

## TOP MICROS OF 2018

From Site Selection magazine, *March 2019*

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by GARY DAUGHTERS

### Ohio's winning ways stem from collaboration and commitment to community.

Micropolitan is a fancy word for a small town. The U.S. Census Bureau provides an exhaustive definition, but when it comes down to it, a micropolitan statistical area (MSA) is a geographic region of one or more counties with one city of 10,000 to 50,000 people. Micropolitans are sprinkled throughout the state of Ohio, and some are right out of a work by Norman Rockwell.

Charming, yes. Sleepy, no. Not in Ohio, as emphatically shown in Site Selection's ranking of Top Micropolitans for 2018. In 2018, as in the three previous years, Ohio produced more Top 100 micropolitans —17— than any other state. Four Ohio micropolitans — Findlay, Wooster, Ashland and Defiance — made the Top 10. Perhaps most impressive of all, micropolitan Ohio's 109 qualifying investments dwarfed those of second-place Kentucky, which totaled 40. The remainder of the Top 10 include Georgia, North Carolina, Nebraska, Texas, Tennessee, Indiana, Alabama and Pennsylvania.





*"The quality of life is a true selling point." Second-ranked Wooster gathers for the holidays.*

*Photo courtesy of Wayne Economic Development Council*

## No. 1: Findlay

The best athletes work like mad to remain at the tops of their games. The best teams play through injuries and put individual egos aside.

So it is with Findlay, which might be seen as the concentrated essence of small town Ohio. With 23 qualifying investments, Findlay, an hour south of Toledo, is Site Selection's top micropolitan for the fifth straight year. It's a record of dominance that has helped propel the town of 41,000 residents to superstar status, so much so that Tim Mayle, director of Findlay-Hancock County Economic Development, is forever being asked to explain the "Findlay Formula."

### Findlay, Ohio Top Projects by Capital Investment

Company	City	New/ Expansion	\$USM	Jobs
Home Depot Rapid Deployment Center	Van Buren	E	25	
MITEC Powertrain	Findlay	E	20	77
Nissin Brake Ohio	Findlay	E	15	
Whirlpool Corp.	Findlay	E	13	260

“What sets Findlay apart,” Mayle tells Site Selection, “is our ability to collaborate within the community to solve problems. We have the ability in Findlay to pull everybody together.”

And that includes the business community.

“I’ve seen how people work together to truly try to find the ideal ‘win-win’ for Findlay,” says Dale Laws, vice president of manufacturing operations for Whirlpool, one of Findlay’s top employers. “It’s been that mindset that has contributed to the great success that Findlay has seen.”

Whirlpool, which last year plowed another \$13 million into its Findlay dishwasher plant, is one of the town’s “Big Three” of repeat investors, which also includes Marathon Petroleum and Cooper Tire and Rubber Company. Marathon and Cooper deploy their top brains to Findlay, as each has its headquarters there.

Findlay also brings a powerful bench to the game, especially in logistics and the automotive industry. Findlay’s 2018 investors include MITEC Powertrain (\$20 million), Freudenberg (\$3.7 million), Nissin Brake (\$15 million), Home Depot Rapid Deployment Center (\$25 million), Ohio Logistics (\$7 million) and Best Buy Warehousing Logistics (\$2 million).

## 2018 Top States

### By Most Top Micropolitan Areas

Rank	State	Count	Projects
1	Ohio	18	109
T2	Kentucky	10	40
T2	Georgia	10	31
4	North Carolina	8	39
5	Nebraska	7	23
T6	Texas	6	14
T6	Tennessee	6	15
T6	Indiana	6	19
T6	Alabama	6	23
10	Pennsylvania	5	14

In keeping with the notion that you’re either getting better or you’re getting worse, the past year ushered in three transformative changes to Findlay’s business community:

- In April, Marathon announced the \$23-billion purchase of its rival, Andeavor, thus creating the nation’s largest independent U.S. refiner by capacity. Marathon CEO Gary Heminger, a Findlay native, will run the combined company.



"We now have 16 refineries, 4,000 convenience stores, 8,500 Marathon-branded locations, 10,000 miles of pipeline and one of the biggest inland barge systems in the country," Heminger tells Site Selection.

Several hundred people, representing some of Andeavor's top talent, will be relocating to Findlay, Marathon's home for 130 years.

