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FOCUS: ASHTABULA COUNTY

Ashtabula County businesses adapt amid pandemic

By Justin Ransom
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The nationwide impact of the novel coronavirus led to a 2020 peak unemployment rate of 14.7 percent, leaving 23.1 million people without jobs. Businesses across the country suffered, leaving many small businesses to shut their doors for good.

However, despite the challenges, businesses in Ashtabula County made the best of the situation.

Stephanie Siegel, executive director of Ashtabula County Visitors Bureau, said COVID-19 actually increased some county businesses where some “report[ed] record-breaking numbers.”

“Day trips spiked this summer, and tourism continues to do well in our county,” Siegel said. “Many of our natural resources and vineyards naturally led themselves to social distancing.”

One trend resulting from the coronavirus pandemic includes the shift

from overnight stays in Ashtabula County to day trips, or daycations, said Siegel.

“Daycations are great for our small businesses, but overnight guests spend three times the amount,” Siegel said. “Day trips are outpacing overnight stays, which impacts bed tax paid to lodging establishments [which are] the main revenue source for visitors bureaus.”

Gene Sigel, an owner of South River Winery, said that he thinks the travel restrictions set not only for national travel but international as well, resulted in an increase of visitors to Ashtabula County, particularly at wineries.

“I’ve been working in the industry for 28 years,” Sigel said. “By looking at the parking lots there’s a lot more traffic in the wine industry this year than in the past. So much of the travel and leisure and tourism that’s happening this year, I think is happening in vehicular base on day trips and things



Above, a cottage is one of the lodging options at Vineyard Woods.

Right, a griffin at South River Winery wears a mask to remind customers to follow protocol to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN RANSOM



that are close. It’s rooted in the fact that people are not able to travel to Canada, or to Europe with the same level of flights or not even within the United States by flights at the same level.”

Scott Runyan, owner of the lodging option Vineyard Woods in Geneva, said the travel restrictions led those in close driving proximity to schedule overnight stays.

“They come up to vacation just to get away from their house,” Runyan said. “A lot of people had vacations canceled, so they’re looking to stay close to home. The population from Pittsburgh, Columbus, Cleveland, that may normally have been going on week-long vacations to the beach, or to the states where they weren’t sure what the travel restrictions were, we ultimately benefited from that.”

Don Woodward of Geneva-on-the-Lake’s Pera’s Motel, Adventure Zone, and Old Firehouse Winery, said “Geneva-on-the-Lake as a whole re-

ally benefited” in trips.

“A lot of people come in and get their cottages or get their motel rooms or get their large house for extended family and they don’t even go down to the strip,” Woodward said. “They just

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Ashtabula Township Park

The Ashtabula Township Park Commission is the steward of two parks in Ashtabula Township.



The first and most popular is Lakeshore Park located just east of the northern terminus of State Rt. 11. It is a beautiful well maintained and manicured 54 acre park on the shores of Lake Erie. It is an ideal spot for families to enjoy the outdoors and it brings many visitors to the area. The second is Indian Trails Park which offers nature lovers 405 acres, 4 miles of primitive hiking trail along the scenic Ashtabula River and 3,000' of improved trail where rare plant species and a vast amount of wildlife can be found. Many spots are found for great

steelhead fishing. At the southern terminus of Indian Trails the Smolen Gulf Bridge can be found crossing the park and river. It is the longest covered bridge in the United States.

www.lakeshoreparkashtabula.org

Conneaut Township Park

Conneaut Township Park boasts the most beautiful views of Lake Erie and Conneaut's Harbor, as well as the iconic Lighthouse. It is the spot on Lake Erie for enjoying all types of sports, water activities, picnicking, and communing with nature for people of all ages. The Board of Park Commissioners welcomes all to come and visit Conneaut and our beautiful Township Park.

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Geneva State Park

Located in Ohio's northeastern shoreline, 698-acre Geneva State Park reflects the character and charisma of Lake Erie. The shimmering expanse of the lake lures vacationers who enjoy



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BUSINESSES

FROM PAGE 2

stay at their place. They want to be socially distanced.”

