Where Great Things Happen
Local legend states that this vineyard along South River Road in Harpersfield Township has received the fewest spring frosts in recorded weather history. The single tree is strategic—all great agricultural fields had a tree planted in their center; when the farmer and his team reached the tree, they were halfway through the day and could rest in the shade.

Thus, the farmer aligned his fields for efficiency and success. Likewise, during the past five years, Ashtabula County’s economic development, business, education and government professionals have aligned their goals for the overall success of the county. This book is the result of that effort.
Grab some coffee.
Pull up a chair.
Immerse yourself in stories from a place where great things happen: Ashtabula County.

We’re located in the far northeast corner of the Buckeye State, home to Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown. We share their geography, and some of their heritage, yet we’ve many unique stories of our own.

That’s what this book is about – a narrative of the communities, schools, natural resources, recreation, industries and people who write our stories every day.

Great things are happening in Ashtabula County. We’re aligned for success and growth, writing a single volume filled with many different stories. That’s been the story of Ashtabula County for more than 200 years — pages of diversity between covers of unity.

There is plenty of room and opportunity here for your story, as well.

Photo: Cottages, Geneva-on-the-Lake.
Great Happenings
Throughout this publication you will find stories about some of the Great Things that are happening in Ashtabula County. This is just a sampling of the success stories that have come about in the past several years as a result of the dedication, hard work and ingenuity of Ashtabula County’s residents and entrepreneurs. The selection was made by a committee of professionals involved in local government and in no way is intended to be all inclusive. Many other stories of Great Things that have happened in Ashtabula County remain to be told. The Board of Commissioners invites you to subscribe to the county newsletter, The Wave, at ashtabulawave.org, and visit our official website, www.co.ashtabula.oh.us, for more stories and to access a dynamic PDF of this document.
It crept down from the north, a glacier up to a mile thick scouring the landscape of what would become Ohio.

When the ice retreated for the last time, some 12,000 years ago, it left behind gifts — gravel, silt and clay — stranded on the bedrock south of a long, narrow lake that would be named “Erie.”

Water from the melting glacier became trapped by the clay soils, creating marshes, bogs, fens, swamps, sedge meadows and a unique forest varietal, the hemlock-hardwood swamp community.

Along the lakeshore, a flat, narrow band of coastal plain remained. Ridges, the beaches of ancient lakes, rose above the plain. Native Americans, and later settlers, favored these ridges for travel. It was inevitable that cities would be planted here, as well as orchards and vineyards.

To the south, much of the swamp forest was cleared for farming; pastures and fields, interrupted only by barns and cattle, stretching as far as the eye could see.

Pockets of hemlock-hardwood swamps dodged the axe, stretches of shoreline received sanctuary as public parks — advantages of being Ohio’s largest county, 702 square miles of land, and almost 666 square miles of water.

Photo: Ice along Lake Erie shoreline.
Ashtabula County was formed from the Western Reserve, a swath of real estate 120 miles deep and claimed by Connecticut. Even after it and several other states gave up western land claims to the federal government, Connecticut retained its “Reserve.”

Around 1795, the state sold the Reserve to the Connecticut Land Company. Surveyors, led by Moses Cleaveland arrived July 4, 1796, at the mouth of Conneaut Creek. The Reserve was open to any man with a few dollars and a strong back, sharp axe and wisdom to obtain proper title.

The migration came largely from the Northeast, and the rising sun would cast long shadows of New England across the Western Reserve for decades to come.

The Reserve’s “special purpose” soon became evident as it, and particularly Ashtabula County, became a stronghold for Yankee-bred abolitionists. One slave catcher declared it was easier to get a saint out of heaven (or sinner out of hell, depending on the version), than to get a fugitive slave out of Ashtabula County.

Yankee influences remain in stately churches, town squares and communities named for places in New England. They also live on in our stories about the rugged, determined and pious people who made great things happen here.

