month in Windsor. Kettunen said the department is also looking for a location to hold a mobile clinic geared toward the Amish families of the Andover/Cherry Valley area.

In June, the clinic expanded its outreach to the Hispanic population. The clinic is held at the Mother of Sorrows Parish Center on West 8th Street from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month. The parish center provides a good fit for the clinic because Mother of Sorrows also has a Hispanic Mass once a week, said Sister Shirley Warner, pastoral minister for the parish. The parish center also provides space to a soup kitchen and the Catholic Charities clothing distribution.

"It really is an area that is dedicated to helping those in need," Warner says. n

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this correlation are complex, the researchers suggest they include effects of poor health in childhood, greater resources associated with higher levels of education and a learned appreciation for the importance of good health behaviors.

The researchers who developed the County Health Calculator note that "Health is about more than health care." In other words, having great hospitals, doctors and access to them does not guarantee good health. When a community's residents don't have health insurance or their wages are so low they afford the co-pays, deductibles and many exclusions that most policies come with these days, health care — the business — becomes an exercise in futility.

"It's about education, income and the environment in which we live," notes the researchers. "People who complete high school and college enjoy better health because they can obtain better jobs with higher earnings and benefits. They can obtain better medical care, but they have more fundamental reasons for better health. They are less likely to be overweight. They tend to live in healthier neighborhoods with better schools, cleaner air and water, access to supermarkets, less crime, and more opportunities for exercise."

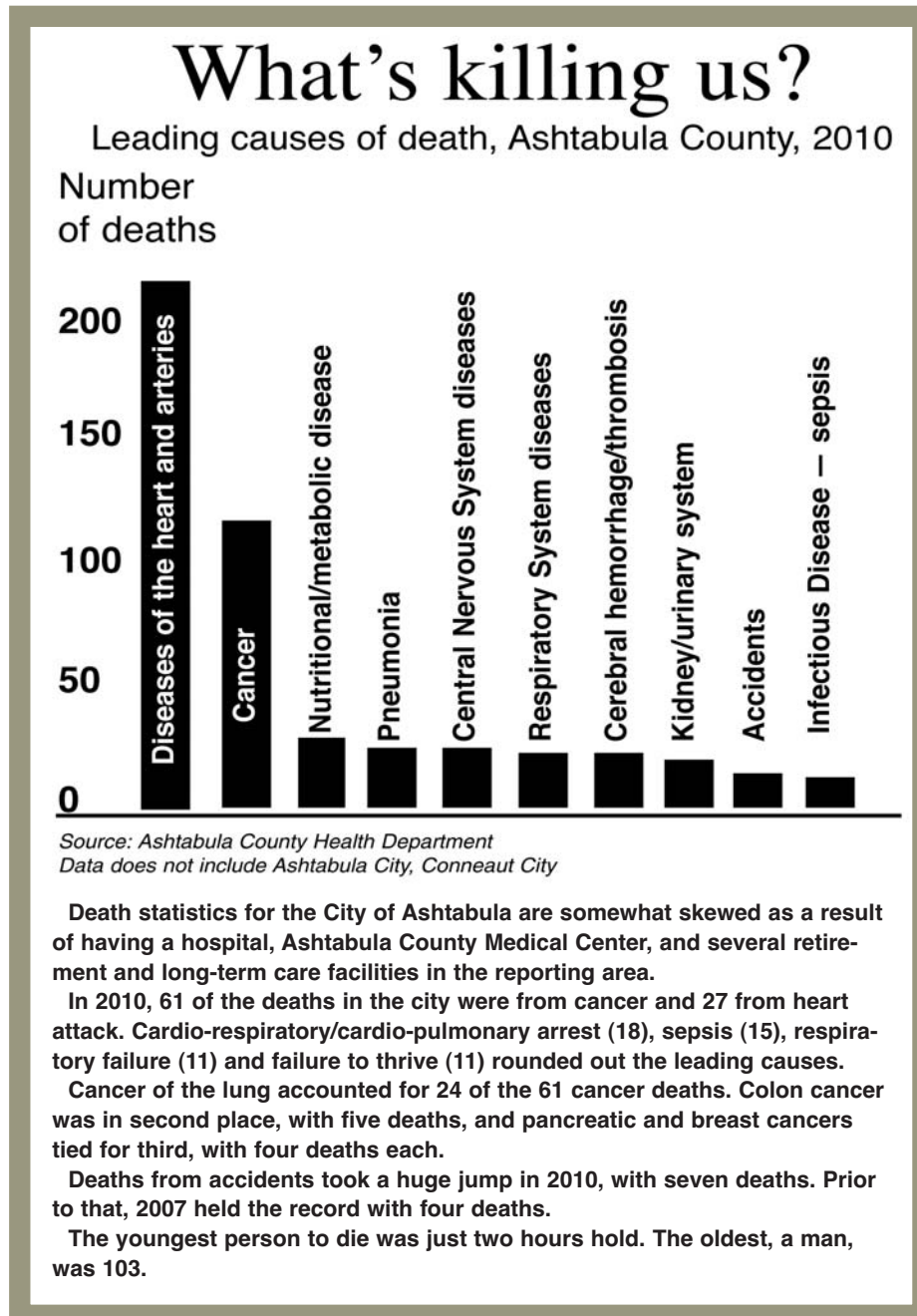
Yet another factor that impacts the health of residents is health insurance coverage. In that regard, Ashtabula County was doing relatively well compared to parts of the nation. In most Ohio counties, Ashtabula included, the percentage of uninsured Ohioans ages 40 to 64 is lower than the national average of 14.7 percent (2007 data). Again, among those at or below 200 percent of poverty and under the age of 65, the county has lower rate of uninsured than the national average of 31.5 percent.

However, because the data is four years old, and a recession that wiped out thousands of local jobs occurred during that period, it is very likely the number of residents without health insurance has increased.

WHAT'S KILLING US?

Rich or poor, well educated or simple, insured or uninsured, every Ashtabula County resident is destined to die. And when one looks at what is killing Ashtabula County residents versus what kills those in other Ohio communities, only the order changes, says Raymond Saporito, the county's health commissioner.

In 2010, diseases of the heart and arteries killed 218 Ashtabula County residents who resided in the county health district



(outside Ashtabula and Conneaut cities, which compile their own data). Cancer was the second-place killer at 121, and metabolic and nutritional illness was third. Accidents ranked ninth, taking 13 lives.

Four years prior, accidents ranked fifth in both the county and state statistics. Heart disease was first, cancer second and chronic lower respiratory disease was third.

"It's the same diseases, but if you look real close, it's the order that is shifted around," Saporito said.

What jumps out at Saporito and other public health professionals is just how many of things that are killing us stem

from poor lifestyle choices. A study that appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2004 concluded that 37 percent of all the deaths in the United States are due to just four lifestyle choices: smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity and excessive alcohol intake and substance abuse.

Environment also plays a role in our health, and that's a mixed bag in Ashtabula County. The cold, wet weather that settles in around late October and lingers until May discourages physical activity, despite the plethora of parks, walking trails and city sidewalks free for the using. The

Western Reserve Greenway Trail, a 27-mile bike path, has its devotees, but remains an underutilized asset for improving health. For those who prefer to exercise in a climate-controlled environment, there are choices ranging from the Ashtabula YMCA to Curves and other for-profit ventures.

On the other hand, Ohio as a whole leads the list of Toxic 20 states with the most toxic air pollution from power plants, according to a study released by the Natural Resources Defense Council in July. While Ashtabula Township's coal-fired FirstEnergy power plant is used only for times of peak demand, the county is downwind from the pollution to the west.

SHIFTING TARGET

Determining the community's health needs is like hitting a moving target, says Saporito. It takes years for poor lifestyle choices to equate into empirical data that drives policy. And new infectious and public health threats can arise almost overnight — prior to Sept. 11, 2001, bioterrorism was not on the radar screen of most local health commissioners.

Nevertheless, roughly every 10 years, county health, social service and education organizations work with consultants to generate a comprehensive health needs assessment for the county. The last county-wide assessment was done in 1999. The county is nearing the survey phase of the assessment that will help set course of public health decisions for the next 10 years.

Saporito said the Ashtabula County Health Needs Assessment Committee is working with the Northeast Ohio Hospital System and Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio to develop the assessment, which will cost \$50,000 to produce.

A random sample of county residents will be asked to complete a survey, which will be mailed out by the Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio. Saporito said that to encourage participation, the survey will come with a \$2 bill.

It's a long survey — 115 questions that deal with health status, health care utilization, health care access, alcohol consumption, drug use, mental health, men's health, women's health, weight control, physical activity, sexual behavior, parenting and demographics.

The county department is also working with the county's school districts to survey a cross-section of students ages 12 to 18. There will be 73 questions on the student survey, and they will deal with tobacco and alcohol use, violence-related behavior,

mental health, drug use, sexual behavior and diet. That survey will probably be administered in October.

Saporito said the Health Needs Assessment Committee should receive a draft report by the end of 2011 and the final report will be made public in early 2012. The essence of this report is to identify factors contributing to health problems in the county.

The committee will then prioritize the health problems, formulate plans and strategies to reduce them and implement programs accordingly. A cycle of evaluation and revision continues throughout the period until another comprehensive needs assessment is completed.

"A needs assessment is always ongoing because your problems, your risk factors always change," Saporito said. "There is always that unknown threat, that new threat."

For example, tuberculosis cases have fallen precipitously since the first half of the 20th century. But in the past decade, as the bacterium has become more resistant to the drugs, the number of cases has started to rise, requiring a response from the department.

The last assessment identified, in descending order, heart disease, cancer, motor vehicle fatality accidents, substance abuse, suicide and child abuse as the top six health problems. Health task force groups were formed to address these problems. The groups inventoried existing services and determined what additional services were needed.

Once again, the subcommittees that tackle specific issues come together to

10 recommendations for improving nation's health

In 2009, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America issued 10 cross-cutting recommendations for improving the nation's health.

According to the commission, how long and how well Americans live depend more on where we live, learn, work and play than on medical care, which accounts for only an estimated 10 to 15 percent of preventable early deaths.

Here are the recommendations by category.

NUTRITION:

n Fund and design WIC and SNAP (food stamps) programs to meet the needs of hungry families for nutritious food;

n Create public-private partnerships to open and sustain full-service grocery stores in communities without access to healthful foods;

n Feed children only health foods in schools.

Physical activity:

n Require all schools, K-12, to include time for all children to be physically active every day.

Tobacco:

n Become a smoke-free nation. Eliminating smoking remains one of the most important contributions to longer, healthier lives.

EARLY CHILDHOOD:

n Ensure that all children have high-quality early development support (child care, education and other services). This will require committing substantial additional resources to meet the early developmental needs particularly of children in low-income families.

n Create "healthy community" demonstrations to evaluate the effects of a full complement of health-promoting policies and programs;

n Develop a "health impact" rating for housing and infrastructure projects that reflects the projected effects on community health and provides incentives for projects that earn the rating;

n Integrate safety and wellness into every aspect of community life.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

n Ensure that decision-makers in all sectors have the evidence they need to build health into public and private policies and practices. n

share their progress. Saporito said there are a surprising number of resources in the county that are tackling these issues.

As is often the case, simply providing a program does not ensure participation and results. For example, although dental needs were not one of the priority issues, the department took advantage of an opportunity to bring a dental clinic to the county. Services were provided on a sliding-fee scale. But Chris Kettunen, director of nursing for the Ashtabula County Health Department, said the response was weak. The department worked with Head Start to

bring a different clinic to the county in August, and in doing the planning for that, addressed issues that they feel prevented more people from using the original dental clinic.

Saporito said it is impossible to make generalizations about the overall health of the county, for there are people who are very diligent about their lifestyles and taking care of their health. And there is another section of the population that is at war with their health.

"This is not something that's going to get solved today," Saporito said of the challenges inherent to changing people's lifestyles and health

habits. "It's probably something that will not be solved in five years. But it might be in 10 years if people get committed. And it's certainly solvable over 20 years." n

Ashtabula County Nursing & Rehabilitation Center

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UH Conneaut Medical Center Board Room

158 West Main Road, Conneaut

RSVP 440-593-0364

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Vincent Cibella, DPM

Wednesday, September 21 | 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Geneva Community Center

72 West Main Street, Geneva

RSVP 440-998-0680

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Lori Ann Slimmer, RN

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2011 PROGRESS SOCIAL SERVICES

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By MARGIE NETZEL n Staff Writer

Ashtabula County social services help in difficult times

Difficult times call for social services — support in food, utilities, job services and other necessary needs. There are places — senior services, transportation and the collection and distribution of food to the needy — where Ashtabula County social services agencies excel, and yet there are other needs — mostly for children — that are not met, said Randy Jones, executive director of the United Way of Ashtabula County.

The United Way of Ashtabula County supports and funds 23 local charities, and these social service agencies have a special strength in numbers, Jones said.

“I think there is a consensus among social service agencies that Ashtabula County leads in collaborative efforts among the agencies,” he said. “These are great partnerships, strong partnerships, that have existed because people respect each other’s work and support each other to minimize the overlap and redundancy of resources.”

Jones said Ashtabula County is full of people and agencies primed to help serve people in need, but funding is both crucial and lacking.

“The key is funding,” he said. “It may not matter which community you ask about funding — there may always be a lack or a shortfall almost everywhere. But lack of funding for social service programs in Ashtabula County has always been a serious issue, which means a lot of people are under-served or not served at all.”

Beyond the obvious money issues, Jones said he would like to see more services — recreational, educational, emotional and physical — for the children of Ashtabula County.

“I think that in general we would like to see more support for children,” he said. “I

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



MARGIE NETZEL / Star Beacon

THE TEAM at State Road Occupational Medical Facility on State Road offer low-cost health care to uninsured and under-insured people. (Front, from left) Julie Hare, Susan Hanifon, and Jackie Snyder. (Rear, from left) nurse practitioner Paul Thompson and owner Ron McVoy.

State Road Occupational Medical Facility provides affordable health care for uninsured, under insured

By MARGIE NETZEL

Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — Paul Thompson sees dozens of patients every day at the State Road Occupational Medical Facility — a steady stream of fevers and rashes, headaches and infections.

The State Road Occupational Medical Facility started 10 years ago, owner Ron McVoy said, and quickly grew, and grew and grew.

“In 10 years, our business has experienced vast growth and development,

changing to meet the needs of our area,” he said. “We provide family practice services and we accept some major insurance. Our primary focus has been to provide affordable health care to those who are uninsured or under insured.”

Two years ago Thompson, a nurse practitioner, put on his white coat and saw 20 to 30 patients each day. He now sees as many as 80 patients every day.

The clinic is located at 600 State Road, Ashtabula Township.

The clinic is focused on serving the 18,000 Ashtabula County residents

without insurance, McVoy said, as well as those who have high deductibles or simply don’t want to bother with the hassle of insurance forms and co-pays for routine medical care.

“It sounds crazy, but we get a lot of people who have private insurance, but their deductibles are \$2,000, \$3,000, or \$4,000 a year. By the time they pay the co-pay and the office fees and diagnostics and everything else, they are hundreds of dollars into one doctor’s visit — and they are paying for insurance,”

See FACILITY, Page 37

OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES IN ASHTABULA COUNTY INCLUDE:

n **Faith In Action Caregivers** is a volunteer effort to help senior citizens get to and from their doctor's appointments.

319 Lake Ave. P.O. Box 1626
Ashtabula OH 44005
(964-5506)

n **The American Red Cross** responds to disaster situations providing emergency assistance to families, emergency communications to military, instructs lifesaving skills for CPR/AED, First Aid, lifeguarding and baby-sitting.
433 Center Street
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(998-1020)

n **The Arthritis Foundation-Northeast Ohio Chapter** educates people about arthritis prevention, symptoms, diagnostic techniques and treatment options; teaches lifestyle management skills to help individuals control their arthritis and improve quality of life.

4630 Richmond Road
Cleveland, OH 44128
(800-245-2275)

n **The Ashtabula County Community Action Agency** provides home delivered meals, weatherization and chore service for the elderly. Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Head Start, lead screening for children. Operates the 211 social service information line.

P. O. Box 2610
Ashtabula, OH 44005
(997-1721)

n **The Ashtabula County Family YMCA** provides physical and social wellness through a wide variety of recreational programs. No child is ever denied access due to financial hardship.

263 Prospect Road
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(997-5321)

n **The Ashtabula Dream Center** operates a soup kitchen and offers free clothing to the needy in the surrounding area.

604 W. 57th Street
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(998-3732)

n **Ashtabula Regional Home Health Services** serves the community with skilled nursing, physical, occupational and speech therapy, homemaker service and home health aides regardless of ability to pay.

P. O. Box 1428
Ashtabula, OH 44005

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



SUBMITTED PHOTO

NURSE LORI Kingston, manager of Community Outreach at Geneva and Conneaut medical centers, nurse Lori Slimmer, who serves as the hospitals community educator; Carrie Clark, Programs Director at Susan G. Komen for the Cure Northeast Ohio Affiliate; and nurse Candace Koss, community outreach nurse Geneva Medical Center show off a big check for the free mammogram and breast health programs.

Lives saved, thousands educated by free mammograms

By **MARGIE NETZEL**

Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

GENEVA — Sometimes you have to fight like a girl.

Geneva Medical Center received a \$70,000 grant for its Breast Health Program, money awarded from the Northeast Ohio Affiliate of Susan G. Komen

for the Cure foundation.

Susan G. Komen for the Cure is the world's largest breast cancer organization, dedicated to helping women and men overcome the cultural, social, educational and financial barriers to breast cancer screening and treatment.

The program offers women with no health insurance or low income the opportunity to get free or low-cost

mammograms through monthly breast health clinics. These clinics offer free clinical breast examinations, screening mammograms, education, and navigation services and is available to uninsured women ages 40 to 64 and women at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Coordinated by registered nurses certified—
See FREE, Page 37

think we do a good job with our seniors because of our senior services levy, but you don't see those same sources of funding for teens and youth and children. Families are stressed in many ways, we need more kid programs in recreation and in education, more programs to guarantee children are ready to enter kindergarten."

The Donahoe Center hosts many of those services to Ashtabula County residents, starting with the Ashtabula County Department of Job and Family Services.

ACDJFS employs 135 social service workers.

Ohio Works First provides cash assistance to eligible low income families;

food stamps to eligible citizens; and a Prevention, Retention and Contingency Program, which provides short term immediate benefits and services to needy families and low-income employed families in need of help.

The Alien Emergency Medical Program
CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES IN ASHTABULA COUNTY INCLUDE:

- (992-4663)
n **Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Northeast Ohio** are adult mentors for children of single parent families.
8 North State Street, Suite 360
Painesville, OH 44077
(800-222-2440)
- n **The Boy Scouts of America** prepares youth to make ethical choices.
Greater Western Reserve Council
4930 Enterprise Blvd. NW
Warren, OH 44481
(800-234-7268)
- n **Catholic Charities of Ashtabula County** provides emergency assistance, financial literacy and housing counseling, representative payee and guardianship.
4200 Park Avenue
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(992-2121)
- n **The Community Counseling Center**, located in the Donahoe Center, provides counseling for a variety of mental health issues.
2801 C Court
Donahoe Center
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(998-4210)
- n **The Conneaut Human Resources Center** helps the elderly and low income families. The Right Track program for elementary children operates during the school year and summer.
327 Mill Street
Conneaut, OH 44030
(593-5273)
- n **The Country Neighbor Program** delivers meals and provides on site meals, transportation and homemaker services for the elderly. Country Neighbor also gives emergency assistance and operates the food bank for area food pantries.
P. O. Box 212
Orwell, OH 44076
(437-6311)
- n **Goodwill Industries of Ashtabula** gives vocationally oriented evaluations, training and job placement for people with disabilities and special needs. Operates seven retail stores selling donated items.
P. O. Box 2926
Ashtabula, OH 44005
(964-3565)
- n **Homesafe** offers shelter, counseling and advocacy for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
P. O. Box 702
Ashtabula, OH 44005

Facility

From Page 35

McVoy said.

Thompson said health care available in Ashtabula County is exceptional, but not affordable.

"The care available in this county is wonderful, but not affordable to people who really need it," he said. "When I think of what lack of medical care does to a person — let me just say that a person who skips yearly checkups and vaccinations is going to potentially run into much bigger health problems later, especially people who need the care."

Thompson said people with known health issues have to keep up with their medical needs.

"Heart disease, diabetes — patients with diseases who are not getting their regular checkups or medication are setting themselves up for a health disaster," he said.

To keep costs low at the clinic — most office calls at State Road Occupational Medical Facility are \$55. The clinic accepts

appointments and walk-in patients. Fees must be paid at the time of the visit and with either cash or credit card.

