The cold front dips down from Canada, slides across the aquatic boundary and tints the churning waters gray with sand.

Residents reach for their sweaters and caps; windows are shut at bedtime, the tomatoes wait another day to ripen. Like a crack in a suit of armor, the slit on the horizon between churning seas and distraught sky grants the sun brief entrance. The effulgence stuns the beachgoers like a bright headlamp in the day’s rear-view mirror. Breathless photographers and poets race to the shore, inspired, stunned, invigorated; hearts pumping, creativity flowing, crashing upon the breakwater of their physical limitations like the waves ready to sweep them into the churning abyss.

The spectacle is neither common nor rare. It happens at the good planet’s will, and chances are it’s inspired Native Americans long before the first Europeans were exposed to this fearsome, awesome spectacle.

A poet by the name of Platt R. Spencer was among those early settlers to be inspired by this interaction of wind, wave and photons. “The opal, quartz, and ammonite gleaming beneath the wavelet’s flow, each gave its lesson how to write, in the loved years of long ago,” wrote Spencer in a poem that describes how Ashtabula County’s natural wonders inspired him to create his famous “Spencerian script.”

Throughout the 200-plus years that this landscape has been assigned the Ashtabula County moniker, there has been a history of great things happening here. And often, those great things were natural events, like the seiches that occasionally roll onto the Lake Erie shore like a tsunami, or the arrival of a cold front, complete with water spouts.

More common are the hazy sunrises of late summer, still winter nights when a whisper is heard from a mile away; and crunchy autumn afternoons borrowed from a small town in New England. These are intangibles that contribute, even define, the quality of life in Ashtabula County. They cannot be categorized as art, culture, medicine or recreation. They are ethos, persons and patina. They exist in the minds of residences and visitors alike as memories, flashes of being in the moment, of being alive.
And they are great.

Where Great Things Happen • Ashtabula County Ohio
Elizabeth Harper, recently widowed, refused to be discouraged by the lack of socialization and cultural opportunities in the Western Reserve wilderness.

Soon after expanding their Harpersfield Township home, Shandy Hall, the Harpers had their grand piano brought by ox cart from New York. The first grand piano in the Western Reserve, it was welcomed with much fanfare by the community.

Meanwhile, in the nearby hamlet of Ransomville, the native artistic talents of Caroline Ransom (1826-1910), were coming to light.

Ransom’s talents eventually brought her the honor of being the first female American artist to have a painting purchased by and hung in the halls of the U.S. Congress. Buoyed by her success, Ransom made the Grand Tour and thus became one of the first U.S. female artists to travel in Europe.

Other 19th century artists to emerge from Ashtabula County include Edith M. Thomas, whose New York Times obituary called her “one of the most distinguished American poets”; Freeman Thorpe, who painted notable national political figures during the second half of the 19th century; and Platt R. Spencer, poet and creator of the Spencerian Script.

This nurturing of the arts and culture remains embedded as a key community value. Both Ashtabula and Conneaut have dedicated art centers, and Ashtabula’s Bridge Street is a hub for exhibits, galleries and The Arts on Bridge Street (TABSS) festival in July. The county has a community orchestra and chorale society, and for those who prefer rock to Rachmaninoff, Geneva-on-the-Lake and Ashtabula offer venues for contemporary music. The Ashtabula County Antique Engine Club hosts a bluegrass festival every summer, and in the summer months, many township and city parks host free concerts featuring local performers.

Community theater options include the Straw Hat Theater and Harbor Playhouse in Ashtabula, The Oak Room at Geneva-on-the-Lake, and the Conneaut Community Center for the Arts.

Photos: Dance students and staff at the Ashtabula Arts Center have a stage for their talent in the arts center complex. The Ashtabula Arts Center’s programming also includes musical theater in the summer (Straw Hat Theater) (next page). In Conneaut, students learn about art during a summer camp at the Conneaut Community Center for the Arts. (above photos)
ASHTABULA COUNTY ARTS & CULTURE

Ashtabula Area Orchestra
In residence at Lakeside High School Performing Arts Center
Sanborn Road, Ashtabula • ashtabulaorchestra.com

Ashtabula Arts Center
2928 West 19th St., Ashtabula • 440-964-3396 • artscenenerws.com
Multi-arts facility featuring dance, theater, music and visual arts.
Exhibit space, performance stages.
Straw Hat Theater, summer performance series.

Ashtabula County Choral Music Society
acms.org
Presents performances of choral works while providing local singers with artistic, educational and musical experience.

Ashtabula County District Library
335 West 44th St., Ashtabula • 440-993-9341 • acdl.info
Hosts authors and presentations throughout the year.

The Conneaut Arts Center
1025 Buffalo St., Conneaut • 440-593-5888 • conneautartscenter.org
Dance, visual arts, fitness, music and theater.
Exhibit area, stage and outdoor performance gazebo.

Harbor Playhouse Theatrical Co-op
341 Lake Ave., Ashtabula • harborplayhouse.org
Community theatre for adults and children.
Open mike nights, music performances.

Kent State University-Ashtabula
3300 Lake Road West, Ashtabula • 440-964-3322 • ashtabula.kent.edu
Public auditorium provides venue for film series, cultural events.

Lakeside High School Performing Arts Center
Sanborn Road, Ashtabula • aacs.net
Public auditorium with pipe organ.

Oak Room (Noble Art Entertainment)
5475 Lake Road E, Geneva-on-the-Lake • thelodgeatgeneva.com
Interactive theater.

Where Great Things Happen • Ashtabula County Ohio
NONPROFITS: INNOVATION AND RESPONSIVENESS

Twice a month, county residents can bargain shop for home improvement items at Community Action of Ashtabula County’s warehouse. Housed in the sanctuary of a former church that was gifted to the agency, the warehouse is stocked with items left over from home remodeling jobs, retailer overstock/returns and odd lots. The material is sold for pennies on the dollar, with the proceeds split between Community Action and Habitat for Humanity.

