

The Strength of Strongsville

Business, community
and government
work together at

CROSSROADS of America

By Ann M. Gynn



Southwest General Health Center, Strongsville



Demag Plastic Group Corporation, North American headquarters



Darice/Pat Catan's corporate headquarters

All roads in Strongsville point to unprecedented growth—expansions and relocations of businesses, a growing population and a city government whose philosophy is to make the process as easy as possible.

"My job is to help build this community to its maximum potential," says Mayor Thomas Perciak. "Collectively, we can get far more done than if I was on a one-man journey."

Strongsville has been on an ambitious development avenue the last few years. In 2001, the city of Strongsville took a proactive viewpoint regarding development and with that idea purchased 182 undeveloped acres from Figgie International. The city applied for and received a \$500,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Development to offset construction costs for a 1,500-foot extension of Foltz Parkway that enables access, and subsequently development of the first 43 acres.

The land is in the Strongsville Business Park, the largest of four industrial parks in the city. Combined, the industrial parks host 182 businesses, from smaller businesses such as Roscoe Medical Inc. to large corporations such as ICI Paints, and employ more than 9,000 people.

To promote the marketing of the city-owned site, the city hired CRESCO Realty, a national and international real estate firm. Promoted as a high-tech business park, it received its first tenant last year when Computer Systems Company purchased 13 acres to build a 47,000-square-foot corporate headquarters.

"It was bought with development in mind," says Gene Magocky, economic development director for the city. "For us to keep attracting business, we need to plan ahead and ensure there is sufficient developable land for the future."

Dedicated to data success

C. Trac Information Solutions Inc. had been renting in Strongsville for a dozen years when they took a different course. "We thought it was time to go ahead and pay ourselves," says Mike Adams, CEO of C. Trac.

Deciding to buy or build a structure involved a multi-city search. But in the end, C. Trac opted to remain in Strongsville—even declining a 15-year tax abatement that one city offered if the company would locate there. "We walked away from several hundred thousand dollars (in tax incentives)," Adams says. "We just think, for our business, Strongsville portrays the image we want to present."

C. Trac helps companies capitalize on their databases by cleaning them up, analyzing data and creating clean databases to help them effectively operate. For example, C. Trac worked with a major sports franchise that had been making 50,000 calls for season ticket sales. Adams says C. Trac came in to clean up the database, analyze who was buying what and bought database lists that fit the buyers' profile. The work ended in a list of 5,000 contacts who purchased the same amount as the 50,000-name list.

C. Trac also worked with a zoo on its membership marketing. While most people focus on marketing to families with children, C. Trac found in its research that most membership buyers were grandparents who say it was a gift-giving opportunity.

Adams says C. Trac is operating in a growth market. "Businesses need to make sure their databases are clean. A company could have five databases within that nobody cleans up, parses addresses. It tries to build the business but doesn't have any reliable data to use for marketing," he explains.

While C. Trac sees growth in its future, it also sees a future in Strongsville where it opened its 12,000 square-foot office on Foltz Parkway in 2004.

"We truly love working in Strongsville," Adams says. "The city (government) is dedicated to helping businesses be successful. When you talk to them, you immediately recognize their commitment. If you need something and they can do it, they will," he says.

Adams needs only point to the process he experienced in constructing his new building to explain the government's willingness to help. He says he worked with Magocky who laid out all the options and considerations for him. When he went to the city with his building plans, he had final approval for construction



"We need to make government easier, not more difficult. We're trying to do that professionally and be as accommodating as possible."

— Mayor Perciak

within two weeks. Adams says it also helped that he used a Strongsville builder, Moran Construction.

"We knew what to expect. It made a world of difference," Adams says.

Competitive manufacturing environment

Demag Plastics Group Corp.'s Strongsville operations serve as its North American headquarters. The manufacturer of injection molding

machines (for a wide variety of end users developing everything from product and transit packaging to car components and consumer goods) acquired Van Dorn Demag Corp., which had been operating in the area for 20 years, in 2003.

"We think manufacturing in North America is a viable thing," says Larry Doyle, director of sales and marketing of Demag Plastics Group. "We're experiencing growth and are competitive against supply equipment importers," he says. "We're able to hold our own and keep costs competitive.

"We appreciate the work the city has done to keep our plant competitive," Doyle says. He notes that the company is able to ship easily from its Strongsville operations. The city sits close to Interstate 71, Interstate 80 (Ohio Turnpike) and less than 10 miles from Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.

Another plus of locating here for Demag is its 378 employees. "We have dedicated employees willing to work hard," Doyle says. "We're not shutting down. We're committed to being here for a long time."


