

KEEPING JOBS IN COUNTY

With help of new program, businesses like Screen Machine are staying in area

By JASON MAIN
Advocate Reporter

Conventional wisdom dictates that enlarging a community's labor force requires looking outside to bring in new companies and the jobs that come with them. But two new collaborations between government leaders, land developers and workforce specialists aim to expand employment in Licking County by working with existing companies.

Members of the Licking County Retention and Expansion Task Force attended a training session Friday at The Works for interviewing local employers with the goal of learning more about their business practices and what they need in order to grow.

The task force's efforts could go far in terms of the number of jobs saved and added in the county. Eric Canada, a partner of Blane Canada Ltd. who led the training, said in

Ohio about 76 percent of new jobs come from companies adding workers to existing locations and 9 percent through entrepreneurship, while 15 percent come from attracting outside companies.

"The vast majority of what's going to happen is from companies that have an investment here and are active here," he said.

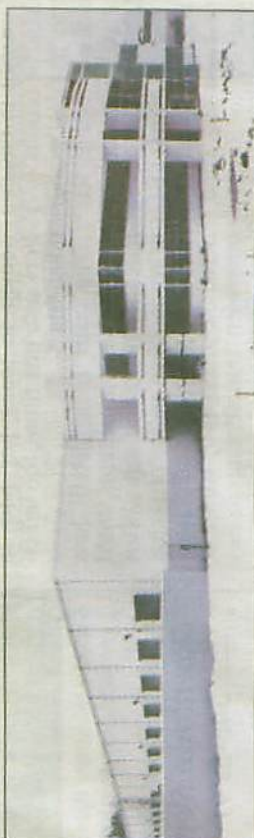
County leaders like to tout manufacturer The Screen Machine's decision to add 90,000 square feet to its local production facility as an example of the good that can come when local leaders get out and talk to businesses about their needs.

The company, which makes portable screening and shredding equipment, wanted to expand its manufacturing capacity. It considered both doing so at its current site in Etna Township near the Ohio 310-Interstate 70 interchange and one in

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A Screen Machine Industries employee assembles a portable tracked impact crusher in the new 83,000-square-foot addition to its manufacturing plant in Etna Township, a result of efforts by county leaders to retain local businesses and expand their employment base. (Michael Lehmkuhle, The Advocate)



Above, this is an outside view of Screen Machine Industries in Etna Township. At right, is an inside view of the massive warehouse at Screen Machine. (Michael Lehmkuhle, The Advocate)

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West Virginia, said company president Steve Cohen.

In order to grow locally, the facility needed water and sewer service, Cohen said. The county's economic development manager Rob Klinger and grants coordinator Sue Spiker were instrumental in helping get waterlines extended underneath I-70 and pulling together state grant funding to help pay for it, Cohen said.

Without their efforts, The Screen Machine likely would have moved elsewhere instead of adding an expected 25 jobs over the next three years, he said.

"Without Rob Klinger and the organization he led, there's no way we would have expanded there because I wouldn't have even known how to begin the process," Cohen said. "I know everything there is to know about my business, but I know virtually nothing about the development business, and he helped us every step of the way."

The task force has compiled a preliminary list of about 300 of the county's most significant employers, such as manufacturers, warehouse operators and others that add value to the community, Klinger said. Two-person teams will visit companies on the list and interview their executives to learn more about their operation and what their needs are, he said.

Hand-in-hand with the retention and expansion task force efforts, another new group called Workenomics seeks to help develop a local workforce that best meets companies' needs. Workenomics is a partnership of workforce development organizations like Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County, and Job and Family Services, as well as public and private sector developers like Anderson Layman Co. and Southgate Corp.

Fred Paul, who coordinates business and industry partnerships at C-TEC, said the two groups complement each other's work and many people

are involved in both.

Workenomics aims to make the area more attractive to companies by providing accurate data about the local workforce, opportunities to train workers for specific jobs and access to grant funding available for training, Paul said.

Phil Cook, a sales representative with Newark development company Southgate Corp., said participating in the partnership makes good sense because it helps the county by adding jobs and gives developers like him more opportunities to do business.

"We're going to be interviewing potential clients all over the community. That's going to give us a structured way to meet people, identify their needs and fill their needs," Cook said. "Everybody benefits if a company comes in or expands. If the community benefits we will benefit eventually, too."

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