

The Campbellsville Comeback

History

For more than 50 years, Campbellsville and Taylor County maintained a level of relative prosperity. Thanks to the presence of one of the world's largest garment manufacturers owned by Fruit of the Loom, the community rarely saw its unemployment rate rise above 5 percent. While very little was invested in future economic development, the community did invest in parks, health care, a library, and other services. By the late 1980's, Fruit of the Loom employed more than 4,000 people at its various facilities throughout Taylor County.

However, starting in the fall 1997 and ending in July 1998, Fruit of the Loom permanently laid off all of its Taylor County workforce and shuttered its facilities in the community. Approximately 3,200 people in this county of 22,000 were now unemployed. Many of them had gone to work straight from high school and had never worked anywhere else. The unemployment rate would skyrocket to nearly 30 percent in the coming weeks. Throughout the region, other communities were reeling as Fruit of the Loom, Osh Kosh, and other cut-and-sew facilities were relocated out of the US. Many wondered when, if ever, these communities - with Campbellsville being the most prominent - would ever recover.

Present

Fast-forward to the middle of 2004, and one can hardly believe that Campbellsville had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country only a few short years ago. More than 3,700 new jobs have been created from 13 new employers and major expansions by more than a half dozen existing industries. The new diversified economy includes new manufacturers (Fleetwood, Murakami, Airguard, Lippert Components, Air Safety and Campbellsville Apparel); significant expansions of existing manufacturers (Cox Interior, WHI, Ingersoll-Rand, and Campbellsville Industries); new service operations (National Data Quest, Frost-Arnett Company and Upstream); and a major distribution center for Amazon.com. These companies represented growing local companies, large private corporations, Fortune 500 companies, the area's first Japanese facility, and the first Brazilian investment in the Commonwealth.

By the numbers

- 3,773 new jobs announced from October 1998 to December 2003
- 200+ new jobs announced through expansions since January 2004
- Average Weekly Wage increased nearly 20% since 1995
- Retail Sales increased 25% since 2000
- Occupational License Fees increased of 44% since 1999
- Despite predictions of major losses, both city and county population grew from 1990-2000.
- In July 2003, Kentucky State Data Center ranks Campbellsville as one of the fastest growing cities in Kentucky
- 2003 saw approximately 60 new housing starts.

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