



SUMMER 2024

COUNTY LEADER



Spring Legislative Session
Wrap-Up

Auglaize County and the
Revival of St. Marys Theater

Treasurer Helps Ohioans
Reach Homeownership

Clermont County Veterans
Village

Warren County Takes Part
in Career Success Cohort

Four Counties Celebrate
Bicentennials

Former Spotlight: State
Senator Shane Wilkin

SCOTUS Establishes Social
Media Usage Test

OSU Extension and
Emergency Readiness

VOCL: Ross County
Commissioner Jack Everson



Cover: CCAO staff and members represented Ohio at the National Association of Counties Annual Conference.

ABOVE:

1: Montgomery County Commissioner Debbie Lieberman and Warren County Commissioner Shannon Jones at this year's NACo Annual Conference.

2: CCAO members Meredith Turner (Cuyahoga County Council), Amy Norris (Harrison County), Kristin Zemis (Tuscarawas County), Casey Kozlowski (Ashtabula County), and David Kern (Defiance County) took part in this year's Glenn College Public Leadership Academy.

3: In May, the Small County Affairs Committee met in Jackson County and heard from JobsOhio, the Office of Budget and Management, and State Senator Shane Wilkin.

4: In May, Mercer County hosted the 10-county luncheon with counties in the western portion of the state.

IN THIS ISSUE...

03 A message from CCAO President Chris Abbuhl

05 Letter From CCAO Executive Director

06 Spring Legislative Session Wrap-Up

07 Treasurer Helps Ohioans Reach Homeownership

08 Warren County Takes Part in Career Success Cohort

10 Former Spotlight: State Senator Shane Wilkin

11 OSU Extension and Emergency Readiness

12 Auglaize County and the Revival of St. Marys Theater

14 Clermont County Veterans Village

16 Four Counties Celebrate Bicentennials

21 SCOTUS Establishes Social Media Usage Test

22 VOCL: Ross County Commissioner Jack Everson

24 CEBCO News

25 CORSA News

26 CCAO Service Corp News

A MESSAGE FROM 2024 CCAO PRESIDENT

CHRIS ABBUHL, TUSCARAWAS COUNTY COMMISSIONER

As we navigate through another year of service and progress, it is my pleasure to address you in this edition of County Leader. Our theme, "Teamwork for a Better Tomorrow," aptly reflects the collaborative spirit that drives our efforts to improve the quality of life for all Ohioans. Together, we are making significant strides in various areas, and I am excited to share some key developments with you.

One of the most noteworthy achievements is the recent passage of the Ohio capital budget, which includes a critical allocation of \$50 million for local jail funding. This investment is a testament to our collective advocacy and commitment to public safety. By securing these funds, we are not only enhancing the infrastructure of our local correctional facilities but also ensuring they can operate more effectively and humanely.

Looking ahead, we have an incredible opportunity to showcase the rich history and vibrant future of our state through the upcoming America 250-Ohio celebrations in 2026. This milestone event commemorates the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding and offers a unique chance for each county to participate in a statewide celebration. I encourage all 88 counties to engage actively in this initiative. By highlighting our local heritage, achievements, and community spirit, we can collectively contribute to a memorable and unifying celebration that reflects the diversity and strength of Ohio. The theme of "Teamwork for a Better Tomorrow" resonates deeply as we prepare for these celebrations and other future endeavors. It is through collaboration, both within our counties and across the state, that we can achieve the most meaningful and lasting improvements. Whether it's through sharing best practices, supporting one another in times of need, or working together on statewide initiatives, our combined efforts amplify our impact.

Underscoring the importance of a strong leadership team and dedicated support staff within our County Commissioners Association of Ohio is crucial as we champion the interests of counties at both state and federal levels to enhance local government operations. It's vital to have skilled professionals addressing complex issues on our behalf, and we are fortunate to have such caliber of individuals in our Association. Notably, CCAO is highly esteemed and effective at the state level, while its advocacy extends beyond Ohio's borders, making a significant impact on the national stage.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your dedication and hard work. Your commitment to public service and your communities is inspiring and essential to our collective progress. As we move forward, let us remain united in our mission to build a brighter, more prosperous future for all Ohioans.

Together, through teamwork and a shared vision, we are shaping a better tomorrow. Thank you for your continued efforts and unwavering dedication.



Chris Abbuhl

CCAO President, Tuscarawas County Commissioner

THANK YOU



to our Corporate Partners for their support!

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PARTICIPATING



USUS MAGISTER EST OPTIMUS - EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cicero, in ancient Roman times, wrote that experience is the best way for one to learn, even if it means learning from mistakes. Experience is the foundation of learning – the building blocks for improvement and fuel progress.

In 1989, Bob Hoover, a decorated World War II pilot with an extraordinary history both in the cockpit and as a POW, was performing airshows around the world, showcasing acrobatics in a twin-engine airplane. After finishing a show, he was giving a few fans a ride when, shortly after take-off, both engines quit. He had to crash land. Thankfully he and his passengers walked away from the plane unscathed. As he disembarked, he smelled kerosene – the wrong fuel for a piston-powered plane, which had caused the near-fatal accident. Late that day, Bob met the ground crew member who had fueled his plane and said, “There isn’t a man alive who hasn’t made a mistake, but I am positive you’ll never make that mistake again. That’s why I want to make sure that you’re the only one to refuel my plane tomorrow. I won’t let anyone else touch it.”

Experience is not only about learning from mistakes but also about daring to try new things. The process of attempting something new, facing unforeseen challenges, and navigating through the unknown provides invaluable lessons that theoretical knowledge alone cannot offer. When we step outside our comfort zones, we encounter situations that push us to think critically, adapt, and grow. These experiences build resilience and foster a deeper understanding of the world around us, ultimately shaping us into more capable and innovative individuals.

In county government, elected officials and their staff cover a vast array of fields, from workforce development to child protective services, and from solid waste management to airport management. No one person can master and innovate in every area a single county addresses. That is why it is important to seek out from others and learn from the experiences, trials and challenges – often mistakes – of others. Another person’s experience is a history, and everything has a history: a tree, a bridge, a political fight, a county building, and a public policy. As the philosopher George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

This will become even more challenging in 2025, as a significant number of county commissioners and elected officials have chosen not to run for reelection in 2024. Without their experiences and contributions in county duties, work within some counties will lose valuable insights and the nuanced reasoning behind policies.

That is why CCAO is working to capture this insight through video interviews with seasoned commissioners. Former CCAO President and Licking County Commissioner Tim Bubb along with CCAO Communications Coordinator Jessica Newbacher are producing a series featuring a variety of our retiring members to capture the lived lessons learned and serve to mentor current and future CCAO members.

This series will showcase the diverse backgrounds of our members and how they applied their past experiences to serving county government. Whether it’s working with connections formed from a previous career in the legislature to advance county initiatives, or completely switching gears with a fresh perspective after working as a business owner, success comes from a plethora of circumstances.

Moreover, this series will spotlight the seasoned leaders who have been in office two, three, and even 12 terms of office! Our dean, Mercer County Commissioner Jerry Laffin has been a commissioner for over four decades! He served during times when economic conditions were unfavorable, and county revenues were short. As a result, he along with his colleagues had to make difficult fiscal decisions and foster long-term conservative fiscal strategies. History repeats itself, and Jerry has used his management experience to weather subsequent fiscal downturns and honed his approach over the years. CCAO is looking to capture Jerry’s first-hand experience and share it with current and future county officeholders.

