

# Testimony

**By Virgil Strickler, General Manager of the Ohio Expositions Commission  
Before the Senate Finance Committee**

## **FY 2012-13 Budget Hearing**

Good morning. My name is Virgil Strickler. I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to you today and inform you of the Ohio Expositions Commission's plans for the future.

The Commission operates the Ohio Expo Center, a year-round, multipurpose convention and meeting facility. The Expo Center is host to five of Columbus' top 10 conventions and a total of 156 annual events held in multiple onsite facilities. A recently completed economic impact study showed that in 2009, these events covered approximately 355 event days and generated an estimated 2.7 million visitors. The Expo Center creates a substantial economic impact on the City of Columbus, Franklin County and the state of Ohio. The total direct and indirect expenditure impact is estimated at more than \$478 million. These expenditures generate approximately \$14 million in local, county and state tax revenues and support nearly 4,600 full and part-time jobs.

On July 27, 2011, our premier event, the Ohio State Fair, will open its gates for the 158th time. Over the past several years, extra efforts with grounds beautification, cleanliness, customer service, free entertainment and comfort areas have enhanced both the public and media perceptions of the fair. As a result, the Ohio State Fair attracts more than 800,000 visitors during its 12-day run and enjoys strong support from local and statewide organizations, sponsors and media.

The Commission's mission is as follows: *To professionally operate and maintain for public benefit a year-round, service oriented event facility and produce the annual Ohio State Fair.*

Our vision is as follows: *To be recognized as a unique, dynamic and profitable facility committed to creating a nationally recognized event venue and producing the highest quality agricultural state fair.*

Our highest number of permanent employees went from 96 in December of 1994 to 62 permanent employees today in March of 2011. I am pleased to say that our staff has taken the initiative to do more with less, all while increasing the number of events held at the Expo Center. A number of our employees have taken on more than one job; for example, I serve as General Manager and Agriculture & Horse Show Director. Our Rental Director has also assumed the position of Maintenance Director, and our Entertainment Director also oversees administration and personnel. All grounds and maintenance supervisors have additional responsibilities with regard to servicing all our weekend events.

Another example of our cost savings measures is that when capital funds were granted for a new building in 2009-2010, our management team and Commission worked with the Governor and legislature to reallocate these

funds for several projects incorporating five buildings and two grounds locations. This reallocation of capital funds effectively increased the life expectancy and capitalized on these facilities into the foreseeable future, in turn maximizing the funds' effects. Our management team has the vision to meet the initiatives of Governor Kasich, the House and the Senate.

Over the past eight years, we have been fortunate to achieve partnerships with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, The Ohio State University, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and Ohio's diverse commodity groups. These relationships have helped the Ohio State Fair continue to serve as a premier showcase at which Ohio's businesses and industries can highlight products including agriculture and green initiatives to help foster growth within the state.

We are very proud of our accomplishments of producing a great State Fair and hosting numerous other events that benefits Ohio in a number of different ways ranging from an overall economic impact to many youth development programs.

However, the Fair's success greatly coincides with the weather during the Fair. The Commission currently has a reserve fund to help cover the costs for extraordinary circumstances relating to adverse weather during the Ohio State Fair. This fund, with a current balance of \$125,000, has not been used since 2003. In the case of a poor weather fair, this fund will be necessary and could quickly be depleted.

I would like to recognize Director Charles of the Department of Public Safety and Colonel Born of the Ohio Highway Patrol for their support of safety standards at the Fair. I thank Director Wray at the Ohio Department of Transportation for their efforts and support.

Finally, I would like to say that the Ohio Expositions Commission is prepared to do our part in sharing the sacrifice with the state during this time of great budgetary concern. The staff and I will endeavor to compensate for the loss of GRF funds by prudent use of operating funds to the extent that we are able. Please keep in mind, however, that one of the primary reasons a Fair is successful is good weather. Good weather, our excellent staff and the support we receive from Governor Kasich and the Ohio Legislature help make the Ohio State Fair one of the best expositions and celebrate everything our great state has to offer.

Senators, thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today. I am available for your questions.