On September 15th, the U.S. Economic Development Administration held a regional forum to provide an opportunity for private sector representatives, local officials and other economic development stakeholders to talk about ways to increase opportunities to create, maintain and expand businesses and jobs.

Led by Dr. David Sampson, U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce for Economic Development, some 65 attendees participated in panels on fulfilling a regional vision and targeting investments.

Dr. Sampson was an active panel participant and suggested the following three guidelines for regional growth:

**Create a positive business climate.** Leadership through a positive belief in a regional future is essential. Investment and innovation are key leadership components.

**Work as a region.** A region must jointly articulate a forward vision and not idealize the past. Fragmentation on a political basis creates diseconomies and is counterproductive. Forge linkages and look for leverage points.

**Develop a skilled work force.** Post-secondary and K-12 school education must be integrated with work force development.

Also in attendance was Anne Pope, Federal Co-Chair for the Appalachian Regional Commission. She noted ARC’s strong support role with EDA and the success of ARC through access to capital for small business and the support of brownfield redevelopment.

Key state and local participants were David Satterfield, Executive Director for the West Virginia Development Office; Don Donell, President of Starvaggi Enterprises; Steve Fennel, President of Sal Chemical; Dewey Guida, President of Dewey Guida Enterprises and Mike Jacoby, Executive Director for Progress Alliance.

The EDA Forum was hosted by the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Commission (BHJ). Dr. John Brown, BHJ Executive Director, stated “on very few occasions do we get a first-hand visit from chief executive officials such as Dr. Sampson and Federal Co-Chair Pope. Their agencies are key financial partners. The more one-on-one time we get, the better our possibility for success.”

During the Forum lunch, Bill Miller, Mayor for the City of Weirton, formally acknowledged EDA’s commitment of $891,000 to the City of Weirton for its downtown investment project. With a comparable funding match from the City of Weirton, this investment will provide essential parking and utility infrastructure related to the State Office Building and is projected to create a minimum of 251 jobs.
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our regional landscape is changing right in front of us. Look for the subtle signs and imagine how they are altering our future.

- **Changes in Leadership.** Our first newsletter was published in spring 1996 and the front cover had a photograph of our eight (8) Executive Committee members. Only two of these eight are present members of our Executive Committee. The passing of leadership has occurred.

- **Road Access Deficiencies at the Veteran’s Bridge.** On October 11th, the Market Street Bridge was closed for a two week period to retrofit newly created four-lane Route 2 improvements to the West Virginia bridge entry. Instantly, access issues to the Veterans Bridge, the obvious default option, became apparent. In our next newsletter, we’ll have traffic and accident information to validate these issues.

- **Increasing Traffic Congestion and Solutions.** Between 1996 and 2002, the average daily traffic count on the Veterans Bridge increased 52% (27270 to 41710). According to the Federal Highway Administration (Traffic Congestion and Reliability: Linking Solutions to Problems, 2004), the weekday peak-period trip nationally takes almost 40% longer than the same trip in the middle of the day, compared to 13% longer in 1982. Given our system capacity, we can not outspend or create more roads to keep pace. Intermodal solutions such as river and rail investments are needed.

- **Entrepreneurship.** 75% of all new jobs are created by existing businesses. If economic diversification, as referenced in so many of our future growth strategies, is our future then the nurturing of existing businesses and expansion of these businesses through entrepreneurship should be our key job growth investment.

- **Magnitude of Mahan’s Lane Project in Brooke County and Route 2.** Project in Hancock County. In the next two years, the Brooke and Hancock Public Service Districts will invest $39 million to provide 4050 people with sewer infrastructure.

**John C. Brown, AICP**
jbrown@bhjmpc.org
Summer certainly ended with a bang and I hope that you and your families were not affected by the recent flooding. The cooperation of the state, county, and local governments, the various volunteer and paid fire departments, police agencies, emergency management agencies, and citizens should not go unnoticed. Everyone involved did an excellent job. They helped save many lives and are now working diligently to cleanup the mess left behind. In times such as these, the good folks of the Ohio Valley put their best foot forward and come to the aid of those in need.

