

Potential projects might add 3,600 jobs

By MONICA SPEES mspees@bgdailynews.com | Posted: Friday, March 6, 2015 11:00 am

Warren County has received nearly 30 prospective company projects since December, which could mean thousands of new jobs.

Since Warren became a right-to-work county Dec. 27, new prospects have shown interest in locating here, Judge-Executive Mike Buchanan said. Not all of those projects' leaders have given an estimated scope of their impact, but Buchanan said that of the ones that have, the potential is for 3,667 jobs and an investment of \$324 million in the community.

Those numbers have grown quickly. Buchanan said when he spoke with Ron Bunch, president and chief executive officer of the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, a few weeks ago, Bunch told him 15 projects were "in the pipeline." When the two men spoke again, Bunch said there were 21 prospects, then soon after revised that number to 27.

Buchanan said he felt like every time he turned around, the prospects were growing.

"It was kind of staggering to me," Buchanan said. Those numbers "are just unheard of."

Before the right-to-work designation, Kentucky wasn't included in certain site selections, Buchanan said. Now, the county is attractive to more companies.

Bunch said becoming a right-to-work area was necessary for Warren County to compete.

"Now, we're included in more projects than we have in the past, which gives us a better chance to win jobs for our community, which is what was intended," Bunch said.

Bunch said it's clear that the county's right-to-work designation is making a difference.

"In comparison, the commonwealth of Kentucky announced 32 new manufacturing-related projects that (would) create 2,213 jobs for the calendar year 2014. Additionally, the commonwealth of Kentucky announced 32 new manufacturing-related projects that (would) create 2,389 jobs for the calendar year 2013," Bunch said via text message. "In the past decade, Warren County announced \$376 million in capital investment and over 1,760 jobs from new companies attracted to our area. Not one job or one dollar during that period was from a new company that was unionized."

Buchanan said that if the county closed on a third of the current prospects, it would be the best year ever for the number of projects attracted to the county.

Buchanan said he believes the response from companies in just two months after the county approved a right-to-work ordinance bodes well for Warren County's future. The county's success with the legislation

should be a good example for the state, Buchanan said.

Since Warren County's passage of the right-to-work ordinance, Simpson, Logan, Butler, Todd, Cumberland, Hardin, Rockcastle, Whitley and Fulton counties have passed right-to-work legislation. The legislation has been introduced in Monroe, Adair, Pulaski, Oldham, Kenton and Boone counties.

"If the entire state would pass it, I think it would improve the economy of all our neighbors around the state," Buchanan said.

To illustrate the effect a right-to-work law can have, Buchanan used the example of Warren County like a store, right-to-work legislation like a marketing ploy and companies like customers.

"If you can't get a customer into your store to show them your merchandise, you can't show them your inventory and make a sale," Buchanan said. "If you've got a nice store with nice sales, nice inventory and nice prices, you can get people in the store."

Buchanan pointed to neighboring Indiana, which became the 23rd right-to-work state in 2012, as an example of what Warren County could experience. More than 100 companies indicated to the Indiana Economic Development Corp. that passage of the law was a factor in their decision to locate or expand operations in Indiana, according to the December Lane Report. Those projects account for about 10,000 projected new jobs and more than \$3.1 billion in capital investment.

Even if no other Kentucky counties had also become right-to-work areas, Buchanan said he thinks Warren County did the right thing.

"We told the rest of the world and our site selectors that Warren County is open for business," Buchanan said.

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