Celebrating John R. Leutz
Assistant Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio
Retiring After 25 Years of Service
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JOHN LEUTZ!
CCAO
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

December 15, 2025

Join us in Columbus this Wednesday to congratulate CCAO Assistant Director John Leutz on his retirement after 25 years of service to counties!

For more information, view the full flier at the end of the "Member News" section below.

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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Former Stark County Commissioner Bernabei passes away

Last week, former Stark County Commissioner Thomas Bernabei passed away at the age of 79.

Tom had a long career of public service, beginning with four years in the U.S. Army, including a tour of duty in Vietnam.

After graduating from Ohio State University's School of Law in 1975, Tom served as an assistant prosecutor in the Massillon Municipal Court and then began a long career of service to the City of Canton. He would serve as Assistant Law Director, Law Director, and City Council, before serving as Stark County Commissioner from 2010 to 2015.

He returned to Canton as the Mayor from 2016 to 2023.

You can read Tom's full obituary here.

Winter Conference materials online, survey link

Thank you again to all of those who attended this year's CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference earlier this month!

The materials shared by presenters at CCAO sessions are available on CCAO's website. For copies of materials shared at affiliate or CEAO sessions, please contact the relevant organization.

We would also love your feedback! You can share your thoughts on how the conference went and ideas for future CCAO events through this survey link.

CORSA seeks Risk Control Coordinator

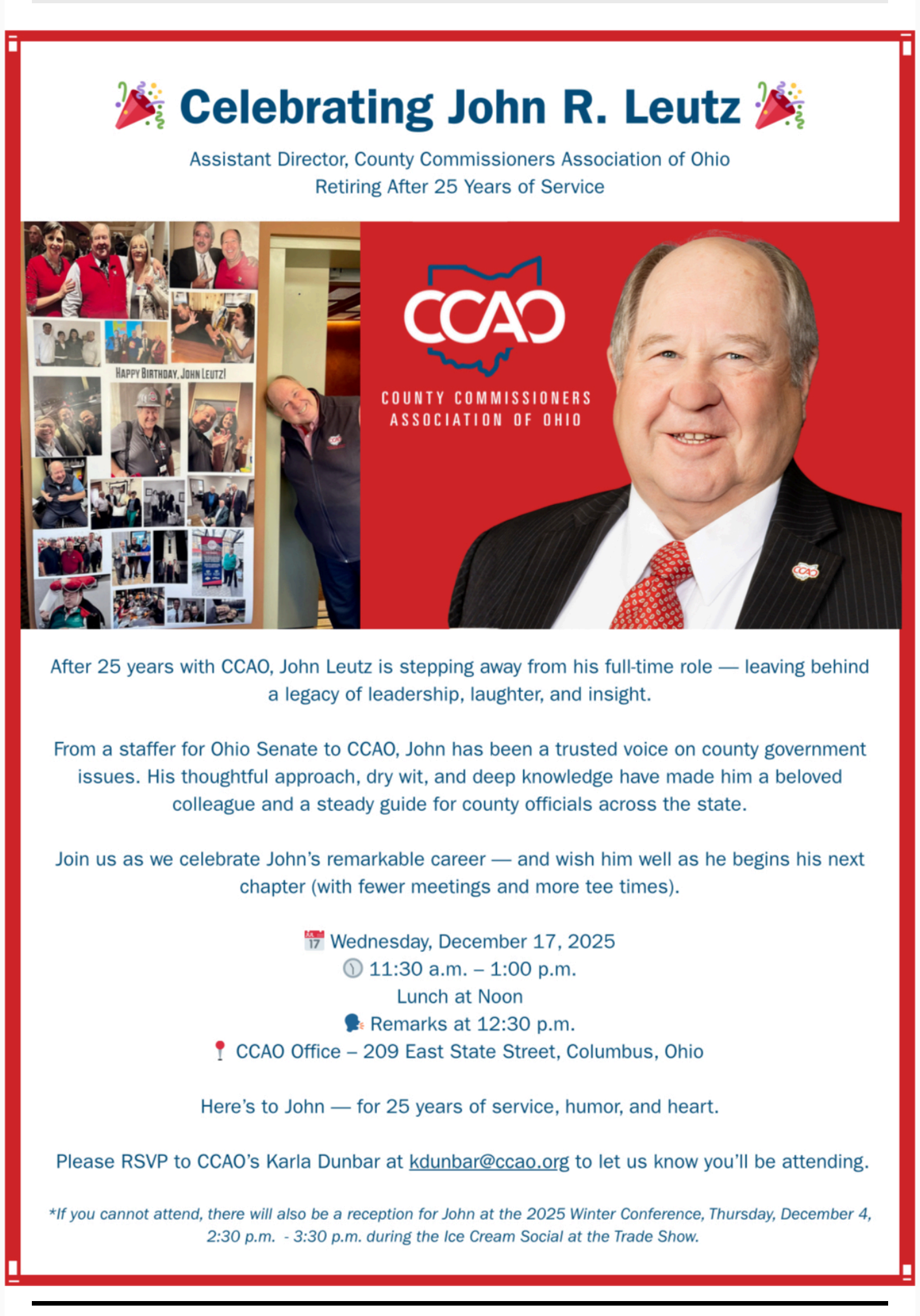
County Risk Sharing Authority (CORSA) has an opening for a Risk Control Coordinator position.

