

Easy access adds to area's appeal

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Luconda Dager, President, Velvet Ice Cream

When we see orange barrels dotting the roadway, our first thought is of slight inconvenience. But the long-term impact of improved transportation points to a future that's far brighter than orange. People may not make the instant connection between transportation planning and its impact on local business. But that impact is real. Improvements on Ohio 161 and U.S. 62 have made it much easier for our largest market of travelers and consumers to get to and from Licking County with ease.

Those improvements also have facilitated Velvet Ice Cream's expansion into new and growing central Ohio Markets, thereby increasing sales and employment. But in addition to improving the path to exporting goods and services to customers outside of Licking County, we've made it easier for visitors and consumers to come to us.

More than 150,000 travelers visit Velvet's Ye Olde Mill every season for tastings, events and tours. In fact, our tour was named by Frommer's as one of America's 10 Best Ice Cream Factory Tours. Another 40,000 people flock to the nearby festival grounds and our factory for the annual Utica Sertoma Ice Cream Festival every Memorial Day.

With more than 2 million people, Columbus has grown to be the state's largest city. Our new bypass makes it more effortless for them to visit our vibrant community. Those visits spur economic development, job growth and community pride. Not surprisingly, Columbus is the biggest feeder market for visitors to the Mill and Ice Cream Festival. This coming year, thanks to road improvements on US 62 and SR 161, those tens of thousands of travelers and the all-important visitor spending they bring to our county, will find that getting here is easier and much more enjoyable.

Here in Licking County, we enjoy a wonderful small-town quality of life. Yet we benefit from the proximity of large, thriving cities and their residents who can get here with ease. At Velvet Ice Cream, we have seen that removing transportation barriers has helped Columbus and other outlying communities really embrace our brand. That raises the profile of our community and all of its businesses.

While Velvet's Ye Olde Mill is closed for the season, we reopen again in spring 2016 and invite you to pop over then for a visit and ice cream cone. In the meantime, we hope you'll include Velvet Ice Cream's favorite holiday flavors — Pumpkin Pie, Cinnamon and Peppermint Stick — as part of your family's celebration this season. Everyone here at Velvet Ice Cream loves that we can share our community's culture and offerings with people outside of Licking County from all across Ohio — and beyond. But of course, we never forget our local family and we truly value the support of our own residents and employees right here in Licking County.

The fourth-generation to run her family's company, Luconda Dager is president of Utica-based Velvet Ice Cream, a major employer and community partner for Licking County. Dager is a regular contributor to the Business Advocate, writing a monthly column on topics that are important to the area's business community.