Photo: Re-enactors stage a scene of education in the Western Reserve at the Jefferson Depot Village, a living history museum.
Trees, rivers and more trees. Great, huge trees.
That’s what the surveying party found when it arrived here in 1796.
Within a few years, the greatest of the trees had been felled. Cabins stood near their stumps and cattle grazed near the behemoths’ tombstones.
Rivers were dammed, mills built and covered bridges soon followed. Where the rivers met Lake Erie, wooden ships connected the bounty of this thick forest to the world. At Geneva Township, a stone’s throw from where The Lodge and Conference Center stands today, Fitch’s Landing was built for moving the prized whitewood, or poplar, lumber from mill to ship. Some of this exquisite lumber ended up being milled into barrel staves destined for Europe’s finest wineries and distilleries.
Wood is as much our heritage as the land it grows upon. Our stories are carved in its limbs, preserved in the 18 covered bridges, myriad barns and historic frame buildings that make our countryside so pleasing to the eye. And in parks and nature preserves, huge, great trees continue to grow.

Ashtabula County’s forest industries account for 4.2 percent of the county’s economy and employ 995 workers (2010).

Photo: Creek Road covered bridge, Conneaut
Water. This county has water. Lake Erie to the north. Pymatuning and Roaming Rock lakes to the south. And three State Scenic Rivers in between. The sea is around us, under us. No wonder this county has more than 900 bridges and culverts. And wherever man and water intersect, great stories are written. Shipwrecks and snarly captains; iron ore docks and immigrant laborers seeking a better life in America; quiet afternoons on the gentle end of a fishing pole. Stories of invention and innovation; perseverance and prosperity; recreation and retreat. There are tales in our rivers and sagas in our lakes. You don’t have to travel far in Ashtabula County to encounter water, or stories born of it.

One of these stories begins around 1873, when iron ore, mined in the Mesabi Range and transported on the Great Lakes, began arriving in Ashtabula Harbor. Thousands of men were needed to unload the vessels, build the railroads and operate the machinery, and thus immigrants began pouring into the Western Reserve from Finland, Sweden, Italy, Ireland and other European nations. Within three decades, Ashtabula became the busiest ore port on the Great Lakes, teaming with vessels of wood and steel, cargos of ore and coal, and laborers of many nationalities. No longer would the Western Reserve be an ethnic extension of New England.

Water is our heritage, a catalyst for creating great stories and changing the composition of our communities; it is both the mother of our diversity and the thread that unites us.

Lake Erie has a significant impact on Ashtabula County’s weather. The lake’s warm waters prolong the growing season along the shore, but also create the potential for “lake effect snow,” which occurs when cold air passes over the relatively warm lake water in November and December.
Native Americans were the first to name the rivers that flow through this county. They named the middle one “Ashtabula,” River of Many Fish.

Settlers agreed with that assessment and retained the name in a slightly modified form.

They eventually used the same name for the county, village, township and city that took root and flourished in this well-watered landscape.

The transplanted New Englanders found the Ashtabula to be a river of many uses. Its power was harnessed for mills, its harbor developed for shipping and its clean water borrowed for a variety of industrial processes.

Along its lower five miles, many bridges were required to accommodate commerce, growth and westward expansion. If the Ashtabula River is a stream of many fish, Ashtabula is a city of many bridges.

Every half hour in the boating season, the alarm sounds, the guard gates descend and the deck of the 1925 Bascule Lift Bridge rises like the blade of a jackknife. A massive metaphor for balance, the icon also is the patron bridge of a vibrant arts, dining and shopping district.

Just north of the Bascule Bridge, the railroad’s coal bridge arches across the Ashtabula, while to the south a second lift bridge provides railroad traffic passage across the river. Both bridges speak to the vitality of the Harbor’s role as a major bulk material handling port.

Photo: The Bascule lift bridge in Ashtabula Harbor was built in 1925 and continues to carry highway traffic across the Ashtabula River.

Ashtabula was the birthplace of actress Malia Nurmi, better known to science fiction fans as Vampira. Other notables from Ashtabula include Urban Meyer, head football coach at Ohio State University, and T-Bone Slim, author and labor activist.
ASHTABULA CITY

Address: 4717 Main Ave., Ashtabula OH 44005
Phone: 440-992-7103
Website: cityofashtabula.com
Incorporated: 1891
City Manager (elected): James Timonere
Square Miles: 7.91

Municipal services: Sewers, police, fire, trash. Aqua Ohio water, FirstEnergy, Dominion East Ohio, cable.