Commissioner Laffin is one of many outgoing, outstanding members Commissioner Bubb and Jessica will be interviewing and videotaping this fall. Others include CCAO President Chris Abbuhl (Tuscarawas County), Larry Holmes (Darke County), Terry Boose (Huron County), Mollie Crooks (Muskingum County), and Ron Amstutz (Wayne County). We hope their lived experience provides valuable insights.

CCAO is committed to facilitating a culture of continuous improvement and growth for our members. Remember, experience is the best teacher!



Cheryl Subler
CCAO Executive Director



POLICY

SPRING LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAP UP

by CCAO Policy Team

Following a flurry of legislative activity in June, the General Assembly is now on summer break.

On the final day of session before break, the House and Senate passed House Bill 2, the capital budget. Since the bill included an emergency clause it became effective immediately upon Governor DeWine's signature on June 28th.

The capital budget included \$50 million for construction and renovation of county jails. This funding will be distributed through a Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) process similar to prior iterations of capital budget jail grants. The bills do not include a formula or a prescribed match amount for potential projects.

DRC is required to target projects that have the greatest need for construction or renovation, that will most improve the condition, safety, and operations of the jail, and to provide additional focus on counties that are or will be used by multiple counties.

The need for assistance with county jail construction costs is consistently flagged as one of the top issues facing counties by our members. CCAO greatly appreciates the General Assembly and DeWine-Husted administration's continued investment in county jail capital costs. If you see your legislators in the county this summer, please thank them for their support of jail funding.

Prior to adjourning for the summer, the House also passed House Bill 497, the county omnibus bill. Sponsored by Representative Brian Stewart and Representative Roy Klopfenstein, the bill would make several "clean up" changes to help the efficiency of county government. Some of the changes in HB 497 include the following:

- Allows boards of county commissioners (BCC) to approve courthouse or jail renovation/repair projects that cost less than \$25,000 without the approval of the clerk of court of common pleas, the sheriff, the probate judge, and the appointee of the judge of the court of common pleas.
- Increases the dollar threshold for contracts the BCC must submit to the county prosecutor for approval to \$20,000. This statute was last updated in 1953.

- Raises the dollar threshold for a BCC's requirement to pass a resolution to sell or donate unnecessary or obsolete personal property to \$5,000.
- Exempts "minor repairs" from needing professional design or engineer services and defines "minor repairs." The "minor repairs" definition was copied from the Ohio Administrative Code.
- Changes the location for holding construction plans, drawings, representations, bills of material, specifications of work and estimates for certain projects under \$25,000 from the county auditor to the BCC.
- Allows Transportation Improvement Districts to contract with the county prosecuting attorney for legal services.
- Makes certain terms and conditions unenforceable if they are included in county contracts, based on an existing law that applies to state contracts.
- Updates competitive bidding notification requirements to align with changes made in the state operating budget last year.
- Clarifies that the definition of "private practice of medicine" for county coroners does not include performing an autopsy at the request of another county.
- Aligns the fees at \$350 per hour that a coroner or deputy coroner can charge for providing expert testimony at a trial, hearing or deposition in a civil action.

HB 497 heads to the Senate for further consideration.

There were many other bills that received hearings and votes prior to adjournment for summer break. CCAO's Bill Tracker is a helpful tool where you can look up the status of bills that interest you and your county. The next session dates for the Senate are scheduled after the November election and the House has not announced its second half of the year schedule.



GUEST COLUMN

HELPING OHIOANS ACHIEVE THE DREAM OF HOMEOWNERSHIP

by Ohio Treasurer of State Robert Sprague

As we all know, housing prices have dramatically increased over the last few years. In fact, reports have shown that today's homebuyers must earn 50 percent more in income than they had prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to afford a median-priced home in the United States. When you add in other variables like high interest rates, increasingly competitive markets, and low inventory, we have a whirlwind of challenges that are keeping prospective homebuyers from achieving the dream of homeownership.

These complex issues are impacting communities and citizens across the country, and they certainly can't be solved overnight. But here in the Treasurer's office, we've jumped into action to give Ohioans a leg up on their homebuying journey.

In January, we launched Ohio Homebuyer Plus – a program that makes specialized, tax-advantaged savings accounts available to Ohio residents. Accountholders have access to above-market interest rates when they deposit money at a participating financial institution. That money then grows to eventually be used toward the down payment or closing costs of a home purchase. Individuals taking advantage of these accounts also qualify for certain state income tax deductions as well.

In designing the program, we talked with a variety of representatives from the realty and lending communities. And, time and again, we were told that the number one barrier keeping people from buying a home was that they simply couldn't afford the down payment. With this new program, we're hoping to help more Ohio families chip away at that barrier.

I think we can all agree that so much of our state's future hinges on its ability to keep hard-working families here in Ohio and to attract more talented individuals to work and live within its borders. By addressing a very real challenge like housing and affordability, Ohio Homebuyer Plus is well-positioned to make a genuine difference. We know this because of the overwhelming interest we've seen in the first six months since its launch.

Since January, we've seen nearly 12,000 Ohio Homebuyer Plus savings accounts opened across the state. Additionally, we continue to grow our list of participating financial institutions, and – as of this writing – there's now approximately 55 banks and credit unions partnering with our office to make these accounts available to Ohioans.

The immediate popularity of Ohio Homebuyer Plus was accompanied by some great feedback from stakeholders across the state, and we're already acting on one such suggestion we received. Currently program requirements limit eligibility to Ohio residents who are 18 years of age or older. That means that active duty service members that stationed in Ohio – but are residents of other states – are not able to open an account. But, we're taking steps to change that.

Alongside state senators Brian Chavez and Terry Johnson and state representatives Nick Santucci and Brian Lampton, we've put forth a legislative proposal that would make Ohio Homebuyer Plus and its enhanced interest rates available to all active-duty military members stationed here in Ohio, even if their permanent residence is in another state. The men and women of our armed forces represent the very best of us, and by allowing them to participate in this program we hope to inspire more military families to consider Ohio when planting permanent roots.

At the end of the day, to purchase a home in Ohio is to invest in Ohio, and we are working hard to help more Ohioans turn the dream of homeownership into a reality.

Visit the [Ohio Treasurer's website](https://www.ohiotreasurer.gov) for more information about Ohio Homebuyer Plus and to access a list of participating financial institutions.

OHIO HOMEBUYER PLUS
A SAVINGS PLAN FOR OHIOANS

Eligibility Requirements

- ✔ **Must be an Ohio resident.**
- ✔ **Must be 18 years or older.**
- ✔ **Money must be used toward the down payment or closing costs of purchasing a primary residence in Ohio.**

www.ohiotreasurer.gov/homebuyerplus

GUEST COLUMN

WARREN COUNTY – COUNTIES FOR CAREER SUCCESS NACO COHORT

by Candace Miller, Economic Development Specialist, Warren County

The National Association of Counties hosted the Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Leaders Academy alongside the Counties for Career Success (C4CS) Cohort during the first week of May in Maricopa County, Arizona. Each of these peer-learning groups afford counties from across the country the opportunity to come together and share best practices for those they serve. Specifically, they seek to remove barriers and support strong pathways to career readiness and economic mobility for job seekers and families with young children.