The innovative project is helping landlords and low-income homeowners do projects to their properties that otherwise would be unaffordable. The program is a practical way to help the agency fulfill its mission of lifting residents and the county out of poverty.

Throughout Ashtabula County, innovative, responsive nonprofit groups work to ease the suffering created by economic disparity and give hope to the discouraged. Many of these nonprofits operate as umbrella agencies to provide services more efficiently. For example, Community Action’s programs include Head Start, WIC, Meals on Wheels, Home Repair and Weatherization, and Grounds for Growth, a local food initiative.

In the southern part of Ashtabula County, where long distances to service centers create transportation issues, Country Neighbor Program provides community-based and mobile services to senior citizens, a centralized food bank that serves the entire county and transportation to medical appointments.

As with many regions of the United States, Ashtabula County’s elderly population is projected to grow through the next three decades, and the county is well positioned for that growth with a Senior Services Levy, the proceeds from which are directed to the areas of greatest local need.

The work of Ashtabula County’s nonprofits touches virtually every resident in the county. They provide basic human services as well as life enrichment through the arts, educational programming, recreation, and historical preservation and interpretation. Every day, they write a story of compassion, hope and the amazing resiliency of the human spirit.

Photo: Jeff Scribben coordinates the home-improvement materials warehouse at Community Action of Ashtabula County, one of the county’s nonprofit agencies. Insert: Judith Barris, Community Action’s executive director, sits in the cab of an 18-wheeler. The agency partnered with truck-driving school to bring the program to Ashtabula County, thus addressing both unemployment and local employers’ need for more drivers with proper licensing.
German immigrant Rudolf Henry Pfaff came to Ashtabula with the skills of a carriage trimmer and left this world as president of one of the city’s largest industries, Ashtabula Bow Socket.

The Bow Socket manufactured tops for convertible automobiles and bicycle parts for Schwinn. The demise of the convertible and off-shore production of bicycles put the company out of business in the early 1980s. However, in the heyday of the Bow Socket, Pfaff set aside a portion of his earnings as a perpetual gift for the betterment of Ashtabula County.

The Ashtabula Foundation was created in 1922 with Pfaff’s initial investment of $5,000. Donations from many other like-minded individuals and corporations over the decades grew that to $20 million. Recipients of this generosity include hospitals, churches, the YMCA, other nonprofits and education.

The late Robert S. Morrison, who pioneered the use of reinforced molded fiberglass, established a foundation, as well, for the betterment of the community.

Numerous scholarship foundations have assisted hundreds of Ashtabula County high school graduates with their post-secondary educations. The Civic Development Corporation (CDC) has raised more than $17 million since its inception in 1959. The corporation is a capital projects fundraiser operated by volunteer trustees. Campaigns are run every five years. By providing local, matching funds for projects, the CDC has brought in more than $27 million in outside investment to Ashtabula County.

Photo: The Ashtabula YMCA is a beneficiary of grants from foundations and the Civic Development Corporation. It plays a vital role in helping residents live healthier lives.
When Hotel Ashtabula opened in 1920, it was the finest lodging to be found between Buffalo and Cleveland.

Located on Main Avenue in Ashtabula, just a few blocks from Route 20, the hotel featured 109 rooms, a ballroom that could hold 300 and dining area for 125 patrons. Advertised as “fire proof,” the hotel was the pride of Ashtabula, an anchor for the south end of Main Avenue and a magnet for salesmen, entertainers, vacationers and businessmen traveling by rail and automobile in the era before the interstates.

The slow death of the city’s downtown district, brought on by a shift in both transportation and shopping habits, brought an end to the hotel in 1985. It sat vacant until recently, when Signature Health committed to locate its Ashtabula offices in the hotel and contract with JCI Contractors to renovate the six-story hotel.

Signature, founded in 1993, is a regional leader in mental health services and has offices in Mentor and Garfield Heights. More than 50,000 square feet of Hotel Ashtabula were renovated to provide Signature with the space it needs for medical offices. The lobby, which features a mosaic floor, and ballroom were restored to their original magnificence. A tile and marble staircase was likewise revived, and new custom elevators installed. A new parking lot to the south of the hotel accommodates up to 140 cars.

Signature completed its move into the building in the summer of 2014, bringing with it dozens of new jobs to downtown Ashtabula. Several floors of the hotel remain to be developed by other business/medical office interests, and there are other properties along the avenue that await vision and investment.

Photo: Signature Health recently completed a renovation of the former Ashtabula Hotel in downtown Ashtabula. The facility provides doctor offices, a pharmacy and lab.
The studies indicated that a lodge built at Geneva State Park would flourish, but the state was not ready to put that kind of investment into the park.

Convinced that it was both the right and smart thing to do, the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners assembled a financing package and negotiated a lease with the state for state park land on which to build the 109-room Lodge and Conference Center.

The lakefront property, which opened in May 2004, has become a hospitality hub for Ohio’s Wine Country, as well as a popular venue for weddings, meetings and reunions. In its first decade of operation, The Lodge hosted 458 weddings and accommodated nearly 500,000 guests.

It has become a significant economic engine in the county’s tourism business, with an $8 million annual impact to the local economy.

Managed by Delaware North Companies, The Lodge has an industry-wide reputation for cleanliness, friendliness and beauty of both structure and setting. Its amenities include indoor and outdoor pools, meeting and conference rooms, a ballroom, indoor and outdoor pools, lakefront gazebo, lounge and Horizons Restaurant with a commanding view of Lake Erie.

It is estimated that The Lodge generates $8 million in tourism revenue for Ashtabula County every year. And for the guests, it creates countless lifelong memories of great things along the shore of Lake Erie.

Photo: The Lodge and Conference Center at Geneva-on-the-Lake has become a hospitality anchor for Ohio’s Wine Country.
The Ashtabula Horror — the train disaster of Dec. 29, 1876 that killed nearly 100 persons and injured scores more — pointed out the need for improved medical facilities in Ashtabula. Many of the injured could not get the emergency medical attention they needed and had to wait until the train with doctors on it arrived from Cleveland.

