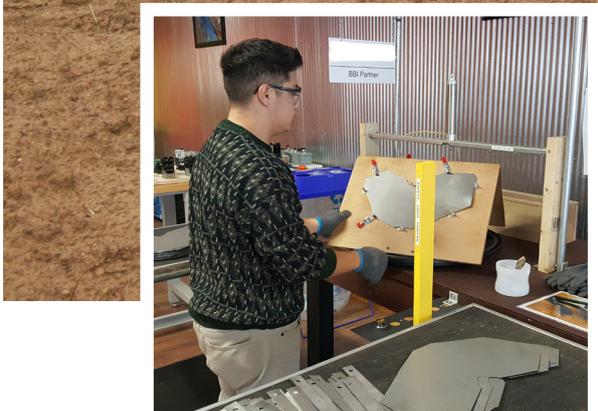
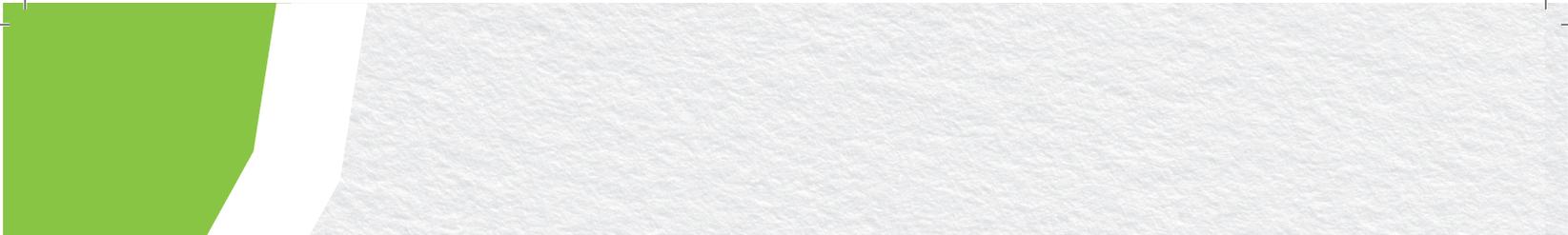


# GROW ASHLAND

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

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# A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT to Address WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

**GROW  ASHLAND**  
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*The retirement of the baby boomer generation is causing a crisis in the available labor pool combined with a loss of knowledge and experience in the workforce. This has created many challenges for a variety of industries in the United States. The Grow Ashland Economic Development office partners with numerous organizations in the Ashland, Ohio area to share ideas and resources for innovative ways to attract, retain, and train the workforce required to support local business.*

Written by Jen Hocken

“We realize that the workforce issues aren’t just an Ashland County challenge, they’re regional and national as well,” said Ashland County Commissioner and Grow Ashland Economic Development Board President Mike Welch. “We have conversations with business owners every day that express to us their concerns with the existing labor pool. We understand and know their frustrations, but don’t know what the answer should be,” commented Commission President Denny Bittle.

One such resource, the employer-led North Central Workforce Alliance (NCWA), works to educate teachers and students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades about the opportunities in manufacturing and other industries in the region. The NCWA is based at the Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center and has established programs such as “Girls with Goggles” and “Guys with Gloves” that encourage students to pursue careers in industries that need a larger labor pool.

The “Girls with Goggles” event brings together approximately six hundred female students in the sixth grade to learn about male-dominated industries in a safe, fun environment. Robotics, manufacturing, construction, and automotive ►►



“By encouraging and piquing the interest of students at a younger age, the county is hoping to see the workforce become better-rounded.”



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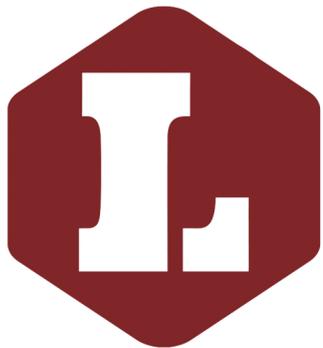
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**Lippert Enterprises, Inc.** extends the life of inventory. This is achieved by offering flexible solutions to our partner networks. Lippert creates a sustainable future for our customers, employees, community and shareholders through collaboration, active leadership, continuous improvement and the highest standards of integrity.



**Q. For readers who may not know who Lippert Enterprises is, can you tell us about the company?**

A. Lippert is the Global Leader in Parts Supply Chain Solutions and we have been providing Flexible Inventory Solutions to companies since 1976. We have over 585,000 square feet of warehouse space and we purchase slow-moving and obsolete inventory, so companies can free up capital, improve cash flow, lower operating costs, free up warehouse space, reduce taxes, and support customers who have older equipment.

**Q. Are you still hiring?**

A. Yes! We have a number of high-quality, well-paying jobs available from entry level to career professional positions. Applicants can submit resumes to [HumanResources@lippert.us.com](mailto:HumanResources@lippert.us.com).

**Q. For potential candidates, what makes Lippert Enterprises such a special place to work?**

A. Our employees represent our most valuable assets, and many have been here for several decades! All employees are entrepreneurs and have the ability to make improvements that will raise customer satisfaction.