"We provide a truly personal service. We take our time with our patients. This isn't just in-and-out, one-after-the-other care. These are medical professionals who care about patients and their needs," McVoy said.

McVoy said the clinic's privately owned status allows the patient huge benefits in cost.

"Being privately owned allows us the freedom to offer our clients health care services above and beyond the industry standard at affordable costs, whether it be occupational services, family practice services, or chiropractic services," he said.

All practitioners are board certified, licensed and credentialed to diagnose and treat common injuries and various medical conditions and illnesses.

As a nurse practitioner, Thompson can order, perform and interpret diagnostic tests; diagnose and treat acute and chronic conditions; prescribe medications and other treatments; and manage patient care.

"A nurse practitioner can do 85 percent of

what a physician can do," Thompson said.

The clinic also offers services through massiotherapist Maureen O'Leary, chiropractic services through Brian Wells and has a physical therapist on-site.

To help patients save money on diagnostics, the clinic draws blood in house and sends it to an Erie, Pa., lab for testing. The clinic charges the patient for the service rather than have the lab bill the patient, which results in a very significant cost savings.

They have also partnered with diagnostic imaging providers and locally owned pharmacies to provide the lowest cost possible for those services, said Thompson. He strives to write prescriptions for generic medications whenever possible so patients can take advantage of the \$4 per prescription deals offered by many pharmacies.

Short waiting times for patients are a plus, McVoy said, and he is looking to add another doctor or nurse practitioner to the staff soon.

"We want to be able to serve even more people in the county," he said. "We see the need is there — our growth in business is proof of that." n

Free

From Page 36

fied through the National Consortium of Breast Centers, Inc. as Breast Patient Navigators, the program's staff is committed to providing quality education, services, and care to the Ashtabula community, said Rob David, president of the Geneva and Conneaut medical centers.

"Our commitment to breast health awareness extends beyond our hospital doors through educational outreach," he said. "Early detection for women who are underserved is a top priority for University Hospitals and the Breast Health Program."

The program has provided 495 women with mammograms since Geneva Medical Center received its first grant in 2003, David said.

In that time, three women were diagnosed with cancer in the screenings. All three are now breast cancer survivors, Geneva Medical Center community educator Lori Slimmer said.

"Since its inception in 2003, we have seen a growth rate of 150 percent in free mammograms," Slimmer said. "Typically, in the early days of the program, about 45 ladies

were taking advantage of the program services, we are now averaging anywhere from 120 to 144 ladies per grant year."

"This program is invaluable to our community," she said. "It is a privilege to offer health and educational services to those in need in a caring and compassionate setting. Ohio ranks fourth in the nation for breast cancer mortality with an average of 27.87 per 100,000 women. The breast cancer incidence rate in Ohio is 116 per 100,000 women. Ashtabula County mortality rates are 28 per 100,000 women and the incidence rate is 128 per 100,000 women."

To support the breast health program, the Geneva Medical Center staff hosts the annual Walk for the Cure. This year the walk will be held Sept. 18 at Geneva High School on Route 84. The day will begin at noon with a vendor's fair until 3 p.m. The traditional balloon launch will be held at 1:55 p.m., and the walk will begin at 2 p.m.

After the walk, participants are invited to enjoy a complimentary pizza party.

This competitive two-mile walk is free for all breast cancer survivors and includes a gift bag and shirt for survivors.

Mothers, daughters, husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, boys and girls are invited to walk for a \$15 registration fee. The registration includes a commemorative T-shirt to

the first 500 participants.

All proceeds benefit Northeast Ohio Susan G. Komen For The Cure.

Geneva Medical Center mammographer and certified educational staff will be at the walk to discuss breast health, how to perform a breast self-exam and how to access breast cancer resources.

The event also will feature a basket auction, door prizes, entertainment and more.

Dr. Amitbah Goel will give a presentation on breast health.

To register for the walk or to become a sponsor for the walk, call (415-0261).

Last year the event hosted 354 walkers, 80 breast cancer survivors and raised \$11,000 for the cause, Slimmer said.

"The residents of Ashtabula County can support these efforts by attending and raising money for a wide variety of local Susan G. Komen for the Cure fundraising events. The monies raised from these events are sent to the local northeast chapter which in turn grants funding out to local agencies in a 22 county region to provide much needed educational programs, screening programs, and breast health support services. Every dollar truly counts," she said.

For more information on the free mammogram program, contact Candy Koss at (440) 998-0695. n

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provides medical coverage for the treatment of emergency medical conditions in non-citizens, the Healthy Families program, which is part of Medicaid, is for income-qualifying families.

The Healthy Start program, provided through Medicaid, covers the medical needs of children and pregnant women; and the Adult Community Medicaid provides health

care coverage for people age 65 and over or disabled citizens.

The Benefit Recovery and Fraud Program is responsible for the detection and prevention of fraud and the recovery of benefits.

For more information on the ACDJFS departments in the Donahoe Center, call (998-1110).

But the Donahoe Center houses more than just

ACDJFS. Located in the gray campus of offices is the Community Counseling Center. This office of psychologists focuses on the evaluation, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health issues. A clinical psychologist uses psychotherapy and other counseling skills to improve emotional and mental health.

For more information on the Community Counseling Center at the Donahoe Center, call (998-4210).

The Donahoe Center is home to the Lake Area Recovery Center, a private, non-profit corporation that provides treatment and prevention services to addicts and patients with compulsive behaviors.

The recovery center also hosts group meetings for people who are chemically addicted.

For more information or for a list of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, call (998-0722).

ACDJFS is also spider-webbed into local communities in the center's two satellite sites — one on main Avenue next to Huntington Bank and one on Lake Avenue.

The Main Avenue site hosts nursing home Medicaid for health coverage for people in nursing homes. Specialized Medicaid programs provide health coverage for elderly or disabled individuals who meet special conditions, including waivers, hospice and residential state supplement insurance,

Healthcheck and pregnancy services provides assistance to medical providers and case management and transportation for Medicaid eligible children and pregnant

**CONTINUED ON
PAGE 39**

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www.acdl.info

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What Do You Need to Know?

OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES IN ASHTABULA COUNTY INCLUDE:

(992-2727)

n **The Jefferson Community Center** provides recreational and educational opportunities for all ages. Meals, transportation and other services are provided for the elderly.

11 Jefferson Street
Jefferson, OH 44047
(576-9052)

n **The Kidney Foundation** provides medication, transportation and counseling for people with kidney disease.

2831 Prospect
Cleveland, OH 44115
(216-771-2700)

n **The Legal Aid Society** secures justice and resolves fundamental problems for low income residents by providing non-criminal legal services and working for systemic solutions.

121 East Walnut Street
Jefferson, OH 44047
(998-0722)

n **The Salvation Army Service Center** provides emergency assistance, emergency food and a soup kitchen in the Ashtabula area.

3527 Lake Avenue
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(992-0276)

n **The Salvation Army Service Units** provide emergency food, lodging and clothing for people in the Andover, Conneaut, Geneva, Jefferson and Orwell areas.

P. O. Box 5847
Cleveland, OH 44101
(216-861-8186)

n **The Samaritan House** provides emergency overnight and short term shelter for the homeless.

P. O. Box 743
Ashtabula, OH 44005
(992-3178)

n **Speech, Hearing and Rehabilitation**, located in the Donahoe Center, provides early education and care options, speech therapy and audiology services to children who have speech, language or hearing delays or disabilities.

2900 Donahoe Drive
Ashtabula, OH 44004
(992-4433)

n **Spiderweb of Jefferson** provides tutoring and counseling for young people as well as a free clothing bank for families.

133 East Jefferson Street
Jefferson, OH 44047
(576-4547)

Food banks struggle to balance supply, demand

Local food banks are struggling to feed the hungry in Ashtabula County as needs rise and funding dwindles, said Dianna Bradbury, director of food bank operations for the Ashtabula County Country Neighbor program.

Whether it is turkey and stuffing for Thanksgiving or a three-day emergency supply of food to help a family make it to the next paycheck, Bradbury said Ashtabula County food pantries are serving more people than ever.

The Country Neighbor program supplies food to community food pantries in

Ashtabula and Geauga counties, Bradbury said, offering an emergency three-day supply of food for needy people and families.

The Country Neighbor food-bank also provides food and non-food items to soup kitchens, not for profit daycare centers, and shelters in Lake, Geauga, and Ashtabula counties. Country Neighbor distributes an average of 750,000 pounds to organizations within the three counties.

The Geneva food pantry, which operates out of the Geneva Community Center on West Main Street, feeds 25 families a day, three days a week.

Bradbury said donations of non-perishable food and canned goods are accepted at any local food pantry. Monetary donations are also greatly appreciated.

"I always ask for toiletry items like toilet paper, bar soap and shampoo, everyday items that everyone needs and aren't covered by food stamps," Bradbury said. "But any donation is appreciated."

Bradbury said she understands people like to donate items to the food pantry, but one dollar can provide an entire meal through the U.S. Department of Agriculture food program. n

women.

Adult Protective Services investigates reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation of adults age 60 and older.

The Ashtabula County Senior Service Levy, which raises tax funds on behalf of the Ashtabula County Commissioners to fund senior centers, senior services and funds the annual Senior Citizens Conference at Kent State University — Ashtabula Campus.

The Main Avenue site also houses child care. Child support enforcement is a major function of the Main Avenue office. The office oversees the location, establishment, modification and enforcement of child support and the establishment of paternity in necessary cases.

For more information on these programs, call the ACDJFS Main Avenue office at (994-2050).

The Ashtabula County Job Source (ACJS) is located at the Lake Avenue site of ACDJFS.

Area residents looking to get back into the work force can visit the ACJS, which houses representatives many organizations that assist people in finding work.

The program includes a resource room including computers, fax machines and many other tools to help people in the job hunt.

The ACJS offers seminars to help people understand how to prepare for a job interview or learn how to write a resume.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) adult program helps "self-directed" adults find employment, while the dislocated worker program, also funded by the WIA, helps people who have been laid off or fired find new employment.

The WIA youth program includes tutoring

and training to enhance study skills, alternative education opportunities, summer work linked to educational or occupational learning, paid and unpaid work experience opportunities, occupational skills training, leadership development, supportive services as needed, mentoring programs and training and employment career guidance and counseling.

The Lake Avenue ACDJFS also houses the county's public transportation services, including the Ashtabula County Transportation System (ACTS) bus; the senior levy transportation program and Medicaid transportation.

For more information on the services offered at the ACDJFS Lake Avenue site, call (994-1234). n



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2011 **PROGRESS** FINANCIAL

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By ELLEN KOLMAN n Staff Writer

County banks, credit unions continue to grow

Ashtabula County's community banks and credit unions continue to grow and succeed in spite of a precarious national economy.

Conneaut Savings Bank, 309 Main St., Conneaut, has been serving the residents of Conneaut and surrounding communities since 1888.

"The importance of the community bank is local decisions made by local people," said Philip Heffelfinger, who has been the president and chief executive officer for 13 years and 34 years total at the bank.

Conneaut Savings Bank remains stable at \$85 million in total assets, which is about the same as last year, Heffelfinger said.

Although, there has not been an increase in total depositors, the bank's market share in the City of Conneaut has risen from 43.21 percent in 2008, to 47.59 percent in 2009 - 2010.

"That is significant, and shows the trust our community has in us," he said.

Conneaut Savings Bank provides primarily all forms of savings, certificates of deposits, specializes in residential loans, new construction and new vehicle loans.

"We are lending money the same as we did before the economic downturn," Heffelfinger said. "Our biggest concern is the loss of equity in our homes and people who are seeking home equity loans have been affected as to how much they can borrow against their homes."

Conneaut Savings Bank recently was awarded BauerFinancial's five-star rating for 68 consecutive quarters, exhibiting the best in financial strength in the nation, according to a press release by BauerFinancial Inc. of Coral Gables, Fla.

"People trust our bank because we are

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

STEVE VARCKETTE, left, Martin R. Cole and Diana Engelhardt of Andover Bank.

It is all about the people at Andover Bank

By **ELLEN KOLMAN**

Staff Writer

ekolman@starbeacon.com

ANDOVER — "It's all about the people," is the slogan for Andover Bank, a local independent privately held com-

munity bank, which began more than 125 years ago and serves Andover, Ashtabula Harbor, Conneaut, Geneva, Jefferson, Austinburg and Madison.

Andover Bank's continued success is indisputable, and according to the numbers, 2010, and so far 2011, have shown

record growth.

"Our assets hit \$295 million at the end of 2010," said Martin Cole, the bank's president and chief executive officer. "At the end of 2009, our assets were at \$279 million."

See PEOPLE, Page 41

People

From Page 40

"We have completed two back to back earnings record years and are on track for a third record earnings record year," he said.

Andover Bank is now nationally ranked in the top 100 by the American Bankers Association. Andover ranked 90th in the nation among Banking Top Performers for 2011. In the category of banks and thrift institutions with assets of \$100 million to \$3 billion, the bank was 90th for return on average equity, according to a press release.

"This was quite an honor considering there are 6,500 institutions in this category," Cole said.

Andover Bank also earned top ratings in 2011 by ranking 18 among the top 20 community banks with \$250 million to \$500 million in assets, based on return on average equity from the Independent Community Bankers of America, a community banking magazine. The magazine published in June its annual list of 400 outstanding community bank perform-

ers.

"Some financial institutions can do it for one year with smoke and mirrors, but we have done it with core earnings performance," Cole said.

In 2010, Andover Bank loaned \$36 million to its customers.

"The present economic environment has kept interest rates low and is good for borrowers; we are loaning," said Steve Varckette, executive vice-president.

In fact, Andover Bank, was chosen in 2010 to be the recipient of the Community Bankers Association of Ohio and BKD of Cincinnati, the BKD Excellence and Innovation Award.

"I am most proud that we are making a difference one person at time," Cole said. "We are proud of the financial aspects, but we also take pride in what we give back to the community."

On Make a Difference Day, 2010, Andover Bank employees hosted a dinner at G.O. Ministry on Cleveland Avenue, Ashtabula. The dinner was courtesy of employees at the Ashtabula Branch of Andover Bank. The staff raised the money to purchase the food, about \$700 worth, then spent all day cooking and serving it to more than 250 guests who attended last year's Thanksgiving in October meal.

Also in October, 2010, Chad Giangola, manager of Andover Bank in the Ashtabula Harbor, presented G.O. Ministries with a check for \$10,000.

Andover Bank is also involved with the United Way Campaign, among other many community service projects at different times a year.

AB Investments, Jefferson, has grown to \$33 million in assets since it opened in 2009. AB Investments provides the community with non-banking products.

"Mark Hannenan, manager, is perfect for us as a financial advisor. His style is very main street and down to earth," Cole said.

"We have the best of both worlds: Traditional banking and investment services," Diana Engelhardt, executive vice-president of Finance and Operations.

The newest banking office in Madison, has already done more than \$2 million in deposits and traffic is increasing.

"The community has received us and we are very pleased," Cole said. "Our board of directors care about the community and they provide us with strong leadership."



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SUBMITTED PHOTO

THE COMMUNITY First Credit Union management team (left) Mark DeGeorge, assistant manager; Mike Riesterer, chief executive officer; and Lucy Campbell, treasurer.

serving our neighbors, friends and families,” Heffelfinger said.

Andover Bank’s continued success is indisputable, and according to the numbers, 2010, and so far 2011, have shown record growth.

“Our assets hit \$295 million at the end of 2010,” said Martin Cole, the bank’s president and chief executive officer. “At the end of 2009, our assets were at \$279 million.”

“We have completed two back-to-back earnings record years and are on track for a third record earnings record year,” he said.

AB Investments, Jefferson, has grown to \$33 million in assets since it opened in 2009. AB Investments provides the community with non-banking products.

The newest banking office in Madison, has already done more than \$2 million in deposits and traffic is increasing.

Community banks and credit unions are similar in that both institutions have a community mind-set and they are managed by members of the local community.

“When you bank at your local bank, the institution is owned by investors and the bank works to make those investors money. When you bank at your local credit union, the institution is owned by the members of the credit union and if you’re a member the institution is

owned, in part, by you,” according to www.consumer-savvytips.org

Another big difference between credit unions and banks is where the profits go. The investors of a bank are reaping the profits of the institution. However, credit unions are non-profit entities. The profits of the credit unions are being returned to the members of the credit union in the form of lower loan interest rates and higher dividends, the website said.

“Here for everyone, committed to you,” is the slogan of Community First Credit Union, 2043 E. Prospect Road, Ashtabula Township.

The credit union has made significant progress in the last 12 months in new members, total deposits and the addition of a kid’s club.

Community First is member owned with a volunteer seven member board of directors who represent various aspects of the community. There are no stock holders and the members elect their board members.

“Our total deposits are up by \$2.20 million. At the end of July, 2010, deposits were at \$54,304,000 and at the end of this July, deposits grew to \$56,550,000,” said Mike Riesterer, chief executive officer.

Community First also was recently awarded BauerFinancial’s five-star rating for 66 consecutive quarters,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

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SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

DAVE FLAUTT (left) and fellow Edward Jones financial advisor Mike Fedler operate two Ashtabula offices of the financial firm.

Edward Jones attributes success to good advice

By **ELLEN KOLMAN**
Staff Writer

ekolman@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — The secret to Edward Jones Investments success in Ashtabula County is the advice given by the financial advisors.

"Buy quality investments and hold on to it for the long term in a diverse portfolio," said Michael Fedler, financial advisor for Edward Jones, 4830 State Road. "With investing, you need to keep a positive mental attitude and a long-term perspective."

Fedler and David Flautt, who is the financial advisor for Edward Jones at the 523 Lake Avenue location are both partners in the investment firm.

"The long term prospects for America are very good; we can have a slow down in our country, but with the global companies we can still do very well," Fedler said.

"Edward Jones profits are up 75 percent. We've had five strong quarters with increases; fundamentally things look good."

Fedler, who has been with Edward Jones for 27 years, opened his own

Ashtabula office in 1985, he recently moved to the State Road office in July.

"I believe in Edward Jones philosophy: Do not worry about things you cannot control, but you can control what you own — buy into quality companies," Fedler said.

An Iowa native, Fedler learned about Edward Jones during college when a representative talked during a financial class.

"I applied and I've been working for Edward Jones ever since," he said.

Flautt, who grew up in southeast Ohio, has been with Edward Jones for nine years and opened the Lake Avenue office in 2004.

"Mike recruited me to come and work for him. I began a new career path at that point. I liked the idea of controlling my own destiny," said Flautt, who worked in the chemical industry for 17 years.

"Edward Jones has worked out for me better than I expected. The business and the clients have been great to me and I have done the same for them," he said.

See **ADVICE, PAGE 44**

exhibiting the best in financial strength in the nation, according to a press release by BauerFinancial Inc. of Coral Gables, Fla.

"We are very pleased with the rating," Riesterer said.

Riesterer said their biggest push is lending.

"When people are ready to borrow, we are ready to lend it. Because of the economy people are not borrowing like they were in the past," he said. "The recent headlines about the stock market and unemployment rates have made people hesitant about going into debt."

But, Riesterer said, if a person is in a position to borrow and buy, now is the time: there are really low interest rates.

Community First's total assets as of July are \$67,521,749.

Seventy-three kids have joined the Dollar Dog Club since it began in April.

"The promotion is going very well, the kids receive incentives to save money while learning how to manage their own money," said Lucy Campbell, treasurer.

Meanwhile, Dollar Dog has been integral in many community service outreaches including visiting daycares, schools and pre-schools.

"Dollar Dog also participates in the area parades, it is fun for the kids and all of us," Campbell said.

Community First offers various products and services including basic checking and saving accounts, loans including auto, mortgage and recreation vehicle loans; and home improvement loans. Other services include regular share accounts, share certificates, money market accounts, IRA accounts and IRA certificates (Individual Retirement Account).

Lakeview Federal Credit Union is not only celebrating success, but its 50th anniversary.

Lakeview Federal Credit Union has three locations: Geneva, Jefferson and Ashtabula Township.

"We continue to make progress serving the community while growing in assets

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

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and employees,” said Sherry Cornell, president and chief executive officer of Lakeview Credit Union, 2909 State Road, Ashtabula Township.

“We are growing because we are local and people trust us. We make all of our own decisions between the board of directors and management while following federal guidelines,” Cornell said.

LFCU’s total assets for 2010 are \$77 million, a growth of 4 percent from 2009.

Anyone who lives, works or worships in Ashtabula County may open an account and do business at the credit union. Today, LFCU has 8,300 members.

