

# Pinwheels

Courthouse lawn display sends prevention message.

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## Branding

helps visitors find the way to attractions, services.

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## Food Hub

Branding helps visitors find their way around the county.

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**Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners**  
25 West Jefferson St.  
Jefferson Ohio 44047

# Ashtabula County Insights

Volume I, Issue 3

## Board works to close Columbus gap

The Board of Commissioners is making the county's needs and issues known in Columbus. "Legislative actions taken in Columbus have a direct effect on the resources we have available at the local level to provide necessary services," says Commissioner J.P. Ducro IV. "Making our voice heard, being active and proactive, are critical to our ability to manage the many local challenges we face."

Board Vice-President Kathryn L. Whittington says the board is advocating for the county on a number of issues that affect local citizens and government. They include elimination of the Medicaid managed care sales tax, sentencing for Felony 5 offenders and additional funds for Children Services.

"I serve on the Health & Human Service Committee and the Justice & Public Safety Committee with the County Commissioners Association of Ohio," she says. "By serving on these commit-

tees it gives Ashtabula County a voice at the state level to participate in legislative decisions that will directly impact the residents of Ashtabula County. It is a vital role for the commissioners to be engaged in the conversations and decisions at a state level so that we can better address the needs and challenges of our county."

"I serve as a member of the Board of Directors with the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, where we play an active role in advocating on issues that are important to counties at the statehouse," says President Casey Kozlowski. "My legislative experience as a legislator also has been highly beneficial toward being able to navigate the many facets of state government for the betterment of Ashtabula County as a commissioner."

Kozlowski lists the Medicaid managed care tax, indigent defense reimbursement and state assistance for battling the county's drug epidemic as topics he holds up to Columbus lawmakers.

## Drug Court:

Judge Gary Yost and team hold offenders accountable, celebrate milestones in recovery: Page 2

## YOUR VOICE

President Kozlowski responds to citizens' questions



Q What are commissioners doing to improve transparency?

Once a month the Board of Commissioners takes the weekly Agenda Meeting to the people of a township, village or city. The remote meeting is held the last Tuesday of the month.

Prior to the Agenda portion, when the board votes on the official business of the county, there is a 30-minute open session where members of the public can voice their concerns, ask questions or make suggestions.

Talk to us! Our next on-the-road meeting is May 30, 6:30 p.m., at the Richmond Township office, 5939 Footville-Richmond Road.

The agenda meeting gets underway at 7 p.m.

Want to know what will be on the agenda? Visit the website: [ashtabulacounty.us](http://ashtabulacounty.us).

Do you have a question for Casey Kozlowski?

Call 576-3750 or email

[crkozlowski@ashtabulacounty.us](mailto:crkozlowski@ashtabulacounty.us)

## Ashtabula County INSIGHTS

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**J.P. Ducro IV, Commissioner**

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The current and previous issues are always available for download from the county's website, [ashtabulacounty.us](http://ashtabulacounty.us), and the Ashtabula Wave, [ashtabulawave.org](http://ashtabulawave.org).

## May 2017 meetings

- 2** 9:30 a.m., Commissioners work session  
1:00 p.m., Commissioners agenda
- 9** 10:00 a.m., Commissioners work session  
10:30 a.m., Commissioners agenda
- 16** 10:00 a.m., Commissioners work session  
1:00 p.m., Commissioners agenda
- 23** 10:00 a.m., Commissioners work session  
1:00 p.m., Commissioners agenda
- 30** **EVENING meetings**  
Richmond Township office,  
5939 Footville-Richmond Road  
6:30 p.m.—public discussion  
7 p.m.—agenda meeting

Regular meetings held in the Commissioners' meeting room, second floor, Old Courthouse, 25 West Jefferson St., Jefferson

## Kozlowski serves on substance abuse forum

From hospitals to law enforcement, from social services to funeral home directors, the county's substance abuse challenges are felt and addressed by many segments of the community. However, until this year, the sectors that deal with these challenges and consequences have not had a common forum in which to exchange information.

Miriam Walton, executive director of The Ashtabula County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, says formation of a multi-disciplinary task force was approved by the board and is bringing the sectors together around a common table.

Walton says the group will probably adopt an acronym for its name to distinguish it from the county's Prevention Coalition. That group's primary function is to educate the public about trends and the latest drug-related threats to the community. The coalition's main event is a summit held in the fall; last year's event drew about 300 participants to the community education event.