**Q. Can you speak more about Lippert Enterprises' involvement in the community?**

A. Many of our employees are volunteering their services throughout the community and we work with Ashland University's Intern program, giving college students a chance to gain real-world experience before they graduate. Lippert is committed to making our community a better place. As such, we are an active supporter of The United Way. Lippert also supports those who have given to defend our freedom by sponsoring the Ashland Military Support Group, which has been sending packages to deployed US Military Troops for many years.

**Q. What does the future hold for Lippert Enterprises?**

A. We are growing every year by offering more inventory solutions to our customers including 3PL services, Vendor Managed Inventory, Kitting, Packaging, Dealer Returns, Legacy Parts Management, 3D Additive Manufacturing, and Government Sales. We have been one of the best places to work in the area and we are very proud of the employees that have grown with us!

are some of the trades in which these students receive hands-on experience and explore opportunities. The “Guys with Gloves” program invites sixth-grade male students to delve further into the world of technical education and other technology-related careers. By encouraging and piquing the interest of students at a younger age, the county is hoping to see the workforce become better-rounded.

The Transformation Network assists with staffing local businesses but is not considered a staffing agency. It works with the companies in Ashland to create training programs tailored to the operation of a specific company, ensuring that the employees are fully versed in the functions they will be performing on the floor. The organization also finds innovative methods to retain the employees. Some companies are too focused on attracting new employees by offering special benefits that then lose current employees that feel underappreciated.

A third organization that helps support local businesses is the Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center where Assistant Director Bill Mellick provides leadership training. Whether a company has challenges with recruiting, selection, retention, or culture, the initial problem lies with the leadership. “Nine times out of ten, it is not because of money, and it’s not because of benefits. Employees are leaving because of the leadership and the lack of management,” says Mellick.

Mellick meets with various companies to discuss the specific challenges and develops a tailored solution centered on leadership training. The leadership issues are often created as a result of floor employees with long tenure getting promoted to positions for which they have not been properly trained. “Sacrificing time to train leaders how to actually be leaders is, very often, not in the budget of time or money. Yet for those organizations that spend that time and money, they have less of the issues and are looking three years out instead of being two years behind,” says Mellick.

“We support the efforts of the NCWA, Transformation Network, and the Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center as they work to come up with opportunities for area manufacturers and businesses. It’s not an easy task, but we know these folks will be the ones to come up with answers,” said Commissioner Jim Justice.

Ashland is collaborating with these three great organizations to improve workforce development in the county. Local businesses can use the service that applies best to them or



utilize a combination of all three, as these organizations can assist any industry in the area. “We don’t believe that there is a ‘solution’ to the workforce problem, but we have come up with several options that can assist in being the answer for our local employers,” stated Kathy Goon, Executive Director for Grow Ashland Economic Development and the Mohican Area Growth Foundation.

Ashland County is working regionally with Richland County and Crawford County on a wage and benefit survey of the manufacturing companies in the region. The survey will collect data about manufacturing benefits, the average pay, and the skill level of employees, which will allow the economic development offices to inform potential new businesses about the state of the county’s workforce.

Grow Ashland Economic Development believes that there are untapped possible employees who could support its workforce numbers. While other organizations tend to focus on the obvious groups who tend to be unemployable or are the largest group to employ, Grow Ashland has identified at least four unique sectors of the population, in the community, as potential employees.

## *“Capital investment in Ashland County is on the rise.”*

In the last year, Ashland County has supported significant new business development and the expansion of existing businesses. It encountered its largest project to date: a \$20,740,000 COMTEX (Central Ohio Medical Textiles) commercial laundry facility, which will initially employ 75 people, to be increased to upwards of 100 in the next five to ten years. The new development will be a great asset to the community. One or two of the unique sectors of the Ashland population may find gainful employment in the culture created by COMTEX. Ashland was successful in bringing the company to town based on similar core values and principles seen in the community.

Capital investment in Ashland County is on the rise. It has increased from \$566,000 in 2013 to over \$80,000,000 in 2018. As Ashland County continues to develop, 2019 is poised for its best year yet for growth.

“As we focus on making the City of Ashland one of the most livable cities in the nation,” said Mayor Matt Miller, “we realize that in order for that to happen, we need to attract more people to our community.”



“It’s our location; it’s our offerings, and it’s our work with entrepreneurs,” says Goon. “Our downtown has a big revitalization going on; our office spearheaded what they call a ‘Revitalization District’ and a ‘Community Entertainment District’ in two different sections of the City of Ashland.” These new districts led to fifteen additional liquor licenses for restaurants in each section. The condition is that 75 percent of the profits have to be from food, and only 25 percent of the profits derived from alcohol.

Grow Ashland also created a ‘Revitalization District’ in the Village of Loudonville in order to spur growth in the southern portion of the county. “When we were approached by economic development to create a district in our downtown, we jumped at the chance. Our village has been out of liquor licenses for quite some time. Now we have another tool for us to be able to attract new restaurants to the area,” stated Mayor Steve Stricklen.

Grow Ashland works with innovative organizations that serve the county to provide a unified, powerful team that can find solutions for the local educational and workforce development needs. “We align ourselves with county partners to help bring forth the programs that will help the community and will help with economic development, which is our ultimate goal,” says Goon. ■



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