

Community VISION 2021

SPIRE growth spurt continues along 534

Expansion master plan sets tone for future of Harpersfield complex

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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HARPERSFIELD TOWNSHIP — A long-term plan for the expansion of SPIRE Institute has recently been completed by an outside firm and will be used to plot the next steps in the growth of the facility, said SPIRE Institute co-managing director Richard O'Dell.

O'Dell said the company does similar work for universities and other institutions.

"We have just completed a campus master plan," he said.

The plan includes 650 acres, with nearly 500 acres of land purchased by SPIRE Institute in the last several years, O'Dell said. He said the plan will help the group decide what facilities should be constructed first.

One of the projects on the agenda is a large residence hall. He said the plan will help decide whether that project comes next or other facility development.

O'Dell said SPIRE Institute intends to construct a hotel on the property but plans have been delayed significantly because of financing issues stemming from the coronavirus pandemic. He said he hopes groundbreaking on the facility can still occur later this summer.

O'Dell said the organization is focusing on potential students from all over the United States and abroad for the fall program. He said attendance at the SPIRE Academy is looking better than last year but a lot of decisions aren't made until August.

He said many athletes, and their families, take extra time to review their options as there are few institutions that offer the athletic and academic options. O'Dell said the families wait to see what situation would fit them best.

O'Dell said students will be allowed to register into October and then new additions for the January 2022 semester will be accepted.

SPIRE Institute has

'We are having good conversations with local political people and companies.'

Richard O'Dell
Co-managing director
of SPIRE Institute

programs for post graduate students and for students in ninth to 12th grades, O'Dell said. The academy also now operates a school on-site through a partnership with Grand River Academy.

O'Dell said SPIRE Academy has hired their own instructors this year but will continue an affiliation with GRA for at least two years. He said plans for their fully certified school should be complete at that time.

Five dorm pods were constructed last year and two more have been added this summer, opening up the possibility for 84 resident students, O'Dell said. The existing focus of concentration for students include basketball, track and field, swimming and drone development.

Two new tracts of participation are on the drawing boards with wrestling, under the direction of Kenny Monday, starting up this fall, O'Dell said. He said start up programs generally take 18 months to get rolling but Monday will hit the ground running upon his arrival.

Lacrosse is another sport on the agenda for the coming years, O'Dell said. "We are also ramping up for



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Villanova's Sean Dolan wins the 800 meters in May at the Big East Track and Field Championships at SPIRE Institute in Harpersfield Township.

lacrosse," he said of the proposed hiring of a coach late this summer or fall with camps next summer

and students in the fall of 2022.

Kibwe' Johnson was recently promoted to SPIRE Institute Track

and Field head coach after the retirement of Charlie Powell.

O'Dell said SPIRE Institute is also in negotiations with a university to help design drone courses that can be attached to the ceiling of the track and field building and be lowered when needed.

"We would be the only facility like this in the world," he said. The course would open up the possibility of drone world championships being held at the facility, O'Dell said.

A variety of summer camps and regular drone competitions are being held at the facility. Ryan Lochte,

a multi-gold swimmer is scheduled to participate in swim camps from August 8 to 12 at the facility.

O'Dell said SPIRE Institute hopes businesses will grow along Route 534 in conjunction of the complex.

"We are having good conversations with local political people and companies," he said.

The emphasis of recruitment of sports competitions to the facility is continuing, O'Dell said.

He said SPIRE Institute hopes to grow the amount of events that would return to Harpersfield Township every year.



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Western Reserve Model Yacht Club members maneuver their boats during a June competition at SPIRE Institute in Harpersfield Township.

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Investing in sleep

ACMC clinic moving to newly renovated home

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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ASHTABULA — Ashtabula County Medical Center will soon relocate its Center for Sleep Medicine to newly renovated space a few blocks south of the hospital on Lake Avenue. And, later this year, patients receiving outpatient physical, occupational, and speech therapy will have a new state-of-the-art facility in the ACMC Health and Wellness Plaza.

ACMC has been offering testing and treatment for sleep disorders since 2003. Testing was originally done in two rooms within the hospital, but overhead pages and typical hospital noises didn't allow for the best sleep environment.

In 2006, ACMC created new sleep study rooms in the former Ashtabula Clinic building, which also housed business offices. The Center for Sleep Medicine became the only service in that building when the accounting and patient financial services departments into the ACMC Commons in the ACMC Health and Wellness Plaza in 2019.

"Over 40 million Americans suffer from chronic sleep disorders - and nearly 20 million experience occasional sleep difficulties. Having a building that is dedicated to sleep medicine allows us to better serve our patients," said ACMC President and CEO Michael Habowski.

The ACMC Center for Sleep Medicine will feature four individual sleep rooms, each outfitted to feel like a home bedroom to best

replicate a patient's normal sleep environment. One of the rooms is a dedicated family room that will allow a parent to stay in the room with a child or a caretaker to stay with an elderly patient who needs additional assistance.

ACMC offers sleep studies under the guidance of a pulmonologist who is board-certified in sleep medicine diagnosis and treatment. During a sleep study, a trained polysomnographer monitors the sleeper's heart rate, oxygen levels, breathing patterns, the number of times they are awakened from sleep, and more. After reviewing the sleep study, treatment options are offered to improve the quality of sleep, which leads to improved health and improved day-to-day productivity and well-being.

The ACMC Center for Sleep Medicine is accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and The Joint Commission.