The community rallied shortly after the disaster and put up the money to establish a hospital, the grand-grandfather of today’s Ashtabula County Medical Center (ACMC).

A Cleveland Clinic affiliate, the hospital and its associated Ashtabula Clinic and Glenbeigh Treatment Center (Rock Creek), provide general and specialized services, including:
- A dedicated cancer treatment center;
- A diagnostic cardiac catheterization lab;
- Obstetrical services;
- Chemical dependency treatment (Glenbeigh);
- Wellness and fitness training (Premiere Fitness);
- Satellite family health centers in Jefferson and Conneaut; and in-patient behavioral medicine.

Conneaut and Geneva each have a University Hospital Medical Center. Each one is a 25-bed, acute care facility. The hospitals are federal designated as “critical access” and provide a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services.

University Hospitals also operate a health center in Ashtabula.

The southern section of Ashtabula County is served by St. Joseph Medical Center, in Andover. The center provides 24-hour emergency care.

Veterans can access Department of Veteran Affairs hospital services through the Ashtabula Veterans Service Commission, which provides transportation to VA Medical Clinics in Wade Park (Cleveland) and Erie, Pa.

Ashtabula County Medical Center traces its origins to the Ashtabula Horror, a train wreck that killed nearly 100 people in 1876.
Medical services are located throughout Ashtabula County. From top: Glenbeigh, Rock Creek; UH Brown Memorial, Conneaut; UH Geneva Memorial, Geneva; St. Joseph Hospital 24-hour emergency clinic, Andover. Additionally, State Road Occupational Medicine in Ashtabula Township provides walk-in nurse practitioner care, diagnostic X-rays and laboratory services. Healthy lifestyles are made possible thanks to the Western Reserve Greenway Trail and other recreational facilities (background image).
Olympic grade. Regulation size. Built by athletes, for athletes. The next level. Largest in the nation.

These sweeping words are the only way to describe SPIRE Institute to the general public. Athletes, on the other hand, sum it up as “WOW”.

SPIRE is an $85 million, world-class sports-performance and training complex located in Harpersfield Township at the Interstate 90/Route 534 interchange. It was conceived and launched by Ashtabula County native and industrialist Ron Clutter, whose vision is to create a facility where the full potential of the human spirit is unlocked via athletics, academics and service.

The facility is designated an official U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Site and offers programs, facilities and resources for TEAM USA in an elite, multi-sport training environment. It also provides training and competition for high school and collegiate athletes who can get in the game regardless of the weather or season.

SPIRE’s track and field center is the largest in the nation and has both indoor and outdoor tracks. A 25,000-square-foot banquet, hospitality and meeting area overlooks the indoor track. Its 50-meter, Olympic-size pool has 10 lanes and 1- and 3-meter diving areas. The 215,000-square-foot field and courts building has synthetic turf that can be used for soccer, lacrosse, football, baseball, softball, field hockey and rugby, or divided into smaller training areas. A multi-purpose court surface can be configured to provide up to 12 volleyball courts, six basketball courts or nine tennis courts.

As impressive as they are, these facilities are but a stage on which SPIRE’s stories of training and personal growth take place. The 25,000-square-foot training facility offers Michael Johnson Performance to athletes who attend SPIRE’s camps and academies. Every athlete who comes into SPIRE is provided the guidance, knowledge and facilities to raise performance and personal growth to the next level.

**SPIRE MISSION STATEMENT**: SPIRE Institute integrates sports and education, training and learning, performance and competition like no place on Earth.
The stadium where the Conneaut High School Spartans challenged other northeast Ohio football teams was built during the Great Depression and showed every year of its age. But there was no money in the school district’s budget to build a new one, let alone an entire sports complex.

In 2008 a group of Conneaut business and community leaders came together to address the need. They formed the CARE for Kids committee and began dreaming. Their dream became known as SPARC — A Social Place for Athletics, Recreation and Community.

The group has raised more than $2.5 million in private donations thus far — about half of the total needed to build the complex on 20 acres of former industrial land in central Conneaut. The core of the complex is already built and in use — a football field with seating for more than 2,000 spectators, an eight-lane, 400 meter track, locker rooms, restrooms and concessions stand.

SPARC is not just for high school sporting events, however. The facility will be used for the performing arts, band concerts, festivals and community gatherings. Accessible to the public, the track and other amenities will encourage physical activity and make for a healthier, leaner community.

The facility is expected to bring a six-fold increase in the number of students and spectators involved in sports as programs are expanded to take advantage of the facility. Additionally, what previously was just two seasonal, youth-only recreation programs in the community will be expanded to year-round offerings for every virtually every resident, from pre-school to senior citizen.

The next phase of the project involves construction of the Ricaute Tennis Park, pegged at $600,000.
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

Our Heritage, Our Stories

There was land to clear, ships to build, crops to harvest and families to rear. Nevertheless, on July 17, 1838, dozens of the county’s most influential, prosperous and learned men and women saw a need to preserve the county’s early history before it was lost.

The group that was formed that day, The Historical and Philosophical Society of Ashtabula County, lives on as the Ashtabula County Historical Society. The society is Ohio’s second oldest historical society, bested only by Cincinnati.

This appreciation of heritage and history is found throughout Ashtabula County, which has 20 museums. Most of these properties are non-profit, operated by volunteers with a passion for history and preserving Ashtabula County's stories for the next generation.

Among the charter members of the new society was Bela B. Blakelee, a surname that lives on in the society’s inventory of properties. The Blakelee Log Cabin, built in 1810, and the surrounding grounds and buildings, interpret the challenging life that faced the early settlers of Plymouth Township. At the society’s Jennie Munger Gregory Museum, researchers can delve into thousands of photographs, clippings and books about Ashtabula County history. Extensive genealogical resources are located at the Platt R. Spencer Memorial Library in Geneva.