"We could go anywhere with our headquarters," says Heminger, "I've had offers from big cities around the country. But you can't replace the knowledge, experience and tremendous work ethic that the people of northwest Ohio bring to the table."

- With one year left on her second four-year term, Findlay Mayor Lydia Mihalik was tapped to lead the Ohio Development Services Agency by newly elected Governor Mike DeWine. Mihalik spearheaded Findlay's rise to the top of Site Selection's annual rankings. She chuckles when asked if she'll employ the Findlay Formula throughout small-town Ohio.

"What's happening in Ashland is different from Defiance. What's happening in Findlay is different from Wooster," she says. "Every community has its different areas of uniqueness. But, really, what stands out is that midwestern pride and work ethic. These communities are oriented toward solutions."

- In October, officials from Findlay and Hancock County launched the first phase of a long-awaited project to stem the city's flooding problem. Findlay's history of flooding dates back to 1913, and the Blanchard River and its tributaries overflowed most recently two years ago. Mayle says the issue spooked at least one company that was considering Findlay for its headquarters.

"They said 'absolutely not. We're not coming until you take care of flooding.' "

The initial phase of flood mitigation, paid for in part by a flood tax the town enacted, is to widen the Blanchard along a half-mile stretch just north of the city's center.

"This has been 100 years in the making," says Mayle. "We all worked together, and that means the city, the county, the agricultural community and the business community."

He says Findlay hopes to leverage flood mitigation for other benefits.

"How do we create areas along the river for people to gather? How do we tie in bike paths, amphitheaters? The Findlay Formula isn't just economic development, it's our entire community, and that's ultimately what makes us successful."

## **No. 2: Wooster**

In 1897, Jerome Monroe Smucker began selling apple butter from a horse-drawn buggy in Orrville, Ohio, on the outskirts of Wooster. Today, the J.M. Smucker company is synonymous with fruit spreads and peanut butter, and a market leader in shortening and oils, ice cream toppings and beverages. Smucker still makes apple butter, too, and with 25 manufacturing operations spread across the United States, the company enjoyed 2018 net sales of \$7.3 billion. It still calls the Wooster region home.

"Orrville is home to our corporate headquarters and a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility," says Ray Hancart, chief of corporate communications. "Wayne County has contributed to our success in many ways, but one of the principal contributions is the quality of life the area offers our employees. The quality of life in Wayne is a true selling point."

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# Wooster, Ohio

## Top Projects by Capital Investment

Company	City	New/ Expansion	\$USM	Jobs
Morgan Corp.	Orrville	N	23	139
Xcess Limited	Wooster	E	7	125
Fort Wayne Metals	Wooster	E	4	42
Prentke Romich Corp.	Wooster	E	4	30
Western Reserve Group	Wooster	E	4	

Wooster, the Wayne County seat, climbs to second in Site Selection's new ranking after third-place showings the previous two years. Its 17 qualifying projects represent capital investments totaling \$57.3 million, including \$42.2 million that went toward manufacturing.

"This is a great honor," says Tom Pukys of Wooster's climb in the rankings. Pukys, president of the Wayne Economic Development Council, says local businesses "are really focused on economic development."

Pukys describes Smucker, which employs 1,700 workers in corporate and 300 in manufacturing, as one of two anchors of the local economy. The other is Schaeffler, the Germany-based automotive supplier that, like Smucker, employs about 2,000 workers.

"Schaeffler's manufacturing success story in Wooster began with just six employees assembling clutches for the Plymouth Horizon/Dodge Omni compact cars," the company says in a statement. "Schaeffler has expanded the Wooster manufacturing campus 20 times, growing from 27,000 sq. ft. (2,508 sq. m.) to over 800,000 sq. ft. (74,322 sq. m.). What began as a team of six hardworking clutch assemblers has evolved into a peerless team of approximately 2,000 highly skilled employees driven by the electrification of the automotive powertrain and a dedication to help shape the future of mobility."

After a mammoth expansion in 2017 totaling \$60 million, Schaeffler is growing again. In October, the company announced a \$2.5-million plan to add nearly 21,000 sq. ft. (1,950 sq. m.) to its Wooster facility and to hire an additional 300 workers.

"In addition to serving as the company's global center of competence for its torque converter product line, the Wooster site is the leading facility for the development and production of Schaeffler's E-Mobility solutions in the United States," the company says.

