

## Workforce Numbers a Double-Edged Sword in Medina County

With unemployment hitting 3.3% and a workforce participation rate of around 80%, Medina County is definitely working. But with booming business comes the stress on companies to find available workers. With over 1,500 openings in manufacturing companies alone, employers struggle to find the workers they need to meet their customer demands and continue to grow their businesses.

Where did all the people go? It is a complicated question and there are several answers. The United States has not had a replacement birth rate since the 1970s. That means there were not as many people being born to replace retiring workers for the last 50 years. In Medina County specifically, the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the county lost 700 participants between 18 and 24 years old in the labor force between the 2010 and 2019 census. That population is typically entry level workforce, which allows companies to hire and train people into higher level roles. And that was before COVID.

Add to that the results of COVID, which are not even fully realized yet. What we do know is there are many deaths and disabilities caused by COVID and those people are out of the possible workforce pool. In addition, the number of drug overdoses also went up during 2020 and 2021, and that population is typically in the workforce.

In a more positive explanation for exiting the workforce, many individuals who were planning to retire over the next 5-10 years moved their timetable up. That number is not fully documented yet, but we know it was more than expected.

Also, individuals who chose to change career paths opened new businesses in record number. New business starts in Ohio are up 21% for the first 9 months compared to last year, and 2020 was a record year. To date, the number of new

business starts is 20% higher than the entire year of 2019, so clearly entrepreneurs felt ready to start new businesses, thus removing themselves from the workforce.

A more complicated reason involves labor shortages fueling more labor shortages. Daycare centers have had a difficult time hiring enough people to staff those locations. When COVID hit, centers closed and many of those workers moved on to other careers where they can make more money. If a family cannot get childcare, someone must stay home with the children, which takes them out of the workforce.

In a similar vein, families that had aging parents who could not go to senior living facilities during COVID found ways to manage, and some of those workers are not returning to continue to support mom and dad.

The area getting the most press are the people exploring new careers. Individuals who had some time to consider their careers are now looking at what they want to do with their futures. In a market where some are reporting as many as 10,000 job openings, and there are only 8,000 people to fill them, according to <https://numberronomics.com/unemployment-vs-job-openings-2/>.

We are not seeing an increase in individuals using social service organizations or eligible for benefits. An unemployment rate of under 5% has always been considered full employment, and Medina County has been consistently under 5% for many years. Individuals on unemployment and receiving a variety of benefits have work requirements to continue, and those agencies are not seeing a large increase in traffic.

### The Good News

Several organizations are taking this challenge head on. The Everybody Works movement spearheaded by the Medina County

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Employment Collaborative was founded to map the workforce ecosystem and help them all work together. This group shares job openings, uses [www.worklocal.net](http://www.worklocal.net) to share Medina County job openings, offers an option for a career counselor to call an individual so they do not have to find the support, and meets regularly to discuss what candidates need to connect to companies.

One program they have put together is a spreadsheet of all candidates currently working with job counselors, which includes OhioMeansJobs, Job and Family Services, Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Medina County Probation, Jobs for Ohio's Graduates, Alternative Paths, Goodwill, and more. Employers can check this document each week to see who is available and discuss them with the counselors. This document is updated every Friday and can be viewed at <https://everybodyworksmedinacounty.org/candidate-pool/>.

To help increase the pipeline of workers, the Medina County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) is hosting nine career development events for students so far this year. Those school events can be viewed at <https://www.medinacounty.org/2021-school-events/>. Volunteers are always needed!

Individuals returning to Medina County from serving prison time are also working with a number of organizations, and companies are talking about how to employ them successfully.

Two organizations in the region work with bringing refugees into the area, and MCEDC is partnering with them to try to bring as many candidates as possible to Medina County. These individuals have seven to nine background checks run on them and do have green cards, as part of the process of bringing them in involves ensuring that they are work-ready so they see a job as the ticket to their future.

In the spring of 2021, MCEDC sent a mailer to residents to help them understand potential jobs available to them. The efforts to help residents recognize the great jobs in their backyards has changed the percentage of people leaving the county each day for work from 70% to 54%.

Receiving funds from the Workforce Area 2 Board, MCEDC also partnered with Proximity Marketing and Lime Creative to run a social media campaign throughout Northeast Ohio. The [www.worklocal.net](http://www.worklocal.net) website received over 1,000 visits and there were over 1.8 million impressions made from those ads.

Looking to the future, it is clear we need to bring more entry-level workers into Medina County. Over 80% of openings are entry level so that we do not need skilled workers or to spend government training dollars. We need people ready for the beginning of their careers to be trained by our companies so they can move up in their career paths.

MCEDC is also looking at ways to bring a transportation pilot program to the county to give those who cannot go to work due to lack of a vehicle a way to carpool to jobs. We are seeking funding through ARPA and other means to have the opportunity to make this impact.

We are also partnering with the Medina County Convention and Visitors Bureau to help people see Medina County as a place to visit on vacation. Studies show that 37% of individuals visit a location before moving or working in the area, so we believe that these efforts can help more workers see the drive is easy, the community is supportive, and the jobs are here.

It is vital to continue the efforts to bring new people into Medina County and help all of our residents have access to great jobs. If you would like to support these efforts, please consider joining MCEDC.