School District: Ashtabula Area City Schools, St. John parochial, A-tech

Population (2010 Census): 19,124
Median age: 37 years
Households: 7,792
Housing units: 9,087

Home ownership rate: 53.7 percent
Median value owner occupied units: $12,208
Median household income: $29,041 (2008-12 census)

Cost of living index: 81.6 percent
Income tax rate: 1.8 percent

Key industries: Health care, polymers, chemicals (Ashtabula Township)

Incentives: Job Creation Tax Credit (new, full-time jobs); County Enterprise Zone Tax Incentives. Joint Economic Development Districts with Saybrook and Ashtabula townships.

Incentives contact: City manager, 440-992-7103

Photo: Shopping on Bridge Street, Ashtabula Harbor.
Conneaut native George Hulet stood on a Cleveland dock, watching the laborers and their system of cable-operated buckets unload a lake freighter. The work was difficult, time consuming and expensive, about 18 cents for each ton moved.

“There must be a better way,” Hulet thought.

A few years later, the merchant-turned-engineer obtained a patent on his mechanized unloader and in 1859 built the first one on Conneaut’s ore dock. The Hulett unloader quickly proved its value, reducing the cost of unloading to just 5 cents per ton. A job that once took days required only five hours with several Hulett’s working at full steam.

Seventy-four more of the grasshopper-like unloaders were built, mostly on the lower Great Lakes, before self-loading ships made them obsolete. Like its inventor, this great innovation got its start in Conneaut, the gateway city to the Western Reserve.

This harbor town is named for Conneaut Creek, which wanders about the city until finding an outlet at Lake Erie. Harbor towns are built with water and the steel of railroads, and Conneaut is no exception. The community’s former depots have been repurposed as museums. Hundreds of stories are told there every summer, while on Conneaut’s beach, the story of the Allies’ Normandy Invasion is re-enacted annually during the D-Day Conneaut Invasion in late August.

The city’s older neighborhoods are stocked with sturdy homes where ship captains, engineers, oilers and stewards passed their winters away from the Great Lakes’ fury. Newer neighborhoods, close to shopping and medical services, provide a range of housing styles and pricing. Living in Conneaut is relaxed and affordable, and a gateway to great journeys and stories.

Photo: Conneaut’s Main Street preserves a feel of the past, offering a gateway to the Western Reserve.

Photo Insert: The gigantic jaws of a Hulet unloader.
CONNEAUT CITY
Address: 294 Main St., Conneaut
Phone: 440-593-7401
Website: conneautohio.gov
Incorporated: 1902 (city)
City Manager:
Email: conneautcityhall@conneautoh.org
Square Miles: 26.43
Municipal services: Sewers, water, police, paid fire department; FirstEnergy, Dominion East Ohio; cable, phone and trash multiple providers.

School District: Conneaut Area City, A-tech, St. John parochial, South Ridge Christian Academy

Population (2010 Census): 12,841 (including inmates of Lake Erie Correctional Institution.)
Median age: 39.6 years
Households: 4,740
Housing units: 5,702
Home ownership rate: 53.7 percent
Median value owner occupied units: $83,510
Median household income: $35,014 (2008-12 census)
Cost of living index: 81 percent
Income tax: 1.65
Key industries: Manufacturing, polymers, home construction products
Incentives: Job Creation Tax Credit (new, full-time jobs); County Enterprise Zone Tax Incentives.
Incentives contact: City manager

Photos: Conneaut has seven miles of lakefront, more than any other Ashtabula County community. There is plenty of room for marinas, public access points and Conneaut Township Park with its million-dollar view of the lighthouse and breakwater.

In both photos, Car Shows are held on the beach. Conneaut’s art deco lighthouse is privately owned.
The old-timers said that if you could see Lake Erie from your farm, it was a good spot for an orchard or vineyard.

Many of these spots exist in the Geneva area, and beginning around 1908 and continuing into the 1930s, Jewish families from Cleveland migrated to these farmlands. The migrants were devotees of a “back to the land movement” promoted by the Jewish Agricultural Association. They created both a community and an agricultural industry that would affect Geneva’s history. At one point, these farmers grew 60 percent of the grapes produced in Geneva and operated a cooperative to eliminate the middle man.

Plagued by low market prices during The Depression, most of these migrants sold out and dispersed after World War II. The heritage of growing fruit in the Geneva area remained rooted in these rolling hills of the Grand River Valley. The purple Conords, grown for juice, gave way to the gold and red berries of wine varietals, introduced in the 1970s. From soil to climate, knowledge to marketing, Geneva is where “grape things happen.”

