



During Memorial Day weekend, the First Responder Appreciation Honor Field, a display of 256 American flags, was placed in front of Mercy Health-Urbana Hospital by Walter & Lewis Funeral & Cremation Services and sponsors to honor the dedication of health care professionals.

Saluting Hometown Heroes

The CEP's two health care partner investors, Memorial Health (Champion Level) and Mercy Health (Advocate Level) – and their teams, have worked especially hard in the past few months to help assure our county's well-being amid COVID-19.

The CEP salutes them and all first responders for a job well done.

Executive Vice President Spence Fisher said that prior to the pandemic, Memorial

Health was preparing to open new inpatient and outpatient pavilions in Marysville.



Then the Memorial Health teams in Marysville and Urbana quickly responded to "the largest public health crisis of our lifetimes," he says. "We celebrate the talented, caring and compassionate team members at

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Memorial Urgent Care | Urbana was recently awarded the Memorial Health President's Award for scoring the highest in "Patient Experience and Care," placing them in the top 5% of urgent cares in the nation. From left: Christy Fischer, RN; Linda Biddle, RT; Chad LeVan; and Dr. Steve Scalise.

24 Small Business Grants Awarded by CEP, County

Local tax dollars have come to the aid of 24 small Champaign County businesses, which recently were granted a total of \$54,265.15 through the COVID-19 Champaign County Small Business Emergency Grant Fund.

The fund – to help businesses reopen and recover from losses in the pandemic, and to help boost the local economy – was established by the CEP with the support of the Champaign County Board of Commissioners. The commissioners authorized using a portion of local tax dollars generated for economic development through conveyance fees collected on Champaign County real estate sales.

"We are very thankful to the commissioners for funding this important initiative," Kyle Hall, president of the CEP Board of Trustees, said. "The COVID-19 grant fund will help small businesses bridge the gap in revenue during the shutdown and help them meet safety requirements for reopening, so that consumers will return to them with confidence."

The 24 grantees will also receive 12 months of free marketing through ChampaignWorks.com. You can follow ChampaignWorks on Facebook for updates on these small businesses, which are a vital part of the county's economic stability.

The businesses are being encouraged to repay

their grants, when able, to the Champaign County Small Business Grant Fund, for future use in supporting economic sustainability in the county, CEP Director Marcia Bailey said.

Here are a few of the comments grant recipients sent via Facebook and email:

- "What an amazing experience to be a recipient! So glad to live and work in Champaign County!"
- "Thank you all so much!! Great community to be a part of!!"
- "So unbelievably thankful to be in a community that supports others when in need."
- "Please pass on my gratitude to the Champaign County Commissioners board for allowing me to receive an emergency grant for my business. Being a shop in Urbana for almost 13 years has been such a privilege and joy."

For a photo collage of grant recipients, turn to Page 3.

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Chamber, CEP Form Recovery Task Force

The Champaign County Chamber of Commerce and the CEP have formed the Champaign County Economic Recovery Task Force to help local businesses reopen and recover from COVID-19 shutdowns.

The task force is composed of Chamber and CEP board members and other community leaders representing retail stores, restaurants, manufacturing, education, agriculture, banking, and city, village and county government.

In initial meetings the task force created subcommittees to focus on specific initiatives, Chamber Executive Director Sara Neer said. These include Urbana University, Fundraising, Personal Protective Equipment, Marketing, and Training and Support.

The Training and Support subcommittee, Neer said, is planning webinars with guest speakers, who will share industry-specific regulations and best practices for operating in the pandemic. The online sessions will be scheduled for restaurants and food service, retail, manufacturing, beauty and barber shops, and health and fitness.

Task Force objectives include:

- Support local businesses impacted by the pandemic
- Ensure that the local economy rebounds from the pandemic as quickly as possible
- Connect local businesses to government
- Establish a unified voice to advocate in the community's best interests
- Ensure consumer confidence in local businesses as they reopen

"We want people to have confidence that they are safe when they visit and shop or dine at Champaign County businesses," CEP Director Marcia Bailey said. "Our local businesses are taking every precaution and are looking forward to having their businesses reopened and serving their customers."

