

RESTORING FINANCIAL EXCELLENCE FOR GEAUGA COUNTY

By Joe DeBoth, Candidate for Geauga County Auditor

Hi, my name is Joe DeBoth, and I am one of two candidates running for Geauga County Auditor. I've been a resident of beautiful Auburn Township for 21 years.

ABOUT ME

I grew up on a quarter-acre lot, which gave me a deep appreciation for land, space, and rural life. I love that our area offers not only ease of access to suburban areas, including amazing parks, but also room for farming, gardening, and animals, yet still maintains a neighborly spirit, where people help one another without regard to race, religion, or political affiliation.

In my childhood neighborhood, the sounds of church bells and trains carrying coal were part of daily life. Here in Auburn, the sounds are different as my neighbors know my dogs, chickens, and goats, sometimes in a charming way, and sometimes in a slightly annoying way. Auburn may be rural, but it has its own unique soundtrack, and even peaceful places have their quirks.

As a young adult, the sounds of life and work were reassuring. They signaled that tomorrow held promise. People generally understood right from wrong. My grandfather, a blue-collared union man, distrusted every politician. My mother recently reminded me of the warning he gave me: never run for political office. Because my grandparents' backyard adjoined ours, I spent much of my formative years with them, and I suspect he knew a time would eventually come when I would follow a passion to serve my community through a role in public service.

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

I believe the community wants someone new who will bring the highest standards of business to our local government. I have more than two decades of experience managing financial departments and fifteen years of modernizing business systems and processes. In addition, I've spent the past three years serving the public sector industry. With that background, and with a fiscal perspective that sees the bigger economic picture, I can help us position the county well today while preparing responsibly for the future.

Friends, we are living in unstable times. Decades of warnings about unsustainable debt have been ignored, and the cracks in our economy and fiat currency are widening. The result is predictable: the poor are becoming poorer, and the middle class is being pushed downward. As large companies lay off thousands of workers, and as artificial intelligence merges with robotics, many jobs are unlikely to return.

In Geauga County, we've been relatively insulated from economic downturns, but we shouldn't take that for granted. Past stability does not guarantee future security. As the average resident

faces rising utility costs, higher food prices, and an ever-growing tax burden, the levers that once supported the well-being of ordinary citizens are shrinking. We know that the government can be quite creative in how it spends our money. As a steward of those resources, I will scrutinize expenditures carefully, and eliminate needless waste.

SO WHY RUN?

Over the past six months, residents have approached me and asked whether I would consider stepping in to help the local government in Geauga. When I was first approached, I politely said thank you, but no thanks as Geauga seemed fine. My instinct was: why fix something that isn't broken? However, after hearing repeatedly from more residents, I decided to investigate for myself.

Being a financial person, I naturally started by examining the financials. I pulled the numbers that were publicly available and immediately noticed a few inconsistencies that didn't add up. At first, I assumed the differences were simply because government financials are prepared under GASB standards, which differ from business financials under GAAP. However, as I dug deeper, I began to see patterns that aligned with the concerns people had been sharing with me.

For starters, I believe our community deserves better transparency so that we can hold our elected officials accountable. The obvious improvement opportunities are as follows:

- The county **should publish** its 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report as it has done with past reports to the Auditor's website.
- The county **discontinued** its Popular Annual Financial Report in 2022. This is a report that is easy to create and easy to understand.
- Expenditures seem to be keeping pace with growing revenues. Over the past six years, areas such as Legislative and Expenditure have **significantly grown**, and the County's IT department, Automatic Data Processing (ADP), has experienced **triple-digit growth**.
- The county recently received certification of its 2023 Annual Financial Report from the State of Ohio. The **process took 772 days, which is not only unacceptable** but also inconsistent with past performance and the performance of nearby counties.

(See Analysis of Geauga County Financial Transparency)

WHAT I WILL DO

As someone who has managed the financial operations of companies larger than Geauga County, and led modernization efforts in Finance, Supply Chain, Human Resources, and Payroll for billion-dollar organizations, I will work to bring leading practices and modern standards to Geauga County.

These transformations take time, sometimes years, before the county can realize efficiencies that may ultimately return tax dollars to its citizens. If elected, my priorities during my first six months are as follows:

- **Work with the State of Ohio to obtain certification in a timely manner.**
- **Correct any internal controls** identified by the State of Ohio, if any remain open.
- **Collaborate with staff and commissioners** to once again publish the Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR)
- **Analyze the Cost Structure of Geauga's IT Department (Automatic Data Processing)** considering that department has grown 126% between 2018 and 2023.
- **Develop a long-term technology-driven strategy to restore and sustain financial excellence** providing near time transparency for its residents

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Considering that I only recently decided to run this year, there simply isn't enough time to meet everyone in person. However, there are ways to connect and I would welcome an opportunity to speak with you. With May just a few short months away, here is a recommendation for what you can do, and we can do together:

First, ask questions. This race is about your voice, and you deserve accountability from every elected official. If I win, I expect you to hold me accountable as well. My grandfather saw how the system can change people, and I want to make sure I stay focused on improving the system rather than letting the system change me.

Second, if you can gather 12 or more people, I will arrange to meet with you. I want to hear and address your concerns. Additionally, I am committed to transparency, thus will share graphs and tables to help you better understand how I plan to remain accountable, not only for myself but also with your help in holding me accountable.

Third, please consider sharing my campaign with your friends and family. If you're on social media, I would also appreciate it if you post and tag me on your platforms. Word of mouth and social media are two powerful tools that can support a grassroots campaign like mine.

In summary, I'm running because I listened to you and I hear you. I am validating your concerns. With my genuine commitment to serving this community by being a good steward of your resources, and guided by the integrity instilled in me by family and faith, I ask for your support as I pursue public service.

I believe I am uniquely positioned to make a meaningful impact for the betterment of our community. My name is Joe DeBoth. I am running for Geauga County Auditor. Please consider voting for me.

If elected, I will restore financial excellence for the residents of Geauga County.