More than a dozen wineries are in the Geneva area, which also hosts Pairings, a culinary institute devoted to wine. A vibrant downtown is anchored with antique shops. The Route 534 Corridor, which stretches from Geneva-on-the-Lake to Harpersfield Township, bustles with development and commerce driven by wine. The Lodge & Conference Center, SPIRE Institute and hospitality businesses that cater to Interstate 90 motorists.

A Joint Economic Development District straddles the city and township, providing an incubator for industrial development and growth. And to the north is the Village of Geneva-on-the-Lake, Ohio’s First Summer Resort.

Photos: Heritage and commerce blend on Broadway in Geneva, gateway to Ohio’s Wine Country.
Geneva was home to Walter L. Main, one of the great circus owners of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Main housed his equipment and animals in barns on the west side of the city, along a road that now bears his name.
ANDOVER VILLAGE
Gateway to Pymatuning

The great Pymatuning Swamp shook off massive torrents of water every spring. Downstream communities, in the Shenango and Beaver valleys of Pennsylvania, suffered devastating flooding whenever the swamp exceeded saturation.

The day after Easter 1912, the town of Sharon, Pa., was hit with a flood that caused $3 million in damages — the same amount of money it would take to build a flood-control dam near Andover.

When the reservoir began filling in early 1934, communities on both sides of the 16-mile-long lake disappeared. In Ashtabula County alone, 4,500 acres of what had been mostly farmland, was submerged under more than 25 feet of water.

The flooding also effectively ended any hope of closure to one of the county’s great legends. It states that settlers discovered a 100-foot-long wooden boat stuck in the muck and that, from time to time, it became visible as recently as 1898. The mystery boat had several legends surrounding it, including that it had been sailed up the Shenango and Beaver rivers in a futile search of a passage between the Ohio River and Lake Erie.

While burying a legend, the dam and reservoir prevented untold human suffering and economic loss. They also helped mold the Andover area into a tourist destination with both private and state-owned campgrounds and boat launches. A picturesque town square lined with diners, shops and a theater, recall an America of the past while supplying necessities to the thousands of campers and boaters who visit Andover every year.

Tourism is not the only industry here, however. Both agriculture and manufacturing have their place in Andover’s economy, and the village is designated a community reinvestment area.

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Phone: 440-295-4747
Mayor: Bernard Baranowski
Administrator: Joseph N. DiBell
Incorporated: 1883
Square Miles: 1.37
Population: 1,415
Households: 411
Median age: 44.2
School District: Pymatuning Valley, A-tech
Services & utilities: Paid police, volunteer fire, municipal water & sewer, trash (private), Eastern natural gas, FirstEnergy/Ohio Edison electric, Armstrong cable
Income tax: 1.5 percent
Incentives: Community reinvestment area.
Edward Sezon was just 17 years old when he requested information from the RICHardson Root Beer Corp. on how to start his own root beer stand. He borrowed some money to purchase lumber and the following summer, Sezon opened his 14-foot-square root beer and hot-dog stand, “Eddie’s Grill,” at Geneva-on-the-Lake. It was 1966, a great time to be an entrepreneur on “The Strip.” Eddie found the right combination for success with a simple menu, consistent quality and friendly service. The business thrived and Eddie, and his family, continue to serve up hot dogs and fries on The Strip.

While wealthy Cleveland residents had been coming to Geneva Township for summer vacations since 1869, the resort really hit its stride with the rise of the blue-collar middle class and automobile ownership. Families from Youngstown and Pittsburgh came here to seek relief from the heat and air pollution of the steel towns. For generations of families, and entrepreneurs, Geneva-on-the-Lake is synonymous with summer and the American Dream.

The village was carved out of Geneva Township in 1927 in order to provide water and sewer to the growing seasonal community. With its reputation as a great summer vacation destination preserved, the resort managed to survive The Depression and thrive in the post-World War II era.

Construction of a state park on the former Chestnut Grove property and, in 2004, the opening of The Lodge and Conference Center at Geneva-on-the-Lake, raised the bar for development in the village. A world-class RV resort/campground and luxury condo development on the village’s east side continue this trend.

For those with the vision and work ethic of Eddie Sezon, the village remains a great place to write a success story.

