

Community

VISION 2020



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Kendl Maldonado, of Palmdale, Calif., prepares to fly a drone on Friday at Spire Institute during a drone flying camp in Harpersfield Township.

Harpersfield Township

Options to grow at Spire Institute

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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HARPERSFIELD TOWNSHIP — The Academy is the educational arm of Spire Institute seeking to grow the number of students and reach out to those in the area, said Rich Odell, co-managing director of Spire Institute.

Odell said Spire has on-going camps and local, regional, state and national competitions in a variety of sports, but 2020 will mark the year of the Academy taking on a new look.

He said educational opportunities are planned for students young and old. Full-time students for the 2020-2021 school year will start to come to the Institute on Aug. 24.

Spire Institute is in the midst of constructing five dorms to be used by the students who are expected to come from all over the country and internationally, Odell said.

The students will be in grades 9-12 there also will be post-graduate students. Odell said Grand River Academy teachers will be providing the instruction in classrooms being completed this summer.

The educational program will be cross curriculum and collaborative, meaning students will learn a variety of subjects in an experiential curriculum instead of in silos of math and science, Odell said.

"What you are learning in

any of these will be applied cross curriculum," he said.

Odell said the plan is to help students learn life lessons and information for life-long decision making instead of just learning for a test. He said students will have five hours daily instruction and four hours relating to a "major" they choose.

The five majors include basketball, swimming, track and field, e-games and drone-robotics. Odell said the future of employment over the next 20 years will involve the ability to learn and change with the times.

He said life skills will also be taught at the Academy based on more than 30 principles, including trust, relationships, collaborative instruction, business and selflessness to name a few.

A new component to the educational system will involve career exploration that can also expand to the local community.

"We will have people who make their living in a particular field who will be on campus," Odell said.

Odell gave the example of an architect who would come to teach high school and post-graduate students about the field, but also opening the classes to area high school students or adults.

Partnerships with companies, schools, non-profits and other organizations are being investigated with the hope of the high school students finding connec-

tions to potential careers through internships and those who are actively involved in their careers.

"We want to be a hub which would give our students chances for internships," he said.

Connecting with area communities is definitely a priority, Odell said.

"We will do a variety of things when we get our feet on the ground," he said.

Odell reiterated Spire Institute hopes to widen the age groups connected to the facility.

"Our service community is 9 to 99," he said.

"There is nothing to say someone who is retired could not come down and take a drone class," Odell said.

As Spire Institute re-groups after Blue Ocean purchased the facility last year, Odell said they are not putting unrealistic numbers or goals out there during a pandemic, but are happy with interest shown so far.

"We feel really good," he said of the students who have already signed up, expressed interest or have already been accepted.

A goal of 700 students enrolled is a goal moving forward, Odell said. He said an expansion to include grades 6-8.

A possibility for the 2020-2021 school year is to have NCAA Division I and II athletes come to Spire Institute if their chosen schools are not able to have them on campus this

year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"We've put it out to Division I and Division II coaches and they have been very supportive," Odell said.

He said the goal is to help students who have a passion for something not to have that pursuit squelched due to the pandemic.

Odell said he sees Spire Institute being a driving engine to help the local economy. In addition to the dormitories under construction, a cooperative hotel agreement was recently announced that is expected to bring a Town-Place Suites to the campus with groundbreaking to occur sometime this fall. The hotel is to be a partnership between Spire Institute and Renew Partners with JCI Construction building the facility and Emerald Hospitality Inc. managing it.

Odell said the facility is expected to take 12-14 months to complete and he hopes more hotels, businesses and restaurants are drawn to the Route 534 corridor. Spire Institute also hopes to continue large events at the facility that have included Division III Track and Field national championships, Big Ten and Big East track meets, high school state competitions and college swimming events, just to name a few.

"We are working to bring much larger events to the venue that will be not just

a one-year [event]," Odell said.

"We will also be doing drone racing in the track and field facility. It is one of the largest in the country," he said.

"We will also do e-sport competitions in the track and field facility," Odell said.

A recent sunny afternoon found drone flying summer campers applying their new skills at the outdoor track. The students were all from the Los Angeles area and were experiencing a new skill at Spire Institute.

As the number of students attending the Academy grow, so will the shopping needs, Odell said.

"There will be more needs for shopping for students to outfit their rooms or supply their majors," he said.

Parents will also need restaurants and things to do while in the area.

"I think the wineries will get a big pickup," Odell said.

He said there will be medical needs for students at the school as the "footprint" of the organization grows.

Odell sees a growing partnership with the Cleveland Sports Commission as attempts to draw larger competitions to the area increase.

Spire Institute was originally started by Geneva resident Ron Clutter through the Geneva Area Recreational and Educational Trust.

Economic development groups in same building

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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JEFFERSON — Having three economic development groups located in one building, has facilitated successful operation of each, according to the team that oversees growth in Ashtabula County.

Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County, the Ashtabula 503 Corp. and the Ashtabula County Port Authority moved into a county-owned building near the Jefferson Post Office last fall and connect with one another daily.