The ACMC Rehabilitation Services move will expand the space available for treating patients in need of physical, occupational, and speech therapy and allows for dedicated areas for pediatric therapy - including a speech lab to assist children overcome speech delays and impairments. The ACMC Foundation is providing funding to support the expansion of pediatric therapy services in the new location. Donations are still being accepted for the project and can be made by visiting www.acmcfoundation.org.

In addition to more space, the move will

place ACMC Rehabilitation Services directly next to Premiere Fitness in the ACMC Health and Wellness Plaza.

"Patients can continue to heal, gain strength, and improve mobility after completing their therapy sessions," Habowski said.

"Our therapists regularly recommend that patients continue their rehabilitation either at home or at a fitness center. By locating our rehabilitation services next to Premiere, our therapists will be able to work with the trainers and fitness specialists at Premiere to help patients become familiar with equipment and how to continue to improve their quality of life."

To learn more about the ACMC Center for Sleep Medicine or ACMC's Rehabilitation Services, visit www.acmchealth.org.

In the near future, the former Valu King space in the ACMC Health and Wellness Plaza will be converted into smaller suites that will be available for lease.

"Our commitment to ensuring quality healthcare is available in Ashtabula County has never wavered. That commitment includes collaborating with other organizations and providers when that makes the most sense," Habowski said.

"By creating a cluster of smaller offices in the ACMC Health and Wellness Plaza, we are providing space for a diversity of providers and services. It's another way of us meeting our mission to provide quality care that positively impacts the health of our community."

Leaders hope to solve Andover ER problem

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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ANDOVER — Efforts continue to figure out how emergency room services can be brought back to the area after the UH emergency department in the village closed during the early stages of the pandemic.

Andover Mayor Jerry Dibell has been working with hospital officials and politicians at the county and state level to try and solve the problem that includes lack of emergency room services for the entire south-east end of the county.

"We just had a conference call," Dibell said of efforts conducted with UH officials in early July. He has been looking into a variety of options including discussing services with other hospitals and reviewing options if a government-hospital cooperation might work.

Dibell said he has been working every angle to solve the problem that can have life and death consequences with at least a 30 mile ambulance ride to the nearest emergency room.

"The mayor has reached out," said Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski. He said the possibility of using federal CARES Act funds or American Rescue Plan money has been discussed to see if any of the funds would fit the criteria for the

federal money.

Pooling resources could be used to start meeting the need but it is a complex problem facing rural areas with lack of emergency services. "It is a big concern. That is why we would want to assist in any way we can," he said.

Kozlowski said most areas of Ashtabula County south of Interstate 90 find themselves with a long ride to hospitals north of Interstate 90, in Pennsylvania or in Chardon.

Dibell said in Chardon Ambulance has the contract for the Andover area but it includes Andover and Richmond, Wayne, Williamsfield and Andover townships as well. He said it can be a challenge to service the needs if ambulances are transporting patients to Ashtabula in emergency situations.

The possibility of public hospitals is one of the solutions for rural areas, Kozlowski said. He said such arrangements presently exist in other areas.

"Lake Hospitals used to be a county hospital," he said.

State Representative Sandy O'Brien said she is in the early stages of researching potential solutions to the problem. She said there is a need for emergency services in rural areas and will be talking with Dibell and others about the problem.

New chief at ACHD

Becker takes over as Health Commissioner after Saporito's retirement

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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Jay Becker took over as Ashtabula County Health Commissioner earlier this year, after long-time Health Commissioner Ray Saporito retired.

Becker, who took over for Saporito in May, has a long history in public health. He worked with the Red Cross before starting work with the Ashtabula County Health Department in 2002, he said.

"I've always had a knack of wanting to work to help individuals in need," Becker said.

With the Red Cross, he helped families that had been burned out of their homes or down on their luck, he said.

After 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, public health added an emergency preparedness branch, Becker said.

"I thought it was a good fit and I went with it and I didn't look back," Becker said.

There was a lot of collaboration at the start, Becker said. "One agency can't do it by themselves," Becker said. "That's one thing I tell you, from day one, I can tell you, and even today, the thing about Ashtabula County ... the collaboration when I started here, it was phenomenal," he added later.

The groups in Ashtabula County worked together well. "People here, they reach out, they work together," Becker said. "We know that we need

each other to make things work."

After working for the Geauga County Health Department for several years, Becker returned to the Ashtabula County Health Department in 2016, and resumed his old position as Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and epidemiologist.

"In 2018 the administrator's position opened up," Becker said.

The administrator handles the financial and grant side of things, Becker said. "That's a big piece of the administrative side of making this agency run, is the funding aspect."

The experience of being administrator was valuable, he said.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, county agencies pulled together.

"We had that county (COVID-19) call, that would take place every Tuesday, early on," Becker said. "And we had 100s of people who were part of that call, and all we had to do was reach out to different members and agencies. People were very interested in what was going on, and any way that they could help."

The reports outlining the county's COVID-19 situation at the beginning of July were some of the best that had been released.

"So our active cases for Ashtabula County (were) listed at 17,"



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Jay Becker is the health commissioner for the Ashtabula County Health Department.

Becker said. The previous report listed 28 cases, he said. "So the numbers keep going down, that is definitely a good sign," he said.

The county's vaccination rate is not rising as much as Becker would like, he said.

According to the Ohio Department of Health, around 43.1 percent of county residents have had at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and the county recently passed 40 percent of residents fully vaccinated.

"That's a very telling statistic, for me," Becker said. Some states with low vaccination percentages are facing an outbreak of delta variant cases right now, he said. "They are currently reporting that anyone who is dying right now of COVID, are those who are unvaccinated," Becker said.

