

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

How Athens County came together for local news by and for the community.

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LETTER FROM CORINNE

Nearly a century of consolidation has left the majority of American newspapers in the hands of a few massive corporations. Decisions about business operations and news coverage that once were made by local people who knew their communities now are made in distant offices by executives who rarely, if ever, visit the towns they serve.

Amid seismic changes in the business environment, America lost 55% of its newsroom capacity in a little over a decade.

My co-founders and I experienced this firsthand here in Athens County, where we've lost 85% of newsroom capacity in the same period. The result: ghost newspapers that don't have enough reporters to function effectively and news deserts that have no local sources of news.

The Athens County Independent is our response to that trend. In some ways, the nonprofit model is bringing journalism back to its historic roots as a purely local operation. Instead of an individual publisher, though, nonprofit newsrooms are owned in trust by their communities. Profits don't accrue to shareholders; instead, that money helps the newsroom fulfill and expand its mission of public service journalism.

And where does our revenue come from? Mostly from our communities, in the form of donations, advertising and sponsorship. We don't make anyone pay for news through subscription fees or paywalls. We simply ask that those who can, give what

they can so that everyone can access trustworthy information.

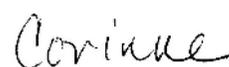
Rather than baking a casserole or lending a tool, you help your neighbors get local news reported by people who call Athens County home.

We're off to a good start on that score, as this report details. Building a new business, however, takes time.

If we were a for-profit, we'd have investors and access to credit to support us as we grow. As a not-for-profit, we need a different kind of investor, who will take their dividends in a healthy business environment, efficient and effective government, and residents who are fully engaged in our community's civic and social life.

History has shown us that the only ones we can rely on are ... us. Not the government, not corporations — just our families, our neighbors and our friends, wherever they may be. When we pull together, we achieve amazing things — look at what we've accomplished together so far! I can't wait to see what we'll do in the years ahead.

Cheers,



Corinne Colbert
Co-founder and
editor



OUR 2022 TEAM

2022 STAFF & INTERNS



Corinne Colbert
Co-Director & Editor in Chief



Dani Kington
Co-Director & Staff Writer



Keri Johnson
Co-Founder and Staff Writer



Jen Bartlett
Co-Founder and Creative Director



Sam Stecklow
Staff Writer



Isabel Nissley
Intern



Malaya Tindongan
Intern

2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Jen Seifert
President



Susan Urano
Vice President



Eli Flournoy
Treasurer



Tom Hodson
Secretary



Ilya Kogan

2022 PARTNERS



2022 BY THE NUMBERS

Despite publishing for only four months in 2022, we published 53 pieces. Our first story was published on August 12, 2022.

Our top five stories, totaling 20,066 views

10,527

Something rotten at Hocking College?

2,851

Hocking College rejects board overhaul

2,845

Sick deer in Athens County: historic outbreak impacts hunting season

2,831

Proposed charter school with controversial connections could divert millions from local schools

1,607

Hocking College controversy: Caucus reconvenes, replaces board member

From August to December 2022, we reached:

30,515

people via Facebook (grew by 371%)

1,307

people via Instagram (grew by 100%)

541

followers on X (formerly Twitter) with over 110,000 impressions

1,000

Indy subscribers

Fundraising:

\$30,300

in individual donations from 450 individuals

\$39,500

in grant funding

OUR IMPACT

Our mission is to empower community engagement through accessible public service journalism. We asked our readers in Aug. 2023 how we're doing. They said that because of our coverage, they:

