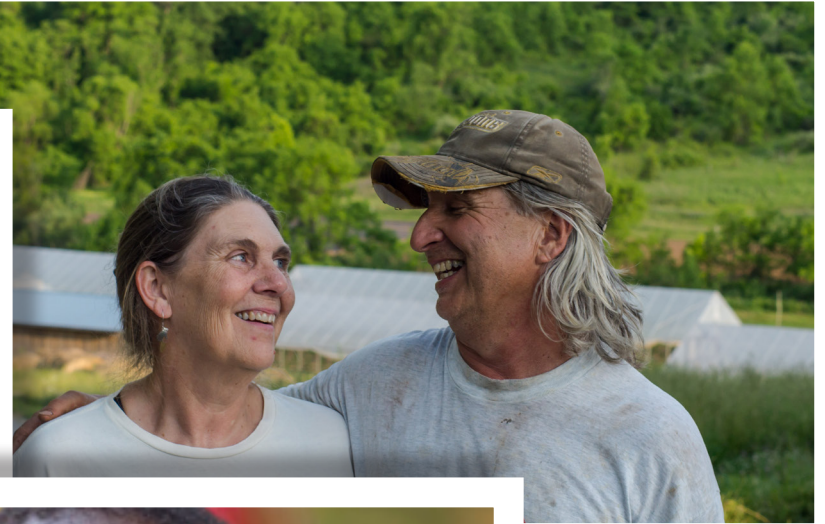


ATHENS COUNTY



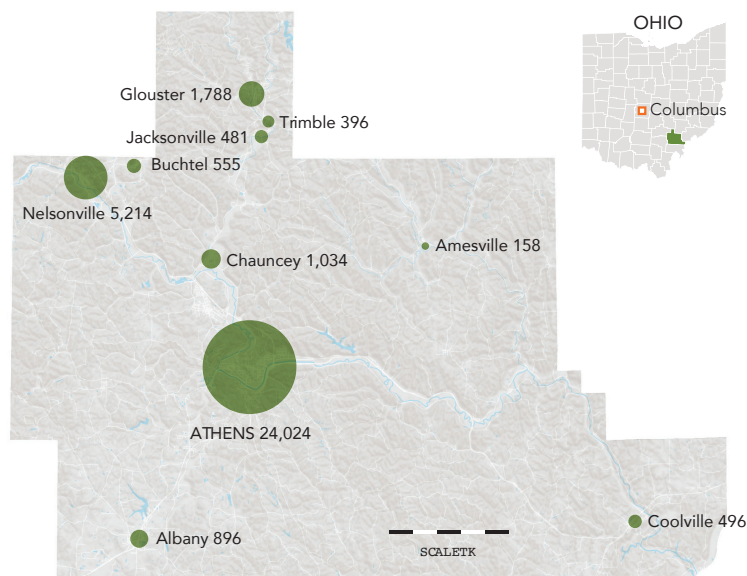
For the love of Athens
ATHENS FOUNDATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six years ago, The Athens Foundation commissioned a report on the state of Athens County. That snapshot informed much of our work as well as that of other nonprofits, churches, and governments in Athens County. This report is an attempt to look at our community today, and we anticipate it will inform and direct the work of the Foundation for the next five years. The Athens Foundation has produced this report in collaboration with Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs and the School of Visual Communication.

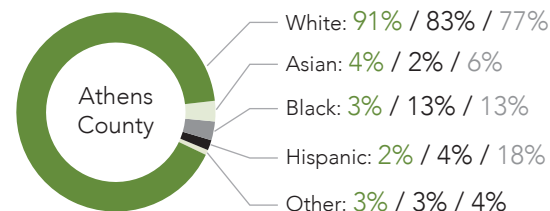
Founded 35 years ago by the then first lady of Ohio University Claire O. Ping, the Athens Foundation provides a vehicle for people to support their community through donations, grants and civic engagement. Our mission is to invest in local strategies to empower Athens County residents and build on the strengths of our region, now and for generations to come.

GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION¹



Population Breakdown by Race/Ethnicity

ATHENS COUNTY / OHIO / U.S.



Percentages exceed 100% because residents of Hispanic ethnicity may be of any race and are therefore also included in the applicable race categories.

	Athens County	Ohio	U.S.
Population	65,886	11.6 million	321 million
Per square mile	128.6	282.3	87.4
Area (sq. miles)	504	40,860	3.5

To date the foundation has given over 2 million dollars to local nonprofits to make our community Economically Vital and promote Individual Health and Well-Being with an outcome toward making a Vibrant Community.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

A strong economy is a key component to solving many of our challenges and creating opportunities. Yet Athens County has the most extreme income inequality in the state. With an adjusted poverty rate of 20%, 3 out of 10 children in Athens County live below the poverty line and more than half qualify for free lunch. Women in Athens County earn 56% of men's income.

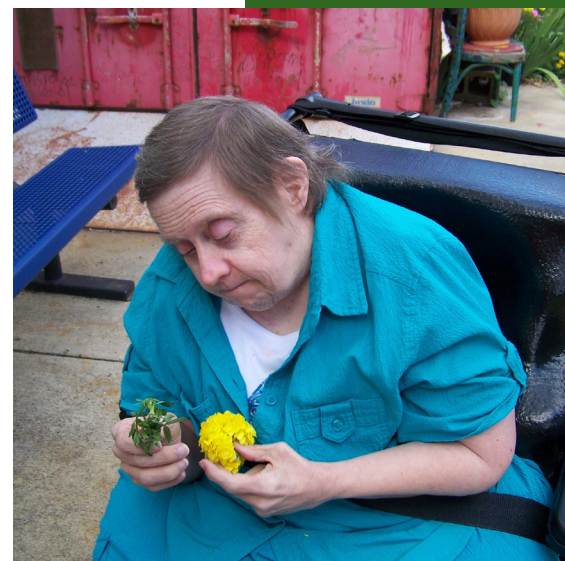
Athens has a strong environment to support new and growing businesses. Public/Private partnerships join forces to train, fund and nurture our local entrepreneurs. Lack of transportation, both individual and public, hurts both employees and children. It affects access to healthcare, jobs and enrichment opportunities for families.

INDIVIDUAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

To participate as community members, individuals and families must be secure-economically, physically, and emotionally. Yet 1 in 5 Athenians are food insecure. Local governments face a higher percentage of blighted housing than other Ohio regions and it is more expensive to rent or own here than in Ohio as a whole. Athens County fares well on many health measures, but tobacco use, opioid addiction, and dental health are some of our biggest challenges.

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Vibrant communities are essential to creating sustainable solutions to the challenges that Athens County faces. Rural Action and other local groups have made considerable progress in stream cleanup, acid mine drainage and zero waste efforts. With new business flourishing in the energy sector and a growing reputation for local foods, Athens is moving ahead. We boast assets in the arts, culture, history and recreation that aren't found in most communities our size.



The Athens Foundation invites the community to strategically invest to create meaningful and measurable results that make a real difference.



INTRODUCTION

Six years ago, The Athens Foundation commissioned a report on the state of Athens County. That snapshot informed much of our work as well as that of other nonprofits, churches, and governments in Athens County. This report is an attempt to look at our community today. We have made every attempt at objectivity and transparency in presenting this information. The report will inform and direct the work of the foundation for the next five years.

The Athens Foundation is our community foundation serving the people of Athens County. Founded 35 years ago by the then first lady of Ohio University Claire O. Ping, its purpose was to provide a vehicle for people to support their community through donations, grants and civic engagement.

Our mission is to invest in local strategies to empower Athens County residents and build on the strengths of our region, now and for generations to come.

To date the foundation has given over 2 million dollars to local nonprofits to make our community Economically Vital and promote Individual Health and Well-Being with an outcome toward making a Vibrant Community.

Through our community leadership, over 200 people have graduated from Leadership Athens County, a countywide nine-month deep dive into Athens County. The foundation also plays a key role in facilitating local conversations that matter using The Art of Hosting. Over the past year, Athenians have come together to discuss the future home of the Athens Farmers Market, OU and community collaboration, and community wellness. We hope that you will find some useful information in the following pages.

PURPOSE

The Athens Foundation has produced this report in collaboration with Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs and the School of Visual Communication.

Our hope is that this snapshot of some of Athens County's key issues and opportunities will help to facilitate conversations among local stakeholders about where we are now, what are priorities are moving forward, and how we can most effectively work together to make our county an even better place to live, learn, work and visit. We have included examples of projects tackling some of our more challenging issues.

The information that follows is broken down into three categories:

Economic Vitality provides updated income inequality and poverty rates for Athens County and profiles central components for improving the economic outlook of individuals and the community as a whole - business development, education and transportation.

Individual Health and Well-Being looks at access to food and housing in Athens County and provides an overview of key health issues, including tobacco use, opioid addiction, and dental health.

Vibrant Communities reviews issues related to Athens County's environment and closes with a celebration of our area's diverse arts, culture and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Because we want as many people as possible to read this report, we've purposefully kept it short. Unfortunately, this meant we had to limit the issues covered and only mention a few of the many organizations working to grow the economy, improve individual health and well-being, protect the environment and stimulate the art, music and food scene in Athens County. If your issue or organization was not included, we apologize and hope you will understand.



ECONOMIC VITALITY

INCOME INEQUALITY

Athens County currently has the most extreme rate of income inequality of any county in Ohio. Across the state, the highest-earning 20% of households make, on average, nearly 5 times more than the lowest-earning 20% of households. In Athens, the top 20% make nearly 7 times more than the bottom 20%.

Income inequality is common in rural university communities like Athens, according to Ohio University Distinguished Professor of Economics Emeritus Richard Vedder. To attract strong candidates, these schools strive to make salaries nationally competitive, sometimes resulting in wages that are much higher than the local norm.

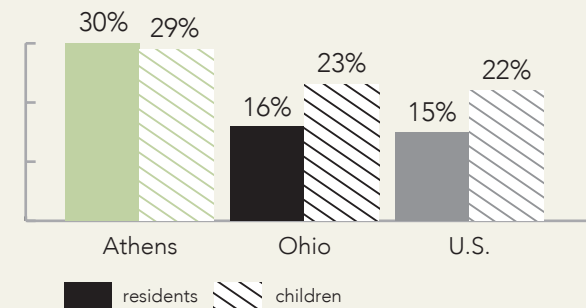
This dynamic is further exaggerated by Athens County's long-term history of poverty.

POVERTY

A **total of 30 percent of Athens County residents live below the poverty line.**³ Questions are often asked about how the large population of college students affects these numbers. Although the US Census Bureau routinely excludes college students living in dorms when they compute poverty statistics, a recent study estimated that excluding students living

Poverty and Income Inequality²

Percent of Residents/Children Living in Poverty:



Athens County has the highest rate of income inequality in the state, measured by the income ratio of the top 20 percent to the bottom 20 percent of residents.

$$\text{Income ratio} = \frac{\text{Income of top 20\% of households}}{\text{Income of bottom 20\% of households}}$$



off-campus as well would reduce the Athens County poverty rate to approximately 20%, still significantly higher than state (16%) and national (15%) averages.⁴

Nearly 3 out of 10 children in Athens County live below the poverty line and more than half qualify for free or reduced price lunch.⁵ One factor contributing to this high child poverty rate may be Athens County's higher-than-average gender wage gap. Currently, women who work earn a median income of \$15,496 (56% of the median income for men). This is a larger gap than exists for Ohio (67%) and the United States overall (71%).⁶ State-

level research suggests much of Ohio's gender pay gap can be explained by variations in education, employment sector, job type, hours worked and time devoted to childrearing. However, even after all these work-related differences are taken into account, a 7 percent difference between male and female wages remains in Ohio.⁴

Key elements in the fight to reduce income inequality and poverty include business development, education and transportation.



The Women's Fund was launched in 2006 by a group of inspired donors with a goal of building a \$250,000 endowed fund. They have almost reached their goal and have awarded over \$30,000 dollars in grants to date.