Recently, LFCU was recently awarded BauerFinancial’s five-star rating for 21 consecutive years, exhibiting the best in financial strength in the nation, according to a press release by BauerFinancial Inc. of Coral Gables, Fla.

LFCU’s philosophy is people helping people and community service and outreach is woven through the fabric of the credit union.

“Our staff and board come up with the ideas and they help coordinate each project,” she said.

The LFCU’s Jefferson and Ashtabula locations recently benefited many Ashtabula County students this school year through the Stuff the Bus Campaign.

“The Stuff the Bus helps kids get ready for school with many of the supplies they need,” Cornell said.

Like Andover Bank’s AB Investments, Jefferson, Edward Jones Investments, Ashtabula, has had a great



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

FROM LEFT, Emily Elliott, Sandy Brown, Sherry Cornell, Bret Fleckenstein, Mary Brockett, Doug Havens, Emily Erb and Jeannette Smegal of the Lakeview Credit Union.

year.

The secret to Edward Jones Investments success in Ashtabula County is the advice given by the financial advisors.

“Buy quality investments and hold on to it for the long term in a diverse portfolio,” said Michael Fedler, financial advisor for Edward Jones, 4830 State Road. “With investing, you need to keep a positive mental attitude and a long-term perspective.”

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“Edward Jones profits are up 75 percent. We’ve had five strong quarters with increases; fundamentally things look good.” n



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Advice

From Page 43

Edward Jones serves individual investors and business owners and helps them reach their long-term financial goals.

“Rather than chasing the latest fad, we recommend a diversified approach that we believe will perform over the long term while managing risk,” according to a fact sheet.

Edward Jones is in all 50 states, and services offered include: annuities, business retirement plans, education savings, equity investments, equity research, estate considerations, exchange-traded funds, financial calculators, fixed-income investments, individual retirement accounts, insurance, investment banking, investor education programs, managed account program, mutual funds, online account access, portfolio and retirement plan reviews, retirement plan rollovers and consolidation, saving, spending and borrowing solutions; and systematic investing, according to www.edwardjones.com.

The majority of Fedler’s and Flautt’s clients are in Ashtabula County and they

are doing well in spite of recent national economy setbacks.

“Our job is to keep our clients invested in down markets and keep them focused on their goals. People need to stay invested when the market is down,” Fedler said.

“With investment rates being low right now there are a lot of opportunities to build a competitive income portfolio. Assets have grown in banking in the county and we have definitely grown our assets at Edward Jones,” he said.

“In this demographic we are seeing our clients retiring and companies are hiring again and replacing those workers who have left in the last four to five years,” Flautt said.

The bottom line is the number of clients Fedler and Flautt serves and the number of assets they have has grown significantly in the last 10 years.

“In the last 10 years Edward Jones’ assets collectively has tripled,” Flautt said. “We are still growing.”

Fedler said there is plenty of opportunity for more Edward Jones offices in Ashtabula County.

For more information call Fedler at 440-992-5700 or Flautt at 440-964-3078. n

2011 PROGRESS REAL ESTATE

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By SHELLEY TERRY n Staff Writer

It may be a buyer's market now but, experts predict improved market for sellers

When "For Sale" signs sprout like mushrooms in front yards, prices fall and buyers cheer.

Today, five years after soaring foreclosure rates popped the housing bubble, Ashtabula County buyers can still get a great deal and if they have watched their credit rating, they are getting reasonable interest rates, said Carl DeMusz, CEO of the Northern Ohio Multiple Listing Service.

"We are experiencing a buyer's market with interest rates at historic lows," he said. "Ashtabula County buyers are in a perfect position since listing prices are low, as well."

DeMusz said one thing is for certain, no matter what the economy — people need homes.

"Those that have good credit and jobs will be best served by owning a home," he said. "Those that have irregular credit and job histories will be forced to rent."

As employment numbers improve and people see the values of homes rising again, they will work toward buying, he said.

"If things go well with the economy, we could see improvement over the next year and a decent recovery in the housing market within two years," DeMusz said. "But I do think these interest rates are going to rise rapidly when the housing market improves."

On Sept. 2, the 30-year fixed rate mortgages were at 4.25 percent, and 15-year fixed rates at 3.125 percent, according to local banks.

"The key to recovery is stable employment and that will take some time to happen," DeMusz said. "Ohio is just beginning to see some improvement but it will still take some more time to recover. It's understandable that unemployed people can't buy a home but there are those who can buy a home right now and are wait-

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

JOHN SMOLEN of Smolen Engineering.

Smolen Engineering finds success in a variety of rehab projects

By **SHELLEY TERRY**

Staff Writer

sterry@starbeacon.com

JEFFERSON TOWNSHIP — While most civil engineering firms are housed in modern skyscrapers or fancy

office buildings, the 1840s farmhouse on Route 46 is perfect for Smolen Engineering.

Started in March 2002 by retired county engineer John Smolen, the company handles a wide range of proj-

See SMOLEN, Page 46

ing.

"We don't know what they are waiting for but if history repeats itself, these peo-

ple will wait too long to buy and will end up saying, 'I could have bought that house for a bargain and I didn't.' People

tend to wait until others buy and they end up paying much higher prices. I guess it's human nature," he said.

But DeMusz foresees a more balanced market for sellers and buyers in 2012. Foreclosure rates have slowed, and in the past year, the number of houses listed as under contract to sell in the Northern Ohio Multiple Listing Service increased 33.9 percent in the five-county area of Cuyahoga, Medina, Lorain, Lake and Geauga counties, and 25.7 percent in the 17-county northeastern Ohio area (which encompasses Ashtabula County).

The majority of those contracts will go to closing, so this is a good sign that the market is improving, DeMusz said. If the trends last, next year is going to be better for sellers.

Yet the current buyer's market boasts of inventory in all price categories and people who are ready and able to buy should go for it, he said.

When asked about the hot spots and/or best spots to buy in northeastern Ohio, DeMusz said there are many nice areas in Ashtabula County.

"I think of the great architecture of Geneva and Ashtabula. I love the summer activity of Geneva-on-the-Lake; there are many nice properties in Andover, Conneaut, and I love Jefferson," he said. "Outside of Ashtabula County, you will find good opportunities in Madison, Chardon, Concord, Painesville, South Russell and Kirtland, just to name a few."

As for run-down neighborhoods with empty, dilapidated buildings, DeMusz said many towns and cities across the country have record numbers of vacant properties and they bring down the values of neighboring houses.

Ashtabula is just one of many in the nation that's fighting this battle. Under the direction of City Manager Anthony

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Cantagallo, former community development director, Jason Strong, started demolishing ramshackle houses in February 2010 with a home at 505 W. 36th St.

Justin Janson of Janson Trucking and Excavating of Rock Creek manned an excavator and smashed and crashed the house into the basement as the neighbors cheered. The house was leveled, and in the spring, the land was graded and seeded.

Strong repeated the routine over and over, eventually demolishing more than 75 vacant, shabby buildings in the city, including commercial buildings and garages.

Eventually, Ashtabula and cities like it will rebound and thrive again, but it will take strong leadership, said Strong, who is running for city manager in November. (Cantagallo is running for re-election).

“The key to recovery is stable employment and that will take time to happen,” DeMusz said. “Ohio is just beginning to see some improvement but it will still take more time to recover.”

For buyers who want to “flip houses,” meaning buy cheap, fix up and sell for a hefty profit — all in a short period of time — DeMusz recommends those people work with their Realtor.

“The reason is that you can buy a fix-up house with real potential to look great at a good price but if it is not in a neighborhood that will support the asking price, it is all for naught,” he said. “A professional can do a comparative market analysis for you before and after repairs that will help you see what the potential is to make a



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

CAROLE STORMER-VAUX, of Re/Max Innovations, displays an Ogden Avenue home in Ashtabula.

profit.”

But one thing is for sure, DeMusz said, it is a buyer’s market.

Carole Stormer-Vaux, an agent with Re/Max Innovations in Jefferson and

Madison, agrees.

“It really is the perfect time for buyers; any buyers,” she said. “Home values are depressed by 20 to 30 percents — lower than they’ve been in years, and rates are

in the 4-5 percent fixed range, on a 30-year note, even lower if you take a 15-year mortgage.”

In most cases, the house payment will be lower than renting a comparable home, she said.

But the market can’t be painted with a broad brush, she said.

“There are a lot of neighborhoods that were not affected by foreclosures,” she said. “Homes in those areas are not selling for bargain-basement prices.”

Sellers are in an interesting spot. If they sell, they are, in most cases, going to get “beat up” on their price, Stormer-Vaux said.

“However, as soon as they take that next step and buy, they are going to get that same great price and interest rate,” she said.

Anyone selling their home in this market, better make sure it is clean, neat and in working condition, she said.

“Price it at the correct, current market value,” she said. “This is the hard part for most sellers in the current market because it might mean selling for less than you paid, depending on when you purchased it.”

A prospective seller should think long and hard about getting into the market, she said.

Should you sell now? “Sure,” she said. “If you’ll become a buyer as soon as you sell. But if not, and your plan is to sell and then rent, or lease, no. In that case, if I were you, I’d stay in my house and wait for the values to climb back up.” n

Smolen

From Page 45

ects, but it’s Smolen’s reputation and love of designing and rehabilitating covered bridges that gives the business a rural niche.

Smolen, who saved 12 of Ashtabula County’s covered bridges during his 27 years as county engineer, also designed and supervised the construction of four new bridges in the county. With that kind of expertise, it’s understandable why Smolen is often called upon wherever and whenever there are projects involving covered bridges.

Covered bridges handled by the firm

include the new covered bridge built across the Ashtabula Gulf to the pedestrian-traffic bridge on the Geauga County recreation trail.

Elsewhere, Smolen has designed covered bridges for Hancock, Preble and Madison counties and worked on a covered bridge project in Michigan. In neighboring Trumbull County, Smolen’s firm oversaw the renovation of the Newton Falls bridge. He’s rehabbing in Clermont and Adams counties.

Whenever Smolen converses about the benefits of wooden, covered bridges over steel and concrete spans, longevity is at the top of his list. Road salt eats away at steel and concrete, and it helps preserve wood. The roof protects the trusses from the weather.

“If they are kept dry, covered bridges

have a very long life,” he said.

Most of Ashtabula County’s covered bridges are more than 100 years old.

After retiring as county engineer, Smolen located his engineering firm a stone’s throw away from his family farm in Jefferson Township. The firm employs nine full and two part-time employees. There are few engineering firms that have knowledge of covered bridges, especially rehabilitation, he said.

But his rehabilitation talents don’t stop with bridges, it includes churches, factories, schools and more.

Smolen Engineering is involved in the restoration of the front of St. Joseph’s Church on Lake Avenue. The church parishioners and insurance money will pay for the \$300,000 worth of repairs and renovations, which will include stabilizing

and rebuilding the walls of the bell tower, rebuilding and refinishing the domes, replacing mortar and removing paint from the stone.

Smolen engineered the restoration of the two towers, which are being lowered 15 feet to reduce weight on the building, he said.

“The brick and mortar were so deteriorated,” he said.

The company also provided the Ashtabula County commissioners plans and specifications for repairs for the jail and the juvenile detention center.

“I enjoy being involved in so many design projects in the region,” he said. “All the things we do amazes me. Everyone thinks (the area) is so depressed, but if you go after work, you will find it’s here.” n

2011 **PROGRESS** AGRICULTURE

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By SHELLEY TERRY n Staff Writer

From apples to soybeans — Ashtabula County grows it all

When folks think of Ashtabula County, they can't help but think of agriculture because it's an extremely important sector of the largest county in the state of Ohio.

This year, however, hasn't been the best for crops thanks to too much rain, and then, too little rain. As of the end of August, the soybeans are booming, and the corn looks good if it were, say, the end of July.

Farmers suffered under a lot of stress this year, but the crops are looking up and farmers at the Ashtabula County Fair predicted Ohio crop at 85 percent of normal, come harvest. Some believe that's too high, but time will tell.

No matter how you look at it, crops were planted late because of a very wet spring. Late harvest means fear of frost, said David Marrison, Ohio State University Extension Agent for Ashtabula County.

"We need a good fall; we can't afford an early fall," he said. "Even our vegetable gardens are two weeks behind."

If all this crop talk is above your head, you might benefit from attending the Ashtabula County Fair, held the second week of August in the county seat of Jefferson, or touring one of the county's 1,280 farms.

"We had a great fair this year, except for Sunday (huge rain storm)," Marrison said. "But we'll take it because the rest of the week was perfect."

Future Farmers of America and 4-H are popular with the young people in the county, and local businesses, individuals and farmers support the Market Livestock Sale held on Friday in the MAC Arena. That's when the children sell their animal projects in an auction that starts at 3 p.m. and often goes on into the night.

"This year's amount is just about \$46,000 higher than last year, making it the highest we ever had," Marrison said.

Friday night's total sale amount was \$240,891, said Darla Vargo, secretary/treasurer of the Ashtabula County Fair Board.

Records were set for a rabbit, duck, turkey, chicken, goat cheese basket and a hogs — all raised on farms in Ashtabula County.

The average size of a local farm is 133 acres, according to the Ohio State University Extension Office. Ashtabula County boasts 30 more farms from last year's statistics.

About 32 percent of the county's land is used for crops, and 4.3 percent is used for pasture, according to the Ohio

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



RAY GRUBER JR. is the third generation of grape growers on the family property on Route 534 in Harpersfield Township.

WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

Ashtabula County — grapes and wine making thrive here

By SHELLEY TERRY

Staff Writer

sterry@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — Whether you enjoy red wine with dinner or sip white wine with cheese and crackers at a picnic, Ashtabula County has a winery and produces a

wine to fit the occasion, thanks to its unique climate.

Wineries are mostly found in the northern part of the county, extending inland about four miles. This area's climate is tempered by Lake Erie, resulting in more frost free days and longer growing season.

Grape production has always been concentrated in

See THRIVE, Page 49

Department of Development.

While many of the county's farmers work part-time, 723 farmers list farming as their primary occupation, according to Connect Ohio.

Agriculture brings a total of \$68.6 million into the county, according to the ODOD.

In Ohio, the county ranks No. 1 in grape production, number three in oats and eighth in hay. Except for grapes, which remained the same as last year (No. 1), Ashtabula County moved up about 10 notches in oats and hay production.

"We'll fluctuate on oats," Marrison said. "You have to remember the statistics are one year behind. We had a wet spring this year, so oats will move down the list next year. It ebbs and flows."

The first cutting of hay turned out good this year, but the second cutting was scarce, he said.

"Anyone looking for hay for their animals will pay a higher price because of it," he said.

On the bright side, farmers are getting a good price this year for corn and soybeans; and for once, dairy farmers are seeing milk prices go up.

Picture a dairy farmer who grows his own corn to feed his cows and he's doing pretty good this year, Marrison said.

"Usually you make more money if you can put (grain) through an animal," he said.

Most of the county's larger farms are found south of Interstate 90 where the growing season is shorter, according to the Ohio State University Extension Service. Grain and dairy farms are important agricultural industries here. Dairy farming is the primary agricultural use, accounting for nearly half of the gross farm income in the county, according to Ohio Agricultural Statistics Service.

"We are seeing record prices for milk this year," Marrison said.

Nearly all of the farms in Ashtabula County — 92 percent — are owned and operated by a family or individual. That figure is the same as last year.

The main crops are hay, corn and oats, compared to the state, where the top crops are corn and soybeans. Greenhouse and nursery products comprise about 11 percent of Ohio's total agricultural receipts.

The fruit crop in Ohio, like Ashtabula County, is important. Apples are grown, as well as grapes, peaches and strawberries.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS

Ashtabula Agricultural Society boasts a long history

By SHELLEY TERRY

Staff Writer

sterry@starbeacon.com

A group of pioneers met on Oct. 30, 1822 at the old brick courthouse in Jefferson to form the Ashtabula Agricultural Society.

From the small group assembled, a committee was appointed to draft a constitution for the society, whose purpose it was to promote the interest of agriculture in the forest covered land of Ashtabula County.

At the first meeting on Jan. 16, 1823, Nehemiah King was elected president; Eliphalet Austin, first vice president; Edward Fifield, second vice president; Matthew Hubbard, corresponding secretary; Jacob Austin, auditor, and Timothy R. Hawley, treasurer.

The First Annual Cattle Show and Fair was held in Austinburg on the first Tuesday in October 1823, featuring a total of \$40 in premiums. The top prize of \$10 was awarded to Jonathan Warner for best improved farm of 50 acres. Cybelia St. John won the first prize for the best grass bonnet in imitation leghorn. The Cattle Show and Fair was repeated the next year in Austinburg and in 1825 moved to Ashtabula, in hopes of attracting greater interest, but it was not successful.

In 1826, the fair Fourth Annual Cattle Show and Fair was held in Jefferson. The first fair in Jefferson was held in the town square with livestock displays tied to the hitching posts in front of the courthouse. The people of Jefferson failed to support the project and the fifth fair was planned, but never held.

The Society's activities stopped for the next 15 years. On March 7, 1842, the Ashtabula County Agricultural Society was reorganized under the leadership of R.W. Griswold. The first annual fair was held at the courthouse on Oct. 15, 1842. At his annual report, Griswold said, "While public attention in our day is so divided and directed to so many objects,



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

THE LOG CABIN at the Ashtabula County Fairgrounds in Jefferson.

each claiming such a share of time, means and energies of individuals as to prevent any one being fully attending to this Society presents a common platform where the whole community can rally as a citizen of common course and as a friend."

A special meeting was called on June 25, 1846, and the Society, as formed in 1842, was dissolved for want of interest taken by the citizens of the county. On Sept. 12, 1846, in answer to an appeal made by the Ashtabula Sentinel, a second organization was formed under the new regulations of the State department of Agriculture.

The first Annual Fair of the reborn Society was held at the Courthouse on Oct. 16, 1846. The present fairgrounds was bought in the early 1850s. The records show in 1854 the Society expended \$2,500 to erect an Agricultural Hall and other improvements to the fairgrounds. The fair of 1858 drew 5,000 people.

In 1861 the fairgrounds was turned into an Army camp, known as Camp Giddings, where 1,500 men from northeast Ohio camped. On Christmas Day, they marched from Jefferson to Ashtabula,

where they took a train to Columbus and mustered into the Union Army. The 29th Ohio Volunteers were engaged in some of the toughest fighting in the Civil War.

The first race track, a third of a mile oval, was built in the early 1870s. In 1914, a balloon ascension was the highlight of the fair.

In 1915 the newly built log cabin was dedicated. Expansion and improvements continued and sometime in the 1920s, the county took title of the fairgrounds, but left the Agriculture Society still controlled the grounds.

Years have passed and there have been a lot of changes at the fairgrounds, but for the Ashtabula County Agricultural Society the goals have remained constant: "To promote the encouragement of agriculture, horticulture, and the rearing of better livestock, improvement of domestic science and art, promote general community betterment, together with all other commercial and educational interests of the county."

This history includes information from articles written by Arlie Keel and Catherine Ellsworth. n

CONTINUED ON PAGE 49

Anyone familiar with the county, knows Brant's Apple Orchard in Sheffield Township and Smith's Fruit Orchard in Geneva boast delicious fruit, cider and pies.

Brant's is celebrating more than 20 years in the business. They allow customers to sample apples by the slice before making their selection. They also sell delicious cider doughnuts.

Smith's is unique because they allow customers to pick their own apples. Most of their apples go out the door by the peck or half-peck.

While Cortland, Macintosh and Idared and delicious varieties of apples are standards among area orchards, the growers are introducing new varieties. Brant grows about 25 varieties that provide a continuum of fruit throughout the season.

The largest vegetable crops are cucumbers, potatoes, sweet corn and tomatoes, but lettuce, peppers and snap beans do well in northeast Ohio soil, according to the OSU Extension Service.

More and more Ohio farmers are selling produce directly to consumers at 278 farmers markets that have been recorded across the state this season, up 31 percent, according to results released in August in the U.S.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

RANDY BOGGS prepares a field for the planting of winter wheat later in September near Fenkell Road in Andover Township.

Department of Agriculture's 2011 National Farmers Market Directory.

The annual report indicates a total of

7,175 farmers markets operating throughout the U.S.

Last year, the USDA reported that 6,132

markets were operating across the country. Ohio ranked fifth for the total number of farmers markets in the state. n

Thrive

From Page 47

Geneva and Harpersfield, but this past year, Kent State University at Ashtabula took notice and has begun cultivating a new group of wine connoisseurs.

In August, the college began offering two new degree programs that will prepare students for skilled jobs in Ashtabula County's rapidly growing wine and grape industry. Each degree program is the first of its kind in the state.