A site of national importance, the Giddings Law Office in Jefferson, also is owned and protected by the society. Joshua R. Giddings, one of the few truly abolitionist U.S. Congressmen of the 1840s and 1850s, ran his private law practice out of the simple but significant white, frame building.

Photo: The Clover Farm Stores building is one of many historical structures preserved at the Ashtabula County Antique Engine Club in Wayne Township.

Insert: Hubbard House, Ashtabula Harbor, was a terminus on the Underground Railroad.
Conneaut, Jefferson and the Windsor area have community historical museums. In Ashtabula City, the Hubbard House, once a terminus on the Underground Railroad, preserves Hubbard family and local history, while the heritage of the county’s Finnish-American population is celebrated at a Harbor museum. Also in the Harbor is the Ashtabula Maritime Museum, which honors the lake and industries that helped put the busy lake port on the map. To the east, the Conneaut Railroad Museum honors the role played by railroads in developing the area.

The county has its quirky museums, as well. The Olin Museum of Covered Bridges is based upon one woman’s lifelong collection of covered bridge memorabilia and research. If you want to have your thinking on America’s presidents challenged, a tour of the One and Only Presidential Museum will accomplish as much. For a more sedate experience, the Victorian Perambulator Museum and the Jefferson Depot depict life from the late 19th century forward. And for adventure, head out to the Ashtabula Lighthouse, which is owned and maintained by the Lighthouse Restoration and Preservation Society. Boat tours to the remote structure are offered during harbor festival events in the summer.

Photos: Shandy Hall in Harpersfield Township is an early frame structure built by Robert Harper, son of the founding father of the township. The property is owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society. The Victorian Perambulator Museum in Jefferson has hundreds of rare carriages, toys and dolls to enjoy. Conneaut’s Railroad Museum is housed in an original depot. It’s collection includes a Berkshire locomotive that was used on the Nickel Plate Railroad.
CELEBRATE!

Ashtabula County residents love to celebrate; and they welcome others to join them in the celebration.

From fire department ox roasts to the county fair; from a sock hop on Conneaut’s Main Street to a D-Day Invasion re-enactment on that city’s beach, Ashtabula County is a festival and fair mecca.

The Ashtabula County Fair, held in Jefferson the second full week of August, blends the iconic, old-fashioned agricultural fair with midway rides, a demolition derby, country music and food. Speaking of food, we celebrate the strawberry every June at Depot Village in Jefferson, and Lake Erie fish at the Wine and Walleyes Festival in August.

In July the festival grounds of the Ashtabula County Antique Engine Club sputter and chug with all manner of antique engines, tractors and farm machinery. Restored historical buildings, bluegrass music, a huge flea market, tractor pulls and home cooking create three days of family fun during the Fourth of July holiday. Conneaut’s D-Day re-enactment attracts hundreds of re-enactors toting their vintage equipment and thousands of visitors armed with cameras and sun block. The three-day event is highlighted by the amphibious assault on the beach at Conneaut Township Park.

October brings the perfect backdrop for the county’s 18 covered bridges, and an opportune time for a festival the second full weekend of October. At the opposite side of the year, the Scenic Rivers Pilgrimage in April pays homage to the three State Scenic Rivers spanned by those bridges.

Photos: The D-Day Re-enactment at Conneaut draws thousands of people to the beach every August. Other events include the Ashtabula County Fair, where youngsters put their 4-H projects on display; Log Cabin Days at the Blakeslee Cabin (first weekend in September); and holiday parades.
On a steamy afternoon in late August, 1962, three fishermen set out from Ashtabula Harbor with a metal cooler chest of iced-down colas and beer.

As the sun beat upon the tanned skin of the fishermen, they downed beverage after beverage, and tossed the bottles overboard. The beers were in brown glass bottles, the colas in light green.

Fifty years later, a tourist from Pittsburgh, strolling along Walnut Beach, came upon exquisite fragments of the bottles. Smoothed and polished by the sand grinding away at their surfaces for more than 18,000 days, the tinted glass had been transformed into Lake Erie jewels, or beach glass.

The last weekend of June, beach glass vendors and buyers descend upon Bridge Street in Ashtabula Harbor to celebrate what may be the ultimate recycling success story — litter to cherished jewelry. The festival is one of Ashtabula County’s biggest and occurs on a street known for celebrations. Bridge Street also hosts an arts festival (TABS) in July and the Wine and Walleye event in August.

Photos: The Beach Glass Festival in Ashtabula Harbor draws dozens of vendors and hundreds of shoppers. The festival is based upon the glass that washes up on Lake Erie beaches after being tumbled around in the lake for years.
On a luscious September morning in 1817, Solomon Sweatland of Conneaut heard dogs baying near the lake shore. Upon investigation, he saw a deer swimming in the lake, and launched his dug-out canoe in pursuit. Dinner, it seemed, was in the bag.

Sweatland soon found himself drifting far beyond the shore, without benefit of hat or outer jacket. His neighbors launched a rescue boat, but Sweatland’s 14-foot-long canoe bobbed out of sight even as a gale swept across the lake.

After several days, a funeral was held and Sweatland’s widow donned the garments of mourning.

Sweatland, however, had completed the 50-mile journey to Long Point, Ontario, Canada, where the cold, exhausted settler came upon a cache of fine clothing, flotsam from a wreck. Refreshed and enriched, he began the long journey back to Conneaut, arriving in time to see his wife still wearing the mourning garments.

Two centuries later, adventurous sportsmen like Sweatland take to the popular waters of Lake Erie with much greater assurance of safety. One may occasionally see a canoe or float of kayaks working the near waters of Conneaut or Ashtabula, but charter fishing boats, sailboats and motorboats are far more common as their occupants seek to satisfy mankind’s lust for challenging the sea.

Public marinas and launch ramps are offered at Geneva State Park, Ashtabula and Conneaut. Ashtabula alone has 10 private marinas and/or yacht clubs with 1,100 boat slips. The 53.1-acre Conneaut Port Authority Access includes a boat launch, fishing and walking pier, and beach area. Two launch ramps, with a total of five lanes, are offered, as well.

