

Invest:

Pittsburgh | **2022-2023**

An in-depth review of the key issues facing Pittsburgh's economy, featuring the exclusive insights of prominent business and regional leaders.





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Fayette County:

From idyllic riverfront landscapes to stunning mountain backdrops, Fayette County has a long and storied history that dates as far back as the Revolutionary War's Marquis De LaFayette, and with an economy that has proven itself as resilient as its namesake, the county is well-positioned for the economy of the future.

Fayette Forward:

**Bold vision
points to
greater
growth
ahead**



nestled between the banks of the Monongahela River and the Allegheny Mountains, Fayette County has a long history, tracing its earliest roots to 22-year-old George Washington and Fort Necessity. That resilience has been central to the country and the county's growth throughout the years, seeing the establishment of a strong community that has overcome the collapse of the steel industry, has emerged from the pandemic and is ready to face the future with a bold vision for continued growth and development.

■ Landscape

Fayette County sits approximately 50 minutes south of Pittsburgh proper and 25 miles north of Morgantown, offering easy access to the region's urban core and amenities, while still maintaining a more rural and peaceful quality of life that includes clean air, relatively affordable housing and natural attractions that range from the Monongahela River that marks the county's western border to the Great Allegheny Passage trail. Per the U.S. Census, the county's population is 126,931, with 2,485 employers operating within the county. Median household income rose 4.5% over the previous year, while home values remained relatively stable, at about \$160,200, a 3.5% increase from 2021, according to RocketHomes' December 2022 housing report.

The county's key industries include healthcare, manufacturing and tourism, while its education sector, anchored by Penn State Fayette, the Fayette County and Connellsville Career and Technical Schools, Douglas Education Center and Laurel Business Institute, provides a variety of degrees, certifications and workforce development programs, with additional access to the Greater Pittsburgh region's nationally recognized higher-education ecosystem. "Fayette County offers many opportunities for jobs, education, culture, and recreation. With the multitude of cities, towns, rural communities, and relative proximity to travel routes, Fayette County offers just about any lifestyle and convenience you are looking for," Jeff Imbrescia, CEO & President of the Douglas Education Center, told *Invest:*

Connecting the county to the rest of Pennsylvania, and establishing Fayette County as part of a critical

logistics ecosystem, are four interstate highways, with I-70, 76, 68, and 79 crossing through its boundaries, while two Class I railroads, CSX and Norfolk Southern, provide additional ease of access for goods and products. The Arnold Palmer Regional Airport and Morgantown Municipal located 35 miles and 25 just outside the county boundaries, respectively, as well as Joseph A. Hardy Connellsville Airport located just south of Connellsville provides additional general aviation air access. Finally, the Monongahela River acts as another avenue for goods to get to where they need to go, with barge traffic snaking its way through riverbends to reach the Port of Pittsburgh. The county's robust infrastructure and connectivity to the wider region overcome the potential challenge posed by its more rural character, as Fred Ensle, training program director for Heartland Fabrication told *Invest*: "Geographically, we are at a competitive disadvantage with the markets we serve. This has been overcome due to many factors, including the intermodal transportation system and the history we have with the community which includes a core skilled workforce." He added: "For us at Heartland, the road system, rail system and the Monongahela River are our lifeblood. We also have a local and county infrastructure that supports us as much as possible. As far as living here, there is a rich diversity in both geography and cultures which gives a person a lot of choices to enhance their work-life balance."

