

Erie Basin supports small businesses and conservation in ten-county region

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Erie Basin Coordinator Greg Small, left, and Ottawa Soil & Water Conservation District Program Administrator, Mike Libben, talk in the front yard of the Historical Octagon House. (Photo by Sheri Trusty)

BY SHERI TRUSTY

OTTAWA COUNTY – In 1991, the Erie Basin Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D) was incorporated with a mission to promote economic and social development while protecting natural resources and supporting conservation programs. In 1994, Erie Basin started the Revolving Load Fund (RLF) program with a mission to create and expand small businesses and create or retain jobs. For many years, Erie Basin was one of many RC&D councils in Ohio. Today, it is the only one left.

Erie Basin serves ten counties: Ottawa, Sandusky, Seneca, Erie, Huron, Ashland, Crawford, Richland, Wood and Wyandot. Within that wide district, the council continues its mission to support small businesses and conservation efforts.

Since its inception in 1994, the RLF has distributed 101 loans totaling over \$3 million and created 315 jobs.



Former Ottawa County Commissioner Jim Sass, who is a member of the Erie Basin RC&D Council, visited the Historical Octagon House & Farm for the first time during June 13 Erie Basin meeting. (Photo by Sheri Trusty)

“We’ve processed 101 loans, and there’s a story behind every one of them,” said Erie Basin Coordinator Greg Small.

Loans average \$10,200, and educational mini-grants support educational programs and small businesses. Mini-grant recipients include Ottawa Soil & Water Conservation District

(\$50) and the Ohio Small Business Development Center at Terra State Community College (\$500).

The group meets quarterly to discuss business, to network, and to visit local sites of interest in the ten-county region. On June 13, the group held its quarterly meeting at the Historical Octagon House & Farm owned by Seneca County Commissioner Bill Frankart and his wife, Janet Frankart, in Clyde. The home is a unique part of American architectural history and is believed to have been part of the Underground Railroad.



From left, Erie Basin Secretary/Treasurer, Kurt Heyman; Sue Heyman; Janet Frankart; and Seneca County Commissioner Bill Frankart talk outside the Historical Octagon House. (Photo by Sheri Trusty)

The Frankarts purchased the home from the family of Eldon and Kathryn Powell in 2021. The commissioner grew up on a farm down the road, and the Frankarts and Powells were friends.

“We had a great relationship with them,” Commissioner Frankart said.

The Frankarts purchased the farm and turned the Octagon House into an AirBnB and then transformed the barn into a wedding and event center. Wedding parties have access to the entire property – Octagon House, barn, outdoor patio and small adjoining woods – from

Thursday through Sunday. The upscale venue retains a rustic charm that ties it to its history and gives homage to the Powells. The Frankarts are thankful they were able to preserve links to the home's past.



The Erie Basin leadership team includes, from left, Secretary/Treasurer, Kurt Heyman; President Cameo Carey; and Coordinator Greg Small. (Photo by Sheri Trusty)

“As well as Eldon and Kate took care of it, it would have been disheartening to see it go to disrepair,” Commissioner Frankart said. “Everything here is as it was when they had it. We cemented the barn floor because it was a dirt floor, but that is where they milked the cows.”

Most of the Erie Basin members who attended the June 13 meeting had never been to the Historical Octagon House, including President Cameo Carey and Secretary/Treasurer Kurt Heyman, who led the meeting with Small. Exposing members to hidden gems in the Erie Basin region is one of the goals of the council.

Among the members at the meeting were former Ottawa County Commissioner Jim Sass. He is the current Ottawa County Historical Society president and serves on the Erie Basin RLF committee.



Erie Basin Coordinator Greg Small leads the June 13 Erie Basin meeting inside the barn at the Historical Octagon House & Farm in rural Clyde. (Photo by Sheri Trusty)

“Erie Basin exposes us to things like the Octagon House. It makes us aware of our surroundings,” he said.

Mike Libben, the District Program Administrator for the Ottawa Soil & Water Conservation District, also attended the meeting. He is a member of the Erie Basin RC&D Council. Libben said the RLF has benefitted Ottawa County.

“We help identify potential projects and businesses that can use it,” he said.

Erie Basin owns an animatronic worm called S.K. Worm that teaches children about conservation. Libben has brought the worm to Ottawa County many times for educational programs.

“I took it into elementary schools in the county, and we had it at the Ottawa County Fair,” he said. “It’s very unique, very Disney-like.”

For more information on Erie Basin, visit <https://eriebasinrcd.org>. For more information on the Historical Octagon House, visit www.historicaloctagonhouse.com.