Geneva State Park has a six-lane boat ramp and a marina with 383 docks for seasonal rental.

Photo: You don’t have to own a boat to enjoy fishing on Lake Erie; the breakwater at Walnut Beach provides excellent fishing. For those who want to go on the lake, fishing charters are plentiful in Conneaut, Ashtabula and Geneva.
Lake Erie does not hold an exclusive franchise on boating in Ashtabula County, however. Pymatuning Lake offers marinas, public launch sites and private boat rental businesses. canoe livery operates on the Grand River.

For many sportsmen, boating is the means to an end, fishing. Lake Erie, Pymatuning and the county’s three Scenic Rivers all provide opportunities for the angler.

The Ashtabula River and Conneaut Creek offer some of the best steelhead (trout) fishing in the Midwest. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), stocks this species, which spends its summers in Lake Erie, but migrates up rivers and streams in fall and winter.

It is during this migration that anglers flock to the Conneaut, Ashtabula and Grand to try their luck at catching a big one — some prime steelhead exceed 10 pounds. Fishing is generally done by wading or casting from piers and shorelines.

Walleye, bass and perch are the prizes for anglers who venture onto Lake Erie from the county’s three port cities. For many anglers, Ashtabula County is synonymous with walleye, and the proof is in the number of charters; there are more than two dozen of them in Ashtabula alone.

Both boating and fishing are significant economic engines for these lakefront communities. The ODNR’s Division of Watercraft estimates that a boat owner will spend $3,800 annually on the activity. An out-of-area fisherman who comes into the county to fish for walleye or steelhead will leave behind hundreds of dollars per day for lodging, food, guides, charter boat fees and supplies.

On Pymatuning Lake, the prize fish are muskellunge, bass, walleye, perch, bluegill and crappie. This lake is 13,500 acres and is shared between Crawford County, Pa., and Ashtabula County. Launches, state parks, supplies and services are available on both sides of the lake.

Photo: Pymatuning Lake straddles the Ohio-Pennsylvania border and offers anglers excellent muskellunge, bass, walleye, perch, bluegill and crappie fishing. The county’s steelhead streams also provide excellent fishing in the fall and early spring.

(Inset Photo courtesy of Ashtabula Co. Visitors Bureau.)

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PUBLIC ACCESS TO LAKE ERIE: (All are accessed from Route 531)

- Geneva State Park: 300-foot-long guarded beach
- Chestnut Grove: Public restrooms, bike path
- Geneva Township Park: Picnic shelters, playground equipment, ramp to seawall
- Seybold Township Park: Shelters, overlook
- Walnut Beach (Ashtabula): Sand beach, low dunes, vegetation, 800 feet long
- Ashtabula Harbor: Boat access
- Lakeshore Park: 54-acre park with guarded beach
- (Al Cummings) Sunset Park (North Kingsville): Picnic shelter, lake views, high bluffs
- Conneaut Township Park: 4 mile long sand beach, 200 to 1,000 feet deep, .3 miles breakwater for fishing, boardwalks on beach
- Conneaut Port Authority Access: Boats only
- Lakeview Park (Conneaut): Greenspace overlooking lake (no beach)
- Broad Street Extension (Conneaut): fishing access to lake only.
STATE PARKS

When the glaciers retreated from what would become northeast Ohio, they left behind two geological features that would eventually become the centerpieces of two Ohio state parks.

Along the border with Pennsylvania, in the southeast section of Ashtabula County, a small lake that once drained into Lake Erie through a deep gorge to the east became isolated as the glaciers retreated and created a dam across the gorge. By the time the settlers arrived, the once-large lake had been reduced to a swamp.

In the early 1960s, the swamp became a reservoir as a result of a flood control project, Pymatuning Dam. The 24,634-acre lake created behind the dam became the impetus for state parks on both the Ohio and Pennsylvania side of the lake.

Activities here include camping, boating, swimming, hiking and fishing. Anglers find walleye, muskellunge, carp, crappie, perch, bluegill, largemouth, smallmouth bass (black bass), and channel catfish from boats, the shore and ice fishing. Although not on the Ohio side, the Linesville Spillway features the famous spot when the carp are so thick ducks walk on their backs.

Nature trails meander through the park, whose wetlands and forests are popular with birders seeking migratory and water species.

At the opposite corner of the county, the 688-acre Geneva State Park offers activities on the lake that was left behind by the retreating glaciers.

The park’s marina is popular with boaters, who can launch their craft from the six-lane boat ramp or choose one of the 407 slips in the man-made harbor. A paved bike trail follows the lakeshore from the marina to The Lodge and Conference Center, where walkers and cyclists can rest, cool off and enjoy lunch in Horizons Restaurant, which overlooks the lake.

Photo: Pymatuning State Park is synonymous with boating, fishing and camping. Watching waterfowl is also a popular activity.
Did you know?

• The Shenango River, which was dammed to create Pymatuning Lake, once extended to within 10 miles of Lake Erie, almost providing the long-sought lake-to-river route between Lake Erie and the Ohio River. But the Shenango, and thus Pymatuning Lake, is in the Mississippi River watershed.

• The majority of Pymatuning Lake, 21,122 acres, is in Pennsylvania. Ohio has 3,512 acres of the lake.

• Mosquito Lake, the second largest inland lake in Ohio and site of a state park, is located in Trumbull County, a short drive from Pymatuning Lake State Park. Both lakes are very popular with anglers.

• The Lodge and Conference Center at Geneva-on-the-Lake is owned by Ashtabula County, which leases the state park land for The Lodge from the state.

• Cowles Creek, which flows through the state park and meets Lake Erie to the west of The Lodge, was once the site of lime kilns. The plaster of old houses in Geneva Township was made using this lime.

