



WINTER 2025

COUNTY LEADER



State Budget Introduced with Targeted Support in Key County Areas

Streamlining Indigent Defense Reimbursement: Introducing the Court Appointed Billing System (CABS)

CCAO Partners with Ohio Realtors and Bricker Graydon, LLC to Hold Forums On Housing

Extension's Role in Agricultural Production Research

Counselor Corner: County-impacting Economic Development Law Changes During the 135th General Assembly

Commissioner Mark Holtsberry's Mission to Preserve Paulding County's Military Past

Voice Of County Leadership: Joe Antram, Logan County Commissioner and CCAO Secretary

An Update from JobsOhio President and CEO JP Nauseef

Honoring Resilience: The Red Tulip Project's Impact in Geauga County

Final Phase of 10-Year Licking County Courthouse Renovation Underway to Restore its Grand Original Courtroom

CORSA News

CEBCO News

CCAO Alumni News

OCERP News



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COVER: CCAO welcomes new Board Members Huron County Commissioner Harry Brady, Belmont County Commissioner J.P. Dutton, CCAO President and Clermont County Commissioner David Painter, Preble County Commissioner Rachael Vonderhaar, Muskingum County Commissioner Melissa Bell, Wayne County Commissioner Jonathan Hofstetter, Perry County Commissioner Scott Owen.

ABOVE:
1: Columbiana County Commissioner Tim Ginter, Geauga County Commissioner Carolyn Brakey, Columbiana County Commissioner and CCAO Board Member Mike Halleck gather for a photo at the 2024 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference.

2: Miami County Commissioner Wade Westfall and Preble County Commissioner Adam Craft pose with Brutus Buckeye for a photo at the 2024 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference.

3: Morrow County Commissioners Tim Siegfried and Jon Mason, CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler, CCAO Assistant Director John Leutz, Clermont County Commissioner and CCAO President David Painter, Morrow County Commissioner Tim Abraham toured Morrow County's new health department building.

4: The Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management was recognized as a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador.

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A MESSAGE FROM 2025 CCAO PRESIDENT

DAVID PAINTER, CLERMONT COUNTY COMMISSIONER

As 2025 President of CCAO, I am honored to serve alongside each of you as we work toward a stronger, more prosperous Ohio. At the heart of our mission is a commitment to advocate for county interests, ensuring that our voices are heard at the state level, and fostering productive relationships with our legislative partners in Columbus.

Advocacy is not just about making our needs known; it is about forging connections, building trust, and working collaboratively with state leaders to achieve meaningful progress. Our ability to govern effectively at the county level is directly impacted by the policies and funding decisions made by the state legislature. That is why this year, CCAO is doubling down on our advocacy efforts, focusing on key policy goals that are essential to the well-being of our residents and the efficiency of our county governments. Counties being our customer focus.

Strengthening Indigent Defense

One of our top priorities this year is securing continued support for indigent defense funding. For years, counties have shouldered a disproportionate burden in providing legal representation to those who cannot afford it. The state has made significant strides in recent years by increasing its share of indigent defense funding, and we must ensure that this commitment is maintained and strengthened. Our goal is to achieve full state reimbursement for these costs, easing the financial strain on counties and allowing us to allocate resources to other critical services.

CCAO is actively engaging with legislators to highlight the importance of sustained indigent defense funding. We are sharing data, real-world examples, and county perspectives to reinforce that a fair and well-funded legal defense system is not just a county issue, it is a matter of justice and fairness for all Ohioans.

Investing in Child Care for Working Families

Another pressing policy priority is expanding access to affordable childcare. Counties play a crucial role in administering childcare assistance programs, and we have seen firsthand how a lack of affordable childcare options creates barriers for working families and economic growth. When parents struggle to find reliable childcare, workforce participation declines, businesses suffer, and

local economies stagnate.

CCAO is advocating for increased state investment in childcare programs to ensure that more families have access to quality care, enabling parents to remain in the workforce. Additionally, we are urging reforms that streamline the administrative process for counties, reducing red tape and improving the efficiency of childcare assistance programs.

The Power of Relationship-Building

Advocacy is most effective when it is built on relationships. Each of us, as county leaders, has a responsibility to develop strong, positive connections with our state legislators. By engaging in regular conversations, sharing our challenges, and offering solutions, we can influence policy in ways that benefit our communities.

This year, I encourage each of you to take a proactive approach in engaging with your state representatives and senators. Attend legislative meetings, invite lawmakers to visit your county facilities, and provide firsthand insight into the issues we face. By doing so, we can ensure that county priorities remain front and center in state policy discussions.

A Unified Voice for Ohio's Counties

The strength of CCAO lies in our collective voice. When we stand together, advocating for policies that support our residents and strengthen county government, we are a force to be reckoned with. This year, let us commit to strengthening our advocacy efforts, deepening our relationships with state leaders, and working toward solutions that will benefit all Ohioans.

I am grateful for the dedication and leadership each of you brings to your counties and to CCAO. Together, we will continue to advance policies that support our communities and ensure a brighter future for Ohio.

I am honored to serve as your CCAO President this year.



David Painter

CCAO President, Clermont County Commissioner

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INVESTING IN OHIO'S FUTURE: SUPPORT ISSUE 2 FOR STRONGER COUNTIES

LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A well-maintained and modern infrastructure is the foundation of a thriving community. Roads, bridges, water systems, and wastewater treatment facilities are critical to public safety, economic development, and overall quality of life. For nearly 40 years, Ohio counties have relied on the State Capital Improvement Program (SCIP) through the Public Works Commission to keep these essential assets in good repair. Now, we must ensure that this program continues.

On May 6, 2025, Ohio voters will have the opportunity to renew funding for SCIP by approving Issue 2, a constitutional amendment that extends this vital program without raising taxes. The County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) strongly supports this renewal and urges all Ohio counties to pass resolutions in favor of Issue 2.

Since its inception, SCIP has provided over \$7 billion in funding for critical infrastructure improvements across all 88 counties. That is over 19,000 projects, including repairing aging roads and bridges, upgrading water treatment facilities, or investing in stormwater systems, this program ensures that communities have the resources they need to maintain safe and reliable infrastructure. Importantly, this renewal is necessary to prevent a lapse in funding when the current authorization expires July 1, 2025.

The impact of SCIP extends far beyond infrastructure—it fuels economic growth, public safety, and job creation. A well-maintained infrastructure network attracts businesses, supports local economies, and enhances the well-being of Ohioans. Without renewal, counties across the state could face funding shortfalls, delaying critical projects and putting communities at risk.

We encourage county commissioners, executives, and council members to take an active role in advocating for Issue 2. By passing a resolution in support of SCIP's renewal, counties can send a strong message that this bipartisan program is essential to Ohio's future. We also urge county leaders to educate their residents about the importance of voting YES on Issue 2 to continue investing in Ohio's infrastructure without increasing taxes.



Cheryl Subler
CCAO Executive Director



POLICY

STATE BUDGET INTRODUCED WITH TARGETED SUPPORT IN KEY COUNTY AREAS

by Kyle Petty, Managing Director of Policy



CCAO Legislative Platform cover page

strong partner to counties throughout his administration and we are looking forward to working with him on his final operating budget. Now that the budget is introduced, it is our job at CCAO to work with the administration and members of the Ohio General Assembly to ensure the final version of the budget further solidifies the state-county partnership. The CCAO policy team has a robust strategy to support our members and strengthen their advocacy efforts through our CCAO Advocacy Task Force, budget priority talking points, regional legislative briefings and more!

CCAO board has identified five main budget priorities during this budget cycle. However, we will be monitoring, advocating, and defending many items that are not on this list. Our top priorities are:

- **Child Welfare:** Bolster Ohio's child welfare system by increasing funding for the State Child Protection Allocation, establishing regional children's crisis stabilization centers, and increasing placement cost transparency through the Department of Children and Youth (DCY).
- **Indigent Defense:** Establish a regional pilot where the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) takes over the operation of indigent defense in three counties, and provide additional funding to ensure that counties

not included in the pilot are fully reimbursed for their indigent defense costs.

