

why?



NORTHWEST OHIO

with **Dean Monske**, President & CEO, Regional Growth Partnership

LOCATION, WORKFORCE,
AND PROJECT-READY
SITES ARE SPURRING A
REGIONAL RENAISSANCE
FOR DISTRIBUTION
OPERATIONS, AMONG
OTHER INDUSTRIES.



Nearly 60% of the U.S. population can be reached from Toledo, OH in a one day drive. This northwest Ohio city is undergoing a revitalization for both business growth and quality of life.

Business Facilities: *Why should companies consider northwest Ohio for relocation or expansion? What are long-standing advantages or recent developments?*

Dean Monske: Currently, the Regional Growth Partnership (RGP) focuses on five core industries—advanced manufacturing, automotive, food processing, advanced energy, and transportation/logistics. Our inherent business assets allow us to successfully compete within these industries.

The Toledo/Northwest Ohio region is fortunate with its central location in the Midwest market. Nearly 60% of the U.S. population can be reached in a day's drive from Toledo. You can drop a pin here and you'll have access to more industrial square footage within 300 miles

than any location in the U.S. Then, add our transportation assets, starting with the highway system, which features the crossroads of three of the country's most traveled interstates—I-80, I-90, and I-75. We're home to one of the largest general cargo ports on the Great Lakes and our region boast of one of the top rail hubs in the U.S. We can easily make a case that northwest Ohio is the ideal location for companies needing to distribute product.

Over the last several years, northwest Ohio has prioritized product development—ensuring we remain competitive for projects by offering a large inventory of spec buildings and sites ready for immediate development. We've aggressively utilized programs through JobsOhio for the construction of buildings and authentication of sites.

BF: *What is a recent project relocation or expansion you'd like to tell us about?*

Monske: Sheetz is a family-owned convenience store with more than 685 locations in six states. In late 2023, the company announced construction of a \$150 million facility in Findlay, OH for additional food preparation and distribution functions. This project will bring 750 new jobs over five years to the region. The company noted that Findlay is located in the heart of a new growth area that will play an important role for the future of Sheetz. The RGP worked closely with JobsOhio and Findlay-Hancock County Economic Development in moving the project forward. Northwest Ohio is a leading location for distribution centers, with many of the top name brand companies operating such facilities up and down I-75.

BF: *Why is the workforce in northwest Ohio an asset to businesses there?*

Monske: Our region prides itself on delivering to businesses a committed, hard-working, and dedicated workforce. And it's not just us; it's a Midwest mentality of people wanting to continuously learn, train, and adapt for their careers and for the good of the company. We have dozens of testimonials from businesses that have chosen to locate here or expand operations, that a primary reason for that decision was our area's strong and talented workforce.

Internally, the RGP's workforce champion is involved in building regional macro and micro workforce coalitions. We have aggressively partnered with key leadership, directors, and career service personnel at Ohio Technical Centers, community colleges, and universities, among others, to ensure training and educational programs are designed to meet high-skilled, in-demand jobs.

To support talent attraction, the RGP manages a Talent Acquisition Services program, funded by JobsOhio, which provides a customized approach to help businesses with recruitment strategies for hiring needs. The program is designed to build a talent plan to help solve the biggest hiring challenges. Services may include talent attraction, sourcing and marketing, pre-screening and assessments, and training.

BF: *What is a program having an impact on the business climate in northwest Ohio?*

Monske: JobsOhio has created several unique, innovative programs that the RGP has aggressively utilized to the benefit of companies doing projects in northwest Ohio.

First, the Ohio Site Inventory Program (OSIP) offers grants and low-interest loans to support speculative site and building development projects with no identified end user. The goal is to fill gaps in Ohio's real estate inventory to ensure our state is more competitive for site selection projects. In northwest Ohio, the RGP has



NSG Group, a global supplier of glass and glazing systems, sources solar energy for its manufacturing plant in northwest Ohio through an on-site solar field.

worked through JobsOhio in facilitating more than \$17 million in OSIP grants and loans toward the construction of 16 spec buildings, amassing 1.8 million square feet. And we continue to build the pipeline for future opportunities.

The RGP has also taken advantage of another creative program put forth by JobsOhio. The JobsOhio Small Business Grant program was created to provide financial support to minority-owned businesses and companies in distressed communities. The program provides capital needed to grow businesses as part of an inclusion strategy focused on underrepresented populations. The RGP has utilized the program as much as any region across Ohio, to the benefit of our area's qualified companies. Already, 88 northwest Ohio companies have been awarded grants exceeding \$2.8 million, which has led to the creation and retention of more than 2,000 jobs.

BF: *What does the future hold?*

Monske: The entire state of Ohio prides itself on the collaborative partnerships at all levels of a streamlined, efficient network system. The unique economic development model of JobsOhio sets our state apart and has provided incredible opportunities for growth in a diverse range of industries.

For northwest Ohio, our region will continue building opportunities for growth behind the inherent strengths we offer in solar and glass. Toledo is recognized as the glass capital of the world. And First Solar, the largest solar panel manufacturer in the U.S., will soon open its fourth facility in the Toledo region,

which includes manufacturing and R&D, where it employs more than 2,500 people. A regional innovation consortium led an effort to recently secure a \$31 million grant through the state's Innovation Hub grant program. Funding will allow for R&D efforts focused on more energy efficient methods for making glass lighter and stronger, and easier to recycle. This could include coatings for glass which can help solar panels better absorb the sun's energy.

Ultimately, the expectation is the commercialization and startup of new businesses, new products, and new high-tech jobs. Similarly, efforts are under way at the RGP in developing an aggressive business development and marketing strategy to attract technology-related businesses.

BF: *Why is the quality of life attractive in northwest Ohio?*

Monske: Both companies and visitors to the Toledo region will find a dynamic, growing downtown which has experienced a renaissance over the last decade. A revitalized waterfront area, as well as an injection of investment from businesses, residential development, and restaurant/entertainment, has triggered contagious enthusiasm that has lifted confidence and optimism and revived a spirit across our community. More than \$1 billion of investment in downtown projects has been completed or in process since 2015. And people are noticing. Just recently, *Barron's* magazine named Toledo as 2024's "Hottest Places to Live" amidst a booming housing market.

And similar downtown developments are also happening at dozens of our **BF**er communities across northwest Ohio.