

Community

VISION 2020



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Scott Wludyga, the incoming superintendent of A-Tech, poses with media equipment in the school's visual communication's studio. He got his start in media at Pymatuning Valley High School and held a variety of positions at WJET television in Erie.

Scott Wludyga

Superintendent shares vision for A-Tech

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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JEFFERSON TOWNSHIP — A love of television started at an early age for Scott Wludyga who got his start on video and on-air projects as a high school student at Pymatuning Valley High School.

Wludyga eventually garnered a spot at WJET in Erie where he held numerous positions as he rose to sports director of the station, but a love of education and being back home returned him to Ashtabula County as an educator.

A love of a challenge and natural inclination to leadership then put him on a new path that has led to his preparation to become superintendent of A-Tech on Aug. 1.

"One of the things I was able to do was [to be] the announcer for the boys basketball games," Wludyga said of his days in high school. He said his love of video started in high school as well and several teachers assisted him in that process.

"I made football highlight films for my teammates their senior year," Wludyga said.

"That was the first time I was on the microphone," Wludyga said of his stint as basketball announcer. After his 1993 graduation from Pymatuning Valley High School, Wludyga went to Allegheny College and earned a degree in communications.

During the year between Wludyga's junior and senior year of college, he was able to get an internship at WJET that changed the course of his life. He said the opportunity quickly escalated into a permanent position.

"I got hired a couple weeks into my internship [in 1996]," Wludyga said. He said he moved from news videographer, to news reporter, to sports reporter to sports director in the spring of 1999. "I was in that position until 2006," he said. At that point, Wludyga decided to go into education through a career technology path that allows professionals to use their career experience to teach in fields such as multi-media.

"I followed the same path as any career tech," he said of his transition in 2008.

Wludyga then earned a

master's degree at Kent State University.

"After teaching, I became interested in the administrative side. That is when I pursued a masters in educational leadership from Concordia University," Wludyga said.

He said he also held a variety of administrative roles during his time in education.

The coronavirus has firmed up Wludyga's understanding of what the school's mission is to the area. He said most of the workers deemed essential by the government are trained for their careers through A-Tech. He said safety forces, nurses, construction and restaurant workers are just a few of the professions that receive instruction at the school.

He said the importance of other careers started at A-Tech were also highlighted.

"What did people miss the most? You missed going to your cosmetologist. You missed going to a restaurant," he said.

The importance of technology for every-day life in a pandemic was also brought to the forefront,

Wludyga said.

"Our students not only know how to set up [communication systems], but they might invent the next app," he said.

The school also helps local students save money by taking high school classes that earn them free college credit or potential industry certification.

A key to the development of the school's 19 majors involves an advisory committee that includes representatives of each career from the area so the school can provide the most helpful educational programs, Wludyga said. "They keep us in touch with what is going on," he said.

A-Tech has about 600 students on campus during the school year with another 250 adults receiving instruction, Wludyga said. He said the students impacted by satellite programs increases that number to about 2,500 with 11 satellite multi-media programs and several junior high computer classes.

Wludyga said some of the perceptions regarding vocational schooling have changed over the years as the importance of

technology has increased and the need for specially skilled workers grows. He said a program for sophomores helps students review a variety of options during a career exploration program included 35 students last year, but now has 70 participating students for the upcoming school year on a waiting list.

"What we are seeing is not only do the students see the value, but parents and grandparents are seeing the value," Wludyga said.

An example of a program that can lead directly to a good paying job is the pharmacy assistant program, he said.

"Our pharmacy [assistant program] is one of only seven in the state where [a student] can be certified as a pharmacy assistant," Wludyga said.

Wludyga was born in Conneaut, but has lived most of his life in the Andover area and his parents Rick and Susan live in New Lyme. He is married to Karla, who he was on the air with on WJET television for many years. The couple have an 8-year-old son, Liam.



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Cynthia Schalmo, left, of Canton, and Meghan Payne, of Monroe Falls, prepare for graduation in the spring of 2019 at the Kent State Ashtabula.

KSUA strives to keep students, faculty and staff safe

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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ASHTABULA — Faculty, staff and students often refer to the Kent State University at Ashtabula community as a family.

"It's a family that is strengthened by the students, faculty and staff engaging together to provide the best possible path to earn a degree," Dean Susan Stocker said. "We have been focused on bringing students back safely, developing protocols and determining space needs, etc."