There have been some delta variant COVID-19 cases in the county, but they have not taken off at this point, Becker said. "I hope we don't see it,

but I think if we're going to see it, it's going to be when the schools get back in session again," he said.

"We listen to vaccination calls from the state, and every other health department is on these calls, and these go on a couple times a week," Becker said. "The state is trying to give us ideas, other health departments are trying to put out ideas, everyone's trying to do different things to get people vaccinated."

Those who wanted to be vaccinated have been, Becker said. "Everyone else, ... even those who are on the fence anymore, they're just not interested," he said.

Becker said he didn't know how to get those people interested in getting vaccinated until the pandemic affects them directly, and at that point it's too late.

Public health has been neglected for years, Becker said. The Ashtabula County Health Department receives \$13,000 per year from the state, he said. "That is a subsidy we receive on a yearly basis," Becker said. "So we have to then reach out and get grants to help fund our programing." The Ashtabula County Health Department's vaccination, tobacco and emergency preparedness programs are grant funded, he said.

ACCREDITATION

The Ashtabula County Health Department is currently going through an accreditation process that Becker likened to a process hospitals went through earlier in his career.

The county health department finished its site evaluation in April, and is awaiting the results, Becker said. The county health department had to submit hundreds of documents for accreditation, while dealing with the pandemic, he said.

"There's just a lot of things I know the public's not aware of," Becker said. The health department has to pay \$5,600 per year to participate in the program.

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STAR BEACON FILE PHOTO

Edgewood Warriors mini-football league was one of more than 50 floats in the 2018 Ashtabula Christmas parade, sponsored by the ADDA.

ADDA to restart downtown events in fall

BY SHELLEY TERRY
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ASHTABULA — The Ashtabula Downtown Development Association was created nearly 20 years ago to restore and revitalize downtown Ashtabula. The mission was to lead, assist and support activities that enhance the quality of life in the community.

In 2018, the group adopted the slogan, "Meet Me on Main."

"This simple line serves as a welcome to everyone," President Myke Dowd said. "It is an open invitation to join in the activities and shop our local merchants."

The COVID-19 pandemic brought financial struggles to many local merchants and caused the group to cancel all events, such as an art show and First Fridays.

"Now, with 2021 finally here we can see the light at the end of the tunnel," Dowd said. "We have new businesses opening up downtown: a bakery, auto service shop, restaurant and a used appliance store."

Dowd is especially looking forward to First Fridays, painted crosswalks, a chili cook-off and other events returning in the fall.

First Friday, Fall Harvest, will be held Oct. 1 on Main Avenue, with entertainment, a scavenger hunt and a food drive.

- An Enchanted Christmas will kick off the holiday season at 7 p.m. Nov. 19 downtown with a Christmas parade, Christmas tree competition, merchant window decorating contest and a snowman cut-out contest.

- Small Business Saturday will be celebrated Nov. 27, where area residents will be encouraged to shop local.

- The annual Christmas parade and activities will be held Nov. 19.

- An ice festival in January.

"We will have carvings and a tower of ice," she said. "All events are geared to bring people downtown."

Last year's parade and other events were canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Dowd noted the ADDA's past accomplishments, including restoration of the fountain in Cornelius Park, new flower pots on Main Avenue, two murals, a farmers market, a chocolate walk and a public art competition. In the future, the group is hoping to get cameras installed along Main Avenue for added security.

One thing the ADDA needs this year is more members and workers, said Marty Cephas, an ADDA committee member.

"We want fresh ideas," she said. "New ideas are very important."

For more information, go to www.downtownashtabula.com.

What's next in Conneaut?



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Anthony, left, and Alonzo Marshall walk on Park Avenue in Conneaut. Expanded business opportunities are occurring in Conneaut Harbor.

Talks about Harbor's future have begun in earnest

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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CONNEAUT — A number of meetings have been held to bring stakeholders together from Conneaut's harbor to discuss improvements and how to continue growth in the area.

Kathy Zappitello, executive director of the Conneaut Public Library, said the library received a \$3,000 grant to help facilitate difficult conversations in the area. The grant was issued through the America Library Association, she said.

"This grant, awarded applicants \$3,000, and the premise of the grant was to offer assistance to small libraries to hold difficult community conversations," Zappitello said. "And we wrote our grant knowing that there was

expansion poised to start happening in our harbor area."

Zappitello said the library was aware that new businesses were coming into the area, and old businesses may have questions. "So we thought there's opportunity there, because there's so much to be decided," she said.

Zappitello met with City Manager Jim Hockaday to discuss the idea, and the potential need for city involvement in improving the area.

The library used the grant funds to purchase equipment to allow remote meetings to take place, Zappitello said. "So this meeting can take place anywhere, whether it's on the library property, or anywhere where we need to hold a conversation," she said. "We have the instruments necessary to do that.

After the library was awarded the grant, they did extensive research into who owned land in the city's harbor area, Zappitello said. "Our goal was that they come together to disclose to each other what their proprietary ideas are, so we had to create a safe space to do that," she said. Another goal was to have the group continue to meet, and provide a unified voice for the area in the future, she said.

After the first meeting, more people were invited, Zappitello said.

An economic development firm retained by the city, the Conneaut Port Authority and the Conneaut Foundation facilitated a number of meetings to discuss some fundamental issues, and Stephanie Siegel, director of the Ashtabula County Con-

vention and Visitors Bureau, has led two meetings to discuss more branding oriented issues, Zappitello said.

