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APRIL / MAY 2021

# Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

*Serving greater Northwest  
and North Central Indiana  
and surrounding counties*

## 2021 Best of Business

*Best of Northwest Indiana Business  
and Best of Michiana Business Awards*

A close-up portrait of Chip Miceli, a middle-aged man with thinning hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt with a subtle pattern. The background is a soft-focus office setting.

*Chip Miceli  
CEO of Pulse Technology*

# PURDUE

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Thank  
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BEST



AS VOTED BY THE READERS OF  
*Northwest Indiana Business Magazine*

---

THE **BEST** NORTHWEST INDIANA

**HOSPITAL GROUP**

**FITNESS/  
WELLNESS  
FACILITY**

RUNNER UP

**HEALTHCARE FACILITY**

Cardiology  
Urgent/Immediate Care  
Physical/Occupational Therapy  
Cancer Treatments  
Mental Health  
Orthopedics (Runner-Up)



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HEALTH**

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APR-MAY 2021

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Northwest Indiana Business Magazine  
905 Joliet St #237, Dyer IN 46311  
is owned and published by  
Linker Media Group, Inc.,  
Troy Linker, President and CEO.

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GOOD BIT

↑ **23,943**

The 2020 census showed Indiana gained population, with almost 10% or 2,102 people moving into the Region. ► PAGE 26

## IN THIS ISSUE

**W**elcome to the latest edition of Northwest Indiana Business Magazine. This issue features the results of our annual Best of Business Awards. Readers got the chance to vote for the best businesses in various categories in Northwest Indiana and Michiana. Some of this year's honorees share how they overcame the pandemic's assorted challenges, finding unique solutions. There is a sense of optimism as the crisis is winding down. Tourism experts have begun planning for visitors to return to the Region's many destinations. This good feeling spills over into construction as there appears to be no end in sight for new commercial projects. While traditional job sectors are performing well, new industries are showing promise, including clean energy. And with economic growth, comes the need for more housing, which also is addressed in this issue. Despite the crisis, daily business continued as seen in our profile of Circles in the Wind in Chesterton and leadership transition stories with community activist Don Babcock and former long-time RDA chief Bill Hanna. Work by nonprofits also seems to be ongoing, but thanks to foundation and community support, those in need continue to be served. Thanks for reading!

— Larry Avila, managing editor

## PICTURE PERFECT



Photo by David Stump

Schilling Development broke ground in July 2019 on the Continental gated community in St. John. The name comes from the fact that it sits atop the Saint Lawrence River Continental Divide. ► PAGE 36

## QUOTE TO REMEMBER

“Very few people exemplify the true meaning of the word ‘leadership’ more than Don Babcock.”

— Jim Schellinger, former Indiana Secretary of Commerce ► PAGE 39

## LEARN MORE

### WEBINARS



#### “IS YOUR WEBSITE DOING A GOOD JOB?”

Join Troy Linker from MultiTactical Marketing on Thursday, April 22 at 11:30 AM CDT as he shares a simple process to evaluate the effectiveness of your website. Scan the QR code or visit [nwib.link/4nk4](http://nwib.link/4nk4) to learn more and to register.



#### “IS YOUR WEBSITE OPTIMIZED FOR LOCAL SEO?”

Join Troy Linker from MultiTactical Marketing on Thursday, May 20 at 11:30 AM CDT as he shares the five most important elements for local SEO success. Scan the QR code or visit [nwib.link/05ps](http://nwib.link/05ps) to learn more and to register.

# AROUND THE REGION



Learn about people, companies making difference at work and in their communities

LARRY AVILA

## Accounting

**Kate Nafziger Leichty**, a certified public accounting, recently joined **Krugger Lawton CPAs'** Goshen office.

## Banking

Merrillville-based **Centier Bank** recently promoted **Janelle Spindler** to manager of its Cedar Lake branch. She has worked for the bank since 2018. The bank also announced: **Amy Bowman** was promoted to assistant vice president of the bank; **Chris Boersma** was promoted to assistant vice president, compliance officer; **Michel Alvarez**, an assistant branch manager in Elkhart, was named **volunteer of the year by The Goshen Chamber of Commerce**; **Justin Schreiber** was named mortgage loan officer at Centier's Carmel branch; **Anthony Jones** was named branch manager of the bank's Merrillville Strack & Van Til branch; **Sabrina Kiser**, branch manager of the bank's Southlake branch in Merrillville, was promoted to assistant vice president.