Photo: The marina at Geneva State Park has room for more than 500 pleasure craft. The state park offers excellent bird-watching, hiking and beach facilities for the landlubbers. Lake Erie sunsets can be enjoyed from the shoreline of Chestnut Grove, near The Lodge.

Where Great Things Happen • Ashtabula County Ohio
The residents of Ashtabula County waited 40 years for the railroad between Ashtabula Harbor and the steel mills of the Mahoning Valley and Pittsburgh to materialize. Once completed, the line energized the harbor and helped the city become an iron-ore receiving giant.

Penn Central eventually became the owner of this line, which was closed in April 1976. The Ashtabula County Metroparks secured a 15-year lease agreement from the line’s owner, the State of Ohio, and was authorized to construct the Western Reserve Greenway Trail on the right-of-way.

The result is the Western Reserve Greenway Trail, Ashtabula County’s longest and narrowest park, 27 miles long, 10 feet wide and stretching from Ashtabula to Orwell. Overall, the WRGT is 43 miles in length and ends in Niles. However, there are plans to extend it at both ends — to the Ohio River in the south and to Lake Erie (North Shore Trail) in the north.

Costing more than $1.2 million, the trail is optimized for foot and bicycle traffic. The entire portion of the Ashtabula County section is paved and offers parking lots at regular intervals. Benches along the trail, a railroad trestle, an 1897 King bridge, numerous streams and historical relics from the route’s railroading days make the relatively flat trail a pleasure to ride and discover. Geo-caching along the trail has become very popular, as well.

The Rotary Clubs of Ashtabula County sponsored a serious of signs along the trail to inform visitors of the area’s Underground Railroad History. The interpretive panels tell the story of fugitive slaves who followed the drinking gourd (Big Dipper) from the Ohio to freedom in Canada.

The trail is closed to motorized vehicles, except when winter conditions make the trail accessible to snowmobiles.

Photo: The Western Reserve Greenway’s Ashtabula County segment is nearly 27 miles long and runs from Ashtabula to the county line with Trumbull County. It is used for bicycling, hiking and geo-caching.
They began arriving the day after school let out in the Mahoning Valley and Pittsburgh. Many of them got here in station wagons packed to the roof with towels, shorts, sneakers, lawn chairs, food, toys and kids — lots and lots of kids who came to Chestnut Grove every summer to camp with their families.

The grove, now the site of The Lodge and Conference Center, was a piece of heaven gone astray on the shore of Lake Erie for many of these vacationers of the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s. The accommodations were Spartan, but the amenity, Lake Erie, more than made up for any lack of creature comforts.

Closed in the 1960s, Chestnut Grove is recalled in a series of interpretive signs that line the bike trail at Geneva State Park. The trail was a cooperative effort between the county, state and The Lodge. The interpretive signs along the trail, funded by the Ashtabula County Convention and Facilities Authority, tell the history of Geneva-on-the-Lake and Chestnut Grove.

Two miles of paved surface link the former Chestnut Grove picnic area, on the east side of The Lodge, with the beach at the west end of the state park. The trail is a rare biking amenity along the Lake Erie shoreline in that it parallels the lake for about one third of its distance, before being swallowed by the park’s cool forest. The trail also skirts the marina and picnic areas.

Bicycles are available to rent at The Lodge and Conference Center, and the trail is open to both guests and the general public.

Photo: The bike trail at Geneva State park links The Lodge and Conference Center to the park’s beach, two miles away. The trail simultaneously offers great views and exercise. Signs along the trail interpret Geneva-on-the-Lake history.
The old covered bridge was tired, and rightly so. Prior to being erected over the Ashtabula in 1913, it had spanned a stream in the southern part of Ashtabula County, but was washed out in the great flood of that year. Bob Benson’s grandfather worked on the crew that assembled the recycled bridge over the Ashtabula River, just a stone’s throw from Bob’s house on Graham Road, Pierpont Township.

In 1971 the bridge had reached the end of its service. Bob and his wife Helen, wanting to preserve their neighbor and family heritage, donated 1.5 acres of land to Ashtabula County Metroparks as a resting place for the relic. Abutments were laid and the bridge moved to the new park, where it remains to this day, a centerpiece of rural charm and quaint picnic shelter.

Ashtabula County Metroparks also owns land around the Harpersfield Covered Bridge and dam, a favorite spot for fishing, canoeing, swimming, picnicking and photography. The centerpiece of this park is the 1868 Howe Truss bridge with a pedestrian walkway that provides a great platform for fishing or photographing the State Wild and Scenic River as it ripples over steps of rock.

The Metroparks system encompasses more than 1,000 acres distributed across 12 properties. The system includes the Western Reserve Greenway Trail.

The county also has village, city and township parks that ensure no resident has to travel far to enjoy green space, outdoor recreation and nature study.

Photo: Indian Trails Park offers four miles of Ashtabula River access, including a boardwalk over a wetland area at West 24th Street in Ashtabula City. The park also includes a waterfall and shallow pool.

Inset: The Graham Road Covered Bridge is the site of a Metropark.
Perhaps the most unusual of these parks are Indian Trails and Lake Shore Park, properties of the Ashtabula Township Park Commission.

Lake Shore Park is on the east side of Ashtabula's breakwater (Walnut Beach is on the right). The park features a public beach, duck pond, picnic areas and the longest pavillon on a Lake Erie Beach in Ohio. Its companion park, Indian Trails, stretches for four miles along the Ashtabula River, encompassing the site of the 1873 Ashtabula Train Disaster, Smolen Gulf Covered Bridge and a 3,000-foot-long paved hiking trail.

Conneaut Township Park features one of the best public beaches on Lake Erie, nearly ½ mile long. Geneva and Saybrook township parks, along with Sunset Park in North Kingsville, offer excellent vantage points for viewing the lake, picnics and relaxing.

