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## **BYPASS TO THE BOONIES**

*Published: Sunday, October 16, 2005*

### **NEWS 01A**

By Mary Beth Lane

#### **THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH**

A new loop of Rt. 33 around Lancaster will bring the Hocking Hills 20 minutes closer to Columbus. A real-estate and housing boom, commercial development, jobs and even more tourists seem certain to follow.

LANCASTER, Ohio -- She spotted the real-estate ad online, describing a a brick two-story nestled on 10 rugged acres in southern Fairfield County.

The commute to Franklin County concerned Charlotte Winner, though \_ until she unfolded the Fairfield County engineer's map.

Circles she had drawn radiated from each exit along the new Rt. 33 bypass. She used them to measure the distance from the closest exit to her dream home

And it was close enough.

"Wow, OK!" she thought.

"I got really excited then," she said later.

Distance to the bypass was key, she said. "Big time, big time."

Last month, she and her husband, Douglas, moved their family from Columbus to Fairfield County, perhaps leading the pack in what many expect will be big changes after the bypass opens this month.

The entire length of the four-lane highway is scheduled to open with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 26.

The 12-mile highway addition skirts the traffic lights and congestion that long have delayed motorists along Rt. 33 -- known locally as Memorial Drive -- through Lancaster.

Construction of the \$141 million project began in 2001. The existing Rt. 33 four-lane stretches from the southeast side of Columbus to Nelsonville in Athen County, where construction of another four-lane bypass is scheduled to start in 2007 with an opening in 2010.

The Winners started using part of the new 65-mph highway, at the Rt. 22 interchange southwest of Lancaster, after the stretch opened this summer.

The bypass loops southwest of the Fairfield County seat, cutting at least 20 minutes of travel time from Columbus to the Hocking Hills region, planners say

Many expect the faster commute will spur more housing and commercial and industrial development, and attract more full-time and weekend residents, tourists and local jobs to the region.

**Tim** Daubenmire, a real-estate broker in Sugar Grove, just south of Lancaster, sees it this way: "The bypass brings the boonies within reach."

\* \* \*

Real-estate ads already highlight bypass proximity.

An ad for a house southeast of Lancaster in Berne Township boasts, "easy access to new bypass."

"Privacy in the woods . . . close to bypass," promises another.

The amenities of a Berne Township "mini farm" include "easy access to Lancaster bypass for Columbus commuters."

Yet another pitch: "Tranquility!! . . . 7 min to bypass!" Real-estate agent Cheryl Sheridan mentioned the bypass in advertising a million-dollar home near the Rt. 188 interchange, about 4 miles west of Lancaster.

"A lot of people commute to Columbus from the Fairfield County area, and the area where that home is located has good access," Sheridan said. Also, she said, "If a home is toward Sugar Grove or Logan, we like to let them know that it is near the bypass."

The Winners moved from Columbus' West Side, which was a short drive to her Downtown job as a benefits counselor for the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System, and to his job as a UPS driver in Hilliard.

The couple often had fantasized about moving with her 19-year-old son and their 11-year-old daughter to enough acreage to stable horses.

When a deal fell through on property in Morrow County north of Franklin County and about 6 miles east of I-71, the Winners resumed their search -- this time closer to Lancaster, where Mr. Winner grew up and has relatives.

Their property in Hocking Township southwest of Lancaster includes a brick house built in 1862, a horse barn and other outbuildings built into rugged, steep hills adjacent to the Christmas Rock nature preserve.

The bypass is about 6 miles and a 10-minute drive away.

Mrs. Winner already uses the opened section of new road to travel the roughly 40-minute, 36-mile commute to Downtown Columbus.

Her husband's drive to Hilliard is longer, she said, but already they've shaved about 15 minutes from both trips.

"That bypass means a lot to us," Mr. Winner said last month, as the family moved into its new home. "We lucked out."

The Winners were pleased to find an existing homestead.

"It was less invasive," Mrs. Winner said. "We didn't find a cornfield and build a new \$300,000 home. We do know that's coming."

\* \* \*

Planners agree that development is spreading south along Rt. 33, deeper into Fairfield and Hocking counties.

Daubenmire and his wife opened a real-estate office in March in Sugar Grove, where they live. He credited the bypass for their choice, calling it "a big catalyst for doing it here and not waiting."

Sugar Grove and surrounding Berne Township are poised for development because of proximity to the new highway. So are Hocking and Amanda townships southwest of Lancaster, said R. Brooks Davis, executive director of the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission.

But despite the bypass access, Davis and other local planners don't expect large subdivisions to pop up immediately because the rural area lacks water and sewer service.