The meetings have been private to a degree, as trust is being built between the parties, Zappitello said.

City Council President Jon Arcaro said it is turning into a public-private development. "And that's what we need," he said. "We need to have a good partnership with private developers and our part, the public, involved in any way we can assist them, whether it be infrastructure work, our zoning regulations, construction, any way we can assist these businesses is very important. That's what's going to continue to spur the growth we've seen in the harbor area. I'm very glad to see that happening."

The city works closely with

the Conneaut Port Authority, and the Port Authority works closely with private businesses, Arcaro said.

One concern for the area is parking, he said. A number of potential areas are being looked at for parking, Arcaro said. "That's a good problem to have, but we're trying to mitigate that, and not make the growing pains so difficult," he said.

The city is also planning to pave Day Street north of Park Avenue, Arcaro said.

The infrastructure along Park Avenue is very old, and in need of replacement, Hockaday said. "It's not just about what's there today, but what's going to be there," he said. A number of new businesses have moved into the area of Park Avenue recently,

SEE HARBOR, 9

U.S. DOT grant will allow improved access, industrial growth

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
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CONNEAUT — A \$19.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation will help pay for the creation of the Conneaut Port Connector, which will consist of a new rail spur and the extension and repaving of an existing road, connecting the city's harbor to the East Side

Industrial Park.

The grant will pay for around two thirds of a spur from the Canadian National railroad line to the industrial park, and pay for the improvement and extension of Thompson Road, City Manager Jim Hockaday said.

The project will create an access point on the east side of the city's dock, he said. Thompson Road will be paved

for a section that is currently gravel, and a section of road will be created, running from the current end of Thompson Road to the port, Hockaday said.

A traffic signal would also likely be added to the intersection of Thomson Road and Route 20, Hockaday said. The addition of the port access will allow semi drivers easier access to Interstate 90,

Hockaday said.

Currently, trucks leaving the port have to travel through residential streets on their way from the port to Interstate 90. The new access would allow trucks to reach Route 20 and Interstate 90 much easier, Hockaday said.

"I think it's an element of good planning is that if we have heavy commercial traffic like that, it needs to

be on it's on road and not rumbling down Broad Street," Hockaday said. "It's bad for residents, it's bad for businesses. They don't jive, they're not compatible. So ultimately, part of the purpose of the Conneaut Port Connector is one, develop the port, but also make sure that port development isn't impacting our residential areas either."

The easiest route for

trucks to reach Interstate 90 is to follow Route 20 to 6N in Pennsylvania, Hockaday said. "Our goal would be any of the industrial park traffic would come off the 6N exit, it just makes more sense, actually," he said.

The rail spur will provide rail access to the industrial park, Hockaday said. It will extend

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Brad Indoe was hired as wine maker at Laurello Vineyards in Austinburg Township after his 2019 graduation from Kent State Ashtabula.

WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Everything's going grape

Entrepreneur chose Ashtabula County

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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AUSTINBURG TOWNSHIP — A love of rural Ohio helped draw Brad Indoe back to his native state.

Kent State Ashtabula was also a big part in Indoe's transition from snack maker to wine maker.

The journey to wine maker was a long and winding trail but Indoe feels he has found his home.

"I was born and raised on a dairy farm in Lodi," said Indoe, who graduated from Cloverleaf High School in 2001. He continued his education at Ohio State University taking agriculture classes, but decided to widen his education.

Indoe ended up with two bachelors degrees and a minor in agribusiness. He said the history and marketing majors provided him the opportunity to widen his horizons.

Indoe graduated in 2006 and headed west. "Upon graduation I got offered a job to go to Los Angeles," he said.

Marketing and sales were his focus as he worked in the consumer electronics industry for more than five years. He said he began to get burned out and took a lot of trips to California wine country. "I fell in love with the wine industry. ... On the weekends I'd go up the coast," Indoe said.

He said he didn't know how to break into the tight California market.

In 2011 he decided it was time to come back home. "I started my own little business," Indoe said of his gluten free snack business that involved individually wrapped health food bars.

Indoe said the snack business was great but he still felt the wine industry was his first love. Shortly after coming back to Ohio a

relative took him on a tour of the northeastern Ohio wineries and Laurello Vineyards was their first stop.

Little did he know that eight years later he would be the wine maker at Laurello Vineyards.

In 2017, Indoe decided to make the big jump. "I didn't want to go back to California ... I found out that Kent State Ashtabula offered a Viticulture and Enology degree," he said.

Indoe said he had made some wine but felt he needed to get more serious about the science side of wine making. He said he loved the program because class size was usually 10 people or less.

"You have a lot of hands-on experience," Indoe said. He said he was able to work at a number of area wineries while attending Kent State.

When he graduated from Kent State Ashtabula in 2019, Kim



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Brad Indoe, left, was hired as wine maker at Laurello Vineyards in Austinburg Township by Kim Laurello, right, after his 2019 graduation from Kent State Ashtabula.

Laurello offered him a job at the winery.

"It was kind of an easy transition," Indoe said.

Indoe had spent a lot of time at the winery so was familiar with the operation. He also worked at other area wineries and loves the collegial atmosphere amongst the competitors.

The program at Kent State was designed to fill the needs of area wineries as older pioneers retire. He said about 90 percent of the graduates stay in the area.

Laurello said she loves

the fact that Indoe is always looking to find ways to improve business for all area wineries not just Laurello Vineyards. She said he Indoe is always asking the question "How can we make this a better place?"

