



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 24, 2011

Ohio Valley Residents Band Together to Overcome Economic Woes

Mahoning Valley, Ohio, was once a thriving area, but that was before the steel factories were shut down. "The factories no longer spew black smoke into the sky, there are no employees patrolling behind their high metal fences, the lights inside are permanently off and there's an eerie silence all around," [Fox News](#) reports. "The buildings stand as large, empty symbols of the industry that used to keep the Mahoning Valley running."



Local historian Jim McFarland explains, "This was the center of the steel industry, mostly because of the location, halfway between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, halfway between New York and Chicago — that led to a lot of manufacturing."

That manufacturing resulted in a vast number of jobs in steel plants along the Mahoning and Cayuhoga Rivers, where generations of families were employed.

Ohio resident Timothy Walton, whose father and grandfather were once employed at the plants, observed, "Everyone worked in the steel mill; it was a good paying job."

But in 1977, that prosperity came to a screeching halt, when Youngstown Sheet and Tube laid off thousands of workers, resulting in the closing of smaller businesses which relied heavily on the steel produced by the plants. A number of residents migrated away from the Mahoning Valley in search of employment. "Black Monday," as that horrific closing day was dubbed, was so significant it was the inspiration for Bruce Springsteen's song entitled "Youngstown."

The valley area has never fully gained back that lost ground. Fox News reports:

Years later, the Mahoning Valley is still struggling to recover. Unemployment hovers between 8 and 10 percent.... Nearly half the people who live here are below the poverty level, and the region has a significant hunger problem.

"It's terrible. Everyplace you go, all positions are filled. You can't find a job to save your life," said resident John Huria, a wanderer who frequently asks around for spare change.

Attorney Ned Gold of Mahoning Valley notes, "We have such a tremendous need in the valley for people that have lost their jobs with the industrial base that has faded. They're hungry."

There are a number of towns throughout the United States that have suffered similar fates as a result of plant closings. Allentown, Pennsylvania, for example, has struggled since its steel plant, Allentown Metal Works, was closed on January 15, after years of economic woes. Perhaps the most well-known example is Flint, Michigan, which suffered a crippling blow when General Motors — an employer of a large portion of the townspeople — closed down several of its auto plants.



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Fortunately, Ned Gold and the rest of the Mahoning Valley have not given up just yet. Gold and fellow attorneys John Falgiani and Marty Cohen have found a solution to address some of the area's woes, and it's a creative one. The three men have formed a group called The Trumbull One Hundred, whose goal is "to bring together 100 Trumbull County citizens from all aspects of the community to work for the betterment of all Trumbull County," and to "embrace and facilitate opportunities by providing resources and leadership to projects that enhance the quality of life for [all] the citizens."

The Trumbull One Hundred has created a fundraiser to help feed the needy people of its town called Foodstock. Fox News writes, "Local bands were brought in at no cost to belt out rock n'roll, jazz and country music. There were even two Elvis impersonators who had women swooning."

According to Gold, the purpose of Foodstock was to make the "haves" recognize how essential they are to the "have nots."

Those in attendance made donations of either cash or food, and most went above and beyond the call, bearing armloads full of food for entrance to the event.

The food was then donated to Second Harvest Food Bank, which collected and redistributed it. Food bank spokesman Mike Iberis said of the fundraiser donations, "This will fill a lot of empty bellies. We have to make sure people get the food they need."

Second Harvest reports that it has encountered a 200 percent increase in need over the last 10 years.

Gold remarked, "This helps bridge the gap so that we get to those jobs that will bring people out of poverty and out of hunger, and it'll happen."

McFarland said of the town's residents, "You can't find a harder working workforce. These people were brought up with strong work ethics. This area will come back."

Meanwhile, there are indications that the Mahoning Valley may rebound, as there is a Chevrolet plant at full production and the shale oil industry is said to be "evolving." Likewise, Fox News observes,

There's also a small business and technology incubator in downtown Youngstown, not just to support business, but also to get the word out that there are many skilled people in the community eager to get to work.

Speaking on National Public Radio, Richard Longworth, author of the book *Caught in the Middle: America's Heartland in the Age of Globalism*, made similar [assertions](#):

[Youngstown] was a steel city. About 30 years ago, all the steel mills collapsed. There was a great sense of denial in Youngstown. People thought, yes, the steel mills will come back sooner or later.

Youngstown now has a new, young mayor, too young to remember the old steel mills, not hung up on denial, who is trying to build a smaller, but decent town there, working with local businesses, working with Youngstown State University. It's a community effort, as these rebuilding efforts have to be, not just companies, but everybody in town, all the stakeholders involved. They've got a couple of new IT companies in there. They've got an incubator. They're trying to fix up their downtown. They are long ways away from making it what they want it to be, but this is the plan now.

According to Longworth, what has taken place in eastern Ohio is part of a pattern that is sweeping across America, particularly in the South and Midwest: the destruction of local economies by the closing of major businesses and factories.



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Until the Mahoning Valley achieves the much-anticipated transformation, however, The Trumbull One Hundred intend to see to it that struggling families are at least guaranteed a meal. People such as Gold and his colleagues serve as a reminder of why Americans give thanks at this season.



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