

P3 honors DuPont's Irwin

- By Steven Collins Senior Reporter
- Apr 11, 2019

CIRCLEVILLE — Pickaway Progress Partnership shared a renewed focus on helping existing businesses expand during its annual P3 investor reception dinner Tuesday and used DuPont as a recent example.

To that extent, Steve Irwin, plant manager for DuPont Circleville, was chosen for the John Stevenson Leadership in Economic Development Award as a part of the reception and DuPont was highlighted for their recent \$220 million expansion.

Ryan Scribner, Pickaway Progress Partnership (P3) executive director, presented Irwin with a small trophy and honored him for his work.

"We started a new tradition a few years ago with an award named for the late County Commissioner John Stevenson who passed away a few years ago," Scribner said explaining the award. "If you knew John he loved this community, was a strong supporter of our economic development efforts and a strong and creative leader in Pickaway County as far as economic development goes. He had his hands on a lot of the agreements that got us to where we are today."

Scribner said Irwin checked all the boxes they're looking for in a recipient.

"[DuPont is] our largest private sector investor in P3, and they're a great collaborator and have embraced the opportunity to work with and embrace colleagues in the same industry in a new way," he said. "He's provided leadership and helping to find solutions to challenges and common ground with those folks instead of butting heads and competing over workforce. It's a no-brainer to honor Steve Irwin for the award this year."

Irwin, who's been plant manager at DuPont's Circleville location for about a year, previously worked as a plant manager elsewhere in the company.

"I feel deeply honored to accept the John Stevenson Economic Development Award on behalf of the DuPont team," he said. "It was a pleasant surprise, and it's truly been a pleasure working with the state of Ohio and the Circleville community, along with P3 on the project. I'm thrilled to have such a great story to share."

Previous award recipients include Healthcare Logistics in 2017, Dr. Mark Smith in 2016 and Stephen Gary in 2015.

In addition to Irwin's award, DuPont was the talk of the reception, given as an example of existing employers that are reinvesting in the community. The company announced in February that it is investing \$220 million into its Kapton production lines.

"We want to make sure we support our existing employers," Scribner said. "It's a fact that it's always easier and less expensive and difficult to nurture and support what you already have than it is to attract something. Any good economic development organization focuses on business retention and expansion. We don't need to look any further than DuPont Circleville."

Scribner said the people in charge of DuPont don't just decide to spend that money on the site, it's something for which the local economy must compete.

"It's a company with international presence and a lot of other sites and product lines all saying, 'Hey, what about us,'" he said.

Scribner said when he first started at P3 it was just after DuPont's previous expansion and he asked what the community had to do to win the next expansion with the company. The answer he got was to make it easy for the company to say yes.

"The answer he gave me was to enjoy the lack of political headwinds in Circleville, and he contrasted doing business here versus in New Jersey where it's like beating their heads against the wall to do anything," he said. "To me that's a credit to our community, elected officials, local government, our workers and the people here."

In addition to presenting Irvin the award, Scribner shared details of a new strategic plan created in December after more than a decade without a one and how P3 will use it.

"Our new plan challenges us to become more targeted and strategic," Scribner said. "It challenges us to be more prepared than we are when it comes to our infrastructure, site availability and development. It challenge us to strengthen our relationships with our multiple governmental entities as well as organizations with similar missions like the Welcome Center and the chamber. It identifies that we've got must be more creative in our workforce development. Lastly, it challenges us to do a better job telling our story."

Scribner elaborated on each of the four points, and shared some insight into meetings with Janet Addy, the outside consultant who helped P3 develop the strategic plan.

"We were driving around the county, talking about all these things and looking at this or looking at that and all the potential," he said. "She said she had no idea about all this. That's the reoccurring theme about Pickaway County, I had no idea about x, y or z. It gets reinforced all the time."

Scribner talked about the growth in the northern part of Pickaway County that's totaled \$200 million in recent capital investments in warehousing and logistics. Those investments have led to a \$60 million increase in payroll in those sectors.

"What's happening at Rickenbacker is impactful and important to our tax base and employment opportunities," he said. "Those numbers are from 2018 and there are new investment and projects at Rickenbacker. I spent most of the day with a group that's going to more than double what's up there now if the market stays the same. It's worth our time and attention and it's an area of strategic focus for us."

Scribner said P3 has been working on getting more involved with the agriculture industry and looking at ways to capture some of that business and development for Pickaway County.

“There’s a project being built right now by a company out of Wisconsin that doesn’t have impressive numbers behind it, but they’re going to buy locally grown grain and beans put them in containers and sell them to markets in Asia,” he said. “The reason why we’re in support of that project, going on two years now, is we looked at where they go across the country and we see the cost of what local growers can get go up 20 or 30 cents per bushel. That’s millions of dollars pumped back into the local economy each year after year. That’s strategic and that’s targeted development that we’re working on.”

Scribner said the last thing is that the communities have to be prepared because any answer other than “yes” means that the company has already moved on.

“No one has the patience for a property that’s almost done, where we say ‘we’ve just got to rezone or we just need to extend that water line or we just need to widen that road,’ if that’s your answer you’re done,” he said. “The company has already moved on to somewhere that’s already done that work. We’re making good progress on that front.”