



# BOUNDLESS OPPORTUNITY POTENTIAL &

*As part of the Wheeling Metropolitan Statistical Area of West Virginia and Ohio, Belmont County is looking to take full advantage of its location. Its natural resources, its transportation, and its hardworking population, have made it become a center for boundless opportunity.*

**Written by Jessica Ferlaino**

**A**ccess to Interstate 70, Interstate 470, Ohio Route 7, public and private aviation services, freight rail service and the Ohio River all play an important role for both business and quality of life in Belmont County. Belmont County has all the necessary services, amenities and infrastructure needed to prosper, and residents are close to Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Cleveland.

Belmont County Port Authority Executive Assistant Sherri Butler has lived in the county for over thirty years and greatly appreciates its transportation infrastructure. "It's so nice to be able to get on the interstate and easily get to the all the things that you want to." She considers the easy access to an interstate highway a great asset to individuals and to businesses.

Belmont County Port Authority Executive Director Larry Merry acknowledged the importance of the county's location. "This is a community that is actually larger than the demographics that you would see if you just pulled up Belmont County. Belmont County is very centrally located to a lot of great communities. It's halfway between I-79 and I-77, with I-70 as the connector. It's really well centered."

"There are a lot of people that work in Belmont County that don't live in Belmont County, and there are a lot of people that live in Belmont County that don't work in Belmont County, and they work close by," Merry continued. "So, our economy of scale is much larger than just Belmont County, and there's really no way to single it out because of our proximity." ►





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"Belmont County has the resources, services and the room to grow."

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**"Belmont College and Ohio University Eastern Campus are active proponents of workforce development and build on the strong work ethic found in the county."**



► Belmont County is certainly a beautiful place with a multitude of natural assets. The river, lakes, and geography provide outdoor recreation galore. This is a family-friendly location to call home.

Traditionally a site of industry, the area also has proud agricultural roots that continue to flourish to this day. Merry himself is a lifelong operator of a dairy farm. The county has quality cattle producers including Dickinson Longhorns, one of the world's premier longhorn cattle ranches.

This is a resilient, hardworking community that continues to claw its way back from economic challenges to enjoy prosperity once again, regardless of the economic circumstances it has been dealt.

"This community has gone through a lot of job loss over the last thirty years," Merry explained. "It has lost the steel mills, power plants, and most of the coal production, but it has been able to retool itself and rededicate itself. Energy, oil and gas have helped to employ a lot of people."

Merry was referring to the Utica and Marcellus Shale plays located below the community's feet and the potential invest-



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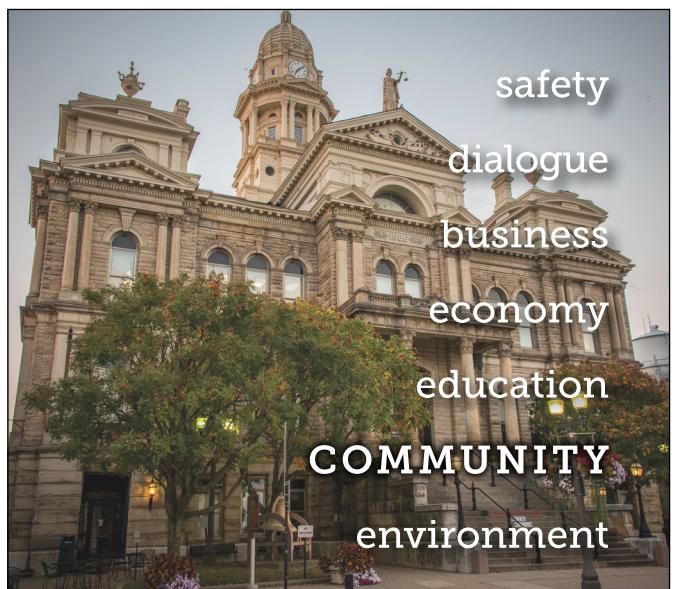


ment in oil and gas exploration and development of that enormous asset. Currently, PTT Global Chemical America, a branch of Thailand's largest petrochemical and refining company, is interested in constructing an ethane cracker plant in Belmont County.