**Paul Marsh**, the president and CEO of South Bend-based **Teachers Credit Union**, begins his term March 2 on the **Credit Union National Association's** board of directors. He will be one of 24

directors on the board, which advocates for credit unions across the country that have about 120 million members.

## Business

**Lisa Daugherty** was named president and CEO for the Valparaiso-based **Center of Workforce Innovations** in late January. Daugherty, who stepped down as president and CEO of the **Lake Area United Way**, took over for **Linda Woloshansky**, who is retiring from the organization after 20 years. Daugherty began her new role with CWI on March 1.

The **Michigan City Chamber of Commerce** recently elected its new directors and officers to the board for 2021. New directors elected to three-year terms include: **Paz Garcia**, Sodexo; **Kim Giannetti**, General Insurance Services; **Mark Zemrowski**, Von Tobel Lumber and Hardware. Elected officers include: **Bill Gertner**, Horizon Bank, chair; **Jill Nygren**, Franciscan Health Michigan City, chair-elect; **Megan Applegate**, Applegate & Co., CPA, treasurer; **Brenda Temple**, Blue Chip Casino, Hotel & Spa, secretary; and **John Wall**, Walsh & Kelly Inc., 2020 chair, past chair for 2021.

## Construction services

**Michael Scott** recently was promoted to vice president of South

Bend-based **First Response Disaster Restoration Specialists**.

## Economic development

**Blair Milo**, former La Porte mayor and secretary of the **Indiana office of Career Connections and Talent**, is joining the **Indiana Economic Development Corp.** The state said Milo's office will be integrated into the IEDC.

**Don Babcock**, Region activist and retired **NIPSCO** executive, has received the state's highest civilian honor. Babcock, who had spent more than four decades with the Merrillville-based utility and retired as director of NIPSCO's economic development team, was presented with the **Sagamore of the Wabash** award. It was noted on Babcock's award that he is "distinguished by his humanity in living, his loyalty in friendship, his wisdom in council and his inspiration in leadership."

**Laura Walls** was named president and CEO of the **Marshall County Economic Development Corp.** She most recently served as executive director of **Carroll County Economic Development Corp.** in Delphi, near Lafayette.

The **Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center**



ACCOUNTING  
Kate Nafziger Leichty



BANKING  
Janelle Spindler



BANKING  
Amy Bowman



BANKING  
Chris Boersma





**BANKING**  
Justin Schreiber



**BANKING**  
Anthony Jones



**BANKING**  
Sabrina Kiser



**BANKING**  
Paul Marsh

recently named new business advisers: **Jeff Buchko**, **Judith Cardenas** and **Nakia Sprouse**.

**Linda Simmons**, director of marketing for **Visit Michigan City-La Porte**, is the new chair of the **Economic Development Corp. Michigan City** board of directors. The organization also announced **Seth Spencer**, founder and CEO of SERA Solutions in Michigan City, has joined the board as a new member.

### Education

**Steven Janowiak** is **Valparaiso University's** new vice president for student life. He has served in the position in an interim capacity since October.

**Yolanda Freemon** is the new director of financial aid for **Ivy Tech Community College Lake County**. Freemon, a South Holland, Illinois, resident, has more than 30 years of experience in higher education.

**Purdue University Northwest** faculty members **Jodi Allen**, assistant professor and family nursing practitioner program coordinator in the College of Nursing, and **Shontrai Irving**, clinical associate professor of business law in the College of Business, recently were selected **Scholarship of Engagement Fellows** for the 2020-2021 academic year.