Photo: Geneva-on-the-Lake is a mile-long carnival with cottages, shops, eateries and music venues reminiscent of decades past. Lakefront cottages and homes provide both summer lodging and year-around living in the village.
JEFFERSON VILLAGE

Named in honor of President Thomas Jefferson, Ashtabula County’s county seat produced two of the most famous abolitionist legislators in the nation’s history: Representative Joshua R. Giddings and Senator Benjamin Wade. Giddings’ law office was a station on the Underground Railroad. The unpertussing building is owned by the Ashtabula County Historical Society and has been restored.

The village is a snapshot of Americana with a handsome red-brick courthouse, justice center and other government buildings at the nucleus. The offices of title companies, banks, attorneys and health care professionals are within walking distance of this county-government district.

A library, public schools and four museums (including the world’s only Victorian perambulator museum) infuse the village’s commercial district with culture and learning. Two blocks north of town, the Ashtabula County Fairgrounds ring with fun and celebration the second week of August; to the east of town, Jefferson Depot Village recalls life in the 1890s.

Northeast Ohio Regional Airport is northeast of the community, and the Ashtabula, Carson & Jefferson Railroad connects the village to Norfolk Southern’s Carson Yard. Jefferson is in the heart of northeast Ohio’s Utica Shale industry, which has driven expansion of foundry employment and investment in the village.

Photo: The county seat, Jefferson is a charming village near the center of Ashtabula County. Photo Inset: (left) The Doyle Road covered bridge is near Jefferson Village. (right) Jefferson Village Hall is at the heart of the town.
In North Kingsville, residents meet a friend for lunch at the "Bridge," purchase groceries at "Tony's," and picnic at "Sunset." If their car is running poorly, they take it to "Dusty and Steve's." and once it's repaired, drive down the "North Ridge."

Born out of a rift between Kingsville Township citizens who lived on opposite sides of the railroad tracks, the village has been creating its own lingo and history since 1915. The rift is healed and the township and village look and feel alike, except for the heavy traffic along Route 20, which follows the "North Ridge" to Ashtabula and Conneaut.

Sited on Lake Erie, North Kingsville has both public green space, Sunset Park, and residential development on the shoreline. Additionally, the village operates the 18-hole Village Green Golf Course and a campground near the shoreline.

North Kingsville is home to an industrial park and Premix (The Composites Group), North America's largest developer, formulator and manufacturer of thermoset compounds and custom molded composites. Industry and nature are in balance: The Cleveland Museum of Natural History owns two unique properties here, The Sand Barrens and Cathedral Woods. There is spiritual balance here, as well: Two church camps operate on the inspiring lakeshore, Camp Luther and Sheldon Calvary (Episcopal).

Most non-residents associate this community with the "The Bridge," a pizza shop on Route 192. The shop's owner, Gary Hewitt, purchased the condemned Eagleville Covered Bridge from Ashtabula County in 1971, disassembled it and rebuilt it to house his Covered Bridge Pizza Parlor.

It stands just south of North Ridge, at the village's only traffic light.

Photo: North Kingsville's Sunset Park is a popular picnic and sunset-gazing spot along Lake Erie.

Photo Inset: Quiet, well maintained neighborhoods make North Kingsville a great "bedroom community" that is close to Conneaut, Ashtabula and Interstate 90.

Where Great Things Happen • Ashtabula County Ohio
Amish buggies are as much at home in the Village of Orwell as the semi-trucks that service the village’s several manufacturing plants and the American-made pickup trucks of those who work in the factories.

The Southwestern Gateway to Ashtabula County, Orwell is a hub of retail, banking, education and manufacturing with many rural spokes. The western spoke of Route 522 intersects the Grand River Valley and connects the village to the Amish community, scenic beauty and history of the Windsor area. The southern spoke, Route 45, is a road of surprises. Among the modest farms and homes is the palatial estate and training camp of boxing great Don King.

On the northern spoke, the Grand Valley Local Schools campus brings grades K-12 together in a single brick building set on a beautiful campus. Byways that surround the village provide residential neighborhoods, manufacturing areas and Amish farms. The Western Reserve Greenway Trail connects to the Trumbull County portion south of town.

Orwell’s past is one of circus life. Head west on Route 522 and just before the county line, prancing on the front lawn of a farm house, is a statue of Sir Henry, the circus horse. The statue, placed there more than 125 years ago, recalls the time when several mud circuses wintered in the Orwell-Windsor area. Windsor also is home to a covered bridge in a stunning gorge, 4-H Camp Whitewood and the Windsor Historical Society’s museum, housed in the 1832 Christ Church (Episcopal).