Neer said that the Chamber will conduct a second Support Local apparel fundraiser. In the first, buyers designated businesses to receive a portion of each sale. In the second, money will be raised to support recovery efforts, Neer said.

In addition, the CEP has conducted a survey to determine the needs of businesses impacted by the pandemic and established, with the help of Champaign County commissioners, the COVID-19 Champaign County Small Business Emergency Grant Fund, which recently presented a total of \$54,265.15 to 24 businesses (See Pages 1 and 3).

For more information about the Economic Recovery Task Force, contact Sara Neer at director@champaignohio.com.



Barclay and Bailey Halls, on the Urbana University campus.

Petition Seeks Dialog About Closed Campus

After Franklin University announced in April it would close the Urbana University campus at the end of spring semester, Keith Monroe, who lives in Salem Township, launched a petition and Facebook group, This Place Matters—Urbana University 2020+.

His goal: to rally fellow alumni, students, current and former UU faculty and staff, and community members and leaders to work with Franklin University on the future of the 128-acre campus. Founded in 1850, UU became a branch campus of Franklin in 2014 and was a Champion level CEP partner.

The Champaign County Economic Recovery Task Force (article at left) has created a subcommittee to address the UU campus.

Monroe and his wife, Julia, are UU graduates, and their daughter was completing her junior year there. Besides his family's personal rela-

tionship with the university, he said, "I knew Urbana closing would have a massive domino effect throughout the community." A 2017 economic impact study by the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education found that the university contributed more than \$60 million a year to the local economy.

The petition states: "We ask that Franklin University work with the alumni, former and current faculty and staff of Urbana University, former and current students, local leaders, and the community to come up with viable alternatives to permanently closing the institution, that Urbana University's campus and material possessions be 'mothballed' from immediate plans of breaking them up during this process, and allow the alumni and these groups to present plans to Franklin University's Board of Trustees."

Ryan Berry Joins CEP Board

Ryan Berry of Berry Digital Solutions has been elected to serve as the IT/marketing representative on the CEP Board of Trustees. He will complete the unexpired term of Brett Spriggs of Bundy Baking Solutions, who resigned due to other obligations.

Berry has worked with the CEP through his digital marketing company, developing the CEP website, creating the ChampaignWorks.com job board and news site, and planning and implementing the CEP's monitor project, which broadcasts economic and workforce development news and job postings at high schools and other locations across the county.

He also partners with nonprofit organizations and has helped local entrepreneurs start companies in IT and cybersecurity, social media and



Ryan Berry

small business consulting. He also created a digital advertising brand, We Spend Local, which promotes supporting local business.

Interested in developing young talent in technology and entrepreneurship, he is developing a class to provide high school students real world experience.

"Through my experience with digital technology and entrepreneurship, I want to help the CEP create unique solutions for our community and develop additional funding opportunities to advance local economic development," Berry said.

Champaign County Small Business Grant Awardees

Row 1:
Paul's Catering
Metz Roofing
Family Country Cuts
Tom's Varsity Barbershop



Row 2:
Brugh's Auto & Tire, Inc.
The Vintage Traveler
Vape on the Square
Main Graphics



Row 3:
Oxner's General Store
Kaleidoscope
Theresa's It Figures!
East Lawn & Garden Center



Row 4:
Kim's Creative Designs
Pam's House of Beauty
Let's Eat Cake
Carriage House Salon



Row 5:
The Hair Closet
The Cutting Edge Hair Salon
Massage on the Square
Tommy Brooks Salon



Row 6:
LG Industrial Supply
The Half Day Café
The Hive
Jones Country Store



Incentives Yield Business Expansion, New Jobs and Payroll

The Champaign County Tax Incentive Review Council (TIRC) recommended in March to continue tax incentive agreements granted to five businesses – American Pan Company, White's Service Center, Phoenix BTS, LLC (Navistar ware-

house), Weidmann Electrical Technology and KTH Parts Industries – and recommended expiration of an agreement with Ultra-met Co.