### Energy

**Anne-Marie D'Angelo** recently was promoted to executive vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary, and is part of Merrillville-based **NiSource's** executive leadership team. **NiSource** is the parent company of the

**NIPSCO**, which serves about 820,000 natural gas and 470,000 electric customers across northern Indiana. **D'Angelo**, who joined the company in September 2019, was senior vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary. In her new role, she leads **NiSource's** legal functions and reports to **NiSource** president and CEO **Joe Hamrock**.

### Gaming

**Julie Vasic** recently was hired as vice president of human resources at the **Horseshoe Hammond Casino**.

### Government

**Bill Hanna**, who has served as president and CEO of the **Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority** for 10 years, announced Jan. 12 he was resigning from the RDA to take over as executive director of the **Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation**. His last day with the RDA was Feb. 12. **Sherri Ziller**, the organization's chief operating officer, was named interim president and CEO.

**Matthew Brown** has been appointed director of the **Indiana State Personnel Department**.

**Jessica Allen** is the new chair of the **Indiana Alcohol and Tobacco Commission**. The commission is responsible for regulating and licensing the state's alcohol and tobacco industries and directs the **Indiana State Excise Police**. **Allen** replaces **David Cook**, who is taking over as **Indiana Inspector General**.

**Breanca Merritt** was named chief health equity and ADA officer for the

### Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.

**Adrian Santos** of East Chicago was elected **North Township Trustee**. He replaces **Frank Mrvan** who now is serving as **Indiana's 1st District Congressional representative**.

**Molly Deuberry Craft**, a Chesterton native, recently was hired as communications director for the office of **Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita**.

### Health care

**Franciscan Health** recently hired the following physicians and medical staff: **Dr. Amir Khan**, general surgery and surgical oncology; **Paula Stout**, physical therapist; **Dr. Kartike Gulati**, head and neck surgeon; **Dianna Galvan**, audiologist; **Dr. Destiny Harrell-Washington**, pediatrician; **Dr. Farheen Dojki**, endocrinologist.

**Northwest Medical Group** in Portage recently hired the following medical personnel: **Dr. Shazia Shivji**, internal medicine; **Dr. Shaun Mehdi**, internal medicine.

**Community Healthcare System** in Munster recently hired the following medical personnel: **Dr. Mohammad Alkhatib**, infectious disease; **Dr. Thomas Cothran**, neuropsychologist.

**Nurses Patricia Martin**, Northwest Health — La Porte, and **Katrina Richmond**, Northwest Health — La Porte, each were presented with a **Daisy Award for Extraordinary Nurses**.

The **Center for Hospice Care** in Mishawaka recently named **Lance Mayberry** vice president/chief operations officer and **Angie Fox** as director of nursing.



**BUSINESS**  
Lisa Daugherty



**BUSINESS**  
Kim Giannetti



**BUSINESS**  
Mark Zemrowski



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
Blair Milo

**Law**

**Natalie Bokota** recently was appointed by **Gov. Eric Holcomb** to succeed retiring **Lake County Superior Court Judge Clarence Murray**. Bokota has served as a magistrate for the Lake County Superior Court since 2000. Murray retired Dec. 31.

**Joel Tragesser** was named office managing partner for **Quarles & Brady's** Indianapolis site. The law firm operates several offices around the country, including Chicago.

**Logistics**

**Ian Hirt**, who has led the **Port of Indiana-Burns Harbor** since March 2017, is stepping down May 3.

**Manufacturing**

**Tim Hollander**, an executive with **Toyota Motor Manufacturing**, is the 2021 chair of the **Indiana Manufacturers Association** board. Hollander is vice president of manufacturing at Toyota's plant in Princeton. He oversees production, plant engineering

and maintenance operations at the facility, which makes the Toyota Sienna, Sequoia, Highlander and Highlander Hybrid.

**Nonprofit**

The **United Way of Porter County Women United** named **Carrie Higgins**, Valparaiso University, and **Kathy Ricke**, Blessings & Blooms, co-chairs of the 2021 committee and **Stephany Leonard**, Teachers Credit Union, vice chair.

**Jill La Fountain** recently was named director of development for **Habitat**



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**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
Don Babcock

for Humanity of St. Joseph County in South Bend.