Because of the pandemic, students will see some changes to the Fall 2020 schedule. Some classes offered by the Ashtabula campus will be taught remotely. Some of these classes will include activities, like meeting with a small discussion group or attending a lecture on campus.

"Our goal for remote classes is to replicate the unique, close-knit community that is the heart of Kent State Ashtabula," Stocker said. "Now, more than ever, we need to remain connected with one another."

A number of classes will be scheduled for delivery on campus. Most of these courses will take place in laboratory settings and will be offered in biology, chemistry, nursing and the allied health programs. Students who come to campus for these classes, as well as the entire faculty and staff of Kent State Ashtabula, must wear face masks and adhere to social distancing rules.

Even if a student signs up for a remote class, there will be opportunities to engage in on-campus experiences. "Students will benefit from the access to quiet study spaces, reliable high-speed internet and library resources including curbside pickup," she said. "Throughout the year, students will be able to participate in student organizations and other campus activities,



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Priscilla Stokes of Ashtabula shares a laugh with a fellow graduate prior to Spring 2019 commencement exercises at Kent State University Ashtabula. The school is presently fine tuning their plans for the 2020-21 school year.

both in person and virtually."

Fall semester classes start on Aug. 27. Later this summer, the faculty and staff will release more information about fall classes.

"We plan to end all in-person instruction on Nov. 20, with remaining instruction, study sessions and final examinations moving remotely for the remainder of the semester," Stocker said. "This plan is designed to address epidemiological models that suggest a potential resurgence in COVID-19 cases in late November/early December."

Because of this new schedule, fall break that had been planned for Oct. 15-18, has been canceled.

KSU at Ashtabula's Student Services team is ready to meet students. They can advise students on everything from class schedules to

financial aid, all remotely. Students are urged to contact the office at 440-964-4217 as soon as possible to get connected with an advisor or financial aid team member.

"In addition to your physical safety, we remain committed to the mental health and well-being of our university community as we prepare to reopen," Stocker said. "We are exploring expanded mental health support to ensure that we are meeting student needs."

Any KSU at Ashtabula student in need of physical or behavioral health services, should visit www.kent.edu/ashtabula/counseling for further information.

Staying safe on campus is a priority at Kent State Ashtabula for the remainder of 2020, Stocker said.

"We know students want to remain on

campus, and we do, too," she said. "To ensure students are taking responsibility for keeping themselves and others safe from the coronavirus, all Kent State students must agree to the KSU Student Pledge and adhere to the Flashes Safe Seven principles:

- Face coverings are required. The university will provide you with two cloth face coverings.
- You must rigorously practice hand hygiene.
- Physical distancing guidelines will be strictly enforced requiring individuals to maintain at least 6 feet of separation from others.
- You must self-monitor daily for symptoms of COVID-19 before coming to campus or attending class.
- Always demonstrate kindness in all you do.

For health questions about COVID-19 and

safe practices, call University Health Services at 330-672-2322, or after hours, contact the Kent State Nurse Line at 330-672-2326. Visit the COVID-19 hub for more information.

Students and faculty will be expected to follow these principles during all face-to-face classes and interactions. Students who fail to follow these guidelines could be subject to the Classroom Disruption Policy or other areas of the Code of Student Conduct.

In some cases, individuals may have special circumstances that prevent them from wearing a face covering. Those individuals must submit a Pandemic Adjustment Request Accommodation Form.

While the campus has no major building projects planned for 2020-2021 school year, Stocker said KSU

Ashtabula plans to put solar panels on the south campus, near where the baseball field used to be.

"It's a university initiative that will allow us to reduce electrical consumption and save \$400,000 over 25 years," said Dave Schultz, director of business affairs and operations at KSU Ashtabula.

The project is expected to be completed late this summer. Five other KSU branches also are going solar: East Liverpool, Geauga, Salem, Stark and Trumbull.

"In the long term, we also plan to do a major renovation of the library," Stocker said. "We are also working on developing several new degree programs. We are working with Community Counseling to develop a bachelor degree in social work. We are also working closely with Ohio Means Jobs to develop credentials shorter than degrees to up-skill the workforce, primarily in information technology."

KSU Ashtabula will continue with its Rising Scholars program from Lakeside High School, and Stocker will continue to serve as the Interim Dean of the College of Applied and Technical Studies, which covers all the regional campuses in the Kent system.