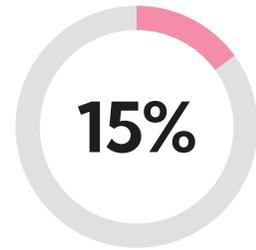
Civic life



Attended a public meeting

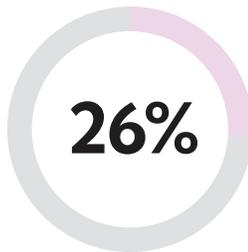


Attended a political event or protest

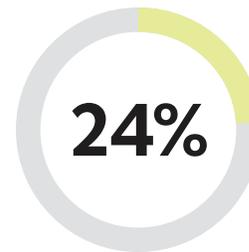


Got in touch with an elected official or government employee

Elections

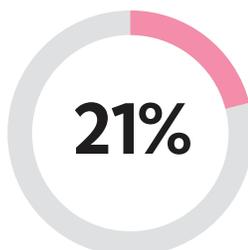


Voted in an election

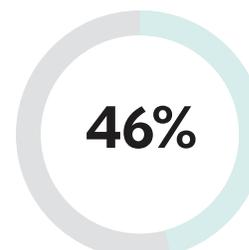


Decided how to vote in an election

Community support



Donated to another local cause



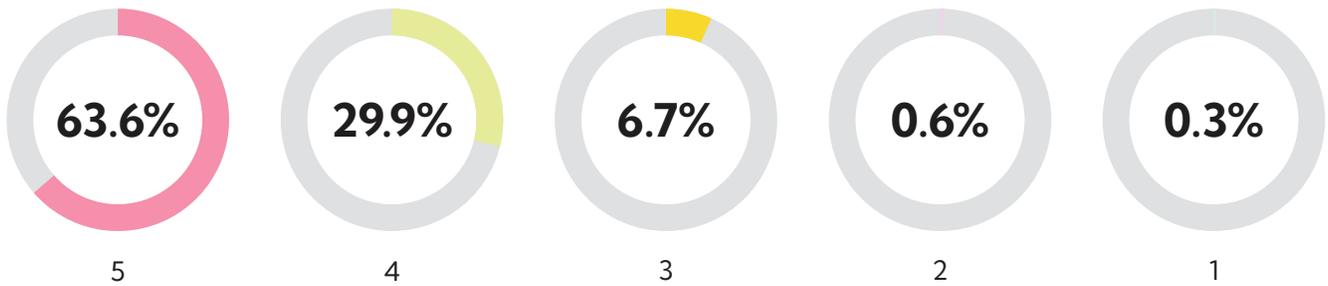
Attended a community event

TRUSTED LOCAL NEWS

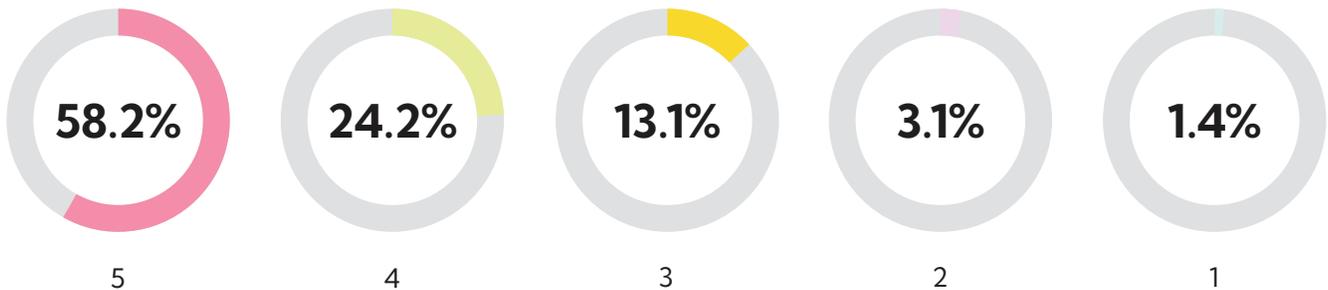
Our readers trust our reporting and value nonprofit news.

Readers answered/responded using a scale of 1-5, with 5 being most trust or most important, and 1 being the least.