Approximately one out of five women in Athens are living at or below the poverty level. The purpose of this fund is to promote philanthropy among women, and to establish a permanent fund which will provide support to programs and projects in Athens County that empower low income women to achieve their full potential.

This year the fund gave support to the Birth Circle's Teen Mothers Camp, Athens Girls Rock Camp and My Sister's Place.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

An unusual percentage of the jobs in Athens County are in the government sector – more than 1 in 3 (35%), compared to just over 1 in 10 (12%) for Ohio overall.⁸ These public workers contribute absolutely essential services to the community. However, when the Athens Foundation recently conducted an informal survey with local mayors and other elected officials, they all mentioned the need for more businesses and private sector jobs. As Albany Mayor Tim Kirkendall says, “We need growth to keep the kids here.”

“Athens County boasts a unique set of resources to assist companies in overcoming hurdles that young businesses commonly encounter,” says Stacy Strauss, Associate Director of the Innovation Center. This assistance is provided by several local organizations, including TechGROWTH Ohio, ACEnet, the Small Business Development Center(SBDC), Business Remixed (Athens County Economic Development Council), the Athens County Chamber of Commerce, the Innovation Center and others. Support provided includes physical space and training on topics such as market research, financial calculations and business planning as well as access to a wide variety of free or reduced-cost technical assistance provided by experienced business professionals. In addition, promising businesses have access to diverse funding sources, including the East Central Ohio Tech Angel Fund and other regional angel funds.

There have been many successful start-ups in Athens County, from Diagnostic Hybrids and Jackie O’s to Ecolibrium Solar and the relatively new Jersey Watch, which provides online management tools for athletic leagues. However, more than half of all new businesses in the United States fail within the first 18 months, and although new businesses start each year, the total number of active companies in the county has declined somewhat over the last decade, from 1,123 in 2005 to 940 in 2014.¹¹

The East Central Ohio Tech Angel Fund (ECOTAF) invests in southeast and southern Ohio technology-related companies like Global Cooling, Inc, an Athens County firm that manufactures and sells environmentally friendly, ultra-low temperature freezers used in the fields of bio research and



biotechnology. **“The perception that there is no economic opportunity can cripple an entire area,” says ECOTAF partner Chris Gerig.** In its first phase, ECOTAF helped launch six companies, which generated

more than \$41 million in revenue and created 125 jobs with an average salary of \$41,000.¹⁰

Sara Marrs-Maxfield, Executive Director of the Athens County Economic Development Council, recommends efforts be made to “highlight existing businesses and create visible clusters,” with a particular focus on “industries that provide family supporting jobs.” Although she recognizes Athens County is hampered by a lack of broadband and commercial-ready property, Marrs-Maxfield argues the area is strongly appealing for employers seeking the kind of highly trained workforce that can be provided by Ohio University and Hocking College.



One program seeking to bridge the educational gap in Athens County is Kids on Campus, which provides after school programs and a free 5+ week camp held each summer at Ohio University. Preference is given to children who qualify for free or reduced lunch or who have been identified as needing extra educational support. In addition to traditional camp activities like swimming and crafts, Kids on Campus helps K-11 grade students improve their reading skills and learn more about science and nature. Busing is provided and participating children are given breakfast, lunch and a health snack.

EDUCATION

Education is the most reliable path out of poverty. A person with only a high school diploma earns, on average, 60 cents for every dollar earned by a person with a college degree.¹²

Athens County is already ahead in this area – fewer county residents lack a high school diploma (11 percent compared to 12 percent for Ohio) and more have an undergraduate or graduate degree (28 percent compared to 25 percent for Ohio). Because Hocking College and Ohio University are located within the county, residents also have access to a wide array of two-year and four-year programs of study from which to choose.

Still, more needs to be done to make learning accessible, particularly to Athens County's youngest children. As Athens City Schools Superintendent Tom Gibbs says, "While we are able to offer some preschool, generally those options are limited to half-day programs that only run four days a week. This makes it difficult for working families to arrange childcare and makes it nearly

impossible for impoverished families to consider work outside of the home." Gibbs says universal all-day preschool programming would go a long way towards assuring that all children are prepared for public school. In addition, as Federal Hocking School Superintendent George Wood points out, "Research suggests that students of low income families gain more in school during the school year than children of middle to high incomes. However, in the summer those same children in low income families lose much more than higher income kids due to, again, lack of access to programs. We have library and reading programs, but many families cannot get to them."

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a persistent problem throughout southeast Ohio, limiting many residents' access to employment, healthcare, shopping, and educational activities. The GoBus provides transportation from Athens to Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and other nearby cities. Within Athens County, bus routes service the City of Athens, Chauncey, and The Plains, but

47% of Athens County households without a car live in communities not covered by Athens Transit system.¹³ Limited hours have also been a concern, as Athens Transit does not provide Sunday service and until recently stopped running at 7:30pm on weeknights and 5:30pm on Saturday. However, a pilot project is currently being conducted on two lines that cover most of Athens City, extending hours of operation to 10:00pm Monday through Saturday. This may be very helpful as industries that employ the majority of Athens County's entry level workers (health services, retail trade, food services, and hotels) often require employees, particularly those most recently hired, to work at least some evening and weekend shifts. According to one Athens County resident, "I have had to quit jobs because of lack of transportation. I was paying more than I was making on a taxi to and from work so I had to quit".¹⁴

According to Jessica Stroh, Director of Transportation Services for Hocking Athens Perry Community Action (which oversees the program), "One of our long-term goals is to expand into the

county to Trimble Township and to Albany and Nelsonville." A recent project with Ohio University has allowed for some expansions, as well as upgrades to improve accessibility.

TRANSPORTATION FOR SENIORS, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

Additional transportation services are provided for the elderly and people with disabilities by the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities and Athens on Demand. These services offer county-wide coverage **but hours are still limited (there is no Sunday service) and demand currently exceeds availability**. According to Stroh (whose organization also oversees Athens on Demand), "Without more vehicles and more operational funds we can't really even do much more. We have a lot of demand that we're not meeting. We have to turn a lot of people away."

