



General Manager Steve Nichols at Urbana's new Cobblestone Hotel & Suites.

## 2020: Year of Progress Despite Obstacles

Although the pandemic presented obstacles to economic development, Champaign County has had many successes to celebrate in 2020:

**Q3 and Legacy Place Projects:** Thanks to public-private partnerships coordinated by the CEP two major projects are underway to restore, renovate and repurpose four prominent Urbana buildings. For details, read the articles at right.

**Cobblestone Hotel & Suites:** The hotel opened on June 12, as COVID challenged the travel and hospitality industry. Yet, says General Manager Steve Nichols, "It's been quite a pleasant surprise how well we've been doing – we've been very busy on the weekends." Nichols, in the hotel industry for 17 years, has been with Cobblestone for the past six, opening and managing the brand's Corry, Pa., hotel before moving to Urbana.

Mike Major, one of several local investors in the hotel, said, "The CEP was essential in leading the way to making this possible and finding a hotel company that's interested in small communities."

A study commissioned by the CEP found demand for a new hotel, which would enable more business and recreational travelers to stay overnight in Urbana – rather than neighboring communities – and support local businesses, such as restaurants.

**New and Expanded Businesses:** The CEP helped facilitate a 15,000-square-foot expansion of Ultra-met in Urbana and growth of seven other Champaign County businesses, representing 100 new jobs and more than \$6 million in investment.

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## Q3 Building Restoration Begins

By next fall, the former Q3 JMC, Inc. building at 605 Miami St. in Urbana – vacant since 2008 – will be the new home of three businesses.

A \$2 million project to restore and renovate the building will begin soon, says Joe Timm, Executive Vice President of True Inspection Services, LLC (TIS), which acquired the property in May from the City of Urbana.



Artist rendering of renovated Q3 JMC building exterior

TIS, a minority-owned, full-service commercial inspection, engineering

and construction management company, will occupy the building's second floor, moving from its South Main Street location.

Community Health & Wellness Partners, which offers a full range of primary medical care including behavioral health in Bellefontaine, Indian Lake and West Liberty, will open a new clinic on the first floor. The Door

Shop, a commercial door and hardware distributor – will have

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## Legacy Place Project Underway

Years of determined work by the CEP and public and private partners paid off in September. The Legacy Place affordable senior apartment project received the green light to begin transforming the long vacant, historic Douglas Hotel and the former Urbana North and South Elementary Schools into 51 apartments.

The apartments in the school buildings will be ready for lease by mid-summer and the apartments in the Douglas, by the end of 2021.

Duane Miller, President of FC Legacy Place, said, "Without Marcia Bailey and the CEP the progress would not have gone as smoothly. She established the relationships with the partners in this project. She and the CEP were great boots on the ground for us."

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Exterior work on North Elementary

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### CEP Developments

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## Senior Center to Open in Spring

The Champaign County Senior Citizen Center will have a lot more space for services, activities and additional members when its new 9,500-square-foot, single-floor building opens next spring at 150 Patrick Ave.

Ground was broken in October for the new building, which will replace the current trilevel 2,300-square-foot Senior Center at 701 S. Walnut St.

Construction of the new facility is being made possible by Civista Bank's donation of 2.2 acres of land and voters' approval of a five-year, 0.5-mill levy to cover construction.

Mary Lee Gecowets, Senior Center Vice Treasurer and Building Committee member, said that the Senior Center is short on space to meet the increasing needs of local seniors. "There are more seniors – that group is growing in Champaign

County. And seniors are living longer today and are more active than seniors used to be. They're interested in learning new things, crafting things, and exercising."

Stacy Barnhart, Senior Center Executive Director, said the new center will provide space for current exercise and art classes, lunch and learn programs, a food pantry, and Medicare and tax preparation services – and new offerings such as the SilverSneakers senior fitness program, a workout room that includes a pickleball court, and a spacious meeting room with commercial kitchen.

