



John R. Pekar, Superintendent

**Board Members**

Sharon Scruggs, President  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Thursday, July 21, 2022**

**Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities Superintendent John Pekar Announces Retirement**

**Lancaster, Ohio** - Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities Superintendent John Pekar announced his intent to retire from his role effective December 31, 2022.

Pekar has devoted his life and career to excellence by providing valuable service to his profession and the community, while also demonstrating a commitment to the betterment of Fairfield County.

For more than 50 years, he has served in a variety of roles in the field, becoming Superintendent of Fairfield DD in 1999. During his career in Fairfield County, John has proven to be a visionary in his time as Superintendent, beginning or adopting many initiatives before most county boards across the state.

Pekar is credited with successfully leading several important initiatives during his tenure:

- Transitioning Fairfield Industries, a vocational habilitation and day services program to newer surroundings and increased employment and engagement activities when the Board acquired grants to open the Opportunity Center on US 33.
- As a founding member of the Workforce Development Committee, Pekar assisted in developing a county program to train and empower employees, inclusive of all people in our community. The Opportunity Center was then turned over to the County to become the Workforce Development Center to begin this next chapter.
- Pekar orchestrated the procurement of a Lancaster business, Art and Clay on Main, with the intention of developing it into a social enterprise of Fairfield DD. More than a decade later, the business now also houses Square 7 Coffee House, employs a diverse workforce, operates internship programs, and serves as one of the cornerstones of a revitalized downtown.
- Creating an ever-evolving space within the River Valley Mall, DiscoverU, that focuses on employment and employability skills.
- ProjectSEARCH, now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year at Fairfield Medical Center, was instituted locally by Pekar, along with leaders from Eastland-Fairfield Technical School, Fairfield Medical Center, and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.

**Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities**

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DiscoverU  
River Valley Mall  
1635 River Valley Circle  
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- Fairfield DD, under Pekar’s instruction further developed its relationship with Lancaster Public Transit (LPT), allowing LPT to draw down significant federal funding to expand their services. This expansion took LPT from only operating in Lancaster, to operating across Fairfield County.

Through his leadership, the agency developed its first strategic plan in 2001, initiating a radical reorganization that accommodated the newly mandated service and support coordinating function in Fairfield County. Over his tenure, Fairfield DD now serves over 300% more individuals with disabilities and their families than when he joined the agency. This growth is attributed to developing partnerships and support in the community leading two successful levy campaigns. The Celebration of Possibilities, developed by Pekar, is a yearly event held to recognize the many community partners and highlight new partnerships with those who model the Board’s mission by enriching the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities through opportunities and connections throughout Fairfield County.

Perhaps John’s most deeply-held belief is that people with disabilities have the right to be contributing and participating members of our community, not simply living in it. This belief led him to change the way Fairfield DD thought about segregated activities and practices, which included moving to utilize public transportation vehicles, a progression to people-first language, and the absolute dismissal of anything that could potentially marginalize people with disabilities. Fairfield DD Board President, Sharon Scruggs, spoke of the upcoming retirement saying "The Board congratulates John upon his retirement. John has led Fairfield DD with a steadfast passion for persons with disabilities, coupled with unmatched knowledge, leadership, and institutional history that has served the residents of Fairfield County leaving the organization well positioned for the future."

In addition to these contributions and accomplishments, John has also been involved locally in several community organizations. After 50 years of service, John is retiring at the end of 2022. He has dedicated his life to serving his community and those who live in it.

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