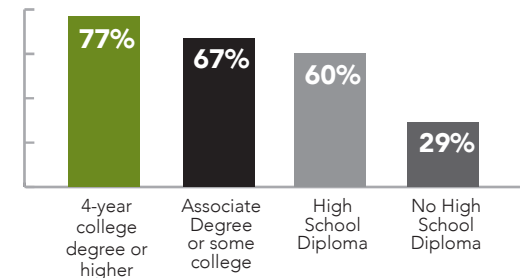
Athens County Job and Family Services provides Medicaid eligible clients with transportation for medical or social service appointments (either directly or by providing money for gas), and the Retired Senior Volunteer program provides transportation for medical appointments only.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT¹⁵

Education Attainment among Athens County Residents Age 25 – 64



Employment Rate by Education Level among Athens County Residents Age 25 – 64



INDIVIDUAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Bounty on the Bricks is a community fundraiser that celebrates local farmers and the beauty of Court Street while generating support for the SEO Foodbank and Kitchen, a division of HAPCAP.

This year, the money raised will benefit over 150,000 southeastern Ohio residents who receive emergency food assistance from pantries in Athens, Hocking, Jackson, Meigs, Perry, Vinton and Washington counties.

Pantries have money deposited in the Pantry Purchase Program of the SEO Foodbank based on the number of people they serve. These funds can then be used by the pantries to purchase the food they need at a lower cost while also building capital for the Foodbank.

As a result of the last 4 years' Bounty on the Bricks events, \$315,000 has been raised through a match of 1:1 by the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Nelsonville and Sisters Health Foundation to create the "Bounty in the Pantries grant program", administered by the Athens Foundation.

FOOD ACCESS

Athens County is known for its thriving food culture, including many small farms that provide fresh produce, grains, meat and dairy products sold at the farmer's market and served in many local restaurants. Athens is home to the annual Paw Paw festival, a growing number of craft breweries and other food-related businesses. This has in part been made possible by ACEnet, the local economic development



organization that was among the first in the country to establish a shared-use, licensed commercial kitchen, processing and warehouse facility. This Food Venture Center is currently used by about 65 entrepreneurs each year, enabling them to make and market salsa, pasta sauce, salad dressings and other products without the high costs associated with buying equipment and obtaining licensing.

However, **Athens County also has unusually high rates of food insecurity (that is, limited or uncertain access to enough food to remain healthy and active).** About 1 in 5 Athens County residents (21%) are estimated to be food insecure, compared to 17% of Ohioans and 15% of the US population.¹⁶ This can occur because a person doesn't have enough money to buy healthy food, can't get to the store or both. 14% of Athens County residents are low-income and live more than 10 miles from a grocery store (compared to a state average of 6 percent). Seventeen percent of Athens County residents receive SNAP benefits (food stamps).

There are many programs in Athens County designed to increase food security, including food pantries and meal programs as well as nutrition, gardening, cooking and canning classes. One innovative program at local schools provides backpacks with nonperishable, child-appropriate food for students to take home over the weekends. Community Food Initiatives' Donation Station has taken another innovative approach, collecting donations of money and produce at the Athens Farmers Market and Chesterhill Produce Auction, using the money to purchase additional locally grown produce for local food pantries and meal programs. In 2015, the Donation Station distributed more than 86,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Food Security¹⁷

Percent of Residents Who are Low-income and Lack Adequate Access to a Grocery Store*



*adequate access is measured as less than 10 miles in rural areas and 1 mile in urban areas





Despite the legal challenges and high cost (\$12,000 or more per home), Trimble has successfully taken 15 blighted homes so far. Says Trimble Mayor Doug Davis, "I've worked with the prosecutor's office, the commissioners, and tracked down property owners to sign off on our paying to demolish their blight." In addition, the Athens County Commissioners and other agencies have been working to demolish blighted housing, but funding is an issue. For every dilapidated structure that is demolished, dozens remain. The county is currently exploring the creation of a land bank program, which would help reduce the cost of acquiring and demolishing blighted homes. In addition to building new affordable houses for low-income residents, Habitat for Humanity of Southeast Ohio has also made it a priority to help wipe out uninhabitable housing, primarily in the Nelsonville area.

HOUSING

The impact of Athens County's high rate of income inequality is perhaps most obvious when considering the issue of housing. **On the one hand, Athens County has a high rate of abandoned and inadequate housing.** When asked about the most pressing problems facing their communities, many Athens County mayors and elected officials mentioned housing blight, which is of particular concern outside of the city of Athens in places like Nelsonville, Chauncey, Glouster and Trimble. "Fifteen percent of our housing is blighted" says Glouster Mayor Miles Wolf, "But I don't have the money to tear them down."

A higher percentage of Athens County houses are vacant (16%), compared to state (11%) and national averages (13%). This can cause safety issues and translate into a reduced tax base due to unpaid property taxes. In addition, unoccupied homes are often run-down looking, with broken or boarded over windows, peeling paint, uncut grass, and other signs of neglect. A large number of these in an area can further suppress home values and interfere with economic development efforts. In addition, at least 160 families in Athens County are living in houses without complete plumbing facilities (hot and cold running water, a flush toilet and either a shower or bath) and 216 are living in houses that lack a full kitchen (stove or range, refrigerator and sink).¹⁸ Finally, several local mayors and elected officials expressed related concerns about their town's infrastructure, including the need for improved waterlines, water meters, and paving of streets and sidewalks. One mayor identified debt associated with EPA-mandated sewer improvements as his community's most pressing problem.

Housing¹⁹

	U.S.	Ohio	Athens County	Athens City
Median Monthly Rent	\$920	\$729	\$703	\$741
Median Monthly Cost to Own a Home (with Mortgage)	\$1,522	\$1,274	\$1,124	\$1,404
Owner Occupied Housing	64%	67%	57%	28%
Households spending > 30% of their income on housing	35%	31%	37%	35%

On the other hand, it is more expensive to rent or own housing in the city of Athens, on average, than it is in Ohio as a whole.

