

3916 Edgewater Drive
Ashtabula, Ohio 44004

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Mr. Ed Looman, Editor
Star Beacon
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No One Else Can Save Us

I read the Pittsburgh Post Gazette article “Ashtabula: A City That Cries Despair”. (<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/08055/859990-176.stm>) I did not read this article until seeing and hearing some of the reactions to it. This is a simple article, written by one author, with the input and opinions of a few people. Opinions are just that. Why the upset?

Maybe it's because this is an outside “intervention” of sorts. Maybe we remain in denial. There are problems here - serious problems. Why deny that? Many are of our own creation; many are not. One thing is certain - hope is not a strategy. No one will come to “save us”. Why would they? And would we want them to? The world is beset with its own problems. When we are all in enough pain, change will come from within. Until then, it will not.

Ren Carlisle's observation on the demographics touches on the root of the problem. To participate in a global economy, to become self-sufficient, and to become confident we must be educated. Our education must be continuing, flexible, and adaptable. There is no substitute or short cut for that. To hope for high-paying, low-skilled jobs to flood our area is to sell our souls again. We don't need the next big deal here. When we all are ready, we have to buckle down, educate ourselves, and endure. This takes time. If we start now, the children being born today will see the benefit. This is not the thing political capital is built on. Who will win an election on that platform? Who is willing to make that long-term investment and commitment? Don't we all want something today? The communities and individuals that do make this investment now, though, will be the leaders in the decades to come. The rest will continue to decline.

The jobs that “went” to China, Mexico, and elsewhere should be a painful reminder of what we don't want. The world is in an information age; not the old industrial age. Those times are gone. We waste scarce time and energy looking for someone or something to blame. We need to adjust and move on – others are.

We often look at our circumstances in a vacuum and think things are better elsewhere. We think Ashtabula is “different”. It is not. It is simply another excuse. Everyone wants that magic pill that fixes everything. Ohio is struggling. Ohio's per capita income is 29th in the country. There is a net “migration loss” as Ohioans leave the State. The State of Ohio is facing a \$1 billion to \$2 billion deficit. Ohio is ranked 38th in

the country for percentage of adults with a Bachelor's degree, yet our college tuition is the 11th highest.

So, I don't think Ohio is going to be of much help to us. Even with Ohio's poor showing in the country, 26% of adults have at least an Associate's Degree. In Ashtabula County, it is only 16.2%. In Lake County, it is 28.2%. Accordingly, the median household income in Ashtabula is \$35,607 versus \$48,673 for Lake County and \$40,956 for the State. This data is all available on the Ohio Department of Development's web site at <http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research/>.

The US Census Bureau data also shows a direct link to household income and education. The increases in income with education are substantial. Not only does education improve the economic welfare of the individual, but the community as a whole improves and employers benefit. We have, in our own community, a State University that offers Associate Degrees, Baccalaureate Degrees, and Master's Degrees. Ashtabula County spends \$8,502 annually per student for K-12. The initial full-time tuition at our campus of Kent State University is less than \$4,800 for a year – a fraction of what it costs us for the first twelve years in our own public schools. There is a plethora of financial assistance available to make this tremendous asset available to every citizen willing to give it a go. A four-year degree here costs less than the typical new car. What would you invest in?

We truly have tremendous assets in this County and we have all the resources we need for success at our feet. We don't need someone or something to save us – all we need to do is to pull together and put these immense assets to their proper use.

I am writing this from my personal opinion. This is not an official Kent State University statement. I am a life-long Ashtabula resident.

Daryl Upole, III
Assistant Professor
Business Management and Related Technologies
Kent State University