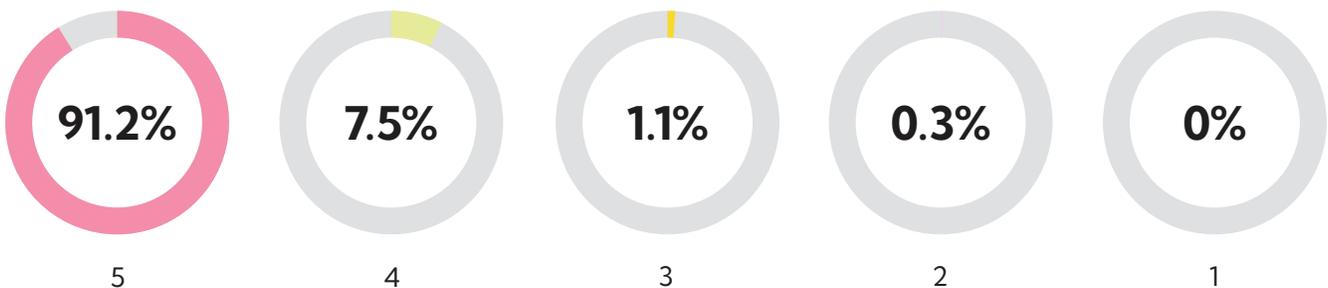
How much do you trust our reporting?



How important is it that the Independent is free to all?



How important is it that the Independent is locally owned and operated?



OUR STORY

CORINNE: MAKING LEMONADE

I was fired from the Athens News on Feb. 28, 2022 — after just eight months as editor — because I wrote an editorial and posted on social media about deceptive advertising in our community’s corporate-owned newspapers. I sent a series of tweets announcing that I’d been fired, and why.

By the time I got home an hour or so later, the tweets had gone viral. Over the course of that afternoon, a couple of folks suggested that I could leverage all the interest in my firing to set up a truly local news operation. I texted Dani: What do you think about “Athens County Independent”? With a name in place, I set up a crowdfunding campaign on FreeFunder that raised almost \$18,000.

We made some crucial connections through personal and professional networks. Some of those connections brought us much-needed guidance and legal advice. Others led to major grants from the Athens County Foundation and the John Glazer Impact Fund. By late spring, we had nearly \$50,000 to launch the Independent.

Dani had quit the Messenger shortly after I was fired, so I asked them to join me. Keri and Jen said they’d throw in their lot with us and voila! We had our founding team. We had our first staff meeting at Jackie O’s Taproom in March 2022.

JEN: A MASCOT IS BORN

When Corinne approached me about putting together the Athens County Independent, it really made me excited and honored that she and Dani chose

me, along with Keri, to be the founding team.

We gathered at various locations around Athens and began our planning. We had our favorite spots: The Mine in Nelsonville, the Taproom and Casa, to name a few. You could feel the energy around us and know this was going to be a great thing.

As the Creative Director/graphic designer, I began to build the brand. It was very daunting because I knew this step was important because it’s what people will see and know us for. We chose an opossum for our mascot, and I created the drawing of Scoop that’s represented us ever since. For the most part, everyone loves Scoop!

DANI: TAKING THE PUBLISHING PLUNGE

After several months of research, meeting and brainstorming, we realized that generating sustainable revenue required that we actually have a product. We couldn’t publish a few fluff pieces here and there, either. While our capacity was limited, we needed to offer something to our community valuable enough to generate a wide and dedicated following.

We gained attention with our first story — posted in August 2022 — about controversial plans to open a charter school in Athens County. We really started to build a loyal audience, however, through in-depth, consistent reporting on controversies at Hocking College. Three of our top five stories in 2022 were about Hocking. People were not getting news about Hocking from other outlets, and certainly not with the depth we were able to provide.

By the time we launched our membership program in November, we had already begun cultivating the loyal audience we needed to stay afloat.

KERI: GROWING SUPPORT

It was astounding to see the community step up and support local news from the start. We have been so blessed by the enthusiasm, kind words and financial support from the Athens community and beyond — Ohio University alumni, former county residents, and local news supporters from across the country.

We work to create community through our membership program. We wanted it to be affordable and ensure that our members know that their donations — no matter the size — enable local, accessible news for all.

We launched the membership program in November with our first NewsMatch campaign. People who make a recurring donation, monthly or annually, get a monthly Member Bulletin newsletter, featuring an Inside Scoop, a behind-the-scenes narrative about the past month’s stories. Within two months, 125 readers had joined with a recurring donation.

