



# Butler County is among Ohio's best at creating jobs. How has that happened?

## **Business**

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BUTLER COUNTY —

Butler County was one of the state's leaders in job growth in 2017 and 2018, and officials say they expect business-friendly practices, location between two large metro areas and amount of land available for development to continue that streak in the coming years.

The county saw a 1.5 percent increase in employment between March 2017 and March 2018, and Warren County saw a 1 percent increase, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Both of those exceeded the state average of 0.9 percent and were just below the nationwide change of 1.6 percent.

The most rapid job growth has come in the health care and the logistic industries, while the area's biggest challenge has been finding employees, a continuing problem nationwide. Officials highlighted the types of businesses coming or growing in Butler County have roots that set them up for sustained employment levels, and some have already made plans to grow.

All of this comes while the region is seen as "a cost effective place to do business," according to David Fehr, Butler County's development director.

"Generally our taxes and utility costs are lower than surrounding areas," Fehr said. "Butler County business can draw employees from both the Cincinnati and Dayton metro areas.

Butler County, which tied Stark County in job growth, was only outpaced by Delaware County (1.9 percent job growth) and Franklin County (1.6 percent job growth). Ohio itself saw 0.9 percent growth in employment during that 12-month span.

Fehr said Butler County doesn't typically get large "here today, gone tomorrow companies." "Most of our job growth is a lot of small to medium size companies adding 5 to 25 jobs at a time," Fehr said.

Counties like Butler, which are adding jobs, also need to ensure they're growing services that can support that increase, which can lead to an even stronger economy, said Miami University economics professor John Bowblis.

"What it's telling you is that area of Ohio is having new firms enter the market, you're seeing new jobs developed, and that will trickle down to other types of jobs, such as people building new homes, people getting their homes repaired and things along those lines," Bowblis said.

As more employers come to an area, higher education institutions like Miami University, Xavier University and the University of Cincinnati become even more in demand to help develop the latest skill sets those employers need, Bowblis said.

Then, more jobs means more tax revenue, which communities can invest in infrastructure needed to attract more employers, he said. It also means better recreational opportunities, more money for local high school education and increased amenities.

What will it take for Butler County to sustain its most recent job growth?

"We need to continue to invest in infrastructure improvements to sustain new business growth," Fehr said. "That is one of the reasons you will see improvements to Union Centre Boulevard/I-75 interchange."

Numerous area communities are getting involved in supporting improvements. . Last year, West Chester Twp. saw more than 1 million square feet of new warehousing distribution space developed, space that has already filled up, according to Aaron Wiegand, the township's community development director.

Continued development in the area, including a new TriHealth facility, also contributed to local job growth. Logistics is another growth area as retail continues to shift to more of an online presence, Wiegand said.

That kind of increase will continue for communities along the I-75 corridor and become even more pronounced "just because our location is great for companies that want to reach a nationwide audience," he said.

The entire county is playing a role in job growth, Wiegand said.

“As those communities continue their growth strategies that they’re under, it only helps the entire region,” he said. “West Chester is close to a build-out stage when it comes to industrial land that’s available, so if the county’s going to continue to grow, it’s going to be either in some of the newer markets, like a Monroe or a Liberty Twp.

“West Chester will still play a role. We don’t intend to give up the title easily, but it’s encouraging to see every community in Butler County really benefiting from this ecosystem of growth.”

Jody Gunderson, Hamilton’s economic development director, said ODW Logistics, Thyssenkrupp Bilstein and Barclaycard led job creation in the city recently. While Gunderson said 2019 job increases are difficult to predict, he did place them at somewhere between 200 and 250 new jobs.

“The City of Hamilton is very fortunate to have a well-developed and diversified local economy,” Gunderson said. “Hamilton’s companies utilize cutting-edge technologies that require skilled employees. Even as technology advances and our industries grow and change, these are jobs that will remain relevant and necessary into the future.”

Health care and manufacturing contributed the most job growth in Middletown, according to Jennifer Ekey, that city’s economic development director.

From March 2017 to March 2018, NTE was constructing the new Middletown Energy Plant while a large Middletown schools facilities project continued, which accounted for “a big increase” in construction jobs in Middletown, Ekey said.

In Fairfield, from March 2017 to March 2018, multiple companies completed expansions and added employees, including Pacific Manufacturing and Koch Foods, according to Alexander Kraemer, Fairfield’s economic development manager.

Pacific Manufacturing added about 150 jobs, and Koch Foods added about 225 recently. Multiple companies have plans to expand in Fairfield, including Express Scripts (more than 300 employees), The Fischer Group 100 employees in three years) and Hollar Inc. (up to 75 employees over the next few years).

“Adding these large employment gains to the steady job growth happening all around Fairfield gives me good reason to believe local job growth will continue in the foreseeable future,” he said.

Liberty Twp.’s most robust growth for March 2017 to March 2018 came as a result of the health care industry, most notably the 300 positions added at The Christ Hospital Medical Center-Liberty Township.

Caroline McKinney, that township’s economic development director, said the amount of land and development opportunities that exist in the community leads to an expectation of more growth.

“With available land and a great location along the booming I-75 growth corridor, Liberty Township is well-positioned for future growth and development,” McKinney said. “The similar is true for the county as a whole. There’s land available and proactive work being done by all communities to attract businesses and jobs to the county.”