Attractive choice for Astro
Kevin Webb, manager of marketing and sales at Astro Instrumentation, says location was a big factor when the company chose to expand and relocate from its Oberlin facility. Not only did the highway and airport access make it accessible to its customers on the East and West coasts, the new location didn't mean employees had to move.

"The city of Strongsville made (relocation) attractive," Webb says. "They're very pro-business and return phone calls."

The Ohio Department of Development supported Astro's move with a grant for land acquisition, construction, new machinery and equipment. Plus it received an Ohio Investment in Training Program grant and a Job Creation Tax Credit.

Astro operates as a one-stop-to-completion operation—designing and manufacturing medical devices for other companies. As such, it works with businesses around the world, an important consideration when Astro chose to locate in a Foreign Trade Zone, which enables the company to fast track its products through U.S. Customs.

Webb says Astro's clients who travel to the Strongsville plant and sometimes stay two or three weeks enjoy the city as well. He says the staff at the top-class restaurant The Pomeroy House even remembers the



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clients' names—something that not only surprises but impresses Astro's customers.

"It's a real nice community. The rec center and library are great too," says Webb, a Strongsville resident.

GE Advanced Ceramics, city power together

When GE Advanced Ceramics, the former Advanced Ceramics, faced power difficulties with a 25,000-square-foot expansion, it worked with the city.

Together, they worked with FirstEnergy to have a 138-kilowatt substation built nearby that facilitates GE Advanced Ceramics' power needs, saving the company an estimated \$300,000, according to Mayor Thomas Perciak.

GE Advanced Ceramics is one of the world's largest producers of boron nitride powders, shapes, coatings and other specialty ceramics. Boron nitride crucibles are used to grow wafers used in wireless phones and LEDs. They also make heaters that increase efficiencies in semiconductor chip-making equipment. They also are useful in applications ranging from automotive packaging to cooling the space shuttle's landing gear. Advanced Ceramics was founded by Union Carbide, which sold the company in 1993. In addition to Strongsville, GE Advanced Ceramics operates in Wales and Japan.

Family-owned and operated
The Catan family knows well what a good community Strongsville is. Father Pat Catan moved his eight-year-old business there in 1962. His children were raised in the area and all four siblings still call Strongsville home.

In 2003, Pat Catan's purchased the former Finast Supermarket Plaza on the east side of Pearl Road and transformed it into a 43,000-square-foot super craft center known as Crafters Square.

That move enabled Patrice Catan to expand the family's bridal shop to a 54,000-square-foot facility, making it one of the largest full-service bridal salons in the United States.

While Pat Catan's has 19 stores in Ohio and Pennsylvania, Mike Catan says the bigger aspect of the business evolved into another company, Darice, a crafts wholesaler that distributes to stores, including Wal-Mart, throughout the country.

Darice uses 1 million square feet for its distribution warehousing, most of which is in Strongsville, Catan says.

"The city along the years has been helpful in our growth. It's like home for us," Catan says.



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Commerce Parkway is one road in Strongsville Business Park, which covers almost 1,700 acres, making it the largest of the four industrial parks within the city. Other business parks include Park 82, Alameda/Progress Drive and Dow Circle. The industrial parks are home to 182 companies that employ more than 9,000 people.

As a business owner and resident, Catan says he has been impressed with the current administration's effort to control growth and grow the right kind of business. "Everybody (in city hall) is trying hard fiscally," he says. "I'd pick them to help run my company."

Growth ahead for metal forger
Girard Associates and Girard

Engineering opted for Strongsville more than seven years ago after operating in the Cleveland area since 1970. It built a 24,000-square-foot facility in the Dow Circle industrial park. Today, it occupies half the space and rents the remaining space. It also operates from 15,000-square-foot in remote facilities, says owner Bob Bollin.

"Strongsville is a strategic location," he says. "It has a pro-

business attitude. They're willing to work with us to help us grow."

While many are unaware of what exactly Girard does, almost everyone comes in contact with products made as a result of its metal forging equipment. "We're a little company you've never heard of, but you don't fly or drive without our parts," Bollin explains.

The 54-year-old Girard Associates serve as the sales component of the company. Girard Engineering began 15 years ago and today is the strongest part of the business. "We've doubled in size every five years," Bollin says.

Girard's engineers design and implement single and large automation projects from forging to packaging. They serve as "guns for hire," providing automation solutions for customers with handling and control problems. Girard assists most Tier 1 auto suppliers, major aerospace Tier 1 manufacturers and works directly with the big automakers, Bollin says, adding everything from motorcycle parts to rocket booster casings are forged through Girard-engineered machines.