In late 2022, we started on several months of hard work and interviews that led to our acceptance into the highly competitive Indiegraf News Startup Fund, which provides direct grant funding, a robust marketing budget to grow our audience, newsletter and website development services, social media assistance and more.

FREE THE LOCAL PRESS



Support from the News Startup Fund, along with our growing membership and the launch of our advertising and sponsorship program early in 2023 was pivotal in allowing us to begin more regular publication.

CORINNE: NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET

Building a successful business takes time — up to five years, according to business experts. That means we still have several years before we can achieve our first goal: a financially sustainable business. And to work toward that, we need:

1. Full-time staff with adequate pay and benefits. Of five people on payroll in 2023, only two are full-time. To report news effectively (and daily!), we need everyone working full time. And staff must have health benefits, which we do not currently provide.
2. Dedicated development and sales staff. Grants and small donations got us this far. To be financially sustainable, we need a stronger advertising and sponsorship program and major gifts. That requires hiring additional staff whose sole responsibility is fundraising and sales.

All of this will cost upwards of \$450,000 per year.

Grants comprise about half of the revenue for most nonprofit news outlets, but southeast Ohio has much less wealth to support major philanthropy than other parts of the state. Building a sustainable local news outlet here will truly take a village — of both individuals and organizations.

The single most important thing most readers can do to support our work is make a monthly or annual gift at a level that is meaningful to them.

KERI: WHY THIS MATTERS

I became a journalist because I knew my community in rural Appalachian Ohio was not represented in national media — and really, not even in local media.

Our local newspaper didn't report hard, investigative news. It didn't talk about my neighbors and our fight for county water; nor did it report on several people dying in police custody in the county jail, or the astounding lack of

resources for poor families and children when it came to food and transportation.

Its capacity was limited and we were hurt by it. We still are. The whole region is. But local news matters, because you matter.

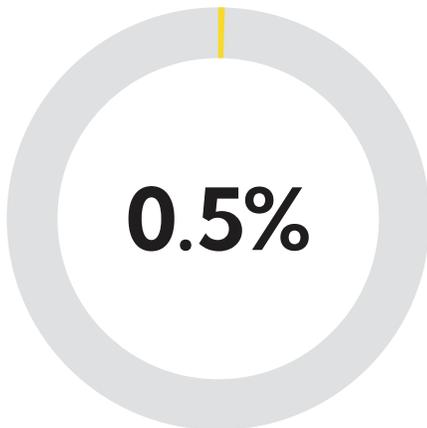
We envision a future that captures our stories — big and small — for the record. Where everyone has access to news, regardless of their ability to pay for it. Where you know the people reporting your news because we're part of the same community and care about its future. It's a future with sustainable journalism jobs, so aspiring reporters don't have to leave home, heritage, culture, family and community to survive. It's one where we can stay and fight for a better Appalachia.

Building that future is hard, but it's fundamental to our democracy, our culture and our community.

