

# What regional economies mean to Licking County

Nathan A. Strum 12:05 a.m. EDT May 21, 2016



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JobsOhio – the state’s private nonprofit corporation designed to drive job creation and new capital investment in Ohio through business attraction, retention and expansion efforts – recently released its 2015-16 strategic vision.

Within the vision, the state highlights many accomplishments for 2015, but I believe it all boils down to the numbers. In 2015, the state (along with regional counterparts such as Columbus 2020 and local economic development organizations such as GROW Licking County) were able to attract 23,602 new jobs to the state with a projected total payroll of close to \$1.1 billion. In the Columbus region alone, these numbers include the proposed BrewDog brewing facility in Canal Winchester, the Sofidel Group manufacturing facility in Pickaway and the Amazon Fulfillment Center under construction right here in Licking County.

But what does this mean for Licking County and Central Ohio? In short, it means there are jobs here. It means that now – more than ever – it is critical to start talking about planning for an increase in population here in Licking County to accommodate the influx of future residents interested in living and working in our communities.

There is a role for every community in a regional economy. In some instances, you can become a bedroom community. Others serve as manufacturing areas, transportation hubs or educational centers (or a combination of all of the above and more).

According to a 2013 study by Ohio Department of Job & Family Service, there are more than 26,000 workers employed in Licking County but living in another county. When you factor in the overall outflow of workers who travel to other counties for employment (more than 48,000), the number looks impressive.

But what I wonder is: Why? Is it a question of salary? Seniority? Something else? With 2.3 percent growth since 2010 (eighth overall in Ohio), it is critical to start ensuring our communities can accommodate both the commuter residents who choose to live here but work outside of Licking County as well as those workers who travel here for employment and develop a strategy to encourage those workers to live here, too.

But there is a third group that communities and local leadership should be talking with. It is those who live in our communities but choose to work in other counties because they do not know or believe that there are local, competitive employment opportunities right here in Licking County. According to OhioMeansJobs.com, there are 4,538 available jobs within 20 miles of Newark.

Of those opportunities, more than 35 percent are listed as being middle- or upper middle-income Jobs (\$30,000 to \$79,000 per year), with a variety of openings in the skilled trades and medical field. Developing a comprehensive strategy to reach these commuter employees and attract them to work here in Licking County is critical to not only stabilize our communities but also increase their overall quality of life.

As a former hour-plus commuter, my wife and I would carpool to our jobs in downtown Pittsburgh – leaving around 6:30 a.m. daily and returning sometime between 6:30 and 7 p.m. Now that we live less than 10 minutes from our respective employers, we have traded our commutes for quality time with friends and family.

If you fall into this category of commuter, check out OhioMeansJobs.com or visit their local office at 998 E. Main St. in Newark to see if there is a local opportunity for employment right here in Licking County.

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