Ashtabula County alone is home to 20 wineries, which draw nearly 500,000 visitors a year.

The new programs are: the Associate of Applied Science Degree in Enology (the study of wine and winemaking) and the Associate of Applied Science Degree in Viticulture (the study of vine growing and grape harvesting).

The degrees were made possible through an affiliation with the Viticulture Enology Science and Technology Alliance, according to Susan Stocker, dean and chief administrative officer at KSU Ashtabula.

Ohio ranks in the top 10 of wine-produc-

ing states and employs more than 4,000 people in the wine industry.

"For us, it's an economic development issue," Stocker said. "Having our program adjacent to the largest growing district in the state provides students with invaluable hands-on learning opportunities which will enhance their employability, both here and in wine regions across the country."

Northeast Ohio contains more than half the wine grape acreage in the state, and the majority of the state's 151 wineries are located in Ashtabula, Lake and Geauga, she said.

Tony Debevec, owner of Debonne Vineyards in Madison, believes his operation will benefit from professional training for his employees.

"At Debonne, we train our workers on site," he said. "The availability of these wine programs at Kent State Ashtabula will shorten our training time and provide us with an elevated quality of wine professionals for hire. In addition, those who go to college have more than just the technical skills to bring to the workplace. They come with new ideas and experiences, as well as industry connections."

Donniella Winchell, executive director of the Ohio Wine Producers Association,

worked with Kent State Ashtabula and VESTA to bring the wine degrees to Ashtabula.

"We're elated that Kent State Ashtabula is committed to develop this program which will surely support the continued growth of high-value regional agricultural, wine, tourism and hospitality industries," she said.

The wine industry's economic impact on the state's economy is estimated at \$580 million annually, producing more than 850,000 gallons of wine each year.

Courses offered cover such topics as sensory evaluation, winery equipment operation, geography of wine and regional vineyard management. The program, available on line and in classroom, is designed to be convenient for both traditional and non-traditional students. Students also will participate in hands-on training at local wineries and vineyards.

Learning about the ethnic heritage of growing grapes awaits students, thanks to families like the Debevecs, Ferrantes, Grubers, Virants, Kohlis and others who settled in Geneva and Harpersfield a couple generations back.

For decades, grapes grown here were traditional American varieties that grew well in clay soil: Concord, Niagara and

Catawba. They were juice and table grapes for Slovenian, Slovakian and Italian families and sold to Coca Cola in Geneva and Welch's in Westfield, N.Y.

In these families' native countries, wine was consumed at meals, and they continued the tradition of making and drinking wine when they moved to America, capitalizing on the weather of this region.

They were assisted by the weather of this region, which is moderated by Lake Erie and assisted by the water and air drainage of the Grand River.

Decades ago, the late Raymond F. Gruber Sr. of Harpersfield worked closely with the Ohio Department of Agriculture in Wooster, and Ohio State University in Columbus, in planting the first five acres of seedless grapes in the state. He also worked with the Grape Research Center in North Kingsville.

"They were trying to figure out which table grapes worked here," said his son, Raymond Gruber Jr., also of Harpersfield. "They did this for 10 years. He provided the labor and they provided everything else."

Although Ray Gruber Sr. made wine only for his family, friends and neighbors, his agricultural research helped start the region's wine boom. n

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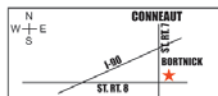
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2011 **PROGRESS** ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By ELLEN KOLMAN n Staff Writer

Ashtabula County gains new community theater, movie cinema

In 2011, Ashtabula County's thespians and art patrons gained a new community theater, while movie buffs lost a cinema.

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

"All the world's a stage," and the youth Shakespearean company, Chamberlains In-Training have trod the boards of the newest theater in Ashtabula County, The Harbor Playhouse Theatrical Co-op by performing "King Lear" in July.

"King Lear" was the first production to be performed at The Harbor Playhouse, 341 Lake Ave., (former Holy Cross Pentecostal Church), which opened in May.

The playhouse will host many community theater productions including the Bard's plays.

"Our vision is for this theater to be open for anyone who wants to come and do a family-friendly production," said Sara Perts, who along with her husband, Ray, have created the non-profit theatrical co-op.

"I always thought it would be cool to put a theater in an old church, because the acoustics would be great and plenty of space for the audience and back stage rooms," she said.

The playhouse is funded by donations and nominal fees from groups who want to host a production at the theater.

The Perts along with family, friends and their Chamberlains In-Training members, worked hard cleaning, painting, and building a stage.

"The stage is six portable platforms bolted together," Ray said. "We sold the church pews and bought second-hand chairs. The theater seats 80 people."

The owners of the building wish to remain anonymous and Sara and Ray serve as the managers of the building and the theatrical co-op.

Four years ago the Perts developed a youth Shakespearean company called Chamberlains In-Training.

"Our youth company is separate from this theater co-op, but it will serve as our new home," Sara said.

Chamberlains In-Training is named after William Shakespeare's group, "Lord Chamberlain's Men," and has about 30 members who rehearsed for "King Lear" since May. Previous productions were "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "As You Like It," "Macbeth," and "Taming of the Shrew."

The reason the Perts' started the youth Shakespearean

CONTINUED ON PAGE 52



BERNADETTE SARTOR (left), playing the Fool, and Ray Perts, King Lear, prepare for opening night of King Lear and Harbor Playhouse in Ashtabula.

WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

company was to help kids understand Shakespeare and the meaning of his plays.

"It is very rewarding when we see the kids bring the characters to life and they understand what they are saying," said Sara, who is also the director of the productions.

On the schedule for fall is the first of Open Mic Nights, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Oct. 4.

"Anyone who would like to play music or recite poetry is welcome to come in," Sara said. "There is a \$1 cover charge to get in, unless you bring an instrument, then admission is free. There will be coffee and baked goods for sale to benefit the playhouse."

For more information call 969-8380 or The Harbor Playhouse Theatrical Co-op can be found on the Internet social network site Facebook, and www.harborplayhouse.org

DESPITE SUMMER BLOCKBUSTERS, THE CONNEAUT THEATER CLOSED ITS DOORS

The lights went down permanently at the Conneaut Plaza Theater in August, limiting further the options for Ashtabula County movie buffs to watch films locally.

The Conneaut Plaza Theater opened in the Conneaut Plaza shopping center in 1979. Dwindling attendance spelled "The End" in September 2008, owners said at the time. It reopened under new ownership two months later.

In a 2010 profile, Sandy McCroskey said she was reluctant to take over the theater during an economy slump but was winning patrons with good service and reasonable prices. She owned the theater for nearly three years.

Recent years have not been good ones for fans of the silver screen. The county lost the Ashtabula Cinemas in Saybrook Township in October 2008. That building has since been bulldozed. The only first-run movie theaters left available in Ashtabula County are the Ashtabula Towne Square, in Ashtabula Township, which offers six motion picture theaters and large snack bar, and the summer seasonal Pymatuning Drive-In open on weekends in Andover. The Andover Showplace on Andover Square features second-run movies as well as live performances.

The county's art centers in Ashtabula and Conneaut, were able to add programs and personnel in spite of the recent economic climate.

ASHTABULA ARTS CENTER

Beth Koski, executive director for the Ashtabula Art Center, 2928 W. 13th St., is proud of how the art center has positively impacted area youth over the years.

"There are many outstanding area young people who are leading successful lives that have the art center as a common thread," Koski said. "It is really exciting when they come back here to volunteer or participate in shows."

One AAC youth, Kimberly Godfrey, 26, of Perry, was hired on July 1, 2011 as the Theater Department Coordinator.

"Kim is a true testimonial of our Ashtabula Art Center youth coming back and we are thrilled to have her," Koski said.

Godfrey is 2008 graduate of Baldwin Wallace College Conservatory of Music. Recently, she directed the summer Straw Hat production of "Footloose," and performed during the summer Brown Bag concert series in Ashtabula and Jefferson.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 53

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS

Noble Art Entertainment has best year yet

By ELLEN KOLMAN

Staff Writer

ekolman@starbeacon.com

GENEVA-ON-THE-LAKE — Noble Art Entertainment at Geneva-on-the-Lake's Oak Room, has experienced their best year to date.

In October, 2010, "Greased" featuring a 1950s sock-hop theme, was the most successful show ever, said Brook Hall, who co-owns Noble Art Entertainment with Sarah Cantrell.

"Everything we do here is original. We write our own shows which allows us the freedom to take an idea and create something magical out of it," Hall said.

Noble Art Entertainment, created in 2007, was so named because "theater is one of the nobler arts," Hall said.

"We wanted to encompass more than theater arts and include comedy and training."

Today, Noble Art has been narrowed down to dinner theater that includes three shows a year: October, December and May.

"This company is doing very, very well — when I first proposed doing dinner theaters in this building to the owners, they were skeptical, but the overwhelming response of the first show in 2007 completely changed their opinion," Hall said. "The shows and the audiences continue to grow."

Hall's background is centered around theater arts, and he is a graduate of Temple University, Philadelphia. Before moving to Ashtabula County in 1989, Hall performed up and down the east coast for 25 years. He served as the entertainment director for the Medieval Faire in Trumbull Township for eight years before forming the partnership with Cantrell in 2007.

"I met Sarah at the Michigan Renaissance Fest. She was the stage manager, casting director and set designer. We blend well, she does the technical side and I do the stage theater," Hall said.

The last three dinner theater shows performed at the Oak Room were "Dead Man's Party," a pirate theme show in May; A Christmas Carol, the seasonal perennial in December, 2010; and "Greased," a 1950's murder mystery in October, 2010.

"Our last three shows all sold out seven out of eight performances," Hall said. "Our growth is almost to the point where we need more space."

See BEST, Page 54



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

BROOK HALL is the owner of Noble Art Entertainment operating out of the Oak Room at Geneva-on-the-Lake.

Godfrey will be offering an acting intensive for high school students who are serious about pursuing theater/musical theater as a career.

"I want to help area students to learn how to audition at the college level," she said.

Many of the offerings at the AAC cater to area youth, and 2010 - 2011 saw the addition of new opportunities including a grant to attend Interlochen Center for the Arts, Interlochen, Mich., as well as some new classes in the various departments.

The Interlochen Grant Assistance Program, created by Bruce Loomis, of Jefferson, provided needed funding for four area youth who each attended a summer program at Interlochen this past summer.

The dance department has added a "Zumba" class with Caitlin Dubsky and a "Basic Dance" class for kids.

"We want to extend the invitation that every dancer enrolled in Ballet I and up are urged to participate in "The Nutcracker" production," said Shelagh Dubsky, dance coordinator.

New to the visual arts department, Doris Jones, a native of England and a recent Ashtabula County resident, will be teaching two workshops on pastels. Ralph Bacon, of Plymouth Township, will be teaching for the first time, "Advanced Drawing" for teens and adults.

"This is a great class for serious high school art students who are looking to build their portfolios," said Meehan Humphrey, visual art coordinator.

Koski is optimistic about the financial health of the AAC for 2011 - 2012, as the Ohio Art Council, which supplies funds to Ohio's art centers, received a significant increase in funds from the Ohio Legislators, she said.

"The Ohio Arts Council is a state funded agency and any increase in their funding helps us," Koski said. "Our local grants appear to be stable, and that is good news."

But, like other area non-profits, community and corporate funding is down.

"It is just a reflection of our economy," she said.

The Ashtabula Arts Center includes a gallery where various area artists' works are featured every month; G.B. Community Theater (fall - spring) and Straw Hat Theatre (summer stock) provide a venue to showcase area acting and musical talent.

The center also provides instructional opportunities in fine arts, dance, theater, musical instruments and voice for children, teens and adults. Artistic workshops and children's' summer arts camp are also available. The AAC sponsors the Brown Bag Summer Concert series in two locations, Ashtabula and Jefferson.

CONNEAUT COMMUNITY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Penny Armeni has seen changes and growth at the Conneaut Community Center for the Arts since she began working at the center in 1987.

"I like my job because everyday is different. Everyday I meet new and interesting people," said Armeni, who has served as executive director since 2003.

The center, 1025 Buffalo St., Conneaut, has made "Kilpi Hall" its home since 1976. Kilpi Hall is a large edifice that was traditionally a Finnish meeting hall and is on the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS

Kimberly Godfrey is theater coordinator of the Ashtabula Arts Center

By ELLEN KOLMAN

Staff Writer

ekolman@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — Kimberly Godfrey, remembers at age 11, watching with a critical eye her father, Bob Godfrey, rehearse theater productions with his music students at Perry High School.

"Our mother, (Lauren Godfrey) taught violin at the Willoughby Fine Arts Center, so my sister and I used to go with our Dad to rehearsals at Perry High School," she said. "Soon, I began writing down notes of what I thought the students were doing wrong, and I kept sharing my notes with my Dad. One day, I noticed he was correcting his students with my notes. I was thrilled because that meant, I was right."

The influence of her well-known talented family in Lake and Ashtabula Counties has been evident in Godfrey's life, whose own accomplishments in the many aspects of musical theater shine their own light.

Godfrey, 26, of Perry, was hired on July 1, 2011 as the theater coordinator at the Ashtabula Arts Center, 2928 W. 13th St., Ashtabula.

"Kim is a true testimonial of our Ashtabula Art Center youth coming back and we are thrilled to her here," Koski said.

Godfrey graduated from Perry High School in 2004, and is a 2008 graduate of Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music. After graduation, she moved to New York City and lived there until summer of 2009.

"I never thought I would enjoy teaching, but while I was still in high school, Deborah Lowe asked me choreograph "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," and I have been choreographing, teaching and directing somewhere



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

KIMBERLY GODFREY is the theater coordinator for the Ashtabula Arts Center.

since," Godfrey said.

Godfrey's extensive resume at the AAC includes portraying "Urleen" in "Footloose," "Eponine" in "Les Miserables: The School Edition," and "Anita" in "West Side Story," during her high school years. The directing bug bit while attending Perry High School. She was the music director for Rabbit Run Theatre kid's summer camp and shortly after she began choreographing PHS's show choir, according to a press release.

During Godfrey's college years she choreographed at Baldwin-Wal-

lace's Music Theater Talented and Gifted Camp in 2007; performed in "The Phantom of the Opera," "Side Show," and "Company," among many others.

Recently, Godfrey has performed in "The Break-Up Notebook," at the Beck Center, Lakewood; directed Straw Hat productions of "High School Musical," in 2009; "Bye Bye Birdie," in 2010; and "Footloose," in 2011. She directed and choreographed "Forbidden Broadway," 2010; and "Hair-spray," 2011 for AAC's G.B. The-

See CENTER, Page 54

National Registry of Historic Buildings. Inside, the large building houses the center's theater, class rooms, gallery and offices. Outside, the gazebo serves as the stage for a summer concert series with a full view of Lake Erie.

Armeni's goal for consistent growth is to attract young families with instruction opportunities for

children.

"We are always adding new classes and looking for new fundraising events; we have a lot of ideas for next year," she said. "We try to reach out to families more and get kids in here and try to attract people with similar things they might travel out of town for."

The dance department is keeping on its toes while

demonstrating significant growth, lead by Dance Director Tessa (White) Deutsch for the past four years.

"Tessa does just a wonderful job," Armeni said. "She is so creative; her wheels are always turning."

Thanks to Tessa and her staff of three other dance teachers, the center now offers dance lessons six days a week, she said.

The dance department offers classes in ballet, jazz, hip-hop, musical theater dance, tap and ballroom. There are classes available for ages 4 to adult.

For people who want to stay in shape and have fun at the same time, the center will be offering Zumba and gentle Yoga classes, taught by two teachers new to the center: Caitlin Dubsy and Lisa Piasek.

Also in recent years, the center has been producing two theater production a year, directed by Michael Breeze.

"This October will be the 'Return of Frankenstein,' because 'Frankenstein 1930' was such a success,"



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

THE BRAVE
Little Tailor (Eric Slayton) sings the finale during a rehearsal by The Summer Youth Theater actors at the Conneaut Community Center for the Arts on Buffalo Street in Conneaut. From left, the jam peddler (Isabella Cleveland) and the princess (Emma Lamont).

Armeni said.

There are also two children's productions, a summer and a Christmas production.

"We just had 25 children perform in 'The Brave Little Tailor,' directed by Madeleine Plosila. They also wrote and performed their own skits," she said.

The center also offers various arts classes, including painting, woodcarving, creative writing, but will offer two new classes this fall of

beginning quilting by Evelyn Boeson, and quilting by Jessica Kennedy.

"We are always looking for new instructors," Armeni said.

Music lessons are also available taught by Jim Fuller.

Every month the center hosts a different artistic exhibit into their gallery.

Other staff at the Conneaut Community Center for the Arts includes Jennifer Simpson, Louise

LeBlanc and Bonnie Watts.

The center is funded by grants, donations, membership fees and fundraising events. Currently there are 480 members and Armeni said they are ready to welcome new members and volunteers.

"In spite of the present economy, we keep adding things and growing because we have been working really hard to listen to what people want to see here," she said. "Also, we keep our prices reasonable." n

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Best

From Page 52

This October's dinner theater production of "Yesterday," promises to be another huge success as the Oak Room will be transformed into the Stardust Lounge and filled with great

music from the 1960s, served with a five course meal.

Much of the success of the dinner theater is because of the talent the actors display in their performances. Hall and Cantrell hold auditions once a year, usually in February.

"The talent in this area is remarkable," Hall said.

Ideally, Noble Art Entertainment would like to grow to the point of

offering training for actors and technicians.

"Our ultimate goal would be to move into our own facility," Hall said.

"Yesterday" will be performed at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, and 29. For reservations call 440-466-8650 or look online at www.genevalanding.com n

Center

From Page 53

atre productions. For the past two years, Godfrey has been teaching theater classes and individual musical theater lessons at the AAC.

"I loved living in New York, but in

2009, when I realized I could do what I love here, at home, I decided to stay," she said.

"The art center staff is thrilled to have Kim join us," Koski said. "Her enthusiasm and high energy are very contagious."

One of Godfrey's responsibilities is to choose the plays for the theater production schedule.

"I try to find varied groups of shows from different genres and time periods to entertain everyone," she said.

One of Godfrey's goals as theater coordinator is to entice more teens and younger children to get involved in theater.

"More kids will help keep the program growing," she said. n

2011 **PROGRESS** PARKS & RECREATION

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By MARGIE NETZEL n Staff Writer

Ashtabula County is full of parks and playgrounds for fun and recreation

Ashtabula County is full of parks — big parks, state parks, long and narrow parks, parks with playgrounds and parks on the lake.

WALNUT BEACH

The last bars on “In the Mood” bump-bah’ed over hundreds of loyal Big Bands on the Beach, the music enthusiasts enjoying the brassy sound of the Tony Esposito Band at Walnut Beach.

Years ago the grassy patch of land jutting into the sandy beach went virtually unused. Now, once a month all summer long, people bring their lawn chairs and umbrellas to eat ice cream and tap their toes to the music at Big Bands on the Beach.

“The advantage is the natural setting,” concert series organizer Timothy Kalil said.

Kalil said using the park in a new way opens the county’s best places up to new people.

“You see the kids playing in the water and they hear the music and they come sit down on the grass and eat some ice cream and listen to music from the 1940’s. We get people here from across the region to hear these bands and sit on our beach,” he said.

But it isn’t just the saxophones and trombones that make the concerts a success, Kalil said.

“The city of Ashtabula has no money for Big Bands on the Beach, he said. “So every year our volunteer committee must raise funds in order for the event to happen.”

The group also takes donations at each concert.

“The funds in the bank account do not cover all of our expenses, so we must go to individuals and businesses and industries for our tax deductible donations,” he said.

Bringing people to the beach for some music and fun also drives the county’s tourism, he said, though local politicians, business owners and residents need to work harder and cooperate to make the area a success.

“I believe there should be greater cooperation among the tourists spots in the vicinity of Walnut Beach such as the Hubbard House, the Ashtabula Marine Museum, the Finnish Museum, Bridge Street businesses, and Lake Shore Park,” he said. “Hopefully we all can meet in the fall to discuss our schedules so that folks can go from one tourism spot to another on the same day. I believe that touring will help save the area since we have been so hard hit by the economy.”

Kalil said the city has to step up to support the efforts

CONTINUED ON PAGE 56

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

LIGHTS ON the Lake committee members display one of the new lighting displays at Lake Shore Park. (From left) Paul Crease, project manager; Larry Fargo, marketing chairman and Mike Wayman, president pose in front of the new Noah's Ark display.

Ashtabula County's Lights on the Lake showcases park, too

By MARGIE NETZEL

Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA TOWNSHIP —
Let there be light.

Lights on the Lake, that is.