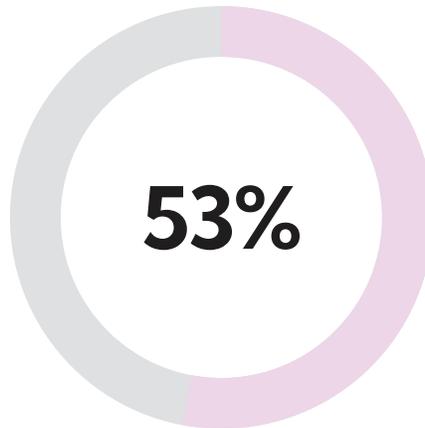
2022 FINANCIALS

Gross Revenue: \$65,728

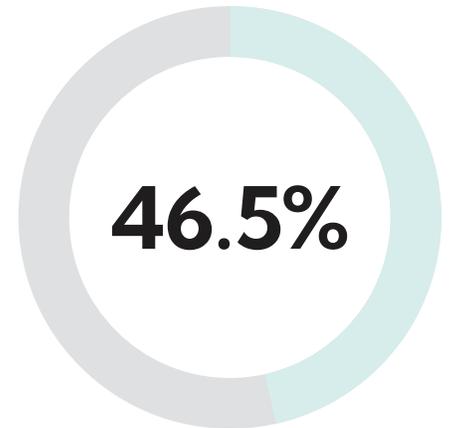
Net revenue: \$26,535



Sales



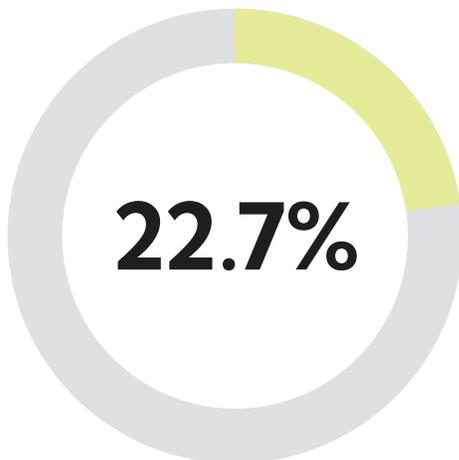
Grants



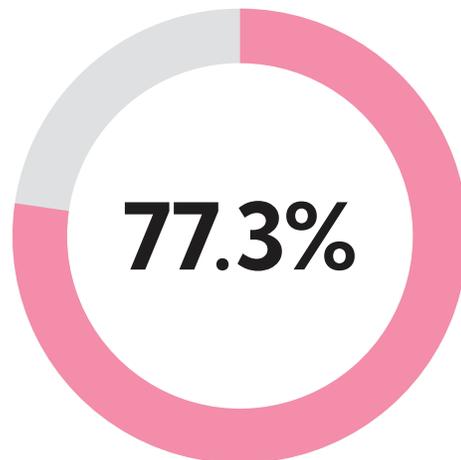
Donations from individuals

Donation revenue

Annualized value of recurring donations: \$15,129

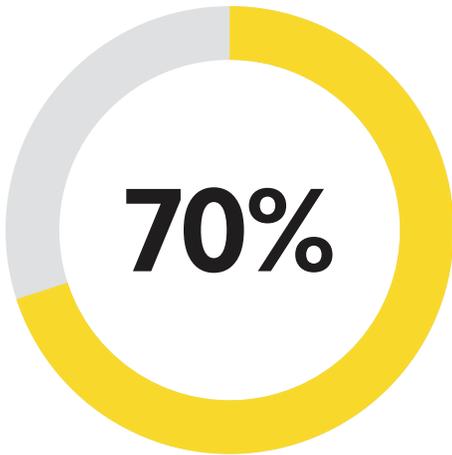


Recurring

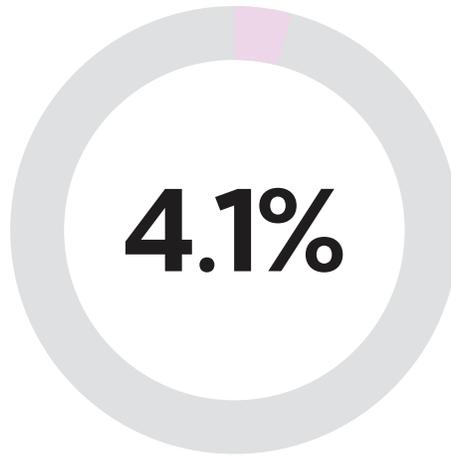


One-time

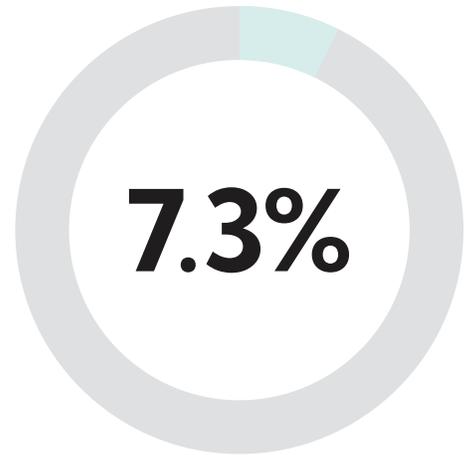
Expenditures: \$39,193



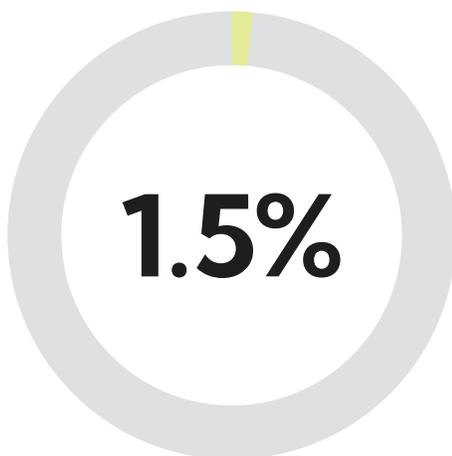
Payroll



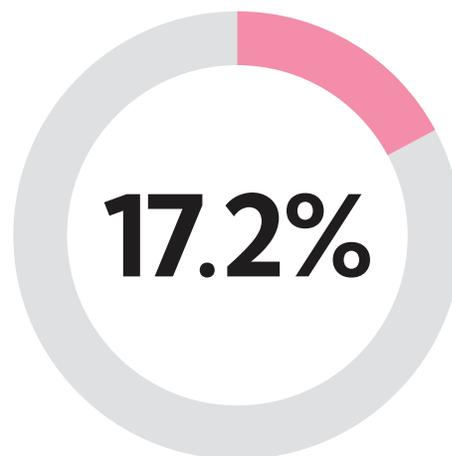
Advertising and marketing



Contract and professional fees



Rent



Office expenses

2022 DONORS

Bold text indicates our inaugural donors, who gave as part of our FreeFunder campaign.

ORGANIZATIONS

(\$5,000 or more)

Athens County Foundation
John Glazer Impact Fund

ORGANIZATIONS

(Less than \$5,000)

Casa Nueva
Nelsonville Community
Foundation
West End Ciderhouse

MEMBERS

(as of Dec. 31, 2022)

Bret Adams
Elizabeth Amoriya
Jennifer Armstrong
Carol Ault
Jen Bartlett
Josh Bartlett
Marlene Bartlett
Joshua Bear
Luke Bentley
Gillian and David Berchowitz
Kathy Berry
Nicholas Bochenek
Martha Boyce
Sue and Alan Boyd
John Brennan
Kristi Buffington
Becky Bunting
Heather Cantino
Dana Carlson
Michael and Jo Carpenter