As the lazy days of summer become just a memory and our thoughts turn to the beautiful colors of fall, we also must continue to concentrate on the many issues facing the Tri-County Area that BHJ represents. Dr. Brown and his staff are diligently working on many projects, such as brownfields projects, economic development issues, community improvement projects, and the many transportation issues facing each of its counties. Three major issues need constant attention. They are funding of the next phase of the Bridge Study, the maintenance of the Fort Steuben and Market Street bridges in light of the reduction of weight limits on the Fort Steuben Bridge, and the U.S. 22 Corridor from Pittsburgh, Pa. to Columbus, Oh.

Each community in the Tri-County Area must realize that future development, and their individual economies, will be affected by the outcome of these issues. A good transportation system is vital to the economic development and growth of the entire area, as is evidenced by the growth around Interstate 70 near St. Clairsville. U.S. Route 22, Ohio Route 7, and West Virginia Route 2 are our versions of Interstate 70. Two of the three bridges located in Steubenville are old and in need of repair and it is not unrealistic to believe that the possibility of one or both of these older bridges may not be in operation in the next 20 years. The recent weight limit reductions on the Fort Steuben Bridge are already having an impact on the commercial truck traffic to the Half Moon Industrial Park in Weirton, W.Va. One can only imagine the adverse effect that would result to the entire area if the Veterans’ Memorial Bridge were the only operating bridge from East Liverpool, Oh. to Wheeling, W.Va.

The BHJ staff is working hard to coordinate efforts between the local government entities and the Ohio and West Virginia Departments of Transportation. However, the support of each and every governmental entity in Brooke, Hancock, and Jefferson is essential to assure a satisfactory outcome. Emphasis is being placed on obtaining funding from the two states to fund the next phase of the Bridge Study and on ensuring that the states continue to fund the necessary appropriations to maintain the Fort Steuben and Market Street Bridges until the two proposed Ohio River bridges are completed.

The U.S. 22 Corridor is another vital piece in the local transportation system. Widening and upgrading of the various routes included in the proposed project would create a link for commercial traffic between Pittsburgh, Pa. and Columbus, Oh. Even though much of this system would be located outside of BHJ’s three-county area, the development of this project would provide great benefits for those three counties. It is believed that this route would become a reliever for truck traffic using Interstate 70. As the traffic pattern shifts, development along the corridor would follow. As of this date, this proposal is not included in the future plans of the Ohio Department of Transportation. Again, the BHJ staff is working with the ODOT contacts to have this corridor included as one of the top issues in the future of the local transportation system.

Your support and influence is essential in promoting these key infrastructure projects to the powers that be in your respective states.

Gary R. Folden

November 3
BHJ Executive Committee
12:00

November 11
BHJ Office Closed—Veteran’s Day

November 17
TAC
Full Commission
10:30
12:00

November 25-26
BHJ Office Closed—Thanksgiving Holiday

December 24
BHJ Office—Christmas

December 31
BHJ Office Closed—New Years

January 19
TAC
BHJ Full Commission—Reorganization Meeting; Election of Officers
10:30
12:00
The Weirton Area Chamber of Commerce, originally called the Weir-Cove Chamber of Commerce, was chartered in 1936 with approximately 122 members. The name was changed to the Weirton Chamber of Commerce in 1948 to coincide with the formation of the City of Weirton. In the late 1980s, the word ‘Area’ was added to the name to acknowledge members who were located throughout Hancock, Brooke, Jefferson, and Washington Counties. Today, the Weirton Area Chamber of Commerce consists of about 400 business owners or professionals who employ approximately 10,000 people.

The motto of the Weirton Area Chamber of Commerce is: “Business and professional people working together to make your community a better place for everyone to live and work.”

The Chamber strives to create a better understanding and appreciation of the importance of people within the business community and concern for their problems; educating the business community and representing them in the city, county, state and national legislative and political affairs; and preventing or addressing controversies which are detrimental to expansion and growth of business within the community.

While the Chamber is essentially a “board of trade” that supports the business entities in Weirton and surrounding areas, it also strives to assist these businesses in “giving back” to the community and to nurture our existing “fabric of life.” We have solid, well-respected programs that develop leadership and entrepreneurship in both youth and adult segments of our community. The Chamber continually strives to improve the quality of life in this area. The following is a sample of our programs.

Youth Leadership Weirton is open to high school sophomores. A total of 35 students from five local high schools are represented in this year’s class. The candidates participate in seven sessions ranging from a Simulated Society exercise to a team building workout on the Leadership Challenge Ropes Course at Franciscan University.