Indoe said he decided to stay in the area because of the growth of the industry and improvement of wine quality in northeastern Ohio. "I saw that I could have a better opportunity to grow," he said of staying in the area.

Laurello said he likes the many areas Indoe improves the winery.

"Brad took it upon himself to educate our staff," she said of the three full-time and 16 part-time workers.

Seasonally variations mean Indoe has a wide variety of tasks throughout the year.

"This time of year we do a lot of bottling because we have to make room in our cellar [for new grapes]," Indoe said.

Bench trials are also a part of the summer scene. "I have a wine lab in the cellar," he said.

The lab helps wine makers evaluate their

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Adjusting to Columbus

O'Brien already making impact in Ohio Senate

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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Sandra O'Brien has one of the longest drives to work for a state representative in Ohio, but that doesn't reduce the excitement about working for her constituents in Columbus.

O'Brien said the adjustment to work in the state legislature has gone well. "It's been great... It is fun I enjoy my peers," she said of her work since she was sworn in January.

While the political division between Republicans and Democrats are intense O'Brien said 80 percent of legislation is the by-product of legislators on both sides of the aisle working together.

The other 20 percent can be a challenge. She said the opportunity to learn about issues and fight for the 350,000 people living in the 32nd senate district which includes all of Ashtabula and Trumbull counties and a northern section of Geauga County.

O'Brien said she has been surprised at the parliamentary procedures that dominate interactions between legislators. She said it is hard to get used to, but it helps keep discussions moving along in a way that doesn't disrupt the proceedings.

"When you listen to testimony you hear both sides of an issue," O'Brien said. She said she ran to bring more government services back to Ashtabula County and the rest of her district as a member of the majority party in the state house.

O'Brien said the Columbus area is "booming" and wants to see northeastern Ohio receive tax dollars back to the district to help grow the economy in this part of the state. She said the tax dollars tend to stay in Co-

lumbus or other large cities and not find their way back to places like Ashtabula further from the capitol.

"I am being told I am a cheerleader for the district," O'Brien said.

She said any legislation proposed includes a question for the presenter about what will it do for northeastern Ohio.

O'Brien said she rents an apartment north of the city, where she for Monday through Thursday because of the length of the drive back to Ashtabula County.

O'Brien said the \$74 billion budget bill took till 2:24 a.m. to complete. She said she is excited about being on a variety of legislative committees including transportation, agriculture, and local governments and elections to name a few.

"We meet weekly, sometimes more than that," O'Brien said.

She said the budget bill was more than 2,400 pages long.

"The committees have set times when they meet," she said.

O'Brien said she is the vice chairwoman of the local governments and elections committee.

"I get the gavel and it is a lot of fun [if the chairman is not able to attend]," she said.

O'Brien said she is excited that the Lodge at Geneva-on-the-Lake will become state property and reduce the county debt load significantly. Many area politicians and business leaders expressed concern that the move could hurt the quality of the operation at the lodge.

"Nothing is going to change," O'Brien said.

Another challenge is getting used to being called Senator instead of by her first name. "They never call me Sandy it is all prim and proper," she said of relationships between the legislators.

O'Brien said an out-



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Sandy O'Brien is settling in to her role as State Senator representing the 32nd district which includes all of Ashtabula and Trumbull counties and the northern part of Geauga County.

going legislator advised her to remember the honor of her job and how important it is to the lives of people throughout the state. She said he told her to never lose the feeling of how "awesome" it is to work in the legislator.

"It is quite an honor to sit on the chamber floor," she said.

The opportunity to work across the party aisle on many issues is a part of the day to day job of legislating. "I can get along with peers on both sides of the aisle. They are good people," she said.

O'Brien said she doesn't know how federal legislators find time to meet their

constituents and all of the demands of the job. "Our senate district fills up my schedule," she said.

O'Brien was a teacher at the junior high, high school and collegiate level before becoming a three term Ashtabula County auditor. She said she earned a bachelor's degree in

Education from Bowling Green State University and a Master's Degree from Edinboro University.

Lenox Township is O'Brien's home and she has been active at the Ashtabula Arts Center, the Ashtabula County Farm Bureau and Sacred Heart Church in Rock Creek.

Ashtabula County's growing Metroparks locations rolling along

BY BRIAN HAYTCHER
bhaytycher@starbeacon.com

The Ashtabula County Metroparks has a number of irons in the fire, with work progressing in a number of projects.

Metroparks Office Administrator Antoinette Green said habitat restoration work on Red Brook Metropark is expected to be finished by the end of the year.

Red Brook Metropark, a former golf course, opened in 2019. In 2020, a paved walking trail was added to the park.

Green said habitat restoration is underway in both the upper and lower sections of the park. "That should be finishing up by November," Green said. The wet weather could potentially delay the work slightly.

The restoration includes

planting a garden and creation of marshy and grassy areas, Green said.

Benches have also been installed along the paved path, Green said.

"That whole northern part of Red Brook above of Carpenter Road, that will hopefully be done by the end of the year, so that people can at least enjoy it," Green said. She asked visitors to the park who venture down into

the lower area to be aware of the machinery that is being operated as work is done in the area.

"They'll be putting some bank stabilization down there," Green said. "There's some reforestation ... they'll be adding."

Most of the trails in the lower portion of the park will remain as primitive trails, and won't be paved, due to environmental agreements,

Green said.

An overlook of the valley is planned, with the potential for more, depending on funding, Green said.

"Once it's completed, people will really start to enjoy it," Green said.