And, she says, "the beauty of the new center" is that it will include a coffee bar by the front entrance to provide seniors a place to "hang out" and socialize – something not possible in the current center.

## 2 New Partner Investors Join CEP

The CEP recently welcomed two new partnership investors – bringing the total to 23 – who support the CEP's mission to advance economic development in Champaign County. They are:

**Open Road Renewables**, a Patron Level investor and clean energy company that develops utility-scale solar projects in Ohio.



Open Road Renewables is developing the Clearview Solar project in Adams Township, with the aim to provide cost-effective, in-state clean ener-

gy power generation and workforce development in Champaign County.

**Legacy Pipeline Services, LLC**, a Support Level investor and all-inclusive natural gas service provider that plans, designs and oversees construction, operations and maintenance of natural gas systems to meet the energy needs of businesses, towns and villages.



You can find a complete list of CEP partnership investors, and how to become one, at [cepohio.com/partnership-investors.html](http://cepohio.com/partnership-investors.html).

## Park National Supports CEP, Provides Office Space

Park National Bank (formerly operating in Urbana as Security National Bank, and before that, Citizens National Bank) supports the CEP's economic development mission as a Support Level partnership investor.

Since 2015, the bank has affordably leased office space to the CEP at its 3 Monument Square location. The bank recently closed its banking services at this site due to the closeness of PNB's other Urbana location (which continues at 828 Scioto St.) and bank customers' increased use of online services, says John Brown. As PNB Division President, he leads 12 branches in Champaign, Clark and Greene counties.

"At our core we are a community bank. We're still operating as community banks in the markets that we serve, wanting to make this a better place for all of us to

live and do business," he says. That's why the bank supports the CEP, which he says "is putting the money that we've invested to such good use."

He adds that he is serving on the Champaign County Housing Consortium developed by the CEP to help meet

current and future housing needs to support economic growth. "By continuing to improve the local housing stock we will continue to improve economic development."

Brown said that PNB wants the CEP to continue operating in its current downtown office space and is making that a negotiating condition with potential buyers of the Monument Square property.



## Peoples Backs CEP Mission

The Peoples Savings Bank, a Support Level partnership investor of the CEP, has served Champaign County customers for 128 years. As one of Ohio's few remaining mutually chartered, state savings banks, Peoples is owned by depositors, not stockholders, says Peoples President Brian Nicol.

Because of this, he said, the Peoples Savings Bank has "the flexibility to give back to the community."

The bank and its staff support many educational and civic organizations, such as the CEP, financially and through volunteer hours.

He adds, "We understand the importance of the CEP. (CEP Director) Marcia (Bailey) and the CEP board do an excellent job advancing

our community." He cited two recent examples: the Legacy Place senior apartment project and the new Cobblestone Hotel and Suites.

"We're a small bank, yet we offer the same products and services of the big banks," Nicol said.

That includes online banking services and the Peoples banking app. Next year the bank will launch a new computer system that will further enhance services and the product base available to customers.

Nicol adds, "We pride ourselves on personal service that exceeds customers' expectations." The bank's 29 employees average 17 years of service.





# Housing Consortium Progressing

The Champaign County Housing Consortium, formed as recommended by the Champaign County Housing Market Study, is moving forward to help implement the study's other recommendations for providing the range of housing needed to support current and future community and economic development.

The group is represented by the CEP, City of Urbana, villages of St. Paris, Mechanicsburg, North Lewisburg and Mechanicsburg, OhioMeansJobs Champaign County, realtors, property owners, Mercy Health and others.

Here's an update on the consortium committees:

**Incentives Committee**, chaired by CEP Director Marcia Bailey, is focusing on tax incentives (abatements) available through the Ohio Revised Code to promote residential development. The group is reviewing Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) rules and CRAs already set up in Urbana and Johnson Township, with an eye on adding CRAs in St. Paris, North Lewisburg and Mechanicsburg and making CRAs uniform across the county.

The committee is assessing the return on investment of temporary tax abatements, which encourage renovation and new construction of housing for current residents and to attract new families and workforce – to promote economic growth and increase long-term property tax revenue.