Leadership Weirton, which has a similar curriculum, is open to adults. This year’s class represents a cross-section of individuals from the business community. Upon completing Leadership Weirton, the participants are encouraged to become a part of one of the many active Chamber committees and/or assist with the Weirton United Way’s fundraising efforts.

The Chamber sponsors seven Business After Hours networking opportunities including a “Member-To-Member” in September, a “Toys for Tots” Campaign in November, and a Holiday Social in December.

The holiday season is a busy time with the Chamber playing host to and coordinating Weirton’s Christmas Parade. Chamber member businesses also help the Salvation Army by contributing money to purchase gifts from the Angel Tree. Last year the Chamber membership purchased over 40 bicycles and nearly $2,000 of Angel Tree presents.

Each spring, the Chamber co-hosts the Home and Garden Expo with Weirton Medical Center and sponsors “Ladies Day at the Chamber” during Administrative Professionals Week. Both are well received and well attended events. The Chamber also coordinates community blood drives and provides flu shots for Chamber member employees.

In April a High School Business Symposium is conducted teaching juniors interviewing techniques, marketing, product development, quality assurance and teambuilding skills. MarketPlace for Kids Summer Camp teaches middle school students many facets of entrepreneurship.

The Chamber’s staff includes Office Manager, Brenda Mull, and Member Services/Programs Coordinator, Lynnell Realischloss. The success of the Weirton Chamber rests not only with the office staff but also with the many community leaders who step up to assist in of the form of facilitators, speakers, sponsors, and coordinators. The current Chairman of the Board of Directors is John Newbrough. Other member of the Board include: William D’Alesio, J.J. Bernabei, Cathie Caranda, Lisa Conti, Richard Crofton, John Frankvitich, Don Gianni Jr., Sharon Bogarad, John C. Greco, Nancy Kowalski, Glenda Robinson, and Rex Fisher.

Communications plays a key role in the success of the Weirton Chamber. An electronic memo goes out each Monday morning via e-mail and a printed “Town Crier” newsletter is mailed each month. Each of these publications reaches approximately 500 people. New Member Breakfast Meetings, Focus Group Luncheons and an Annual Membership Banquet help in providing two-way communications between the staff and the membership.

The Chamber recently published a quality of life book highlighting tourism, economic development, and housing in Brooke and Hancock Counties. This was a joint effort between the Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle, the Hancock County Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Commissions of both counties. The book called “Northern Panhandle Life” can be viewed on the Chamber website at www.weirtonchamber.com. The Weirton Area Chamber of Commerce partners with many other organizations such as the Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle, Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Commission, Hancock County Convention & Visitors Bureau, the West Virginia Small Business Development Center, Northern Panhandle Workforce Investment Board, WV Job Services, West Virginia Northern Community College, and the City of Weirton. Recently, the Chamber formed a “Healthy Collaboration” partnership with Carelink Health Plans to offer discounted health care insurance for Chamber membership employees.

Business development, business retention, promoting tourism, and community development are major goals of the Weirton Area Chamber of Commerce. The Weirton Chamber will work towards these goals and strive to improve the quality of life in our communitie}s and hopefully make this area a better place to live and work!
In Fiscal Year 2004, BHJ’s funding for all categories—Transportation, Community Development, ARC, EPA and Economic Development—totaled $496,120. Transportation alone accounted for 54% of that amount.

The administration of these dollars covers a wide range of activities. The Regional Bridge System Study has been perhaps the most notable. Considering the age and condition of both the Fort Steuben and Market Street bridges, the need for a new bridge is becoming increasingly more evident.

At the request of Mayor Bill Miller, City of Weirton, the BHJ Transportation Study (BHJTS) held a special meeting on August 18 at the MBS Warehouse located in the Half Moon Industrial Park in Weirton. The businesses located in the industrial park rely on the bridge and have legitimate concerns about its future. Officials from both the Ohio and West Virginia Departments of Transportation discussed the future of the Fort Steuben Bridge as well as the planned improvements to access the US 22 highway network from the park.

Mr. Dan Moeglin, ODOT District 11, said that upon inspection the bridge received an overall poor condition rating. Substantial deterioration below the bridge decking necessitated posting load limits which will be closely monitored. Further restrictive action could be taken if the load limits are not adhered to. Mr. Moeglin stressed that public safety will not be jeopardized.