Ashtabula County's Lights on the Lake committee is changing the

way people see Lake Shore Park, the way people see Ashtabula County, and the lighting, too.

“Lights on the Lake is about families,” president Rick Coblitz said. “It is about bringing people to our beautiful park in this beautiful county and showing off everything our area has to offer.”

Coblitz said he is convinced Lake Shore Park is putting Ashtabula's best foot forward for tourists and residents alike.

“There aren't a whole lot of winter activities, especially for families,” he said. “We don't want people to stop coming to the county

See **LIGHTS**, Page 62

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



MARGIE NETZEL / Star Beacon

THE HARPERSFIELD COVERED BRIDGE gets a few new "friends" in the Friends of the Harpersfield Covered Bridge Metropark. The group holds events at the bridge and surrounding park to raise awareness and funds to maintain the outdoor space. Pictured in front of the bridge (front row from left) Marsha Vandervort, Denise Weinmann, Janie Sibell. (Rear, from left) Ed Dempshar, Dave Pierce, Jim Pristov and Rhonda McElroy.

Group keeps historic bridge and park in good order

By MARGIE NETZEL
Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

HARPERSFIELD TOWNSHIP — Denise Weinmann takes her 4-year-old son Evan's hand as they walk across the century-old wood of the Harpersfield Covered Bridge.

Evan is mostly interested in the water underneath his feet, the fish in the water and the dam pushing that water and those fish down the Grand River.

But Denise is looking with a critical eye — there is litter on the south bank, someone needs to clean the bathrooms, the pavilion needs a new roof and there is some standing water underneath the tree.

Weinmann is the president of the Friends of the Harpersfield Covered Bridge Metropark. The "Friends" group are local volunteers who have come together to protect the historic bridge and park from vandalism and lack of funding for care and maintenance and

improvements. The group raises funds through sponsorships and fundraising events.

They were united several years ago when vandals spraypainted signs, trees and the covered bridge, causing thousands of dollars in damage. Because the Ashtabula County MetroParks board didn't have the money to fund the cleanup, the group stepped forward to remove the graffiti.

Since then, the group has taken
See GROUP, Page 62

of local folks, as well.

"I believe our tourism will help save this area if only folks would understand that the economy and tourism are inextricably linked and have a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship. I hope the city continues the concerts each year," he said. "My advice for our politicians, businesses, and citizens is please be aware that we exist and that we are an important of this community and the economy."

LAKE SHORE PARK

The geese and ducks and a few graceful swans live in relative harmony at Lake Shore Park in Ashtabula Township.

The fowl attract visitors of all ages during most of the year — when the weather isn't so brutally cold — but even the sledriders who take advantage of the park's hills and dales stop to toss some feed to the ducks.

Under the direction of the Ashtabula Township Park Commission, which also oversees Indian Trails Park, Lake Shore Park is one of the most popular parks in Ashtabula County.

Located just east of the northern end of Route 11, Lake Shore Park is a place for runners, bikers, motorcycle riders, weddings, sled riding and duck feeding.

A fenced in playground is available for children to enjoy. Horseshoe pits and volleyball courts are available, and local teams play at the bocce courts. A classic car show is held every Sunday throughout the summer. An 18-hole disc golf course can be used year-round and a large, life-guarded beach is crowded and busy through most of the summer. Five pavilions are available for rent and use, all with views of the lake. The waterfowl pond is home to the beautiful white mute swans and other feathered friends who stop for a visit. A pair of peacocks are also residents of the park.

A public boat launch, accessed right on the shore, is available for the anglers, pleasure boaters and jet skiers. A bait shop sells all the goods for a fishing trip.

Though the county's most popular park is usually well-attended no matter the weather, many events are also held there.

The annual Easter Egg Hunt, where hundreds of local children scramble for candy-filled eggs is always a favorite event. The annual Rib Burn Off, always held the third weekend of September, brings thousands of people to the area.

The biggest — and last — event of the year at Lake Shore Park is Ashtabula County's Lights on the Lake.

The Ashtabula County's Lights on the Lake committee, a non-profit group, organizes, sets up and plugs in dozens of huge holiday light displays along the winding road of Lake Shore Park.

The Lights on the Lake Committee reinvests its earnings in more displays after paying the overhead of insurance, electricity bills, marketing and supplies. The cost to drive through the display remains \$5 per vehicle.

"Lake Shore Park is the perfect setting for Lights on the Lake," said Rick Coblitz, president of Lights on the Lake.

"We think the park is very nice," he said. "For us, it is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 59



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

GEORGE JOHNSON, of Ashtabula, gets in a bit of wind surfing at Lake Shore Park in Ashtabula Township.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

ALEX JONES, 4, of Conneaut, propels a ride near at Conneaut Township Park on Lake Erie in Conneaut.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

THE ASHTABULA lighthouse is a poplar sight for tourists to photograph during their visit to Ashtabula County.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

PEYTON BROWN, 6, of Aurora throws a handful of stones into the air while staying cool in Lake Erie at Conneaut Township Park Beach.



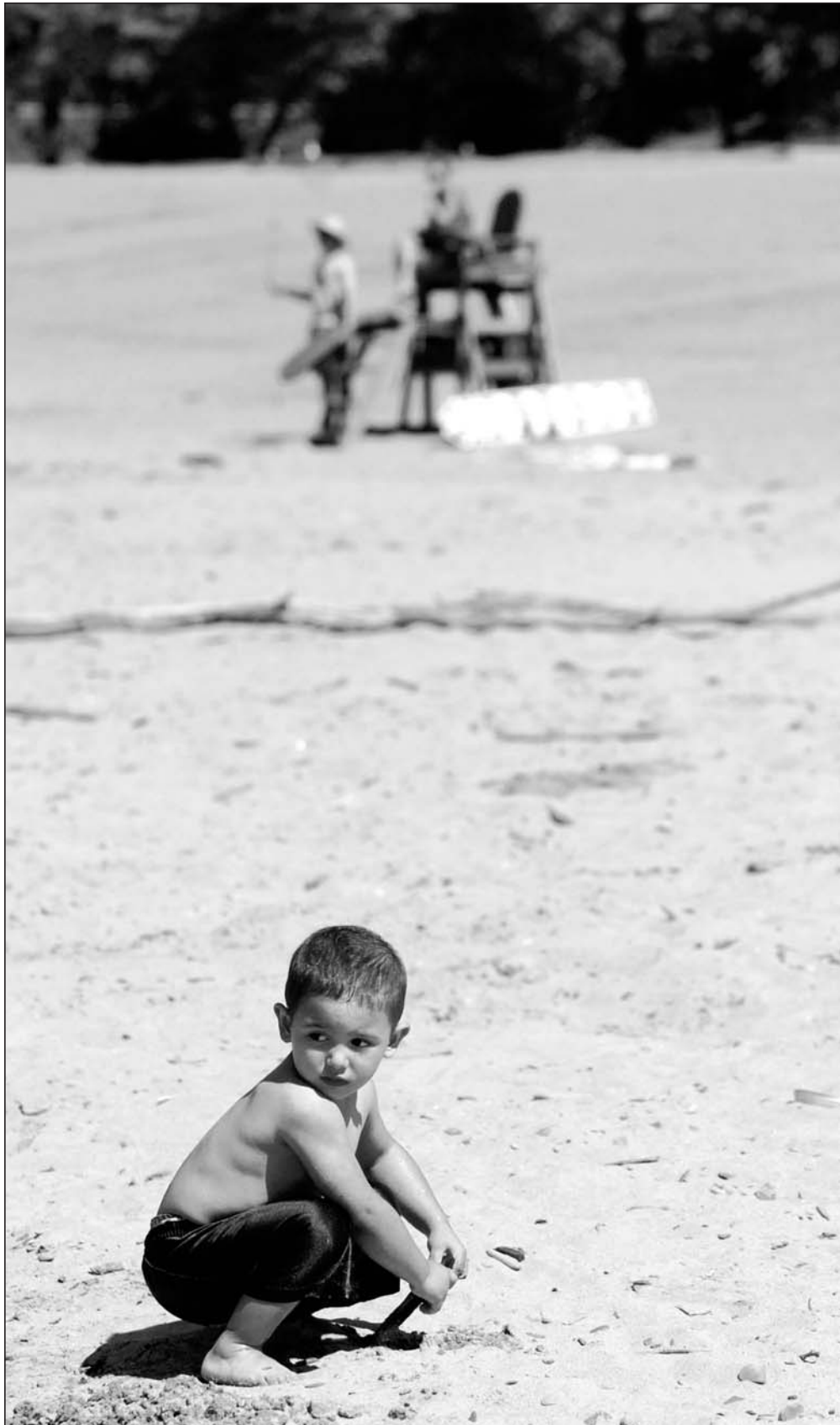
BILL WEST / Star Beacon

LIFEGUARDS ROBBY Jenks of Geneva and Caitlin Moore of Orwell are ready provide aid in a moment's notice to swimmers in the waters of Lake Erie at Lake Shore Park in Ashtabula Township.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

MARLENE WHITE and Stewart White of Youngstown stay calm, cool along the Lake Erie shoreline a Conneaut Township Park Beach in Conneaut.



KAMDEN WADE, 2, of Ashtabula, looks back to the waters of Lake Erie as he plays on the beach at Lake Shore Park in Ashtabula Township.

BILL WEST / Star Beacon

a very nice layout because of the rolling hills.”

But beyond the wow and awe of the thousands and thousands of holiday lights is the drive to bring more people to Lake Shore Park and Ashtabula County.

“We work hard to try to expose people to Lake Shore Park, people who aren’t familiar with it,” Coblitz said. “Maybe they will say ‘Hey, I should come for the rib burn off or to visit in the summer.’ Part of the idea is to help build the park up with interest and with infrastructure. We put a lot of infrastructure into this park in the way of underground electrical wiring that can be used year-round.”

INDIAN TRAILS PARK

Also under the wing of the Ashtabula Township Park Commission is Indian Trails Park. This 405-acre park includes four miles of primitive hiking trails along the scenic Ashtabula River and improved trail where rare plant species and wildlife can be sighted.

Steelhead fishermen love the angling at Indian Trails Park, which also leads to the Smolen Gulf Bridge, which is the longest covered bridge in the nation.

GENEVA TOWNSHIP PARK

Allison Lehr’s voice rose above the crowd at Geneva Township Park, where weekly summer concerts are a tradition. But high winds and a fierce spring storm ripped through the park early this year, tearing apart structures and dropping trees and limbs on the soggy ground.

But cleanup and reconstruction brought the park back to life and use, as does a new park board to oversee the “under-utilized” park, Ashtabula County Court of Common Pleas administrator Marianne Sezon said.

The park, which includes picnic shelters and tables playground equipment, trails, a sand volleyball court and a baseball field, is located within Geneva-on-the-Lake, but belongs to Geneva Township.

“The park is definitely under-utilized,” she said. “There could be a lot of exciting things there; a food stand, a boat launch, and better playground equipment.”

The park isn’t without natural beauty. Perched just above the shore of Lake Erie, Geneva Township Park has a 1,050-foot shore. Depending on water

levels, a sand beach is often accessible. Paved paths from the parking lot lead to a handicapped-accessible wooden ramp which zigzags through natural-growth vegetation down the low bluff to a seawall. Fishing is allowed off the paved seawall.

Benches overlooking Lake Erie are along the south side of a mulch path at the top of the bluff. The eastern portion of the park is partially shaded by trees while the west is an open mowed-grass field. Newly renovated pavilions, thanks to the storm, give Geneva Township Park picnic shelters and tables. Playground equipment, trails, an upland sand volleyball court and a baseball field are available for use.

Geneva Township Park is open from 9 a.m. to dusk, May through September.

HARPERSFIELD COVERED BRIDGE METROPARK

There’s a lot to do around the old wooden planks of the Harpersfield Covered Bridge. Fishermen bring their poles to their favorite fishing spot, there are plenty of places for a picnic or a walk. The water is bath-warm in late August and just ankle deep in places, perfect for wading.

A piece of county and state history — the Harpersfield Covered Bridge is the iconic picture of Ashtabula County, Harpersfield Township Trustee Jim Pristov said.

“When people think of Ashtabula County, they think of Geneva-on-the-Lake, of wineries and grapes and they think of this old wooden covered bridge. The Harpersfield Covered Bridge is so much more than a way across the Grand River. It is the very essence of our township, our county and our region.”

The Harpersfield Covered Bridge Metropark is the most recognized park in the Geneva area, Metroparks board president Charlie Kohli said. Located on Harpersfield Road at the Grand River dam, fishermen angle for trout in the spring and fall; and bluegill, crappie, and large and smallmouth bass nearly every day the weather permits.

The park features public picnic areas and pavilions on both sides of the river, recreational fields, and public restrooms. The independently operated Bait Shop by the north parking lot provides hunting and fishing licenses,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 61



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

CASSANDRA GARCIA, 11, achieves air time thanks to the efforts of Carolyn Garcia, 13, right, and Caleb Garcia, 14, at the Lake Shore Park beach in Ashtabula Township. The Garcias are from Ashtabula.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

A PEACOCK does his best to impress a hen at Lake Shore Park in Ashtabula Township. Sydney Heider, 19 months, of Pittsburgh, Pa., returns to the beach with a handful of sand at the Pymatuning State Park beach in Andover.

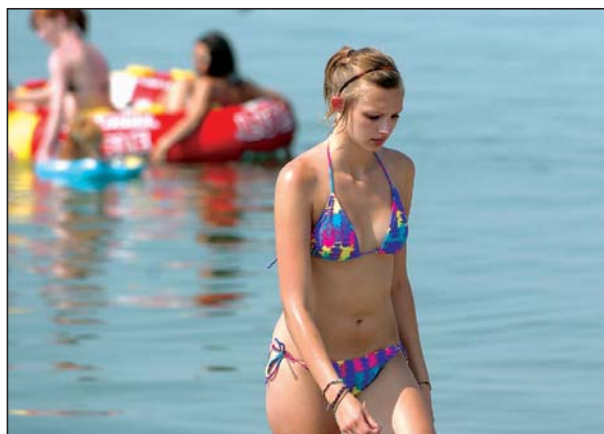


BILL WEST / Star Beacon



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

EMILEE EDWARDS, 8, of Madison, beats the heat at Breakwater Beach at Geneva State Park.



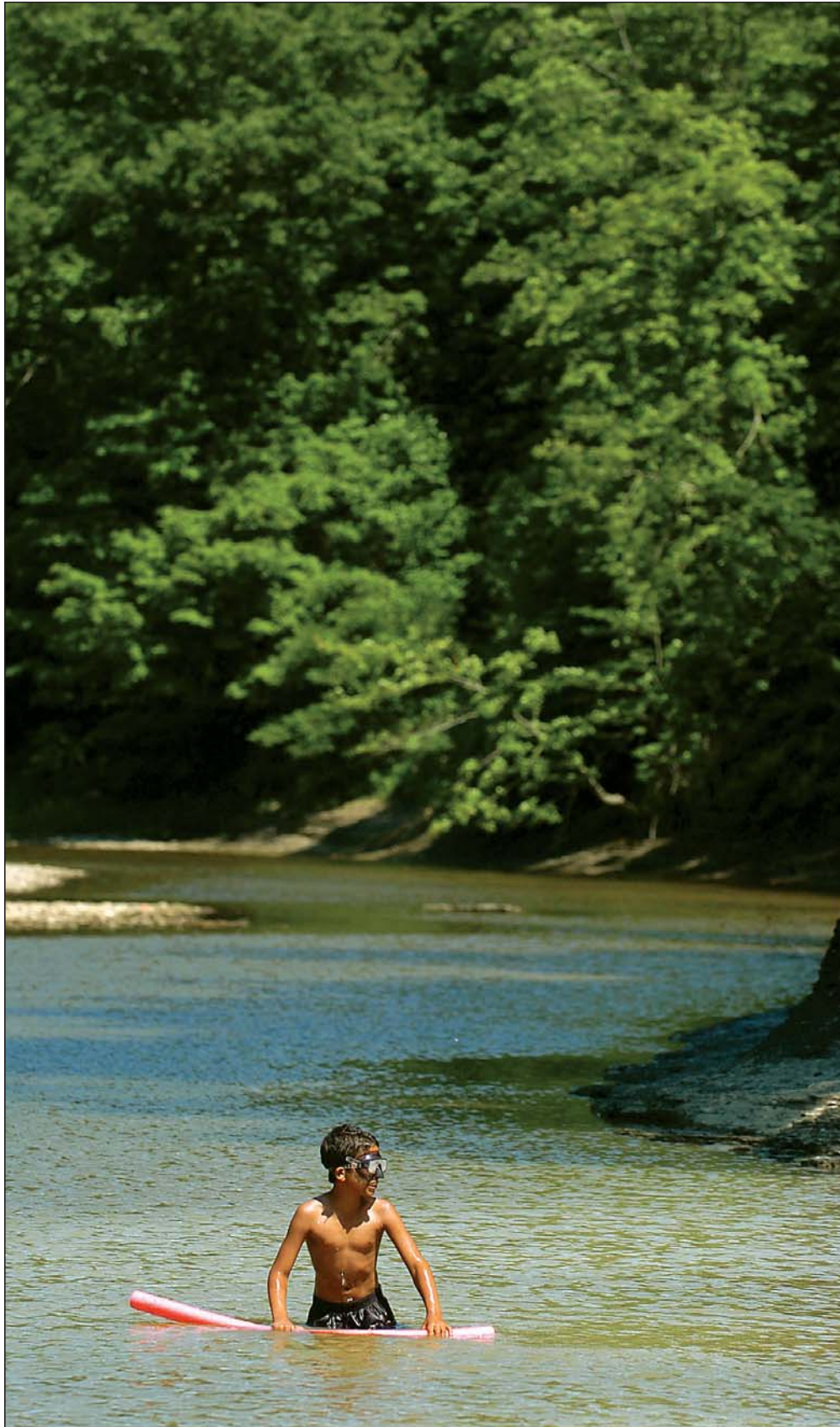
BILL WEST / Star Beacon

ABBIE SCHLICK of Conneaut stays cool strolling on the beach at the Conneaut Township Park.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

A BEAUTIFUL sunset graces the shores of Lake Erie at Sunset Park in North Kingsville.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

TIVON CLARK, 9, of Ashtabula, explores his surroundings on the Ashtabula River at Indian Trails Park in Ashtabula Township.

bait, and refreshments. The park is open to the public every day during from early spring until the Covered Bridge Festival in October.

SAYBROOK TOWNSHIP PARK

The congregation of Messiah Lutheran Church left the hallowed walls of the church on Station Avenue in August to take communion and worship by the lake.

This summer service, including potluck lunch, was held at Saybrook Township Park and the day didn't go without some rain and some natural wonders.

Pastor Michael Meranda was in the middle of the offertory when a water spout danced across the surface of the lake, giving a show to the gaping congregation.

The 7.6-acre Saybrook Township Park is on Rt. 531, just east of the Russell Road intersection and west of the Mill Run Court intersection in Saybrook Township.

The day-use park has two large picnic shelters, complete with wind guards for those strong off-lake gusts, and a concession stand. The northern part of the park is shaded by trees and has a large playground area — appropriate for most ages — in the center. A line of benches overlooking Lake Erie are plotted along a wooden split-rail fence.

There is no beach access at Saybrook Township Park. In fact, thick vegetation and a well-placed line of trees cover the steep bluff to the shore. Access beyond the split-rail fence is prohibited.

Parking is available along the park's access road, which loops around the park. The park has basketball and sand volleyball courts, an open mowed-grass green space and a baseball field.

The park is open dawn to dusk and year round, weather permitting.

CONNEAUT TOWNSHIP PARK

Burn, baby, burn.

Conneaut Township Park is the home of the Conneaut Rib Burn-Off, where local rib chefs and chili cooks will flock to the lake front to see who's got the right sauce, the best rub and the tastiest meat.

A fundraiser for the Conneaut Human Resources Center, the event

draws thousands of people and hundreds of families.

The event showcases improvements at the park, including a custom-built stage designed and built by inmates at the Lake Erie Correctional Institution from materials purchased by the Conneaut Township Park commissioners. The stage's design allows it to be disassembled and stored for future use.

The nearly 60-acre Conneaut Township Park is on land north of Rt. 531 from the Fairview Drive intersection east to Wrights Avenue. The park has ample parking lots, including lots off of the Chestnut Street extension.

About half of the park is made of sand from Conneaut Harbor's west breakwater. The harbor's southern breakwater marks the east side of the beach, and sand covers all but the northern 600 feet of the breakwater, which is used for fishing access.

There is plenty of beach at Conneaut Township Park — thousands of feet of walkable sand — accented by a series of wooden boardwalks known as the Conneaut Township Park Boardwalk, which connects parking areas to the beach and shore.