Warren County is one of only eight counties in the nation selected to participate in the C4CS Cohort. A key feature of the cohort is cross-sector collaboration among workforce, education, human service agencies and employers. In addition to learning from their peers, the cohort offers technical assistance and supports the development of a local action plan for the participants.

Joel King, Superintendent of the Warren County Career Center (WCCC), expressed his appreciation and excitement around joining forces with multiple partners, stating, "We at the Warren County Career Center are incredibly grateful to the Warren County Board of Education, the Warren County Commissioners, and especially Commissioner Shannon Jones for their support in securing this opportunity through the National Association of Counties' Counties for Career Success initiative. This collaboration with Warren County Children Services and OhioMeansJobs (OMJ), Warren County will allow us to serve our students more connected and efficiently, ensuring they have access to the resources and support they need to achieve lifelong success. By working together and leveraging our collective strengths, we can reduce disparities, boost our local economy, and prepare our students for the future of work. This initiative is a testament to the power of cross-sector collaboration and our county leaders' commitment to investing in our young people's success."

The WCCC, OMJ, Warren County and Warren County Children Services have been hard at work structuring

a collaborative pilot program centered around youths and young adults, aged 16-24, who are currently enrolled at WCCC. The goal is to link the students with an employment opportunity, allowing them to begin on-the-job training while earning their credential. The project leads have sought out employers in high-skilled industries with opportunities to earn a competitive wage, such as engineering, construction, robotics, manufacturing, etc.

"Workforce development, from the perspective of OhioMeansJobs, is about the economic empowerment of our citizens," said Josh Hisle, Deputy Director of OMJ. "While

we may focus specifically on upskilling through credential attainment for an individual, it is our hope that the entire household would participate and welcome holistic solutions. Partnering with the Warren County Career Center and Children's Services gives us the ability to do this. With so many barriers to be mitigated, it is incredibly valuable to have all of these perspectives and services to better inform our clients and help them tackle multiple life challenges. We show people what they are capable of and help them come up with a strategy to achieve their goals.

We've all done this well for years, but

now that we are doing it together, we are starting to see what we are truly capable of."

A component of the C4CS is ensuring that individuals on the periphery, who may be the furthest from career success are well-positioned to obtain the education, skills, and credentials needed for a career that will promote economic mobility. With this in mind, the five students participating in the pilot were identified as likely being TANF eligible. Not only will this pilot equip these students to seamlessly enter the workforce, but it also brings in a pre-existing funding stream to support the entire process. Through TANF dollars, the cohort has a means to cover expenses related to employment, such as purchasing uniforms and access to transportation, as well as covering the student's hourly wage. Additionally, through the involvement of Children Services, a more holistic approach is taken when looking at the student within his or her family unit. New



pathways emerge as available supports that can increase the economic mobility of the entire family are uncovered, making this truly a cross-sector project.

Speaking about the collaborative effort, Tanya Sellers, Deputy Director of Children Services, stated, "I am pleased to have been involved in the success of the collaboration between Warren County Children Services, OMJ, and the WCCC, supported by NACo. This partnership has been a turning point, enhancing mutual understanding and offering comprehensive services for families in need. By breaking down barriers and working seamlessly together, we are now better equipped to address challenges faced by families in Warren County. This collaboration showcases the power of teamwork in creating a positive impact on our community."

The pilot will assess its impact through credential and employment attainment data as well as 2nd and 4th quarter wages of the students upon exiting the cohort. While it is still in the early stages, there is a lot of momentum around the project, including being named a 2024 NACo Achievement Award Winner in the Children and Youth category. As the process continues, Warren County will be able to share its successes, challenges, and insights with their fellow C4CS cohort members for the betterment of local public and private sector partners across the country, while continuing to equip and promote the economic empowerment of individuals and families for lasting success.



Josh Hisle, OMJ Warren County Deputy Director; Joel King, Warren County Career Center Superintendent; and Tanya Sellers, Warren County Children Services Deputy Director.

2024 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference

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Wednesday, December 4 – Friday, December 6, 2024

**Hilton Columbus Downtown
402 North High Street, Columbus**



GUEST COLUMN

FORMER CCAO MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

by State Senator Shane Wilkin

As an introduction, I am State Senator Shane Wilkin and I reside in Hillsboro with my wife, Kristy Wilkin and our two daughters. I am a former Highland County Commissioner as well as a former State Representative for Ohio's 91st House District. I have since assumed office in 2023 to Ohio's 17th Senate District which covers 9½ counties spreading all across Southeast Ohio.

Being a Highland County Commissioner was a job I greatly enjoyed. Drawing from my experiences as a commissioner and state senator, I have identified key strategies that have been effective for me in both positions. I share these insights with newer commissioners, acknowledging that each county and commissioner is unique.

I took office in January of 2009, which in hindsight was just in time for the great recession. Along with this was the loss of a major employer, DHL, which was just north of us in Clinton County. This withdrawal attracted national attention as approximately 10,000 jobs were lost, 3,300 of them being in Highland County. As a newly elected official, the lessons were coming hard and fast.

In the face of a daunting 30% reduction in the general fund budget, I discovered the skill of effective communication. Accurately conveying, or as I like to say no "sugar coating," the county's financial situation to fellow elected officials was imperative, with early and honest communication being the key to success. Providing better information to each department was crucial, as no one desires a budget cut, especially not twice in a single year. We had to conduct two rounds of cuts, one in March and another in the fall. By providing timely and accurate information, we were able to facilitate productive discussions and build trust across departments. Though the conversations may still be difficult, our commitment to openness and honesty ultimately led to a better outcome for all.

Relationship building with other county commissioners is vital and as you may know, each county has its own differences. This offers an opportunity to learn and grow from one another's experiences and approaches ultimately leading to improved and more cost effective solutions to common challenges. Building relationships with your state representative and your state senator is also essential. I was fortunate to have good state-level representation, making it easy to establish a connection. This does not mean having their cell number and calling them whenever you

need something. Instead, build a relationship by talking to them when there is no ask. Invite them to district events and tours to understand firsthand what your county needs. When you make a request, they will know you and your county, which inevitably will make them more receptive



State Senator Wilkin with CCAO Policy Staffer Rachel Reedy, Columbiana County Commissioner Mike Halleck, and CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler at the 2023 OCCO Reception.

to your needs. Many of them have experience as county commissioners, so they can offer valuable advice and share their experiences. That is how a bond is formed that will stretch beyond your needs, but will benefit the needs of the constituents.

If there is something that current State Senator Shane Wilkin could tell Former Highland County Commissioner Shane Wilkin who was about to take office, it would be to take two key actions. First, be a knowledge seeker and second, leverage every good idea that may be shared with you. This will help you gain valuable insight from direct experience. Recognize the power of learning from others and capitalize on the resources and associations (CCAO) that are offered to you. This in turn will keep you informed and will help you achieve your goals.

As I reflect on my journey from county commissioner to state senator, I am reminded of the importance of experience in leadership. I have seen firsthand the benefits of having a deep understanding of the issues facing counties. Experience is not just a badge of honor; it is a crucial tool for making informed decisions and driving progress. I thank each of you for your unwavering dedication to public service and I hope that we all continue to work together in every one of the eighty-eight counties to form an even more flourishing Ohio.