Will the bridge be closed? According to officials, this is the first step towards a permanent closure. The bridge is listed as “functionally obsolete” and does not meet the current AASHTO standards for bridges and roadways. It cannot be rebuilt to standards in its current condition and location. In the meantime, maintenance and inspection costs of $200,000 will maintain a safe level of service.

The Commission agreed several “next steps” should be taken: (1) BHJ staff, in coordination with ODOT and WVDOT will provide quarterly reports to the Commission; (2) Senators Bowman and McKenize and Delegate Ennis will provide letters of support to expedite road improvements at Freedom Way and Main Streets and (3) BHJ and ODOT District 11 will support a $600,000 (Ohio Transportation Review and Advisory Committee (TRAC) application to prepare a location and environmental study for the preferred bridge alternative. The funding request to TRAC will be presented on Thursday, October 21 in Columbus.

In other bridge-related news, representatives of the BHJTS staff and Policy Committee, as well as Progress Alliance and the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, attended an introduction of ACCESS Ohio in Columbus. Jefferson County community leaders were afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding plans to complete the proposed Columbus, Ohio/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Interstate Corridor via US 22 through Steubenville. The corridor between Steubenville and New Philadelphia is becoming a high freight route and major traffic gateway into West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Indiana. The ODOT Freight Study completed in 2001 indicates the combined freight tonnage traveling over both the Fort Steuben Bridge and the Veterans Memorial Bridge ranks as the 20th highest gateway for freight tonnage entering and exiting the State of Ohio.

ODOT traffic count surveys indicate that the combined average daily traffic over both the Veterans Bridge and the Fort Steuben Bridge increased from 33,180 in 1996 to 47,250 in 2002. The surveys also indicated the combined average daily truck traffic (ADTT) over both bridges grew from 3,670 in 1996 to 4,810 in 2002. By comparison the combined ADTT crossing on the I70/470 bridges near Wheeling, WV remained static from 12,660 in 1996 to 12,490 in 2002.

On August 3, a meeting of political, economic and transportation leaders met to discuss the next steps needed for a corridor planning study.

“Tis the season” - for traffic counts, that is! Since May, BHJ staff has conducted over 100 counts in various locations throughout the region. According to Shawn Price, BHJ senior technical engineer, this is a record number.

Traffic counts are normally done each year beginning in May through mid-October depending on the weather. This year, BHJ staff did counts for Steubenville, Toronto, Mingo Junction, Tiltonsville, Wellsburg, Beech Bottom, Weirton and Wintersville.

Mr. Price initiated a new program this year to update traffic counts on a continuous three-year cycle. For example, locations at Lovers Lane and Sunset Boulevard in Steubenville and State Highway 27 in Wellsburg were updated from 2000-2001.
Barb Zimnox, BHJ’s community development specialist, is responsible for the administration of almost $25,000,000 in project funding for water and sewer projects in Brooke and Hancock counties. Ms. Zimnox works closely with the funding agencies, public service districts and local officials to successfully coordinate each project from inception to completion.

The Route 8 Sewer Project in Hancock County is one such project. Plans for this $14,436,620 project began a little over a year ago. Congressman Alan Mollohan showed his support by providing a $4,850,000 State and Travel Appropriation Grant (STAG). Other funding was obtained through a Hancock County EDA Grant ($1,500,000); Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council (IJDC) Grant ($1,426,000); IJDC Loan ($6,468,620) and tap fees ($192,000). When completed, sewer service will be provided to approximately 650 residents along Route 8 from New Cumberland to Smith Road. Sewage will flow to a treatment plant to be constructed in the Deep Gut Run area.

The PSD anticipates going to construction by next fall. Final design is currently underway, and a Phase One Archaeological Survey will begin shortly at the treatment plant site. Easement acquisition is ongoing. If the project stays on schedule, it should be completed within two years from now.

Much of the success of the project can be attributed to the Hancock County Commissioners. Ms. Zimnox said, “The Hancock County Commissioners have been a force in getting this project funded and moving forward.”

Another Hancock County project that’s moving forward is the Route 2 Sewer Line Extension. The project will add 21 residential customers and 5 businesses to the existing system from Ergon north to Newell. It is currently under construction and should be finished within a month.

The Hammond Public Service District has a project that’s ready to go to the Public Service Commission for a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity. The Hukills Run and Greens Run Water Line Extension will add approximately 39 households to the existing PSD system. This $1,415,636 project is funded by an IJDC loan as well as an IJDC grant.