The campus unveiled a newly refurbished auditorium last year and a new entrance and front parking lots were completed in 2017.

The campus now boasts a new sign and main entrance facing Lake Road West. In addition, the project provided additional green space to the campus.

"With the addition of the Robert S. Morrison Health and Science building on the west side of the campus, it was time to update the entrance to provide easier access to the entire campus and, in the spirit of place making, we wanted the entrance to come to the heart of the campus," Stocker said. "This creates a stronger campus identity."



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Local politicians and supporters of the Risberg pipeline react during a December 2019 ribbon cutting ceremony in North Kingsville to celebrate the recently completed pipeline that will now bring natural gas to Ashtabula County.

Risberg Pipeline brings natural gas to region

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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NORTH KINGSVILLE — In December of 2019, a group of elected officials, business leaders and construction workers gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a natural gas pipeline that runs from Meadville, Pa., to North Kingsville.

Construction on the Risberg Pipeline started in spring of 2019 and cost an estimated \$86 million, according to the pipeline's website. The pipeline was built by RH energytrans.

"We have known for a long time that this part of Ohio was in need of natural gas supply to support not only existing businesses, but also new business opportunities," Oivind Risberg, owner and CEO of RH energytrans, said at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"I'm very happy that we spent the last few years 100-percent dedicated to get gas in here, because I got tired of listening to the need for natural gas supply when we have so much of it underneath us."

Officials also opened a valve at the event, letting natural gas flow through the pipeline to Dominion, which is contracted to take a significant amount of the gas from the pipeline.

The pipeline has been in the works for several years, said Dennis Holbrook, a spokesperson for RH energytrans.

"We've had a long-standing relationship with Dominion," Holbrook said. "And

we've talked at different times about the proximity of our system to theirs, the east Ohio area."

RH energytrans hoped to start construction in the fall of 2018, but regulatory issues delayed construction until early 2019, Holbrook said.

"The pace may have been a bit slower, but we did well in terms of passing muster with the regular inspections that were taking place," Holbrook said. "[The testing] took place throughout the construction to assure environmental compliance, in particular. So, I think, given the breadth of the project, I think that was very encouraging."

The majority of the line is 12-inch diameter pipe, Holbrook said. It can transport 55 million BTUs of natural gas per day, Holbrook said. There were 28 miles of new pipeline laid during the construction that connect to an existing 32 miles of pipe, according to the company's website.

The project was delayed by wet weather in the spring of 2019, slowing down construction.

If demand increases, the amount of natural gas through the pipeline can also be increased, Holbrook said. The expansion could be done by increasing the compression of the gas, he said.

RH energytrans can also construct a pipeline running parallel to a six-mile stretch of pipe that is only eight inches in diameter, or replace that

smaller pipe with a larger one, a process called looping, Holbrook said. That narrower section of pipeline would act as a bottleneck for the flow of natural gas.

"If the need is there, there is an ability to expand," Holbrook said. "The bigger part was getting the pipeline in place to begin with."

During the early phases of the project, a number of people asked Holbrook why not build it bigger initially, he said.

"Of course, I explained that pipe is extremely expensive," Holbrook said. "Every time you upgrade to a different-sized pipe, it adds basically tens of millions of dollars to the overall project. So what we put in was what we thought was a fair size for piping, with the ability to use compression and some looping later on, as opposed to putting a larger-diameter pipe in now."

There will be minimal environmental impact to increasing the capacity of the line, Holbrook said.

Work still needed to be done after the ribbon-cutting, restoring land over where the pipeline was buried. At this point, some work needs to be finished on one access road, then work on the pipeline will be finished in Ohio, Holbrook said. There is still some remediation work that needs to be done in Pennsylvania, he said.

Everything is in place for Dominion to utilize the natural gas from the pipeline,

Holbrook said.

Dominion spokesperson Neil Durbin said that the Risberg Pipeline is operational at both ends.

"For Dominion Energy Ohio, the Risberg Pipeline provides additional natural gas capacity to help us serve an area that has been supply-constrained for years," Durbin said.

"This new pipeline also enables Dominion Energy Ohio to provide more supply reliability to the Ashtabula area, as well as drive economic growth there in the months and years to come."