"It's somewhere between a \$5 and \$6 billion investment project, so that is a big advantage," said Merry. "Millions of dollars have been invested in the infrastructure for that potential project." Though the decision on the development of the plant has yet to be finalized, it remains a focus in Belmont County.

The county is experiencing a great deal of investment in anticipation of and in preparation for this announcement, which is expected in the first quarter of 2017. "We're already trying to prepare this community for companies and to develop sites, so companies will do business with the cracker and will use the products out of the cracker plant, if built, to grow," Merry said.

"We can attract those additional jobs that way. When I look at this community, for years and generations, it has provided coal that was put into power that was sent out all over the northern and eastern US to power jobs. Well, with the oil and gas, we don't want it all to get shipped off. We want there to be jobs as a result of it." ►



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**"The port authority is collaborating with existing and prospective businesses to strengthen and diversify the local economy further."**



► The Belmont County Port Authority is doing everything in its power to capture some of the cracker-related business by enhancing local facilities. By laying the groundwork, it will be able to jump into action if the cracker facility is approved and immediately capitalize on that investment.

Belmont County has witnessed the construction of several motels and additional retail, and for a rural county, it is quite impressive. Merry hopes to see that the county "continues to grow in anticipation of people being here and staying here and working within the industry. We've worked hard to receive grants and loans to put in the necessary infrastructure for growth."

To date, the oil and gas industry has invested hundreds of millions in Belmont County and its infrastructure. State and local government agencies have extended water and sewer lines and transportation infrastructure to foster a business-friendly environment. Quoting the movie Field of Dreams, Merry explained that he is a firm believer in "build it, they will come."

Belmont County is an ideal location for business and industry to succeed. It is in an elite class of US cities that offer a major waterway, Class I and Class II rail, and highways that carry over 10,000 trucks daily.

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"The fact that it is a transportation center with I-70, the Norfolk Southern and the Wheeling- Lake Erie railroads, and the Ohio River accessible is a major advantage," said Merry. "We have really re-upped those efforts to try to inform companies that logically we are at a major transportation and population center of North America."

Education is another factor that is supporting growth. Belmont College and Ohio University Eastern Campus are active proponents of workforce development and build on the strong work ethic found in the county. There is no shortage of labor either. The population is 68,000, though it can draw on a labor force of 250,000 people from the region.

Belmont County has the resources, services and the room to grow. The port authority is collaborating with existing and prospective businesses to strengthen and diversify the local economy further and is encouraging investments that will support growth and further improve the quality of life in the community.

"We have a publicly held industrial park, and we have a couple of privately held areas that are considered industrial parks to be able to accommodate business," said Merry. The Belmont County Port Authority works with private landowners, so that development stimulates economic and community growth.

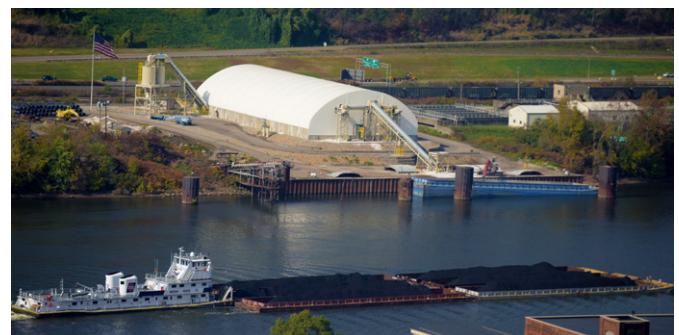
The port authority's many partners include township and county government, as well as regional partners like the Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth (APEG). "They are part of Jobs Ohio, which is the lead economic organization in the state of Ohio," Merry noted.

The county is prepared to accommodate the significant economic and population growth that is expected without having to sacrifice the standard of living. The growing population shows no sign of slowing.

Belmont County has repeatedly proven that it can support big industry and may have the opportunity to do so again soon. There is a future in the oil and gas industry, and the county has positioned itself to be able to support the growth that will result if the highly-anticipated decision regarding the ethane cracker plant is positive. Opportunity is on the doorstep, and Belmont County is ready to answer when it knocks. ■



**"Belmont County is very centrally located to a lot of great communities."**



#### **Belmont County Port Authority**

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