

## Coshocton Ohio – County Road 12 Economic Development Project

MILLCREEK TOWNSHIP – In Coshocton County businesses, citizens and organizations work hand in hand to contribute to the overall prosperity of the county. The Coshocton Port Authority, a government entity, was created to “connect businesses, industry, finance, government and education to promote growth and prosperity.” Serving this exact purpose, Dorothy Skowrunski, the executive director of the port authority, has implemented multiple projects, creating jobs in the region and incentives for industries to choose Coshocton and expand here. She has been closely working with Ohio organizations such as OMEGA, ODOT and APEG among others. Together, they created jobs for the people of Coshocton, developed EPA cleaning projects to bring in industries and sustain economic growth. All these actors of economic development connect the dots, designing win win situations.

The Amish community also is part of the Coshocton community. More than that, the Amish community of Coshocton County is a major player in the economic growth of the region specifically in the wood and furniture industry. The Ohio wood industry contributed to approximately \$22.05 billion to Ohio’s economy in 2010. It provides 118,000 jobs throughout the state. The total exports in 2010 amounted to \$8.20 billion which represents roughly 16 percent of the total exports of the state of Ohio. Within this industry, the Amish community – with approximately 60 businesses involved in wood crafting – are employing 323 people and selling each year \$61,362,435 of wooden products, therefore contributing considerably to the economic growth of the region. The high quality of the fine furniture produced is extremely valued thus is shipped throughout the United States as far as Alaska and also in Europe. The last five years, their sales have boomed and with it, their exportations have increased. With high standards and high demand products, those businesses are concerned about the poor quality of the roads surrounding them, namely, County Road 12. The road in question is bumpy, dangerous and almost impassable. The poor condition of the road damages the furniture that is shipped, tainting the reputation of the finest furniture makers in the United States. The Amish community had expressed its concern to county officials. But, with road schedules filled until 2020, the county engineer alone could not do much for them. Rehabilitating County Road 12 was not even part of the agenda. As Skowrunski likes to say, “There’s only a problem when there is no solution.” The economic organizations in play just had to come up with a more unconventional strategy. Money from the state of Ohio usually comes with strings attached. Therefore, the Coshocton Port Authority brought multiple local agencies together and connected the dots to create a viable project. The project in question will rebuilt 6.45 miles of County Road 12 in Coshocton County with a 2.5” intermediate course and full depth pavement. The construction should take place as soon as possible, whenever the bidding process is over. The project should be over by Oct. 1. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$845,000.00 which is the total construction cost. The organizations cited below have each contributed to the financing of the project either with in-kind dollars or with actual dollars. Coshocton Port Authority: Skowrunski committed dollars from one of the Schooler Family Foundation funds to the project. County Commissioners: The county commissioners are the project designated grantee. They will advance the money for the project and will be reimbursed later by the organizations cited here. County Engineer: The county engineer Frederick T. Wachtel contributed to the project by committing real dollars and in-kind dollars in services to match the missing dollars.

ARC/GOA: The Appalachian Regional Commission Grant Funding part of OMEGA has committed dollars to the road reconstruction project.

APEG: Through its State 629 Roadwork Fund, APEG has contributed to the project.

ODOT Jobs and Commerce: They are committing dollars to the road reconstruction project.

Northeast Coshocton Community Infrastructure Fund (NECCI): The Amish community, area businesses and local residents are highly concerned about this project as it is impacting their businesses and lives. They are committing dollars to the project through a special economic development fund set up through the Coshocton Port Authority and Coshocton Foundation. This fund will meet the current needs of this project and will continue to grow to be used as matching funds for future economic development public infrastructure projects. With a resurfaced road, more than 60 businesses will be able to fully expand and export their fine crafted furniture safely. In turn, it will stimulate their growth with the projected creation of 96 jobs within the next five years. Moreover, the projected business increase over the next five years is estimated at 20 percent as it will be easier to ship and receive the furniture and raw material. Plus, the safety of the road being improved, it will draw more people in the nearby cities creating even more economic and touristic activity.

By connecting the dots among all available resources, the idea to rehabilitate Coshocton County Road 12 has become a feasible project.

MILLCREEK TOWNSHIP – Approximately six and a half miles of County Road 12 in Millcreek Township has a fresh coat of blacktop thanks to the persistence of area residents and business owners. “This all started with us looking for a warehouse in Coshocton and working with Dorothy Skowrunski (from Coshocton Port Authority in the fall of 2014),” said Paul Nisley, who operates Penwood Manufacturing, which is located just off of CR 12. “We reconnected with her when we became concerned about the roads and she realized how much economic development is going on in this area.” Skowrunski organized a meeting this past spring with Amish and English business owners, managers and CR 12 residents and also invited representatives from local and state agencies and government offices. “This was not a road project,” she said. “It was an economic development project. There are 63 businesses in this area with over 300 employees that touch another 1,000 companies. They make some of the finest, handmade furniture in the United States and their products were not getting to where they were going in good shape because of the road. We had to get the road fixed.”

By working together, Skowrunski and those concerned about CR 12 discovered that the county didn’t have the funds available to pave the road, but there was still hope. Brad Biggs from ODOT said there was grant money available if the community could do a matching fund of \$100,000. After hearing this news, the Northeast Coshocton Community Infrastructure Committee was formed and money collected from area residents and businesses was put into a special fund at the Coshocton Foundation to pay for this project and any future economic development infrastructure projects. In addition to community members, help for the little more than \$800,000 repaving project was received from the: Coshocton Port Authority: Skowrunski committed \$50,000 from one of the Schooler Family Foundation funds to the project. Coshocton County Commissioners: The county commissioners are the project designated grantee. They advanced the money for the project and will be reimbursed later by the organizations cited here. Coshocton County Engineer: County Engineer Frederick T. Wachtel contributed to the project by committing real dollars and in-kind dollars in services to match the missing dollars.

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“All the different entities worked together on this project,” Skowrunski said. “If one didn’t do what they said they were going to this would not have happened.”

The Northeast Coshocton Community Infrastructure Committee is extremely thankful for everyone who helped make the repaving of CR 12 from New Bedford to Mound possible. They also hope the project shows how cultures can be bridged and the Amish and English can work together to make their community stronger.

Everyone who played a role in the project and residents of the area were invited to a gathering on Oct. 28 at Millcreek Equipment on CR 12 to celebrate the completion of the project.

“I tip my hat to Dorothy (Skowrunski),” said Coshocton County Commissioner Dane Shryock, who was at the celebration with fellow commissioners Gary Fischer and Curtis Lee. “She drove this project by getting the funding for it in place and by working with the community.”

Skowrunski said no one in the state of Ohio has ever approached a project like the CR 12 community members did. The 16 day project was completed early and just under budget.

“We had signs made up (that will be placed at either end of where the road was paved) thanking you (the community) for helping to make this project become a reality,” said County Engineer Frederick T. Wachtel. “Hopefully we can use this as a model for other projects.”

The Northeast Coshocton Community Infrastructure Committee already has its sights set on getting County Road 10 paved next year, but right now just wants to thank everyone, including God who helped make the CR 12 project a reality.