- **County Jails:** Create an ongoing and dedicated funding source to assist counties with jail construction or renovation projects, and allow for inmate medical expenses in the jail to be covered by Medicaid through an 1115 waiver.
- **Next Gen 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1):** Increase funding for NG 9-1-1 upgrades and operations to account for the projected shortfall in revenue from the monthly access fee.
- **Child Care:** Codify the eligibility for publicly funded child care at 200% of the federal poverty level, and support capacity building efforts.

CCAO is pleased that Governor DeWine included several of CCAO's budget priorities. The Governor's budget proposal includes a \$25 million increase in SFY 2026 and a \$30 million increase in SFY 2027 in the State Child Protection Allocation (SCPA). The SCPA goes directly to county public children services agencies (PCSAs) for placement costs of children in foster care. Additionally, the budget proposal includes \$30 million over the biennium to assist communities in starting child wellness campus. The child wellness campuses would provide short-term treatment and care for multi-system youth at risk of custody relinquishment or in PCSA custody and unable to access timely, appropriate placements. In addition to funding, CCAO has asked for policy changes aimed at stabilizing placement costs and increasing transparency around rates. The budget includes language that authorizes the Department of Children and Youth to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to establish statewide rates for placement and care of children eligible for foster care maintenance payments.

The budget proposal also includes funding for the Northwest Regional Hub pilot program that would allow the state to administer the indigent defense system in Allen, Hardin, and Putnam counties. This pilot program was a recommendation of two different task forces that studied the indigent defense system in recent years. The pilot program will hopefully create an outline for a

regional state administered system that can be expanded to other interested counties in future operating budgets. Unfortunately, the budget also provides only a negligible increase to the county reimbursement appropriation items (\$800,000 in SFY 2026 and \$5.2 million in SFY 2027). The Ohio Public Defender's estimate for the reimbursement rate for the remainder of the current state fiscal year is 78%. With no change to the reimbursement appropriation, next year's reimbursement rate will likely stay the same or slightly decrease. CCAO is working with OPD to determine a sufficient fiscal request that we can have submitted by the General Assembly. Once we have that request, we will be sure to distribute it to the membership.

Additionally, the Governor's proposal includes \$154.9 million over the biennium for county jail projects. The proposal is funded by the excise tax on adult-use marijuana. The funding would be distributed through a competitive grant process administered by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) similar to the process they currently utilize for capital dollars. Furthermore, the budget proposal provides dollars for the complete construction of the state system and continue to provide operational funding for the state. The budget proposal unfortunately does not provide additional funding for counties, which will be needed to allow counties to upgrade and operate the NG 9-1-1 system locally. We are currently experiencing an approximate \$50 million shortfall in estimated revenue derived from the universal access fee increase and expansion included in the previous budget.

Last, the proposal increases the eligibility for publicly funded child care (PFCC) from 145% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 160% of the FPL. Additionally, the Child Care Choice Voucher program is funded to continue providing PFCC to families between 161% and 200% FPL. DCY is also implementing several federal child care requirements during this biennium, including: capping parent co-pays at 7%; paying providers by enrollment; and paying at the 50th percentile of the 2024 market rate.

We are very thankful for Governor DeWine for including several of our policy priorities in his executive budget request. However, we know that we will need to bolster his initial efforts and defend some of the funding contained in the executive proposal. CCAO is committed to providing our members with the platform and materials to be successful advocates for the association's priorities.

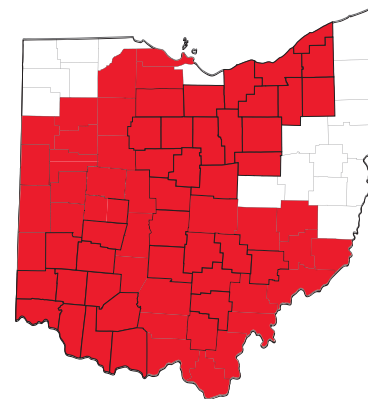
First, we are holding regular meetings of the CCAO Advocacy Task Force. The meetings will begin on March 3rd at 2:30pm and will occur every two weeks. The calls provide our members with timely information on CCAO's budget advocacy efforts and offer an opportunity to ask the policy team questions. If you are interested in participating in the calls, please contact the policy team. Next, we are providing our members with one page advocacy documents. Each document will focus on a specific CCAO budget priority, and provide our members with talking

points to assist with advocacy. The documents will be updated as we progress through the budget process to further empower our members' advocacy efforts. Last but certainly not least, we will be hosting regional legislative briefings throughout March and April. The meetings will take place in your counties and provide an opportunity to connect with your legislators and advocate for CCAO's budget priorities. We are very excited about these briefings and please be on the lookout for calendar invites for your regional briefing!

The CCAO policy team looks forward to working with the Ohio General Assembly and the DeWine administration to further strengthen the state county partnership in the operating budget. We are excited for the layered advocacy approach that combines the efforts of our CCAO policy team and empowers our CCAO members with the tools to be successful advocates. We have a long road ahead, but there is a lot of opportunity to strengthen counties in this budget!

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FEATURE

STREAMLINING INDIGENT DEFENSE REIMBURSEMENT: INTRODUCING THE COURT APPOINTED BILLING SYSTEM (CABS)

by Elizabeth R. Miller, State Public Defender



With long term support from the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, the Office of the Ohio Public Defender (OPD) has developed an online system for the submission of indigent defense reimbursement – the Court Appointed Billing System (CABS).

With the implementation of CABS, the OPD now provides (1) OPD Online, which is a case management system for public defender offices across the State and (2) CABS – a fully integrated billing system for appointed counsel, Ohio’s courts, and auditors/fiscal offices.

CABS OVERVIEW

- CABS is a fully integrated cloud-based system that supports the submission of indigent defense fee bills by court appointed counsel, review of bills by a court, and certification by a county that the bills have been paid. All submissions are digital, which will help support accuracy and reduce the time in which fee bills are submitted for reimbursement.
- The system has automated functions that will help identify mistakes and reasons why fee applications are denied for reimbursement. For example, charge code errors, unsigned financial disclosure forms, and mathematical errors will be identified through programming checks and the use of drop-down fields.
- CABS has three modules:
 - (1) an online module for Court-Appointed Attorneys to submit their bills;
 - (2) an online module for Courts to review and approve,

modify, or return submitted bills; and

(3) an online module for the County Auditor/ Fiscal office to review and certify the judicially approved bills for the amounts paid.

- CABS is easy to use with simple screen interfaces to input necessary information. Users will be able to access updates on the status of submitted bills, receive notification of status changes as the bill progresses, and respond to comments or questions about a bill, if requested.

- Courts and Auditors will have the ability to review the fee application online, with all associated attachments including the client financial disclosure statement, motion for extraordinary fees, and any receipts or invoices for expenses incurred by the Attorney. The Court may approve, return, or modify the submitted fee application to the Attorney for correction. The Auditor then enters the fiscal information regarding payment and submits it to OPD for reimbursement.

In 2024, OPD partnered with Summit County for initial implementation and testing. CABS is now being used in multiple counties, has over 500 active users, and has processed over 5,000 cases; making the process faster, reducing bills rejected for reimbursement, and increasing efficiency in processing these bills. The OPD is excited to announce that CABS is now ready for use across the State of Ohio.

At the beginning of this year, a broad email was distributed statewide inviting Courts and Counties to be placed on the calendar to move from paper billing to CABS. If you are interested and haven’t already, please have your County contact the OPD CABS team at CABSSupport@opd.ohio.gov or you may call 614-466-5394 and ask to speak to a member of the CABS team.

Additional information about CABS is available at: <https://opd.ohio.gov/appointed-counsel/appointed-counsel-billing-forms-program>.

FEATURE

CCAO PARTNERS WITH OHIO REALTORS AND BRICKER GRAYDON, LLC TO HOLD FORUMS ON HOUSING

by CCAO Policy Team

The shortage of housing options has become a major focus of public policy discussion at the Ohio Statehouse and at the county level. The Ohio General Assembly is expected to continue its engagement with this issue in 2025, in part by considering recommendations made in the report of the Ohio Senate Select Committee on Housing. The governor and the legislature will also need to review housing-related programs that were started in the FY 2024-2025 budget, such as the Department of Development's [Welcome Home Ohio](#) program for housing renovation and construction, and the Ohio [Low Income Housing Tax Credit](#) (LIHTC), which is paired with federal LIHTC projects.