The Risberg Pipeline was one of the first projects Growth Partnership Director Greg Myers worked on when he joined the organization.

"[Natural gas] was one of the missing pieces of the development puzzle we didn't have for years," Myers said.

He said the Risberg Pipeline was what made the Petmin pig iron plant — planned for the Ashtabula Harbor — possible.

"Without [the pipeline], we wouldn't be talking about any additional development projects that required sizable volumes of natural gas," Myers said.

The pipeline project would not have happened without Dominion, because Dominion agreed to take the natural gas, Myers said.

There are 10 to 15 new projects or expansions of existing companies that are being actively worked on in the area, Myers said.

"Many of those, we wouldn't be talking about if not for the Risberg Pipeline," he said.

Natural gas is useful as a way to operate industrial furnaces, Myers said.

"Our bigger facilities, whether it's a company like Ashta Chemicals, or Ineos Pigments, or the Petmin project, the need for natural gas is critical in terms of their operational capacity," he said.

The county has been out of the running on a number of projects due to a lack of reliable natural gas, said Casey Kozlowski, president of the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners.

"This is a big deal for Ashtabula County, and it's going to help fill a void that has existed for many years," Kozlowski said. "And from an economic development perspective, it's going to enable us to be now in the running for larger-scale projects, such as the Petmin project, that is in the works already."

Access to natural gas is a prerequisite for many projects, Kozlowski said.

"Many projects, they just looked right by us, because we haven't been able to necessarily check that item off the list in years past," he said.

The pipeline will put Ashtabula County in a good position for other large-scale economic development projects in the future, Kozlowski said.

Natural gas is one of the key components of infrastructure

needed for economic development, State Rep. John Patterson said. Ashtabula County has had access to many kinds of infrastructure, but lacked natural gas, he said.

"The main line that came into Ashtabula County traversed eastern Cuyahoga [County] and Lake County," Patterson said. "And by the time it got to Ashtabula, there wasn't enough left for heavy commercial use."

Patterson said the pipeline has opened a new wave of economic development.

The COVID-19 outbreak has hindered economic development in the county, Patterson said. But he said the infrastructure in Ashtabula County isn't going away.

"When COVID passes, we're going to be ready," he said.

In addition to the end of the pipeline in North Kingsville, the city of Conneaut has placed two taps on the pipeline. One is located near the city's industrial park and the other is near Route 7.

Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted was in North Kingsville for the ribbon-cutting in December.

"Gov. [Mike] DeWine and I really appreciate the investment that's being made here today," Husted said at the event. "We're excited about what's happening here. We appreciate RH's investment. We appreciate Dominion stepping up and leading. We want to be great partners for the long run with you."

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Pig iron plant poised to bring change

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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ASHTABULA — The construction of a nodular pig iron plant in Ashtabula Harbor is expected to bring about 100 full-time jobs to the area upon completion.

Petmin first announced its intention to build a \$474 million facility in the Ashtabula Harbor in late 2018. The facility is expected to create a maximum of 600 jobs during construction and around 100 jobs once it is finished, said Jim Timonere, Ashtabula City Manager.

Construction is expected to take two and a half years, he said.

"Things have slowed down a little bit due to COVID, but it seems like their new schedule is on track," Timonere said. "We're really excited to get the ball rolling down there and get construction underway."

The facility would produce nodular pig iron, a type of metal used to produce high value metal components like engine blocks and landing gear, said Greg Myers, executive director of Ashtabula County Growth Partnership.

Currently, all of the nodular pig iron in the United States is imported, Myers said. A lot of the consumers of nodular pig iron in the United States are located in the northern Midwest, around the Great Lakes.

"So they can move material by barge, they can move it by rail, they can move it by truck," Myers said. "They're located in close proximity to



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The Petmin pig iron plant is planned for the Kinder Morgan Pinney Dock property in Ashtabula Harbor.

those customers."

Petmin initially considered building a facility in Ashtabula some time ago, but the lack of natural gas at the time made the area not feasible. With the recent completion of the Risberg Pipeline, which runs from Meadville, Pa., to North Kingsville, there is enough natural gas to make the project viable.

Petmin narrowed down the sites it was looking at in 2016, Myers said.

"I think they were moving forward on advancing the project in Canada until they were informed that we had a project underway to overcome our limitations on natural gas supply," Myers said.

Petmin started to evaluate Ashtabula County more in late 2017 and 2018, Myers said.