Main Photo: Aptly named, Hart’s Barber Shop is at the heart of Orwell Village, a crossroads community on routes 45 and 322 in southern Ashtabula County.

ORWELL VILLAGE
Address: 179 West Main St., PO Box 56, Orwell OH 44076
Website: orwellvillage.org
Phone: 440-437-6450
Manager: Jack Nettis, Jr.
Incorporated: 1921
Square Miles: 1.97
Population: 1,660
Households: 642
Median age: 35.4
School District: Grand Valley Local, A-tech, St. John parochial
Services: Water, sewer (municipal and county), paid police, volunteer fire, FairPoint Communications cable, FirstEnergy, Orwell Natural Gas.
Income tax rate: 1%
Incentives: Community reinvestment area.
ROAMING

SHORES

Ashtabula County’s

“Golden Pond”

Rock Creek, a lovely tributary of
the Grand River, is partly responsible for
Roaming Shores Village, Ashtabula County’s youngest incor-
porated community. Bob Cook, a resident of the community
for two decades and president of Roaming Shores Village
Council, will tell you that many smaller streams also flow into
the seven-mile-long lake, which has a sizable watershed.

Likewise the community’s population comes from many
walks of life and careers. There are doctors, lawyers, business
owners, tradesmen and retirees. Some live in the village
eyear-round, others come only on weekends. All have one
thing in common: They love living on the water.

Roaming Shores is by far the most affluent of Ashtabula
County’s villages, with stable and growing property values.
Many of the homes are on the waterfront, and some 1,300
boats are registered to owners in the community.

With nearly 90 miles of privately owned shoreline, Lake
Roaming Rock is Ashtabula County’s “Golden Pond.” Lake
Roaming Rock was created in 1966 as part of a private
community development.

Roaming Rock Shores Association cares for the roads, club
house, public beaches, docks and other shared amenities. It
also owns the 800-foot-long concrete-and-earth dam that
imparts Rock Creek. Roaming Shores Village was incorpo-
rated in 1979 to provide the association with municipal
services.

The lake has a surface area of 650 feet and main
channel depth exceeding 35 feet. It is the largest private
body of water in Ohio - only owners and their guests may
use the lake, the shoreline of which is virtually all
residential development. The lake has many inlets that
add to the charm and privacy of this great community.

Only two private businesses, a waterfront restaurant
and a marina, are in the village, which is near Rock Creek
and has convenient access to Cleveland via Route 8.

Photo: Lake Roaming Rock is the largest
private lake in Ohio. The private community
of Roaming Shores is on both sides of the lake.

Where Great Things Happen • Ashtabula County Ohio

ROAMING SHORES VILLAGE
Address: 2500 Hayford Road, P.O. Box
237, Roaming Shores, OH 44084
Website: roamingshoresoh.gov;
roamingshores.org
Phone: 440-563-3132
Administrator: Kevin Grippi
Incorporated: 1979 (village), 1966
(association)
Square Miles: 2.82 square miles, 72 of
which is water
Population: 1,508
Households: 582
Median age: 40.2
School District: Jefferson Area,
A-tech, St. John parochial
Services: Municipal water, sewer,
police and dam maintenance; associa-
tion maintains village roads, beaches,
docks, club house, ball fields and lake
management/security.
Income tax rate: none
Association dues: $700 annually
**ROCK CREEK**

Rock Creek, the waterway, tumbles over a series of rocky steps just a few hundred yards south of the village, giving credence to its name and a nod to the community that shares that moniker.

Route 45 crosses this stream near the waterfall and bisects the village that was born here with the coming of the Ashtabula-Trumbull Turnpike in 1818. A covered bridge was built over the stream in 1832; traffic on the turnpike was so heavy, the bridge had two lanes, one for each direction. A livery stable was in town and a toll gate stood near the bridge; stories are written whenever people and beast must cross water.

Those halcyon days are recalled in a mural and the 19th century homes that overlook the creek. A small business district caters to the needs of a mostly residential village. Amenities include a public library, churches, restaurant, post office, convenience store and neighborhood elementary school. Several home-based business owners, in the spirit of those who earned their bread from the turnpike years ago, take advantage of the busy Route 45 that runs through this community.

