



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Defiance Crescent-News
By Taryn Lawson
August 18, 2016

ARCHBOLD — Ney has become the first entity in Defiance County to post its spending online at OhioCheckbook.com.

Representatives from Ohio State Treasurer Josh Mandel's office held a conference Wednesday at the Northwest Ohio Educational Service Center, 205 Nolan Parkway, Archbold, to announce that Ney as well as Chesterfield Township have both added their spending to the site, which aims to boost government transparency.

Chesterfield Township is the second local government in Fulton County to post its information at OhioCheckbook.com.

"What we are trying to do is take public information data and put it into a visual, more accessible format," said Andrew Coutts, public affairs liaison and project management officer with the state treasurer's office. "It's not only for constituents, but also for local government leaders, to increase their efficiency."

Ney's online checkbook includes over 1,500 individual transactions representing more than \$523,000 of total spending over the last three years. Chesterfield Township's checkbook includes information on more than 2,000 transactions, representing \$970,000 of spending over the last four years.

OhioCheckbook.com was launched Dec. 2, 2014, marking the first time in Ohio's history that citizens could see all state government expenditures.

The treasurer's office reported that since its launch, the voluntary program has received "overwhelming support," garnering more than 600,000 searches to date.

Ohio was featured prominently in the U.S. Public Interest Research Group's March 2015 "Following the Money" report, after climbing from number 46 to number 1 in the rankings for spending transparency nationwide — a position it's held now for two consecutive years.

In an effort to expand the program to the local level, Mandel's office sent a letter last year to 18,062 local government and school officials, soliciting their participation and noting that "while posting the state's checkbook online was a great first step, we are working hard to equip OhioCheckbook.com with the ability to host and display local spending as well."

Through public information sessions such as Wednesday's, Mandel and staff hope to reach more entities, and ultimately add data from counties, cities, townships, villages, schools districts, libraries and more to the site.

Local entities pay nothing to participate, and Coutts added that the treasurer's office will assist staffs in implementing the program



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

if needed.

Currently, there are 402 entities posting information at OhioCheckbook.com, and 776 committed entities, which includes sites in various stages of progression.

“Obviously the original intention — the main intention — is to increase transparency, but I can’t tell you the number of secondary and tertiary benefits that a lot of local entities have reported after using this,” Coutts said.

One such benefit, Coutts said, is that the checkbook allows school and local leaders to compare their community’s spending to that of comparable communities.

“You can see who they’re using for certain vendors, and what kind of pricing they’re getting,” Coutts said. “You can kind of compare yourself, and hopefully that can increase efficiency in the way governments are spending tax dollars.”

Kelly Ilagan, public affairs liaison with the state treasurer’s office, said they heard from “a lot of receptive people” after the letters went out, as well as some who feared the new program could generate an influx of public records requests.

“What we’ve seen with the 402 local governments and school districts that are online is that, not only does it decrease public records requests by putting the information right at the tips of their fingers, but also, we’ve seen a decrease in the time it takes to respond to records requests,” Ilagan said.

OhioCheckbook.com displays more than \$534 billion in spending over the last eight years, and includes more than 147 million transactions. Features of the site include “Google-style” search capabilities, interactive charts and functionality to compare state spending year-over-year and across agencies.

Ney and Chesterfield Township’s sites are available to view at Ney.OhioCheckbook.com and ChesterfieldTownshipFulton.OhioCheckbook.com.

####