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ALONG THE WAY: David Dix

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A competitive Portage County Office of Economic Development requires a budget of \$750,000 to \$1 million.

That's the word from Audrey Taylor, president of Chabin Concepts, a California consulting firm that works with Kent's Don Schjeldahl of the Austin Co. in Cleveland. Don, who likes Kent and Portage County and wants them to do well, has submitted data about our county to Taylor for a recommendation to the Portage County commissioners about economic development. Don, I should add, does not want to be our economic development officer.

A competitive office, Taylor said via telephone, would require someone experienced in economic development, business, finance and marketing and three assistants, one for marketing, one to attract new business, one to retain existing businesses as well as an office staff. Taylor said her estimates assume an office that would consolidate with economic development efforts in Kent, Ravenna, Streetsboro and Aurora and garner private funding from businesses.

Commissioners Chris Smeiles and Maureen Frederick said Wednesday they were surprised by the estimate.

Don often has said the state of Ohio historically has underfunded economic development so I asked Taylor for her assessment.

"Don is correct," she said. Ohio's commitment to economic development is not competitive with South Carolina, Georgia or Kentucky and those three states are not competitive with what is being spent in California and Oklahoma on economic development, she said.

If so, Ohio, the beneficiary of so much 19th and early 20th century economic development, is settling for backwater status in 21st century economic development and we in Portage County conform to that profile.

As Walt Kelly's Pogo once said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Remember the beautiful Ravenna Bicentennial book published and funded seven years ago by Don Wilson III, the Ravenna native who became an international banker?

Don is currently working with his cousin, Tom Gregory, who's retired from White Rubber, on another book about his hometown.

Don said it will focus on Ravenna from the beginning of the 20th century until the advent of World War I and rely partly on Tom Gregory's extensive post card collection of the community.

"It was a classic period for Ravenna," Don said. Many of the handsome buildings in the city's commercial center were new at that time and reflect the architecture popular then. Passenger rail service linked Ravenna to major cities like Cleveland and Pittsburgh and the streetcars connected the community to the Akron and Alliance areas. Manufacturing was booming. Beautiful homes, many still standing today, stood along tree-lined boulevards.

Because of his banking career, Don and his family have resided in England, Asia, New York City, and now Connecticut, but he remains devoted to his hometown, Ravenna.

Don recently retired from Chase Bank, where he was vice president for risk management. Having married in his late 30s, he and his wife, Lynn, have three children, James, a high school senior, Charlotte, a high school sophomore and Robert, a sixth-grader.

Right now he heads up leadership giving for Harvard College, from which he graduated in 1970, and Tufts School of Business of Dartmouth, where he received his MBA. Don said he may soon get back into business in a consulting role.

Don is a proponent of the Midwest and states like Ohio in particular.

"This area is going through economic changes, but it has staying power because the values of its people are so solid," he said this past week.

He is particularly proud of the education he received at Ravenna High School.

"We had a wonderful faculty," Don said and recalled among others, the late Bernice Douglas, Betty Sullivan, Nunzio Polichene, and his physics teacher, Eugene Roliff, who he said is now at Kent State.

The Streetsboro Planning Commission's Jim McIntyre during last year's big fight over the city's overlay plan, described politics in Streetsboro as, "a blood sport."

His assessment kept coming to mind as the campaign to elect the community's first full-time mayor wound down last week with the private lives of candidates being scrutinized for dirt.

Police records, some going back 15 years, were published even though the law permits one's criminal past, if the crimes are not serious ones, to be expunged from the record after seven years.

Affadavits alleging sleezy and unlawful behavior were shared with the media. Since none resulted in charges filed, we opted not to print them. This had no effect because eager campaign workers simply printed up fliers with the sleezy stuff without attribution and distributed them to homes in the night.

Easy access makes Streetsboro prime development territory so the stakes run high because elected officials of this fast growing community are determining the future. Sites along S.R. 14 near the Turnpike, some of them once productive farm land, now command prices as high as \$100,000 per acre in some cases.

That kind of money excites passion as property owners look to cash out by selling to or working with developers and it often pits them against those citizens, who want stricter, long-rang planning.

In that context, when congratulating the new mayor, Tom Wagner, I told him I did not envy what he would confront in his new job.

"I've got a thick skin," he replied.

He'll need it.