



LOOK BACK: LTV Steel's bankruptcies **PAGE 19**

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FOCUS: Reimagining universities **PAGE 10**



REAL ESTATE

A first look at the Lumen

THE CURTAIN IS GOING UP ON PLAYHOUSE SQUARE'S 34-STORY APARTMENT COMPLEX | **PAGE 6**

The historic Keith Building on the other side of Euclid Avenue is reflected in the glassy exterior of the Lumen tower.

MICHELLE JARBOE/CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

E-COMMERCE

Digitally native companies face challenges

Behemoth Amazon looms large over online businesses' marketing efforts

BY JAY MILLER

Across Miles Road from the 880,000-square-foot, 2,000-employee Amazon fulfillment center in North Randall, the eight workers of OrangeOnions toil, designing and creating products — mostly dolls under the Playtime by Eimmie and Plushible brands — that will find

their way to Amazon centers across the country and be shipped out from Northeast Ohio as a result of sales made on the company's own website.

It's a juxtaposition that conveniently wraps up the rapidly growing world of online retailing, which is bubbling up in Northeast Ohio and everywhere else for smaller companies. Amazon looms over a marketing channel fill-

ing up with online-only businesses that are growing rapidly because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"March was our biggest month ever," said Christine Vasquez, sales and marketing manager of OrangeOnions.

Digitally native companies aren't new. They've been around for a decade, creating and selling products under the radar, not in shopping centers or brick-and-mortar storefronts, but primarily online. Because of Amazon's size, getting on that platform is a key way to attract customers.

It's unclear, though, how many digitally native businesses — businesses that sell only online — are operating in Northeast Ohio and how fast they are growing.

See **E-COMMERCE** on Page 16

SPORTS BUSINESS

Kaulig Racing zooms into NASCAR title contention

BY KEVIN KLEPS

In its first two years competing in NASCAR's Xfinity Series, Kaulig Racing had 10 top-10 finishes in 66 races.

The Welcome, N.C.-based arm of the Hudson-based Kaulig Companies didn't crack the top five once.

"Five years ago when we started, we were running between 20th and 25th every week. If we could get in the top 20, we felt like we were running good," said Matt Kaulig, the executive chairman and owner of a group of businesses that includes LeafFilter.

In 2020, Kaulig Racing's two full-time drivers — Ross Chastain and Justin Haley — are title contenders on a stock-car circuit that is one step down from NASCAR's Cup Series.



Kaulig

Haley, a 21-year-old phenom, has won three Xfinity races and entered the Oct. 10 Drive for the Cure 250 at Charlotte Motor Speedway at No. 4 in the 2020 points standings.

Chastain has a Kaulig Racing-best 13 top-five and 24 top-10 finishes in 27 starts. The 27-year-old entered the Charlotte race at eighth in the points standings. Should Chastain hold the position, he would join Haley in the three-race Round of 8.

See **KAULIG** on Page 17



BOUNCING BACK

After years of cutbacks and change, the University of Akron is looking to the future. **PAGE 12**

COURSE CHANGES



Hiram College's recent restructuring resulted in the sunsetting of some programs and the introduction of a new institutional organization.

As costs rise and enrollments shrink, colleges and universities remake their academic structures

BY RACHEL ABBEY MCCAFFERTY | As costs rise and enrollments shrink, higher education is not an industry that can afford to stand still.

Across the region, colleges and universities have taken on a host of redesigns and restructurings in recent years with the goal of finding efficiencies and boosting enrollment.

Take the University of Akron and Hiram College, for example. Akron cut academic programs and shrunk the number of colleges it had, while also laying off faculty and experiencing leadership churn. Hiram underwent a broad process of change that resulted in the sunsetting of some programs and the introduction of a new institutional structure.

But change has been taking place in more incremental ways across the region, too. At Youngstown State University, the institution trimmed the number of its colleges and academic departments in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Walsh University recently restruc-



The University of Mount Union in 2017 began work on a three-college plan, with each college having its own dean.



Walsh University recently restructured its academic calendar to six eight-week terms in light of COVID-19 concerns.

ured its academic year, scheduling its programs into six eight-week terms.

Ultimately, it's about making sure the institutions of today are best designed for the future.

For example, the changes to Walsh's calendar allow students to take the same number of courses in the fall and spring as before, but to focus on a smaller number of courses at one time, said Michael Dunphy, interim vice president of academic affairs. It also gives students more control over their schedules, allowing them to skip a term when they need to, or schedule classes to finish degrees faster, especially at a time when more students are arriving at college with credits in hand from dual enrollment programs in high school.

"We're really trying to address the needs of students in this very complex market right now, where we can still give them a very high-quality education but do it in a way where they have more choices," Dunphy said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPHS

Academic redesign is a constant at institutions of higher education, said C. Todd Jones, president and general counsel of the Columbus-based Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio. Colleges and universities have to adapt as fields of academic study evolve and as students' areas of interest change.

And the changes are sure to continue.

Locally, Cleveland State University is in the midst of this process, having formed task forces in areas such as academics, administration, and growth and innovation that are focused on creating recommendations for the future. And some reforms could even cross campuses. Take a recent announcement from the University of Akron and Cleveland State, which shared that the two institutions were looking into merging their law schools.

It's important institutions know themselves before adding or revamping programs, Jones said. Programs should build on an institution's unique strengths.