Sand dunes dot the landscape near the mouth of a small Lake Erie tributary crosses the middle of the beach. A wooden foot-bridge crosses the tributary.

Feeling tired? Take a rest on the benches overlooking Lake Erie, which showcase views of the harbor and Conneaut Harbor West Breakwater Lighthouse.

Conneaut Township Park includes picnic facilities, playground equipment, a concession stand, athletic fields and courts and a gazebo.

THE ASHTABULA COUNTY METROPARKS

The numbers just don't add up for Charlie Kohli.

President of the Ashtabula County MetroParks Board, Kohli struggles to keep the grass cut, the buildings maintained and the parks visitor ready through most of the year.

The most popular of those parks is a long ribbon of trail — the Western Reserve Greenway Trail. This 43-mile-long trail (27 miles in Ashtabula County) begins next to West Avenue across from the ODOT garage in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 63

Group

From Page 56

the use of the park to heart. The fundraising events have turned into must-attend family outings for locals and tourists, Weinmann said, pulling people into Ashtabula County with the charm of the old covered bridge.

“We sort of realized that the key to changing how people treat the park is in changing how people view it,” she said. “Do they view it as a place to dump trash, or a place to bring their kids and go fishing? Do people view the park as something to drive through or a place for car shows and pet shows and family fun days?”

“Friend” and Harpersfield Township Trustee Ed Dempshar said lack of funding makes the group necessary.

“The metropark just simply does not have the money to maintain this park,” he said. “We have a volunteer who comes out here three to four days a week to mow the grass — he uses his own gas, his own mower and he donates his time. If he didn’t do it, the grass may not get cut.”

The park, which is overseen by the Ashtabula County Metroparks board and funded through the Ashtabula County commissioners, has fallen through the cracks, the Harpersfield Township trustees said.

Metroparks board member Charlie Kohli said the parks board is glad to have the help, and has asked the township trustees to take over mowing the grass at the park.

“With the county’s budget issues our budget dropped from \$30,000 to \$20,000, which is significant for the parks,” he



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

MISSY ROHM, of Ashtabula, walks with her daughter Avery, 5, (left) and Katrina Weber, 6, of Jefferson during a visit to the Harpersfield Metropark.

said.

The Ashtabula County Metroparks general fund provides maintenance and development at four parks, Kohli said, including the Western Reserve Greenway Trail.

The movement is catching on. Girl Scout Bonnie Brandt recently revamped 10 picnic tables at the park. Boy Scout Matt Pekar built a fire pit and seating. Young Girl Scouts plant and maintain flowers at the park and local businesses have donated

resources and money to further improvement projects, Dempshar said.

“Since we started the friends group, we have Young Marines out to help and the 4-H kids put in their time and everyone gets involved,” he said.

Friends member Rhonda McElroy said Ashtabula County is a destination and the bridge is a gateway.

“It is so great to bring people into the park with events and send them out to the

rest of the county. We know that someone from Lake or Cuyahoga or Geauga county that comes here for one of our events will stop at a restaurant or go to Geneva-on-the-Lake and spend their dollars in our community. The parks have that sort of influence if only people are willing to work at it.”

Future projects, which need funding and volunteers, include new playground equipment, the purchase of a mower and tractor and a new roof on an old pavilion.

To fund these improvements and to get people coming to the park, the friends hold several events and fundraisers throughout the year. In May, the group hosts a park cleanup day to clear brush and leaves from the grounds. A car show, the Music By the River festival, the Christmas celebration, and a dog walk fill out the yearly schedule. In 2011, the group held the first Harpers Field Day, a day of family fun along the river. To see photos of the first Harpers Field Day, visit <http://friendsofthecoveredbridgepark.shutterfly.com>.

To raise more funds, the group held a “dinner by the river” raffle. The winner won a surf and turf dinner on the river — right in the middle of the sand bar — for 10 people.

Money donations for holiday lights and decorations, to keep the park clean, and for landscaping needs can be sent to Friends of the Parks, Ashtabula County Metropark, Attention: Harpersfield Bridge, 25 W. Jefferson St., Jefferson, 44047, or to Harpersfield Hall, 4858 Cork-Cold Springs Road, Harpersfield.

For more information email friendsofthecoveredbridge@gmail.com or call (645-5059). n

Lights

From Page 55

just because of the snow. Ashtabula has things to do and see all year round. So we see so many families go through the display because this is a family event. Lights on the Lake is becoming a real tradition for local and not-so-local families.”

Coblitz said the volunteers at the holiday light display see many out-of-state license plates and take notice when someone says they are from Youngstown, Cleveland,

Erie or Lake County.

Coblitz said 15,000 to 20,000 people drive through Lights on the Lake each year.

All the money earned at the light show is reinvested in the park and furthers the display, he said.

“We are still working on some new attractions,” he said. “We are always working on the attractions. One of the main things we are doing is switching things to LED light bulbs. We did an experiment with the LED’s last year and it went really well. We are also making some minor changes on other displays, adding to them and moving things

around.”

Admission to Lights on the Lake is \$5 per car, which makes the show popular for families.

“They just load up in the car and come down to see the lights,” he said. “It is an affordable family outing.”

Lights on the Lake is open from Nov. 25 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday through Jan. 1. The display is open on holidays (Christmas, Christmas Eve, New Year’s Eve) from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Advance sale tickets can be purchased, six for \$25 at retail store locations throughout the county.

“This is park use at its best,” Coblitz

said. “We are taking space that isn’t really used in the winter nights and working to promote our county and our city at the same time. This is the only holiday light show I know of that is right on the lake.”

Support is the crux of this effort, he said. “Certainly without the support of the community, we would not be here,” he said, “but we are also trying to give back to the community. This was started in the first place to give something back to the people of Ashtabula.

For more information on Ashtabula County’s Lights on the Lake, visit www.aclotl.com. n

Ashtabula and ends south below Orwell. From there, the trail continues to Champion, just north of Warren.

The Western Reserve Greenway is the former PennCentral right-of-way. The Ashtabula County MetroParks has a 15-year lease agreement for the right of way with the state, which owns the land. The lease authorizes construction of the Western Reserve Greenway on the Ashtabula portion of the old railroad tracks.

Kohli said the metroparks board struggles with diminished funding, which severely limits grants and federal funding applications and further inhibits the growth and promotion of the county's metroparks.

Volunteers make the parks possible, Kohli said.

"The metroparks would not be possible without countless hours from tireless volunteers who do everything from weeding to grass cutting to planting and cleaning up debris to fundraising," he said. "The Greenway rangers spend hours patrolling the trail, keeping order and making note of problems or issues as they arise."

Volunteers include Ashtabula County Volunteer Bike Patrol, Friends of the Metroparks, Ashtabula County Parks Foundation, Ashtabula County Metropark board members and the Grand River Trail Riders.

Because the trail construction is federally funded, motorized vehicles are prohibited except for motorized wheelchairs and maintenance vehicles. However, as a result of the same law, snowmobiles are allowed on the trail when weather conditions permit.

Improvements to the trail include the parking lot on Woodman Avenue where the trail crosses at street level. The land was donated by the Herzog family and the Ashtabula Rotary Club funded the project. A restored 1897 King Bridge was also installed at the Clay Street crossing. This bridge, built with steel from one of Andrew Carnegie's steel mills, is the only one that has been restored and put to use.

Once the Western Reserve Greenway is fully developed, it will tie into a nationwide network of hiking and biking trails, Kohli said.

STATE PARKS

Geneva and Pymatuning state parks offer a variety of amenities and fun activities, Geneva State Park, director Mike Blake-man said, especially when the marina opens in the spring.

Geneva State Park offers camping, fish-



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

DONALD FRANKOWSKI, of Milwaukee, rides his bike on the Greenway Trail in Austinburg Township.

ing, boating, canoeing and a guarded swimming beach. In winter, visitors enjoy snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and ice fishing. A six-lane boat ramp provides access to Lake Erie's central basin. The marina includes a canteen and concession area, which supplies gasoline, boating essentials and bait. The marina includes 383 rental docks.

Visitors to Geneva State Park can choose from camping, lakefront cedar cabins, or rooms at the Lodge and Conference Center at Geneva-on-the-Lake. The lodge features beautiful views of Lake Erie and offers 109 guest rooms, a full-service restaurant, and conference facilities as well as an indoor swimming pool and hot tub, fitness center, game room and bike rentals.

The facilities are also available for weddings and other events.

At Pymatuning State Park, located in Andover, is part old swamp forest and water recreation area. Considered one of the finest walleye and muskellunge lakes in the country, Pymatuning offers camping, swimming and boating. With 3,512

land acres and 1,407 water acres, Pymatuning State Park is a popular place for fishing, hunting, hiking, picnicking outdoors and in picnic shelters, and swimming on the 350 foot beach. The park includes a nature center with summer nature programs. With five boat launch ramps and 360 rental docks, Pymatuning State Park is a popular place to boat and fish in the summer and in the winter, with ice fishing, ice boating, ice skating and cross country skiing available.

The park includes 26 family cottages, 32 standard cottages and one premium cottage. These lakefront accommodations include 331 electric and 21 non-electric campsites, 18 seasonal campsites, 18 full-service campsites and a campground beach. These camping amenities are pet friendly and include showers, flush toilets, a dump station, laundry services and a camp commissary.

The 26 family cottages sleep six people and are heated for year-round use. 32 standard cottages are available May 1 to Nov. 1 each year and sleep four people. The premium cottage also includes dishwasher,

wood deck with gas grill, central air and a three-person spa. Family cottages include gas fireplaces and microwave ovens. All cottages are furnished with cable TV, outside grill, fire ring, linens, towels, and cooking and eating utensils.

Pymatuning Lake is famous for its wall-eye fishing and has the reputation of being one of the best fishing lakes in the state, the park reports. Anglers will also find good catches of crappie, black bass, bluegill and channel catfish.

Visitors to Pymatuning State Park are often told to "take a hike" on the park's two of well-marked trails. The 350-foot swimming beach is located just south of the causeway. The beach includes a bathhouse, showers, vending machines, and a volleyball court.

The ducks walk on the fish at the Pymatuning Spillway where each year thousands of visitors stop to feed bread to the ducks and carp. The wildlife crowds together and the ducks actually stand on the carp to get a share of the food. n

2011 **PROGRESS** EDUCATION

ASHTABULA COUNTY

By MARK TODD n Staff Writer

School districts deal with tight budgets, new state initiatives

Serious money concerns coupled with state compliance programs have made the job of educating Ashtabula County's public school students a lot tougher the past 12 years.

State funding cuts, coupled with reductions – or the outright loss – of government grants has hamstrung districts at the same when education overseers in Columbus are demanding better scores and improved performance.

Despite the money woes, districts aren't standing still. Personnel has changed, programs have been launched and new buildings have risen – or are rising in districts such as Ashtabula and Geneva. Some buildings have closed, too.

Over the past months, districts have been making cuts to stay afloat financially. Some services have been dropped – or, in the case of some extracurricular activities, given a price tag – but those moves only can go so far. For the average district, people are main expense, their wages and benefits comprising more than 80 percent of an annual budget.

Districts have responded by reducing numbers through attrition and retirement rather than lay-offs. In the Grand Valley Local Schools district, upwards of nine teachers haven't been replaced upon departure, along with seven support staff, said Superintendent Bill Nye.

Busing has also been revamped and a wood shop course has been chopped, Nye said.

Is one of a handful of districts who will ask voters for help this fall. Support at the polls will head off additional cuts, Nye said.

"We're trying to keep what we have," he said. "We're struggling."

Geneva will be seeking \$1.7 million for operations. "We are facing a deficit in funding for general operation," said Kevin Lillie, treasurer. "We have gone 18 years without any additional operating money."

Districts across Ohio find themselves in the same predicament, said Patrick Galloway, spokesperson for the Ohio Department of Education. "Some districts are resorting to levies," he said.

Others are experimenting to reduce costs. Partnerships with neighboring districts, even municipalities, to trim expenses are being explored, Galloway said. That's a concept endorsed by the ODE, he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

NEW CLASSROOMS and labs are being constructed at A-Tech in Jefferson Township.

More than a new name, A-Tech provides the formula for individual success

By **ELLEN KOLMAN**

Staff Writer

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JEFFERSON TOWNSHIP — The Ashtabula County Joint Vocational School has a new name to match its vision for its students in today's world.

The new name, Ashtabula County Technical and Career Campus (A-Tech), reflects the full range of

students served, plus the quality educational options available.

"We realized our name did not portray the exciting career education options we provide," said Superintendent Jerome Brockway. "We are not just a vocational school, and we have not been for years."

"Our students were hampered as they faced prospective employers and colleges who wondered what a

joint vocational school is. There are only a handful of schools in the country still using 'joint vocational' as part of their names," he said.

Brockway said in choosing a name that best represents the mission of the school as well as one that is fresh and modern, they consulted focus groups of area businesses and industries, as well as

See A-TECH, Page 67



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

JAMIE TIMONERE (left), a fast forward teacher at the Ashtabula Area City Schools, helps students to class during the first day of school at Ontario Elementary School.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

BOBBI NELSON (right) poses with her granddaughter Marissa Bisbee during the first day of school at Huron Elementary School in Ashtabula.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

PARENTS WAIT as their children board a school bus on Main Avenue on the first day of school in the Ashtabula Area City Schools.

"(State schools superintendent) Stan Heffner is advocating districts sharing services with other districts," Galloway said. "Districts are becoming more resourceful."

Districts are also still absorbing the full impact of Gov. John Kasich's budget, which was signed into law on June 30. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education advocate, spelled out some of the changes in Ohio public education in an analysis published last month.

The budget contains money to fund Common Core standards that are a part of the Race to the Top program, a state-based initiative.

Districts have a financial reason to boost their performance, per the new budget. All schools will be ranked, and schools that fall into the bottom five percent for three straight years will be subject to a severe shake-up, according to the Institute.

On the other hand, districts that shine academically and financially will be recognized by the state. Innovative programs will also earn attention.

The budget also holds educators responsible by obliging districts to evaluate teachers in four categories — accomplished, proficient, developing and ineffective — by July 2013. Districts have a lot of latitude regarding implementation of the teacher exam, according to the Institute.

Earlier this month, the state board of education said it was preparing a plan that would evaluate teachers. There's a chance the plan could be rolled

out on a trial basis in a few dozen districts — possibly later this year. The budget doesn't address every educational concern, according to the analysis. The shared services Galloway mentions will be laid out to a degree in a state plan that scheduled to be unveiled next year that could suggest ways for districts to merge some services, including transportation, food services — even treasurers and human resources staff.

n

Below Star Beacon staffers take a district-by-district look at some of the changes in programs and personnel the county's public schools experienced over the past year:

ASHTABULA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

Three of five new elementary schools on Wade Avenue opened Aug. 29, part of the school district's \$42.8 million campus-style Ashtabula Lakeside Elementary Campus. The new three schools are the lower elementary grade schools. The other two schools, serving grades 4-6, will open next year.

Each school will house about 450 students. The campus was funded through an agreement with the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC).

While the campus approach to education has detractors who favor the neighborhood-school concept, the new style will make operation more streamlined and improve transportation, school

CONTINUED ON PAGE 69



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

PAIGE MURPHY (left) a senior from Pymatuning Valley, works on Katelynn Beattie, a senior from Jefferson, at the new cosmetology classrooms at A-Tech in Jefferson Township.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

RENEE BOOTH, a senior from Lakeside, works on Rosanne Fier, a senior from Ledgemont, in the new cosmetology classrooms at A-Tech in Jefferson Township.

A-Tech

From Page 64

students and staff from the school.

A-Tech prepares high school students for an ever-widening list of technical careers and college; and adults needing to update or develop their job skills.

"We are the only school in the county that educates high school students and adults," he said.

A-Tech has upgraded much more than just their name and logo. The school has made technological improvements, the Cosmetology program lab facilities has received an up-Do, and the campus will soon be sporting a new building.

The Vocational Readiness Program and the Buildings and Grounds Maintenance program will be housed in a 12,540 square-foot, state-of-the-art building at a cost of \$1.8 million.

The building, which is in its final stages of construction, boasts two classrooms with a loft for storage and a high bay lab area.

The Vocational Readiness Program is designed for students that are at least 16 years old, have attempted 9th grade, and have credit deficiencies. The program is one-year in length and is designed to prepare students to enter a two-year career and technical program upon completion, according to www.atech.edu.

"Our Building and Grounds Maintenance program was in a regular classroom and was in need of adequate lab space,"

said Mike Candela, secondary administrator. "The building has all the technology in place you would find in a modern day classroom with the flexible floor space needed to accommodate class sizes."

The building was paid for through permanent improvement money that was set aside over the past 20 years, Brockway said.

Every program at A-Tech has an advisory committee from people within the community who work in that industry and provide recommendations of what their operating standards are to provide the equipment and technology needed to teach the programs successfully, he said.

A-Tech has experienced major technology upgrades, campus wide, over the past two years including providing "a fiber back bone" for the fastest available computer technology.

"We have virtual servers to meet all of the students needs that are continually backed up or saved so none of our operations (students or staff) are lost," Candela said. "We have a total of 600 computers on campus and they have all been upgraded."

There is also a centralized storage system, so it does not matter what computer a student sits at, they can log on and continue a project or do research from any computer on campus, he said.

Internally, the campus has experienced a cost-saving comfort upgrade. The buildings all have new thermostat sensors, replacing a 30-year-old system that left some areas hot while other areas were cold.

"This summer we put in 160 new controls and 25,000-feet of

new cable; this is an efficient, cost-saving computerized system," said Keith Biber, business manager.

Also, new this fall, the Cosmetology program lab facilities boasts 40 new salon stations, 10 new hair washing stations, four pedicure units complete with sinks, four facial stations and new teacher carousels.

The Cosmetology program, like many of the programs at A-Tech, provides training for high school students and adults.

"We are thrilled to be able to have this beautiful new lab. Our students will benefit from having the newest equipment available," said Tina Teter, adult cosmetology instructor.

More than a new name, A-Tech provides the formula for individual success.

"Forty-seven percent of our high school students go on to some type of post-secondary education. As we continue to move forward, we will be offering 21 credits to graduate like any high school by 2014," Brockway said.

With the future in mind, A-Tech, in the next several years will expand into other medical programs like pharmacology. In the mean-time, A-Tech will continue to prepare their 1,200 high school students and 600 adult students.

There are 22 career technical programs for high school students to choose from and 11 satellite programs in all of A-Tech's participating high school systems.

"The community needs to know how important student success is to us and we have the tools here for our students to be successful," Candela said.

For more information on A-Tech, look online at www.atech.edu or call 440-576-6015. n

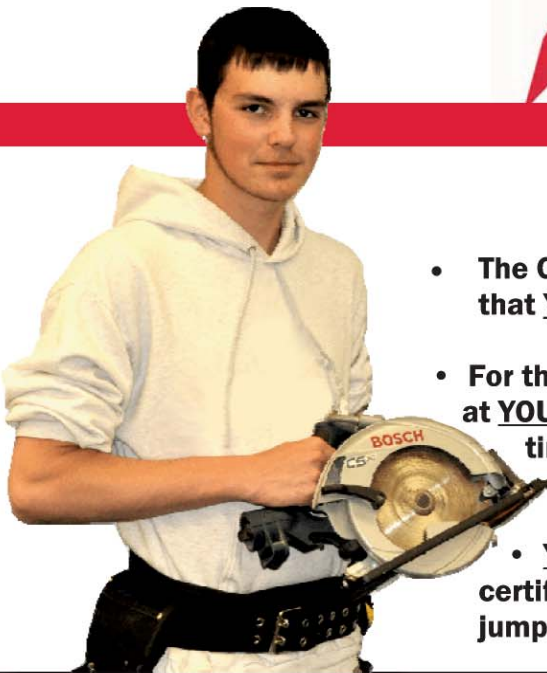
1565 State Route 167,
Jefferson, OH 44047
440-576-6015 . WWW.ATECH.EDU



A-Tech students (left to right) Zachary Grien, Carpentry 2; Molly Hayner, Culinary Arts 2 and Amarilys Maldonado, Early Childhood Education 2.

DID YOU KNOW...

- The Ohio Department of Education reports that **YOUR A-Tech** has a 99.2% graduation rate.
- For the past five years Cosmetology students at **YOUR A-Tech** have maintained a 98% first time pass rate on their State Cosmetology Board Exam.
- **YOUR A-Tech** offers 62 industrial certifications across 21 programs that can jump start your career.
- **YOUR A-Tech** has agreements with 6 universities, colleges, and technical schools that allow you to earn college credit while still in high school.
- During the 2010/2011 school year **YOUR A-Tech** had 1,255 high school students enrolled in either on-campus programs or satellite programs.
- By 2013 all of **YOUR A-Tech** programs will be **TECH PREP!** This means students could earn college credits while in high school.