GUEST COLUMN

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE: OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION'S VITAL ROLE

by Haley Shoemaker, Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator, Columbiana and Mahoning counties, and Marissa Mullett, OSU Extension

Ohio State University Extension plays a critical role in equipping Ohio communities with the information and resources they need to effectively respond to emergency situations—from severe weather events to transportation disasters. By assisting communities in organizing their leaders before a crisis occurs, preparing them for specific emergency scenarios, and providing ongoing support throughout the process, Extension stands ready to assist Ohioans during times of disaster.

EVALUATING COMMUNITY READINESS

Emergencies are inherently unpredictable. But community response can be anticipated and methodical. A team of Extension professionals started implementing a two-year grant (via the United States Department of Agriculture — National Institute of Food and Agriculture) that will help Ohio communities evaluate their capacity to respond to community disasters of various size and scope. The grant involves tabletop exercises and role-play scenarios that will help prepare community leaders for real-life emergency situations. Extension professionals who gave leadership to the immediate and long-term response to the East Palestine train derailment in 2023 are the primary project leads.

EXTENSION TEACHING TOOLS AND TRAININGS

Ohio State University Extension employs several educational tools to prepare communities for emergencies:

Grain C.A.R.T. (Comprehensive Agricultural Rescue Trailer): This mobile teaching unit is used to train first responders and agricultural workers on grain bin safety and rescue, and is often used alongside Ohio Fire Academy curriculum to train other first responders across the Buckeye State. The Grain C.A.R.T is transported to farms and other agricultural events to demonstrate real-life grain bin safety and rescue.

Bovine Emergency Response Planning Program (BERP): Delivered across Ohio, this program equips first responders, veterinarians, and emergency management agencies with the tools necessary to triage, contain, and safely handle livestock involved in transportation emergencies. This class emphasizes human and animal safety while providing hands-on livestock trailer demonstrations, tabletop scenarios, and post-accident reflection techniques for involved responders.

Nuclear Disaster Planning Zone Training: Extension professionals serving counties within nuclear disaster planning zones take part in evaluated drills every two years that simulate the emergency response sequence that follows a radiological incident. In these exercises, Extension professionals provide community guidance regarding agricultural production and coordinate livestock protection measures.

UNIQUE POSITION OF EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS

Extension professionals hold a distinctive position within their communities related to emergency preparedness. They're often already established trusted sources of unbiased information in communities, and they have direct access to Ohio's largest land-grant university's resources, training, and support. Additionally, they tap into the collective experience and expertise of their 800-plus colleagues when disaster strikes.

Extension remains committed to safeguarding Ohioans and enhancing community resilience in the face of adversity.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



FEATURE

RESTORING HISTORY: THE REVIVAL OF ST. MARYS THEATER & GRAND OPERA HOUSE LIVE

by Alexis Vander Yacht, CCAO Summer Communications Intern



The St. Marys Theater and Grand Opera House exterior during renovations.

119 West Spring Street in the Auglaize County city of St. Marys has been a town treasure since 1895. The complex was designed to be a center of entertainment for the community. There were four store fronts on the first floor along with the theater and lobby, accompanied by second floor dubbed "The Music Hall," and a third floor that was occupied by a Masonic Lodge and The Knights of Pythias Hall. The theater's first event, a comedic operatic called Nancy, was held that same year on November 7. In 1940, the third floor had to be removed due to structural issues; however, the first and second floor would see many visitors over the decades. It began as a Pavilion Playhouse, evolving first into a venue for silent films and later into a full-fledged movie theater.

It remained a functioning theater and opera house until its closing in 2015. Auglaize County Commissioner Doug Spencer is a part of a nonprofit group, Friends of St. Marys Theater and Grand Opera House, with the goal of "bringing it back

to life and making it an everything house." During an interview about the space, he expressed how crucial the theater was to life in St. Marys and its surrounding communities. Commissioner Spencer is a lifelong St. Marys resident himself and has fond childhood memories of the theater. When he ran for county commissioner in 2006, he held a fundraiser in the music hall, now called the Ballroom.

The restoration project started in 2021, with the goal to have the chains off the doors in honor of St. Mary's Bicentennial Celebration in 2023. Commissioner Spencer knew the potential of the building, but he could not do it alone. He lives by the mantra, "I don't know how to do anything, but I know a bunch of people who do." He rallied a group of people together to help bring the theater back to life.

The restoration had an initial cost estimate of \$3 million. They raised funds locally and have received grant funding twice through the state capital budget. Although restoration costs have fluctuated over the years, in-kind services from those who share passion about the project have allowed the group to proceed quickly and cost-effectively.

The two main identifiers of downtown St. Marys were the Blade and Marquee, and the outside facade of the building that had been covered with metal siding. The 1970's siding has been removed, accidentally uncovering the bricked-up windows on the second floor after removing an anterior false wall. The windows have been restored along with the 1940's Marquee that proudly reads "St. Marys." While the



The newly-restored marquee, with the original letter board replaced by a new digital board to allow for the display of multiple and more complex visuals.

original marquee had traditional letter boards, the renovation has replaced it with a digital board that has the ability to display multiple graphics. The new marquee retained the traditional lettering appearance of the original.

Commissioner Spencer says that the space is a time capsule with a few modern modifications. He recalls his aunt, a St. Marys School District alum from the class of 1952, saying, "This looks just like I remember from high school" upon seeing the space for the first time its reopening.

The board sometimes had to come up with creative solutions. Rather than replacing a large structural crack at the tallest portion of the theater, they replaced that portion with a large garage door. This allows the space to serve as an outdoor venue as well. The hope is to have the Ballroom finished by the end of the year, providing yet another space for the community.

The theater's mission is to provide entertainment, cultural and educational events for St Marys, the county, and the region. The theater has kicked off a strong start with the bicentennial celebration as well as some impressive acts that have visited. In July 2023, the theater hosted Comedy Night with Jimmy Failla, whose wife is a St. Marys native.

Commissioner Spencer says he takes immense pride in the compliments the acts that have performed have received, and performers and comedians love the intimate setting. The theater

seats almost 400 attendees not counting the balcony seating, allowing for a spacious yet personal setting. Musicians have praised the great acoustics the room was built to have in 1895. The theater brought back silent films, showing twice a year with an organist from New York.

The theater has also been working on local history showcases. The county received a grant from the America 250-Ohio Commission to put on "From Auglaize County to Hollywood," a story about two St. Marys men, William K. Howard and Jim Talley, who went to Hollywood, and excelled in film and in literature, respectively. This event will be held over two days in November, highlighting works. The theater is also working on incorporating other topics

that could help educate the community, such as writing books.

The St. Marys theater vows to never play first run movies, as they want to remain true to their original goal of bringing back an influential piece of historical architecture. They also hope to start hosting weddings throughout their outdoor spaces and ballroom. Overall, the restoration has been a true labor of love.

Commissioner Spencer said that the project "isn't about the group that comes together now, this project is about the group that came together initially and gave us this gift. People today get to utilize it and more importantly, the people in the future. They will have this gift because we were able to get it restored and rehabilitated."



