



2020 Annual Report

The Ottawa County Improvement Corporation (OCIC)'s mission is to serve as the lead economic and workforce development agency in Ottawa County. Our vision is to become a recognized strategic resource for the Ottawa County business community, where OCIC engagement enhances private sector profitability, encourages capital investment, and demonstrates job creation. The OCIC does this through an integrated approach that includes Business Retention & Expansion, New Business Attraction, Workforce Development and Communications & Marketing.

While 2020 was a year unlike any the world had seen in more than a century due to the global pandemic known as COVID19 – creating uncertainty on many levels and paralyzing many cities, counties, and states – Ottawa County persevered.

Due the pandemic, the OCIC immediately shifted its focus on efforts to assist the small business community by effectively communicating updates involving COVID19 procedures and protocols, unemployment resources, and the various assistance programs made available at the local, state, and federal level. The OCIC participated on weekly calls with the Ottawa County Commissioners, Health Department, Emergency Management Agency, and social service agencies throughout the county, as well as Governor DeWine's daily press conferences. A COVID19 resource page, ocic.biz/coronavirus, and an interactive COVID19 Resource Packet were created for businesses and both were updated on a regular basis.

A social media marketing campaign called "Keep Calm & Support Local" was organized to help support the Ottawa County small business community. The goal of the campaign was to encourage the public to buy from their local businesses and inform the public of the social distancing guidelines that small businesses were asked to follow. More than 40 small businesses participated in this campaign. The OCIC also collaborated with the local chambers of commerce to distribute PPE Toolkits and facemasks to small businesses across the county as part of a larger statewide effort paid for by JobsOhio and the Regional Growth Partnership (RGP). Amid the pandemic, the OCIC committed to being a resource to the business community, their employees, and our partners across the county.

The year also brought staff changes for the OCIC. In July, the organization welcomed Chris Singerling as the new Director. Chris has sat at the crossroads of economic and workforce development for over 20 years. He immediately began building relationships with local businesses, as well as with county, regional and state partners, while getting acclimated to his new role and Ottawa County's economic diversity. In September, the organization welcomed another new face. Carolyn Rodenhauer began her new role as the Business & Workforce Development Manager, bringing her wealth of knowledge and experience as a former workforce development manager. As the year concluded, the organization welcomed Monica Metcalf as the new Employment Resources Assistant for OhioMeansJobs of Ottawa

County, bringing with her exceptional customer service skills and ability to create a comfortable environment for clients.

The OCIC completed 13 socially distanced and virtual business visits with small, medium, and large operations throughout the county. Since July, the OCIC was also in contact with 10 site selectors from around the country interested in Ottawa County's pro-business climate and geographic location. While also working with numerous regional, strategic partners to enhance those efforts.

Following the unfortunate events that unfolded in Columbus surrounding the original passage of House Bill 6 (HB 6), the OCIC passed a resolution outlining the detrimental impact the repeal of the bill would have on our county and state without a thoroughly vetted and workable replacement. Underscoring the countless elected officials and citizens from Ottawa County who worked tirelessly to educate the public and our elected leaders in Columbus about the impact on our state's energy grid and the thousands of direct and indirect jobs both Davis-Besse, and the Perry plant in Lake County, have on our entire state. The OCIC also submitted testimony in the Ohio State Senate in December reinforcing those important facts. While the future of HB 6 is still unclear, the OCIC remains committed to an ongoing dialogue with our elected leaders and influencers across the state to ensure the current and future operations of the plant continue.

In December, it was announced that a well-established, family-owned, northwest Ohio manufacturing company had plans to expand its operations into Ottawa County. Lewco Inc. is recognized as a world-class manufacturer of industrial ovens and custom unit handling conveyors. The company will be moving into the historic Building 460 in the Lake Erie Business Park in Port Clinton. Lewco Inc. was originally founded in Sandusky, Ohio as the Ohio Welding Company in 1917. While the company will maintain its headquarters in Sandusky, the company will invest nearly \$12 million and create 163 new positions to support its significant growth being driven by e-commerce. Renovations and occupation of the building are expected to be completed by the fall of 2021. This will be the single largest influx of job creation into Ottawa County since Fenner-Dunlop, Lewco Inc's new neighbor, arrived in 2008.

The OCIC's Revolving Loan Fund portfolio continues to be an important tool to partner with community lenders in supporting small business investment in the county. There are currently three "gap financing" loans to local businesses totaling \$284,000. Mel and Barb Ayers took on a new project to bring a north coast barbecue spot to the shores of Lake Erie. The Que Barbecue opened its doors at the former Nagoya Japanese Steakhouse building located in Portage Township. OCIC funds were used for acquisition of machinery and equipment.