Jen Davis, Neighborhood Development Services, Veronica Cardello, Ohio Realtors, Portage County Commissioner and CCAO Board Member Christina Christian-Bennett, Lake County Commissioner Rich Regovitch, Former CCAO Senior Policy Analyst Jon Honeck, Jamie McMillen, Akron-Cleveland Association of Realtors at the Regional Housing Forum in Portage County on November 1, 2024

CCAO welcomes greater investment and support from the state for housing, but the Association also recognizes that fundamental decisions about growth and development are made at the local level. County commissioners are taking the lead in working with other local governments and the private sector to boost housing development and attract the growing workforce that employers need. Counties are involved in supporting housing development in many different ways, including (just to name a few): land bank programs to redevelop properties; financing infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water and sewer facilities, ditches and stormwater control; subdivision regulations to guide the layout of new neighborhoods; regional planning agencies that identify preferred areas for development; building departments to oversee compliance with applicable codes; and support for vocational training efforts to train the construction

workforce of the future.

To support members' efforts to foster greater dialogue, CCAO is partnering with Bricker Graydon, LLC, and the Ohio Realtors to sponsor a series of regional housing forums around the state. Four of these events were held around the state in 2024: Allen (August 28), Fairfield (October 18), Portage (November 1), and Ross (November 13). Panelists included local experts from the public and private sectors who discussed challenges and opportunities in each local housing market. Lt. Governor Jon Husted attended the Fairfield County event to emphasize the administration's interest and support for finding solutions to this issue. Experts from Bricker Graydon highlighted various public finance tools that could be used to direct development where it is most needed. A summary of these tools is available online through the [Economic Incentives Toolkit: Ohio's Public Sector Tools for Growth and Job Creation](#). Experts from OhioRealtors explained the need for a new approach to zoning that would speed up the plan approval process and remove much of the uncertainty for developers. This approach involves the creation of standard, "off-the-shelf" housing designs that would be pre-approved by local governments and could be used for a variety of different lot sizes. Speakers at all four events emphasized the need for an ongoing dialogue and a proactive approach by counties and other local governments to build partnerships with all of the private and public sector organizations involved in housing development.



Former CCAO Senior Policy Analyst Jon Honeck, Veronica Cardello, Ohio Realtors, Ross County Commissioner Jack Everson, Sandra Green, Scioto Valley Realtors and Mike Jacoby, Bricker Graydon at the Regional Housing Forum in Ross County on November 13, 2024

FEATURE

HONORING RESILIENCE: THE RED TULIP PROJECT'S IMPACT IN GEAUGA COUNTY

by Jessica Newbacher, CCAO Communications Coordinator



accomplished when a community unites with a shared mission.

The Red Tulip Project of Geauga was founded in 2012 by a group of mothers and Judge Terri Stupica, who recognized the urgent need for a Level II Peer Support home for women in recovery. Their vision was to establish a safe and culturally appropriate housing option that would provide stability, peer support, and reintegration into the community. However, their mission faced significant barriers—funding was scarce, and broad support was lacking.

Tragically, by 2016, two of the three women who initially advocated for this project had passed away due to substance use-related causes. At the memorial service for one of them, Dr. Dennis Michelson spoke of the growing number of overdose deaths and the collateral damage felt by families and children. It was a heartbreaking but pivotal moment, reigniting the resolve of the community to push forward. Within a year, two more women had lost their lives to addiction. When Jaime Dvorak, the most recent of those women, passed away on February 1, 2017, her father and now-Gauga County Commissioner Jim Dvorak posed a powerful question: "What am I going to do for you to help build that house?" The answer was clear—together, they would build it.

Gauga County, though rural and underserved in many ways, is known for its generosity. Through storytelling, awareness campaigns, and sheer determination, the people of Geauga rallied behind the cause. The result was a fully community-funded and community-built recovery home, constructed on donated land, making it the first and only women's recovery residence in Geauga at the time. The support did not stop there. As awareness grew, so did

In Ohio's counties, the fight against substance use disorder is deeply personal. For Geauga County, this battle took a transformative turn with the founding of the Red Tulip Project, a grassroots initiative that emerged from grief and a firm resolve to create lasting change. The Red Tulip Project is a testament to what can be

community engagement. Local businesses, individuals, and organizations came together to fundraise, provide materials, and offer services to ensure the home could sustain itself and expand its reach. Since its opening, the Red Tulip Project has not only provided in-house support to 30 women but has also extended its reach to hundreds more through its outreach program, Red Tulip Beyond.

A key component of the Red Tulip Project's success is its commitment to reintegration. Lasting recovery is not just about achieving sobriety—it is about reclaiming one's place in the community. Through peer support programs led by certified individuals with lived experience, the project ensures that women in recovery have access to guidance, encouragement, and the practical resources they need to rebuild their lives.

The project emphasizes that recovery is not just about "freedom" from addiction—it is about embracing a new, determined way of life. The continuum of care model used by Red Tulip fortifies sustainable recovery by focusing on structured support, skill development, and meaningful community engagement. This approach increases the probability of long-term success and reduces the likelihood of relapse.

Despite its success, the work of the Red Tulip Project is far from over. The organization continues to expand its efforts to combat substance use disorder through education, advocacy, and direct intervention. Recent initiatives include:

- The Meditation Garden: A serene space designed to



Gauga County Commissioner Jim Dvorak wearing his memorial t-shirt for his daughter, Jamie

provide residents with a peaceful environment for reflection and healing. The project has applied for grants to install signage and raise awareness about the importance of the 12 steps of AA.

- Anti-Vaping Awareness: Partnering with local schools, YMCAs, and libraries, the Red Tulip Project has distributed anti-vaping posters and is working with local businesses to amplify the message.
- HUGS Not DRUGS Campaign: This program leverages partnerships with pizza shops and real estate agents to distribute educational pamphlets to families and new homeowners, fostering awareness about substance use disorder and available recovery resources.
- Life Recovery Program: A faith-based initiative that provides structured weekly support to individuals in recovery, reinforcing their commitment to a substance-free life.

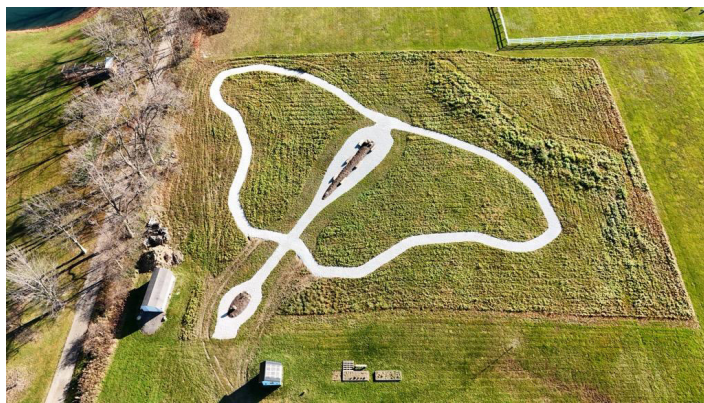


Monarch Meadow House

- Partnering with grassroots organizations to amplify recovery resources
- Advocating for policies that prioritize long-term recovery and reintegration
- Encouraging community engagement to reduce stigma and foster support networks

The journey of the Red Tulip Project is one of heartbreak, resilience, and triumph. It is a story of a community that refused to accept loss as the final chapter, instead turning tragedy into a catalyst for meaningful change. Thanks to the unwavering commitment of local leaders, organizations, and residents, Geauga County now has a beacon of hope for women in recovery.

For county commissioners and community leaders across Ohio, the Red Tulip Project serves as both an inspiration and a challenge—to recognize the power of local action in addressing the opioid and to commit to creating pathways for recovery in every corner of the state. Together, we can build stronger, healthier communities where no family has to endure the pain of substance use disorder alone.



12-Step Meditation Garden aerial view

As the Red Tulip Project looks ahead, sustainability remains a top priority. The organization has worked diligently to secure funding through grants, donations, and community partnerships. Strategic planning is also underway to expand facilities, enhance security measures, and improve digital accessibility for outreach efforts. Additionally, training and certification for peer support specialists continue to be a focus, ensuring that individuals in recovery have access to compassionate and knowledgeable mentors.

