

Business Amid COVID: CEP Board Members Share Insights

Several CEP board members know firsthand the challenges of small business, including running one in a pandemic. They share their insights here.

Pat Thackery, leisure/entertainment CEP Board rep, owns Café Paradiso and Carmazzi's Candy & General Store in Urbana with his wife, Patsy. Business has

Businesses thankful for CEP COVID grants. See Page 2.

been good for both enterprises, but it's been a learning process to serve customers amid COVID-19.

After the Café reopened, initially for dine at home service only, they had to adjust the dine at home

menu to include selections that could hold their quality to customers' homes.

Pat said they chose to take dine at home orders over the phone – not online – to retain personal customer service.

Now that limited dine-in service is available, too, business has shifted from about 60% dine at home to 60-70% dine in. "People are feeling more comfortable. Our protocols are better than they need to be (as confirmed by the Health District)," Pat says.



Pat and Patsy Thackery, in front of Café Paradiso and soon-to-be In Good Taste Fresh Market, next door.

While he's hopeful, Pat

Continued on Page 2

Rittal Business Booming With Growing IT Demand

As businesses and their employees depend on video conferencing platforms to stay connected during the pandemic, business is booming at the Rittal North America facility in Urbana.

Rittal, an Advocate Level investor in the CEP, is recognized as an essential manufacturer of IT enclosures, racks and accessories, produced in three shifts by 400 of the Urbana facility's 500+ workforce. To keep up with growing demand, Rittal is recruiting 40 more assemblers, machine operators and welders, says Neil Love, Vice President of Opera-

tions and Supply Chain.

"We've seen a fantastic growth in IT infrastructure for critical customers including major West Coast tech firms," he says. Rittal is the single-source supplier for one of these companies and one of two enclosure suppliers for another.

Rittal recently invested more than \$3 million in state-of-the-art equipment to form metal for IT enclosures.

The company also is investing in current

Continued on Page 4



Rittal's new punching center used to help meet its growing demand for IT enclosures.

KTH Keeping Busy – And Hiring

KTH Parts Industries, Inc., a Champion Level CEP investor, is running at full production, with many Saturdays scheduled for the remainder of this year, thanks to "robust high sales demands" in the automotive sector, reports Chris Millice, KTH's Senior Vice President of General Administration.



days, hosting open interviews to fill 40 to 50 open production positions. "The availability of candidates to fill these positions is very limited," says Millice. "We have been advertising these positions by radio, social media and news publications."

While keeping up with demand, KTH also has been closely following CDC guidelines to

Continued on Page 4

Champaign County's largest employer, KTH is one of the largest Tier 1 automotive suppliers in the U.S., employing more than 1,100 associates in a 1.068-million-square-foot complex west of St. Paris. KTH makes underbody structural frame components for cars, with Honda its top customer.

KTH also has been busy on Sun-

Inside

CEP Developments

Businesses Grateful for Grants	2
Business Liaison Shares Plans	3
Job Site Growing	3
CEP Facilitates Building Sale	3
Housing Consortium Starts	4

Small Businesses Thankful for Emergency Grant

The CEP has surveyed the 24 small businesses granted in May a total of \$54,265.15 through the COVID-19 Champaign County Small Business Emergency Grant Fund.

All reported that the grant, which the CEP established with support of the Champaign County Board of Commissioners, has helped them reopen and recover from losses in the pandemic.

One grantee replied, "Yes, I would not have been able to reopen." Recipients used their grants for supplies, rent, utilities, payroll, insurance, bridge funding and "rebuilding website for future sales."

Most reported increased business. One reported, "Customers seem to be making a special effort to shop locally." Others commented:

- "I have gained some new clients and have been told they appreciate the cleanliness."
- "All clients have come back &

- a few extra."
- "Somewhat – ticking up slowly."

Most of the businesses reported bringing all employees back to work, while some are still at reduced workforce.

