

Port authority, officials going to Washington — again

By LORI WINCE
ThisWeek Staff Writer

Nearly a dozen public and private leaders from Licking County plan to spend April 30 in Washington, D.C., talking to legislators about what's going on locally.

"It is a productive day," said Rick Platt, executive director of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority. "Last year, the best quote was from (Licking County Commissioner) Tim Bubb, who said, 'We're cementing relations to cement jobs in Licking County.'"

The port authority sponsors the trip each year. Last year, Platt said, seven local officials flew to Washington and met with congressional legislators representing Ohio.

"We want to make sure we remain in the minds of our congressional officials so they know who we are and what we're about," Platt said.

This year, the group includes 11 people: representatives of Boeing, Bionetics and Atlantic Inertial Systems; Licking County

Commissioners Tim Bubb, Doug Smith and Mark Van Buren; Heath Mayor Richard Waugh; Licking County Chamber of Commerce president Cheri Hottinger; Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority board member Fred Paul; Platt and port authority operations assistant Bill Wright.

They are expected to meet with Democrat U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown and U.S. Reps. Zack Space (D-Dover) and Pat Tiberi (R-Genoa Township). They'll also have a brief meeting with staff for Republican U.S. Sen. George Voinovich.

"I've been to D.C. with other interest groups in lobbying efforts to keep the port authority in front of the legislators' agenda so they don't forget us when votes come up," Waugh said, adding that he's poised to do the same thing during this trip.

"It's so they will hear and listen to our issues so we can get an audience and list our issues," he said. "We like to keep contact open and let them know how important the port authority is to Heath and Lick-

ing County." Platt said the trip has been better organized this year; the group will depart before 5 a.m. and returns the same evening. He said they've organized sessions to prevent delays in going through security several times and hope to return a little earlier than 1 a.m. the following day, as they did last year.

Waugh said he believes the trip is worth the long hours partly

because legislators then are aware of issues and are more empathic if one of the local mayors calls to mention a problem or a concern.

"One of the major responsibilities of the port authority, as owner of the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center (COATC), is to keep federal, state and local officials informed and engaged in the successes and challenges of the base," Platt said. "It's fitting that

the story about one of Ohio's most successful public-private partnerships will be told by an impressive public and private contingent that epitomizes the base."

Platt said the trip helps keep public officials abreast of the value of jobs at COATC and to protect the interests of the companies based there. His agenda includes "requests for continued support for the workloads that are key to

maintaining the base's economic impact and updates on aerospace and defense-related industry trends, particularly those being noticed at the base."

Businesses on the 350-acre COATC campus employ 900 people and provide a \$55-million annual payroll, according to the port authority's Web site.

lwince@thisweeknews.com



DOLDER'S NURSERY