The Red Tulip Project of Geauga stands as a powerful example of what is possible when a county embraces innovative, community-driven solutions. For county leaders across Ohio, it serves as a model of resilience, collaboration, and impact. Other counties can explore similar approaches by:

- Establishing peer support housing programs tailored to local needs



Owner of Premier Custom Builders Bradley Campos, Geauga County Commissioner Jim Dvorak and Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine after a tour of the Red Tulip Project

GUEST COLUMN

EXTENSION'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESEARCH

by Ellen Essman, Senior Research Associate, Government Affairs, OSU Extension

eFields and ePLUS reports provide valuable insight to Ohio growers and producers

Research plays a critical role in advancing the mission of land-grant universities and their Extension services. Land-grants, like The Ohio State University, were founded on the principles of practical research and innovation aimed at benefiting academic growth and the livelihood of communities, industries, and the public. Through its research efforts, Ohio State University Extension has built an exchange of knowledge that directly benefits local agricultural producers, industries, and communities. The research findings empower agricultural producers to make informed decisions, improve productivity, and enhance sustainability on their farms.

Faculty and staff within Extension's Agriculture and Natural Resources program work directly with agricultural producers and industry representatives across the state to conduct on-site research. Their findings bring better understanding of how variables such as soil type and health, weather conditions, and other environmental factors impact crop production. On-site research is especially powerful as it not only generates real-world data but also builds strong relationships between agricultural producers, Extension, and industry partners. The research results reflect local needs that offer practical, area-specific solutions that can help growers optimize their operations.

In 2024, Extension professionals collaborated with local producers to capture critical data from 428 research sites statewide through the eFields and ePLUS research programs. Their findings highlight the essential role of research in navigating challenges posed by climate, technology, and resource management in Ohio's agricultural community.

eFields Research

Ohio State's eFields research focuses on bringing more understanding to agricultural production practices. The findings offer insight into how different environmental conditions affect crop growth and production. During the 2024 growing season, Extension faculty and staff worked with agricultural producers in 42 Ohio counties to conduct on-farm research at 260 locations. The primary focus of eFields research during the last growing season focused on precision nutrient management strategies, including optimizing fertilizer use, improving pesticide and seed application, evaluating biologicals, and advancing digital tools for agriculture.

The findings from last year's growing season were recently compiled and made publicly available through the 2024 eFields Report. This report is a valuable resource for Ohio's agricultural producers, equipping them with data-driven insights to make informed decisions for their farming practices. The electronic version of the 2024 eFields Report is available at go.osu.edu/eFields2024, and hard copies will be available at local county Extension offices soon.

ePLUS Research

In 2024, the ePLUS research program was initiated to model the eFields research program. Instead of focusing on row crops and forages, ePLUS research focuses on fruit and vegetable production, ornamentals, woodlands, and aquatics. Research under the ePLUS program is dedicated to advancing production agriculture and wise use of natural resources through on-site research. The research areas for ePLUS focus on crop pest and cultural management, conservation, technology, mechanization, economic analysis, and community engagement.

David Ernst, an agricultural producer in Morrow County, shared about his experience as an ePLUS research partner. "I have long been fascinated by new and innovative farming practices and the research that has led to them. The opportunity for my family and farm to be active participants in one such study has been both exciting and rewarding."

In 2024, the ePLUS research program included 168 research sites across 54 counties in Ohio, focusing on cutting-edge practices that aim to improve sustainability, efficiency, and profitability in farm, forest, and garden enterprises. The 2024 ePLUS Report is available at go.osu.edu/ePLUS2024.

MOVING FORWARD

On-site research programs like eFields and ePLUS identify immediate and long-term challenges for agricultural producers, from adapting to climate change to enhancing resource management. As agriculture continues to evolve, the collaboration between Extension, industry, and farmers will be more crucial than ever.

Any agricultural producer or grower interested in participating in on-site research should contact their local Extension office. A list of all county and state Extension offices is available at extension.osu.edu/lao.

COUNSELOR CORNER

COUNTY-IMPACTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LAW CHANGES DURING THE 135TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

by Timothy Barry Esq., Jacquelin Lewis, Esq., Jeffrey Harris, Esq.

Ohio has been on a roll of good fortune of late – as measured by its economic development “wins” – and the State has gained attention across the country for its innovative programming and initiatives in this space. It’s paid off, as Ohio has the unique distinction of being the only State to rank in the Top 5 for total economic development projects every year from 2019 to 2024. Here, Bricker Graydon attorneys highlight the most impactful substantive changes to economic development law enacted during the 135th Ohio General Assembly. We’ve assembled the following list of changes that will impact CCAO’s members and their constituents.

The State’s biennial operating budget, **House Bill 33²**, had baked within it many changes to Ohio’s economic development laws, including:

- Modified the criteria to be a “distressed area” to qualify for a **Rural Industrial Park Loan**. Specifically, for counties, a “distressed area” is a county where its “per capita personal income is equal or less than eighty percent of the personal income of the United States.”
- Altered the **Ohio Brownfield Program** and **Ohio Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program** so that each county has one “lead entity” to submit grants and receive funding. The ODOD selected lead entities from a list recommended by county commissioners, subject to county population size. (Note lead entities were further changed during the lame duck session (see House Bill 315, below)
- Established the **Welcome Home Ohio tax credit program** operated by the ODOD for construction and purchase grants to counties for “qualifying residential properties.”
- Established nonrefundable **state-level low-income housing tax credits** (LIHTC) for investments in affordable housing mirroring the federal program.
- Various changes to **Ohio’s tax increment financing (TIF)** laws, including allowing for “super-long TIF” - up to 60-year TIFs - for any county TIFs whereby \$1.5 million has been collected annually via PILOT payments.
- Authorized county-wide transportation financing districts via **Regional Transportation Improvement Projects (RTIPs)** that allow up to 100%, 30-year real property tax exemption related to transportation improvements

and “opportunity corridor improvements.”

- Authorized counties with a population greater than 800,000 and a convention center to designate a “**convention center headquarters hotel**” and divert its respective lodging tax revenue to fund associated projects.

Many public officials eagerly tracked the legislative journey of the virtual meeting bill - **House Bill 257³** - as it wound through enactment during lame duck session.

- Allows a public “board, commission, committee, council, or similar decision-making body” of state or local entities to **conduct meetings and enact binding formal actions virtually**. Public bodies that have members elected by the public or members who are compensated (outside of expense reimbursements) are ineligible to meet virtually.

Another lame duck bill, **House Bill 315⁴**, was packed to the gills with all manner of law changes, including these affecting economic development:

- Substantial **broadening of the definition of “lead entities”** under the Brownfield Remediation Program.
- Allows a county that is already included in an existing port authority to **create its own port authority**, encompassing only its own territorial jurisdiction, if (1) the existing port authority has an area of jurisdiction that includes more than one county and (2) the county creating its own port authority that has a population greater than 100,000.

Many other substantive law changes were proposed, heard in committee, and even passed from one chamber to the other. But those changes ended up on the cutting room floor. We can expect many of those – and other – law change proposals to crop up again in the next State biennial operating budget during spring 2025.

1 JobsOhio, Ohio’s dynamic approach to economic development empowers inclusive prosperity, THE BUS. J. (Jan. 13, 2025), <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/news/2025/01/13/ohios-dynamic-approach-to-economic-development.html>.

2 Am. Sub. H.B. No. 33.

3 Sub. H. B. No. 257

4 Am. Sub. H. B. No. 315



FEATURE

COMMISSIONER MARK HOLTSBERRY'S MISSION TO PRESERVE PAULDING COUNTY'S MILITARY PAST

by Jessica Newbacher, CCAO Communications Coordinator

Paulding County Commissioner Mark Holtsberry's interest in military history began with his own family and has been evolving over the years. With family members involved in the military from World War II all the way up to Afghanistan, he is inspired by their bravery and honor that comes with serving our country. Holtsberry's uncle, Ray Keck, who was known by locals as the "county historian," also had a passion for local history, leading Holtsberry to dive deeper into the military side of things.

Holtsberry recalls a time during his childhood when he would ride his bike to a store and met three unnamed veterans. "I just listened. They always wanted me to come back and hear their stories," he said. This experience piqued his interest in military history and has stuck with him.