When combined with high unemployment and low wages, this results in a larger percentage of “house burdened” residents in Athens County (37%) than in the state (31%) or the nation (35%). A household is considered house burdened when 30 percent or more of its income is spent on housing. In addition, a lower percentage of housing is owner-occupied in both the city of Athens (28%) and Athens County (57%) than in Ohio (67%) and the United States (64%). A major contributing factor is the high demand for off-campus student housing created by the presence of Ohio University and Hocking College. Low-income families may feel forced to move outside of Athens to obtain lower cost housing, but as mentioned earlier, this may make it more difficult to get work, groceries and medical care as well as participate in preschool and other educational or social activities, particularly without a car. According to Kenneth Oehlers, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Southeast Ohio, “We have families that work jobs, they bag groceries and work with hospice patients, and they come home to live in a trailer with no plumbing or in a house built in 1900 that hasn’t had any updates since the 1960s.”



Athens County residents fare better than the rest of Ohio on some health measures, including rates of obesity, heart disease, and high blood pressure, in part due to the large percentage of college-age adults living in the county. Among the most pressing local health concerns are opioid addiction, tobacco use, and lack of access to dental care.



In an effort to prevent drug use and addiction before it starts, Health Recovery Services also operates the Teen Institute Youth Leadership Academy. After attending a weekend training camp, participants meet weekly to plan community awareness campaigns on drunk driving, bullying, drug use and other related issues. Reggie Robinson, program manager for HRS' Community Programs division, says some of the students have chosen to become prevention ambassadors after witnessing addiction firsthand. "They don't want to be another statistic in their family," says Robinson said.

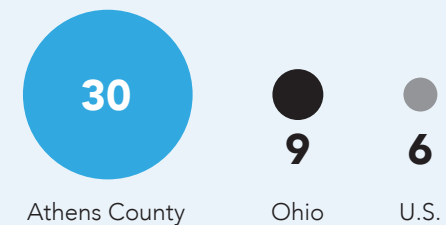
OPIOID ADDICTION

The number of babies born addicted to drugs is one of the more "poignant and consequential results of a broader statewide and regional trend of increased opioid abuse," according to Joe Gay, executive director of Health Recovery Services. This increase seems tied to high unemployment and poverty rates, increased heroin availability, and a spike in the prescription of opioid medications in the late 1990s and early 2000s. "Many times opioid addiction begins with a prescription for painkillers for legitimate health problems," says Kathy Trace, director of Community Health Programs at Ohio University's Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine. Both Gay and Trace agree that the increase in opioid abuse has been particularly dramatic in southeast Ohio Counties like Athens.

Since 2014, the Maternal Opiate Medical Support Project (MOMs) has provided counseling and medication-assisted treatment to 106 pregnant women and mothers dealing with addiction to opioids and other drugs, through a partnership of Community Health Programs, Health Recovery Services and the Athens Medical Associates OB/GYN clinic.

Opioid Use²⁰

Babies Born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Due to Drug Use During Pregnancy per 1,000 Births





Smoking cessation programs are offered through the Baby and Me Tobacco Free project, Health Recovery Services, OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital, and Ohio University. By 2015, smoking had been banned on both the Ohio University and Hocking College campuses as well as in public parks and recreation areas in Athens City and Nelsonville. In addition, the Athens City-County Health Department is working to create policies that would increase the legal smoking age to 21 and to further limit tobacco use in housing and public spaces, such as in parks and playgrounds in other areas of Athens County.

TOBACCO USE

Lung cancer is more common in Athens County than in the state or nation,

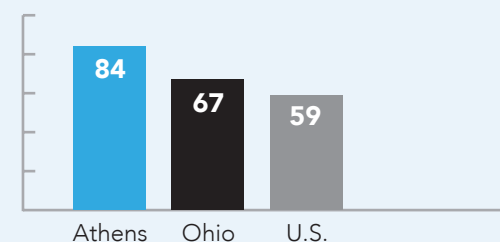
accounting for 17% of all cancer cases and 30% of cancer-related deaths.

Although rates of smoking have declined somewhat in recent years, tobacco use remains relatively high in rural, low-income areas throughout the country, including in Athens County. According to the American Lung Association, rural Americans are also more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke and less likely to have access to tobacco cessation programs.

"People turn to tobacco and other substances to manage stress," says Ruth Dudding, director of health education at the Athens City-County Health Department. In addition, many rural teens still view cigarette and smokeless tobacco use positively, equating these behaviors with maturity and masculinity.

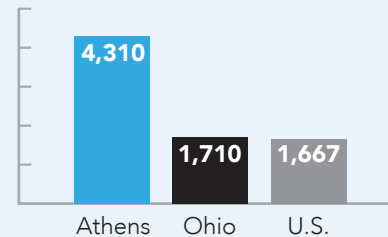
Incidents of Lung Cancer per 100,000 People

Lung cancer is the leading form of cancer in Athens County, accounting for 17% of all cancer cases, and 30% of cancer-related deaths.²¹

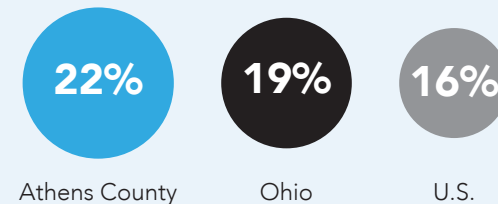


Dental Hygiene²²

Number of People per Dentist



Percent of Population with Poor Dental Health



DENTAL HEALTH

Compared to Ohio and the rest of the country, Athens County has far fewer dentists and somewhat higher rates of poor dental health (defined as lack of regular dental visits and/or lost teeth). In addition to causing tooth decay and gum disease, inadequate dental care has been found to contribute to other serious health issues, including poor nutrition, heart disease, stroke, premature birth and low birth weight.²³ Athens County also has a higher-than-average rate of diabetes, which further increases the risks associated with poor dental health.

