

Butler County wants to share its best-kept secrets

Courtesy Journal News, By Michael Pittman, Staff Writer

Updated: 2:00 p.m. Sunday, November 6, 2016

BUTLER COUNTY OHIO. —



Butler County wants to make sure its best-kept secrets aren't so secret.

The Butler County Visitor's Bureau is asking residents, visitors and stakeholders to let them know what they like best about the county, and what needs to be improved. This is part of an effort known as Project Spark which its goal is to find areas of improvements to make it a destination county. Pictured is Christina Norris writing down what she likes best about the county while at last month's Trunk-R-Treat event in Fairfield.

The Butler County Visitors Bureau and Butler County government are leading a multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction countywide branding effort known as [Project Spark](#), underway for several months. But the first step is to find out what people like about Butler County, and where does it need to improve.

“The real key to this project is to engage audiences and groups, residents alike,” said Butler County Visitors Bureau Executive Director Mark Hecquet. “People know what’s great, but they never really say it. They were never really asked, but there’s a great willingness to link arms and to be awesome.”

Butler County Administrator Charlie Young said when Hecquet came to the county about participating in this project, “It was like a veil was lifted from our eyes a little bit on what’s possible.”

“My focus on the government side is ‘How do we make it easier for our citizens to be served’, not ‘How do we make it easier to serve them.’ And there’s a really profound difference between those two perspectives,” Young said. “It’s about everybody that lives here, everybody that visits here, everybody that does business here, and how do we bring all of that together and make it a coherent message.”

There are “territorial issues” among many of the communities within Butler County, but Hecquet and others involved with [Project Spark](#) say there’s a desire to overcome these issues. At a recent workshop, stakeholders representing townships, the county, and schools, as well as the arts and culture, business and medical communities, are on board with [Project Spark](#), said Butler County Commissioner Cindy Carpenter.

Before that workshop was over, they wanted to implement the ideas as soon as possible.

“We knew we could get a core group together, but I had no idea it would be set on fire like it has,” she said.

Hecquet said they aren’t quite ready to implement any of the ideas. He and others are still gathering input from other stakeholders, such as the religious community, and are analyzing the data.

But Carpenter said the stakeholders already providing input said there’s an opportunity to build on the diverse of attributes of the county, including physical attributes like community events, the Great Miami River, the parks and library systems, and a business community that’s both established and burgeoning. They also want to build on the diverse intangibles assets like the county’s long and rich history and the fact a person can go from preschool to a Ph.D all within the county.

“I’ve heard people say that’s what makes us special, the diversity is what makes us special and why someone would want to come to Butler County,” Carpenter said.

Throughout the month of October, green and white boards populated events and festivals where residents were asked two questions: “What makes Butler County great?” and “What can make Butler County greater?”

Though Christina Norris is a Springfield Twp. resident, in the area of Pleasant Run, she spends a lot of time in Butler County, including at Fairfield’s Community Arts Center and Miami Valley Ballet Theater.

“There’s so much free or low-cost excellent programming for kids and family, and people are not aware of it,” said Norris, who plans to move to Butler County next summer. “As a parent I just started looking for things to do, and I find so much of it right here just a few minutes from home. I love it.”

As far as what could make the county better, she said, “That’s a hard one to answer.”

Joe Rocklin, from Liberty Twp., said Butler County's libraries and parks are a big reason of what makes Butler County great. And what can be greater, he said, "There's always asking for more parks and more opportunities to do things like (Fairfield's Farm-R-Treat) out in the community. More community events are always a good thing."

People wanting to voice their opinion on the project, or become involved can visit the [Project Spark](#) at www.ButlerCountySpark.com.

"We need the voices of our residents talking about how great this county is," said Butler County Visitors Bureau Executive Director Mark Hecquet. "We need the visitors to talk about how great it is to be here. We need to have the visitors leave here saying how great it is. We know it's great."