

Our Hidden Advantages: Location, Transportation, and Logistics

By Sam Howard

Communities across the country talk about economic renewal, and the conversation often begins with what they lack. Not enough people. Not enough capital. Not enough attention from outside investors. Not enough effort by government.

In Lewis County, that habit has obscured a more important question: what do we already have that others do not?

Lewis County's geography shaped its earliest years. The Ohio River was not merely a boundary; it was a lifeline. The river brought us our namesake, Meriwether Lewis. Early exports of salt moved downstream by flatboat, connecting this region to broader markets long before highways or rail lines existed. That advantage has not

disappeared. In many ways, it has become more valuable.

Today, transportation costs are once again a central concern for manufacturers and logistics firms. Supply chain disruptions, fuel price volatility, and global uncertainty have forced companies to rethink how and where they move materials.

Waterborne freight remains one of the most cost-effective and energy-efficient forms of transportation available. For industries that move bulk commodities or large volumes of finished products, proximity to the Ohio River is a practical advantage that cannot be easily replicated.

Lewis County's access to rail transportation further strengthens that position. CSX rail service connects the county to

major industrial centers across the Midwest, Southeast, and East Coast. Rail offers manufacturers flexibility, redundancy, and cost control. Qualities increasingly valued in a world where just-in-time delivery has given way to just-in-case planning. When combined with river access, rail connectivity places Lewis County within a multimodal network that many competing sites simply do not offer.

Equally important is where Lewis County sits on the map. Located within a day's drive of a large share of the nation's population and manufacturing base, the county occupies a central position in the eastern United States. For companies serving domestic markets, this reduces shipping times and costs while improving reliability. As more firms seek to shorten supply chains and bring production closer to customers, geography and central location have once again become deciding factors.

These physical advantages do not guarantee success on their own. They are not substitutes for workforce readiness,



infrastructure investment, or thoughtful planning. But they do provide a foundation, and a strong foundation is an essential building block for success. In economic development, some assets can be created over time. Others are fixed. The river, the rail line, and our location fall into the latter category.

For much of the past generation, Lewis County's strengths have been viewed through the lens of what was lost rather than what remains. The closure of the shoe and component factories is a prime example. Yet in an economy increasingly focused on efficiency, resilience, and reliability, our existing assets de-

serve renewed attention and promotion. They are not relics of the past. They are tools for the future.

Understanding and valuing these advantages is a necessary step in any serious discussion about renewing Lewis County. Before asking what the county needs to become, it is worth recognizing what it already is, and why that still matters.

We have what it takes. It is up to us to act.

About the Author

Sam Howard is a construction executive and economic development professional with more than 30 years of experience in the building and infrastructure sectors.

He serves as Chief Executive Officer of Trace

Creek Construction, Inc., where he oversees company operations, financial management, and long-term strategy. The firm specializes in design-build construction, construction management, and pre-engineered building systems, with completed projects across the public and private sectors, including schools, hospitals, churches, judicial facilities, detention centers, and industrial developments.

Howard also serves as Managing Member and Economic Development Manager for Northeast Kentucky Development, where he works to attract new and expanding industries to the region. In that role, he is directly involved in project development, site promotion, and financing strategies, including design-build leaseback models. His work brings him into regular collaboration with local and state officials, business leaders, and community stakeholders.

Howard's focus is on job creation, infrastructure development, and strengthening the long-term economic vitality and quality of life in Northeast Kentucky.

Editor's Note

This column is the second part of a guest series authored by Sam Howard and published by THE LEWIS COUNTY HERALD to encourage thoughtful discussion about Lewis County's future. Howard is the primary author of the series; I am serving as editor and host, working with him on clarity and presentation for HERALD readers. While we have been lifelong friends, this series appears because of his professional experience in construction and economic development and his interest in Lewis County's progress. The views expressed are those of the author, and readers are encouraged to engage with these topics as the series continues.

- Dennis Brown

Northern Kentucky coaches bring Christmas Hat Tree to David Iery



THE LEWIS COUNTY HERALD
Campbell County baseball coach Scott Schweitzer, Dixie Heights' Chris Maxwell and Beechwood's Kevin Gray deliver a Hat Tree to David Iery's front porch. (See story on Page 1)

66 JOBS

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centives based on the company meeting job creation and wage targets

The investment adds to ongoing economic development activity across the commonwealth during Gov. Beshear's administration.

ROBOCALLS

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Bust out the confetti and strike up the band! A New Year is dawning and we're kicking it off with a big hand. Applause to everyone who visited us this year and special thanks, too.

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Auctions by Cooper Multiple Estates Auction

Saturday, January 10th at 10:00 a.m.

Location: 76 Auction Lane, Vanceburg, KY

(Warm, spacious indoor auction facility)

Auctions by Cooper presents another outstanding multiple-estate auction, featuring the **Bill Bertram, Roger Brown, and Alden Rigdon estates**, all of Vanceburg, KY.

FEATURED ITEMS INCLUDE

Automobiles: 2019 Ford Ranger XLT – 1 owner, low miles, loaded; 2012 Ford F-150 XLT – 1 owner, 65,159 miles, 8-ft bed, loaded; 1997 Ford F-250 XLT – 7.3 Power Stroke diesel, 5-speed, 8-ft bed, loaded.

Recreation: Suzuki 4-Wheeler; (2) New Moto dirt bikes.

Firearms: Remington, Browning, Winchester, Marlin, Sabatti, Sig Sauer, Smith & Wesson, CZ, Ruger, High Standard, and others (All FFL rules apply — we do not ship firearms).

Pocket Knives: From the 1800s–1970s by Remington UMC, Russell Barlow, Kinfolks, Case XX, Ulster, Robeson, Schatt & Morgan, and many more.

Watches: Pocket watches by Illinois, Hampden, Studebaker, Waltham, and Railroad watches.

Coins: Gold coins (5 total), Silver Morgan and Peace Dollars, Many additional coins.

Antiques & Collectibles: Local art by Mitch Tolle, Dan McCane, and Jack Esham, Wildlife prints signed by R.J. McDonald and others, Rare Catlettsburg blue decorated 4-gallon churn, Antique quilts and comforters, 1940s “Li'l Abner Dogpatch Band” wind-up toy, Dazey butter churn, Lance store jar, Cast iron toys and banks.

Furniture: 4-piece oak bedroom set, Oak roll-top desk, Oak dining table & chairs, reclining sofa and chairs, chests, dressers, end tables, and more.

Tools & Equipment: Craftsman riding mower, Troy-Bilt self-propelled mower, Stihl weed eaters & battery blower, Power washers, water/trash pumps & hoses, Craftsman & DeWalt cordless tools, Sockets, ratchets, pliers, hammers, wrenches, clamps, drill bits, Ladders and tools of every kind for every job.

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More photos and a complete listing, including numbered lists of firearms, coins, pocket knives, and watches, available on **AuctionZip** and **Facebook**.

Stacy Cooper Auctioneer
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**Electric Plant Board
of the
City of Vanceburg
and Staff**