■ Economic development

Despite national expectations for an economic slowdown, Fayette County is well-positioned to tackle the future. Armed with multiple economic development agencies, strong local businesses, and other community stakeholders that overcame both the collapse of the steel industry and the 2020 pandemic, the county is part of the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, which aims to coordinate economic development and support commercial growth throughout the 10-county Allegheny region. Uniontown, Connellsville, Point Marion, Lemont Furnace, Masontown, Brownsville and Dunbar are just a few of the cities, towns and boroughs that make up Fayette County's 43 municipalities, and each drives the county's economic development engine, while the Fay-Penn Economic Development Council provides a series of business support programs through PA One Stop and PA Engage. In addition, the Council's partnership with Grow with Google supports employees looking to upskill in the data analytics, IT, project management and UX design fields. In his statement, Ensle commended the county on its business support strategy, saying, "The county has gone above and beyond to make sure that business is supported. There are many organizations that have been formed in the county for just that purpose, including getting business and our education system to work together for the betterment of the community at large. And these organizations have been succeeding in this mission."

Tourism Treasure:

Fayette County's outdoor landscapes are a natural draw to visitors in the region and across the country.



46
trail miles



300+
park acres



50
of historic
sites and
buildings

Businesses can also expect financial support from the Council, with five different loan programs available to rural enterprises, capital expansion projects, tourism and attracting growth to the county's designated Enterprise Zone. Locally, the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, as well as those of Connellsville and Uniontown, with the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission help coordinate specific projects and networking events. Businesses expanding their operations in the region can leverage pad-ready sites at Fayette County Business Park, Dunbar Township Business Park, Franklin Industrial, and others throughout the county as it looks to leverage its status as a manufacturing hub to drive the region forward. Bill Shaffer, Jr., of Uniontown-based Shaffer Fabricating, added in his own statement to *Invest:* that Fayette's investments were paying off. "Fayette County has made much progress in moving the county forward. There has been major investment in tourism and recreation for visitors and residents, giving all a better quality of life. There has also been major investments in expanding and opening business and industrial parks...Businesses need welcoming communities to consider opening up shop. Fayette County offers this. There is more work to be done but we are moving in the right direction.

■ Manufacturing

Fayette County is a manufacturing hub for a variety of products. Thanks in part to the region's legacy as a mining and steel manufacturing center, ease of goods transportation and local expertise, dozens of light and advanced manufacturing businesses call Fayette County home. The industrial parks across the county provide expansion and investment opportunities for both already-established manufacturers and potential new entrants to the market.

Driving the local industry forward are companies that include Stahls' Hotronix in Masontown, Dunbar's Edge Ovens and JLE Industries, Heartland Fabrications in Brownsville and the veteran-owned Fayette Pipe in Lemont Furnace. These companies and others provide Fayette County with its manufacturing backbone, employing 3,425 in the sector and accounting for 9.3% of the county's total employment, while adjacent industries further bolster county employment, with mining and quarrying providing another 848 jobs, transportation and warehousing 1,967, and construction an additional 1,384 jobs, according to the county. Speaking on both its history and the economic activity local manufacturing businesses provide, Shaffer told *Invest:* "Our organization has helped provide economic



The healthcare sector is Fayette County's largest employer, accounting for over 20% of workers.

growth to Fayette County by providing jobs with a wage that can sustain a family and also provide solid Monday through Friday work schedules allowing our employees time to relax and enjoy all Fayette County has to offer."

■ Healthcare

Acting as both an economic driver for the region while simultaneously providing world-class care, Fayette County's healthcare sector is led by West Virginia University Medicine's Uniontown Hospital, Penn Highlands Healthcare's Connellsville Highlands Hospital and the UPMC Uniontown Hillman Cancer Center. The industry provides just under a quarter of the county's overall employment base with 7,394 working across six healthcare organizations, with three – Excela Health, Allegheny Health Network and Montgomery Medical – channeling millions of dollars of investment for new facilities in the thick of construction in Connellsville, South Union and Georges Township, respectively.

With healthcare organizations funneling millions of dollars' worth of investment into new facilities and expanded services within the county, local



stakeholders have partnered to establish workforce development pipelines, with Penn State Fayette offering a B.S.N, and the Fayette County Career and Technical Institute (FCCTI) offering its own practical nursing program. Fayette CTC has invested \$2.25 million in a new training facility to prepare for the anticipated workforce demand, while Laurel Business Institute offers a variety of programs in its School of Healthcare, from Cardiovascular Technology to Medical Office Administration, while the Premier Employer Partnership provides avenues for businesses to support student growth through financial aid and hands-on experience.