Obtaining dental care can be particularly challenging for low-income families, according to Bob Gallagher, executive director of Athens County Job and Family Services. Most dentists are located in Athens City and can be difficult for residents in other parts of the county to access. Further, many dentists will not accept Medicaid patients because no-show rates tend to be higher and reimbursement rates are typically lower for this group. There is currently no emergency dental clinic in Athens County to provide services for Medicaid patients unable to find a dentist or for uninsured residents who cannot afford to pay for their own dental care.



VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

One distinctive aspect of Athens County is the effort made by many to reclaim and protect the environment.

WATER QUALITY

In and around Athens County, coal mining significantly impacted watersheds including the Hocking River and its related creek system – Monday, Sunday and Federal – as well as Raccoon Creek. When water comes into contact with rocks exposed by mining, the resulting runoff tends to be highly acidic and to contain elevated levels of iron, manganese and aluminum. Creeks that receive enough of this runoff become less able to sustain fish and other aquatic life.

Many local waterways were once believed to be so damaged by this runoff as to be not worth trying to save. However, beginning in the 1980s, individuals and organizations such as Rural Action and Ohio University collaborated with government agencies and private foundations to develop plans, obtain funding and conduct projects designed to minimize and counteract the impact of acid mine drainage. The result has been a significant improvement in the acidity of local waterways and the return of fish and other forms of life in some areas.

Residents of Athens County generally obtain their water from a centralized water system or private wells. **The treated water in Athens City has consistently been found to be within EPA limits for all tested bacteria and compounds.** As a precaution against contamination, a four square mile protection zone has been established around Athens City's wellheads and a combination of community education, monitoring and wellhead protection zone enforcement have been instituted. However, in some rural areas of Athens County, untreated sewage continues to be dumped directly into nearby creeks, either because the area is too hilly to accommodate a leech field or because the expense of installing a septic system would cost half the value of the house or more.

HYDRAULIC FRACTURING AND INJECTION WELLS

Although Athens County has experienced little hydraulic fracture (fracking) activity directly, **more than 3.2 billion barrels of waste water were disposed of in eight Athens County injection wells in 2015, more than in any other county in the state.** Fracking waste water tends to be high in sodium and chloride and may include trace amounts of other chemicals, such as barium, strontium, and radium.²⁴



Prior to issuing injection well permits, state officials check the location and engineering plans to ensure the local water supply is protected from contamination. Ohio University Associate Professor of Environmental Studies Natalie Kruse Daniels suggests that questions remain about how this wastewater will move over time. Athens County Commissioners have funded baseline testing of groundwater at 9 sites throughout Athens County, including near some injection wells.

SOLID WASTE

Athens County has received national attention for its innovative approach to the management of solid wastes.

Started with funding from the Sugarbush Foundation in 2010, the Athens and Hocking Zero Waste Initiative is a collaborative project of Rural Action and the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University. This project seeks to transform the liability of solid waste into an asset that can create jobs, generate revenue and reduce negative environmental impacts caused by landfills and the illegal dumping and burning of waste. To achieve these goals, the Zero Waste Initiative has developed community collaborations, conducted waste audits, and sought to educate the public and influence local policy.

To date, these efforts have succeeded in expanding access to curbside recycling, and increased local recycling capacity to include a wider spectrum of glass and plastic as well as tires, batteries, and electronics. Ohio University, Hocking College and several other public schools within the county have adopted aggressive recycling initiatives as have some businesses. Further, many local events – from football games to Brew Fest – have

worked with the Zero Waste Initiative to dramatically increase their recycling. For example, the 2015 Nelsonville Music Festival successfully diverted 94 percent of its waste, more than 6,500 pounds, from local landfills.

Ohio University also collected and composted over 600 tons of food and yard waste in 2015. Faculty and staff of Ohio University's Environmental Studies program are currently experimenting with the use of microorganisms to break down this waste through anaerobic digestion to create compost, fertilizer and methane biogas (which can be used in place of natural gas).





ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY BUSINESSES

Athens County is also home to many environmentally-friendly businesses. These include organic farms and food producers as well as traditional businesses that seek to operate in environmentally-friendly ways, such as by installing solar panels or actively participating in waste recycling projects. Exeterra, LLC is a relatively new local business that manufactures a product to convert waste wood and other biomass into marketable products such as

charcoal and fertilizer. BDT Architects and Interior Designers specialize in designing sustainable buildings such as the headquarters of Athens Real Estate Company (and Catalyst Cafe) on West Union Street in Athens.

Several alternative energy companies have also been established in Athens County, including Carbon Cycle Engineering, Dovetail Solar and Wind, Ecolibrium Solar, Global Cooling, Inc., Sunpower, Inc., Third Sun Solar and Wind, and others. Until recently, increasing demand for alternative energy seemed virtually assured due to a new Ohio law that mandated utility companies take steps to increase energy efficiency and diversify their energy portfolio. Passed nearly unanimously in 2008, this legislation established a timeline for gradually increasing reliance on alternative and renewable energy sources, ultimately intended to result in at least 25 percent of the state's electricity being generated by alternative energy sources, and at least half of that from renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. However, in 2014, the Ohio legislature passed Senate Bill 310, making Ohio the first state in the nation to place a temporary freeze on such requirements, a move which the Pew Charitable Trust reports resulted in a measurable decline in alternative energy investment, in both Ohio and nearby states. Efforts are now underway to pass legislation that would make the freeze permanent before it expires and, according to Jessica Lubetsky, a program officer with Pew's Clean Energy Initiative, "A lot of states are looking to Ohio to see what happens there."²⁵

Although this report has focused much of its attention on Athens County's most persistent problems, it is important to also recognize that this community has many assets, including a rich cultural tradition maintained by families



who have lived here for generations; two dynamic colleges that continuously introduce new students, faculty and staff to the area; and a thriving nonprofit sector that seeks to bring these two communities together to tackle issues ranging from hunger and housing to the environment and the arts. Particular areas of strength in Athens County include:

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Athens County offers the opportunity to enjoy natural beauty and outdoor activities without the crowds found in some of Ohio's more well-known resort areas. Several hundred miles of hiking trails, some of which also welcome mountain bikes, ATVs and horses, can be found on much of the county's abundant public land, including in Sells City Park, Strouds Run and Burr Oak State Parks, Desonier Nature Preserve, Fox Lake Wildlife Area, the Wayne National Forest, and Gifford State Forest. Visitors interested in a wide variety of outdoor activities can find ample opportunities to picnic, camp, boat, zip line, swim, hunt and fish. In addition, the 21-mile Hockhocking Adena Bikeway follows the path of an old railway line between Athens City and Nelsonville.