Photo: The Harpersfield Covered Bridge is the centerpiece of an Ashtabula County Metroparks property on the Grand River in Harpersfield Township.
Inset: A paved trail, 3,000 feet long, follows the Ashtabula River in Indian Trails Park.
SCENIC RIVERS

A Theme of Beauty Flows Through It

“The scenery of Ashtabula County, notwithstanding the depth of the forest which covered it, was even at an early day attractive. The streams, which are for the most part small and gently-flowing rivulets, were attended with valleys, which gradually rose upon either side, that in the primitive wilderness were picturesque and beautiful.”

Williams Brothers 1878 History of Ashtabula County

Two centuries of farming, industrialization and homesteading have not changed the scenic qualities of Ashtabula County, especially when it comes to its rivers and streams.

Ashtabula County has more state-designated Scenic Rivers than any other Ohio County. Two of the streams, Grand River and Conneaut Creek, are designated State Scenic and Wild Rivers, while the Ashtabula is a State Scenic River.

These designations are awarded only after the streams have passed a rigorous study and review for water quality and protection. Stewardship committees, comprised of local citizens with an interest in the stream, work with volunteer water-quality monitors and Division of Watercraft Scenic Rivers personnel to make sure the streams remain worthy of their designation.

What are Scenic Rivers good for? Fishing, swimming, nature study, photography and day-dreaming, for starters. Covered bridges span them, canoes and kayaks float on them and farmers work their “picturesque and beautiful” valleys today as they did two centuries ago.

Photo: The Ashtabula is one of the county’s three State Scenic Rivers. The Grand and Conneaut also are designated “Wild” by the state. Recreational opportunities abound on these rivers, which also provide excellent resources for nature study.
The list of contaminants was lengthy and frightening: chlorinated benzenes, chlorinated ethenes, hexachlorobutadiene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and other organic compounds. Even low-level radionuclides and heavy metals had made their way into the Ashtabula River via the industrially polluted Fields Brook, a Superfund site.

The International Joint Commission, in 1985, declared the lower Ashtabula River an Area of Concern.

Industry responsible for the contamination rallied to voluntarily remediate both Fields Brook and the river through a collaboration known as the Ashtabula River Partnership (ARP). Frank R. Lichtkoppler of the Ohio State University, Ohio Sea Grant College Program, calls the partnership “a model for remedial action.”

Still, when the partnership began to come together in January 1994, it was the first time that kind of approach had been used to develop a community-based solution to a complex pollution problem. The partnership included involvement from the State of Ohio, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Ashtabula City Port Authority, and Ashtabula River Cooperation Group II, a group of private companies with operations in the affected area.

The project cost $60 million and was funded, in part, by the Great Lakes Legacy Act (federal dollars), and the Cooperation Group II. Workers removed 25,000 pounds of hazardous contaminants from the river bottom. Embedded in nearly 700,000 cubic yards of sediment, the contaminants are locked inside a landfill several miles from the lower river.

The project wrapped up in May 2010, when students from the After School Discovery Program traveled to the once heavily-polluted river and assisted with the planting of native seedlings on a peninsula in the lower river.

Photo: The Ashtabula River and inner harbor, once an Area of Concern, has been cleaned up thanks to a massive, cooperative effort that became a model for dealing with complex, heavily polluted sites. Proof of the water’s quality is found in the resurgence of various aquatic species.
NATURE WRITES THE POETRY

It was known as Callander’s Grove, a grassy spot along the Grand River where the steamboat Victor picked up passengers for the excursion up river and picnickers could spread a blanket and listen to the bands from Jefferson and Orwell.

In the early 1900s, it became a private hunting camp for a judge Smythe from Iowa. And from there, Camp Vladek, a Workman’s Circle summer resort. The Cleveland City Mission was the next owner of this 60-acre parcel of wetlands in a predominately farming area.

It was the mission that donated the property to The Nature Conservancy, which uses several of the camp buildings for office space and is helping the land heal. The property is part of the Conservancy’s Morgan Swamp holdings in Ashtabula County.

The swamp is located in the Grand River Lowlands wetland system and at 1,400 acres is one of the largest privately protected forested wetlands in Ohio. Habitat includes swamp forest, sphagnum bogs and sedge meadows that are home to a diversity of plants and animals.

The Nature Conservancy also works with volunteers to eradicate invasive species and protect wildlife by making the county a friendly place for migratory birds to nest.

The Western Reserve Land Conservancy also is invested in the county. The conservancy purchased from the county the former Lampson Reservoir in Jefferson Township, which had a failing earthen dam. The conservancy drained the reservoir, repaired the dam and hired a firm to plant all manner of native plants in the wetlands that was left behind.

The Conservancy donated the 112-acre parcel to Ashtabula County Metroparks for further development as a natural areas resource.

The county is a priority for The Nature Conservancy’s work due the quality of its rivers, wetlands and forests and the abundance and diversity of fish and wildlife. Through the protection and wise use of these natural resources, The Nature Conservancy works to offer opportunities that benefit people and local economies by providing recreational activities such as bird watching, canoeing/kayaking, hunting, fishing, and hiking at the Grand River Conservation Campus on Callender Road.”

Karen Adair - Northeast Ohio Projects Manager
The Nature Conservancy

Photo: Morgan Swamp is owned and protected by The Nature Conservancy. The property is on the Grand River Lowlands, which 12,000 years ago was a lake that stretched from Farmington to Austinburg. Inset: Bald eagles are making a comeback to nature preserves and rivers in Ashtabula County. Inset Photo (above) Lampson Reservoir, once owned by Ashtabula County, was purchased by the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which lowered the level in the lake, repaired the dam and planted native wetland species.
Ashtabula County native Jim Bissell continues to be amazed by what he and other Cleveland Museum of Natural History scientists find in our county’s natural areas.

Bissell is curator of botany for the CMNH and is in charge of the museum’s Natural Areas program. He has devoted his professional life to protecting the biodiversity of Ashtabula County.

The museum protects more than 3,000 acres of unique habitat in the county, including the Geneva Swamp in Geneva City and Geneva Township. The sprawling parcel gives visitors a sense of what the landscape would have looked like in the section of the Western Reserve that would become Cleveland. It also serves as a sanctuary for many endangered and threatened species and is a living laboratory for students at the neighboring Platt R. Spencer Elementary School.