Eventually, Holtsberry began to investigate the number of Civil War veterans who are buried in Paulding County. "I found over 900, with six of them being confederate veterans," remarked Holtsberry. "So, then I thought, well I'm going to put this in a book format. The genealogy society in our county backed and supported it, and they even donated a copy to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C." The first book Holtsberry wrote is called *Civil War Veterans Buried in Paulding County*.

Through this process of researching Civil War veterans, Holtsberry found that 42 of them buried in Paulding



Paulding County Commissioner Mark Holtsberry

County had unmarked graves. Working with the Veterans Administration, he is in the process of placing military headstones on their respective graves, one by one, by hand. "I have installed close to 65 tombstones, with around 15 or 16 more to do," Holtsberry said. "There are also some unknown veterans buried in Paulding County. They were marked in 1940 on census maps as veterans, but we don't

know who they are." The Works Progress Administration (WPA) went to work during the Roosevelt administration documenting each of the veterans buried in the 78 active cemeteries. This has been a vital source for Holtsberry's efforts in identifying all the unmarked graves.

Holtsberry's curiosity did not end at the Civil War. He also researched Spanish American War and World War I veterans and again found unmarked graves in the county. He went on to write two more books documenting the veterans from Paulding County, (*Paulding County in the Splendid Little War* and *Paulding County in the Great War*) and now all three of his books are on file in the Library of Congress.

"I completed my third book in 2018, which was the 100th anniversary of the ending of WWI. I didn't even think about it until it was pointed out to me," said Holtsberry. "We were the first county in the state of Ohio to get this done by the 100th anniversary." Paulding County's military history is now well-documented at the national level.

Holtsberry started writing *Military History in Paulding County* for the West Bend News after World War II veteran Stan Jordan passed away in 2021. Holtsberry admired Jordan's writing style and content and wanted to keep the column alive. He has found that readers notice when he doesn't submit an article for a few weeks. "I enjoy doing it. It's not part of my job function as a commissioner, but it keeps my name out there, and lets people know that I am a strong supporter of veterans," Holtsberry said.

Holtsberry will continue to participate in veterans' advocacy as long as possible. Every year, the VFW has him speak at cemeteries on Memorial Day, and schools have asked him to speak on Veterans Day. "I always put flags out on our cemeteries for Memorial Day, and on Veterans Day I go around and spruce up the headstones that need attention. I work closely with the Veterans Services office on these issues. Their board is very supportive of what I do," he said.

Holtsberry will keep writing articles for the West Bend News, and in the future he wants to help revamp the 1940 veterans census maps and get them up-to-date. He plans to finish installing the tombstones, though it is demanding physical work. He has another book almost ready for *continued on page 16*



VOICE OF COUNTY LEADERSHIP

JOE ANTRAM, LOGAN COUNTY COMMISSIONER AND CCAO SECRETARY

How long have you been a county commissioner?

I've been a commissioner since 2017.

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

I'm proud to represent Logan County because I was born and raised locally on the Antram Family Farm, which has been in our family for more than 100 years. After directing high school band programs for 35 years in districts in Logan County, I retired from teaching in 2013. My engagement in agriculture, commitment to public good and devotion to my community have been integral to my efforts as a commissioner.

Why did you want to be a commissioner? What are you most proud of for having achieved in your time as commissioner?

With this spirit of service, I've been comfortable fulfilling the duties of a county leader. This office has allowed me the opportunity to interact with others and help to make decisions with impartiality and integrity.

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

Of course, the position of commissioner is not without its share of challenges. Our role in helping to find consensus can be difficult during polarizing circumstances. Farming continues to be the top enterprise in West Central Ohio. Not everyone recognizes or appreciates the driving forces behind new economic development. Industrialization, non-traditional Agricultural methods and capital formation are sometimes met with distrust and skepticism. A big challenge for leaders in rural counties is to find ways to preserve pride in heritage while also exploring contemporary opportunities. Solid communication from all angles and relying on your planning commission can help to formulate a long-range plan for your county that will accommodate most interests.

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?

A positive relationship between state officials and county government is essential to ensuring progress for our citizens. Communication between both sides needs to be honest and take place often. It is beneficial to everyone when state representatives and senators ask for county opinions before voting on legislation. With the encouragement of CCAO, I've become more adept at calling state leaders proactively when issues affect Ohio's counties. Here's hoping that the newly elected members of the legislature will compliment those who are already good listeners.

To keep current with county concerns, our residents are welcome to express their opinions and interests twice a week during scheduled open forum sessions at the Commissioners' Office. People appreciate being able to stop in to visit since no appointment is required. An outreach program initiated by commissioner Mike Yoder honors a distinguished citizen with the American flag that was flown above the Logan County Courthouse the previous month. Honorees have included veterans and centenarians who have served their country and county well. We've received a great deal of media attention and positive community support for this program.

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?

Management of finances is crucial to the success of any business model. Realizing this was an important part of my transition from a teaching staff member to commissioner. Creating budgets that influence several offices has been a learning experience for me, especially during the roller-coaster economy during COVID-19. We were able to adjust hours of operation in some offices to adjust finances and still adequately served our citizens. The county elected officials worked as a team to retain staff and deliver a balanced budget.

The county elected officials worked as a team to retain staff and deliver a balanced budget.

Now we're in a different situation with recent competitive workforce trends. Employees express new expectations of pay, benefits and work conditions. It's a struggle to further develop attractive but affordable employment packages to attract and retain quality staff.

What advice do you have for our new members?

Working as a commissioner can be hectic and perplexing since it seems big decisions come across our desks every week. However, if we pledge to work with our fellow county officials in a positive manner, we can all achieve great things together! Empathetic interaction can help when communicating with constituents. Tackling the next hot topic with collaboration and respect will help attain a "win-win" situation for all concerned.

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

I've attended CCAO activities and conferences since first taking office. Insight, motivation and education gleaned from these events have helped me to confidently meet the demands of my position. Anyone who is new to the commissioner position should take advantage of the services available through CCAO. For me, becoming a member of the CCAO Board of Directors (now holding the office of Secretary) has been an opportunity to share experiences and perspectives while learning the intricacies of policymaking.



40 Years
1983-2023
OHIO COUNTY
EMPLOYEES
RETIREMENT PLAN
For the future you imagine

EMPOWER

**Working with you
to create the future
you imagine.**



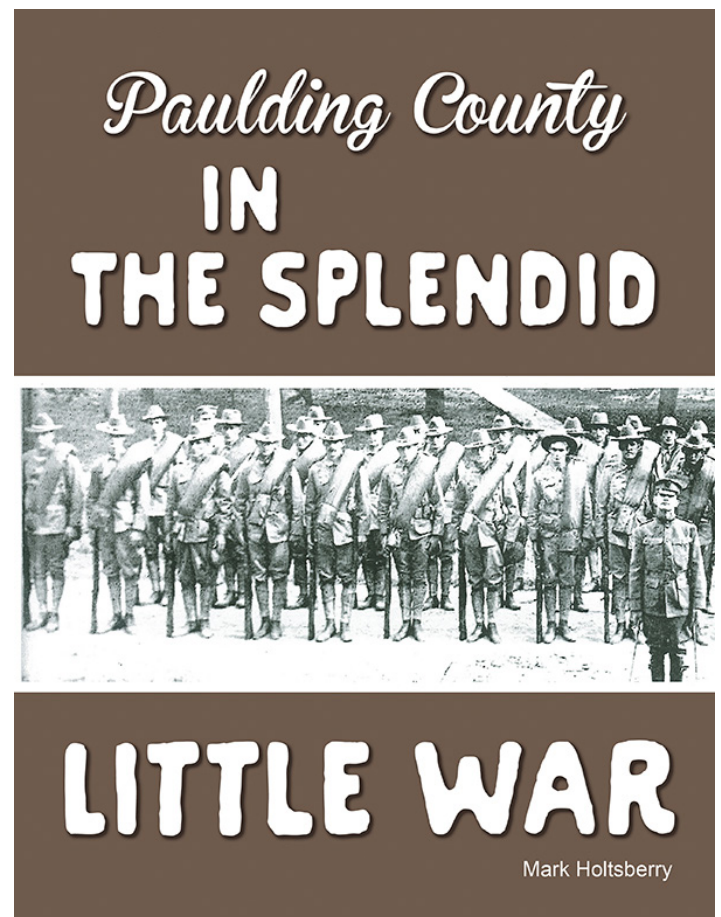
Ohio County Employees Retirement Plan (OCERP)

continued from page 14

publication, titled *Men on the Wall, Volume I*. "When I first got elected to office, I wanted to recognize our veterans from our own county who were killed in service," said Holtsberry. "I put together quite the list with the help of others, and there are over 300 names on that list from the Civil War on."