Artist's rendering of the planned garage door that will allow the building to function as an outdoor entertainment venue in addition to its traditional usage.

FEATURE

EMPOWERING VETERANS: CLERMONT COUNTY'S VETERANS VILLAGE PROJECT

Adapted for Publication from a Clermont County Press Release by David Scheibenzuber, Clermont County Interim Communications Coordinator

The plight of homeless veterans is a sobering reality, with over 900 individuals in Clermont County alone in need of assistance. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Clermont County, the Veterans Administration, the Clermont Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) and Duke Energy have partnered to support those who have served their country with honor and valor.

The Veterans Village project, situated in Felicity, Ohio, spans nearly ten acres and holds the promise of a brighter future for homeless veterans. With plans for 28 homes, including 22 one-bedroom and six two-bedroom residences, the village aims to address the pressing need for shelter among veterans in Clermont County. The units will be fully furnished, have broadband access, and provide greenspace to ensure the veterans have the comfort and stability they deserve.

The Veterans Village is a collaborative project between the Clermont County Board of Commissioners, the Veterans Administration, and the Clermont Metropolitan Housing Authority. The \$6 million project is set to open in spring 2026. The initiative is backed by \$1 million in federal HUD HOME funds and received an additional \$1 million from the One Time Strategic Community Investment Fund this summer.



Veteran's Village Concept

The county received multiple grants from Duke Energy to support the Veterans Village project. The most recent \$10,000 grant will be instrumental in covering essential planning fees, blueprints, and renderings, thereby facilitating the realization of the Veterans Village. The first \$10,000 grant in 2023 helped with the early phase costs to get the idea off the ground, including planning and advocacy.

"The veterans served us. It's now time for us to step up and serve them," said Bonnie Batchler, Clermont County Commissioner. "We don't want to see a homeless veteran living on the streets or in the parks in Clermont County."

Read the [full press release here](#).

“THE VETERANS VILLAGE WILL NOT ONLY PROVIDE HOUSING, BUT ALSO INTEGRATE SUPPORT SERVICES THAT ARE CRUCIAL FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ITS RESIDENTS.”



Chad Schaffer, Government & Community Relations Professional for Duke Energy, Bonnie Batchler, Clermont County Commissioner and Alicia Morlatt, Executive Director of the Clermont Metropolitan Housing Authority posed with the \$10,000 check from Duke Energy.



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THE FORWARD PATH



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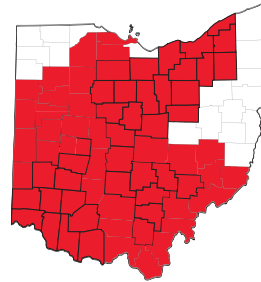
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FEATURE

COUNTY BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

This year, four counties celebrated their 200th birthdays. Congratulations to Holmes County, Lorain County, Seneca County, and Williams County! The following pages contain photos and descriptions of each county's events.

HOLMES COUNTY

The Holmes County Bicentennial Kickoff was held on June 30 in conjunction with Thunder over Holmes County. After having to delay a day due to predicted severe weather, the celebration went off fabulously with the day kicking off with the Bicentennial Parade. At the Courthouse on the lawn were inflatables for the kids and behind the courthouse was a petting zoo.

That afternoon in the courthouse there was a presentation which included speeches from Melissa Patrick, the Bicentennial Chair, Mayor Kelly Hoffee, Commissioner Joe Miller, Congressman Troy Balderson, Ray Paoletta from Congressman Max Miller's office, Mary Kate Hastings from the DeWine-Husted Administration, and the county Republican Party head

Rob Hovis and county Democratic Party head Ramona Stoner.

After the speeches and presentation of proclamations and commendations, was the premier of a history video that was produced by Bronson Allison of Livemore TV. The night ended with a big fabulous fireworks display. This was the start of a year long celebration that will include other festivals and events, time capsules and a play on the history and a second video to wrap things up next June. Because the organization of the county happened in 1824 and it officially was approved as a county in January 1825, the county decided to celebrate in both years to keep both sides happy, the side that says it counts when it applied and the ones that say when it's official.



Holmes County Commissioner Dave Hall with his family on one of the Bicentennial Parade floats.



The Bicentennial Parade included replica vehicles from the Holmes County Historical Society.



CCAO Executive Director Subler shared a gift with the Holmes County Commissioners and the Bicentennial Committee chair in honor of the bicentennial.



The bicentennial celebration included a petting zoo on the grounds of the Holmes County Courthouse.

LORAIN COUNTY

Lorain County celebrated its bicentennial on May 24. State Representative Gayle Manning and Congressman Bob Latta each presented the commissioners with proclamations commemorating the landmark anniversary.

The commissioners re-enacted the May 24, 1824 meeting, with Commissioner Jeff Riddell playing the role of Commissioner Benjamin Bacon, Commissioner David Moore as Commissioner Ashael Osborne, and Commissioner Michelle Hung as Commissioner John S. Reid. The reenactment recreated the appointment of County Treasurer Edmund West, portrayed by County Treasurer Dan Talarek.

A time capsule was filled with a variety of items from the county's political subdivisions, elected officials and historical societies and will be opened in 50 years.



Lorain County Commissioners David Moore, Michelle Hung, and Jeff Riddell during the county's bicentennial celebration.



The Lorain County Sheriff's Honor Guard presented the colors during the celebration.



Lorain County Bicentennial Commission meeting, from left to right: Assistant County Prosecutor Dan Petticord, Commissioner Jeff Riddell, Commissioner David J. Moore, Commissioner Michelle Hung and Commissioners' Clerk Theresa Upton.



Lorain County Commissioner Dave Moore and Elyria Mayor Kevin Brubaker unveiled the Lorain County Courthouse banners in celebration of the county's bicentennial.

FEATURE

COUNTY BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

SENECA COUNTY

Text courtesy of Sheri Trusty, Seneca County Media Relations Coordinator

Two hundred years ago, the history of Seneca County began when the county was officially organized on April 1, 1824. Earlier this year, Seneca County Museum Executive Director Theresa Sullivan stood before a group of dignitaries inside the museum and kicked off a year-long celebration of the county's bicentennial.

"This is truly an exciting day for Seneca County as we reflect on 200 years of history," Sullivan said. "We'll learn about the county's influential people and noteworthy events."

Like many American pioneers, the county's earliest settlers faced the hardship of creating a life from nothing except what they could extract from the land. But in Seneca County, situated on the edge of the Great Black Swamp, they faced the added challenge of birthing civilization in an unendingly damp and merciless bog.

"I always marvel at our ancestors who came here," said Congressman Bob Latta. "They looked at this and said we can make this work. They cleared the land and made it productive."

Latta was among the many dignitaries who attended the event to present proclamations and to recognize the county's 200 years of progressive history and extraordinary people. The early residents who established Seneca County built a foundation of strength and resilience that still endures 200 years later.

"People today aren't any less hardy," said State Rep. Gary Click. "We need to remember that we are paving the road for the people who will come after us."

The yearlong celebration of the Seneca County Bicentennial will provide many opportunities for local residents to more fully understand the monumental progress of the county's history.

"It's important to reflect on where we've been and how far we've come," said Seneca Regional Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Bryce Riggs.

