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## East Ohio 'job ready sites' eyed

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ELECTED OFFICIALS from several surrounding counties, along with the Ohio Department of Development and representatives from the Strickland administration, appeared at Ohio University Eastern Tuesday to discuss potential sites for economic development.

Brought to Belmont County by the Port Authority, through the Belmont County Commissioners, the speakers informed the audience, most of whom were local government officials, on how to best educate its county to ensure "job ready sites."

Christine Bustamante, who works at a site selection and accounting firm known as KPMG, stressed the importance of today's economic competition and told officials that that competition was worldwide.

Belmont County Port Authority Director Larry Merry said people tend to think competition is in the surrounding counties, but he disagrees.

"Most people think that Ohio County is our biggest competition, but it's not," he said. "Our competition may be China on one project and Georgia on the next."

"In today's world, we're no longer competing against sister counties in Ohio," said Belmont County Commissioner Mark Thomas, noting that our competition could lie in areas such as Russia or even India.

Bustamante also discussed the significance of having these potential sites ready as soon as possible for employers or companies.

"We need to have shovel-ready sites, and we need to have the infrastructure ready, so we can hand over the sites immediately," Merry said.

Merry also noted that currently, there is an "extra demand on a readied workforce," and said, "The saying use to be 'location, location, location,' but, like Christine said, right now, most companies are looking at the 'workforce, workforce, workforce.'"

Other speakers included Governor's Regional Director in East Central Ohio Lisa Duvall, Governor's Regional Director in Southeast Ohio Christie Mash, Environmental Specialist of Business Development for the ODOD Brad Biggs and Manager of Business Development for the ODOD Martin Irvine.

Both Biggs and Irvine educated the audience on the Ohio Department of Development and discussed several sources of funding that the department can provide for the counties' sites including grants, bonds and refundable tax credit.

According to both Biggs and Irvine, the ODOD hopes to help and work with the surrounding counties and communities to only better the state of Ohio.

"Christine told us how to prepare, and Brad and Martin told us how to get there," Merry said.

The Monroe County Commissioners were present at the meeting and appeared to be enthusiastic regarding the information that was delivered.

"It was a good, informational meeting," said Commissioner John Pyles. "We discussed how we can build ourselves on our weaknesses to promote our strengths."

Because the Belmont County Commissioners acted as intermediaries for the Port Authority as well as the ODOD, Thomas said, "Our message was that the (surrounding counties, cities and villages) understand and embrace the theory of teamwork in regional economic development and understand and appreciate what the ODOD offers to our local government," adding that (the commissioners) are just "trying to gain further prosperity in Eastern Ohio."

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