The former pool house at the park is very well-placed, Green said. "So we want to make sure we're really

SEE METROPARKS, 10



BY DAN HINER | STAR BEACON

Eddy Eckart is the executive director of the Ashtabula County Land Bank. Eckart is the son of former U.S. Rep. Dennis Eckart.

A different path in public service

Eddy Eckart took some cues from his father, but made his own way

BY DAN HINER
dhiner@starbeacon.com

JEFFERSON — As a child, Eddy Eckart remembers walking into his father’s congressional office. Dennis Eckart served as a U.S. representative for Ohio’s 11th and 22nd Districts from 1981-93.

The concept of public service resonated for Eddy Eckart. But the idea of running for public office wasn’t in his future.

Instead, he went to Canyon College for a degree in English. He followed with a master’s degree in Business. Eventually from Case Western Reserve. Those skills turned into a career as the executive director of the Ashtabula County Land Bank in September 2018.

“What has been very exciting and very fun for me is to continue the work that the Land Bank had been doing, but to work toward some new objectives,” Eddy Eckart said.

While not following in his father’s political footsteps, one of those new objectives continues one of his father’s projects.

Dennis Eckart was an advocate for the cleanup of

brownfield sites. Brownfield sites are former grounds that feature contamination from years of industrial work on the premises. Eddy Eckart is actively trying to tackle Brownfield sites in Ashtabula County.

“It’s been fun to carry that on, and it’s inspiring,” Eddy Eckart said.

At the end of 2019, the Ashtabula County Port Authority, the Land Bank and the Ashtabula County Planning Department applied for a \$600,000 grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency to assess old industrial sites. The county will also receive \$1 million for Brownfield site cleanup — that allocation was a part of Ohio’s 2022-23 budget that passed on July 1.

“We feel we got a leg up because we’ve been performing these assessments,” Eddy Eckart said. “And now, probably early next year once the state figures out the mechanism for getting that out to the counties, we will be able to work on cleaning up those sites.”

The \$1 million could clean up one or two brownfield sites. It depends on the state of contamination per-

taining to each location.

Eddy Eckart said the county received the \$600,000 due to the infrastructure surrounding the Brownfield sites throughout Ashtabula Township. The deepwater ports, railroads and intersection for State Routes 11 and 90 all played a part.

“We were one of two communities in Ohio that got that much money,” Eddy Eckart said. “Everybody in Ohio got \$350,000 or less. We put together a very compelling case.”

The Brownfield sites are major projects, and the big projects catch the public’s attention. But a lot of the Land Bank’s work focuses on vacant house demolition and rehabilitation.

Since 2014, the Land Bank has seen 240 homes in the county taken down. One property the Land Bank is working sits near Bridge Street and 4th Street. One house has already been taken down while a church and another house are still standing. Eckart has reached out to developers to see what the land could be used for after development.

“It’s often times the big, flashier projects gather people’s attention,” Eddy Eckart

said. “For every flashy project, there’s probably 10 that are creating incremental change for a neighborhood.”

Eddy Eckart said communities were “missing a tooth in the smile” when buildings were demolished. The demolition left holes in neighborhoods, the Land Bank started focusing on rehabbing buildings.

He said the rehabilitation process was slowed in 2020 due to a lack of materials caused by the pandemic.

Now, developers are looking at lots to build new buildings.

“We haven’t seen much new construction, particularly in the three cities in the county in a while,” Eddy Eckart said. “That’s the kind of infill development we’re excited to see.”

While Eckart and the county are focused on revitalization, they are also trying to find ways of making housing affordable. Though the Federal Home Loan Bank grant, houses in the county can be built and sold to those on a fixed income.

“That could be a disabled veteran, it could be those who are already retired and living on a fixed income, it could be any number of

groups of folks whose window for affording a house can only be so much,” Eddy Eckart said. “We’re going to be applying for a grant in the next couple of months to see if we can build for units of this housing.”

He said more housing could be built if the program is successful. He wants to “test the waters” before committing to a larger series of projects.

The projects, whether big or small, require cooperation between various groups in Ashtabula County. Eddy Eckart wanted to see the different departments and organizations work together to focus on addressing issues, and he’s pleased to finally have the goal realized.

Eddy Eckart’s office isn’t big. He’s the only employee in the Ashtabula County Land Bank. But just like his father, he’s willing to take calls to help, even if it’s something like helping the public navigate foreclosed and forfeited property sales.

“The process can be very convoluted based on various agencies and the court system,” he said.

“But I’m here to help folks navigate that.”

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UH Conneaut, Geneva look to grow, improve

BY SHELLEY TERRY
sterry@starbeacon.com

University Hospitals Conneaut and Geneva medical centers are working to enhance health care services for the Ashtabula County with renewed focus on post-acute transitional care, sleep medicine and otolaryngology.

POST-ACUTE TRANSITIONAL CARE

In 2020, UH Conneaut began a renewed focus on providing extended care services close to home. The Post-Acute Transitional Care program is a specialized service for patients who need days, weeks or even months of complex medical care, skilled nursing care and/or rehabilitation in order to be well enough to return home after a hospitalization for a major surgery, serious illness or severe injury.

A multi-disciplinary team works to provide the appropriate level of nursing care, array of supportive services and estimated length of stay needed to achieve the patient's goals and satisfy any insurance requirements.

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and once on Saturdays.

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- Meals ordered from a menu and at your preferred time

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- Television and phone in every room

SLEEP MEDICINE

University Hospitals Geneva Medical Center is now welcoming patients to the new Sleep Center, which opened in the fall of 2020.