"I think one of the greatest things about our community is we just didn't say, 'Oh, we don't have the gas. Good luck to you somewhere else,'" Timonere said. "We knew that



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Palmira Farinha, chief operating officer of Petmin Inc., discusses a pig iron plant project to be built in Ashtabula during an October 2019 town hall meeting at Kent State Ashtabula.

there was going to be an issue with expansion and even reliability with the manufacturing that we have here now, if we didn't get a better supply of gas. So for those 10 years, we were out there trying to make deals and working with people to get this gas into the county."

The city plans to improve some roads near Kinder-Morgan Pienny Dock to accommodate expected traffic in the area.

"We're anticipating a lot of [car and truck traffic] coming down Route 11, so basically, we're going to get them off of Lake Road, there, as quickly as possible, and on to those back streets to avoid any traffic congestion or things like that with the regular residential traffic," Timonere said.

The plan is to widen Parkgate Avenue, which leads to the entrance to Pinney Dock, to four lanes, then pave East 5th Street, which is not paved currently. There are not any homes along Parkgate Avenue and the section of East 5th Street between Parkgate and the entrance to the Petmin facility, which will be located on East 5th Street, Timonere said.

"So it's just a better way to get them quickly off that road and onto a more dedicated road onto their facility," Timonere said.

The projects have not been put out for a bid yet, Timonere said. They could go out to bid at the beginning of August, with construction taking place later this year, he said.

"This is going to be one of the largest economic development projects that I've seen in my lifetime in Ashtabula County," said Casey Kozlowski, president of the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners. "The Petmin project is a big deal and we're really excited to see it coming to fruition here in Ashtabula County."

The construction of the plant is a large investment into Ashtabula County, Kozlowski said.

There have been many conversations between the county building department and Petmin, Kozlowski said.

"They've had conversations and we're just waiting for things to move along," he said.

State Rep. John Patterson said traffic in the area would challenge people's patience during construction.

"The research that I've read indicates that factories and business facilities tend to cluster," Patterson said. "For example, Silicon Valley is not one isolated business entity. They feed off one another. It's my prediction, in the long term, that there will be other industries come into Ashtabula that will feed off the Petmin project and exist with that synergy that such an effort brings about."

There could be a resurgence of high-tech jobs in the county if a metal casting facility comes to the area, Patterson said.

The Petmin project and the recently completed Risberg natural gas pipeline are foundational industries that will move the county forward, Patterson said.

The Ohio EPA issued a new air permit for Petmin on July 17, according to a statement from the EPA. The permit was issued after a public hearing in May.

Residents submitted a number of questions and comments to the EPA about the permit. The comments ranged from questions about

the potential impact of the pig iron plant on air quality in Ashtabula County to requests for the EPA to deny the permit because the plant could impact tourism.

A number of the public comments mentioned tourism. The Ohio EPA addressed the concerns in its response to the public.

"Maintaining any community for the economic benefits of tourism is an important issue," the EPA stated. "However, this is not something Ohio EPA can consider under existing rules and regulations. These issues are typically decided through local zoning rules and should be addressed with their local city or township zoning organizations."

Initially, Petmin planned to have a facility at the plant that would have captured carbon dioxide produced by the plant, but a contract has not been signed yet, so moving forward without changing the permit would have made them out of compliance, Timonere said.

"It has been their intention the entire time to have a facility there that would capture the CO2 that comes off the plant, because it is a commodity," Timonere said.

The city is strongly suggesting that Petmin still construct the capture plant, and Timonere said he believes that Petmin still plans to build the facility.

The changed permit is still within EPA requirements, Timonere said.

"I am very sensitive to the observations of those who are concerned about the air quality, and yet at the same time, having worked with some of the folks at the Ohio EPA, I have a great deal of trust in them to do the right thing," Patterson said.

"I'm satisfied that the EPA is doing its homework on this," Patterson said. "Especially given the input that our people offered, and that's fair. The EPA should have answers to all of those questions."

A balance needs to be struck between preserving the environment and developing the economy, Patterson said.

"If we're looking for an area that's absolutely pristine, there won't be development of any kind," Patterson said. "But we have to be on guard for those projects that would be detrimental."

He is optimistic that balance can be found here.

"I'm still bullish on Ashtabula County," Patterson said. "I remain confident."

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