The North Kingsville Sand Barrens is the only high-quality fossil dune ridge that has been preserved in northeast Ohio. The preserve, which is open to the public, has a large population of native lupine and is one of three sites in the state for the endangered bend lily. It is Ohio’s only site where the endangered moss bug-on-a-stick is known.

The museum’s Grand River Terraces property preserves a riparian forest that is home to the West Virginia white, a relatively rare forest butterfly that emerges for just a couple of weeks in the spring. The proliferation of garlic mustard in the white’s habitat has greatly reduced its numbers, but the invasive species has been eradicated at the Terraces, allowing the white to flourish on the native plants.

The museum continues to seek out high-quality habitat in Ashtabula County and raise funds to purchase the land, preserving the habitat for future generations to enjoy and study.

Above: Jim Bissell talks botany with a group of visitors hiking the Stanton Forest Preserve in Sheffield Township. The Cleveland Museum of Natural History recently acquired the forest along the Ashtabula River. On the Grand River, the museum protects the Terraces, a rich forest that supports the West Virginia white butterfly and many wildflower species. Lupine grow at the museum’s Sand Barrens property in North Kingsville.
The Dow plummeted; the U.S. economy went into a deep recession; unemployment rose on the tide of bad news.

In Ashtabula County, the Board of Commissioners saw the county’s funding cut by 20 percent. Services had to be sacrificed; layoff notices issued.

As revenue from state and federal resources dried up, Commissioners insisted that the county rely upon local resources and people to weather the economic downturn and prepare for the certain recovery.

The product of this realization was a year-long study of the county’s strengths, needs and future. That study culminated in a day-long summit at which goals were developed and prioritized. By the summer of 2010, Commissioners were ready to act on one of the top five goals appoint members to an Economic Development Steering Committee that would work on accomplishing the other 15 top goals on the list.

Members of the Steering Committee that tackled these challenges came from state government, local government, health care, manufacturing, small business, education, retail sales, agriculture, tourism, labor, construction and the services industry. All served as volunteers.

Meanwhile, the Civic Development Corporation (CDC) funded tourism summits for Ashtabula County. Again, the summits brought together representatives from all sectors of the community to discuss how each plays a role in growing tourism in Ashtabula County and benefits from that growth.

CDC committed much of its five-year campaign to growing tourism. CDC Executive Director Nora Anderson, in explaining the board of trustees’ rationale for this significant investment, said the organization was building “upon the strengths of Ashtabula County.”

These efforts have been likened to aligning arrows in a quiver. There is sense of moving forward in a positive direction as one unit rather than as individual groups, businesses, school districts and political entities.

This publication fulfills one of those goals by telling the story of Ashtabula County in print and electronically. Another major goal was accomplished with an industry-business-education council to ensure that training purchased with Workforce Development dollars prepares job seekers with the skills and knowledge that local employers actually need. To that end, commissioners contracted with the county’s lead economic development group, Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County, to serve as a business services representative, or liaison between workforce training and industry.
The result has been an alignment of real-world training for real-world jobs. The Ashtabula County Technical and Career Center (A-tech) and Kent State University-Ashtabula are the education members of this partnership.

For example, A-tech, located near the county seat of Jefferson, offers a 600-hour industrial maintenance program that includes 371 hours of hands-on laboratory work. Students study welding and prepare for certification testing; are introduced to milling machines, lathe work, threading, surface grinding, layout tools and drill presses; receive 95 hours in computerized numerical control, 34 hours in programmable logic controls, and 135 hours of technical training in pumps and valves, jigs and fixtures, hydraulics, pneumatics and electricity. Safety, shop math and blueprint and schematic reading also are covered.

A-tech’s Workforce Development Office also offers four-year apprenticeship programs in plastic process, industrial maintenance mechanic, industrial electrician, and tool and die maker.

Ashtabula County Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), headquartered at A-tech, offers The Adult Learning Connection, a free program to assist adult learners with reading, math and English, GED preparation and workforce education and basic skills. Service centers are located throughout Ashtabula County. The county also offers skills development and job placement services for youth, disabled and senior job seekers.

The federal Workforce Investment Act grantee for Ashtabula County is the Geauga, Ashtabula Portage Partnership (GAPP). In Ohio, the one-stop concept is fulfilled by the OhioMeansJobs centers. Ashtabula County's center, which is under the supervision of the Department of Job and Family Services, is located at 4352 Main Ave, Ashtabula.

The next step in this realignment of community economic development resources is to form a nine-member economic development committee representing county government, port authorities, the Civic Development Corporation, tourism, the three cities, chambers of commerce and Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County.

Growth Partnership is the county’s economic development voice and designated entry point for all new projects that require the expertise of development professionals. As the county moves forward through this period of economic recovery, the professionals at Growth Partnership are ready to assist with expansions of existing businesses as well as the relocation and startup of new ventures in Ashtabula County, Where Great Things Happen.
Write your story here...

Stories are best told around campfires bathed in the afterglow of an epic sunset. In Ashtabula County, sunsets are an event, especially along the Lake Erie shoreline, where the setting sun always has an audience of photographers, romantics and tourists who pause to bathe their senses in the colors of a day well spent and story well written.

Great things are happening in Ashtabula County, Ohio. Great stories are being written.

Whether you are considering relocating or starting a new venture in our county, relocating a professional practice or just looking for a place to retire, Ashtabula County is a great place to write your story.

If you can see your family, your business, your dreams becoming part of our story, or if you just want to explore incentives, financing packages, tax credits, real estate, worker training and state and federal assistance, please contact Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County, 440-576-9126, or visit our website, ashtabulagrowth.com.

Thank you for reading our story.

We look forward to hearing, and becoming part of yours.

Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners
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Peggy Carlo, Joseph Moroski, commissioners
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Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County
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