

Marking a milestone



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As Fay-Penn Economic Development Council celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, one of the accomplishments is the PTC Building in Uniontown, which was the former VFW dance hall. The building was awarded the Pennsylvania Association of Economic Developers Project of the Year award for 2017.

Fay-Penn celebrates 30 years this month

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Eberly

Fay-Penn Economic Development Council turned 30 this month, with past and present leaders reflecting on what the economic development agency as accomplished.

Board member and former state senator Richard Kasunic said when he first entered into state politics in the 1980s, the majority leader

of the House of Representatives, the late Jim Manderino, came up with an idea to help bolster Westmoreland, Washington, Greene and Fayette counties with an appropriation of \$2 million to use for economic revitalization.

"The money coming in wasn't being shared equally," Kasunic said, adding that a majority of the money was going to Westmoreland and Washington.

Kasunic took the issue to Harrisburg and was able to have \$500,000 in line for Fayette County's economic development, but the state



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MARKING, Page A3

MARKING

Continued from A1

didn't want the money to go directly to the county, necessitating the need for an economic development agency.

Kasunic and the late county Democrat party chair Fred Lebder visited local philanthropist, the late Robert Eberly, about starting such an agency.

"Everyone in Fayette County knew how respected he was and his history with philanthropy—he was always looking out for the betterment of the county," Kasunic said of Eberly. "That was the beginning. Bob took the bull by the horns, he contacted his friends and set up the agency in Fayette County known as Fay-Penn."

Since its inception, Fayette-Penn has moved

forward with the ultimate objective of creating and sustaining a supportive environment to attract new businesses and expand existing ones.

Throughout the years, Fay-Penn administered, created and merged with a number of local industrial and economic development organizations having a similar purpose, becoming the only organization in Fayette designated by the state as a Certified Economic Development Organization (CEDO).

Kasunic said that Eberly, who served as the organization's original board chairman until 2001, was big on putting up spec buildings because he knew from his business background that businesses want a place that they can move into that day, not what could be ready for them at a later date.

"More importantly, he understood to take care

of businesses and respect those who are going through rough times and be there for people who have been here for years," Kasunic said.

"Those were the things we were looking at—promoting the county and helping local businesses."

George Rattay, the current chair of the Fayette County Democratic Party, was contacted by Kasunic at the start in 1991. He joined as a representative from a labor union and has remained involved.

For Rattay, an accomplishment that sticks out to him are the creation of the business parks that have attracted businesses to the area as well as the loan programs to keep existing businesses in the county.

"That's especially important when you're competing with other counties and other states," Rattay said.

Kasunic said every chairman at Fay-Penn has taken the mission of the organization to another level.

"We've had a very strong board of directors that guided us throughout the years," said the board's current chair, Mark Fike.

Fike was the president of the Fayette Industrial Fund, which purchased and developed land for Fay-Penn and the business parks before merging with the agency.

"The thing that sticks out to me is the success of the business parks, especially the Fayette Business Park in Smithfield," Fike said of the business park where companies like Boeing, Johnson-Matthey, Gerome Manufacturing and Montgomery Medical are located and where around 2,000 people are employed. "It's the gem of Fayette County."

Fike also spoke of the success of the University Business Park by Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus in North Union Township. And though the nearby Dunbar Business Park has no tenants yet, there are prospects moving in this year, he said.

"I would say the business parks are definitely a tremendous asset," Fike said.

Bob Shark, executive director of Fay-Penn, said another of many notable projects was the PTC Building in downtown Uniontown, which was once the VFW dance hall. That development received the Pennsylvania Association of Economic Developers Project of the Year award in 2017 and helped retain 75 high-paying jobs with PTC.

Shark said while the 2020 numbers have yet to be tallied, over 11,500

jobs have been created and retained since Fay-Penn's inception and over \$1.4 billion in new investment in business has taken place in the county.

As for 2021, Shark said, along with new construction at the Dunbar Business Park, new construction will also begin this year at the University Business Park.

Fike thanked the Eberly family for their support over the years as well as the philanthropic support to the county over the years.

Kasunic said Fay-Penn has had an active role in bringing various water and sewage projects to the area to attract businesses as well as helped making the Mon-Fayette Expressway a reality.

"Fayette County's future looks very bright, and a lot of it has to do with the leadership out of Fay-Penn," Kasunic said.