“We can just communicate. There is an organizational communication that happens when you are in close proximity. Deals come together quicker,” said APA Executive Director Mark Winchell.

GPAC Executive Director Greg Myers said the partnership with AC503 Corp, and the Port Authority is important as each group has a different role to play and can coordinate quickly because of proximity.

“A more robust discussion,” Myers said of the opportunity to interact in the same office regularly.

503 Corporation Ex-



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Three Ashtabula County economic development agencies are now housed in the same building in Jefferson allowing for on-going cooperation on a daily basis. Pictured from left are Greg Myers, executive director of Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County, Sarah Bogardus, executive director for the 503 Corporation and Mark Winchell, executive director of the Ashtabula County Port Authority.

ecutive Director Sarah Bogardus said it is great to have a “team” atmosphere as she is the only employee of the revolving loan fund. She said it is nice to have the other two organizations to connect with a potential customer when she is out of the office with Winchell or Myers on site.

Growth Partnership

is a private non-profit organization that attempts to coordinate with potential businesses, other organizations, local politicians and state development organizations, Myers said.

“We are a soup-to-nuts operation,” he said.

Myers works with Cindy Rabe, manager of business services, and

together they help to fulfill needs for industry and other businesses including, permitting assistance, infrastructure development, tax incentive preparation, strategic planning and providing existing industry support.

Assisting the Petmin pig iron project is a major part of the organization’s activity during

the last several years, Myers said. He said he has assisted the company since he started at Growth Partnership in 2016.

Myers said large projects that include 700 construction workers and an estimated 100 full-time positions are important for the permanent development of the county.

“That is a very large economic stone being dropped into our pond,” he said.

The infrastructure component was especially important in landing the company, Myers said. He said the organization was most specifically involved by helping facilitate the Risberg pipeline to bring natural gas to the site.

Myers said the coronavirus pandemic has slowed some potential projects but things are looking bright for growth in the county.

“I think we are doing very well,” he said.

Winchell said the Port Authority is focused on three specific tasks that fill in the blanks to help future development opportunities.

He said the delivery of large volumes of raw water, the reclaiming of “brown fields” — for-

mer industrial sites — and specialty financing are the crux of the port authority’s operation.

“We have a permit to pull 200 million gallons a day from Lake Erie,” he said.

Winchell said the amount of water taken on the average day is about 20 million gallons and fulfills the needs of many industrial companies in Ashtabula Township including Ashta Chemical and INEOS.

The water was made possible when the Port Authority was able to acquire the former Plant C on Lake Road and slowly bring down the structure around it while continuing water production for area companies at the same time.

The availability of a large volume of water is important for the day-to-day operations of the companies, Winchell said. He said the “brown field” reclamation includes a variety of potential opportunities in Ashtabula County, including many former gas stations with underground tanks that need to be removed before they can be used for any other purpose.

“There is enough [brown-field] work for two lifetimes,” he said.

Winchell said a former gas station property in Saybrook Township had a tank removed with the assistance of the port authority and will hopefully be used for another business project in the future.

In the funding arena the port authority attempts to be a “third piece” in a development-funding policy that includes state money funneled to businesses.

“We can move seamlessly providing economic development services,” Bogardus said.

She said the 503 Corporation was formed as a revolving loan fund in the 1983 and opened in 1984.

The organization was created during a time when many industries left the area creating an economic problem that county economic development leaders needed to be address, Bogardus said.

The organization provides an extra bit of money to make deals work, Bogardus said. She said a general format is 50 percent from Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County, 40 percent from the 503 Corporation and 10 percent from the business itself.

The fund provides loans that are normally slightly lower than bank loans but with rates dropping so significantly, loans from the 503 Corporation are generally a “little higher or a little lower” than bank loans, Bogardus said. She said the loans are a maximum of 15 to 20 years with equipment loans 5 to 7 and other needs somewhere in between.

The coronavirus pandemic slowed the process last quarter but deals are slowly coming into line.

“We have loans in the pipeline,” she said.

Bogardus said the 503 Corporation has applied for some Cares Act funds that could be used to provide help for area companies outside the PPP program presently being administered.

“It would be COVID-related,” she said.

“This is an interesting job. You get to do a little bit of everything,” Bogardus said.



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Loss of festivals felt throughout Ashtabula County

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

A jet ski operator leaves a trail off Breakwater Beach at Geneva-on-the-Lake recently. Many area parks, beaches and businesses have been busy as tourists look for things to do.

Many festivals in Ashtabula County have been canceled due to COVID-19, but tourists have still been visiting the area.

The Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau has been forced to cut its staff by 50 percent, and cut operations and marketing by even more, said Stephanie Siegel, executive director of the ACCVB.

"It's no secret, [COVID-19] hit this industry immensely," Siegel said.

Siegel also serves as the president of the Ohio Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus. Other areas have been hit harder, such as Cincinnati, which had to take a 90 percent cut to staffing and operations, Siegel said.

Communities that have natural resources are well positioned for a comeback, Siegel said.

"We're so fortunate here that rivers and beaches and vineyards naturally lend themselves to social distancing," she said.

The CVB is getting more requests for covered bridge information, Siegel said. The covered bridges naturally lend themselves to social distancing, she said.

