



**ALL WE NEED  
IS YOU!**

Community Improvement Corp



Photo credit: Illuminate USA

**2023 | ANNUAL REPORT**



**Jennifer McDonald**  
2024 Board Chair

It's been an exciting year to be part of the GROW Licking County CIC leadership team. Our organization has seen a record number of requests from companies looking to locate in the region. We truly have a spotlight shining bright on Licking County – with many announcements spurring major industrial growth and new career opportunities for our community. We are thankful for the support from our investors, which allowed the GROW team to take on marketing and sales initiatives. We have embarked on a robust business retention and expansion program, meeting with 27 local business leaders to ensure our existing companies are as healthy as our new ones. Our meetings are always open to the public and we welcome our investors and community members to attend to learn about area development and organizational goals. We look forward to continuing the critical economic development work in 2024 and beyond to ensure our community is a great place to locate, live, work, and play!

## ILLUMINATE USA

In March, Invenergy announced plans to invest more than \$600 million through Illuminate USA to create one of the largest solar panel production facilities in the country. The investment included acquiring and building out a 1.1 million-square-foot building in the Pataskala Corporate Park. At the time of the announcement, Illuminate USA committed to bring 850 good-paying jobs to Licking County; surprisingly, it is now expected to create 1,000 jobs at full production.

Landing a project of this magnitude did not happen overnight. The preparation of the Pataskala Corporate Park has been a 15+ year process. Years of roadwork and infrastructure improvements headed by the Licking County Commissioners were done in preparation for future development. The building that now houses Illuminate USA was originally a speculative development venture by Red Rock Developments.

### Why Pataskala? Why Ohio?

When we asked Illuminate USA the reasons that brought them to locate in Pataskala, the answer was the people, proximity, and partnerships. Ohio is a manufacturing powerhouse with a manufacturing-oriented workforce and exceptional training programs for manufacturing skills. Ohio is also within a day's drive to half the nation's population, allowing products to be easily transported

along existing infrastructure. Illuminate USA said the state's economic development

entity, JobsOhio, is one of the best in the country and its local network of partners is a great resource, including GROW Licking County, OhioMeansJobs, and IMPACT Community Action.

### Bringing Jobs to our Local Workforce

Justin Barnhart went to Reynoldsburg High School and lives five minutes from Illuminate USA. He went to Cleveland State for his engineering degree and while most of his colleagues went to other states for jobs, he applied to Illuminate USA. Now he is excited about working with the most advanced manufacturing technology in the state, making almost 10 million solar panels a year at full capacity, close to home.

**"Illuminate USA lets us keep our kids here,"  
said Pataskala Mayor Mike Compton.**

Illuminate USA's partnership with OhioMeansJobs Licking County allowed them to promote available jobs and host hiring events, exceeding expectations by being fully staffed prior to the start of production.





## INFRASTRUCTURE LUNCHEON RECAP

On May 16th, GROW Licking County, Licking County Area Transportation Study (LCATS), and the Licking County Transportation Improvement District (TID) hosted the first annual Licking County Infrastructure Luncheon. This sold-out event featured presentations from planning and engineering experts on recent and ongoing studies that look to address current infrastructure needs while preparing for future growth. Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik was the event's keynote speaker. She provided insight on statewide development and trends, as well as initiatives to encourage continued growth and development.

## COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

### MARKETING | LICKING COUNTY WORKS

In 2023, our Marketing and Licking County Works committees combined due to overlapping marketing and workforce development efforts, allowing for further collaboration of committee members. GROW staff attended several events throughout the year to promote the Licking County Works career pathways resources. The manufacturing career pathways video was released in July, featuring local students and employees at various positions within the manufacturing industry.



