

# We're open for business in Licking County



Photo: Jessica Phelps/The Advocate

[Kent Mallett, Reporter](#) 12:02 a.m. EST December 19, 2015

NEWARK – National corporations and local entrepreneurs, manufacturers and retailers, and every size of business opened their doors or began operations in Licking County this year.

At least 70 new businesses started here in 2015, from downtown Newark to the Port Authority in Heath, from downtown Granville to Etna Township, from North 21st Street in Newark to the New Albany Personal Care and Beauty Campus, where Bath and Body Works opened an 860,000-square-foot facility.

The county's economy has benefited from the business growth, reaching all-time highs in employment and county sales tax collections this year.

And even more new business is expected in 2016, led by the announcement Amazon will build a fulfillment center in Etna Township and its subsidiary Vadata will build a data center in New Albany.

The Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority invested \$25 million in 14 projects this year, attracting new companies Ariel Corporation and Chromocare, constructing speculative buildings to lure more manufacturers, helping existing companies expand, adding new roads and repairing a bridge.

“From a Port Authority perspective, it’ll stand out as a memorable year, a milestone year, with spec buildings that rivaled anywhere else in the state,” Port Authority Executive Director Rick Platt said.

One of the most distinctive new companies, Chromocare, moved into a clean room lab in the Horton Building on the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center campus, where it is hiring molecular biologists, geneticists and clinical chemists to perform genetic testing for drug compatibility.

“They’re hiring people for completely new positions to our region,” Platt said. “It’s exciting and it’s very much an untold story, in a field that didn’t exist until a few years ago.”

The COATC campus also added Ariel, a manufacturer of gas compressors, based in Mount Vernon, that moved into a 50,000-square-foot speculative building.

In Newark, the newcomers include a new restaurant in the North End, a banquet hall downtown and a trash hauler far exceeding its first-year expectations.

The Old Bag of Nails opened in August at 1671 N. 21st St., where several restaurants previously operated.

Tim Miller, general manager of The Old Bag of Nails, said the popular central Ohio chain has enjoyed great success despite being north of the retail-rich North 21st-Deo Drive area.

“It’s been a really good reception,” Miller said. “Everybody is loving the place. I think it’s the openness compared to the old place. With our name, the fact we’re down here, they’ll go the extra 200 yards.”

The recognizable restaurant, which changes its menu every three months with the seasons, can overcome any aversion to the location.

“People have preconceived ideas because it’s always failed (here), but if you give them a reason to come back, it’ll build on that,” Miller said.

“I think our food is a comfort-type food, with healthy portions, a good deal for what they’re spending. It appeals to everybody, no matter what demographic.”

Adkins Disposal Service began operating in March. When brothers Hank and Ralph Adkins returned to the business they accumulated a combined 73 years experience.

Ralph Adkins was one of the original owners of Big O Refuse in 1983, and Hank Adkins worked for Big O for seven years after 27 years with Waste Management.

Big O exited the market after it was purchased by Waste Management, but Adkins jumped in and filled the void.

“We’re ahead of where I thought we’d be,” Hank Adkins said. “I never thought we’d have as many accounts as we do. We’re ahead of schedule.”

The new company, with an office in downtown Newark, has seven employees, including three drivers, but operates in parts of Licking, Perry and Fairfield counties.

“I know the business and the people know me,” Ralph Adkins said. “They put their trust in us. That’s why we’re getting all the customers.”

Customers who just received a bill from one of the other trash haulers will stop Adkins drivers on their route and inquire about the cost and service, Hank Adkins said, adding, “They see how we treat their neighbor.”

Ralph Adkins said, “We don’t just throw the stuff. We treat them like we want to be treated. They don’t have complaints with us. We make sure things are done right.”

The Skylight banquet hall, which moved into the former Newark City Schools administration building in downtown Newark, got off to a slow start, but hosted 22 events from February to the start of December.

“We’re moving right along,” The Skylight owner Bentley Austin said. “I was pleasantly surprised, in my first year. Generally, the first year, everybody has (already) booked their stuff.”

“I wasn’t quite ready in December (2014). The place just wasn’t quite done. We had a slight glitch with the company putting in fire alarms and smoke detectors.”

The Skylight hosted about two weddings a month, mostly during the summer months, Austin said.

“The city is enjoying the space,” Austin said. “It’s taking off. I’m getting great response. All the brides have been just super responsive. We’re getting a cross-section of caterers in there.”

Austin, who also owns The Vault in Columbus, said Newark differs in a couple of ways from the capital city. Newark does not book events as far in advance, and people know all about your business.

“Newark is a small, little town,” Austin said. “They know everything. Word gets around. So we’re very, very careful to make it a hassle-free event.”

James Hostetter, president of the Downtown Newark Association, said there always seems to be people willing to take a risk on opening their own business downtown.

“It’s the American dream to own your own business and be your own boss,” Hostetter said. “You’ll make mistakes. All businesses make some type of mistake, hopefully small mistakes, and you’ll learn and grow from them.

“We’re evolving as a city. Most businesses look at that (downtown construction) as a positive change and look at it as growth.”

In Granville, where a dozen businesses opened in 2015, storefronts never are empty for long, Granville Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Steve Matheny said.

“There’s more interest than there is space (on Broadway),” Matheny said. “I’m impressed with the talent and courage and ambition these folks have.

“They have a passion for what they do, which is encouraging and motivating for the rest of us.”