



Journal Opinion

Columbiana County at Forefront

This edition of The Business Journal focuses on Columbiana County, a part of our region that has seen significant change since the economy was such that two decades ago local leaders sought inclusion as a county in the Appalachian Region – not exactly an indicator of economic health.

In some respects, Columbiana County was hit harder than its neighboring counties to the north, Mahoning and Trumbull, when its core industries collapsed. But today the county finds itself at the forefront of the economic activity surrounding the Utica shale play that increasingly is defining our region.

Some of the earliest leasing activity took place in Columbiana County, providing unexpected wealth to farmers and other landowners. Perhaps the most significant development has been the construction of the cryogenic plant for wet gas in Hanover Township. The processing plant, its first phase nearly complete, is part of a \$900 million investment by the Utica East Ohio partnership. Gathering lines are being developed by a joint venture of Chesapeake, Total SA and EnerVest Energy.

The Columbiana County Port Authority is guiding much of the oil and gas development in the county. Most recently, the authority approved leasing more land at its Wellsville Intermodal Facility to Anchor Drilling Fluids USA Inc. and Southern Automation Inc., companies that serve customers in the

shale play. Overall, operations related to the Utica play represent a growing segment of business there.

Other companies at the industrial park are Marathon Petroleum Corp., which is developing a truck transfer station on the 3.6 acres it purchased from the port authority. Also, QST is leasing half an acre to provide trucking services for Anchor.

The Wellsville Intermodal Facility stands as an example of how the port authority positioned itself to capitalize on the opportunities the oil and gas industry presented here long before the phrase "Utica shale" became familiar in the region. Taking advantage of existing assets including waterway and road access and a site that formerly served as a brickyard, development of the Wellsville park extends back more than a decade. Those assets were enhanced with the installation of a 60-ton overhead crane. Activity at the park is such that Tracy Drake, port authority CEO, predicts he could fill 100 more acres at Wellsville were the land available.

A fair share of the success of the Intermodal Facility can be attributed to the port authority, Drake in particular. When he arrived at the port authority in 1993, he began searching for developable land and started piecing together the park in Wellsville. That foresight continues to pay dividends for Columbiana County and the region as a whole.

Today Columbiana County stands as a key component in the economic engine that drives our resurgent region. It's a terrific turn of events.