

State official looks to help small businesses

By LYNN THOMPSON Times Reporter | Posted: Friday, January 11, 2013 2:41 am

EDON — There are two kinds of warriors in the United States Army. We call them airborne rangers and chairborne rangers.

The airborne ranger is a gun-slinging, door-kicking, steely-eyed hombre intent on getting things done. He is lean and mean, loud and proud, crude and rude. He has to be. When he's on the front line, out numbered and up against the wall, he doesn't have time for questions.

His chairborne counterpart is a smooth-talking data geek who makes sense of numbers and acronyms. He is a scrounger, a negotiator with a social network outside normal channels.

There are a lot of door-kicking warrior-types in northwest Ohio. Small, family business people on their own, trying to get things done and make ends meet.

There aren't a lot of chairborne rangers, though. No one behind the scenes wheeling, dealing, navigating and negotiating through the odds and ends of conflicting, dual-agency-regulation interpretation. Not for micro-business, mom and pop shops where all five employees are related.

That is where Todd Colquitt comes in. He is a Business Advocate for Governor John Kasich's "Common Sense Initiative."

Thursday evening he met with a small group of local business types in the Florence Township Fire Hall in Edon.

The problem, he said, is that the state has accumulated some 15,000 rules and regulations governing how people do business.

"Some of them are necessary," he said. "A free market doesn't mean a free-for-all. There are some bad actors out there and they have be dealt with."

"A lot of them aren't, though," he said. "They come from people with good intentions — people who want to help and solve problems and keep bad things from happening, but they have no idea what kind of impact their decisions will have."

They make those decisions within their own agencies, present them to the legislature, turn them into public policy and often find themselves surprised by their own results, he said.

Colquitt's job is to hunt for those well-intentioned ideas; find them, define them, refine them or destroy them before the power of law dictates their enforcement.

"We reviewed and caught 4,400 of them last year," he said. "The good news is that that's actually way

down from the year before.”

He came to Edon looking for clues. “We’re looking for rules that don’t make sense,” he said. “Things that force small businesses to do things they wouldn’t otherwise be doing.”

He met with people like Lamar Trausch who owns an empty factory on the edge of town. It’s not empty yet, but it will be soon. Darford International shut down its plant there two months ago.

“People in government don’t think we can manage our own businesses,” Trausch said. “I can’t do a thing without getting someone else’s permission.”

Darford made dog treats. “The rules regulating that were than the ones on food for people,” he said.

“We had to comply with every one of them, and when we tried to partner with someone else we found out we couldn’t because they weren’t in compliance with a whole different set of rules. That stopped everything.”

“People in Columbus don’t know and don’t care that we’re here,” said Jeff Kaiser, of Kaiser Heating and Cooling. “They think everything west of I-75 and north of Ohio-30 is cows and corn, but there’s more to Ohio than Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati.”

Scott Longanbach, of Trailers, Tires and Wheels in Edon, said he couldn’t crack the state’s online tax forms. Neither could his accountant, Jody Porter. She was there. “You call and ask for help, and all they tell you is, ‘Check the website,’” she said. “We did. The information was never there.

“There is nothing here for the small family businesses,” she said. “They need equity to get bank loans, but when they build equity it gets taxed away by the government. They are getting crushed.”

Colquitt pointed out, several times, that he could only address issues pertaining to pending rules and regulations. He promised to take back what he heard though, all the way back to his boss, Lieutenant Governor Mary Taylor.

Gov. Kasich put her in charge of CSI on his first day in office. “He did that because it’s his top priority,” Colquitt said.

“Well, that’s something I guess,” said Kaiser. “This is the first time I’ve ever seen anybody from Columbus in Edon.”

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