All six companies followed through on their commitments to invest in

improvements and expansions of their operations and create and retain jobs. These agreements have resulted in \$32.2 million in investment, 180 new jobs, \$7.5 million in new payroll and \$175,850 in new paid taxes.

Agriculture: Champaign County's Top Industry

Agriculture has long been a key part of the Champaign County economy. "Together, agriculture (farmers and businesses that support farming) is easily the number one industry in the county," says CEP Board of Trustees Vice President Todd Michael, president of Michael Family Farms, which grows and markets potatoes.

Mark Westfall, the CEP Board of Trustees agriculture representative who grows row crops on 6,000 acres with Andy Heath, adds that agriculture accounts for 14 percent of all U.S. jobs. He adds, however, that the number of people in crop and livestock production is decreasing.

Less than 2% of working Americans work in production, adds Ed Funderburgh, the CEP Board's township trustee representative, whose family farm raises crops and finishes 20,000 head of hogs a year.

"Like a lot of industries, production ag has gotten more specialized. Equipment, seed and chemical improvements, technology and economy of scale have reduced the number of people needed," Westfall explains.

Justin Evans, Chamber of Commerce representative on the CEP Board, said he has been involved in farming since childhood and that 80% of his family's insurance business, Tri-County Insurance Services, LLC (founded by his father), involves agribusiness. He adds that Champaign County farmers produce "over \$130 million in cash receipts annually."

Agriculture is currently in an overproduction cycle, lowering prices for farm products, brought on by a trade war with China and the pandemic, Westfall says.

A Realistic Outlook

But he keeps a realistic, not pessimistic, outlook. Forty-six years in farming have taught Westfall, "Nothing cures low prices like low prices. If prices get cheap everybody uses more, and all of a sudden, demand goes up, and that takes care of overproduction. The market tends to work through all the variables and tries to balance."

Michael agrees. "I think agriculture will do just fine if allowed to do what we do best without too many burdensome regulations."



CEP Vice President Todd Michael (second from left) and family, of Michael Family Farms, (from left) son Kyle, wife Jill, and son-in-law and daughter, Drew and Kathy Sponheim.

Amanda Douridas, agriculture and natural resources educator for The Ohio State University Extension in Champaign County, said that as the number of farmers in production agriculture decreases, their average age increases – 57.2 years, according to the last agriculture census in 2017. "Farm transition is something that is important to sustain our farms."

One solution for farms without heirs interested in farming, she said, is establishing mentorships for young people who want to farm.

Michael, a third-generation farmer, said, "Agriculture requires lots of equipment and land, making it expensive to get started. Partnering with established farmers is one way a new farmer can get started."

While he was studying at Ohio State University, his family founded Michael Farms, which raises snap beans, sweet corn, cabbage and potatoes. In 2014 he started Michael Family Farms with his children, Kyle and Kathy, growing potatoes and partnering with other growers to market potatoes across the country.

The Role of Marketing

Another option for young people wanting to enter farming, says Westfall, is entering agriculture on a small scale and selling to local markets.

While the pandemic has contributed to an oversupply of dairy products and

disrupted large scale meat production, it's had a positive effect on local producers, including those who sell on the virtual farmers market, ChampaignLocallyGrown.com. "Their business has tripled with people staying closer to home and ready to buy local," Westfall said.

Douridas adds, "If local markets are available for farmers, they can diversify their operations and will not see the impact of low crop prices so severely. It enables the beginning farmer to start small and grow and it helps our community by providing jobs and spending dollars that stay in the community."

"Marketing has become as important as growing (to the success of a farmer)," Michael says. "Having a customer for what you grow before you plant is very important. The margins are small, so value added products and services is where you can be profitable."

Funderburgh adds that while hard work is still important in farming, "You must work smart and use all the new technologies out there."

Westfall says, "We have adapted to stay competitive, and in the process have become more environmentally friendly while producing a surplus."