In Beech Bottom, West Virginia, final design is ongoing for a water line extension and upgrade that would extend water service to an additional 9 residences and 4 businesses to the northern end of the Village. The project will also upgrade the existing system providing improved fire protection, better quality of water service and an adequate water supply for future development.

The Beech Bottom water line extension is a $1,192,101 project. Congressman Mollohan supported the project with an SAP grant in the amount of $554,355. By early November, the Village will find out if the $637,746 SCBG funds applied for will be available.

Construction on the Colliers Water and Sewer Line Extension Project is now complete. The project came in under budget enabling the PSD to explore the possibility of purchasing needed equipment for each side of the project with the remaining funds.

The Hammond Public Service District submitted and received approval upon funding an application to the Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council for a water project in the Lazear’s Lane (Wellsburg) area. If the project is funded, water service will be extended to approximately 10 residences and 5 business. Congressman Mollohan generously introduced $55,000 in his funding bill to be earmarked for this project. Remaining funding is being sought through a Governor’s Partnership Grant application.

According to Ms. Zimnox, future projects will be developed based on the water and sewer facilities plans.
With a land area of just 0.5 square miles, you may not notice this tiny village of approximately 276 residents (as of July 2002) as you drive north along Ohio State Route 7 just 9 miles from Steubenville, Ohio. Instead, you are more apt to notice the New Cumberland Locks & Dam on the Ohio River or looking straight ahead you see the towering smoke stacks of the Ohio Edison Sammis Plant.

The lock & dam, located on the right bank of the Ohio River, is just two miles downstream from New Cumberland, WV, which was originally planned to be the site of the lock and dam. The dam is a 1,200 by 100–ft main chamber that enables large tows to make passage through the lock.

If you take a closer look, you will find the Village of Stratton is a closely-knit community where neighbors still look out for one another. It is a community of mostly retired folks—the median age is 44.6—who can enjoy all the advantages of small-town living while still having close access to shopping in Steubenville, Youngstown or Pittsburgh. According to statistical information found on the Internet, the length of stay since moving in is significantly above the state average.

Within the community is a park, a library and a swimming pool as well as a senior center. Most of these amenities are the result of the hard work of the citizens working together to make life just a little more pleasant.

For example, when Lola Kakasic Swanagan first moved to Stratton, there was a library. Actually, there was a building everyone called the library—but, there were no books. Lola searched for a way to get books to fill the shelves, and found it. She read about a larger library that gave books away each year. She got in her truck and went after them. A real library came into existence.

The municipal building not only houses village offices, but also has a room available to rent for showers, receptions and other parties.

There are two pools that serve the community. One is an outdoor pool located at the park and open during the summer months. The municipal pool is open all year round. It is used by some area high school swimming teams—Stebenville Catholic Central, Edison and Wellsville—as a home base for practice and meets. The Stratton Sea Cats, coached by Darlene Sperry, is a group of swimmers ages six and up who also use the pool for swim meets. The senior citizens have a designated day each week for their use. Open swimming is available on Saturday and Sunday from 12-8.

The entire length of the Village is less than a mile long. Within that area is a group of people who take pride in their surroundings and enjoy a life that is reminiscent of by-gone days. It’s a place where you can walk down the street and know your neighbors. It’s a community that works together and cares about one another.

Stratton, Ohio may be small in appearance, but it offers a large dose of satisfaction for small town life.
Related Web Sites

Appalachian Regional Commission
www.arc.gov

Brooke Pioneer Trail Assoc. Inc
www.brookepioneertrail.org

Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle
www.bhbdc.org

CHANGE, Inc.
www.changeinc.org

City of Steubenville
www.cityofsteubenville.us

Hancock County Convention and Visitors Bureau
www.hancockcvb.com

Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce
www.jeffersoncountychamber.com

Ohio Department of Transportation
www.dot.state.oh.us

Progress Alliance
www.progressalliance.com

State of Ohio Government Information
www.state.oh.us

State of West Virginia Government Info.
www.state.wv.us

State Route 2 & Interstate 68 Authority
www.route2andi68.com

U.S. Census Bureau
www.census.gov

U.S. Department of Transportation
www.dot.gov

Village of Wintersville
www.wintersville.net

Weirton Chamber of Commerce
www.weirtonchamber.com

West Virginia Department of Transportation
www.wvdot.com

West Virginia Development Office
www.wvdo.org