He is also working on a book on World War II and emphasized the fact that women who served did not always receive proper recognition for their service, as they were not eligible to receive pensions after serving. "I have worked with Congressman Bob Latta to see what we can have changed about this," explained Holtsberry. "Although it's too late for the women who were not properly honorably discharged to receive a pension, they should be recognized for their service and word it so that people understand that they served honorably."

Holtsberry recommends other counties work with their County Recorder's office to research and document their local military history. Read Commissioner Holtsberry's column here: <https://www.westbendnews.net/autonews/category/columns/mark-holtsberry/Text>



Commissioner Holtsberry's book "Paulding County in the Splendid Little War"



GUEST COLUMN

AN UPDATE FROM JOBSOHIO PRESIDENT AND CEO JP NAUSEEF

by JP Nauseef, President and CEO of JobsOhio

Established as the state's private economic development corporation in 2011, JobsOhio's foundational strategy centers around serving companies across targeted industries with high productivity, wages, and economic impact. As JobsOhio finalizes its next five-year strategic plan—JobsOhio 2030—the organization continues to assess, reflect, and plan for the future of the state's diverse business ecosystem.

Since 2019, Ohio has experienced a swing in momentum across virtually every measure of economic vitality. New project wins have increased by 47% to 2,155 developments, bringing with them over 126,000 new jobs. New payroll climbed 27% to \$6.6 billion, putting more money in Ohioans' pockets. Ohio is also the only state in the U.S. in the top five for economic development projects and projects per capita for five years in a row (2019-2024). The key to this success is largely attributed to the state's comprehensive approach to building a best-in-class business climate. From attracting companies like Amazon Web Services, Anduril, Intel, Joby Aviation, Medpace, and Sierra Nevada Corporation to investing in more than 550 small businesses throughout the state, Ohio's inclusive approach to economic development is spearheaded by JobsOhio and the hardworking state, county, and local officials that all makeup Team Ohio.

A Skilled Workforce

For the first time in a generation, Ohio is experiencing significant population growth through domestic migration. According to Census Bureau data, from 2019-2023, a net of 97,000 people moved to Ohio for job-related reasons. Even more telling is who's moving: a 2024 Bloomberg analysis reveals that Ohio's 25-44-year-old population, the prime working-age demographic, is stable or growing in three-quarters of the state's counties. Newcomers have cited three key advantages that make Ohio their ideal destination: proximity to family and friends, superior value for their money, and access to quality jobs.

The state is actively investing in this growing workforce through programs like TechCred, which has awarded over 100,000 credentials to date, equipping Ohio workers with the skills needed to thrive in advanced industries. These upskilling initiatives, combined with a network of over 80 universities graduating 21,000 engineers and scientists

annually, ensure Ohio's talent pipeline remains robust and ready to meet the demands of tomorrow's economy.

Seamless Site Options

JobsOhio stands ready to help local officials give companies across diverse sectors a competitive advantage, starting with top-tier industrial sites. Through the SiteOhio program and the Ohio Site Inventory Program (OSIP), JobsOhio has taken a proactive approach to preparing, authenticating, and delivering shovel-ready locations for business expansion and relocation. Rather than simply maintaining a database of available properties, SiteOhio involves a rigorous authentication process that assures all utilities are at the property boundaries with adequate capacity, due diligence studies are complete, and every relevant state and federal entity has provided their concurrence. Of the 32 sites authenticated to date, 10 have already been selected for development, bringing 14 different end users to Ohio, including industry leaders like Google, MAGNA, and Nestlé Purina.

Complementing this authentication process, OSIP provides the funding muscle to help you take promising sites from potential to project ready. Since 2020, this strategic initiative has turned \$148 million in strategic OSIP investment into nearly \$1.8 billion in private development, creating over 18 million square feet of new industrial space across Ohio. Building on this momentum, the state of Ohio is also doubling down on site development through the All Ohio Future Fund, a \$750 million investment in preparing sites for the next generation of megaprojects.

New Horizons

2024 marked the conclusion of JobsOhio's 5-year strategic plan, which paved the way for its next chapter: JobsOhio 2030. Under the banner of "Let's Grow, Together," this new plan will build on a decade of progress and take JobsOhio's impact to the next level. Six strategic pillars that will drive progress towards these goals:

- **Skilled Technical Workforce:** JobsOhio is focused on attracting, developing, and retaining top talent. While Ohio already ranks #1 in the Midwest for workforce productivity and #3 nationally for its manufacturing workforce, the corporation recognizes there is much

more to be done through JobsOhio talent programs and initiatives and targeted upskilling programs.

- **Fully realizing Ohio as the “Silicon Heartland”:** Building on Intel’s transformative investment, JobsOhio aims to fully realize Ohio’s potential as a hub for semiconductor innovation and supply chain growth.
- **Incorporating the Opportunities of AI:** JobsOhio is strategically positioning Ohio to harness the power of artificial intelligence across the state’s diverse industrial base, focusing on real results and measurable impact.
- **Innovation:** By uniting JobsOhio’s Innovation Districts under the Ohio Discovery Corridor brand, the corporation is creating a network effect that amplifies Ohio’s strengths, competes successfully for federal funding, and attracts top-tier research, venture investment, and entrepreneurial talent.
- **Energy Production:** With the Ohio Valley projected to supply nearly half of America’s natural gas by 2040, JobsOhio will leverage Ohio’s abundant natural resources and diverse energy portfolio to offer companies both competitive rates today and energy security for tomorrow.
- **Competitive Brand:** The Ohio brand promise of “having it all in the heart of it all” increasingly resonates with companies and talent alike, as evidenced by the state’s growing in-migration of job seekers.

Together with our partners across Ohio, we’re building an environment where every business, community, and talented individual can seize tomorrow’s opportunities today. We appreciate your support and invite you to learn more about what is in store for the year ahead at JobsOhio.com.



ENCINO Energy
Unlocking Ohio Oil & Gas

Without your ongoing support, we could not continue to make notable positive impressions on our communities as we leave as minimal a footprint as possible on our environment. **THANK YOU!**

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Thank you for 15 years of partnership with the CCAO.

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Executive Vice President
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THE FORWARD PATH



The year ahead may bring twists and turns for employers. But no matter what obstacles come, the right partner can help you remain steady on the path forward. Sedgwick supports Ohio clients and their employees by simplifying workers' compensation claims. We help mitigate risks, control costs, administer discount programs, share safety best practices, and provide expert program consultation. Taking care of people is at the heart of everything we do.

For additional questions, contact Tony Sharrock at:
P. 614.376.5450 E. tony.sharrock@sedgwick.com

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GUEST COLUMN

FINAL PHASE OF 10-YEAR LICKING COUNTY COURTHOUSE RENOVATION UNDERWAY TO RESTORE ITS GRAND ORIGINAL COURTROOM

by Alan Miller, Writer, TheReportingProject.org



Damon Blood of Robertson Construction cuts plywood to cover ornate woodwork ahead of restoration of the original courtroom in the Licking County Courthouse in Newark. Provided By Alan Miller/ TheReportingProject.org

A nine-month project to restore the original courtroom is the final phase of a 10-year, \$18.2 million restoration of the 148-year-old Licking County Courthouse in downtown Newark.

The original courtroom in the 148-year-old Licking County Courthouse is filled with artwork and stained glass so ornate that even some of those accused of heinous crimes sit in awe.

Sit on church-like pews where their shackles scratch and scar the wooden benches.

Where Thomas Marcelain, the latest in a long succession of common pleas judges, has presided since 2003 – in this particular space until last month.

That's when a work crew moved out the pews, tables, marble busts of Civil War-era American jurists and prepared for the last in a series of top-to-bottom renovation projects designed to preserve the centerpiece of downtown Newark.

