



# Forward **THINKING**



**SIDNEY-SHELBY**  
**ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP**  
*technology. growth. progress.*





**Written by Robert Hoshowsky**

**P**ositioned at the northern edge of the Midwest-Dayton-Ohio Region is a manufacturing powerhouse which is leading in diverse manufacturing, food processing and production agriculture.

Sidney-Shelby is the base of two certified, shovel-ready industrial parks and the world's biggest businesses including Honda of America Manufacturing, trailer maker Airstream, food producer Cargill, and world-leading heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) and refrigeration company Emerson Climate Technologies.

Jim Hill has been the Executive Director of the Sidney-Shelby Economic Partnership (SSEP) for almost two years and is proud of the small Midwestern town and the accomplishments of the SSEP.

Despite a modest population of just under 50,000 people, Sidney-Shelby thinks big

and acts big, attracting some of the best-known companies to the area, and many of them are expanding existing operations.

One significant company driving Shelby County is famous Japanese multinational conglomerate Honda which has had a presence in the area since 1985. "We have a strong base of suppliers and related business that support Honda operations," says Hill. "The Honda Engine Plant employs more than three thousand employees, and Honda is the largest single employer in Shelby County."

The Anna Engine Plant (AEP) is Honda's biggest engine plant worldwide, totaling 2.6 million square feet, on over fifty acres with over fifty lines manufacturing engines and components, the plant produces 1.18 million engines every year.

Last September, Honda celebrated forty years of manufacturing in America since its first production in Marysville, in 1979. ►



- ▶ The company is a huge force in Ohio, having invested over \$11 billion into the state. It employs some fifteen thousand people here, purchases \$10 billion worth of parts and materials yearly, and donates over \$100 million to community organizations.

"Honda's success in Ohio has always been driven by the dedication and innovative spirit of our associates, and this fortieth anniversary milestone is a tribute to Honda associates, past and present, who have provided their energy, ideas, and passion to create high-quality products for our customers," said President of Honda of America Mfg. Inc., Mitsugu Matsukawa, last year in a media release. "Based on the team we have in Ohio and the opportunities ahead, I'm excited for the future of Honda in America."

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The Sidney-Shelby Economic Partnership was formed in 1983 and is comprised of leaders in the community, business, and government "dedicated to maintaining the economic growth and stability of Shelby County," according to the SSEP. Working alongside governmental officials both local and state, the organization is committed to expanding and retaining businesses county-wide.

The SSEP provides valuable assistance for workforce development, project planning and coordination, markets and labor, utilities, financing, taxes, and more to help businesses grow and succeed.

SSEP works to ensure that the county remains competitive as a strong manufacturing center. Through the Workforce Partnership of Shelby County (WFP), it is helping companies grow and attract the technology workers needed for their businesses. Sidney-Shelby was one of the first to launch a private-public partnership to create pathways for students to engage in good careers right in Shelby County.



"We are focusing on strategic public-private partnerships and better marketing and branding to get the word out about what we have to offer," say Hill. "That involves working with our local Sidney and Shelby County partners and with our regional partners in economic development, which is the Dayton Development Coalition (DDC)." JobsOhio, the private-sector-led economic development organization, works with regional partners around the state to assist in economic development.

The Sidney-Shelby Economic Partnership is also pursuing business internationally. In 2018 and 2019, the SSEP sent Hill and a county commissioner to Japan to build on relationships with current Japanese investors, many of them buoyed by Honda's strong presence in Shelby County.

Sidney-Shelby has two shovel-ready industrial parks certified through DP&L and McCallum Sweeney – the Sidney Ohio Industrial Park and the Amos Industrial Park. The county is also home to two of the Dayton region's top three manufacturing employers. Over the years, many businesses and manufacturers have not only moved operations to the county, but are expanding.

In February 2018, Airstream announced a new 750,000-square-foot facility expansion of its campus. The \$40 million, state-of-the-art plant will be powered entirely by renewable energy credits and feature a new corporate office and an Airstream heritage center.

"We embrace our rich history even as we move into the future," said Airstream President and Chief Executive Officer Bob Wheeler in a release. "This new facility will give us the room to build and innovate quality products, all while maintaining the hand-made craftsmanship that makes Airstream an American icon."

The expansion will consolidate several production locations. Airstream, which has a longstanding presence in the area, was quick to praise the county and its people. "The workforce here in Shelby County is second-to-none," added Wheeler. "We couldn't be happier reaffirming our sixty-five-plus year commitment to Jackson Center. In addition, the State of Ohio is a great place to do business, and their continued commitment to Airstream made this an easy decision." The move will also benefit locals, increasing the total employment to approximately 1,200 after the expansion.

Not to be outdone, Minnesota-based Cargill announced a \$225 million expansion last fall which will see it expand its Sidney-based soybean crushing and refined oils facility. After examining some other competitive sites for its current soybean processing operations, the company reaffirmed its commitment to Sidney. When completed in about twenty-four months, this



will be the largest soybean-crushing facility in North America, allowing Cargill to meet customer demands for food oils.

“They also make a variety of oils for different clients at their Sidney facility, such as canola, to sell different blends,” says Hill. “The idea is that the majority of the soybean oil that they process for their customers will be produced here, as opposed to part of it being shipped in.”

And in 2018, Emerson completed the first phase of its four-year, \$100 million renovation and expansion project in Sidney. Emerson Climate Technologies is another top area employer and has made significant investment in the area. Emerson is now in the third phase of an expansion. The first phase saw expansion of corporate offices and some laboratories. The more recent phases include an overhaul of the company's campuses and Sidney-based facilities.

Recently, Hill had a conversation with NKTelco, Inc. General Manager Preston Meyer. NKTelco is a locally owned and operated broadband communications business. The two spoke about several key issues, including NKTelco being certified by NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association as a Smart Rural Community. Sidney-Shelby boasts excellent fiber infrastructure, which is unique among rural communities, but of tremendous importance to today's data-driven companies.

“I think a strong fiber backbone serves as a business attraction and retention tool, keeping our companies connected to the global world. Yet it also helps with growing smaller companies that compete in the entrepreneurial space,” comments Hill.

Hill and his staff are pleased with the many accomplishments of the Sidney-Shelby Economic Partnership and look forward to all that 2020 will bring. He welcomes the launch of a new brand for Sidney-Shelby County, moving past research into the marketing phase.

“We are currently experiencing \$267 million in major project investment in manufacturing, and the annual economic output in the county's manufacturing sector totals roughly \$7.1 billion.” Five of the top twelve manufacturing companies in the Dayton region are located in Shelby County, so the area nurtures its strong economic base.

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With a strong economic base comes the need to grow a future workforce. The Workforce Partnership is providing pathways for young people to enter careers in manufacturing, skilled trades, and construction through business-education partnerships.

“Over the last seven years, we have had over 16,000 direct touch points between students and companies fostering career exploration, job shadowing, direct internships, and a variety of connection points so that people here know there are good career opportunities,” states Hill. “We are part of [HometownOpportunity.com](http://HometownOpportunity.com), which is a four-county workforce portal that we use to encourage local employment opportunities,” he explains.

“Students in classrooms throughout Shelby County utilize Hometown Opportunity to learn about careers and develop career pathways. Our local foundation recently added Skilled Trade Scholarships to their offerings in order to help more students pursue certificates and associate degrees. Our workforce efforts are a key to maintaining and growing our economy and we are very committed to that effort,” adds Hill. ■



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