

Positive outlook expected for Franklin Co. economy in 2012

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CHAMBERSBURG, Pa. —

It's a new year and so far the [economic outlook](#) for **Franklin County** is positive.

"We think 2012 appears to be a very, very strong year in Franklin County, and a prosperous year for Franklin County," said L. Michael Ross, president of the Franklin County Area Development Corp.

[Businesses](#) are expanding and that means jobs for the area, including the **Norfolk Southern** project in Greencastle, Pa., and Volvo Construction's expansion in Shippensburg, Pa., Ross said.

Ross said Norfolk Southern's nearly \$95 million intermodal facility off Hykes Road in Antrim Township, Pa., is "well under construction." The facility is slated to open by the end of this year.

When the facility is operational, approximately 650 [trucks](#) will drop off and pick up containerized freight each day. Containers weighting up to 34 tons will be transferred between tractor-trailers and trains.

In Shippensburg, several businesses are in the expansion mode.

Volvo announced last year it will invest \$100 million in its Franklin County, Pa., campus and start producing wheel loaders, excavators and off-highway haulers there.

The company plans to establish its North American sales headquarters and rentals program in Shippensburg.

Ross said the project is expected to be in full construction mode this spring.

Also in Shippensburg, but across the line in Cumberland County, Pa., Shreiber Foods has spent millions to expand its yogurt facility, which means more jobs for the company, Ross said.

US Express Enterprises in Shippensburg, which is the fifth largest trucking company in the country according to Ross, invested several million dollars to upgrade its Fayette Street location.

Despite proposed federal defense cuts, Ross said Letterkenny Army Depot appears to be stable. Much of its work has been in defense, and in support of the country's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We think for 2012 and 2013, Letterkenny and its 3,800 employees will remain stable," Ross said.

In addition, nearly 50 businesses in the Cumberland Valley [Business](#) Park that is part of Letterkenny employ approximately 1,000 people, Ross said.

Franklin County's unemployment rate is about 6.6 percent, while the state's rate is 8.1 percent, and the national average is 8.6 percent.

“We are running well below the state and national rates, and as this year unfolds, we are anticipating it’s going to be a very strong year,” he said.

Ross said he’s weary of the doom-and-gloom mentality in the community when so many companies are thriving.

In the last 15 months, Manitowoc — formerly Grove Worldwide — has hired 900 people at its Shady Grove, Pa., plant off Pa. 16, Ross said.

“JLG (with its main plant in McConnellsburg, Pa.) had the same kind of situation. They hired significantly in 2011 and are projecting a strong 2012,” Ross said.

At Monday’s Chambersburg Borough County meeting, Ventura Food’s land-development plan was approved to expand its Chambersburg location by 112,000 square feet.

Ross said the expansion would create 50 new jobs.

Knouse Foods in Chambersburg is doing a more than 5,000 foot expansion of its campus.

Jennings Chevrolet is completing its new dealership off Walker Road in Chambersburg and Keystone Ford off Walker Road has announced plans to expand its dealership, he said.

Three new restaurants — **Olive Garden**, **Texas Roadhouse**, LongHorn Steakhouse — have submitted land-development plans which, if approved, will mean more jobs for the area, Ross said. Each is planned to be built in the Walker Road area.

“With that will come job growth. We feel very good about our location, our position and things are going to happen,” Ross said.