The first meeting of the new task force was in March. Walton says the group started with a small core that includes law enforcement, schools, safety forces and hospitals. Representation is slowly expanding into other fields, and Walton expects the number to top out at around a dozen members to keep things manageable.

"We are still very much in the formation stage," she says. "We've had a lot of conversations and good responses. They are all very excited about doing this."

### See Task, page 5

Board of Commissioners  
President Casey Kozlowski



Professionals who work with Drug Court include (from left) Marie Lane, Nicholas Iarocci, Zach Wentink, Honorable Gary L. Yost, Matt Butler, Bryan Rose and Concetta Rogazione.

Taking a right turn at the crossroads of jail time or

# Drug Court

Shortly after 9 a.m. on most any Thursday morning, Drug Court is in session in the courtroom of Common Pleas Judge Gary Yost.

There is no jury, although legal, probation and mental health professionals listen from the sideline and check the veracity of what is reported by the individuals who come before Yost, one by one, in the presence of their peers. On this morning, there are about two dozen offenders, ranging in age from late teens to 50-some. Each of them is accountable to Drug Court.

"All right, good morning everybody," Yost says as he aligns himself with the podium. He reminds the participants that if they are nearing graduation, they must take care of all costs, fines and other obligations to the court before they can graduate out, in July.

The most recent graduation was at the end of March, so the number of participants is down to fewer than three dozen. But there are always participants entering the program, and for several of those, it is their first appearance in Drug Court.

"Why do you want to be in Drug

Court?" Yost asks a young woman. "There are a lot of rules and you have to be willing to follow the rules, no matter what. Do you want to do this?"

She nods. "You do want to do that? I'm glad you've come," Yost says, handing her a welcome coin.

Another participant receives a round of applause for 100 days of sobriety, and another a coin for six months. Some participants receive gift cards for achieving their goals. And one, who failed to meet required appointments, gets a day in jail.

As Yost says, there are a lot of rules. And if the participant breaks one, the court has the power to impose sanctions. Yost even goes so far as to tell an offender that serving a four-month jail sentence might be easier than Drug Court, which is going to take more than a year of following rules, going to meetings and being accountable to the team and court.

Nevertheless, dozens of drug offenders in Ashtabula County apply for the Drug Court program as an alternative to jail time. Once an offender is accepted, Drug Court becomes a consuming, multi-dis-

ciplinary lifestyle that can put the participant on the path to a better life, if he or she is willing to do the work and follow the rules.

### Two tracks

The participants come in under one of two tracks. For those in the "diversion" track, the state's case against them can be dismissed and their court record sealed if they complete Drug Court.

"Those court records are sealed," Yost says. "That's a huge benefit. All the records in the court file are gone."

That is an especially strong motivation for those who want to get a good job or progress in a career that could be derailed by a drug conviction. When the participant is accepted as a diversion applicant, he or she enters a guilty plea and the court stays all further legal proceedings while the participant meets the conditions of the program.

The other track is post-conviction. While the offender's case cannot be dismissed, the participant has the opportunity to avoid a

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# *the county's branding effort is all about* introducing tourists to the

From the 2017 Visitor's Guide to decals on residents' car windows, the ACCVB keeps the county's brand front and center with tourists

Visitor friendly with extensive use of the county's 50-plus branding symbols. Those are key elements of the design that underpins the 2017 Ashtabula County Visitors Guide, says Stephanie Siegel, executive director of the Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACCVB). "Everything we did in it we kept the visitor in mind," Siegel says. "So if someone is in Geneva, and they want to know where they can find a place to eat, it is right there in the Geneva section."

Visitors don't have to wade through long blocks of text to find the information they need, either. "We tried to tell the story through pictures and little nuggets," Siegel says.

And branding logos. The bureau is the repository for the county's "A" brand that was rolled out four years ago but has yet to be adopted by many county businesses and nonprofits that could use the connection. There is a logo for just about any kind of industry or activity in the county, and if something is missing and a compelling case for a logo can be made, the bureau's graphic artist will create one.

Siegel says that the bureau went with a new designer this year, which helped impart a fresh look to the guide while saving money. Overall, the ACCVB was able to reduce its guide production costs by \$8,000 over the 2016 publication and still print the same quantity.

The guide hit the streets in February. Last year the ACCVB distributed 90,000 visitors' guides and Siegel says the same quantity was ordered for this year.