The Ashtabula County Technical & Career Center Board of Education and staff are dedicated to providing equal employment opportunities without regard to sex, race, creed, national origin, religion, age, pregnancy, handicap or disability.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

MARK BREWSTER, technical coordinator at Grand Valley Elementary School, works on a computer with Mariah Riffett during the first day of school at Grand Valley Elementary School.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

EVAN MCNICHOLAS (left) and Kayla Smith (right) listen during Spanish II class during the first day of school at Jefferson High School.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

GABI HAMRICK, a first grader at Michigan Elementary School, relaxes during the first day of school at the Ashtabula Area City Schools elementary complex.

officials have said.

District employees agreed to forgo pay raises this school year to help the district meet its budget, Superintendent Joseph Donatone said. This makes three years in a row that the teachers have forgone pay raises. Pay raises given to longer-serving employees will be frozen for six months.

Every worker in the district also agreed to work a day without pay. The initiatives will help the district end the 2011-2012 year in the black, Donatone said.

The school board established a student activity fee to reduce the cost to the general fund of operating extracurricular activities. These fees generate about \$80,000 per year to help cover the total cost of the extracurricular programs, which is about \$614,158 per year, Colucci said.

Donald Rapose began his duties as the principal of Lakeside High School on Aug. 1, replacing former principal Sylvia Atkinson, who retired.

BUCKEYE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Buckeye Local Schools faced a challenging year fiscally, but also marked the achievement of being an "excellent" district for the first time.

Faced with declining enrollment and cuts in state revenue, the board of education voted earlier this year to close North Kingsville Elementary School at the end of the school year.

The closing necessitated a reshuffling of resources. The majority of the North Kingsville students were absorbed by Kingsville Elementary. Ridgeview Elementary's population also grew as a result of the closing. Further, both elementary schools became K-5 buildings and sixth-graders are attending Braden Junior High School this year.

The district's buildings situation has been center stage for board of education members this year. The board last year hired Fanning Howey as architect to help the district prepare a facilities master plan. Earlier this year, a volunteer group was pulled together and hosted two community dialogue events to gauge residents' preferences for building configurations.

Based upon that input, the volunteer group developed a report and recommendation, which was adopted by the board of education. It calls for the construction of a new elementary building to replace the North Kingsville and Kingsville buildings. Additionally, Ridgeview Elementary and Edgewood Senior High would be renovated and a new middle school building erected on the Edgewood campus.

The project was broken into two phases, with the elementary and middle school construction being the first phase. The project, pegged at \$25 million, will be decided by voters in November. The board is asking for 5 mills for 36 years.

The district cannot do both phases at one time because the Ohio Revised Code sets limits on how much debt a school district can take on. The limits are based upon a percentage of the 10-year average of assessed valuations of real property in the district. Both phases would have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 72

Ashtabula County public school districts report cards show improvement

By **MARK TODD**

Staff Writer

mtodd@starbeacon.com

Despite budget distractions and operating cuts, Ashtabula County's public school districts made noticeable gains on the so-called state report cards over the past school year, according to data from the Ohio Department of Education.

Comparing 2010-2011 to 2009-2010, Four of the seven boosted their overall district designation – topped by Buckeye Local Schools' excellent rating, the first achieved by a county district. Three maintained the same designation. None took a step back.

Five improved the number of indicators the state uses to gauge effectiveness, and five also upgraded their performance index score.

Every district met state-required attendance figures, all but one – Ashtabula Area Local Schools – hit the graduation goal.

However, not one of the districts met a federally-required standard called adequate yearly progress for 2010-2011. AYP analyzes the academic performance of 10 different student groups, including minorities and students with disabilities. If any one of those groups doesn't meet AYP for two straight years, the building enters School Improvement – and a new level of government scrutiny.

Buildings in School Improvement must create a performance plan and may be obliged to offer students a choice of schools and supplemental services – all at the district's cost. Buildings exit School Improvement by meeting AYP for two consecutive years.

A growing number of school buildings fell into School Improvement status, which occurs when a building does not meet a federally-required standard called adequate yearly progress. Each district failed to pass muster in every category regarding disabled students, hurting AYP.

A glance across the charts also finds a majority of districts had difficulty meeting test score standards at the middle/junior high grade levels.

Aware of sanctions that befall schools that repeatedly fail to measure up, some districts have taken some innovative steps. Jefferson Area Local Schools, not satisfied with its junior high-level scores, did some internal tinkering that paid off.

"By separating the junior high from the high school and designating a principal for the junior high has helped our junior high make considerable progress," said Superintendent Doug Hladek.

Jefferson's junior high climbed from academic watch to continuous improvement after the move.

Here's a thumbnail look at each district's 2010-2011

Selected statistics from report cards

Here's a comparison of data in selected categories gleaned from Ashtabula County school district report cards from 2010-2011, with comparisons from the 2009-2010 cards.

A DEFINITION OF TERMS:

n Designation: A rating based on the results of a handful of measures. The best rating is excellent with distinction, followed by excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch and academic emergency.

n Indicators: There are 26 tracked by the state, mostly student proficiency test results at various grade levels. Graduation and attendance rates are other indicators.

n Performance index: A reflection of achievement for every student over a full academic year; a weighted average that includes all tested subjects and grades and untested students

n Attendance rate: The state requirement is 93 percent

n Graduation rate: The state requirement is 90 percent

Numbers from 2010-2011 are given first, followed by figures from 2009-2010 in parenthesis:

ASHTABULA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

Designation – Continuous improvement (academic watch)

Indicators met (out of 26) – 13 (10)

Performance index – 90.2 (88.1)

Attendance rate – 93.8 percent (93.6)

Graduation rate – 78 percent (76.8 percent)

Average daily student enrollment – 3,936

BUCKEYE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Designation – Excellent (effective)

Indicators met (out of 26) – 25 (22)

Performance index – 99.1 (97)

Attendance rate – 95.3 percent (95.1)

Graduation rate – 91.4 percent (96.6 percent)

Average daily student enrollment – 1,961

See STATS, Page 70

report card compared to the previous year:

ASHTABULA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

Ashtabula enjoyed significant gains in the latest evaluation, and as a result saw its designation rise from "academic watch" to "continuous improvement." Indicators also rose, from just 10 of 26 in 2009-2010 to 13

See CARDS, Page 70

Cards

From Page 69

this past year.

The attendance rate was nearly identical and above state minimums. However, the graduation rate of 78 percent was well below the state requirement of 90 percent — although higher than the 76.8 percent posted in 2009-2010.

Ashtabula was the only county district not to meet the graduation requirement.

Seven Ashtabula school buildings are under School Improvement status for failing to meet AYP. They are Lakeside High School (six years in SI), Lakeside Junior High (five years), Saybrook Elementary (five years), McKinsey Elementary (four years); and Thomas Jefferson Elementary, Lakeside Intermediate and State Road Elementary (one year each)

Ashtabula improved its test scores in fourth grade reading, sixth-grade math, eighth-grade reading and Ohio Graduation Test 11th-grade social science. Scores fell below minimums in third-grade math.

BUCKEYE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Seated at the head of the class is the Buckeye district, with the county's first-ever, district-wide excellent rating

Stats

From Page 69

CONNEAUT AREA CITY SCHOOLS

Designation — Effective (effective)
Indicators met (out of 26) — 17 (18)
Performance index — 93.4 (93.6)
Attendance rate — 94.8 percent (94.7 percent)
Graduation rate — 95.7 percent (93.3 percent)
Average daily student enrollment — 1,983

GENEVA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

Designation — Effective (Continuous improvement)
Indicators met (out of 26) — 25 (25)
Performance index — 98.6 (97.4)
Attendance rate — 94.6 percent (94.4 percent)
Graduation rate — 95.7 percent (92.6 percent)
Average daily student enrollment — 2,710

JEFFERSON LOCAL SCHOOLS

Designation — Effective (continuous improvement)
Indicators met — 23 (20)
Performance index — 97.6 (94.2)
Attendance rate — 94.6 percent (94.8 percent)
Graduation rate — 94.1 percent (91.7 percent)
Average daily student enrollment — 1,966

GRAND VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS

Designation — Effective (effective)
Indicators met (out of 26) — 21 (23)
Performance index — 96.2 (97.9)
Attendance rate — 95.1 percent (95 percent)
Graduation rate — 93.6 percent (93.7 percent)
Average daily student enrollment — 1,432

PYMATUNING LOCAL SCHOOLS

Designation — Effective (effective)
Indicators met (out of 26) — 23 (16)
Performance index — 96.5 (92.5)
Attendance rate — 94.2 percent (94.3 percent)
Graduation rate — 95 percent (99 percent)
Average daily student enrollment — 1,370

from the ODE. Buckeye missed only one of the state's 26 indicators (seventh-grade math), compared to four the previous year.

Buckeye netted a 99.1 performance index score for 2010-2011, compared to 97 percent for 2009-2010.

See CARDS, Page 71

ASHTABULA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

LAKESIDE PRIDE

COMMUNITY WIDE

We have MOMENTUM!



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Cards

From Page 70

No Buckeye buildings fall into the School Improvement program.

CONNEAUT AREA CITY SCHOOLS

The Conneaut district maintained its "effective" rating this past year, but saw the number of indicators met drop by one.

Conneaut met 17 of the 26 indicators in 2010-2011, compared to 18 in 2009-2010. Every proficiency test result that didn't pass muster in 2009-2010 was repeated this past year, with the addition of seventh-grade reading. Other below minimum areas: Fourth-grade math; fifth-grade reading, math and science; sixth-grade math; seventh-grade math; and eighth-grade math and science.

The district's performance index was essentially unchanged, 93.4 percent in 2010-2011 compared to 93.6 percent the previous year.

One building, Conneaut Middle School, has spent two years in School Improvement.

GENEVA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

Geneva improved its designation in 2010-2011 to "effective," compared to "continue improvement" from a year earlier. The number of indicators it met was identical – 25 of 26 – although the subject was different.

This past year fifth-grade math didn't meet state standards; last year it was eighth-grade science.

Geneva's performance climbed to 98.6 percent from 97.4 percent one year earlier.

No Geneva building is in School Improvement.

JEFFERSON AREA LOCAL SCHOOLS

Jefferson earned an "effective" rating this past year, climbing from "continuous improvement" in 2009-2010.

Performance index is 97.6, up from 94.2

The district met 23 of 26 indicators, compared to 20 the preceding year. Jefferson improved its scores in third-grade math, seventh-grade math and eighth-grade math. Below state requirements are fifth-grade reading and math and eighth-grade science.

Two Jefferson buildings, the junior high and Jefferson Elementary have one year each in School Improvement.

GRAND VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS

Grand Valley retained its "effective" designation this past year.

The district met 21 of the 26 state indicators, a dip from the 23 met in 2009-2010. Fifth-grade reading, math and science – which did not meet minimums in 2009-2010, were joined by eighth-grade math and science.

No Grand Valley school buildings were on School Improvement, the same as the preceding year.

PYMATUNING VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS

Pymatuning Valley retained its "effective" rating as its number of indicators met jumped dramatically, from 16 of 26 in 2009-2010 to 23 this past year.

The district improved scores in fourth-grade math; fifth-grade science; eighth-grade reading, math and science; and Ohio Graduate Test (10th-grade) math and writing. PV did not meet requirements in fifth-grade reading and the OGT (10th grade) science and social science.

Two buildings, the high school (one year) and primary elementary school (two years), are in School Improvement. n



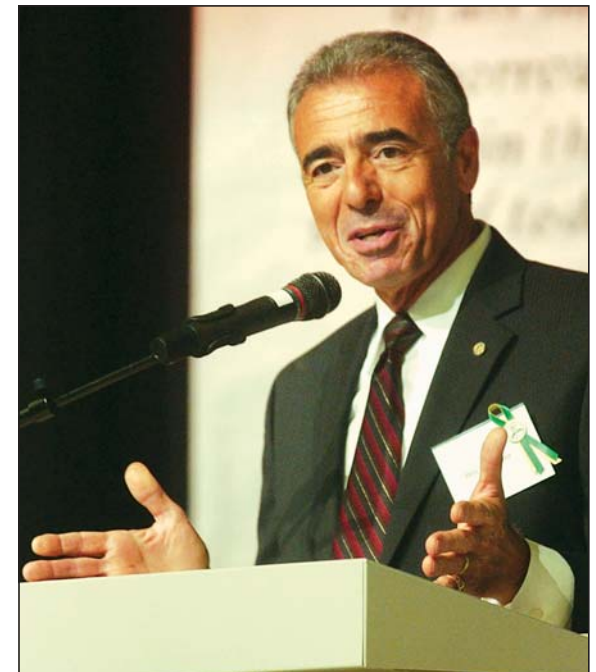
BILL WEST / Star Beacon

AMY RICHMOND checks on student information at Geneva High School.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

CONNEAUT MIDDLE SCHOOL student Emily Wilcox keeps her concentration level high during a computer tech class taught by Beth Carlisle.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

BENJAMIN PINTABONA, project manager for the Ashtabula Lakeside Elementary Campus, addresses a dedication crowd at the Ontario Kindergarten to third grade school.

cost about \$44 million.

The board plans to build the new elementary school on the Kingsville Elementary property. That school and North Kingsville Elementary, as well as Braden Junior High, would be demolished with funding in the bond issue.

No state money will be used to build the new schools; the direction provided by the community was to move forward on the project without waiting for the district to qualify for the Ohio School Facilities Commission money.

As part of performing the groundwork for taking the issue to voters, the district hired a consultant to prepare a 10-year enrollment projection. The study showed that enrollment, both resident and open, will fall to 1,718 by 2020, a decrease of 244 from the 2010-2011 school year.

Ten years ago, there were 2,274 students enrolled in the district.

CONNEAUT AREA CITY SCHOOLS

For the first time in awhile, construction wasn't a big part of the past year in Conneaut. Instead, some innovative programs captured attention in the district.

Over the past 12 months, the district expanded its technology program to include computer classes and curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Also unveiled were robotics classes at Conneaut High and Gateway Elementary schools, as well as a fine arts unit at Gateway.

The district is nearing the home stretch of its months-long program to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. Brewer-Garrett, a mechanical engineering firm, is overseeing the installation of energy-saving heating and lighting systems, as well as devices that will reduce electricity consumption.

Earlier this month, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections announced it had sold the Lake Erie Correctional Institution in Conneaut to Corrections Corporation of America for more than \$72 million. Operated as a private business, the LaECI now must pay taxes — a total estimated around \$1 million — to the city, school district and Ashtabula County.

School administrators came and went over the past year in Conneaut. Treasurer Mary Gillespie and Lakeshore Primary principal Ruth Farr resigned and retired, respectively. Gillespie, who accepted a job with the Ashtabula County Educational Service Center, was replaced by Lindsay Cotton. Farr was replaced by Karen Kehoe for the balance of the school year.

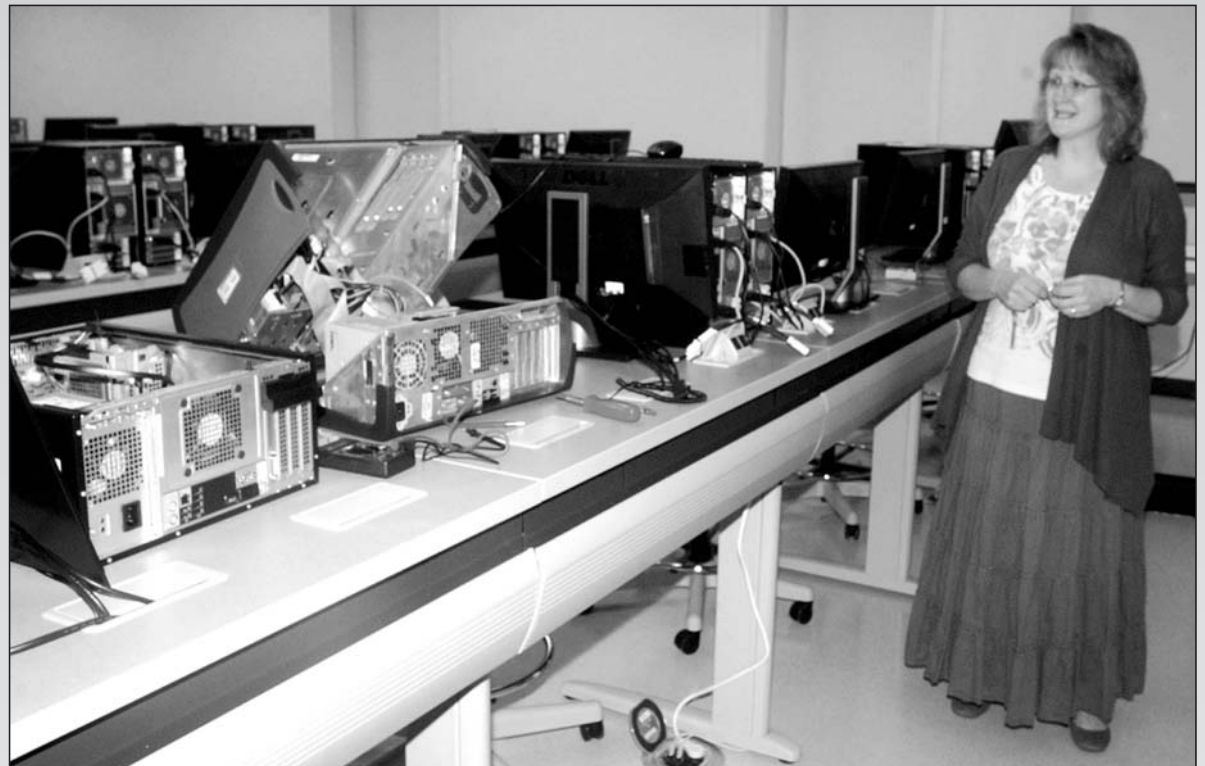
When Kehoe stepped down to become the district's director of special services, James Kennedy occupied the principal's desk. Kehoe replaced long-time administrator James Lutes, who retired.

GENEVA AREA CITY SCHOOLS

New buildings are becoming a reality in Geneva. The exterior walls of two new elementary schools — both under construction behind the Austinburg and Cork elementary schools still in use — are going up. The new schools will each be 43,750 square feet and will cost

CONTINUED ON PAGE 75

SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

IRENE EDGE, an assistant professor of computers at Kent State University-Ashtabula Campus, displays the computer technology lab at the new renovated school.

KSUA renovates, builds and adds degrees

By **MARGIE NETZEL**

Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

ASHTABULA — Students relax on the new chairs in the academic wing of Kent State University, chatting about their new class schedules, professors and the cost of textbooks.

The lounge areas are part of a \$1.2 million renovation of "A-wing," Dean and chief administrative officer Susan Stocker said, a step in the journey of becoming a "21st Century learning environment."

"The renovation of the second floor of the north wing in Main Hall is the next step in our vision to create a 21st Century learning environment," she said. "To remain a top-notch campus providing a world-class education, we must address our aging facilities with the ultimate objective to provide the best possible place for students to grow and learn."

Stocker said the vision for transformation includes promoting safety and accessibility, utilizing best practices in energy efficiency and creating innovative classrooms and learning spaces that promote a modern approach to higher education learning.

"This is done through collaboration, interactivity and engagement," she said. "This new-style learning can't take place in old-style static spaces. We must ensure that each student is prepared to compete, contribute and succeed in a high-tech, global work environment. This means providing every student a learning experience with the latest technologies and equipment — tools they will use in their 21st century careers."

The renovated space in A-wing includes energy efficient lamps and ballasts and new energy efficient windows.

The \$15 million, 55,000-square-foot Robert S. Morrison Health and Science Building is the new home to

See KSUA, Page 73

KSUA

From Page 72

the campus' associate of applied science degree, available in one of four allied health programs: Occupational therapy assistant technology, physical therapist assistant technology, radiologic technology and respiratory therapy technology.

"The Robert S. Morrison Health and Science Building will allow wide and convenient access to advanced education in a range of nursing and allied health fields," KSU President Lester Lefton said, "fields that are virtually recession proof."

"In turn, the graduates who study here will boost the region's ability to compete in a high-tech, knowledge-based economy."

Lefton said the community both earned and deserves state-of-the-art educational opportunities.

"It is not surprising that such a promise-filled facility has taken shape here," Lefton said. "KSUA, and each of Kent State's eight campuses, are committed to the educational and training needs of the communities we serve."