Siegel said that restrictions in Pennsylvania brought an increase from the neighboring state.

“Travel guide requests from PA have increased 200 percent and approximately 50 percent of our traffic in the visitor center is from PA,” Siegel said.

“We are also going by what our members are telling us -- lodgers have seen it in their reservation zip code originations and restaurants have reported it with reservation phone numbers.”

One reason for the increase in traffic to Ashtabula County comes from the level of safety provided by the businesses in Ashtabula County. Runyan said his lodging business in particular offers a safe getaway for families.

“When things started opening back up people started looking for safe getaways,” Runyan said. “People tried to figure out what they were allowed to do and what was safe.” Vineyard Woods offers multiple cottages spread out for couples or families to visit. Runyan also notes that surrounding wineries have taken precautions and followed protocols to focus on the safety of their guests.

“The wineries have done a very good job in the area of changing their



A server serves a couple wine at South River Winery while wearing a mask to follow proper protocol to restrict the spread of COVID-19.

protocols,” Runyan said.

Siegel said the impact of social distancing at bars and restaurants led customers to travel to wineries to make up for smaller dining experiences. In particular, Siegel said South River Winery experienced no issues with social distancing.

“Many bars and restaurants in Ohio that are adversely impacted by COVID have been impacted because they’ve had to reduce their capacity to 50 or 25 percent of their normal business level to keep people distanced,” Siegel said. “The impact was mitigated for us in summer by the fact that we didn’t face the same capacity restrictions. We already had tables six feet apart to begin with for decades. People can spread out in the lawn all over the 80 acres.”

Though social distancing did not play a role in visits to South River Winery, Siegel said interactions with their customers diminished.

“We often spend some time with personal interaction discussing our products with them and they’re introduced to them,” Siegel said. “It’s been harder to have interaction with people and talk about the wines or the spirits and taste them with them.”

Siegel said customers have responded great to the restrictions.

“People have been very patient,” Siegel said. “The customers have learned to wait in line at a distance and patiently.”

Some other businesses have struggled.

Woodward said that some businesses perished.

“There were some businesses that just couldn’t figure out how to open a small restaurant,” Woodward said. “They had no area to put patios out and a couple didn’t open.”

Woodward said the employment rate at Geneva-on-the-Lake also suffered.

“Geneva-on-the-Lake probably has 100, if that many, full-time employees year-round, but then we gear up and a couple thousand are necessary, maybe even more than that, to run Geneva-on-the-Lake during the peak of the season during the summer,” Woodward said. “We could never gear back up.”

Speaking specifically on Old Firehouse Winery, Woodward said they couldn’t rebound with their employees.

“We never got more than 30% of our normal employee needs.” In some instances, Woodward said they “actually turned people away” because they “didn’t have a capacity for them.”

As for Adventure Zone, Woodward said to establish a safe place for customers, he needed to make changes.

“We had to pull other machines off more to get social distancing,” Woodward said. “We reduced capacity. We got a lot of compliments on Adventure Zone. I think people feel safe coming there.”

Even though the pandemic caused Woodward to adapt his businesses, he said that given all circumstances pertaining to the uncertainty dating back to April, he is pleased with the way the year has gone.

“Sitting around in April wondering if you’re even going to have a season, I’m very happy with the way things have turned out,” Woodward said.

Since the pandemic caused many businesses to adapt to the circumstances, businesses managed to find ways to generate customer satisfaction and Siegel said she believes it will have a lasting impact on visitors.

“[This] introduces people to our region and gives them a reason to return,” Siegel said.

PARKS FROM PAGE 4



a family campground, cedar cabins, rooms at the lodge, and cottages. 4499 Padanarum Road in Geneva.