"We take pride in that—knowing that not much in America doesn't operate without our equipment," Bollin says.

He says another attraction of

operating in Strongsville is the quality housing available. "A substantial number of our employees live in the city," Bollin adds.

And his employees, who are at the top of their field and willing to travel anywhere at any time, like where they are. Bollin says Girard has a retention rate of 99 percent. "That's important," he explains. "We build personal relationships with our customer base, people who want to know we're going to be in it for the long haul."

ICI Paints relocates to Strongsville

Last year, ICI Paints opted to move to this southwest suburb from downtown Cleveland. ICI Paints acquired the former Glidden Company in 1986. It manufactures paint under the names Glidden, Dulux, Ralph Lauren and This Old House to name a few, as well as caulk and adhesive products such as Liquid Nails. ICI Paints has 49 manufacturing sites in 25 countries, employing more than 15,000 people. Its headquarters in Strongsville employs 460, while its research facility in the city employs an additional 180—making ICI Paints the second largest employer in Strongsville. The Strongsville school

district is the largest employer.

Renaissance Park—a new entrance for the city

In 2004, Strongsville residents approved rezoning the northwest corners of Pearl and Whitney roads from single-family residential to general business.

The zoning change has enabled the old motel row to disappear in favor of Renaissance Park, a \$38 million retail and office complex, being developed by David Lewanski. Its anchor tenant is the 116,000-square-foot Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse. Other potential tenants for the 34-acre site include restaurants, banks and a grocery store.

More shops and restaurants plus movies

The retail business in Strongsville is booming, serving as a regional destination for Northeast Ohio shoppers. The city's retail centerpiece, Westfield SouthPark Mall, is expanding 200,000 square feet to meet the demand. The addition, under construction now, will add a 14-screen Cinemark movie theater, a 40,000-square-foot Dick's Sporting Goods plus 25 special stores and restaurants. It is scheduled to open in spring 2007.

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Mayor Perciak says Strongsville's business-friendly atmosphere has existed for a long time. "It's a good solid mix. You can't support residential without a good business base."

He explains that the growth of business in the city means an increase in income tax revenue received from people who work in Strongsville. The additional revenue enables the city to maintain its services without having to make

significant cuts or withhold raises from its city employees.

In addition, the business community contributes in more voluntary ways—companies contribute to the city's homecoming celebration, its fireworks as well as its holiday lights festival.

"It's the part of the community that makes life here important," Perciak says.

That personal touch extends the other way too. Perciak, a lifelong

banker, says he is more than willing to help businesses succeed in Strongsville. "If they have a problem financing, I get on the phone and ask the bank to take another look," he says. "We need to make government easier, not more difficult. We're trying to do that professionally and be as accommodating as possible."

A destination for the future
Industrial and business projects have taken off in Strongsville recently. In

2005, nine projects were completed that brought an estimated 766 jobs to the city.

These include:

- ICI Paints, 460 employees
- Prago Trade, 24 employees
- European Adoption Consultants, 35 employees
- Transwestern Publishing, 33 employees
- GMAC, 62 employees
- DHL Express, 125 employees
- R&M Tool, seven employees

- Mercury Messenger Service, four employees
- Goddard School, 16 employees

Five additional projects already are underway, including:

- Clark Reliance, a 25,000-square-foot expansion of its existing facility to accommodate consolidation of out-of-state plants that will bring 50 new jobs
- Atlantic Tool and Die, a 20,000-square-foot expansion for a new product line that will bring 20 new jobs
- Bearing and Drive Systems, a new 40,000-square-foot building to accommodate consolidation of out-of-state facilities that will enable 25 new jobs
- World Almanac, a 120,000-square-foot facility that will host 125 jobs
- Computer Systems Company, a 47,000-square-foot facility that also will bring 125 new jobs.

City officials estimate that the 14 projects will create more than 1,100 jobs in the city and represent an aggregate payroll of \$53 million. — —

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School District—925
ICI Paints—645
National City Corp.—525
Darice Inc.—490
PPG Industries—379
Demag Plastics Group—378
Ceres Corp.—321
City of Strongsville—305
Hy-Level Industries—280
Altenheim—274
Cleveland
Clinic Foundation—260
Resolve—250
Avery Dennison Corp.—243
Eberhard
Manufacturing—220
Atlantic
Tool & Die Co. Inc.—200
Cintas Corp.—185
MCPc—175
Mills Van Lines—150
Clark Reliance Corp.—110

Source: City of Strongsville