Job responsibilities include the ability to work with minimal supervision to assist member counties, elected officials and department heads with assessing and mitigating risks of loss and the ability to identify loss trends and make recommendations for programs that address local and state-wide loss trends.

Job qualifications:

- Bachelor's Degree in Insurance and Risk Management, Business, or related field or equivalent professional experience;
- A valid Ohio Driver's License and the ability to meet insurance requirements;
- Knowledge of and ability to use computers and computer applications relevant to the position;
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.

Individuals interested in applying should contact Frank Hatfield, CORSA Assistant Director (fhatfield@ccao.org). Those interested in applying should contact Frank for a full job description and if still interested after a review of the full job description should submit a resume and salary expectation.



Celebrating John R. Leutz

Assistant Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio
Retiring After 25 Years of Service

After 25 years with CCAO, John Leutz is stepping away from his full-time role — leaving behind a legacy of leadership, laughter, and insight.

From a staffer for Ohio Senate to CCAO, John has been a trusted voice on county government issues. His thoughtful approach, dry wit, and deep knowledge have made him a beloved colleague and a steady guide for county officials across the state.

Join us as we celebrate John's remarkable career — and wish him well as he begins his next chapter (with fewer meetings and more tee times).

📅 Wednesday, December 17, 2025
🕚 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Lunch at Noon
🗣 Remarks at 12:30 p.m.
📍 CCAO Office – 209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio

Here's to John — for 25 years of service, humor, and heart.

Please RSVP to CCAO's Karla Dunbar at kdunbar@ccao.org to let us know you'll be attending.

**If you cannot attend, there will also be a reception for John at the 2025 Winter Conference, Thursday, December 4, 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. during the Ice Cream Social at the Trade Show.*

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

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STATE AND FEDERAL

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New election official training portal launched by Secretary of State

Secretary of State Frank LaRose recently announced the launch of a new statewide training platform offering improved, interactive instructional content designed to better educate Ohio's election officials.

The Ohio Election Readiness Training Institute features a modernized menu of course material focused on the legal requirements and standard operating procedures for administering elections. Each training module provides participants with interactive presentations that have been proven to increase knowledge and retention.

New members, directors and deputy directors of an Ohio county board of elections must complete six training credits within six months of appointment, plus an additional eight credits in their first full year. Incumbent or reappointed board members, directors and deputies must complete at least eight credits of continuing-education training each calendar year.

The Readiness Institute will operate year-round, providing election professionals, poll workers and candidates with continuous digital access to the most current instruction content, including material based on the Ohio Election Officials Manual, the Candidate Requirement Guide, the Campaign Finance Handbook and the Ohio Ballot Questions and Issues Handbook, among other publications produced by the Ohio Secretary of State's office.

Employer contributions to go toward pensions

Since 2018 all employer contributions to the OPERS Traditional Pension Plan (excluding the Combined Plan) have been directed toward pensions, with no money being set aside to pay for health care. The trustees voted at the November meeting to continue that allocation in 2026.

Based on input from OPERS' actuaries, each year the Board determines the usage of the employer contribution. In 2024, the trustees discussed updates to the funding policy and came to the consensus to consider allocating contribution to fund health care if the pension amortization period was at or below 10 years. The amortization period at the end of 2024 stood at 15 years.