Pymatuning State Park

Pymatuning State Park invites outdoor lovers of all ages to enjoy a relaxing lakeside vacation experience. In a setting that highlights the mystery of an old swamp forest and the excitement of a water recreation area, Pymatuning is one of the finest walleye and muskellunge lakes in the country and offers excellent camping, swimming, and boating opportunities. 60 cabins, 373 campsites including primitive sites, RV sites, Rent-A-Yurt. Picnic shelters, boating, swimming, fishing, games, camping and beach nearby. Open seasonally. Pet and kid friendly. 6100 Pymatuning Lake Rd in Andover

Saybrook Township Park

The park offers a beautiful view of Lake Erie and its magnificent sunrises and sunsets. The Park sits on the bank of Lake Erie and is a panoramic setting for family reunions, parties, and outdoor activities. Saybrook residents have been visiting this Park for 100 years as the property was sold to the Saybrook Township Park Board in 1918. Visit www.saybrookpark.org to see more about the park’s amenities. 5941 Lake Road West in Ashtabula

Walnut Beach

Offers concession stand, tennis, basketball and volleyball court. Plank walkway to beach. Nature trail through wetlands area and sand dunes. Kid friendly. Walnut Blvd. & Lake Ave. in Ashtabula

Enjoy a Fall Driving Tour of the Covered Bridges of Ashtabula County

1. NETCHER

1544 Netcher Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 14' 6" (2.7 mi. from center of Jefferson)

The bridge over Mill Creek and was opened to traffic in 1999. It features a timber arch with inverted Haupt trusses. The "Neo Victorian" designed structure is 110' Long, 22' Wide, and 14' 6" High.

2. SOUTH DENMARK

2670 South Denmark Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 9'0" (2.7 mi. from Netcher Rd Bridge)

Built in 1890 this Town Lattice bridge spans Mill Creek. The 81-foot-long structure was bypassed in 1975.

3. CAINE

4699 Caine Rd, Pierpont Township

Clearance 11'0" (6.7 mi. from S Denmark Rd Bridge)

This first Pratt Truss bridge in Ohio was built in 1986 in honor of the County's 175th anniversary. The 124-foot-long bridge traverses the west branch of the Ashtabula River.

4. GRAHAM

4646 Graham Rd, Pierpont Township

Bypass (5.9 mi. from Caine Rd Bridge)

Built from remnants of a bridge washed downstream in the 1913 flood, the bridge now sits in a small park on the south side of the road.

5. ROOT

4680 Root Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 8'4" (3.9 mi. from Graham Rd Bridge)

A 114-foot-long Town Lattice built in 1868, Root Rd Bridge was raised 18" during the rehabilitation in 1982-83. New laminated girders and a center concrete pier were also added.

6. MIDDLE

910 Middle Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 13'6" (8.3 mi. from Root Rd Bridge)

This 136-foot-long Howe Truss bridge was built in 1868 over Conneaut Creek, which is a favorite Steelhead Stream. It was rehabilitated in 1984 with the help of 7 volunteers.

7. STATE

5899 State Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 16'2" (5.1 miles from Middle Rd Bridge)

Containing 97,000' of southern pine and oak, the State Rd Bridge was erected in 1983 across Conneaut Creek. This 152-foot-long Town Lattice was the first covered bridge designed and built by County Engineer, John W. Smolen, Jr. A 4' opening spans the length.

8. CREEK

371 Creek Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 11'4" (3.4 mi. from State Rd Bridge)

The construction date of this 125-foot-long Town Lattice is unknown. It sits 25' above Conneaut Creek and was renovated in 1994.

9. BENETKA

4500 Benetka Rd, Sheffield Township

Clearance 11'0" (11.5 mi. from Creek Rd Bridge)

A 138-foot-long Town Lattice with arch bridge, Benetka was built about 1900. It was renovated in 1985 when a laminated arch 9 in. wide, 38 in. thick, spanning the length of the bridge, was added.

10. OLIN

1880 Dewey Rd, Plymouth Township

Clearance 12'0" (2.5 mi. from Benetka Rd Bridge)

Olin's have owned property next to the bridge since it was built in 1873. The 115-foot-long Town Lattice structure over the Ashtabula River was renovated in 1985.