Linda Clark
Susan Cole
Tanya Conrath
Nancy Cooper
Sarah Cornwell
Crissa Cummings
Kirsten and Geoff Dabelko
Deborah Daniels
Doug Debrick
Robert Delach
Berry Dilley
Mitchell Farley
Jack and Leslie Flemming
Eli Flournoy
Katherine Forney
Norman and Maryann Garber
Andrea Gibson
Ryan Gillion
Peggy Gish
Tacy Greenwood
Elizabeth Guarino
Jim Hart
Brent and Sarah Hartman
Lisa Heinz
Matt Hendrickson
Heather Hively

Terry and Debbie Hogan

Ms. Kristine Hoke
Theo J. Hutchinson
Janice Huwe
Chris Innis
Badger Johnson
Heather Johnson
James Johnson
Mollie Jones
Katherine Kelley
Nicole Kellogg
Katherine Kieninger
Katherine King
Laura Kington
Shannon Kiser
Zion Klinger
Regan Neviska
Faith Knutsen
Madison Koenig
Ilya Kogan
Hannah Kopp
Damon Krane
Shelley Lieberman
Ted Linscott
Brian & Lindsey Long
Jessica Loomis
Christina Lords
Benjamin Marakowitz-Svigals
Ariel Martian
Tim Martin
Michael McBride
Jan McGarry
Davey McNelly
Wendy McVicker
Lauren Miller
Adriane Mohlenkamp
Ann Money Penny
Scott Moody
Theresa Moran
Sue Morrow
William Myers
Abigail Neff
Gregory Newton
Chris O'Loughlin
Sherri Oliver
Rebecca Onion
Shawn Ostermann
Delia Palmisano
Christopher Payne
Tim Peacock
Alexandria Polanosky
McCray Powell
Ryan Powers
Shannon Pratt-Harrington
Drea Reany
Mary Reed
Thomas Reid
Robert and Kay Rhyan
Sarah Riddlebarger
Kelee Riesbeck
Susan Righi