"Right now, [tourism is] strong," Siegel said. The ACCVB is encouraging people to stay safe and follow recommendations related to COVID-19.

Potential visitors have been asking about what precautions are being taken by area businesses to protect people from COVID-19, Siegel said.

The ACCVB is worried about the long term.

"We feel pretty comfortable in the short term, barring any kind of spike or shutdown," Siegel said. "What concerns us a little bit is looking [at], 'How do we get to this point next year?'"

The businesses that are adapting and being creative are doing well, Siegel said.

"So it's not dire, but it's not awesome," she said. "We're all going to do what we need to do to make it happen."

The ACCVB has had contact with a number of travel writers from outside of the county, looking to know more about Ashtabula County.

"We're getting lots of PR that we didn't receive in the past," Siegel said.

Tourism in Conneaut is doing well under the circumstances.

"Our beaches are filled with visitors," said Connie Naylor, president of the Conneaut Convention and Visitors Bureau. "I was at the beach last Sunday and the parking lots were full and people were social distancing."

"Of course, we're missing our big events, so that takes a drain on tourism," Naylor said. "No D-Day, no Perch and Pilsner, no July 4th Festival."

The lack of festivals

is being felt across the county.

"We do feel an impact with the lack of events and festivals," Siegel said. "Of course, they're feeling that everywhere, and so that's going to affect bed tax and occupancy."

Festivals all around Ashtabula County have been canceled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The county's ice wine festival had its last weekend canceled due to COVID-19 and was one of the first events in the county to be shut down.

Since then, many more festivals have been canceled, including the Grape Jamboree, the Wine and Walleye Festival, the Perch and Pilsner Festival and D-Day Conneaut.

Most recently, the Covered Bridge Festival, which had previously been altered from its usual form, was canceled altogether.

The reason for the cancellation is rules in place from the state of Ohio banning parades, festivals, fairs and carnivals, with the exception of county fairs, according to the Ohio Department of Health.

The Ashtabula County Fair has voted to host a junior fair only and will consist of animal shows, the market livestock sale, a 4-H

Style Review, Royal Court crowning, and a 4-H general, sewing and nutrition products showcase.

The ACCVB doesn't expect to reach the tourism numbers from last year, Siegel said.

"We're operating and projecting to be

at about 65 percent of where we were last year, when you look at overall 2020," Siegel said. "That's generous, but I'm optimistic."

Restaurants with outdoor seating are busy and there is a lot of carry-out business being done, Naylor said.

Raceway 7 in Pierpont is still holding races and that is bringing visitors into the city, Naylor said.

Conneaut has seen two new kayak rental businesses open in the last year.

"Our two new kayak businesses are flourishing, both the one in the harbor, Harbor Yak, and the Conneaut [Creek] Float and Fly shop," Naylor said. "There are kayaks everywhere. We've seen them on Conneaut Creek. We've seen them all over the port area. So that's a real plus."

"We look a little normal," Naylor said.

The Geneva-on-the-Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau could not be reached for comment.

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and law enforcement personnel.
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FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ASHTABULA COUNTY SINCE 1922



The Ashtabula Foundation is a private, nonprofit, philanthropic organization established in 1922. Our ten volunteer board members, all comprised of life-long Ashtabula County residents, have nearly 180 years of combined service to the foundation. All grant requests are carefully and thoughtfully reviewed by our trustees to ensure good stewardship of the funds. Several designated funds are set up for specific charitable purposes, as well as undesignated funds that benefit Human Services, Arts, Culture, Historical, Educational, Religious, Community, Recreational and Conservation who qualify. The foundation also administers several yearly college scholarship funds as well as oversees and funds a Youth Philanthropy program with nine of the high schools in Ashtabula County.

OUR VISION is to be both a proactive and responsive force in addressing charitable, religious, educational, quality of life, and other worthy causes in Ashtabula County.

OUR MISSION is for the betterment of Ashtabula County. We achieve this by administering the funds to reflect the intent of donors who wish to address the significant needs of Ashtabula County. Grants from the Ashtabula Foundation benefit all residents throughout Ashtabula County who seek greater quality in educational, religious, and cultural pursuits.

This year, 2020, we celebrate 98 years of service to Ashtabula County, and the year 2022 will mark our 1st Century!

In 2018, we broadened our **VISION** when we launched our 2nd Century Campaign with a goal - to build a larger capacity for granting funds by the year 2022 our 100th Anniversary. Once we reach our goal, we will have the capacity to gift \$1 million a year in grants to 501c3 nonprofits in Ashtabula County. The primary reason for our campaign is to further strengthen our vision, mission and financial resources so we are able to meet the increasing needs of Ashtabula County into future decades.

COVID-19 has largely impacted the lives of our residents, and the Ashtabula Foundation has and will continue to make important assessments to support our community.

If you are interested in joining our campaign or would like more information on the many ways to give and create your legacy, please contact our office.

For questions and inquiries, please contact our office:

Kelley L. Katon, Associate Director

440-992-6818

www.ashtabulafoundation.org

ashtabulafdn@gmail.com



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