To help in their recovery and build consumer confidence the businesses reported using social media, partnerships with other community organizations, Small Business Development Center resources, marketing, building an online store, gift certificates and revising their business plan.

One grant recipient has already repaid the CEP \$1,000. The fund's Pay It Forward provision suggests that recipients repay grants when they get back on their feet. Repayments are going into a fund for future small business needs.

Contact CEP Director Marcia Bailey if your small business (50 or fewer employees) is struggling due to the pandemic: marcia@cepohio.com or 937-653-7200.



Businesses Receive PPE Kits

CEP Director Marcia Bailey presents Tom Winnenberg, Operations Manager of Sutphen Corporation, one of many PPE Safety Toolkits that the Dayton Development Coalition gave to the CEP to distribute to local small businesses. JobsOhio donated the kits for businesses across the state. They contain 100 3-ply masks, 10 KN-95 masks and a 24-ounce bottle of hand sanitizer. The CEP still has a few of the kits. If your business needs one, contact the CEP at info@cepohio.com or 937-653-7200.

CEP Board Members Share Businesses' Experiences During Pandemic

Continued from Page 1

said he's also concerned about the future of government's support of small business. "Are things going to change in November?"

Yet, the Thackerys recently bought the building next door to the Café, 12 Monument Square. Amy Forrest, owner of In Good Taste Catering in Mechanicsburg, will open a new business, In Good Taste Fresh Market, on the first floor.

The Fresh Market will carry Champaign County and central Ohio food products, take home dinners, fresh salads, dinner ingredient packages, charcuterie trays and gourmet gift baskets.

Ryan Berry, the IT/marketing CEP Board rep, said, "Connecting to our community online has never been more important." His company, Berry Digital Solutions, provides digital marketing services for small businesses, including website development and social media.

His team has helped clients "pivot quickly and adjust to the daily changes caused by COVID-19. We are spending every day creating new ways to connect our community digitally."

Accustomed to meeting online before the pandemic, the Berry Digital team has been guiding clients and community leaders to use web conference software.

Ethan Snyder, small business CEP Board rep, says that his business, Old Souls Farms, has had to be flexible. Old Souls grows and markets micro-greens, specialty greens, herbs and head lettuce near St. Paris.

"The pandemic caused a massive marketplace shift for us. Some customers completely dried up and closed their doors. Other customers' volumes doubled almost overnight. Adjusting for these shifts has been difficult, but manageable."

Before the pandemic Old Souls' market mix was evenly split among industrial, food service and retail customers. "Now the sales mix is almost entirely retail." He's hopeful the traditional blend will return.

Wearing PPE is a standard part of food production, but getting those supplies became challenging during the pandemic.

Snyder adds, "We were fortunate to be able to take part in the PPP loan. As a result, we protected roughly 15 jobs at full-time hours."

Dana Zook, legal CEP Board rep, is a partner of Wagner, Maurice, Davidson & Zook Co., LPA, in Urbana. Zook said that the firm stayed open throughout the pandemic as an essential business

that performs title work for lenders.

"Although we did have clients cancel appointments due to the virus, we were very busy with the real estate side, as people wanted to buy or refinance with lower interest rates."

For a time, limited hours in the courts and county offices made completing legal work difficult. "Particularly because the majority of court and county records in Champaign County are not available online," Zook said.

Dana Booghier, building and zoning CEP Board rep, is director of Champaign County Building Regulations. In this role he has helped local businesses comply with state orders limiting occupancy during the pandemic.

The Champaign County commissioners granted him authority to issue business-occupancy certificates, at no cost, to help them determine the number of people permitted in their buildings under the limitations. He has issued 13 certificates.

The commissioners also allowed him to keep normal operating hours and services. He's stayed busy issuing building permits and conducting building inspections, and says, "We're slightly ahead of last year in residential and commercial development (despite the pandemic)."



Y Inventors Camp

Children work on a project at the annual Inventors Camp at the Champaign Family YMCA. Employees of Weidmann Electrical Technology, Rittal, Inc., KTH Parts Industries and ORBIS led the campers in hands-on projects and shared their experiences in manufacturing.