Declining enrollment can also be a driving force in these redesigns, he said. In Ohio, the pool of high school graduates is shrinking. That means, in an ever-more competitive environment, colleges and universities have to create programs that are attractive to new students.

Enrollment was the big driver behind Hiram's academic redesign process, said Liz Okuma, senior vice president and dean of students. The college wanted to make sure it had attractive, relevant programs to draw in students.

Hiram ultimately cut some programs and added others, as well as switched some programs, like economics and philosophy, from majors to minors.

This was such a dramatic change that Hiram's leadership knew the process had to be a collaborative one, Okuma said. That meant that not only faculty, but students and alumni needed to buy in.

That collaborative, transparent approach has carried forward to today, said vice president for academic affairs and dean Judy Muyskens. For example, she thinks it helped the college be nimble and adapt when the

Lessons learned: What makes a good academic redesign?

University leaders should think about involving staff, faculty and the community in conversations from the start

BY RACHEL ABBEY MCCAFFERTY

Communication, data and transparency: If a university wants to successfully change its programs or processes, those factors are a good foundation.

Those are some of the lessons learned through the many academic redesigns and restructurings that have taken place on Northeast Ohio's campuses in recent years.

When possible, university leaders should be thinking about the future and involving staff, faculty and the community in conversations about change early on, said Brien Smith, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Youngstown State University.

The pandemic forced many institutions to change almost overnight, as going remote meant the loss of funds from dorms, parking and meal plans. There also were state budget cuts.

At Youngstown State, the university found administrative efficiencies by reducing the number of its colleges and academic departments. It also laid off some staff.

"We could have, and other universities could have, been looking at efficiencies a lot earlier, so there was a little more time to think about this," Smith said.

Faculty need to be involved in academic redesigns from the start, said Ashland University provost Amiel Jarstfer. Ashland has monitored its academic programs for years, watching the marketplace for changing student needs, but

the COVID-19 pandemic made a more concentrated effort necessary. The university started to look at programs to enhance or phase out in April.

Sunsetting programs can be painful, he said, and acknowledging that is important. Communication needs to be clear and intentional.

Ultimately, no matter how good an idea is, it won't succeed without



"THERE'S A LOT OF MOVING PARTS THAT NEED TO BE CONSIDERED!"

—Michael Dunphy, interim vice president of academic affairs at Walsh University

the support of the people who have to implement it.

"And so you have to spend the time with the individuals that are going to be impacted," said University of Akron executive vice president and provost John Wienczek.

Often, that happens after the fact, he said, as institutions try to implement change and then step back when it's not working as planned. So leaders have to stay strong and stick with the "fundamental idea" of the change, while being flexible on how to achieve it, he said. And letting people be part of the change helps them let go of the old.

When going through drastic changes like these, it's important to support faculty with the tools they need, said Michael Dunphy, interim vice president of academic af-

fairs at Walsh University. For example, as Walsh moves toward more online and hybrid education, the university has offered additional training on the tools to its faculty members.

And the process needs to be collaborative, especially with something complex such as changing the academic calendar, Dunphy said. When Walsh moved to eight-week sessions, it wasn't just an academic consideration. Student affairs had to be involved to weigh in on how it would affect dorm life, for example.

"There's a lot of moving parts that need to be considered," he said.

One benefit of such a broad change is that it offers a chance for staff and faculty who may not often work together to do just that. And that can help change the culture of an institution for the future, Dunphy said.

That was the case at Hiram College. After its comprehensive redesign, the college has made ongoing review of data a greater part of its decision-making processes.

For example, taking a close look at the data is now part of the process when the college is looking to hire new faculty, said vice president for academic affairs and dean Judy Muyskens. That includes enrollment in individual academic areas, but also the number of credit hours a faculty member in those areas generates.

"We look at the numbers, and we make our decisions based on the numbers," Muyskens said.

greater efficiencies and more collaboration among programs, said executive vice president and provost John Wienczek. And that could lead to new program offerings. He's seeing these kinds of changes across higher education, including at the University of Idaho, where he worked before coming to Akron. In Idaho, the university didn't eliminate colleges, but it did move toward more shared services and interdisciplinary degrees, he said.

"In general, I think the driving force behind all of this is the demographics," Wienczek said.

There are fewer high school graduates, he said, and more adults are looking to add credentials to their resumes. So the number and kind of students that universities serve are changing.

Changes to the University of Mount Union's structure went in the opposite direction of Akron but served a similar purpose. The university's prior structure had about 145 faculty members reporting to one dean, a model the institution had outgrown.

"That's a model that existed for places that were small, traditional liberal arts colleges with, say, maybe 50 to 80 faculty," said Jeff Breese, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

Breese arrived at Mount Union in 2017 and in his first year got to work on a plan. The university convened a working group for the redesign, which quickly determined that faculty needed leaders who could focus on a small group of programs. A three-college plan, where each college had its own dean, was born. It was important that the new deans be able to work independently but also collaboratively.

As colleges and universities revamp their academic offerings, they're creating programs that are "more integrated and more applied," said Lynn Pasquerella, president of the Association of American Colleges & Universities in Washington, D.C. The time for siloed programs has passed, she said, and students need the chance to practice the skills they learn in the classroom.

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pandemic struck. The more streamlined structure the college had adopted, which gathered academic programs into larger schools and

gave them administrative support, also eased that transition and made communication easier.

The University of Akron has seen a

variety of changes in recent years, including a restructuring of its colleges and schools. The university went from 11 to five, which could lead to

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