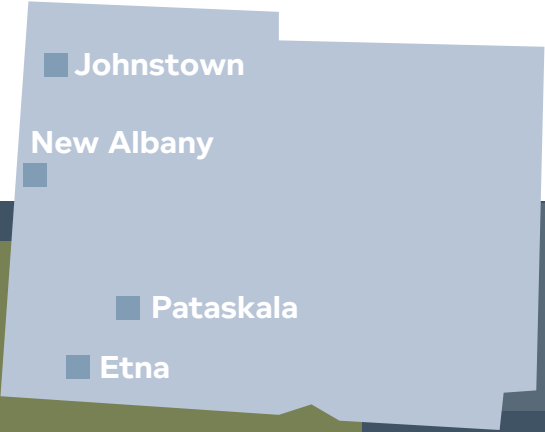
### INFRASTRUCTURE

Our infrastructure committee aims to leverage relationships to secure funding and advocate for infrastructure improvements.

Some initiatives the committee supported this year included improvements along the Thornwood corridor, as well as the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) RAISE Grant awarded to the City of Heath. In July, Governor Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) officials announced that the state would spend an additional \$90 million to improve roads in Licking, Delaware, and Franklin counties. These regional infrastructure



improvements will help support the growth of our Licking County communities and industries.




**illuminate  
USA**  
Pataskala  
**Attraction**  
Total Investment \$600M  
Jobs Created 850



Etna  
**Expansion**  
Total Investment \$80M  
450K sq ft **Expansion**

**RYDER**COMMERCE  
by whiplash

Etna  
**Expansion**  
Total Investment \$3M  
Jobs Created 216

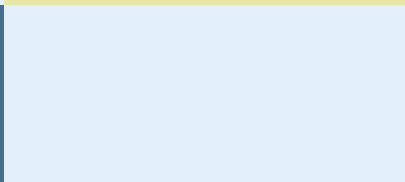


**Armstrong**<sup>®</sup>  
WORLD INDUSTRIES

Johnstown  
**Expansion**  
~70K sq ft **Expansion**  
Jobs Created 15



New Albany  
**Attraction**  
Total Investment \$85M  
Jobs Created 300




New Albany  
**Attraction**  
Total Investment \$1.5B  
Jobs Created 10

Since 2012,  
**GROW LICKING COUNTY  
INVESTMENTS RESULTED IN**

over <b>10,500</b> new job opportunities	more than <b>\$25.6</b> <b>BILLION</b> in new investments	over <b>6,700</b> existing jobs retained
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Data source: GROW Licking County

# COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS



Community preparedness continues to be a focus for our organization. GROW has partnered with many local municipalities, committees, task forces, and organizations to help prepare our communities to thrive.

## HOUSING

**Housing availability** can affect Licking County employers and their ability

to attract a qualified workforce to maintain their operations. Employees in our community need housing of all types and price points to live and work in Licking County. According to the Building Industry Association (BIA) of Central Ohio Housing Study, for every 100 jobs added, 81 permits were issued in Licking County. The study also stated that if historical building permit activity continues, the region will not meet the housing need based on the anticipated job growth projections through the year 2032. To read to full housing study, visit [biahomebuilders.com](http://biahomebuilders.com)



At the **Columbus Region's annual ED-411** event, GROW board member

Mayor Mark Johns participated in a panel discussion, along with Jamie Greene of planning NEXT and Lark Mallory of the Affordable Housing Trust of Columbus and Franklin County, to discuss housing and community development.



*"FRAMEWORK is the result of a 15-month collaborative project that engaged 15 unique jurisdictions, more than 4,000 residents and included three rounds of public engagement. The result*

*is a guide, a set of best practices, that can be levered by local communities and the county to better plan and manage the future. As we move through the first year of implementation we encourage all residents and elected leaders to utilize the report and the associated resources: [frameworklc.org](http://frameworklc.org)"*

- Jennifer Roberts,  
The Thomas J. Evans Foundation

## EDUCATION

Our local education partners offer specialized programs to provide opportunities and training for the next generation entering the workforce.

In 2023, Central Ohio Technical College (COTC) announced a new semiconductor manufacturing program in response to the rapidly evolving industry following the 2022 Intel announcement. The semiconductor manufacturing program introduces students to how semiconductor wafers are manufactured and processed to become an integrated circuit used in a variety of industries.