Partly because of a pending $2.4 billion unrecognized loss to be included in future pension funding, the trustees have determined that it's prudent for the fund to again allocate the entire employer contribution amount next year to pensions.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

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Welcome Home Ohio program accepting applications

Last week, Governor DeWine announced that applications are now being accepted for the latest round of the Welcome Home Ohio program, providing $65.6 million in total to help improve housing access around the state.

That includes $22.8 million in grants for the purchase of qualifying residential properties at foreclosure sales; $22.8 million in grants for rehabilitation or construction of homes; and $20 million in nonrefundable tax credits for qualifying rehabilitation and new construction once a property is sold. Land banks and subdivisions are among the eligible applications for funding. More information about the program's requirements can be found on the program's webpage.

Grant applications are being accepted through January 16 and tax credit applications are being accepted on a rolling basis until those funds are expended.

The program has given nearly $60 million to support the creation of 481 homes in 26 counties so far, according to the Department of Development.

County land use planning grants accepting applications through February

The Department of Agriculture has announced a new $1 million grant for county governments to develop, update, or implement Land Use Plans or Farmland Preservation Plans.

As the state continues to see growth in numerous industries, food and agriculture remains Ohio's top industry – contributing $124 billion to the economy each year. This grant helps align farmland preservation with economic vitality, encourages collaboration between farmers and local governments, and supports efforts to preserve farmland.

To be eligible, county governments must demonstrate collaboration with:

- All townships, villages, and municipalities within the county that contain active farmland;
- The county Soil and Water Conservation District and/or Regional Planning Commission; and
- Optional partners such as land trusts, agricultural nonprofits, or educational institutions that provide technical assistance.

Applications and more information can be found at the program's webpage. Applications must be submitted no later than February 27, 2026.

Grants for ISPs to complete extension for set-back homes

BroadbandOhio is accepting applications for the Ohio Broadband Line Extension program, which is intended to offset costs associated with line extension construction projects for running fiber to unserved homes that are set back from main roads. The grants are available for projects beyond the first 200 feet and are capped at $9.50 per foot.

The grants will be accepted and rewarded on a rolling basis until the $3 million in funding is exhausted. Projects must be operational by December 31, 2026.

The grants are only available to internet service providers, but CCAO encourages counties to help raise awareness of the program with ISPs in their areas.

More information can be found on the program's webpage.

COUNTY NEWS

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Each week Counties Current highlights the happenings in our counties in the words of their local media. One story from each of the CCAO's five districts is highlighted, and on occasion other stories may be highlighted as well.

Northwest District

Ottawa proposes annexation for Putnam County's sewer districts

LimaOhio.com, December 6, 2025

The Putnam County commissioners want to get out of the business of being a sewer-service middleman for residents outside of Ottawa.

The village of Ottawa is happy to take over the work, so long as many of those residents' properties annex into the village.

And apparently no one can find the existing contract to modify, as a "gentleman's agreement" has been in effect since 1978. At the same time, the possibility of the U.S. EPA requiring an operator of record for the county-owned sewer lines hangs over the commissioners' heads.

That's the standstill between the commissioners and village as laid out during a meeting Thursday morning as the commissioners weighed what to do with an estimated 268 customers in Sewer District 1 and Sewer District 2.

"The big thing is all these people's bills will be reduced when they come into town," said Kyle Stechschulte, Ottawa's public works director, explaining the $2,000 annual advantage if sewer district residences annexed into Ottawa.

Stechschulte walked through numbers from two similar homes with two residents, one from inside the village and one from outside the village, where Ottawa charges an additional 30 cents per cubic foot but could legally charge one-and-a-half times its in-town rates.

Northeast District

Commissioners send 2025 ARPA interest earnings to new airport terminal

Ashland Source, December 12, 2025

Ashland County commissioners transferred recent interest earnings from a COVID-era federal grant to pay for finishing touches at a brand new airport terminal.

Commissioners said the $46,247 American Rescue Plan Act check will be written to Simonson Construction for the purchase of furniture and other finishing touches at the Ashland County Airport terminal.

The nearly $2 million terminal, under construction since March, is set to open with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Dec. 16.