In September 2020, the RISE Small Business Innovation Grant expanded into Ottawa County. RISE stands for Regional Incubator for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship. Through the grant program, \$61,985 in funding was awarded to 23 small businesses in pursuit of sustainability and growth with special consideration for those impacted by the recent public health emergency. The program is a collaborative initiative of the Ottawa County Improvement Corporation, the Ottawa County Community Foundation, and a generous grant from the Burton D. Morgan

Foundation. The RISE program was first established by the Erie County Economic Development Corporation (ECEDC) in partnership with Bowling Green State University (BGSU) and the Norwalk Economic Development Corporation (NEDC). The objective of RISE is to grow jobs and spearhead economic development by linking business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs to regional service providers with expertise in business start-up, development, and acceleration. A quarterly interactive development series is currently in the works for 2021 for the grant recipients. The plan is for this to be an annual initiative creating an alumni network and collaboration between small businesses across the county.

Regional partnerships will play an integral role in the future growth of Ottawa County. The 4CG (4 County Group 4 Collaborative Growth) initiative remains strong and meets regularly to discuss priorities and strategies to support our local workforce needs. The 4CG is a group of economic development and workforce development organizations in Huron, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Seneca Counties. The 4CG, in coordination with the BGSU Center for Regional Development and Poggemeyer Design Group, completed a study to identify initiatives to address workforce needs. Results were completed in June 2020. Along with four other counties, the 4CG worked with JobsOhio to promote the OHZone Virtual (online) Career Fair with the assistance of The Montrose Group. Additionally, the OCIC began having dialogue with Firelands Forward to also discuss the region's workforce shortage and ways to enhance them. The long-term goal of Firelands Forward is to drive economic growth through innovative regional workforce strategies.

Hiring and matching job seekers to employment opportunities remains a top priority of the OCIC, as it is a top priority of our local businesses. Today, more than 9,100 job openings are listed on OhioMeansJobs.com within a 30-mile radius of Oak Harbor (Ottawa County's central-most location). The OCIC is in its fourth full year of operating the OhioMeansJobs Ottawa County location, which serves both job seekers and businesses alike. During the pandemic, when businesses were required to close their doors and the state's unemployment rolls more than doubled the OhioMeansJobs of Ottawa County staff assisted with 1,049 unemployment calls due to COVID-19 with the bulk of those calls between March and June. OhioMeansJobs Ottawa County continued to meet the needs of job seekers which included created/updated 214 resumes, assisting clients with career exploration and job coaching. Visit the OhioMeansJobs of Ottawa County offices if you need job seeking assistance, resume support, practice with interview skills or are considering a new career path. You can also find openings on ohiomeansjobs.com or follow local job openings on the OhioMeansJobs of Ottawa County social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).

Through the Business Advisory Council initiative, 9 students completed the Career Engagement Opportunity (CEO) credit-based internship program during the 2019/2020 school year. Another 12 high school seniors completed our inaugural Skilled Trades Academy (STA) program during the 2019-20 school year. For the 2020-21 school year, deciding whether the STA was going to occur was no easy task. In July, as local school districts were evaluating their COVID19 policies and procedures, the STA Program Instructor announced he was stepping down due to health concerns. Almost immediately, OCIC staff, BAC members and representatives of Northwest State Community College began putting a plan in place. Educators and business representatives

of the BAC embraced the new concept and took the necessary steps to move forward with its implementation. The BAC held an Open House on September 17 for high school seniors (and their parents) selected for the program kicked off year two of the STA. The 2020-21 STA now includes virtual classroom instruction from Northwest State Community College's Core Manufacturing & Logistics Skills (CMLS) Program curriculum and in-person hands-on lab activities in the designated workshop area that will prepare students to take the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) Certified Production Technician (CPT) exams and assessments in Spring 2021. High school seniors are required to apply for entry into the program and are accepted into the program by a panel of Ottawa County educators and business representatives.

Like many other organizations, the Ottawa County Safety Council went virtual for most of 2020 and continues to do so with guidance provided by the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation. Monthly professional development meetings were put on hold back in March. While the safety council was put on hold for four months, important information and resources regarding upcoming trainings and safety-related programs were being communicated to members. Meetings resumed in August but went virtual for members. Through the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation's Safety Grants program, extra steps were taken to provide financial relief to Ohio's employer community during the pandemic. Ottawa County employers were direct beneficiaries of a \$1.54 billion dividend in April 2020 and a \$1.34 billion dividend in October 2020.

Suffice it to say, 2020 was an unprecedented year, but Ottawa County and the OCIC persevered. We remain committed to our business community and continue to work with regional partners, as well as local and state officials, to position Ottawa County as a place for both new and existing employers to expand their business. Those positive relationships and working together will only benefit Ottawa County in the short and long run. In fact, we are already well positioned for an even more prosperous 2021. To learn more about OCIC, connect with us on social media, visit our website at ocic.biz or call our office at (419) 898-6242.

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