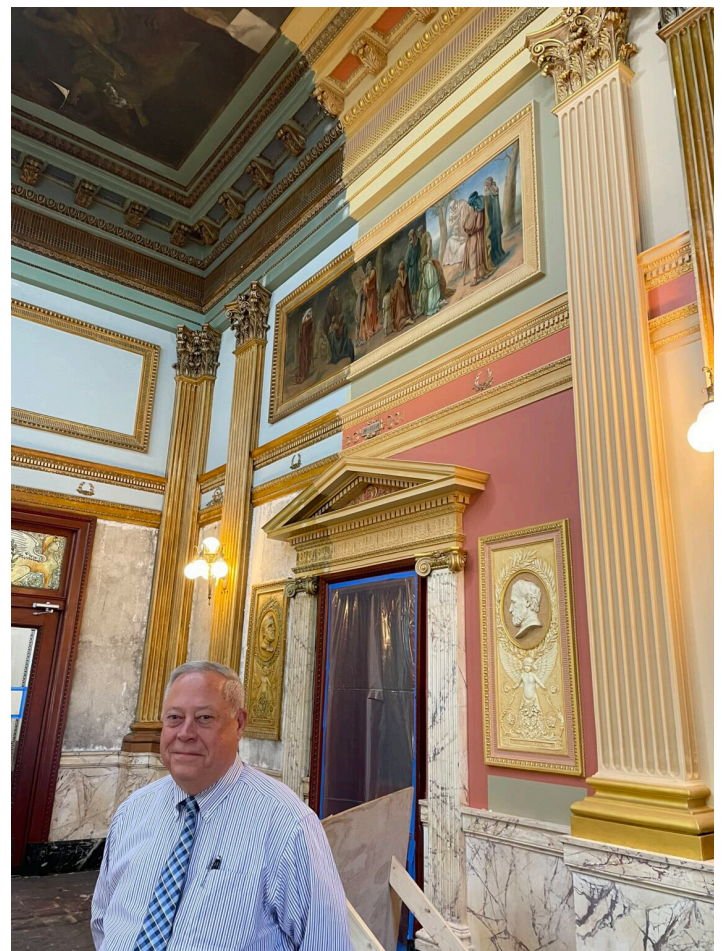
Marcelain is holding court in a basement meeting room at the County Administration Building across South 2nd Street for the next nine months while his courtroom is being restored, and he's not unhappy about that, because he said it will be worth the wait.

"Even before this project, people were impressed with this

courtroom," he said, standing amid a construction zone where the intricately carved wooden bench he normally presides from was being encased in plywood to protect it during the work going on around it.

"It matches the majesty of the law and the importance of it, and getting it back to the way it was originally will be even more impressive," Marcelain said, noting that he has seen criminal defendants captivated by the artwork.

The Civil War was fresh in the minds of Licking County residents in 1876 when courthouse construction began. It is the fourth courthouse on that site. The first was made of logs. The second was a two-story brick structure built in 1815. As the county grew, that building was replaced by a larger brick building in 1832. That courthouse burned



Judge Thomas Marcelain visits his courtroom as restoration begins. He is holding court across the street in the Licking County Administration Building until March while workers and artists restore the courtroom. Provided By Alan Miller/TheReportingProject.org

down in 1875, taking a lot of early county records with it.

The cornerstone of the current courthouse was laid on July 4, 1876, in celebration of the nation's centennial. Three years later, wooden features in the clock tower of this building also caught fire, but the building was saved and restored.

Judge Thomas Marcelain visits his courtroom as restoration begins. He is holding court across the street in the Licking County Administration Building until March while workers and artists restore the courtroom. Credit: Alan Miller History books say that Civil War Gen. Charles R. Woods, a Newark native, led a mile-long parade on the day the courthouse cornerstone was laid, and his image is part of the artwork in the original courtroom.

Among others depicted in courtroom artwork are fellow Civil War Gen. William Rosecrans; Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, Abraham Lincoln and Ohioan William McKinley; as well as Benjamin Franklin, the Marquis de Lafayette; Henry Clay, who was a U.S. representative, senator and pre-Civil War-era secretary of state; and U.S. Supreme Court Justices Salmon Chase, an Ohioan, and Daniel Webster.

The courtroom also features several large murals on the walls and ceiling, including those depicting the signing of the Magna Carta, the signing of the U.S. Constitution, and one each depicting the delivery of the 10 Commandments and King Solomon's Law.

The original courtroom art spaces allowed for additional images, which will be added during the renovation, which is to be completed in March 2025.

Scaffolding will be installed starting this week (July 15) to allow artists and historic preservation experts from the Wisconsin firm of Conrad Schmitt Studios. This is the same company doing renovation work across 3rd Street at the former Home Building Association banking building, a historic structure designed by famed architect Louis Sullivan. And Robertson Construction of Heath, the contractor for the courtroom project, is also working across the street to renovate The Arcade, one of few remaining glass-roofed shopping centers from more than a century ago.

The architectural firm for the courthouse project is Rogers Krajnak of Columbus, and Centennial Preservation Group of Columbus is restoring the pews and other wooden features.

"The changes you will see here will be stark," said Nick Conger, project manager for Robertson Construction.

He pointed to a small portion of a courtroom wall where artists from Conrad Schmitt had cleaned and painted, and the difference is stunning between the freshly restored artistry and that which had been coated in layers of dirt



Ewa Devereux works to restore artwork at the Licking County Courthouse in Newark. Provided By Alan Miller/TheReportingProject.org

and grime from decades of smoke from coal stoves and natural wear and tear.

The courtroom renovation is a \$3.2 million project to install modern technology in ways that will not be seen by the public – burying wires and electrical boxes in walls and the floor – and a painstaking artistic and historic preservation undertaking to restore the courtroom to its original glory, said Tim Bubb, a county commissioner who has helped guide the renovation projects through the years.

In all, the courthouse renovation, including the courtroom, is costing the county \$18.2 million, Bubb said. The work started a decade ago with a \$9 million project to repair or replace exterior features such as the building's dome 170 feet above Courthouse Square, and the roof and gables.

Also included in that first phase was new plumbing and a million-dollar elevator – expensive in part because of the challenges of installing it in a stone and brick structure built in 1876, when steel and wooden staircases were the only way up.

The second phase was a \$6 million project to replace all the windows and exterior doors, tuckpoint brick and stonework, restore the lower level, update heating and cooling systems and repair the four sets of staircases leading from the square to the second floor, where the original courtroom is now the final phase of the years-long renovation.

"It's much more than paint and carpet," Bubb said. "In the past, they removed the spittoons, took out the gas lights and added electricity. That's about it.

"This is an artistic renovation – putting it back like it was originally," he said. Alan Miller writes for [TheReportingProject.org](https://www.reportingproject.org), the nonprofit news organization of Denison University's Journalism program, which is funded in part by [donations from readers](#). Sign up for The Reporting Project newsletter [here](#).



CORSA NEWS

CYBERSECURITY IS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT!

by Ali Redmond, CORSA Membership Services Manager

Cyber threats are increasingly sophisticated. By staying informed, practicing good cybersecurity hygiene and participating in regular training, employees can help safeguard the information that their county is responsible for protecting. A proactive approach is the best defense against the evolving landscape of cyber threats.

For information regarding CORSA's cyber risk management services please contact Frank Hatfield, Assistant Direct, at fhatfield@ccao.org or 614-220-0639.



Best Practices for Mitigating Cyber Breaches

- **Regular Password Updates:** One of the most straightforward yet effective ways to protect sensitive information is by regularly updating passwords. Using strong, complex passwords - comprising uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols can significantly reduce the likelihood of unauthorized access.
- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA):** Multi-factor authentication adds an additional layer of security beyond just a password. This typically involves a second step, such as a text message with a verification code or an authentication app. This practice makes it substantially harder for cybercriminals to gain access even if they obtain the password.
- **Phishing Awareness and Training:** Phishing attacks are one of the most prevalent methods used by cybercriminals to breach systems. These attacks often come in the form of seemingly legitimate emails asking for personal or organizational information. Regular training sessions should be held to educate employees on how to recognize

phishing attempts. Employees should be instructed on how to verify the sender's information and report suspicious emails to IT departments immediately.