Photos: Children cool off in the cascading Rock Creek, just south of the village here. Traditions ranging from Morgan Hose's ox roast to an old fire truck that's a staple in the Memorial Day parade.
The raising and lowering of Ashtabula Harbor’s iconic Bascule lift bridge create the heartbeat of the business district. When the bridge fails to allow land traffic to continue across the river, the merchants of Bridge Street suffer the economic equivalent of a “heart attack.”

Such was the case in 2008, when a maintenance project disabled the bridge for an extended period and required traffic detour around The Harbor. Threatened business owners came together as the Lift Bridge Community Association and began a marketing campaign to bring visitors back to The Harbor.

“We wanted to find a way to showcase what we had to offer and give people a reason to come,” Shelly Mullen, chair of the LBCA at the time, told a reporter for Lake Erie Living magazine. “It took a significant commitment of great people wanting great things.”

The Harbor community survived the bridge work and became a thriving district that has been compared to The Flats of Cleveland. Events like the Wine and Walleye Festival, The Arts on Bridge Street and Beach Glass Festival have brought thousands of new visitors to The Harbor. New restaurants have opened and once-vacant storefronts now offer merchandise.

The LBCA has grown into a partnership of business owners, civic leaders and fans of Ashtabula Harbor who invest both money and time in this community. Thanks to their work, a need for more parking on Bridge Street was created, and the LBCA worked with the city to satisfy that need. A strategic plan has been developed, as well. Extending the Western Reserve Greenway Trail (North Shore Trail), to The Harbor and making improvements to Walnut Beach are the group’s top priorities.

Photo: The Lift Bridge Community Association is a partnership of business owners, civic leaders and others committed to revitalizing Ashtabula’s Harbor District. A revitalization implementation strategy was recently completed for the group. Priority projects include Walnut Beach Park, the North Shore Trail and parking on Bridge Street.
Diversity, surprise.

These two words describe Ashtabula County’s 27 townships.

In the northern tier of the county, along the Interstate 90 corridor, the townships have a suburban, at times urban, feel to them. In Ashtabula Township, the Ashtabula Towne Square mall provides an anchor for retail and strip mall commerce. Saybrook Township, on the opposite side of Ashtabula City, likewise has a vibrant business district along U.S. Route 50.

There is diversity of housing here, as well. Tidy neighborhoods built during the post-World War II boom provide affordable housing for families and singles alike. Close to shopping, schools and medical care, these neighborhoods are reminiscent of the “Leave it to Beaver” backdrop of American life. For those who want more and living space, Saybrook Township offers modern housing developments near the shores of Lake Erie and a golf course.

Drive a couple of miles south of these major townships’ next residential areas and you encounter farms, nature preserves and parks. Go a mile or two north, and your term farms travel end at the Lake Erie shoreline. Along the way you will pass some of the county’s largest industrial employers in the area known as “the chemical shore” whose output includes titanium, industrial gas and other chemicals.

Below Interstate 90, Ashtabula County’s townships become more rural and sparsely populated, yet full of diversity and surprises. Routes 7, 193, 45, 46 and 534 connect these townships, stacked one upon another. Be prepared to slow down and move over as you travel routes 7 or 193 — several Old-Order Amish communities are in Orwell, Windsor, Monroe, Denmark, Pierpont, Annskov and Williamsfield townships. Their buggies, roadside bake sales and barn raisings always come as a pleasant surprise to the traveler.

The east-west byways and highways of Ashtabula County’s townships likewise extend an invitation for diversity and surprises. How about a presidential museum that also recognizes the presidents of the Continental Congress? Or a cooking school paired with a bed and breakfast? Or a horse farm, country store, consignment shop, roadside playground, town square, gazebo, boat launch or covered bridge?

Townships also can be a great place to start a business. Several Joint Economic Development Districts have been established in the county’s townships and offer the infrastructure required by manufacturing. For those who want to take their living from the soil, the county’s townships offer the kind on which to grow dreams.

Photo Ashtabula Township offers a mix of residential, industrial and commercial land use with public green space near the East Side Presbyterian Church and Braden Middle School (Buckeye Local).
• **Ashtabula County has 27 townships:** Andover, Ashtabula, Austinburg, Cherry Valley, Colebrook, Denmark, Dorset, Geneva, Harpersfield, Hartsgrove, Jefferson, Kingsville, Lenox, Monroe, Morgan, New Lyme, Orwell, Pierpont, Plymouth, Richmond, Rome, Saybrook, Sheffield, Trumbull, Wayne, Williamsfield and Windsor.