Douridas backs him up with these stats:

- A 35% carbon footprint decrease in swine production since 1940
- A 16% carbon footprint drop in beef production since 1977
- The dairy industry operates with only 21% of the number of cows milked in 1944
- Soil erosion has decreased 47-67%

Looking to the Future

"Another challenge is farmland preservation (one focus of the newly updated county comprehensive plan), to make sure we are preserving our prime farm ground," Douridas says. Champaign County, she adds, lost 14,000 acres of farmland to development between 2008 and 2012. "But we only lost a couple thousand acres from 2012 to 2017." (That drop in farmland loss could, to some extent, be the result of stronger crop prices, she said.)

"I think we have a lot of potential in Champaign County. Land prices are still high, which is a challenge if you're buying land, but it helps farmers when leveraging for operating loans."



Photo taken in 2017 for Weidmann's fifth anniversary in Urbana.

Pandemic Has Minimal Impact on Weidmann Operations

Weidmann Electrical Technology, a Patron Level CEP investor, has experienced minimal impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, says General Manager Tom Amedro.

"The primary issue has been with childcare, as some employees have had to call off work, sporadically, due to not being able to secure daycare for their children." In some cases, he adds, employees have asked for modified schedules to accommodate their situations.

The manufacturer, located on West Court Street in Urbana, makes paper products for insulation in electrical transformers. Orders from North American customers have been mostly unaffected, as "only one or two customers delayed orders by a week or two to accommodate their staffing situations," Amedro said.

"However, our market in China

WEIDMANN

was slowed to a crawl in the early part of the year but has come back strong in the last two months." He adds, "Our smaller markets in South America are still having problems and have delayed orders."

All in all, Weidmann's operations have remained relatively unchanged, except for having to modify procedures and policies to comply with state mandates and CDC recommendations.

"We have always had an outstanding group of people, and in the current trying times they continue to step up, act responsibly towards one another to mitigate the spread, all while doing their jobs, satisfying our customers, and, as we say in our business of supplying insulation for transformers, 'help keep the lights on.'"

Saluting Heroes

Continued from Page 1



Memorial and how they reacted and continue to respond to the needs of our patients and communities."

Memorial Health teams focused on maintaining safe environments, developing COVID-19 protocols, keeping all areas of Memorial facilities clean and sanitized, and building and maintaining an inventory of personal protective equipment.

"We were proud to be one of the first to partner with Battelle to utilize their decontamination system for N-95 masks, allowing us to continue their vigilant protection of staff and patients," Fisher said.

"We are so grateful to our communities in Champaign and Union counties for following the guidance and doing all they can to flatten the curve. Because of that, our teams have been able to remain healthy and ready to serve as we expand back to the health and wellness services needed."

In addition, Memorial Health has used telehealth services, to help assure patient health and safety. "We stand ready to care for you and your family – whether your care is a mammogram or laboratory test, physical therapy or urgent care service."

Jamie Houseman, President of Mercy Health-Urbana Hospital, said, "We've really been blessed. We've seen very low numbers, compared to across the state." She said that the Urbana Hospital team prepared "for an influx of possibly very sick COVID patients, and we worked very hard to double our capacity."

The extra beds weren't needed, she's thankful. "All of our restrictions and people's fears have kept them out of the hospital."

Houseman adds, "Now more than ever, I have such respect for my team at the hospital."

She also appreciates the support of community leaders, the health district, the Emergency Management Agency and local EMS. And community members who sent cards and well wishes. "But that doesn't surprise me. That's Urbana."

In late May, Urbana Hospital reopened all services, with restrictions. This includes a newly expanded cardiac rehabilitation center, with twice the space, including a larger gym and areas for lifestyle, wellness, nutrition and cooking classes.

CEP Business Liaison Busy Planning for Summer, Fall Programming and Events

As students studied online from home this spring, business was anything but usual for CEP Business Liaison Ashley Cook, who partners with businesses and schools to introduce students to a wide range of local career opportunities.

Nevertheless, she carried on:

- Partnering with the Dayton Development Coalition in plans for a virtual job fair

tentatively scheduled for this summer

- Planning the 2020 Champaign County Design Challenge in which teams of Champaign County high school and middle school students will compete in October, coached by engineers from local companies and the City of Urbana. The annual challenge is organized by the

CEP, OhioMeansJobs and Ohio Hi-Point Career Center.

