

The Columbus Dispatch

Columbus growing as distribution hub

Chamber tells of region's role in transportation, worker training

By Mark Williams THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Whether by train, plane or ship, getting stuff from or through Columbus to the rest of the world is becoming a bigger deal to the area economy and the jobs driving it.

Nearly 1,300 Columbus business and community leaders at yesterday's annual meeting of the Columbus Chamber learned more about the growing importance of Columbus as a distribution hub.

"Our world is about better, faster, cheaper," said John Ness, president of ODW Logistics and co-chairman of the Columbus Region Logistics Council, after the meeting. Logistics includes not only the movement of goods, but also the increasingly sophisticated work that goes into managing transportation systems.

Columbus got a boost six months ago when the revamped Heartland Corridor train line was completed. The \$191 million project allows freight trains to travel between the port of Norfolk, Va., and Columbus in 25 hours with shipping containers stacked two high.

Next up is the expected completion in 2014 of improvements at the Panama Canal that will drive even more traffic through Columbus, Ness said.

The canal is being widened to accommodate bigger ships and to move ships through the canal more quickly. That means more ships heading to East Coast ports, sending even more trainloads of goods to Columbus to be distributed throughout the Midwest, Ness said.

Growth in transportation and related employment in the Columbus area was triple the average for the region in 2010. Pay averages about 12 percent higher than other sectors with the same level of education and training.

"You can't offshore a logistics job," Ness said.

The logistics community locally is being nurtured with an eye toward the future.

Columbus State Community College's Center for Workforce Development received a federal grant worth \$4.6 million to train about 1,000 students over three years for logistics jobs. An additional 300 current logistics workers will receive training to boost their skills. The school estimates that 17,400 new and replacement workers will be needed in the industry by 2013 in Ohio.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, the meeting's keynote speaker, emphasized the importance of trade as a way to help businesses in Columbus and Ohio expand and add jobs.

Exports support 10 million U.S. jobs and more than 350,000 in Ohio, Locke said.

"The simple fact is that the more American and Ohio companies export, the more they produce," he said. "The more they produce, the more workers they need. And that means jobs — good-paying jobs here at home."

He praised local business leaders for forming Columbus 2020, an economic-development organization, to build on the region's strengths to add jobs and help companies expand.

"All the potential is here for Columbus to be an international hub of innovation and entrepreneurship," he said.

The key group behind Columbus 2020, the Columbus Partnership, said it has raised \$26 million of the \$30 million it needs to help achieve its goals of adding 180,000 jobs in central Ohio by that year.

Its goals also include a 40 percent increase in per-capita income and being ranked in the top 10 communities in the nation for economic development. It also is working to produce a new image for the city.

Also yesterday, the chamber presented its top award and introduced its new leader.

The Columbus Award, the chamber's highest honor, went to Mike Curtin, associate publisher emeritus of The Dispatch.

"Our honoree has touched us throughout his more than 30 years at The Columbus Dispatch and has led causes that have improved our community," said Jack Partridge, chairman of the chamber board and president of Columbia Gas of Ohio.

Among the efforts, Partridge said, were influencing the location of the casino in Columbus and passing a levy for the Columbus Metropolitan Library.

