

## **Dick Maggiore: Forging strategy to add jobs in Stark County**

By **Dick Maggiore Special** to The Canton Repository

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An important report about recommendations for strengthening Stark County has huge ramifications for those of us who live, work and play here.

The report, “Strengthening Stark County, a Call for Economic Transformation,” was initiated by the inspired leadership of the Canton Repository, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Stark Community Foundation. They asked for the work because they increasingly were concerned about the future of our community.

We all should be thankful for their stewardship.

The report’s overarching message: Our population is getting smaller, poorer and older. It’s sobering. If we stay on the path we’re on, we should expect to get even smaller, poorer and older. The numbers don’t lie.

Others have joined in the conversation and the work to find a better path toward a higher quality of life. The report shared research and gave direction.

The report says, “Economic development serves as the catalyst for addressing the root cause of social problems within communities.”

At the end of the day, put in its simplest terms: How do we create more jobs?

A dozen organizations are working on economic development in our county. The report recommends the Stark Economic Development Board collaborate and coordinate with these organizations on a shared economic plan for Stark County.

So two questions come to mind: Should the focus be on recruiting companies to move to Stark County? Or should we focus on retaining and growing companies already here?

The report recommends focus on existing Stark County companies. We wholeheartedly agree. This does not mean, of course, that we shouldn't get excited about the prospect of new companies coming to town. We must continue to respond to inquiries and do all that is reasonable to attract new companies.

But the rewards will be greater if we focus on and support existing companies by helping them to grow. Research shows this focus works, especially given our limited economic development resources.

### **Resource allocation**

The next logical question is: How do we decide the optimal allocation of our limited economic development resources in support of existing Stark County companies? How can we achieve the most job creation with our limited dollars? What's the secret sauce?

Consider this: Divide our existing Stark County companies into two camps.

One camp makes products and/or services and sells them locally. Most retailers would fit into that camp, from restaurants to clothing and department stores, gas stations and more. Included in this camp are many types of firms providing services from health care, legal, financial, repair and more.

The second camp includes our local companies that make products and/or services but sells them outside Stark County. These companies make a product or service that is so different and special that companies and people from outside our area willingly spend their money here.

Examples include The Timken Co., which sells its bearings all over the world. Diebold sells its ATM machines almost everywhere. Shearer's Foods manufactures and sells more kettle chips than any company in North America and sells them across our continent. Fresh Mark, Nickles Bakery and Mid's Sauces sell their products far and wide. Marathon Refinery, Ohio Gratings, Republic Steel, MK Morse, Gregory Galvanizing and many more make the list.

The difference between these two camps of companies is that the first camp is exchanging dollars within our community. They are not adding to the pie. They are not growing our community.

The second camp's sales are outside Stark County, meaning the money is coming in to our county. They are growing the pie. When there's more money in our community, we all reap the rewards. Notably, the companies in camp one benefit due to increased local sales.

We believe the opportunities companies in the second camp present are therefore the key to growing a community — the secret sauce. We can use this **strategy** to grow our community and thereby create new jobs.

### **Growing the workforce**

If we succeed in helping camp two companies grow and create jobs, our workforce will grow. Stark County will enjoy more prosperity and grow its population, while the average age notches down to a younger demographic.

Notice the examples in camp two are manufacturers. Our community has a long heritage and strength in manufacturing. Making things gives us an edge.

We also have an increasing number of companies here selling services around the country. An example is Patriot Software, which sells accounting and payroll service from its office right here in Stark County. Our professional services sector, including law, accounting, technology, media, financial service firms and others, sell their services here and outside Stark County.

Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village is an example of selling an experience. The experience draws visitors from around the country to come and spend their money here. We expect this to grow as the Village grows. Johnson Controls Hall of Fame certainly fits in camp two.

The report noted that growing businesses demand more employees. Stark County has a definite edge in well-trained people, thanks to our vibrant post-secondary education system, including Stark State College, Kent State, Walsh, Malone and Mount Union universities and Aultman College of Nursing.

Focusing our support for our camp two businesses is our best bet in combating the sobering reality that our county's population is shrinking and those of us who remain are getting older and poorer.

With our great schools and economic development experts working closely with the needs of our growing companies, we are face to face today with the opportunity to reverse the brain drain to brain gain.

*Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of [Innis Maggiore](#), founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning ad agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.*