Business Liaison Outlines Plans

CEP Business Liaison Ashley Cook and her husband, Ray, have had an eventful summer, with the July 24 birth of their son, Baylor.

At the end of her maternity leave, on October 1, Cook will return to work for the CEP and as Ohio Hi-Point Career Center supply chain instructor at Urbana High School.

As CEP Business Liaison she builds partnerships between local high schools and manufacturers and health care businesses to connect students to nearby career opportunities.

Cook plans to work around COVID-19 restrictions by setting up virtual and one-on-one meetings between students and business leaders. She also wants to schedule business tours for small groups of students, as businesses will allow, and will continue developing student internships.

She is moving ahead with plans for the annual Design Challenge for county middle and high school students, who will be mentored by local engineers. In September, Cook will host a planning meeting with the schools. Details about the challenge will be released to the schools on October 1.

CEP Facilitates Sale of Building

A building that's been vacant since the early 2000s in downtown Mechanicsburg, at 2-4 Main St., is being returned to productive residential and business use, thanks to a partnership of the CEP and Village of Mechanicsburg.

The village obtained the building – an abandoned, tax delinquent property – through the legal process of expedited foreclosure. Through state law, the CEP – as a community improvement corporation – acted as an agent for the village to help find a buyer to return the building to constructive use for the community.

The Mechanicsburg Village Council approved the sale to Ben Layne, the village's mayor, who bought the building as a private citizen. He is the only person to bid on the building, which CEP Director Marcia Bailey showed to 15 individuals the past two years.

Layne will renovate the upstairs for his family's residence and the downstairs for commercial use. The downstairs will include two retail units and space at the rear of the building for a laundromat. "I have spoken to someone who may be interested in leasing one of the retail units already," he said.

Village Administrator April Huggins Davis is grateful for the CEP's help. "The Village will be happy to see this property back on the tax books, occupied, and hopefully another business downtown."

Schools Following Common Reopening Plan

Champaign County schools adopted a common plan for reopening for the 2020-21 school year.

To stay on top of changes in pandemic conditions, the superintendents are meeting weekly, says Dr. Dan Kaffenbarger, superintendent of the Madison-Champaign Educational Service Center and education representative on the CEP Board of Trustees.

"The superintendents are trying to hit an ever-shifting target," he said. So long as Champaign County is at Level 1 (yellow) or Level 2 (orange) of Ohio's Public Health Advisory Alert System, all county schools will be open for face-to-face classroom instruction, while giving par-



Job Postings Still Going Strong on Champaign Works

Champaign Works, a job posting and community news website launched last fall with the CEP's support, continues to see an increase in job postings, even during the pandemic, the site's webmaster, Staci Wisma, reports.

The Champaign Works job board has been the second most visited page since the start of the pandemic.

"We've had over 600 visits to the job board with more than half of those since the start of July," Wisma said. That compares to more than 1,000 total site visits in the past 30 days.

"We have received a lot of positive feedback from employers that they are receiving applications and do believe it's beneficial to post on Champaign Works," Wisma said.

The site, developed by Berry Digital Solutions, also is seeing an increase in news submissions from local organizations. Schools, civic groups, businesses and others are encouraged to submit news at champaignworks.com/share.html. And businesses are encouraged to promote special events, sales, products and menus.

ents the option to elect online learning for their children.

If the county rises to Level 3 (red), schools would shift to a hybrid approach of reduced capacity face-to-face learning and remote learning. Level 4 (purple) would require remote learning for all.

Under current state guidelines, teachers, staff and students will be required to wear face coverings at school.

While all local districts will follow the general principles of the common reopening agreement, each is customizing it to fit the specifics of their facilities and population. Details are available on each district's website.