Lynda Rose
Jim Salzman
Kelly Sauber
Jim Scarff
Lucy Schwallie
Jennifer Seifert
Sheila Shafer
Wenda Sheard and Richard Thieret
Susan Shroad
Sasha Sigetic
Terry Smith
Cynthia Snide
Rob Somers
Salem Spinelli
Solveig Spjeldnes
Patricia Stokes
Cita Strauss
Terra Talamh
Victoria Taylor
Nick Tepe
Rachel Terman
Susan Urano
Brian Vadakin
Emily Vigue
Melissa Loomis
Matt Weeks
Myke and Regan Welch
Susan Westenbarger
Marsha Willan
Jasper Wirtshafter
John Wryst
Rees Wyant
Raymond Zielinski

ONE-TIME DONORS

Lauren A
Gerald A
Michael Abbott
Andrew Abernathy
Kelly Coon Adami
Jeffrey Aicher
Ashley Alderman
Liane Allen
Michael Anderson
Katherine Anderson
Stephanie Ares
Marcie Baker
Charlie and Natalie Barman
Gary Bartlett
Damien Bawn
The Beans
Kathryn Becker
Daniel Bell-Moran
Christopher Belz
Paul Benedict
Laura and Tom Bennett
Elizabeth Bjork
Lora Blankenship
Laura Blazyk
David Blum

Diane Blyth
Hank Bond
Barbara Bootz
Amy Borgstrom
Michael Bothwell
Rachel Boughton
Olivia Bower
Martha Boyce
Robert Boyce
Anna Wright and Brad Jokisch
Jamie Brewer
Daniel Briere
Thomas Brincefield
Hilarie Burhans
Jenny Byers
Susan Calhoun
John Campbell
Phil Campbell
Heather Cantino
Joe Capozzi
Janet Carleton
Michael Catheline
Chris Chambers
Josh Chandler
Chris Chmiel
Carissa Christensen
Caleb Chung
Debra Cleaver
Linda Cochran and Richard Duff
Carla Colbert
Janice Collins
Luke Colpo
Garth Coombs
Anne Cooper
Gary Cordingley
Mary Costello
Cassie Costilow
Lori Crook
Samuel E. Crowl
Kelly Czack
Anaya D
Patrick Daugherty
Kevin Davies
Jurnee Davis
David Davisson
Sydney Dawes
Shelley Delaney
Signe Denbow
Christine DePriest
Berry Dilley
Meg Dillon
Edward Dinel
Kathleen Dobie
Phillip Dodson
Cathy Duke
Rachel Dumaine
J E
Ashley Eastman
Pamela Ecker
Vicky Eggleston
Dan Eickholt

Terry and Lyntha Eiler
Kate Emery
Maureen Empfield
RaeAnn Ensworth
Kathleen Evans
Sheridan Evans
Eric Falquero
Robert and Kathi Filar
Lauren Fisher
Beverly Flanigan
Beverly Olson Flanigan
David Forster
Meg Friesen
Michael Fulton
Karl Garrison
Gleb Garshin
Lynn Gedeon
Deborah Giovenco
Allen Glover
Robin Diane Goldstein
Mary Gonsowski
Donna Goodman
Sean Grady
Debra Graves
Karen Green
Jon Greenberg
Erik Gunn
Susan Haas
Mark Hackworth
Cassandra Hall
Peter Hanink
Holly Hardman
Avys Harmon
Katie Hatcher
Sharon Hatfield
Jason Heinrich
David Herold
David Herold
James Hill
Jenaye Hill
Alan Hirsch
Jan and Tom Hodson
June Holley
Amy Hollis
Trish Holmes
James Hopkins
Jordan Horrobin
Christine Hughes
Rich James
Daphne Jansen
Ariane Jenkins
Ariane Jenkins
Judy Jenkinson
Rushabh Jhaveri
Keri Johnson
Riona Johnston
Beverly Jones
Nanette Kalis
Alexandra Kamody
Daniel Karney
Terry Kelleher