11. SMOLEN-GULF

7001 State Rd, Ashtabula

Clearance 14'6" (2.6 mi. from Olins Bridge)

The longest covered bridge in the U.S. is of Pratt Truss construction. Engineering and structural design was done by John W. Smolen, Jr. (former county engineer) and architectural design was done by Timothy J. Martin (current county engineer). Dedicated in 2008, it is 613' long and stands 93' above the River. With a clear width of 30', it will support full legal-load traffic and has a life expectancy of 100 years.

12. RIVERVIEW

Indian Trails Park, 4761 State Road, Ashtabula

This bridge is 150' long and 14' wide, making it one of the larger bridges, yet it carries only pedestrian traffic. It mirrors the Pratt arch design of its big brother, Smolen-Gulf, which rises above. Both cross the Ashtabula River at Indian Trails Park. Riverview, dedicated in 2016, provides exercise trails and a place to enjoy the beautiful river scenery.

13. GIDDINGS

1400 Giddings Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 15'6" (8 mi. from Smolen-Gulf Bridge)

Pratt Truss construction was used for this 107-foot-long bridge built in 1995. It crosses Mill Creek in Jefferson Township. At this point the tour returns to Jefferson (3.5 miles back) via Jones Road, Rt. 167 and Rt. 46.

14. DOYLE

1300 Doyle Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 13' 6" (1.8 mi. from Jefferson)

A 94-foot-long Town Lattice bridge built in 1868, Doyle spans Mill Creek, a tributary of the Grand River. This bridge was renovated in 1987 when a laminated arch was added.

15. WEST LIBERTY

94 West Liberty St, Geneva

Clearance 15' (10.6 mi. from Doyle Rd Bridge)

The shortest covered bridge in the U.S., Liberty spans only 18'. The structure is supported by a single Kingpost and its roof is a Scissor Truss which gives the bridge a light, open feeling. Timber for this bridge was harvested from county land owners. The bridge was modularly constructed by students of Ashtabula County Joint Vocational School (now A-Tech).

16. HARPERSFIELD

1122 Harpersfield Rd, Geneva

Clearance 10'9" (3 mi. from Liberty St. Bridge)

This two-span Howe Truss bridge is 228' long and is the second longest bridge in Ohio. Built in 1868, it is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A 1913 flood altered the river, requiring a steel bridge to link the covered bridge to the north approach. A walkway was added in 1992.

17. MECHANICSVILLE

1153 Mechanicsville Rd, Geneva

Clearance 10' (4.6 mi. from Harpersfield Bridge)

Longest single-span covered bridge in Ashtabula, this 156' long Howe Truss with Arch was built in 1867. The arch is 15 layers of 2x8 lumber and is encased by large beams which form the X's of the Howe Truss. Believed to be the oldest of the County's bridges, it was renovated in 2003.

18. RIVERDALE

3349 Riverdale Rd, Rock Creek

Clearance 9'6" (9.2 mi. from Mechanicsville Bridge)

This 114-foot-long Town Lattice bridge sits high above the Grand River. Center steel bracing was added in 1945, and in 1981, the floor was rebuilt and glue laminated girders added to the interior. This creates a bridge-within-a-bridge and narrows the passageway. The Rd at the east end of the bridge washed out in 1987 and a new concrete abutment was built.

19. WINDSOR MILLS

7696 Warner Hollow Rd, Windsor

Clearance 11'3" (14.5 mi. from Riverdale Bridge)

Windsor Mills is 120' long and spans Phelps Creek, a tributary of the Grand River. Built in 1867 the Town Lattice bridge rests on abutments of sandstone (quarried nearby) and creek stone. The field stone center pier was replaced with stone-look concrete when it was renovated in 2002-03.



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Mayfield Heights: 1438 S.O.M. Center Rd., Suite 101
(Located in the Professional/Gallucci Bldg.- Across from Eastgate Shopping Center)

Mentor: 9875 Johnnycake Ridge Rd.
(In front of Concord Plaza/Rt. 84)

Willoughby: 35104 Euclid Ave., Suite 100
(Inside the Parkhill Professional Bldg./Next to Pizza Hut)

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