Rittal Invests in Future

Continued from Page 1

and future workforce needs, Love said. Here are three examples:

Apprenticeships

Rittal, partnering with ApprenticeOhio and Clark State Community College, has three four-year apprentices – one in industrial engineering and two in maintenance engineering.

David Vanderveen, an assembler at Rittal for six years, is the industrial engineering apprentice. He was looking into returning to school for engineering when Rittal announced the apprenticeship. Love says about Vanderveen: “He’s one of those hidden gems you have in your organization. He’s growing very quickly and showing great potential in his apprenticeship.”

Love adds, “Increasingly there is a drive for apprenticeships, as we have less people with technical backgrounds in the workplace. It’s a great way to grow our capability.” And it provides the Rittal apprentices the chance to advance their careers while being paid and avoiding debt from education.

TAC Partnership

TAC (The Abilities Connection), which serves and employs people with developmental or physical disabilities, has placed five associates who support Rittal’s industrial engineering team. They cut gaskets for IT racks and complete other tasks as needed.

Claus Wolf, Rittal’s Sourcing and Procurement Manager, said that the partnership has “helped us as a business when hiring for open positions is challenging. And it’s helped us to connect with the wider community and



David Vanderveen

to provide purposeful work” for TAC associates.

UD Partnership

A team of business undergraduates completed their senior capstone project at Rittal, for which they won the University of Dayton’s 2020 Outstanding Operations Senior Team of the Year Award.

Wolf said he gave the team free rein to investigate ways to reorganize Rittal’s wood-based product supply chain, including pallets. “They found a vendor that saved us more than \$100,000. They found a solution that we couldn’t, even when we tried several times,” Wolf said. Rittal plans to continue the partnership with an eye on expanding its talent pool.

KTH Needing to Hire More Production Associates

Continued from Page 1

protect its workforce, Millice said. This includes:

- Facial coverings, sanitizing and social distancing
- Moving some workstations or placing barriers between workstations to ensure proper distancing
- Requiring face shields and masks for associates who work in processes where social distancing cannot be accommodated
- Hiring personnel whose full-time job is to wipe down high-traffic areas several times a day

Housing Consortium Begins Work

The newly formed Champaign County Housing Consortium has begun meeting to review recommendations made in the Champaign County Housing Market Study, conducted by the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC), to guide Champaign County leaders on local housing needs.

The consortium developed this vision statement: *Champaign County is a live, work and play community that offers residents a modern, diverse lifestyle in charming villages and the City of Urbana. Our community locations, coupled with our friendly hometown environment, are assets for residents of all ages.*

Consortium members are: John Brown, Kerry Brugger, Tim Cassady, Brenda Cook, Doug Crabill, April Huggins Davis, Gene Fields, Lee Henderson, Terry Howell, Dusty Hurst, Todd Michael, Spencer Mitchell, Jamon Sellman, Amber Smith, Andy Yoder and Carolyn Young. Others will be invited to serve on committees.

The consortium formed subcommittees to focus on:

Products – to help determine types of housing needed and ensure affordability

Infrastructure – to review ordinances, zoning, lot size requirements, etc.

Incentives – to inform decision-making about incentives to support housing development and to examine how public financing could help provide desired housing types

Marketing – to attract developers and calculate their return on investments

The subcommittees have begun meeting, and the next full consortium meeting, by Zoom, is scheduled for September 16.

Consortium priorities include:

- Prioritize downtown and main street development.
- Use economic development tools established by local government.
- Protect existing housing stock and prevent decline.
- Develop creative financing strategies to promote development.

CEP Director Marcia Bailey added that the housing market study and the Champaign County Comprehensive Plan recommend encouraging development in or near incorporated areas to preserve the county’s agricultural environment.

Visit CEPOhio.com to review the complete study.

- Emphasizing that associates stay home when they are not feeling well
- Restricting all non-essential visitors from entering the plant

“At KTH we pride ourselves on our dedicated workforce, which is one of the best in the industry, as we work through labor demand constraints and follow COVID safe practices,” Millice says.

Contact Us

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