About 10,000 guides will be mailed to future visitors as a result of a request on the [website](#) or a phone call. The ACCVB offers a program that gives lodging, food and other tourism-related businesses the option of having their rack card included with the guide for just 20 cents each when the guide is mailed.

"We already know that they are going to visit the county because they called and asked for a guide," Siegel says. "So this is a great way to reach those visitors."

The ACCVB prioritizes guide distribution to members, many of who purchase advertising



Stephanie Siegel, executive director of the Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau, holds the 2017 Visitor's Guide, which makes extensive use of the county's branding and visitor-friendly features. The guide is the bureau's primary print promotional piece for tourism in Ashtabula County. Below, the county government logo is used on Ashtabula County vehicles and printed materials.

the annual publication. Copies also are available to pick up at the ACCVB office, 1850 Austinburg Road, and the Old Courthouse, 25 W. Jefferson St. Businesses that cater to tourists are encouraged to have a supply on hand – the guide includes a pull-out map that lists the major highways of the county and all of the covered bridges, wineries and barn quilt locations.

Siegel points out that those business could benefit from membership in the CVB, which has the lowest membership rate in the state, \$50 for a business and \$25 for a nonprofit.

Membership fees help fund the ACCVB's advertising and promotion efforts, but the lion's share of the \$675,000 annual budget will come from the county's 3 percent lodging tax. That portion at the budget is projected to be around \$500,000 in 2017. The county also has a 2 percent lodging tax that is committed to the Convention Facilities Authority and used to reduce the debt on the Lodge and



Conference Center.

As lodging tax receipts grow with increased tourism and higher-end lodges, hotels and beds and breakfasts coming into county, the ACCVB is able to expand its reach and embark upon innovative marketing efforts.

Siegel says the CVB has been very diligent about using the county's "A" branding, especial-

ly in the new Visitor's Guide. Unfortunately, the use of the brand by businesses and nonprofits in the county has been sporadic, which leads to visitor confusion and brand dilution. This is despite the fact that the county ACCVB offers 50 different A-brand symbols that can be used in marketing a business, nonprofit or activity.

This spring the ACCVB will launch a citizen-based initiative to raise awareness of the "A" brand. Any county resident who shows proof of residency at the ACCVB office will be able to pick up a 5-inch-square A-brand decal for their vehicle. The brands available

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Ohio Wears Blue on April 12, and Commissioners and staff donned the color to show their support of the Child Abuse is Preventable initiative represented by blue. From left are Jamie Arcaro, Community Services department; Lauren Davis, Human Resources; Dog Warden Donna Yan; Candy Korver-Baker, Commissioners office; Board of Commissioners Vice President Kathryn Whittington and President Casey Kozlowski; Board Clerk Lisa Hawkins; Lori Larson, Risk Management; and Laura Thompson, Commissioners office.

## Court from page 2

prison sentence by carefully following the Drug Court program. The applicant pleads guilty and is sentenced to Drug Court as a condition of community control.

Stephanie Belconis coordinates the program, which is marking its first decade. She says there were 45 individuals in Drug Court up until the end of March, when the graduation ceremony was held. A dozen were graduated out of the program; the next graduation is in July, at Jefferson Area High School.

"It's a good way to help them celebrate what they've done and encourage them to keep moving through recovery," says Miriam Walton, executive director of The Ashtabula County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

Walton says Drug Courts fits one of the two criteria for a successful treatment program, as determined by research. The first is immediate access, the second is a prolonged course of treatment. With Drug Court taking more than a year, participants are highly invested in the process and the stakes.

Historically, about two-thirds of the Drug Court participants will graduate; 72.6 percent have not had an offense after graduation.

Yost took over the program after Al Mackey, who started it, left the bench. "Judge Yost has been equally phenomenal," Walton says. "He has taken it to a whole new level."

The team members are Magistrate Concetta Rogazione, Prosecutor Nicholas Iarocci, Public Defender Marie Laine, Michael Murphy and Kathleen Kinney of Lake Area Recovery Center, Sheriff's Department Detective Brian Rose, Melissa Haas of N.E.O.C.A.P., Proba-

tion Officer Zachary Wentink and Belconis. The team meets for an hour every Thursday morning to review participants' performance in treatment and compliance with the court's directives. Yost uses the information garnered from that session to confront, encourage and congratulate participants during the weekly court appearances. Even residents of the NEOCAP program in Warren check in with Drug Court via video conferencing.