Wooster's top project of 2018 was a \$23-million investment by Morgan Corporation, a Georgia-based company that calls itself North America's largest manufacturer of medium-duty truck bodies. After a lengthy site search throughout the Midwest, Morgan obtained a lease on a 340,000-sq.-ft. (31,587-sq.-m.) building formerly owned by JLG, a maker of aerial platforms. Morgan plans to hire about 140 workers, with full production to launch in early 2019.

### Tied for No. 5: Ashland



There's nothing like the presence of a brewpub to indicate economic fermentation in a small-town economy. Doug Reynolds has seen it, himself, since he and his wife, Anna, opened Uniontown Brewing Co. in downtown Ashland, Ohio, in December of 2017.

"A year before we opened, 75 percent of the downtown buildings were leased," Reynolds tells Site Selection. "As of today, that's up to about 95 percent. Six buildings have sold since we opened. It's just a really good vibe downtown now."

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## Ashland, Ohio

### Top Projects by Capital Investment

Company	City	New/ Expansion	\$USM	Jobs
Central Ohio Medical Textiles	Ashland	N	20	100
Eco-Flo Products	Ashland	E	13	
TWG Development	Ashland	N	9	
Brethren Care	Ashland	E	5	
Stone Creek Dental	Ashland	E	3	

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"The word that pops out is 'catalyst,' " says Reynolds, an Ashland native. "The mayor comes in and talks to us about being at the forefront of a movement. It's awesome to hear those words."

"It's amazing to see," says Anna.

Uniontown, in 2018, expanded its payroll by 35 workers, one of 11 qualifying investments in the Ashland micropolitan that pushed the perennial Top 10 finisher from a seventh-place tie in 2017 into a tie for fifth place in Site Selection's new rankings.

The roots of this diversifying local economy, not surprisingly, lie in manufacturing, says Kathy Goon, executive director of Ashland Area Economic Development. The county's 96 manufacturers include Pioneer National Latex, founded in Ashland in 1939. The world's most prolific latex balloon maker, Pioneer currently employs 111 workers, 20 percent of whom have been there longer than 30 years.

"Our town," says Goon, "was built on latex balloons."

With an output of 2.5 million balloons a day, Pioneer broke ground in June on a warehouse expansion for which it received a 50-percent reduction in property taxes for 10 years.

Other repeat investors include Perio, maker of Barbasol shaving cream, every can of which is produced in Ashland; Mansfield Plumbing Products; and Step2, which calls itself the country's largest manufacturer of preschool and toddler toys. Goon says the community's business recruitment strategy is built around achieving proper scale.

"Not that we wouldn't embrace Amazon or another bigger company," she says, "but we embrace the ones that are 100 to 150 employees. That's our sweet spot, because we can get them here, we can give them what they need and if they happen to fail or leave, it's not going to devastate the community."

COMTEX, a high-tech launderer that services hospitals, will invest \$41.2 million and expects to employ 75 workers at its 75,000-sq.-ft. (6,968-sq.-m.) laundry facility. Myles Noel, COMTEX CEO, tells Site Selection that Ashland stood out among the company's other suitors.

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## Top 10 Micropolitan Projects By Capital Investment

Company	City	State	New/ Expansion	\$USM	Jobs
Big River Steel LLC	Osceola	AR	E	1,200	500
International Paper Co.	Selma	AL	E	553	
Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations	Wilson	NC	E	266	
Agropur Coopérative	Lake Norden	SD	E	250	125
Viega	McPherson	KS	N	210	
Denso Corp.	Athens	TN	E	190	320
Whole Stone Farms	Fremont	NE	E	180	
Frito-Lay	Frankfort	IN	E	159	50
Pfizer	McPherson	KS	E	156	325
Portobello America	Baxter	TN	N	150	220

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"We would go to other locations and be met by an individual or a realtor or a developer. When we went to Ashland," Noel says, "we were met by a team, including an executive of Grow Ashland, the people responsible at the political level, the people responsible at the operational level, the chief engineer, the whole team.

"We were overwhelmed by the reception. Overwhelmed by the respect with which they treated us. It was really quite refreshing to find people who were so motivated to do the right thing for the community and so motivated to help us succeed."