In Hocking County to the south, planners are watching and waiting, said Audie Wykle, of the county Regional Planning Office.

"Everyone sees us potentially as the next big growth area."

But outside its county seat of Logan, officials say, Hocking County lacks zoning and needs a plan that balances change with preservation.

County planners are preparing to circulate a proposed growth blueprint among townships there.

"It's important to offer retail and industry, but you don't want it to get in the way of what everybody comes to Hocking County for," Wykle said. "Tourism is a very viable industry for us down here."

The real-estate market there is lively.

Tammy Besece owns a title company in Columbus and last year opened another office in Logan, making hers the county seat's first.

"People complained that attorneys took three weeks to get their searches and closings done," said Besece, who owns a second home along Lake Logan, just west of Logan.

She expects business to increase.

"You can see that everyone down there must work in Columbus. Rt. 33 is packed. I think more people, once the bypass is done, will buy second homes or relocate there," she said.

"If it takes you 40 minutes to get (to Columbus) from Delaware, why wouldn't you go south and drive 40 minutes in?"

\* \* \*

The change is showing in Hocking County land prices.

**Tim Jubach**, whose company builds luxury log homes there as second homes for baby boomers who want amenities and seclusion, said Hocking County land prices have tripled since 2002.

"Three years ago, you could buy property for \$1,000 to \$1,500 an acre in large parcels," he said. "Now it's \$3,000 to \$5,000 an acre for large, undeveloped parcels."

**Jubach** owns 100 acres just east of the south end of the bypass near Sugar Grove, where he intends to build pricey homes on four 25-acre lots.

Fairfield County land around bypass interchanges also has increased in value, county records show.

A 30-acre spread in Greenfield Township on the northern end of the bypass sold this year for \$36,690 per acre, up from about \$4,000 an acre. A commercial building is under construction there.

A 17-acre piece along Delmont Road in Hocking Township that overlooks the bypass sold this year for about \$26,466 an acre, up from \$10,500 an acre. J.D. Equipment Inc., a John Deere tractor dealership, has opened there.

New business and light industry are a welcome sight because any planner knows that without a mix that includes new industry, the schools can't afford an influx of students from new homes.

Perched at the Rt. 188 interchange with Rt. 33, Lancaster's Rock Mill Industrial Park is open for business. The tractor dealership is visible from the bypass.

Mike Pettit, Lancaster's economic-development director, said he hopes to attract small- or mid-sized industrial firms. "We don't want to be just a bedroom community. We want people to work here."

Neither he nor other city officials worry that commerce along Memorial Drive, the Rt. 33 business route through Lancaster, will shrivel and die when traffic is diverted.

On the contrary, Hobby Lobby and T.J. Maxx recently opened shop near River Valley Mall. Walgreens opened along Rt. 33 at W. Fair Avenue, about four blocks north of 6th Avenue, where a new tuxedo shop and ice-cream parlor have opened.

The State Highway Patrol is moving its post from the corner of Ety Road and Rt. 33 north of the bypass to the Rt. 188 interchange on the bypass. But local speculation has it that its old location is ripe for restaurants, although how many is unknown.

The same sort of makeover is expected for the former Whittier Drive and Rt. 33 location of an Ohio Department of Transportation garage, which was move from its home across the street from the River Valley Mall to a spot at the W. Fair Avenue bypass interchange.

"Lancaster is a large enough community that I think with the through traffic on the bypass, the locals can get back on Memorial Drive and do their shopping," said Mayor David Smith. "The retailers are going to be there."

The city's west side, near where Rt. 33 branches off into the northern stretch of the bypass, also is growing fast because of its location.

Hundreds of houses and condominiums are going up on former farm fields along W. Fair Avenue.

"They realize that W. Fair Avenue is not that far away from the bypass or Memorial Drive," Smith said. "We are already seeing the impact of the bypass even though it's not open yet."

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**Illustration:** Photo, MAP appeared in newspaper, not in the archive.

**Photo caption:** (1) CRAIG HOLMAN | DISPATCH

This look northward, from south of Lancaster, shows where the new bypass curls away from Rt. 33 and heads west on its way around that city.

(2) Map

(3) **TIM** REVELL | DISPATCH

This southward view, shot near the Delmont Road overpass in Fairfield County, shows an already-opened section of the Rt. 33 bypass.

(4) WILL SHILLING | FOR THE DISPATCH

Doug Winner and his wife, Charlotte, hang the family "W" on their new home. It's close enough to the bypass to make their commute to the Columbus area manageable.

(5) Map

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