Riggs, along with Chamber and Destination Seneca County Director of Marketing, Marisa Stephens, collaborated with Sullivan and other members of the Seneca County Bicentennial Committee to plan the celebration. Sullivan expressed much gratitude for the work Riggs and Stephens put into the project.



The Seneca County Commissioners welcomed a number of dignitaries to the Seneca County Bicentennial Kickoff, including fellow county elected officials Julie Adkins (County Auditor) and Damon Alt (Common Pleas Judge). Also attending were Congressman Bob Latta and State Representative Gary Click.



Congressman Bob Latta presents a proclamation to Seneca County Museum Executive Director, Theresa Sullivan, in honor of the county's bicentennial during a ceremony at the Seneca County Museum.

"We cannot say enough good about them," Sullivan said. "They are absolutely fabulous."

Among the many bicentennial events planned by the committee are the Secrets of Seneca County Historical Driving Tour, a self-guided tour that also kicked off in April. The tour includes 19 stops that encompass every township in the county.

Seneca County Commissioners Anthony Paradiso, Bill Frankart and Tyler Shuff attended the kickoff event, and Sullivan expressed gratitude for their support of the bicentennial celebration.

Shuff presented a proclamation to Sullivan on behalf of all the commissioners.

"May our future be as bright as our past," Shuff said.

WILLIAMS COUNTY



Williams County Commissioners Terry Rummel, Lewis Hilker, and Bartley Westfall with bicentennial proclamations at the county's ceremony.



Bill Priest and Denver Henderson, two members of the county's bicentennial committee, with Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, Commissioner Lewis Hilker, Mayor of Montpelier Steve Yagelski, and State Representative James Hoops.



On April 1, 1820, the Ohio Legislature enacted legislation to officially establish the name and boundaries of Williams County. Williams County's original boundaries have evolved over the years to shape the vibrant community they have today. Because of the challenges faced in 2020, plans for a celebratory event were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Named in tribute to American Revolutionary hero David Williams, the county was officially established in April 1824. The first general election, held on April 8, 1824, marked a foundational moment in Williams County's governance. As preparations unfold for the 2024 celebrations, Williams County looks forward to honoring its rich heritage and the visionary leaders who have guided its journey over the past 200 years.



CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler and Assistant Director John Leutz presented Williams County Commissioners Bartley Westfall and Lewis Hilker with a gift to celebrate the county's bicentennial.



All of the living current and former Williams County commissioners and key staff gathered to observe the county's 200th anniversary session.



SAVE THE DATE

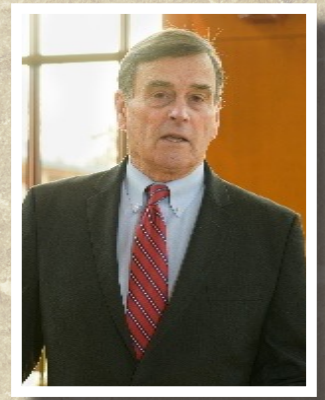
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COUNSELOR'S CORNER

US SUPREME COURT ESTABLISHES TEST FOR WHEN PUBLIC OFFICIALS MAY BE LIABLE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

by Frank Hatfield, CORSA Assistant Director

The Test: In *Lindke v. Freed*, 601 U.S. ____ (2024), the U.S. Supreme Court recently held that a person who sues a public official or employee alleging a First Amendment violation as a result of being blocked from the public official's "personal" social media or deletion of the person's comments on same must show that (1) the defendant had actual authority to speak on behalf of the State on a particular matter and (2) purported to exercise that authority in the relevant posts.

Background: Mr. Freed, the City Manager for Port Huron, Michigan, had a Facebook page. Freed's Facebook page listed him as "father, husband and city manager of Port Huron, Michigan." Not only did Freed post about his children, but also during COVID-19, he posted regarding the policies he implemented for the City of Port Huron. Mr. Lindke, a concerned citizen, reviewed Freed's posts. Lindke was critical of Freed's actions and noted his displeasure on Freed's Facebook page. Ultimately, Freed deleted Lindke's posts and blocked him. Consequently, Lindke sued alleging Freed violated his First Amendment rights.

Issue: The issue before the court was when a government official posted about job-related topics on social media, whether that was official or private speech. In the opinion written by Justice Amy Barrett, the court suggested that Freed did not give up his First Amendment right when he became a city manager. "Thus, if Freed acted in his private capacity when he blocked Lindke and deleted his comments, he did not violate Lindke's First Amendment rights - instead, he exercised his own."

The court held that the "state-action doctrine required Lindke to show that Freed (1) had actual authority to speak on behalf of the State on a particular matter, and (2) purported to exercise that authority in the relevant posts." This case was remanded to the Sixth Circuit for further proceedings consistent with the Supreme Court's Opinion.

Determination of "state-action" relative to a public official's social media activity is a tough endeavor as outlined by the Supreme Court in the excerpt below from pages 12-13 of its opinion:

For social-media activity to constitute state action, an official must not only have state authority — he

must also purport to use it. State officials have a choice about the capacity in which they choose to speak. "[G]enerally, a public employee" purports to speak on behalf of the State while speaking "in his official capacity or" when he uses his speech to fulfill "his responsibilities pursuant to state law." If the public employee does not use his speech in furtherance of his official responsibilities, he is speaking in his own voice.

Consider a hypothetical from the offline world. A school board president announces at a school board meeting that the board has lifted pandemic-era restrictions on public schools. The next evening, at a backyard barbecue with friends whose children attend public schools, he shares that the board has lifted the pandemic-era restrictions. The former is state action taken in his official capacity as school board president; the latter is private action taken in his personal capacity as a friend and neighbor. While the substance of the announcement is the same, the context — an official meeting versus a private event — differs. He invoked his official authority only when he acted as school board president.

Risk Mitigation Recommendations: In light the Supreme Court's new test to determine if an officeholder or public official may be held liable for social media use, we recommend the following considerations:

1. Clearly separate and label your public social media account(s) from your personal social media account(s);
2. Do not make exclusive agency or office public announcements by your individual social media account; and
3. Consult your Prosecutor's Office or legal advisor for advice on how to limit potential liability under the *Lindke* test.

CORSA members may avail themselves risk mitigation policies and services at www.corsa.org that include a template social media policy, online training modulars regarding social media risks, and contact information for CORSA staff.



VOICE OF COUNTY LEADERSHIP

JACK EVERSON, ROSS COUNTY COMMISSIONER

How long have you been a county commissioner?

I was elected on November 9th 2022, so I have been a commissioner for a year and a half.

Can you tell me about yourself? What is your professional background? What other elected positions have you held? Why did you first run?

My professional background is of a turnaround manufacturing manager. I learned early in my career methods of change management for underperforming plants and ways to fix what was wrong. Being put in charge of an underperforming manufacturing facility as a plant manager, general manager, or VP of Operations, I would focus on people, product, or process to determine what was wrong and work with the team there to develop solutions. Because every assignment was different, I needed to modify my approach and ever evolve potential solutions. I really loved the pace, pressure and challenge of helping businesses in trouble and found the work very meaningful and impactful to everyone I had the pleasure of working with.