"Tell me a little bit about how you are using those deep-breathing exercises. It's on the list of things you can use when you are feeling angry," Yost asks a NEOCAP resident.

## Looking ahead

Yost constantly challenges participants to think about how "people, places and things" will affect their ability to get and stay sober. For example, when a participant moves from a residency program to an apartment or other private living space, Yost wants to know if that environment will put the participant at risk for falling back into a pattern of abuse. He questions them on what they've learned thus far in the programs and how they are putting that knowledge and coping skills into practice in family and work environments. The pop quizzes keep the participants on their toes, but the most probing question of them all gets to the heart of the program itself: "Why do you want to be in Drug Court?"

In general, a participant gets only one shot at successfully completing drug court. If a termination occurs because of a diversion track participant's failure to comply with the terms and conditions, the stay of legal proceedings is lifted. For post-conviction participants, a complaint for violation of community control

will be filed and a violation hearing set.

Both the participant and the court must agree that Drug Court is the best course of action for the offender and society.

"Nobody is forced to join the program, and they have to apply," Yost says. Application is made to the prosecuting attorney through the defendant's lawyer. A substance abuse assessment at Lake Area Recovery Center is required, as is a risk assessment and investigation with the Ashtabula County Probation Department. LARC's assessment will determine the level of treatment required: intensive outpatient, non-medical residential or community-based corrections through NEOCAP.

During the first 13 weeks of the program participants spend three hours a day, four days a week, in their intensive outpatient section, plus go to a minimum of three court-approved self-help recovery program meetings per week. Random drug screens are required throughout the Drug Court Program.

Phase II is 12 weeks, one day a week, of intensive outpatient work plus weekly drug court and empowerment group meetings, and the self-help recovery programs sessions. A third phase requires ongoing Drug Court meetings and self-help recovery program meetings.

Other program options include residential treatment at Turning Point or in the Ashtabula County Jail, or the NEOCAP facility in Warren.

As to how long all of this takes in practice, Belconis says the average time is 15 months from start to finish, although one participant sprinted through it in 13 months, while another took 26 months.

"There is not a set time," Yost says.

# Pinwheels draw attention to abuse



On April 18, the annual Pinwheels for Prevention, held to draw attention to Child Abuse Prevention Awareness month, was held on the Old Courthouse front lawn. Elected officials gathered for the reading of a proclamation from the Board of Commissioners. From left are Barb Schaab, recorder; Tami Pentek, clerk of courts; Dawn Cragon, treasurer; Roger Corlett, auditor; Nicholas Iarocci, prosecutor; Rep. John Patterson, 99th District; Commissioner J.P. Ducro IV; Board of Commissioners President Casey Kozlowski; Tania Burnett, Children Services executive director; and Board of Commissioners Vice-President Kathryn L. Whittington. Burnett says her agency in 2016 received 2,660 calls regarding possible child abuse. The number keeps trending upward. Whittington said that citizens can find ways to help children by volunteering with organizations and programs that support children and youth. "There is always something you can do to help a child," Kozlowski said. Patterson suggested that the actions adults take toward children today set the direction of the child's life all the way to eternity. "It's about making a difference for all time in what we do today," Patterson told the crowd of several dozen. "Our efforts to work together affect our community, affect our children and affect our future."

## Branding, from page 3

will be lighthouse, grapes, beach, book, veteran, wine glass, bicycle, covered bridge, fish, wave, fork and paws—the latter celebrating the pet-friendly nature of many Ashtabula County parks and attractions.

Later this year, the ACCVB will launch a citizens' ambassadors program. Free orientation training will be provided for the ambassadors who will provide a connection to tourists at concierge booths at The Lodge and Conference Center and Spire Institute.

"It will be designed to help citizens become ambassadors for our county," she says. "We would like to roll it out this summer."

The ACCVB recently hired Jayson Stoltz to handle the back side of its website. Siegel says that Stoltz has been able to move the site to the top of search results by optimizing it with the various search engines. As a result the visitashtabulacounty website received 10 times more hits in March 2017 than it did a year ago.

"We had 11,646 page views (in March 2017)," Siegel says.

Stoltz mines the data from Google Analytics

to determine where site visitors live as well as their behaviors. One of the most interesting statistics to come out of that data is that their number one interest is not wine but film buffs.

The visitor information is guiding Siegel in placing advertising. The stalwarts of Pittsburgh, Akron-Canton, Warren and Columbus remain, but the data also indicates that the ACCVB should pay more attention to the Wheeling, W.Va., and Erie, Pa. markets.

