

Just about every week someone asks me how the commissioner job is going. “Do you like it?” “Is it what you expected?” “Are you making any progress?” And of course, many folks just want to know how things are going for Morgan County. So, I have put together this short “report” to update you on how the commissioner job is going.

Generally I feel very upbeat about the progress we are making. And I hasten to point out that when I say “we,” I mean the three commissioners. Obviously one commissioner can accomplish nothing without the support of the others. My two colleagues, Ron Moore and Dean Cain, have been great to work with. Both are strongly committed to helping move Morgan County forward. While we all don’t necessarily agree on everything, we do work well together – each bringing certain strengths to the table. Ron and Dean have been very supportive of my initiatives, and I have tried to reciprocate.

I focused my campaign on a three-pronged theme: **communication, commerce and clean up**. Here is how I have tried to move that agenda forward.

Communication. Anyone I talked with last year may recall that I proposed “town meetings” in each of our 14 townships, as a way of connecting the taxpayers to the county government. I am pleased to report that we met in each township, and the meetings were well attended. The highest attendance was 45 people in York Township. The meetings covered a wide variety of topics – but were never “gripe sessions.” Taxpayers came with questions and concerns, and we tried to answer or find solutions.

We launched the “official Morgan County website.” (<http://www.morgancounty-oh.gov>) The site is, and will be, under construction. I am updating and adding content to the site as I have the time. Most recently, I have begun to upload the minutes of the commissioners’ meetings, which will be available for online viewing and downloading.

We hired an unpaid “media intern” (Kathleen Dobbins), who prepared several press releases detailing some of the projects and programs of the commissioners’ office. We also began distributing our press releases to a wider range of media outlets.

Commerce. In an advertisement I placed in the *Morgan County Herald* in October 2004, I suggested that the county create a “grants” office. Both Ron and Dean worked very hard to make this come to fruition. We have hired a grant writer/administrator (Shannon Wells), who is already making a positive impact on Morgan County’s grant-funded programs. This office will eventually support small businesses in locating start-up capital and through a revolving loan fund.

Soon after the election (before I took office), I began attending various county-related meetings. After attending meetings of the *Governor’s Office on Appalachia - Broadband Initiative Technology Task Force* and *The Morgan County Community College* advisory committee, I instantly saw a connection. I contacted members of those two groups explaining the connection, and urged them to meet together. Two very positive things have come from facilitating that meeting. One, Chesterhill has wireless broadband Internet connectivity at the branch of Kate Love Simpson Library, where several area residents are already taking coursework in computer applications via the Internet. Two, a consortium of colleges and universities was created to deliver a wider range of courses and training to Morgan County students. Students are now enrolled in practical nursing courses here in Morgan County.

Clean up. To be honest, this is the area where I am most frustrated, and I know many of you are, too. Morgan County has several obstacles to achieving the goal of a cleaner county. Contrary to what I had been led to believe, we do not have all the laws in place to affect the change we need. Moreover, our law enforcement and judicial systems are under-staffed, and cannot devote the time and attention to this issue when the safety and security of the taxpayers is at risk.

I have not given up on this issue. It is critical to our economic development. Abandoned property and vehicles, and junk along our roads have already cost us jobs. We know that prospective employers have turned away from Morgan County because of these problems. I believe we now have a regulation in place to control nuisance properties and we will test it soon.

We are continuing to work with a group of concerned citizens and officials (the Environmental Task Force) to address clean up. We are seeking alternative sources of funding. And you can help, too. Tell your township trustees that this is an important issue. Report illegal dumping to them. Tell all your elected officials that you want the county to be cleaner. You can help set the agenda for the coming year. After all, we all work for you.