The C-TEC of Licking County Postsecondary Center continues to develop their manufacturing and skilled trades programs. The state-of-the-art Advanced Manufacturing labs give students the ability to gain valuable hands-on experience to prepare for their careers.

Our Licking County Works career pathways toolkit provides additional resources for workforce development and education. Through these resources, students and job-seekers can gain more knowledge to upskill and apply for jobs in Licking County's in-demand industries. Learn more at [lickingcountyworks.com](https://lickingcountyworks.com)

Additionally, GROW staff participated in several local job fairs and school visits to educate local students about the in-demand career opportunities available in their own backyard.



## BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION PROGRAM

A majority of job growth in a community comes from the expansion of its existing businesses. In 2023, staff met with 27 economic base companies within nine jurisdictions in Licking County through our Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program. BRE meetings allow staff to build relationships with business leadership and connect available resources based on current opportunities or challenges experienced by the company. Referrals to OhioMeansJobs Licking County and our local education and training providers are frequently offered to support ongoing workforce development efforts.

The BRE program also serves as a conduit for dialogue, offering employers a regular platform to receive updates and provide feedback on trends and local initiatives related to housing, transportation, education, and other areas that may impact their workforce or operations.



**OhioMeansJobs**

Licking County  
A proud partner of the  
American Job Center network

*"The partnership between OhioMeansJobs Licking County and GROW Licking County allows us to better serve the needs of our Licking County employers. As our county continues to experience significant growth, we continue to provide resources that promote career opportunities in demand occupation areas. These resources help to educate our local workforce about the career opportunities within the community. In addition, through BRE efforts, our partnership supports Licking County businesses ensuring they have what they need to be successful."*

– Angela Carnahan, OhioMeansJobs Licking County

# GROW BY THE NUMBERS

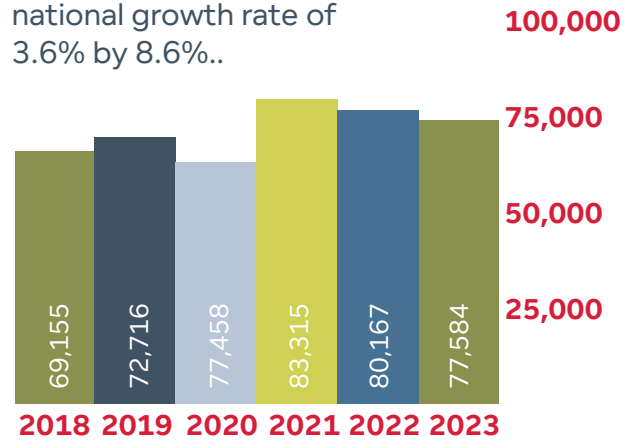
## TRENDS TO WATCH

According to Lightcast, Licking County has surpassed other surrounding counties in terms of job growth in the manufacturing industry since 2019. Barriers to entry into the manufacturing industry are low, with most positions only requiring a high school education or a certificate program. Most employers also provide on-the-job training for their new employees. There are many opportunities looking ahead to the future of manufacturing, including automation, on-shoring, and an evolving workforce.

## JOB TRENDS

Data source: Lightcast

From 2018 to 2023, jobs increased by 12.2% in Licking County, OH from 69,155 to 77,584. This change outpaced the national growth rate of 3.6% by 8.6%.