The Sleep Center has been completely renovated, offering four remodeled bedrooms with private bathrooms, free Wi-Fi, cable TVs and queen size beds. The center also has its own dedicated parking area for patients.

Depending on the patient, some

cases only require one consultation and visit for a diagnosis and treatment plan to be formulated. In most cases, a treatment plan involves a diagnostic sleep study—some can be done at the sleep lab while others can be done at the patient's home.

During in-lab sleep studies, patients are monitored by noninvasive, painless technology to see what types of physiological signs are exhibited during the different stages of sleep. Measurements include airflow monitoring, brain wave activity, heart rhythm, pulse oximetry to check oxygen status, and muscle tone and activity.

Following the study and appropriate evaluation, therapy can be determined. Therapies may include continuous positive airway pressure

SEE UH, 10

HARBOR: Talks underway on the future of Conneaut's waterfront

FROM PAGE 4

and more are coming, Hockaday said.

"The goal has been, can we do a directed, focused area redevelopment that includes new businesses, that includes new residential opportunities, and how do you do that?" Hockaday said. "It was becoming apparent over the last two years that there was going to be quite a few people that were moving down into the marketplace."

A large number of the commercial storefronts on Park Avenue changed hands in the last several years, Hockaday said.

A plan was needed for the redevelopment

of the area.

The city, the Conneaut Foundation and the Port Authority sat down to ask how to improve the opportunities the area presents, Hockaday said. "All too often, the discussion is 'I'm the government, I'm here to help,'" Hockaday said. Water lines, sewer lines and sidewalks would be traditional suggestions of how the city could help, he said.

The conversation has been focused on how to work with the non-profits and businesses investing in the area on how to redevelop the area, Hockaday said.

"And we've done a couple of things," Hockaday said. "One,

we've talked about, what does it look like? Get down to a picture, what does it look like? What are we hoping to do? And that can mean a lot of things."

One major issue is what to call the area, Hockaday said.

"What do you call that area?" Hockaday asked. "Conneaut's a big place, it's 27 square miles, you get lost in it with GPS," he said later.

The next question is what is the area's identity. Siegel has worked through two exercises on rebranding the area.

"You have to be able to call it something, and when you say the harbor, if I said 'hey, it's up in the harbor,' you're ... potentially

thinking Ashtabula harbor," Hockaday said. "It has to have a brand identity that is not only unique to Conneaut, but unique to the area as well."

The identity for the area cannot be created top-down, it is created by the property owners in the area, Hockaday said.

The meetings have been great, Hockaday said. They are paused slightly currently, due to business owners being busy with work, Hockaday said.

There are aspects of the revitalization of the harbor area that council will need to participate in, Hockaday said.

Some potential improvements to the area

include the ability to set up bollards to close the street off for festivals, and street lighting with power outlets and wireless internet, Hockaday said. Many vendors at festivals take payment through cellphones with card readers, which need internet access to work, he said.

"Even if it's something more simple, where (the street lights have) an audio feed into it, and there's a speaker on it and you can pump music for any kind of event," Hockaday said. "That is just one simple thing that we look at: street lighting."

The city is working to make it easier to buy buildings, get fund-

ing for projects, and brand the area, Hockaday said. The city's comprehensive plan identified the harbor area as being a major opportunity for redevelopment, he said.

Hockaday said he has enormous respect for business owners in the harbor area for the effort they have put in.

"I just want to see (the area) continue to grow and get cleaned up," Arcaro said.

"Blight has been an issue in the city for a long time, and people not taking care of their property. With a private sector picking up some of these properties that can be rehabilitated and put back into use is definitely a plus for the city."

GRANT: U.S. DOT grant will allow improve access, industrial growth

FROM PAGE 4

north from an existing Canadian National line, into the industrial park, he said.

That rail access could then allow access to CSX and Norfolk and Southern tracks, in addition to Canadian National tracks and the city's port, he said. "It's got lots of options," Hockaday said.

Most significant manufacturing requires access to railroad tracks, Hockaday said. The access to tracks vastly increases the amount of cargo that can be moved in and out of the industrial park.

Trains have significantly more carrying capacity than semis, which allows amounts of raw materials that would otherwise cause excessive amounts of truck traffic, Hockaday said. "If you need anything that's in excess of 2,000 tons a day, you have to have rail," he said.

The city's iron ore dock can move around 5,000 tons per hour, he said.

"I would say probably most significant man-

ufacturing operations require some kind of rail component or rail access component," Hockaday said. "And here it's not just about rail access, it's about connectivity to the Great Lakes. You can either by rail or by boat, you can reach almost anywhere in the world."

The project will cost around \$28 million. Of that, \$19.5 million will be covered by the grant. Some of the remaining cost will be covered by local revenues, and the majority will be covered by development projects, Hockaday said. The city is also anticipating participation from the state as well, he said.

The majority of the funding will pay for the railroad spur portion of the project, he said. "Rail is far more expensive to construction than roadway," he said.

The grant is currently in the pre-agreement phase, and work is being done on environmental work related to the grant, Hockaday said. "We're going through that, we're making progress," he

said. Engineering work on the project will hopefully start at the end of the third quarter, he said.

City Council President Jon Arcaro called the grant a huge accomplishment. Facilities that move into the East Side Industrial Park will have the choice between bringing in materials via truck or rail, Arcaro said.