■ Tourism

While its past may have been rooted in manufacturing, Fayette County's attractions – both natural and cultural, are among its secret weapons – with great potential for growth. The Allegheny Mountains offer a number of trails for hiking and mountain biking, and nestled not far from Ohiopyle State Park lies the incomparable Frank Lloyd Wrights' Fallingwater House, a UNESCO World Heritage site, a national historic landmark, and

the “best all-around work of American Architecture,” in a poll conducted by members of the American Institute of Architects. Fallingwater alone has attracted over 6 million visitors since its opening to the public in 1964 and saw an additional 100,000 visitors over the last year.

Beyond Fallingwater's halls lie the Allegheny Mountains, whose whitewater valleys provide rafting along the Youghiogheny River Gorge at Ohiopyle State Park while the Great Allegheny Passage's 150 miles of trails connects Fayette County to Cumberland, Maryland in the south before heading north into Pittsburgh proper, with the trail's popularity bringing visitors from across all 50 states and internationally, while Ohiopyle State Park regularly draws around a million visitors annually.

The county is well equipped to handle the capacity and the tourism industry's recovery, and in 2020 alone saw \$457.9 million in tourism spending, despite the year's challenges. With 1,420 hotel lodging rooms and 19 campground sites, hundreds of vacation rentals and the luxury Nemacolin resort in Farmington, visitors have a number of different options, each providing a unique but no less memorable experience when visiting



From relaxation to high adventure, Fayette County is an ideal place to work, live, and play.

Fayette County. "Growing up in Fayette County, we drive by many of the world-class attractions the county has to offer without giving it much thought, but these attractions are visited year-round by people from all over this great country and beyond," EDGE Ovens Owner and COO Michael French told *Invest*: "Many of our visiting customers and suppliers often bring their spouses with them when visiting so they can take a day to visit some of the attractions, such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, Kentuck Knob or Fort Necessity, go rafting at Ohiopyle, Boating on the Youghiogheny River Lake, fishing in our local streams or river, skiing at one of our resorts, or just driving through the Laurel Highlands viewing the fall foliage."

■ Quality of life

The same natural attractions and local amenities that drive the region's tourism sector also help provide a quality of life for residents that can't be found anywhere else. That quality of life extends to both individual residents and the businesses that call Fayette County home. In his statement, Shaffer explained, "Fayette County has so much to offer that often is overlooked. Yes, we have beautiful mountains and rivers that often get national attention and rightfully so but, there is so much history and culture here in the county. There is adventure and entertainment everywhere in the county from the State Theatre Center for the Arts to the endless miles of hiking trails through Forbes State forest, in all seasons there is something enjoyable to do in the county for individuals and families. From a business perspective, Fayette County offers a good mix of blue-collar work ethic

but also offers companies access to candidates from great colleges with many large and smaller universities in or within a very short drive of the county.

■ Looking ahead

With industries poised for future growth, local government and community stakeholders prepared to capitalize on economic tailwinds and a county whose history is still being written by the residents and businesses that constitute it, Fayette County has much to offer. From its robust infrastructure that makes it a hub by river, rail, road and air, economic development initiatives and numerous incentive and financing programs, to the natural beauty that drew those first few hardy settlers hundreds of years ago and made it the resilient economy and community it is today. Looking forward to the future, the elected and legislative leadership in Fayette County have joined together with the area's economic and community organizations to become a driving force in Southwestern PA. To be sure, Fayette County is ready to move forward and face whatever challenges may emerge, ready to capitalize on the opportunities ahead making Fayette County the best place to work where you can live and play. ■



Capital Analytics would like to thank Fayette County for its contributions in compiling this chapter. To learn more, visit their website at: www.fayettecountypa.org