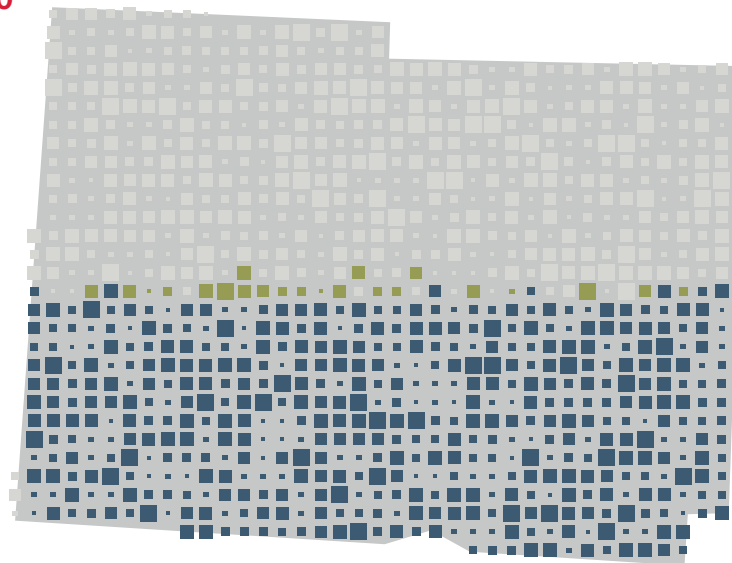


## LICKING COUNTY LABOR FORCE

Population: 182,824  
 Labor Force: 91,940  
 Employed: 89,085  
 Unemployed: 2,855

180,000

90,000



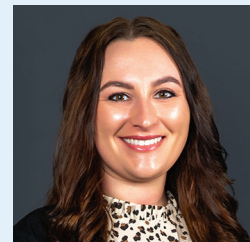
## GROW TEAM



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## 2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Board Officers

**Jennifer McDonald, Chair**

President & CEO,  
Licking County Chamber of Commerce

**Joseph Robertson, Vice Chair**

Trustee, Monroe Township

**Erin Grigsby, Treasurer**

Director of Finance & Compliance,  
Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority

**Corey Alton, Secretary**

Vice President of Commercial Loans, Park National Bank

**Mark Johns, Past Chair**

Mayor, City of Heath

### Board of Directors

**Tim Bubb, Commissioner**

Licking County

**Jennifer Ellis-Brunn, Director**

Licking County Department of Job & Family Services

**Mike Compton, Mayor**

City of Pataskala

**Amy Dell, Program Officer, Scholarships and Education**

Licking County Foundation

**Brandon Hess, Broker & Partner**

Shai-Hess Commercial Real Estate

**Lauren Massie, Dean of Technical Studies**

Central Ohio Technical College

**Mark Mauter, Director of Economic & Community Development**

City of Newark

**Robert Montagnese, President & CEO**

Licking Memorial Health Systems

**Robert O'Neill, President**

Southgate Corporation

**Jim Roberts, Executive Director**

Southwest Licking Community Water & Sewer District

## 2023 INVESTORS

ADR & Associates

AEP Ohio

Bricker & Eckler

Buckeye Lake

Region Corporation

City of Heath

City of Johnstown

City of Newark

City of Pataskala

C-TEC

Denison University

The Energy Cooperative

Etna Township

First Federal Savings & Loan

Granville Area Chamber  
of Commerce

Granville Investment Group

Heath-Newark-Licking County  
Port Authority

Huntington National Bank

Legat Architects

Licking County Chamber  
of Commerce

Licking County Commissioners

Licking County Foundation

Licking County Job and  
Family Services

Licking Memorial Health Systems

Matesich Distributing

MedBen

Monroe Township

North Valley Bank

The Ohio State University at  
Newark (and) Central Ohio  
Technical College

Park National Bank

Pataskala Area Chamber  
of Commerce

Project Construction Co.  
Shai-Hess Commercial  
Real Estate

Southgate Corporation

TrueCore Federal Credit Union

Union Township

Verdantas

Village of Granville

Village of Hebron

Whether you are a company interested in locating or expanding into one of our thriving communities, a possible employee looking for a future opportunity, or a prospective partner looking to become more involved in the continued growth of Licking County -

### ALL WE NEED IS YOU!

Join us as we continue to ensure that Licking County is a premier location where everyone can live, work, play, and invest.



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IS YOU!**

Community Improvement Corp

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growlickingcounty.org



THE  
**COLUMBUS**  
REGION