"Well, I can tell you something: it's very comfortable. I was out (there at the terminal) the other day," said Ashland County Board of Commissioners President Jim Justice.

Commissioner Michael Welch said the county will be reimbursed for a lot of the money following expected donations.

Officials hope the 4,000 square-foot terminal will someday host a "part 141" flight school, who have said will be equipped with three flight simulators and two or three offices for trainers.

The airport currently offers a "part 91" school, a training program through the Federal Aviation Administration that allows someone to earn private pilot ratings. A part 141 school is more extensive and allows people to fly commercial jets.

Central District

Franklin County Commissioners pass $2.2 billion budget for 2026 with 'targeted reductions'

WOSU Public Media, December 10, 2025

On Tuesday, the Franklin County Commissioners approved the budget for 2026. The $2.2 billion budget is smaller than past years, with commissioners saying this is the first time in more than a decade that they have had to make "implemented targeted reductions."

The reason for the cuts, commissioners cite, are the expiration of pandemic relief funds, rising inflation and uncertainty from the state and federal government.

The largest funding cuts are a 34% budget cut for community partnerships, a 33% cut for public facilities management and a 29% cut for economic development and planning. The commissioners also cut their own budget by 11%.

Some county agencies did receive increased funding. Sanitary engineering, the municipal court and the county engineer all received a boost in funding of at least 10%.

However, the majority of the county service budgets did not change significantly.

In a press release, Commissioner John O'Grady said the commissioners prioritized funding health and human services in the new budget.

"This budget honors our commitments to children, families, seniors, and residents facing crisis," O'Grady said. "It strengthens the programs that matter most and ensures our agencies have the staff, tools, and resources needed to serve our most vulnerable neighbors with effectiveness and care."

Southwest District

County Commission To Consider Greene County 911 Building Lease Monday

Greenville Sun, December 12, 2025

The Greene County Commission will consider a resolution Monday that would allow for Greene County 911 to occupy the former Greene County Building and Zoning Office on Union Street.

The County Commission meets at 6 p.m. Monday in the Nathanael Greene Assembly Hall at the new Greene County Administration Center, 401 Takoma Ave.

The Greene County Building and Zoning Office moved to the new Greene County Government Administration Center in early October after sharing the building on Union Street with Greene County 911 for several years.

The commission will consider authorizing a new lease that would allow 911 to use the whole building. However, 911 does not pay to lease the building.

In addition, the commission will consider a resolution that would close the county's American Rescue Plan fund, Fund 127.

The American Rescue Plan funds were sent to local governments by the federal government beginning in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The county fund was set up by the county at the time in an effort to make tracking the funds easier. The funds have mainly been used to match grants or undertake reimbursable grant projects.

Greene County Director of Accounts and Budgets Danny Lowery previously said that any funding remaining in the account is already committed or tied to existing projects approved by the county.

The closure of Fund 127 and the movement of any of its operation to the county's General Fund will not impact any ongoing projects, and is principally a clerical change.

Funding received through the American Rescue Plan had to be obligated by the end of 2024, and must be spent by the conclusion of 2026.

Southeast District

Belmont County allocates opioid settlement funds for new health facility

WTOV, December 13, 2025

Belmont County commissioners have decided to use funds from a 2022 opioid settlement to construct a new health department facility.

Commissioner J.P. Dutton explained that the decision was influenced by the significant impact of the opioid crisis on county entities like the coroner's office and health department, which will share the new building.

"Really, it's going to allow for additional services to be provided through the health department and for the Belmont County coroner, it's the first time ever the Belmont County coroner will have an actual public space," Dutton said.

As construction continues, Dutton noted they are beginning to estimate the cost of the new facility.

"Right now we're building the building obviously, and some work right around the building," Dutton said. "But the entire site, the parking area, all those types of things, that's in design right now and should be completed very soon and actually before the end of the year or early next year, we'll be going out to bid for that portion. So the exact number is really hard to tell at this point, but probably around $15 million is a round number roughly."

The project remains on schedule, with completion expected in the third quarter of next year.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Please view the CCAO Calendar for a comprehensive list of events to note.

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DECEMBER 17
John Leutz Retirement Party at CCAO Office

DECEMBER 25
Christmas - Holiday

JANUARY 1
New Year's Day - Holiday

JANUARY 19
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Holiday

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