In 2011, I decided to see if this Lean Sigma technique I used in fixing business problems could work in government with their challenges. At the time, the City of Chillicothe was financially insolvent, economic development had stalled out, and the United States was still in the middle of an economic recession from the housing crisis... no problem... right? So, I decided to run for mayor. Running an issue focused campaign for the first time against a very qualified and gifted opponent, somehow, I won a very close race. As most turnarounds work, it was ugly at first with cuts, cost cutting, and change in general, which involved heavy-lifting. I also limited myself to one term so I would have the political will to make tough choices. Long

story short, the city recovered to established financial carryover expectations, we achieved a significant debt reduction through consolidation and repayment focus, and the economic development of the downtown was well underway at the end of my term. The tagline for my campaign for mayor was "A New Vision," and I made sure I left the foundational structure, methods, and committees established to continue the vision past my term. I think the renovation of downtown Chillicothe has turned out nicely under current Mayor Feeney (my Auditor while I was Mayor), ever since.



Highland County Commissioner Brad Roades and Everson at CCAO's 2022 New Member Training event.

Why did you want to be a commissioner?

Unlike a brutal financial turnaround, Ross County in 2022 was fiscally solvent and national and state grants were plentiful coming out of COVID. These are prime elements for growth that would not be seen again in my lifetime. Growth is the fun part compared to the crisis management of

correction. At my age, it is time for the fun part to utilize the organizational skills I have developed over the years.

What are you most proud of for having achieved in your time as commissioner?

The UNSECO designation acquired last year for the Hopewell Culture was something we worked on while I was Mayor of Chillicothe, and the Appalachian Community Grant awarded earlier this year sets the template for substantial growth in Ross County during the remainder of my term. I worked on both of these objectives during my campaign in 2022.

What has been the biggest challenge you've dealt with as a county commissioner?

To teach patience to my colleagues in designing the process of sustainable growth. The facilitation of these

great opportunities require grounded and incremental steps to avoid short-sighted immediate gratification activities. The comprehensive template we construct needs to stand the test of time and constant change, to fulfill the next chapter of Ross County and regional history

What do you find are the most successful methods for reaching out to the residents of your county to communicate what your office is doing and why it's doing it?

This is an area where I think we could do much better and we are exploring various media avenues to leverage our message. With all the changes coming with our growth plans, constituent communication will need to be more than attending public events, press releases and kissing babies. Keeping citizens informed about the evolving Ross County vision, project progress and new opportunities for employment, entertainment and cultural education will be a focus relative to new delivery elements. .

What was the biggest surprise or adjustment after taking office?

In my career, I was use to being in a position of bottom line leadership. County politics is built on peer relationships of elected officials in separate authority lines, that have to work together in agency authority to get big picture initiatives accomplished. I have always been a good listener and used synergy in my decision-making. The county political silo management system forces cooperation and leads to better decisions based upon developing better ideas acceptable to all.

One of the primary responsibilities of a commissioner is to develop a balanced budget and provide adequate resources to deliver county services. What has been one of the biggest challenges in that area?

Ross County has the benefit of a growing county tax collection due to inflated home values. We also have a vastly increasing sales tax base because of the UNESCO designation and associated increase in tourism. This spring, Ross County received \$48 million in the Appalachian Community Grant for projects that will transform selected areas of the county. The complexities of budgeting lies in the priorities of the utilities, roadway improvement and a multitude of grant funded projects to intelligently build out the growth model.

What advice do you have for our new members?

Think BIG and work with other counties from a regional impact perspective.

How have you or what has your county been doing to participate in the state-county partnership?

Ross County served as a lead applicant for our submittal to the Appalachian Community Grant which encompassed 14 counties and a total of 42 individual projects. This regional approach in the grant application was a deciding reason we were awarded the \$154 million overall award. We have management responsibility for all of those projects and the coordination will be challenging within a completion deadline of October 2026 for all 42 projects. We have overhauled our Planning and Development department and are confident we will accomplish this task.

Could you discuss your involvement with CCAO as well as the benefits of being an active member?

I am an active member of the CCAO Board of Directors, OCERP Advisory Committee, and OASP Board of Directors. I attend all CCAO quarterly meetings and find them of great value toward my education of county government operations. The networking with my commissioner peers at these events is awesome and invaluable!

What are your main priorities, personal issues, and causes? Why?

When I became a commissioner, I was also the Executive Director of BESTOhio Industry Sector Partnership, a manufacturing-based organization representing eight counties in south-central Ohio with 160 participating members. On June 30th this year, I resigned from that position to dedicate my full time as commissioner. At the end of 2024, Ross County Commissioner Dwight Garrett is retiring and will be a tremendous loss to the leadership of Ross County government. I will need to fill that gap along with my fellow commissioner James Lowe and a new and inexperienced commissioner to be named after the November election.



CEBCO NEWS

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

by Mike Kindell, CEBCO Managing Director



CEBCO CONTINUES TO GROW

With the additions of Butler County and Pike County for a January 1, 2024 effective date, CEBCO has grown to 48 counties. CEBCO now serves approximately 15,700 employees and 35,000 members. CEBCO is Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's largest group in Ohio.

CEBCO ANNUAL MEETING

CEBCO celebrated our 20th Anniversary on April 5 with over 130 guests present, including the CEBCO Board, CEBCO County commissioners, elected officials and staff, along with consultants and brokers. Lenny Eliason (Athens), Harry Brady (Huron), Bryan Davis (Scioto), and Lew Hilkert (Williams) were each re-elected to serve another four-year term.

As part of the celebration, CEBCO had three Honored Guests, who each spoke about the formation of CEBCO pool and how the pool has grown from the initial eight counties to the current forty-eight counties that are now served. Larry Long, former CCAO Executive Director, Senator Robert Hackett (CEBCO's first board VP and second President), and Lenny Eliason, CEBCO's longest serving board member and Past President, gave a brief history of the formation and start of the program.

Presentations were made of the 2023 financial results, 2023 medical and pharmacy claim results, and potential changes to the 2024/2025 benefit plans. There was discussion regarding the impact of the GLP-1 medications, that treat both Type II Diabetes and Weight Loss. CEBCO saw an increase in this category of medication of more than \$6 million over 2022. We are looking at potential partners to help us manage the weight loss portion as there are many factors that might be addressed to lower costs and improve member outcomes.

To wrap up the meeting, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield sponsored a Keynote Address and we were fortunate to have Jim Tressel, former OSU football coach and YSU President, speak! His topics included having an attitude for gratitude and tips for being Servant Leaders for our members and families. Mr. Tressel spoke for more than an hour, took many pictures, as well as, signed many autographs. We appreciated his message and wisdom.

CEBCO BOARD RETREAT

The CEBCO Board of Directors met at the end of April for

our Annual Board Retreat. The initial order of business was to elect officers and the following commissioners were selected: President – Cory Noonan (Allen County); Vice-President – Harry Brady (Huron County); Secretary - J.P. Ducro (Ashtabula County); and Treasurer - Bryan Davis (Scioto County). Recognition was given to our outgoing President – Tony Bornhorst (Shelby County), who held this position for three years. Tony retired as a commissioner at the end of June and we will miss his experience and expertise.

In anticipation of board vacancies (two, possibly three) that are upcoming, a Board Recruitment packet was developed and approved and will be used by board members to seek Commissioners interested in serving on the CEBCO Board. The Executive Committee will review applicants and make recommendations for board members.