- **Secure Remote Work Practices:** With the rise in remote work, employees must adopt secure practices when accessing county systems from outside the office environment. Using VPNs (Virtual Private Networks) can help secure connections and safeguard data. Additionally, it's imperative to avoid using public Wi-Fi networks for accessing sensitive information unless a VPN is in place.
- **Incident Response Plans:** Preparation is key in mitigating the consequences of a cyber breach. Employees should be well-informed about their organization's incident response plan. Knowing the proper channels to report a suspected breach and understanding the steps the county will take to address it can significantly reduce recovery time and potential damage.
- **Software Updates and Backup:** Outdated software can provide an easy pathway for cyber breaches. It is essential that all software programs, including operating systems, applications, and antivirus tools, are regularly updated. This creates a robust defense against vulnerabilities that hackers exploit.
- **Back up your data regularly:** If you are a victim of a security incident, the only guaranteed way to repair your computer is to erase and re-install the system.





CEBCO NEWS

CEBCO WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS FOR 2025

by Mike Kindell, CEBCO Managing Director



Effective 1/1/2025, Clermont County became the 49th Ohio county to join CEBCO for their medical and pharmacy benefits. In addition, Butler and Washington Counties added dental benefits, and Darke County added vision benefits for their employees. CEBCO now covers over 16,700 employees with 37,000+ members. CEBCO remains Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's largest employer group in Ohio.

On November 22, 2024 at the last CEBCO Board of Directors meeting of the year, we celebrated the service of two outgoing board members. Williams County Commissioner Lew Hilkert, served on the CEBCO board for over 11 years and has retired from public service. Washington County Commissioner Kevin Ritter, who joined the CEBCO board in January 2023, traded in his commissioner's hat and started his new role as an Ohio House Representative for the 94th District in January 2025. While we will miss Lew and Kevin's experience and expertise, we are pleased to announce that the two open board seats have been filled by Williams County Commissioner Bart Westfall, and Darke County Commissioner Matt Aultman, who officially joined the CEBCO Board of Directors effective January 2025.

In addition to saying farewell to our outgoing board members at the November meeting, Senior Benefit Specialist Wendy Dillingham, was recognized and congratulated for her 18+ years of service to CEBCO. Wendy retired at the end of December and has made an indelible impact on CEBCO and the counties and members she had served over the years. She had the distinct honor of being one of the three original employees of CEBCO and she will be greatly missed.

The Wellness Program underwent a few changes as enhancements were made to the CEBCO Rewards 200 program for the 2024/2025 program year. Employees and their covered spouses can still earn up to \$200 in incentives via participating in the wellness program which runs from 8/15/24 – 6/30/25. Emphasis has been placed on incentivizing members to have an annual preventative visit with their primary care provider as this has proven to result in lower overall claims costs, compared to those members who do not have a regular relationship with a PCP. The CEBCO Board approved going forward, future wellness program years will begin on 7/1 and conclude on 6/30 the following year.

The CEBCO Annual Membership Meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 4, 2025. Highlights of the program will include elections for four Board of Director Seats, a review of our 2024 benefit year, and potential program changes for 2025 and 2026. A buffet lunch will be served. More to come.

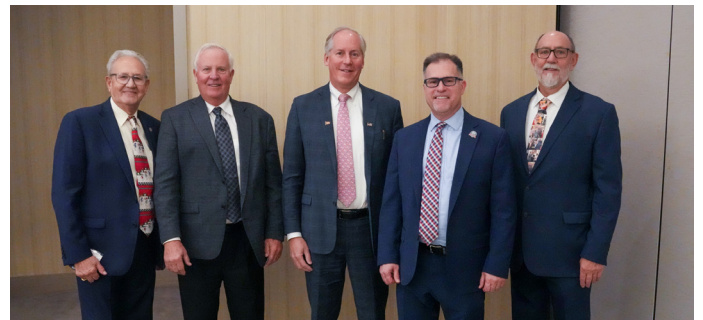
Health topics that are being emphasized this winter include: Self-Care awareness and Food is Medicine/ Healthy Eating. Please use the following links to learn simple steps to help improve your overall health.

[Healthy Body, Healthy Mind](#)

[5 Tips For Eating Healthy On A Budget](#)

CCAO ALUMNI ASSOCIATION GATHERS AT WINTER CONFERENCE

by Steve Caraway, OCERP Administrator/Special Projects Manager



CCAO Alumni with Executive Director of the America 250-Ohio Commission Todd Kleismit

Attendees enjoyed an update from Todd Kleismit, Executive Director of the America 250-Ohio Commission, who shared exciting developments surrounding the upcoming celebration of America's 250th birthday in 2026. Kleismit highlighted various initiatives and projects being planned to commemorate this monumental milestone in Ohio and across the nation. For more information on these celebrations, visit America250-ohio.org.

In addition to the presentation, members conducted organizational business. Former Franklin County Commissioner Marilyn Brown was unanimously re-elected as President of the Alumni Association, reaffirming her strong leadership and commitment to connecting and supporting alumni members.

The CCAO Alumni Association serves as a vital network for former county leaders, providing opportunities to remain engaged in important issues and initiatives impacting Ohio's counties. The Winter Conference meeting is a valued tradition that allows alumni to reconnect, exchange ideas, and stay informed.



OCERP NEWS

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF THE OHIO COUNTY EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT PLAN

by Steve Caraway, OCERP Administrator/Special Projects Manager

This year marks a significant milestone for the Ohio County Employee Retirement Plan (OCERP) as it celebrates 40 years of dedicated service to county employees and elected officials. Since its inception, OCERP has played a pivotal role in helping tens of thousands of hardworking individuals build a secure and fulfilling retirement.

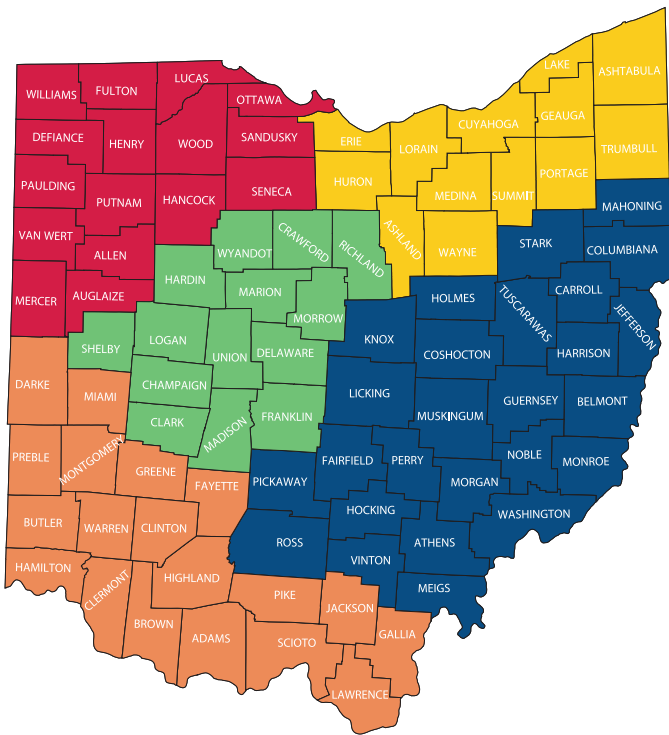
“As we reflect on 40 years of OCERP, it’s clear that this plan has made a difference for countless county employees and elected officials,” said Tim Bechtol, Hancock County Commissioner and Chairman of the OCERP Advisory Committee. “We created the plan 40 years ago to assist counties in offering another valuable benefit to their employees, and we take our fiduciary duty very seriously.” With the beginning of 2025, now is an excellent time to prioritize your future. The start of a new year is the perfect

opportunity to set goals and make positive changes—like enrolling in OCERP. Administered by the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO), OCERP provides tools and resources designed to help public servants achieve the retirement they imagine.

If you’re not yet a member, don’t delay. Visit OCERP457.com today and take the first step toward a brighter financial future. Enrollment is quick, easy, and ensures you’re on the path to retirement success.

Join us in celebrating 40 years of excellence with OCERP, and make 2025 the year you take charge of your retirement journey!

Meet your OCERP representatives from Empower



KEVIN PIETRO

Retirement Plan Advisor
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