**Infrastructure Committee**, chaired by Dusty Hurst, is looking at ways to create uniform zoning across the county. "If a developer comes in, we want them to consider multiple areas throughout the county rather than being limited to one municipality or location," Hurst said. Uniform zoning will support this approach and help enforce code violations to turn around nuisance properties.

To help create thriving downtowns that attract and support development around them – as recommended by the housing study – the committee also is looking at ways to encourage converting vacant upper floors in downtown districts into lofts, condos and apartments, and updating existing retail space and streetscapes.

**Products Committee**, chaired by Doug Crabill, is identifying types of housing needed to help employers attract workforce.

Besides new development, emphasis is being placed on rehabbing existing properties. Crabill said that creating vacant building registries, like those in Mechanicsburg and Urbana, could be used to incentivize rehabbing vacant houses and returning them to productive use.

**Marketing Committee**, chaired by Sara Neer, is looking at ways to promote Champaign County as an ideal place for housing development and to demonstrate the return on investment available to developers.



## CEP Websites Still Growing

The CEP's website, CEPOhio.com, and ChampaignWorks.com, supported by the CEP to post local jobs and share positive local news, continue drawing more visitors. Champaign Works newsfeeds run on screens at all county high schools, in communities served by the CEP, and on We Spend Local screens in businesses.

"Growth for CEP and Champaign Works is amazing," says Staci Wisma of Berry Digital Solutions, which developed both sites.

### Key Champaign Works stats:

- 1,000 unique visitors per month
- New users up 413%
- Return users up 304%
- Users spending twice the time on the site

"Job postings (at [champaignworks.com/jobs](http://champaignworks.com/jobs), the site's most visited page) have increased significantly throughout COVID," Wisma reports. Local employers can post jobs free at [champaignworks.com/hire.html](http://champaignworks.com/hire.html).

Businesses, organizations and individuals may upload good news with a photo at [champaignworks.com/share.html](http://champaignworks.com/share.html).

### Key CEPOhio.com stats

- Visitors up 21% over 2019
- Top pages visited: Available Properties and CEP Business Playbook, a guide to starting a business in Champaign County
- 90% of traffic from Google searches

## Former Q3 Building to Become New Home of 3 Businesses

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light manufacturing and warehouse operations at the site.

CEP Director Marcia Bailey credits the Champaign County Board of Revision for helping put the wheels in motion for this project. The board approved the City of Urbana's 2015 request to obtain the property free of unpaid back property taxes after no one bid on the property at a sheriff's sale.

After acquiring the 20-acre site in 2017, the city pursued redevelopment, to clear it of contamination and prepare it for business use.

Bailey assisted the city in reaching an agreement with TIS, the city's development partner, to oversee the site cleanup and redevelopment. "They were the only

company that came forward with interest in renovating the building and turning the brownfield into a greenfield for business development," Bailey said.

On behalf of TIS, Bailey applied for a JobsOhio Site Redevelopment Pilot Program grant to help fund the work.

JobsOhio granted \$883,947 to help cover costs of demolition, environmental remediation, asbestos abatement, removal of waste and site preparation. The city provided \$348,435 in matching funds. TIS contributed \$116,145.

TIS owns 12.6 acres on the east side of the 20-acre site, including the building. The remaining portion is being readied for business development.

Timm said that the new location will

"help take us to the next step in the growth of our company, to hire more personnel and expand our operations." He added that some of the 12.6-acre parcel will be developed for sale to other businesses.

"The building will be an anchor for future development on the rest of the property, restore jobs lost when Q3 JMC closed, and generate tax revenue for our community," Bailey said.

Kerry Brugger, Urbana's director of administration, said, "We're excited to see the building come back into productive use. It's a great project for our community. It eliminates a severe safety and health nuisance for the community and will retain and create jobs."