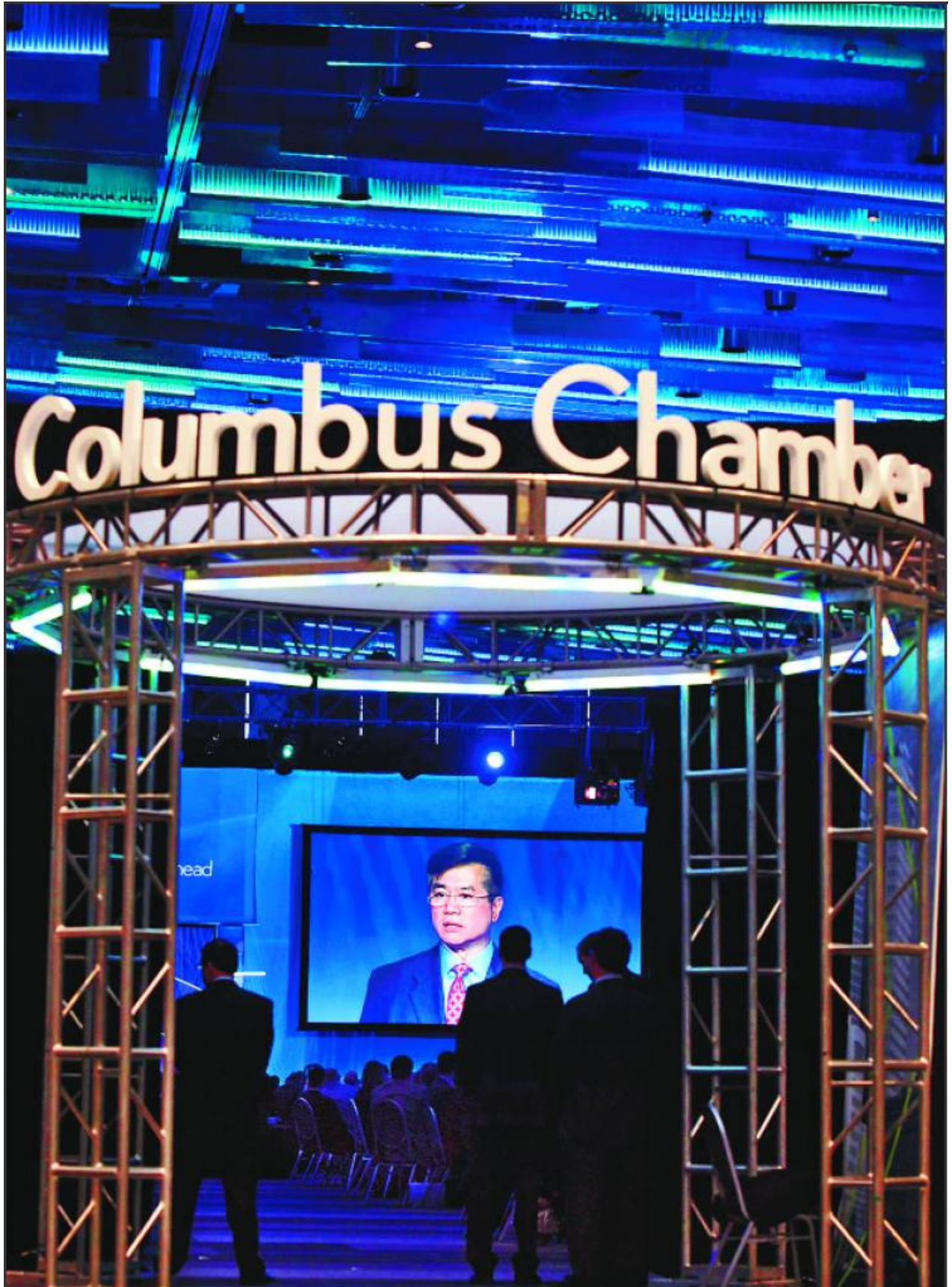
Last year, Ohio voters approved moving the casino site from the Arena District to the West Side. In November, voters approved a levy for the library that will generate \$30 million a year.

The chamber's new president and CEO, Michael Dalby, also was introduced.

Dalby comes from the economic-development group One Southern Indiana in the Louisville, Ky., area. He is expected to start in early April.

He replaces Ty Marsh, who left the chamber in July and is working on the Columbus 2012 Bicentennial plan.

mawilliams@dispatch.com



TOM DODGE DISPATCH

Gary Locke, U.S. secretary of commerce, speaks to the Columbus Chamber's annual meeting at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. Locke emphasized the importance of trade as a way to help businesses grow.



TOM DODGE DISPATCH

Mike Curtin, left, associate publisher emeritus of The Dispatch, accepts an award from chamber board chairman Jack Partridge. With Curtin were family members Sharon Curtin, Christy and Bryce Monson and Bob Curtin.



Michael Dalby, new chamber president and CEO