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## 2018 Top Micropolitan By Number of Projects

	Micropolitan	Projects
1	Findlay, Ohio	23
2	Wooster, Ohio	17
3	Batavia, N.Y.	13
4	Shelby, N.C.	12
T5	Tupelo, Miss.	11

T5	Ashland, Ohio	11
7	Cullman, Ala.	10
8	Defiance, Ohio	9
9	Wilson, N.C.	8
T10	Angola, Ind.	7
T10	Danville, Ky.	7
T10	Orangeburg, S.C.	7
T10	Danville, Va.	7
T14	London, Ky.	6
T14	Beatrice, Neb.	6
T14	Tiffin, Ohio	6
T14	Wapakoneta, Ohio	6
T14	Manitowoc, Wis.	6
T19	Blytheville, Ark.	5
T19	Thomasville, Ga.	5
T19	Waycross, Ga.	5
T19	Glasgow, Ky.	5
T19	Mayfield, Ky.	5
T19	Ogdensburg-Massena, N.Y.	5
T19	Sanford, N.C.	5
T19	Fremont, Ohio	5
T19	Sidney, Ohio	5
T19	Greenwood, S.C.	5
T29	Selma, Ala.	4
T29	Bainbridge, Ga.	4
T29	Calhoun, Ga.	4
T29	Plymouth, Ind.	4
T29	Frankfort, Ky.	4
T29	Madisonville, Ky.	4
T29	Opelousas, La.	4
T29	Hastings, Neb.	4
T29	Kearney, Neb.	4



T29	Marion, N.C.	4
T29	New Castle, Pa.	4
T29	Somerset, Pa.	4
T41	Talladega-Sylacauga, Ala.	3
T41	Cordele, Ga.	3
T41	McPherson, Kan.	3
T41	Adrian, Mich.	3
T41	Vicksburg, Miss.	3
T41	Norfolk, Neb.	3
T41	Plattsburgh, N.Y.	3
T41	Albemarle, N.C.	3
T41	Roanoke Rapids, N.C.	3
T41	Ashtabula, Ohio	3
T41	Bellefontaine, Ohio	3
T41	Bucyrus, Ohio	3
T41	Celina, Ohio	3
T41	Zanesville, Ohio	3
T41	Athens, Tenn.	3
T41	Crossville, Tenn.	3
T41	Union City, Tenn.-Ky.	3
T41	Corsicana, Texas	3
T41	Lufkin, Texas	3
T41	Big Stone Gap, Va.	3
T41	Sheridan, Wyo.	3
T62	Albertville, Ala.	2
T62	Troy, Ala.	2
T62	Douglas, Ga.	2
T62	Fitzgerald, Ga.	2
T62	Jefferson, Ga.	2
T62	Jesup, Ga.	2
T62	LaGrange, Ga.	2
T62	Freeport, Ill.	2

T62 Auburn, Ind.	2
T62 Frankfort, Ind.	2
T62 Huntington, Ind.	2
T62 Warsaw, Ind.	2
T62 Bardstown, Ky.	2
T62 Maysville, Ky.	2
T62 Mount Sterling, Ky.	2
T62 Minden, La.	2
T62 Hannibal, Mo.	2
T62 Lebanon, Mo.	2
T62 Sedalia, Mo.	2
T62 Columbus, Neb.	2
T62 Fremont, Neb.	2
T62 Scottsbluff, Neb.	2
T62 Auburn, N.Y.	2
T62 Rockingham, N.C.	2
T62 Washington, N.C.	2
T62 New Philadelphia-Dover, Ohio	2
T62 Norwalk, Ohio	2
T62 Salem, Ohio	2
T62 Wilmington, Ohio	2
T62 Meadville, Pa.	2
T62 Pottsville, Pa.	2
T62 Sayre, Pa.	2
T62 Gaffney, S.C.	2
T62 Seneca, S.C.	2
T62 Watertown, S.D.	2
T62 Cookeville, Tenn.	2
T62 Martin, Tenn.	2
T62 Pecos, Texas	2
T62 Plainview, Texas	2
T62 Rio Grande City, Texas	2



T62 Sevierville, Tenn. 2

T62 Sulphur Springs, Texas 2

## Gary Daughters

Senior Editor

Gary Daughters is a Peabody Award winning journalist who began with Site Selection in 2016. Gary has worked as a writer and producer for CNN covering US politics and international affairs. His work has included lengthy stints in Washington, DC and western Europe. Gary is a 1981 graduate of the University of Georgia, where he majored in Journalism and Mass Communications. He lives in Atlanta with his teenage daughter, and in his spare time plays guitar, teaches golf and mentors young people.



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