MICRO-BREW AND SLOW FOOD CULTURE

As mentioned previously, Athens County has in recent years become known for its exceptional farmer's market, restaurants and micro-brews. The 30-Mile Meal Project encourages the local sourcing of ingredients whenever possible and is an initiative of the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet), the

Athens County Visitors Bureau , and over 100 local food partners (including restaurants, breweries, cafes, wineries, bakeries, local specialty food producers, and others).

Jackie O's Taproom and Brewery has been rated "Best Brewpub in Ohio" and is leading Athens' emergence onto the craft brewery scene, along with Devil's Kettle Brewing, the West End Cider House and Little Fish Brewing Company.²⁶



CULTURE

Athens County enjoys a vibrant music, theater, culture and arts scene that includes Stuart's Opera House, Starbrick Gallery, Nelsonville Emporium and the others that populate Nelsonville's Historic Square Arts District. We are home to the Kennedy Museum of Art and the Dairy Barn Arts Center; ARTS/West, Passion Works Studio, and Paper Circle. There are several local theater groups, including the Athenian Berean Community Players, the Brick Monkey Theater Ensemble, and Ohio Valley Summer Theater. Local students and faculty provide access to their art, music, and theatrical events and traveling acts are also regularly brought into the area as part of Ohio University's Performing Arts series. In addition, the Athena Cinema shows a variety of independent movies while local bars such as Casa Nueva, The Union, and the Smiling Skull showcase many local and regional bands. Finally, Athens County is home to several annual food and music festivals, including the Nelsonville Music Festival, Ohio Brew Week, Parade of the Hills, the Ohio Pawpaw Festival, Amesville Fireman's' Festival, Boogie on the Bricks, the Athens Halloween Block Party, the Athens Film Festival, and the Ohio Smoked Meat Festival. Local traditions are preserved, taught and celebrated through projects like the Little Cities of Black Diamond, the Winding Road, the Appalachian Christmas Carol, the Old Time Fiddlers Contest and the Athens County Fair.

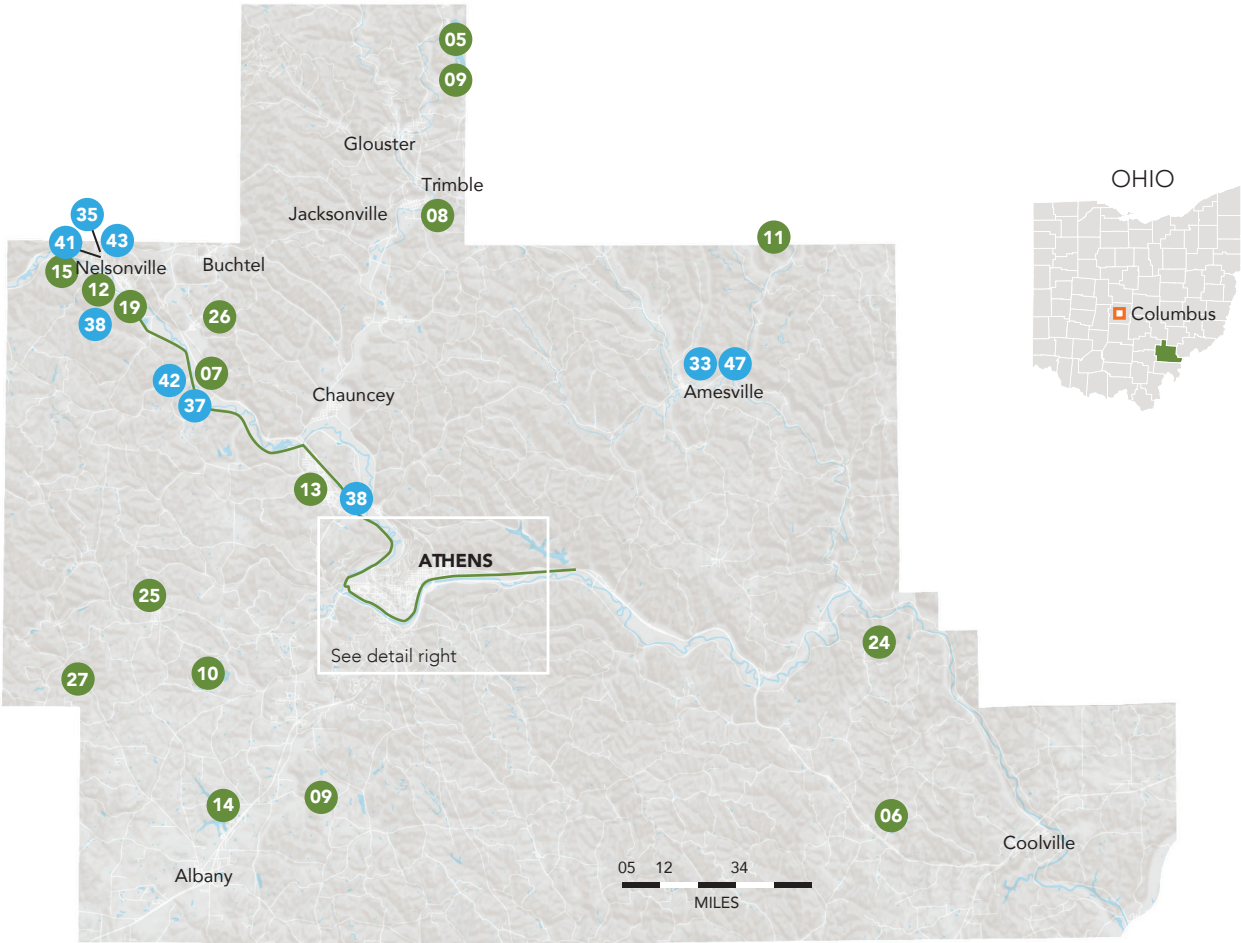


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RECREATION, ARTS, AND ATTRACTIONS