"Jayson has taken our website to the next level. Now we can gather all kinds of data from it," Siegel says.

The bureau has developed a new co-op advertising program for its members that leverages their advertising dollars in these markets. The bureau picks up 50 percent of the advertising cost. The business uses a photo unique to their establishment and the branding on a very clean ad. The bureau purchases a block of ads, all containing the branding, business' website address and that of the ACCVB. The print ads are scattered through the newspaper or regional magazine so the reader sees multiple examples of what the county has to offer, all tied together by the branding "A."

For more information, call 275-3202.

## Task, from page 2

represents the Board on the task force.

"(The Board of Commissioners) is extremely important in helping us get that message out as we go forward," Walton says.

As to what the message will be, Walton says that is something that the task force will work on as it goes forth.

She says the Board also provides support to the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board by serving as sub-grantees for grants that fund special programs and services.

"We are writing these grants and administering them, but (Commissioners) are still the ones who say, 'Yes, we are willing to do this,'" Walton says.

The new task force was inspired by the Elevation Group in Conneaut, which last year put together a community-wide awareness event. In the process of planning and executing the event, the different sectors learned about programs and projects within each other's realm. Walton says expanding this concept to a countywide effort will give stakeholders a similar forum for sharing and cooperating on efforts and data collection.

# Ashtabula Local Food Council to open food hub in Geneva

If the project stays on schedule, a food hub will be available to Ashtabula County growers and institutional food buyers by the end of May.

Courtney Johnson, coordinator of the Ashtabula Local Food Council (ALFC), says the Community Harvest Food Hub will be based at Pairings in Geneva and link local growers with restaurants, schools and other buyers of fresh food in bulk quantities.

A hub works like a farmer's market, but buyers place their orders through a website at which growers list what they have available in institutional quantities that week. Johnson says that because multiple growers can contribute their output of the same item, the hub allows growers to tap into a larger market than the consumer-oriented farmer's markets.

"This is a big project for our county," Johnson says.

The ALFC began a food hub feasibility study soon after the group was organized two years ago. The ALFC is a project of the local chapter of Ohio Farmers union and was organized by Johnson and Mardy Townsend.

The group's work involves three areas: Community, growers and policy. One of the first projects tackled by the group was a farmer's market in Geneva. The market returns to downtown Geneva (Depot Street municipal parking lot) this spring. Several enhancements are pending for this year's market, including a permit to allow vendors to sell wine and the option of using SNAP benefits to purchase fresh food.

"(The Ashtabula Local Food Council) is a great asset to the county. They are providing much needed services—health and nutrition and education—to our residents. ALFC is also helping support and promote the local farm markets. These markets give our residents the opportunity to purchase from our local farmers. There is a variety of education opportunities for the residents, as well, through the organization," says Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners Vice President Kathryn L. Whittington.

Partnering with Ashtabula County Community Action and My Neighborhood at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Ashtabula, the group offered canning classes in 2015. Johnson says that effort will be expanded to a week-long, countywide program in September that will involve growers and community centers to help consumers learn how to purchase and preserve fresh food in larger quantities.

For May the focus will be getting the food hub up and running at Pairings. Johnson says the Geneva restaurant was selected because it



The Ashtabula Local Food Council works to make fresh, locally grown food available to consumers in Ashtabula County. Farmers markets are one of the most visible means of doing this. The Bridge Street Farmers Market, held on Sundays beginning at 10 a.m., connects consumers to locally grown food.

has excellent facilities that are licensed by the Ohio Department of Agriculture for packing food. It also has a commercial kitchen already in place so growers who want to do a value-added product, such as pickles or jams, will have access to the necessary equipment.

ALFC is working with Rep. John Patterson, 99th District, to locate institutional buyers interested in purchasing from the food hub. Johnson says they have secured "five or six large buyers committed to begin purchasing" once growers have adequate quantities available.

While the food hub will operate during the

season that educational institutions are not buying food, Johnson says the hub will look into using the Pairings facility to freeze food for these buyers to use at a later date.

Although the cost of the food is likely to be higher than what an institution would pay through a large wholesale supplier, Johnson says that a study out of the Columbus City Schools showed that local food saved the district money because transportation costs were lowered. Further, buying locally produced food is better for the environment because less fuel is used to get it from farm to table.

Online: [ashtabulafood.org](http://ashtabulafood.org).