A lot of work will have to be completed at Thompson Road and Route 20, Arcaro said. The city is trying to limit the amount of traffic coming into downtown for projects like the Thompson Road expansion and an upcoming replacement of the Norfolk and Southern railroad trestle. "We've put the city through quite a bit these last few years with all the infrastructure improvements we're doing, but it has to be done," Arcaro said. "It's something that's going to benefit the city for years to come."

The port connector project will also help with the city's planned dredge material facility,

Hockaday said. The facility will use gravity to take material dredged from Conneaut's harbor and separate it into its component parts.

The dredged material facility project is

mentioned in the grant, Hockaday said.

Currently, a tire pyrolysis facility is in the process of obtaining permits, and is expected to be constructed at the industrial park.

Hockaday said he could see other facilities being constructed after the pyrolysis facility. "There are certainly off-take opportunities that speak directly to this project," he said.

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METROPARKS: Ashtabula County's growing locations rolling along

FROM PAGE 5

thinking about and being thoughtful on how it's going to be used," she said.

NEW PARKS IN WORKS

There are a pair of new parks that are being discussed. No date for the opening of either park has been set.

One, called Upper Grand, located at the intersection of Cork Cold Springs Road and Route 45, is being worked on, Green said. The Metroparks received a grant to pay for a canoe and kayak ramp at the park, which is located along Grand River, she said.

The Metroparks owns more than 130 acres of property in the area, according to county records.

"It used to be a camp, a summer camp, years and years ago," Green said.

A number of buildings on the property have been demolished, Green said. There is a pavilion on the property.

"Once the park is done, and it's open, people will be able to rent the pavilion, and there'll be trails and things like that, but it's going to take some time," Green said.

There is an approval process that has to be followed through for the park, she said.

A property owned by the Metroparks in Conneaut has been accelerated slightly, due to ongoing construction work in the city. "That one's something we really have to think about soon," Green said.

The Metroparks board recently approved work



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

A small pond is under development at the Red Brook Metropark in Saybrook Township.

on the Conneaut property.

The amount of time it takes from when a property is purchased by the Metroparks to when a new park opens varies for every park, Green said.

Timing and funding are two issues that impact the time it takes, she said. The Metroparks seek out as much grant funding as possible for its parks.

"I'm hoping that people will get to enjoy the parks, what is already completed, and we just want to be able to open more parks, so we can have people continue to visit," Green said.

"There are so many great pieces of property in Ashtabula County that we want people to come and visit and be proud of and enjoy," Green said, thinking about and being thoughtful on how it's going to be used, she said.

New parks in the works

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The Metroparks board recently approved work on the Conneaut property.

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GRAPE: Entrepreneur chose Ashtabula County

FROM PAGE 5

Indoe said a lot of time must be spent on the sensory side of the wine development process, which includes the aroma, flavor and the appearance of the wine.

Laurello said it is also important to taste wine outside the wine cellar. "We might go to our homes or out to dinner," she said.

Laurello said the wine maker often tests area wine or out of the region imports from the Finger Lakes in upstate New York.

'The harvest time is the most hectic time of the year. We are working seven days a week.'

Brad Indoe
Winemaker,
Laurello Vineyards
in Austinburg Township

Indoe is also spending time making sure grapes are growing in the best way possible, which often means many grapes need to be cut away from the

vine. He said different kinds of grapes are harvested in September, October and even early November with the Ice Wine season beginning as early as Thanksgiving.

"The harvest time is the most hectic time of the year. We are working seven days a week," he said.

The winter involves protecting the vines from the cold weather through a technique called "hilling up."

The rest of the winter is spent preparing the wine which can include blending of wines.

UH: Conneaut, Geneva facilities look to grow, improve

FROM PAGE 9

therapy (CPAP), bilevel positive airway pressure (BiPAP) or other PAP devices; dental appliances to help patient's breathing during sleep; inspire therapy; light therapy; and neuropsychiatric interventions.

Patients who suffer from sleep disorders may get in touch with the UH Geneva Sleep Center by calling 440-415-0153, where they can schedule an appointment and insurance can be verified in one simple step.

The new Sleep Center is located at 810A W. Main St., Geneva.

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- Rhinitis is swelling and inflammation of the mucous membrane of

the nose. It can be caused by the common cold or seasonal allergies, and is usually characterized by a runny nose. Those who suffer from chronic rhinitis, allergic rhinitis, and a runny nose can benefit from a special procedure called ClariFix Cryotherapy.

The treatment uses cold temperatures to stop symptoms at their point of origin. The procedure is quick and takes an hour or less at your doctor's office. A doctor will use anesthesia to numb the nose, then place an endoscope in the nose to apply the cold treatment. Nasal congestion usually subsides in a few weeks following treatment.

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FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ASHTABULA COUNTY SINCE 1922
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For questions and inquiries, please contact our office:
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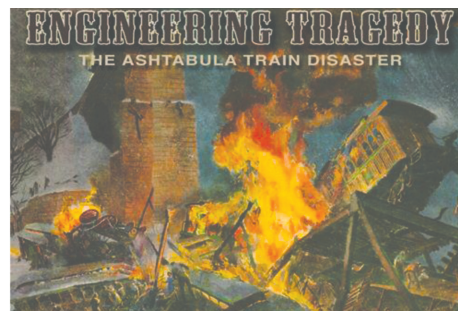
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Ashtabula Foundation

FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ASHTABULA COUNTY SINCE 1922



The Ashtabula Foundation is a private, nonprofit, philanthropic organization established in 1922. Our eleven 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, 2021, we celebrate 99 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



**Board President,
 Joseph A. Misinec, Jr.**