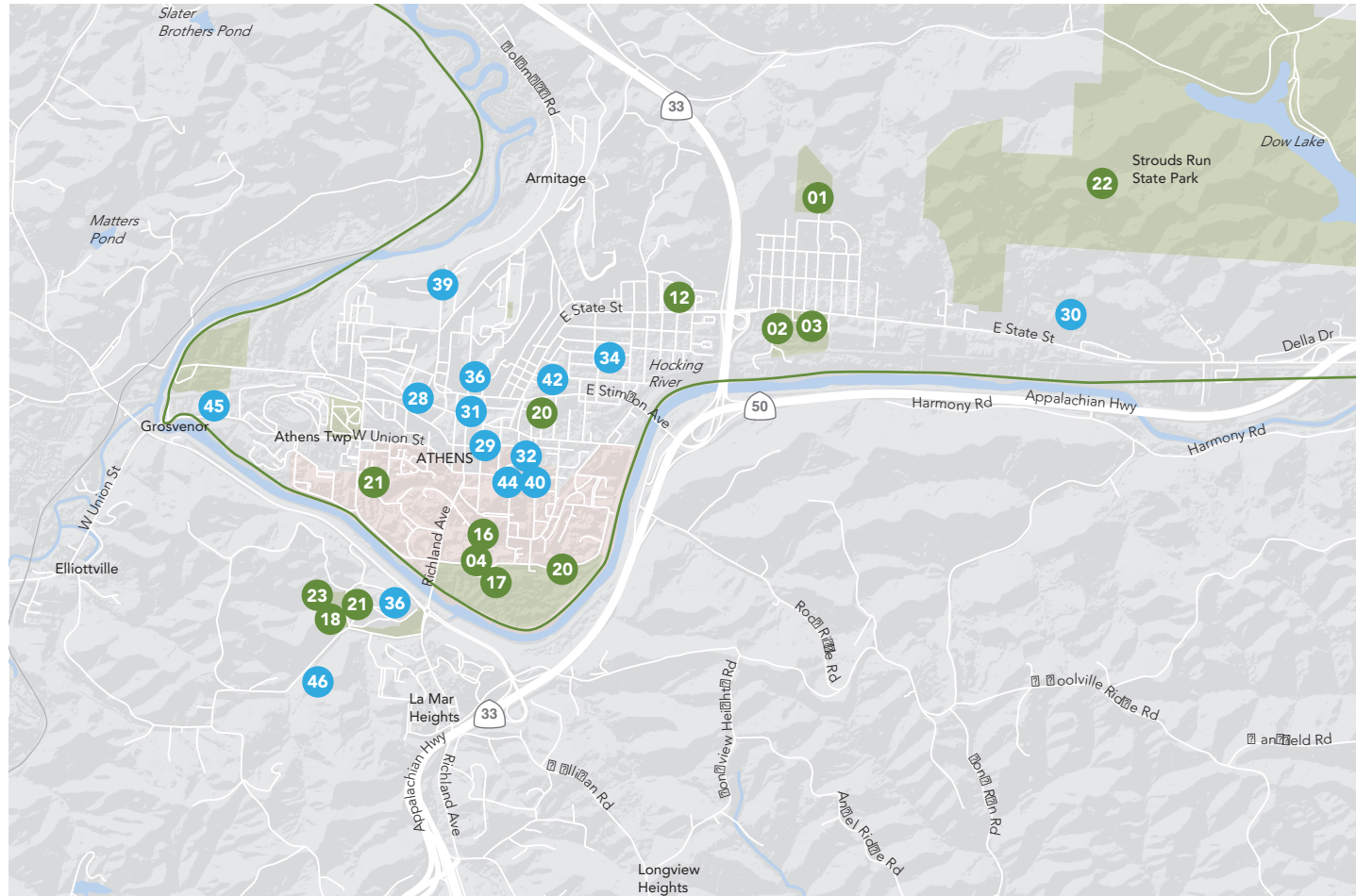
ATHENS COUNTY



RECREATION

Athens City Preserve/Sells Park	01	Fast Traxx Motoplex	08	Ohio University Aquatic Center	16	The Skyline Speedway	24
Athens Community Center	02	Forest Hills Golf Course	09	Ohio University Golf Course	17	Waterloo Wildlife Area	25
Athens Skate Park	03	Fox Lake Wildlife Area	10	Putt People First Mini Golf	18	Wayne National Forest	26
Bird Ice Arena	04	Gifford State Forest	11	Robbins Crossing Historical Village	19	Zaleski State Forest	27
Burr Oak State Park	05	Hocking Valley Scenic Railway	12	Roller Bowl Lanes	20	Hockhocking Adena Bikeway	—
Desonier (Marie J.) State Nature Preserve	06	The Plains Indian Mounds	13	Southern Ohio Copperheads	21		
Dow's Rollarena	07	Lake Snowden	14	Strouds Run State Park	22		
		Nelsonville Aquatic Center	15	The Ridges Trails	23		

CITY OF ATHENS



ARTS AND ATTRACTIONS

ARTS/West	28	Final Fridays	35	Stuart's Opera House/Gallery 1879	43
Athena Cinema	29	Kennedy Museum of Art	36	Templeton Blackburn Memorial	
Athena Grand Cinema	30	Movies 10	37	Alumni Auditorium	44
Athens County Historical Society and Museum	31	Nelsonville Music Festival	38	The Athens Photographic Project Gallery	45
Athens Community Music School	32	Ohio Valley Museum of Discovery	39	The Dairy Barn Arts Center	46
Coonskin Library Museum	33	Ohio Valley Summer Theater	40	Village Productions	47
Factory Street Dance Company	34	Paper Circle	41		
		Passion Works Studio	42		

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