*Douglas Hotel being prepared for apartment construction.*

## Legacy Place Progressing

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Besides the CEP and project developer Flaherty & Collins, key players are the City of Urbana; Urbana City Schools administration and Board of Education; Miami Scioto Holdings, LLC, owner of the Douglas Hotel since 2007; and Resident Supports and Services, Inc.

"Revitalizing and repurposing these historic buildings will have a tremendous impact on our economy and the attractiveness of our community and downtown," Bailey said. The anchor of the southwest corner of Monument Square since 1870, the Douglas has stood vacant

since 2004.

She adds, "I'm looking forward to further business development in Urbana, especially in the downtown, to accommodate the new Legacy Place residents."

Another positive outcome of the project, she said: It will make much needed single-family housing available for new residents as seniors downsize to move into the apartments.

Miller said that the project accomplishes two goals: "turning three vacant buildings back around to make them useful assets to the community and meeting Urbana's need for affordable senior housing."

## Pioneer Electric Celebrates 85th

Pioneer Electric Cooperative, a Champion Level CEP partnership investor, is celebrating 85 years as a not-for-profit, member-owned electric distribution utility.

"The CEP congratulates Pioneer on this milestone, and we thank Pioneer President and CEO Ron Salyer for his instrumental role in helping five years ago to establish the CEP as Champaign County's private-public economic development agency," CEP Director Marcia Bailey said.

## Contact Us

### Champaign Economic Partnership

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## 2020 A Year of Progress

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**Sale of Downtown Mechanicsburg Building:** The CEP facilitated the sale of a downtown Mechanicsburg building, 2-4 Main St., that had been vacant more than 10 years. The building was owned by the village due to real estate tax foreclosure. The buyer, a local private investor, is developing the building into a loft apartment and first floor retail space.

Chuck Hickey, Mechanicsburg Village Council member and chair of the Village Planning

Commission, appreciates the CEP's role in helping return the property to productive, tax paying use – and helping to make the downtown more attractive. "It's a key downtown parcel ... the missing tooth in the smile."

He adds, "Villages like Mechanicsburg don't have the staffing to make things like this happen. I thank the CEP for helping to make it happen."

**COVID-19 Emergency Grant Fund:** In partnership with the Champaign County commissioners, the CEP granted \$54,265.15 to help 24 small local businesses

## Local Manufacturing Staying Strong

Despite the economic impact of COVID-19, Champaign County manufacturing employment is staying strong. In fact, growing.

Through third quarter 2020 county manufacturing employment stood at 3,887, compared to 3,817 in 2019 and 3,574 in 2013.

The concentration of manufacturing jobs as a percentage of total jobs has also increased in the county. In 2013, manufacturing employment in Champaign County was 3.9 times the national concentration, compared to 4.12 times in 2019 and 4.24 now. Average earnings in manufactur-

ing in the county have increased from \$64,536 in 2016 to \$69,917 this year.

A significant percentage of local manufacturing jobs is still held by older workers, age 45 and above. An encouraging sign is that more young workers are joining the mix as efforts by local manufacturers, schools and the CEP have introduced young people to manufacturing opportunities.

The share of local manufacturing jobs held by 19- to 24-year-olds increased from 3 percent in 2018 to 8 percent in 2020.

## Welcome These New Businesses



**Above L:** Stay Active Studio, LLC, 2nd floor, 23 Monument Sq., Urbana. Personal training/group fitness. Owner Rosemary Fodor.



**Above R:** Owners Wendy and Jeff Pyfrin and son Elius Feucht at Sittin' Purdy Dog Grooming, 36 Monument Sq., Urbana. Dog grooming and nail trimming by appointment, 937-594-2728.



**At right:** Owners Megan and Zach Cauley at Peace, Love & Candles, 106 S. Main St., Urbana. Hand-poured 100% soy wax candles and wax melts. **Above:** Pony Wagon Bargains, 146 S. Springfield St., St. Paris. Discounts on top name merchandise. Owners Jason and Jessica Anderson.



Check out these businesses on Facebook.