Lefton said record enrollment at the Ashtabula campus, which now numbers 2,000 students in a 30 percent enrollment jump, shows the community's need and desire for higher education.

Stocker said the health and science building has transformed the campus through new opportunities for students.

"Since the opening of the Robert S. Morrison Health and Science building, enrollment has steadily increased, passage rates for licensure exams continue to be above the national average, and new labs and classrooms — like the simulation lab, cadaver lab, and full-scale apartment for occupational and physical therapy students — are providing hands-on learning experiences that are second-to-none and applicable to a real-world setting," Stocker said.

"This state-of-the-art health and science building is paying dividends by attracting additional students, providing both enhanced learning and teaching experiences, and graduating a well-prepared and qualified workforce. In short, this beautifully designed and well-equipped building will serve as a cornerstone for furthering and enhancing higher education in Ashtabula County."

At Kent State they measure growth in bachelor's degrees. The Ashtabula campus now offers 11 bachelor's degrees which can be earned entirely at the Ashtabula campus.

"We now offer over eleven bachelor's degrees, all of which can be earned in their entirety on our campus," Stocker said. "These programs are taught by highly credentialed, award-winning faculty who give students a personalized experience throughout their entire time here."

The degrees are often stepping stones to even higher education and success, she said.

"If a student is considering going on to earn a masters or

a doctorate, KSUA is the great place to get that bachelor's degree at an affordable price, allowing students to save money for graduate school."

Exciting new associate's degrees are also on the class list at KSUA. Ashtabula County's successful wine and grape industry has prompted two new associate degree programs at

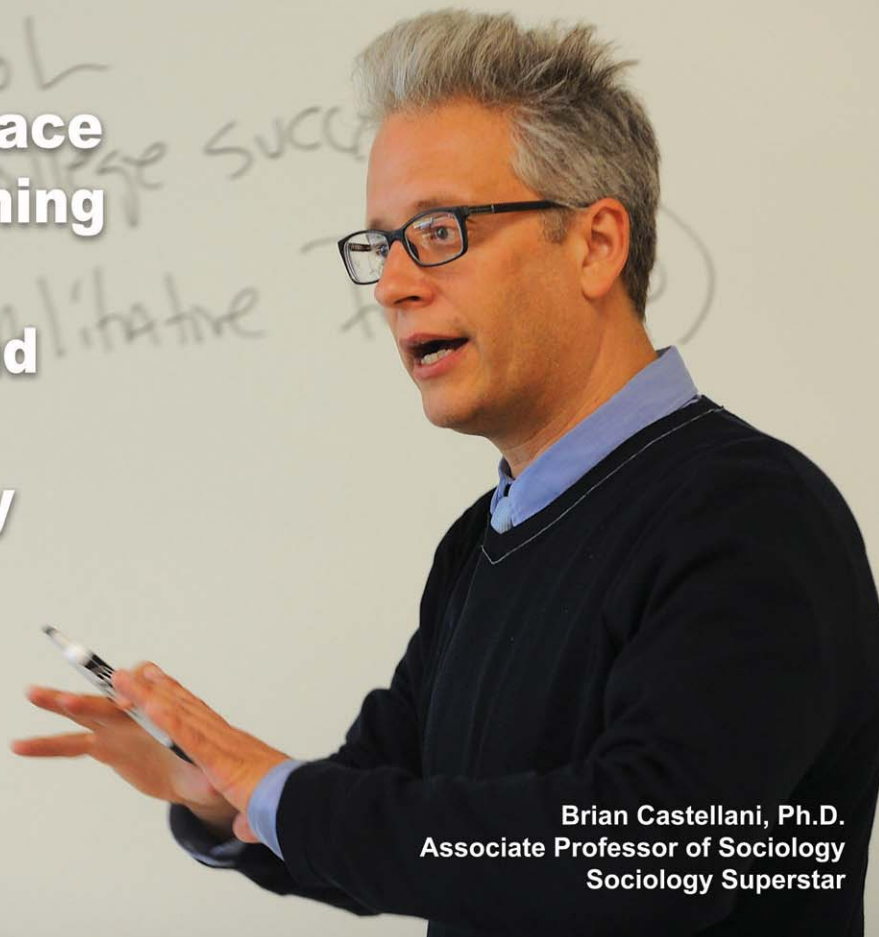
Each degree program is the first of its kind in Ohio. The two new degree programs, the associate of applied science degree in enology (the study of wine and winemaking) and the associate of applied science degree in viticulture (the study of vine growing and grape harvesting), will be offered at the university's Ashtabula campus beginning fall semester. Through an affiliation with the Viticulture Enology Science and Technology Alliance (VESTA), these two-year programs are the first college degrees related to wine-making offered in the state of Ohio.

"We're very excited to provide students the opportunity to study and eventually work in this industry that is so important to our region," Stocker said.

Courses are offered both online and in the classroom, covering topics such as sensory evaluation, winery equipment operation, geography of wine and regional vineyard management. The program is designed to be convenient for both traditional and non-traditional students to earn a degree or take a few classes.

For more information on all degrees offered at KSUA, visit www.ashtabula.kent.edu or call 440-964-4217. n

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Brian Castellani, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology
Sociology Superstar

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BILL WEST / Star Beacon

CONNEAUT MIDDLE SCHOOL teacher Beth Carlisle watches her students perform during a computer tech class. Clockwise from left front above, Victor Rockwell, Justin Osborne, Danielle Hall, Alexis Nelson, Emily Wilcox, Kayla Malone, Marilyn Souza, Erik Heinonen, Tysen Hunt, Adam Laitinen and Alex Filipcic. Sabrina Phommavichit (right) and Paige Johnson respond during the first day of school in the Jefferson Elementary School Library.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

JAMIE TIMONERE (center), a fast forward teacher at the Ashtabula Area City Schools, helps students to class during the first day of school at Ontario Elementary School.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

MARK BREWSTER, technical coordinator at Grand Valley Elementary School, works on a computer with Mariah Riffett during the first day of school.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

WENDY MCINTYRE takes a tour of Ontario Elementary School following a dedication ceremony of three new kindergarten to third grade schools at the Ashtabula Lakeside Elementary Campus on Wade Avenue.



BILL WEST / Star Beacon

GENEVA SCHOOL bus driver Anne Hayes gives the "thumbs up" sign after her starts up at Geneva High School.

\$8,642,375 each.

Geneva Middle School welcomed a new principal, Steve Candela, who took the reins from now-assistant principal Richard Belconis. A new entrance has been created for the school, a project combining a remodeled junior high school and the construction of an entire wing of the building.

The junior high school is located in the former Geneva High School on Sherman Street. The junior high school shares some of the old footprint of the high school. The 104,763-square-foot facility cost \$19,428,298 to build and furnish. The school has a new LED sign, main entrance and a new staff and visitor parking lot.

The district construction total is \$73 million, with the Ohio School Facilities Commission paying 73 percent of that bill, said Superintendent Mary Zappitelli.

The community said good-bye to Geneva Elementary over the summer as the building was torn down and the land under it sold to the City of Geneva for a wine and culinary education center.

Platt R. Spencer school will be demolished this year. The Geneva-Platt R. Spencer School, located on Austin Road, is consolidation of the Geneva Elementary and Platt R. Spencer schools.

GRAND VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS

Budget woes prompted some revisions in the Grand Valley district this past year. The wood shop program was chopped and bus routes were consolidated, said Superintendent Bill Nye.

The district's multi-media and art programs earned awards.

Doug Hitchcock was hired as principal of GV High School, succeeding Steve Sisko, who held the job for 17

CONTINUED ON PAGE 76

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JEFFERSON LOCAL SCHOOLS

Jefferson Area Local School District is in the final stages of a building program begun in May 2005.

An athletic building that includes two sets of locker rooms, a wrestling room and a concession stand was completed in October. The start of the year saw work begin on administrative offices for the Jefferson Board of Education.

The board office building will also house a concession stand and rest rooms and could be finished by the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 77

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SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

THE WALLS of the new athletic complex at SPIRE Institute are taking form at the in Harpersfield Township.

SPIRE Institute makes a splash locally and globally

By **JAN PERALA**
For the Star Beacon

HARPERSFIELD TOWNSHIP — SPIRE Institute, the massive sports, education and wellness complex, located just south of Geneva in Harpersfield Township, is making a splash locally and globally, and with the debut of a state-of-the-art Aquatics Center, the ripple effect ever widens.

The Aquatic Center was previewed last Wednesday evening by top officials of the U.S. Olympic Committee, which is considering SPIRE as a venue for training and competitive events. The Aquatic Center's crown jewel is a 10-lane, **See SPLASH, Page 77**

SPIRE Institute launches residential academy

By **MARGIE TRAX**

Staff Writer

mtrax@starbeacon.com

GENEVA — While public high schools in Ohio are facing serious budget cuts, it's a whole new world in the northeast corner of the state.

SPIRE Institute just outside Geneva has launched a 150-200

student residential academy designed to draw athletic students from around the world to the area; and thus, has begun a long-term relationship with the Geneva Area City School District which will include constructing athletic fields and leasing school property.

SPIRE operates a 750,000-
See SPIRE, Page 79



Photo by JAN PERALA

SPIRE INSTITUTE founders Ron and Tracy Clutter are pictured poolside in the new state-of-the-art Aquatics Center at SPIRE Institute slated to open in mid October.

Splash

From Page 76

50- meter Olympic sized pool equipped with state of the art technology and designed to make its sparkling, azure waters the fastest swimming surface in the world.

Two moveable bulkheads will allow the pool to be divided into smaller competition pools. The natatorium, which is the largest in Ohio, boasts seating for at least 2,300 spectators. The Aquatics Center will offer an array of swimming classes for the general public geared for every level of expertise. Scuba classes and water aerobics will also be on the agenda when the facility opens in mid October. Adjacent to the Olympic sized pool is a recreational pool, handicap accessible by a wheelchair ramp, as well as four additional therapy pools still under construction.

Also housed in a wing of the 293,000-square foot Aquatic Center are an expansive fitness center, which will be open to the public, and the Michael Johnson Performance Training Center at SPIRE, which will offer training regimens in a world class venue geared to assist elite athletes in reaching the pinnacle of their potential. A

medical research area is also planned for the facility.

A food court will open in the Aquatics Center in mid- October. The food court will provide an additional dining for spectators, athletes and their families. A 25,000-square foot glass encased banquet facility with tiered dining areas overlooking SPIRE's Indoor Track, the largest in the world, provides a venue for meetings and special events, and a customized menu with preparations by Culinary Institute of American trained chef Jaime Cordova.

With the opening of the Aquatics Center, 750,000 square feet of pools, indoor playing fields, courts and, track and field areas will be under roof at SPIRE not including the outdoor stadium and track with seating for 10,000 spectators and an adjacent area for discus and shot put competition.

In August 2012, SPIRE will open a residential academy, Spire Independent, with a curriculum placing an equal emphasis on sport and academics that is expected to attract student athletes from around the world. Students at SPIRE Independent will have the opportunity to learn all facets of the business of sports, including sports medicine, athletic training, coaching, broadcasting, journalism and athlete representation while studying traditional sub-

jects in a one of a kind arrangement.

Ground is scheduled to be broken for a 300-bed dormitory for boarding students within months and additional construction is planned in the future.

Among the luminaries who have joined the SPIRE Institute team are Olympic Gold Medalist Diana Munz as senior director of swimming and U.S. Men's Junior Volleyball Coach John Hawks as director of Volleyball. Paralympian World Record Holder Aimee Mullins is on the advisory board. World record holding sprinter Michael Johnson, who claimed the title "the fastest man in the world" after clocking the fastest time ever recorded in the 200 meter dash at the 1996 Olympic Games, will head the Michael Johnson Performance Training Center.

The nationally acclaimed competitive swim club, Lake Erie Silver Dolphins, has joined forces with SPIRE. The facility has hosted the NAIA Track and Field National Championships, the NCAA Division I Track and Field Invitational and the USA Volleyball Junior Men's Team Training.

SPIRE Institute has already created a profound residual effect on the well being of the area economy by creating employment opportunities in construction, hospitality, food services and sports manage-

ment of September, said Superintendent Doug Hladek.

Jefferson enjoyed the success of its Model United Nations and Scholastic Bowl programs. For three consecutive years, Jefferson Area High School has snatched the top trophy at the annual Scholastic Bowl, claiming victory over eight other high school teams. In March, Jefferson High School students Zack Clark, Jenna Burnett and Jennifer Hall won the event for the Falcons, bringing home the crystal trophy.

Jefferson was prepared to implement many cutbacks including eliminating some sports programs and staff, but as the new school year began no staff members had lost their jobs and no programs were cut. Nine teachers retired and two teachers resigned eliminating the need to lay off any employees for the 2011-2012 year, Hladek said.

To help boost revenue, the district implemented a pay to participate program for junior and senior high school sports and high school extra-curricular activities, such as marching band.

PYMATUNING VALLEY

Thanks to a state grant, PV students are reaping the benefits of new technology thanks to a state grant, said Superintendent Alex Geordan. "We have a new technology system called Thin Client that is an energy efficient system we received through a state grant," he said.

The district was able to get new computer screens, hard drives, new computers in classrooms and labs at no cost to the taxpayer, he said.

"We are going green as much as possible and we are thrilled about that," he said.

For the first time last year the district offered their Middle School students the ACT Explore, a college readiness test for 8th-graders and helps them discover strengths and weaknesses and helps them figure out a future career field, Geordan said. "This was funded through another grant at no cost to the tax payers," he said.

Staff writers Carl Feather, Ellen Kolman, Shelley Terry and Margie Trax contributed to this story



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

PEGGY HUGGINS leads a group of people into the newly renovated second floor at Kent State University-Ashtabula Campus during a recent open house.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

STUDENTS WAIT to board their school bus on West Avenue during the first day of school in the Ashtabula Area City Schools.



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

AARON DAVIS, a teacher at Pymatuning Valley Middle School, helps DOMONIQUE TERLINDEN open her locker during the first day.

Splash

From Page 77

ment. High school and college students on break have found jobs in the banquet center, coffee shop and food courts. "SPIRE has created a turning point in the economic viability of the entire region creating growth in our recreation, education and construction industries," said Ashtabula

County Convention and Visitor's Bureau Executive Director Mark Winchell.

"It's a game changer for our area to have this world class, Olympic caliber facility in the middle of our home turf," Winchell said.

SPIRE also offers opportunities for wellness and self-improvement for all ages.

Local hospitals and physicians have brought seminars and learning opportunities for the gener-

al public to SPIRE and an innovative, collaborative facilities partnership with Geneva Schools allows shared facilities use in exchange for new construction.

SPIRE co-founder Tracy Clutter said "Ron and I have always envisioned SPIRE as a place where the doors would be open for local community members to share everything SPIRE has to offer. We have worked very hard to make

our programs affordable and accessible to everyone and think that anyone who comes to SPIRE, whether they are taking a swimming class or are watching their son or daughter play soccer can have a great experience."

Tracy is right", said Ron Clutter. "One of the core principles behind SPIRE is to provide programs and opportunities for anyone who wants to better themselves. I have lived in

Geneva all my life and SPIRE was designed to serve as a resource for the local community, region, country and world. Whether it is participating in a fitness class, swimming laps or taking one of the educational classes we will offer on health and wellness, SPIRE makes it possible for everyone to

reach their full potential while experiencing Olympic-grade facilities."

The essence of SPIRE is its core mission "to unlock the full potential of the human spirit via athletics, academics and service." SPIRE Institute is a part of the nonprofit Geneva area Recreational, Educational Athletic Trust (GaREAT). n

SPIRE

From Page 76

square-foot athletic operation in Harpersfield Township, formerly known as the Geneva area Recreational, Education and Athletic Trust (GaREAT). The facility includes the world's largest indoor running track, batting cages, indoor and outdoor soccer and football fields, volleyball and basketball courts, and the new aquatic center is under construction.

Scheduled to open in September 2012 on SPIRE's 175-campus, the academy will train student athletes in five sports: soccer, volleyball, lacrosse, track and field, and swimming and diving. The program will accept students from 9-12 grade, plus students who are between high school and college.

Its founder, local industrialist (and Geneva High School graduate) Ron Clutter has poured his fortune into the \$60 million facility, working hand and hand with the Geneva Area City Schools Board of Education, which approved the 25-year lease of 36 acres of property surrounding the high school.

The payment by SPIRE to Geneva Area City Board of Education is \$400,000 a year for the first five years of the contract, beginning July 1, 2012, \$500,000 a year for the ensuing five years, and \$600,000 a year for the last five-year term, Geneva Schools Superintendent Mary Zappitelli said.

"The additional income to the dis-

trict from this arrangement will greatly help the district in educating its students in an era of shrinking local and state resources," she said.

For its part, SPIRE will renovate several fields at the school with all-weather turf and others will be constructed on an undeveloped portion of the land north of the existing fields. SPIRE will also construct two baseball and two softball fields, six multi-purpose playing fields and a field house with locker rooms, concession stands and restrooms. There is additional land available for more expansion.

Geneva High School has an agreement to use the football field, indoor and outdoor track and soccer field for athletic activities throughout the year.

A second portion of the agreement includes the lease of classrooms after school hours starting in the fall of 2012.

Zappitelli said the agreement prioritizes use of the high school by district students during the school day.

"There are certain playing fields reserved for use by high school students during the school day, and no SPIRE students will be using classrooms during the school day," she said. "Any Geneva middle school or high school team may use the fields at the high school for practice or interscholastic competition at no cost."

Classrooms will be for the exclusive use of high school students during the day, with SPIRE students taking the desks after school hours, Zappitelli confirmed.

The same goes with athletic fields,

she said.

"During the school day, SPIRE students will be training on some of the fields while Geneva High School students will also have access to the fields they need during the school day for physical education, band or other such purposes," she said. "After school hours, high school students will have priority use of the fields while SPIRE students are in the classroom."

The deal is good education meets good use of government and community resources, Zappitelli said.

The SPIRE dollars and construction of athletic fields and courts comes as the Ohio School Facilities Commission, which provides the state fund contribution to the cost of constructing school buildings, does not provide funds for athletic facilities, Zappitelli said.

Clutter declined to comment on the details of the agreement, saying only that community involvement and providing initiatives makes a positive impact on area youth. However, the only other academy in the U.S. that compares to the one being planned at SPIRE is IMG Academies in Bradenton, Fla., which is owned by Cleveland-based IMG Worldwide, according to the Spire Web site. IMG Academies teaches students about tennis, golf, soccer, baseball, basketball and lacrosse.

At IMG Academies, soccer and lacrosse students pay \$43,800 and nonboarding students pay \$31,100 a year. Spire's prices have not been determined yet. n

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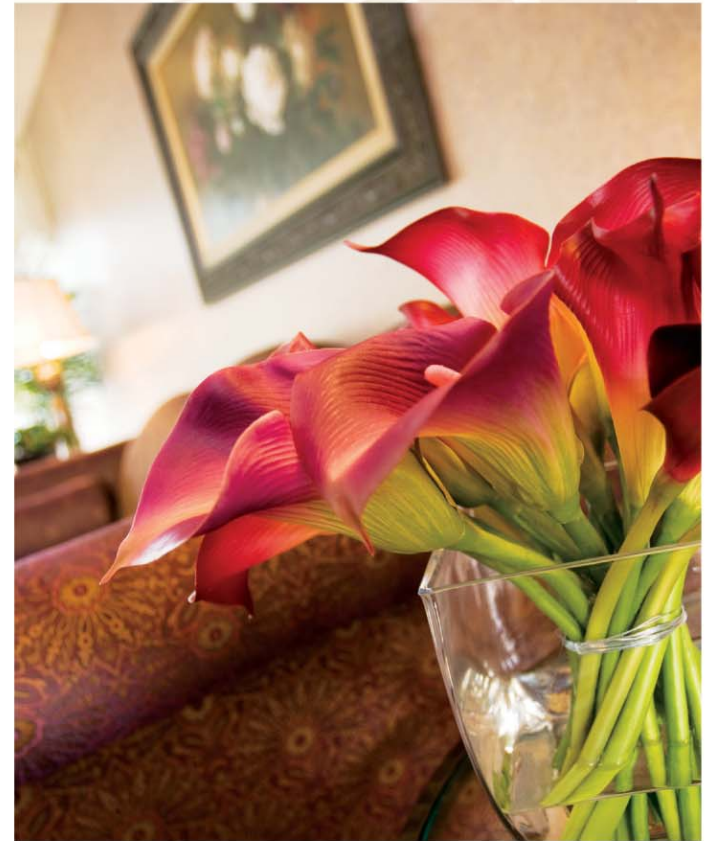
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