- Tentatively scheduling career programs for next school year
- Planning for the CEP/Manufacturing Council county fair booth
- Planning the YMCA Inventor's Workshop

camp for ages 6-12

And as the Ohio Hi-Point Career Center Supply Chain teacher at Urbana High School, she got her first taste of teaching via digital platforms. She guided her students in business planning projects and articles that explored how the COVID-19 pandemic would impact their business plans.

Cobblestone Hotel & Suites Now Welcoming Guests

Urbana's new Cobblestone Hotel & Suites opened June 12, as construction of the three-story, 54-room hotel, at 170 State Route 55, continued through the pandemic.

"The hotel looks great. We think it's been finished at a level higher than people are going to expect. They're going to be very pleased with the design, the comfort and quality level," said Mike Major, one of several local project investors. He and investor Terry Howell are project co-chairs.



Fireplace in Cobblestone lobby.

Major added that the hotel is "an important piece of the puzzle" in economic and community development. "We really needed a quality hotel, a place where families can stay, and for visiting businesspeople from across the country and around the world, so they don't have to stay in Springfield or Troy."

Community improvements like this, he hopes, will tip the scale to convince more families and commuting executives to live in Champaign County. "If they see the whole package, like the new schools and all the good restaurants here, our community becomes more and more appealing, to get away from the high taxes in Columbus."

While Urbana University's closing was disappointing,



The new Cobblestone Hotel & Suites at 170 State Route 55 welcomes visitors as they enter Urbana.

Major said, "when a door closes, a window opens — there may be an institution that wants to take that perfectly good campus and put it to good use."

Howell said, "The future is extremely bright. I believe that America and Champaign County will bounce back stronger, maybe in a slightly different form."

"We're excited and we anticipate success," Major said. "We already have weddings that are being booked in August, and Cobblestone is

getting a lot of calls about the hotel."

He added, "We're extremely appreciative of the city, county, the CEP, and everyone who has expressed support and been excited about this project. We couldn't be in this position without that assistance."

The hotel, which is ADA compliant, features extended stay suites, studio rooms, rooms for large families, fully handicap-accessible rooms and suites, an indoor swimming pool, conference room, outdoor patio with a gas firepit, a breakfast bar, workout room, and a wine and beer bar.

CEP Releases Comprehensive Housing Study

A recently completed housing market study commissioned by the CEP — Open for Business: Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis for Champaign County, Ohio — can be downloaded at cepohio.com/housing-study.html.

Conducted by the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC), the study provides an in-depth analysis of the market rate and affordable housing markets in Champaign County and its four largest communities: Urbana, Mechanicsburg, North Lewisburg and St. Paris.

"Although this study was conducted and completed just before the COVID-19 crisis began to grip Champaign County and the state, its findings and recommendations will be even more relevant after the crisis subsides and we return to business as usual," said CEP Director Marcia Bailey.

Bailey will soon be working with local governments to create a housing consortium — one of the recommendations of the study — to guide housing development now and in the future. A committee of local government and private sector leaders advised the GOPC.

Alison Goebel, GOPC executive director, said, "We were heartened by the recent project investments and downtown rehab activity in Urbana and the villages. More, now than ever, we believe that Champaign County has the community spirit and commitment needed to coordinate and leverage resources for new housing projects in the future."

Focus areas of the study include:

- Rally stakeholders and sustain commitment
- Prioritize downtowns and main streets

- Preserve farmland and concentrate housing development in or near corporation limits
- Open for business: ensure local governments are strong partners to development
- Protect existing stock and prevent it from declining
- Tap into creative, patient, financing strategies
- Maintain affordability

In addition to Major and Howell, local investors in the project include Dr. Steven Bohl, Kimberly Gordon, Jerry Gecowets, Bryan Thompson, John and Ceil Canestraro, Jason Kile, and Todd Michael. Brian Woganese and Jeremy Griesbach of Cobblestone administration also have invested in the project.

Reservations may be made at urbana@staycobblestone.com or by calling 888-693-8262.

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