Deborah Kerwood
Fred Kight
Peggy Kilty
Amy Kimmel
Dani Kington
J Anthony Kington
Peggy Kington
Kristi Kinnard
Suzanne Knauerhase
Irina Kogel
Alex Konrad
Diana Koppang
Zak Kramer
Angela Krile
David Kurz
Samuel L
Micki Lamb
Anna Levak
Charles Levine
Shanda Lewis
Myke Linscott
Jon Little
Bridget Lombard
Shona Marshall
Dezere Martin
Eric Marty
Sheila Marucut
Michael Massa
Debra McBride
Ruth McCall-King and Thomas
King
Alex McCann
Loraine McCosker
Kayla McDermott
Kathleen McDonald-Johnson
Angela and David Mclaughlin
Michael McMullin
Cameron McNamee
Lauren Meschler
Ashley Metcalf
MJ Milillo
Michael Miller
Ann Miner
Wendy Minor Viny
Kailee Missler
Heather Mitchell
Andrew Molloy
Patrick Monaghan
Mary Ann Moore
Kelly Morman
Brenda Morris
Whet Moser
Christopher Motta
Teresa Mozur
Elliott Murley
Kellen Murphy
Mary Murray
Reagan Neviska
Lesley Nickus
Gordon Niessen
Robert Nirkind

Mary Nossek
Megan Nunemaker
Thomas O'Neill
Alissa Paoella
Ann Paulins
David Pedley
Missy Pence
Diana Perry
Mason Pew
Julie Pierce
Kerry Pigman
Adrienne Pike
Mark Plenke
Sandy Plunkett
Laura Pollak
Daniel Pomerantz
Josephine Pommering
Beth Pratt
Alexis Preskar
Bonnie Proudfoot
Chris Pyle
Thomas Quinn
CD Raspin
Patricia Raube
Susan Redden
Carrie Reece
June Reiter
Robert Rencarge
Lin Rice
Tom Rickard
Michael Rigsby
Cecilia Rinaldi
Brenda Rios
Mary Rizzardi
David Roche
Dawna Roederer
WDF Ross
Michelle Rucker
Joe Rudemiller
Cat Russell
Mark Satchwell
Mr. Rod Sauer
Elizabeth Saysr
Leslie Schaller
Lisa Schaller
Christopher Schelling
Ginger Schmalenberg
Andy Schotz
Deanna Schwartz
Carrie Shapiro
Amanda Sharrai
George Sherwood
Sebastien Siclait
Rachel Siegel
Seth Sisler
Arian Smedley
Patton Smith
Marley Soluna
Robert Somers
Janice Sorensen
Jack Sowers

Jan Stanley
Sam Stecklow
Sallie Stephens
Joanne Stoecker
Tom Strodtbeck
Meg Stone
Barbara Stout
Amy Summerfelt
Jackie Swan
Carolyn Sweeney
Jen Sycks-Wright
Sarah Szilagy
Kat Tenbarga
Amanda Teuscher
Lawrence Times
Cynthia Timm
Megan Tompkins-Stange
Joseph and Jan Tucker
Kathy Turner
Ruth Umoh
Carol Urling
Dylan Vanover
Katherine Varga
Stefanie Vigoren
Camryn Wagner
Anne Walker
Stephen Washington
Bruce Weber
Beth Weingroff
Cecilia M. Weldon
Kristin Westbrook
LB Weyand
Julie White
Roy Whitmore
Earl Williams
Florence Williams
Christine Wilson
Michelle Wilson
Tamara Winters
Don Wirtshafter
Brian Witte
Ben Wolford
George Wood and Marcia
Burchby
Catherine Woolley
Peggilee Wupperman
Stan Yerrick
Avery Young
Charles Younts III
Zach Zimmerman

OUR MISSION

The Athens County Independent empowers community engagement through accessible public service journalism.

OUR VISION

We will be Athens County's trusted, go-to news source, empowering all residents to drive change toward a more fair, connected and participatory community.



athensindependent.com | info@athensindependent.com