• The largest is Monroe, 38.5 square miles.

• There is no income tax in townships (JEDDs excepted).

• Three elected trustees represent the residents at the township level.

• Trustees bear the responsibility for township road maintenance, including plowing and salting.

• A volunteer fire department is in most townships; departments provide mutual aid to each other.

• Police service is provided through the Ashtabula County Sheriff’s Office; in most cases this funding comes through the county’s general fund.

• Private wells and ponds are primary water sources in the rural townships; private and county water services are offered in several northern townships.

• Most townships have zoning regulations, boards and an official.

Main Photo: John and Mary Ellen Svoboda moved from Solon to Rome Township in order to find the slower-paced lifestyle of their childhoods. They purchased the Crescent Farm and restored the farmhouse, barn and workshop, where John, a sheet metal craftsman, works on his projects.

Photo Inset: The town hall is the epicenter of township government and frequently a polling place.

Where Great Things Happen • Ashtabula County Ohio
John Smolen Jr. still recalls seeing remnants of the March Road covered bridge floating down Mill Creek and asking his father about the source of the debris.

Although Smolen’s childhood memory of Ashtabula County’s covered bridges was one of loss, Smolen would end up being the county engineer who saved the 12 covered bridges still standing when he first filled the office. But Smolen would do more than save the historic bridges; he also spearheaded the effort to fund and build another six modern covered bridges.

As a result of the retired county engineer’s efforts, Ashtabula County has become the Covered Bridge Capital of Ohio, with 18 publicly accessible wooden bridges. All of the historic bridges have been rehabilitated and 17 of them are still in use.

Among the historical bridges are several of the Town lattice design, a bridge type normally associated with New England rather than Ohio. The bridges, with their characteristic, criss-crossed planks that form a lattice work of diamond shapes, still carry traffic thanks to reinforcing laminated structures and center-point piers.

Ashtabula County’s covered bridges are, for the most part, tucked in the valleys of townships. One of the bridges, Smolen Gulf, connects Ashtabula and Plymouth townships by spanning the Ashtabula Gulf for 608 feet. It is the longest covered bridge in the United States.

The shortest highway covered bridge in the nation, 18 feet, is located in Geneva.

John Smolen Jr. has since retired as county engineer. He works with his son, Andrew, in their Jefferson Township civil engineering firm that specializes in designing and engineering covered bridge construction and rehabilitation.

The second weekend of every October, Ashtabula County pays homage to its covered bridges with a festival held at the bridges.

The Smolen-Gulf covered bridge, completed in 2008, is the longest in the nation at 613 feet. The county has 17 other covered bridges, 12 of them dating to before 1920, including the Warner Hollow Bridge in Windsor Township.
Inspired by author Suzi Parron (*Barn Quilts and the American Quilt Trail Movement*), Ashtabula County fabric quilters Kathy McCarty and Chris Angerman knocked on doors and asked questions until they assembled a team of residents who share their passion for old barns, quilts and their stories.

This steering committee formed the Ashtabula County Barn Quilt Trail in the spring of 2014. The trail meshes perfectly with the county’s Covered Bridge Trail and provides tourists yet another reason to leave the highway and seek out the rural treasures of Ohio’s largest county.

Barn quilts are quilt patterns painted on signboard and mounted on barns or other rural structures. The barn quilt phenomenon got its start in southwest Ohio. While it has spread to dozens of other Ohio counties and inspired a few attempts in Ashtabula County, there was no concerted effort until the duo of quilters caught the vision.

Ashtabula County’s Barn Quilt Trail will have at least a dozen quilts by the end of 2014. These quilts help drive tourism into rural areas and give cottage industries relatively inexpensive exposure.

In the process, the stories behind the county’s barns and farms are being preserved, and buildings that were once neglected are getting a fresh coat of paint and new lease on life.

Photos: Chris Angerman and Kathy McCarty (right) are quilters who co-founded the Ashtabula County Barn Quilt Trail. They stand with the Farm Bureau barn quilt that is at the entrance to the Ashtabula County Fairgrounds. Inset: The barn quilt at Blakeslee Log Cabin barn, Plymouth Township.