After a presentation from our Investment Advisors, AAM and SAA, it was decided that no changes needed to be made to our Investment Policy or allocations. Currently, as bonds mature or coupon payments are received, CEBCO is taking advantage of higher-than-normal bank interest rates and keeping more cash and cash equivalent investments. We will continue to monitor the markets to decide the appropriate time to reinvest in the Bond Market.

WEIGHT LOSS MEDICATIONS

As CEBCO approaches our 2025 Renewal Meeting, weight loss medications, and especially, the GLP-1 medications are under review by the Board and Staff. In the past year, there has been a nearly 300% rise in utilization of this category of medications. At this time, Anthem does not cover these medications for their fully-insured book of business and only 9% of self-funded plans do cover the medications. We are reviewing the cost of the medications (approximately 2% of total premium) versus the potential advantages of covering them. At this time, our members use them on average for four months or less.

VISION PLAN ENHANCEMENT

Starting February 1, CEBCO added more retail vision providers to our VSP network. Nationally, Costco and Walmart/Sam's Club will now provide network benefits. There are also regional locations that include Pearle Vision, Rx Optical, Clarkson Eyecare, MyEyeDr., and SVS Vision among the new providers that will be available.



CORSA NEWS

CLAIMS DEVELOPMENT

by Jeff Knapp, CORSA Claims Supervisor



BRANDY ALLEN, CORSA CLAIMS REPRESENTATIVE, HITS THE GROUND RUNNING

As many of you know, Brandy Allen joined CCAO in 2016 to work in accounting where she excelled to ultimately become a Senior Accountant. Spring 2024 Brandy began a new chapter in her career as a CORSA claims representative. In her new role Brandy provides administrative support, data management, and assists with financial functions for the CORSA claims team. She also provides excellent customer service and technical support to CORSA members as well as adjusts first and third-party claims. Please welcome Brandy!

THEFT CLAIMS IN THE FORM OF BUSINESS COMPROMISE EMAIL (BCE) & CHECK WASHING INCREASE

Claims of payment fraud by BCE and check washing are on the rise putting governmental entities, including CORSA members, at risk. We must remain vigilant to reduce the risk of being a fraud victim. BCE is a sophisticated scam that targets both counties and individuals who perform legitimate transfer-of-funds. The scam is frequently carried out when an individual compromises legitimate county or personal email accounts through social engineering or computer intrusion to conduct unauthorized transfers of funds. The scam is not always associated with a transfer-of-funds request. One variation involves compromising legitimate business email accounts and requesting employees' Personally Identifiable Information, Wage and Tax Statement (W-2) forms, or even cryptocurrency wallets.

According to FBI IC# data, the average cost of a successful BCE attack is more than \$125,000. BCE can yield massive ROI for cybercriminals. In fact, BCE stands as one of the most financially devastating cybercrimes, resulting in losses of \$2.7 billion in 2023. **A Kentucky city recently sustained a theft of \$4 million in federal funding after someone directed that money to a private bank account. "These types of attacks can be especially impactful to state and local governments that may do business with dozens, if not hundreds, or different vendors,"** Hassold, who is now director of threat intelligence at cybersecurity firm Abnormal Security, told CNN.

Check washing is an old but effective way to steal public funds. Thieves get possession of a paper check, typically through the mail, then use chemicals to "wash" the payee name off the check and make themselves the payee. Then, cash or deposit the check to steal the county's money.

CORSA encourages counties to be on alert and take preventative measures including, but not limited to:

- Train staff to examine incoming email addresses. Validate the domain of the sender as genuine. Enabling display of email ID will show you the domain of the sender to validate whether the email ID (including domain) matches with display name;
- **Do not accept wire transfer instructions solely by email. Verify every wire transfer by phone, do not accept account number or payment instruction changes by email among other preventative anti-fraud measures. Call a known vendor and/or bank phone number, do not call an unknown number or number contained in a potential fraudulent email, invoice, or other documents/links associated with a potential fraudulent email.**
- For wire transfers to vendors, CORSA strongly encourages members consider enrollment in the anti-fraud services Positive Pay and ACH Positive Pay. The Ohio Auditor of State also recommends enrolling in the above anti-fraud services to guard against check fraud. (See: [Auditor of State Best Practices](#))
- Do not accept payroll changes solely by email. Validate payroll change requests through an alternate source; by phone or in-person with the employee. Call a known phone number for the employee, do not call an unknown phone number that may be listed in the potentially fraudulent email;
- Do not click on links within suspected spoofed or phishing emails or reveal confidential information;
- Should you still cut and mail paper checks please refer to the [American Bankers Association](#) for several tips to reduce your exposure to check washing theft; and
- Review internal controls and operational handbooks for how to report payment fraud schemes and alert appropriate IT professionals, local law enforcement, FBI, and CORSA or your carrier.



CCAOSC NEWS PROVIDING VITAL SERVICES TO COUNTIES

by Steve Caraway, OCERP Administrator and
Special Projects Manager



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
SERVICE CORPORATION

Since its inception in 1991, the County Commissioners Association of Ohio Service Corporation (CCAOSC) has been a cornerstone in assisting county governments across Ohio. Formed as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the CCAO, CCAOSC is dedicated to developing and sponsoring services that enable counties to enhance their operations and serve their residents more effectively.

ENHANCING EFFICIENCY AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

CCAOSC offers a wide array of service programs tailored to help counties achieve three primary goals: improving fiscal efficiency, enhancing community programs, and boosting employee job satisfaction. Each program is meticulously designed to address specific needs within county operations, ensuring a comprehensive support system for local governments.

PREMIER PROGRAMS FOR COUNTY NEEDS

CCAOSC Energy Program: In partnership with Palmer Energy, this program assists counties in managing their electric and natural gas supply contracts, promoting energy efficiency and cost savings.

CCAOSC Workers Compensation Programs: Focused on workplace safety, this initiative helps counties reduce workers' compensation premiums through proactive safety measures and risk management.

Cyber Defense and County Benefits+: These programs provide essential cyber security measures and supplemental employee benefits at group pricing, safeguarding both digital assets and employee well-being.

County FIRM: A vetted and qualified third party organization that provides various professional services to advocate for and support Ohio counties before, during and after facility improvement projects.

Comm-Core: Offers Ohio counties IP-based hosted voice and data solutions, VoIP, and surveillance systems. In addition, Comm-Core offers surveillance systems designed to enhance communication and security operations.

Each day, the Service Corporation team at CCAO works to make a difference for county governments in Ohio.

GUEST COLUMN



POWER UP WITH THE LATEST MONEY NEWS

[The Currency™](#), a publication by Empower, delivers the latest money news and views shaping how we live, work, and play. This free educational site and biweekly [newsletter](#) explore top financial headlines, original research and insights, market commentary, and trends. Stay current and plan, save, and invest for life.

- Answering top-searched finance questions;
- Providing market commentary from industry professionals;
- Sharing perspective and actionable tips on money management;
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County Leader, CCAO's quarterly e-magazine, provides an in-depth look at the news, programs and policies affecting Ohio's 88 counties. The e-magazine also showcases our members, offers best county practices as well as ways to enhance the state-county partnership practices and shares the offerings of the association. If you have questions or story submissions, contact Editor Jessica Newbacher at jnewbacher@ccao.org or 614-220-7986.