**Real estate**

**Clyde Scott** was recently promoted to chief housing officer of **JHT Real Estate Organization** in Gary.

**Sales**

**Melissa Helvey** was hired as an account executive with **APL nextED** in Valparaiso, a provider of technology services to the academic sector.



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
Linda Simmons

**Tourism**

The **Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau** promoted **Janis Logsdon**, the organization's advertising sales and leisure marketing director, to the recently created position of assistant director. She will retain her current responsibilities but also will coordinate and manage the staff's multiple projects and work with Executive Director **Jon Hunsberger** to advance the organization's mission.



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
Seth Spencer

**News**

More than \$10 million has been raised for **Indiana University Northwest** as part of **Indiana University's Bicentennial Campaign**, the college announced. The campaign launched in 2015, surpassed its original \$8 million goal, thanks to contributions from more than 10,000 alumni, supporters, businesses, foundations, and faculty and staff.

**Dairy Queen** opened Dec. 29 in Hammond. The **DQ Grill & Chill**



**GOVERNMENT**  
Bill Hanna

TRANSFORMING ideas into realities

**2021 Best of Northwest Indiana Business**

**Best Commercial Architectural Design Firm**

Floor plan labels: BALCONY, BUILDING GAS GRILLE, MASTER BEDROOM, WALK-IN CLOSET, MASTER BATH, LIVING ROOM/ DINING ROOM, PRIVATE ELEVATOR LOBBY, ELEVATOR, BEDROOM, BATH, STUDY, KITCHEN, LAUNDRY, MECH, COMMON CORRIDOR

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**GOVERNMENT**  
Matthew Brown



**GOVERNMENT**  
Molly Deuberry Craft



**HEALTH CARE**  
Lance Mayberry



**HEALTH CARE**  
Angie Fox

**Restaurant** at 954 Indianapolis Blvd. is owned and operated by **Danny Patel**.

Griffith-based **Bulkmatic** has launched a new business unit focused on providing dry bulk supply chain solutions. **Bulkmatic Solutions** will be led by **Ben Caplenor**, who has more than 20 years of logistics experience.

**NiSource's** efforts to use more green resources to generate power has landed it again on the **Dow Jones Sustainability Index**. Its late 2020 inclusion was the Merrillville-based

utility's seventh consecutive year on the index, which recognizes the company's sustainable business practices and performance. NiSource is one of seven U.S. utility companies on the 2020 list.

**Indiana University Northwest** in Gary opened its new **Academic Media Production Space** in the John W. Anderson Library Conference Center, Room 333.

**Franciscan Health Dyer's** new \$16.5 million addition opened in early January. The 25-bed surgical unit was









part of a third-floor north tower expansion at the Dyer hospital at 701 Superior Ave., which added about 20,000 square feet to the facility.

**Rowley & Co. LLP** now is part of **Somerset CPAs and Advisors**. The combination was official Jan. 1, company representatives said. There are now 235 people working for the combined operations, which will be at 409 W. Kieffer Road in Michigan City and operate as **Rowley & Co. Somerset CPAs and Advisors**.



MTA is proud to accept this award, making it the 15th year MTA has been recognized in Northwest Indiana Business Magazine. Many thanks to Northwest Indiana Business Magazine and its readership.

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**LAW**  
Joel Tragesser



**MANUFACTURING**  
Tim Hollander



**NONPROFIT**  
Jill La Fountain



**TOURISM**  
Janis Logsdon

South Bend will be the home of the **Chicago Cubs' Class A-Advanced minor league affiliate** through 2041. The **South Bend Park Board** on Jan. 19 approved an extension to the existing Use Operations and Management Agreement with the South Bend Cubs. The agreement amends a 2011 agreement, which preserves a 33-year arrangement between the city of South Bend and team until 2041.

Operators of the former **Dyer Auto Auction** at 641 Joliet St. in

Dyer relaunched as **Chicagoland Independent Auction**. A statement from Merrillville-based **Commercial In-Sites** said the real estate firm represented the buyer, Dyer Auto Auction, in its purchase of a property at 7900 Melton Road in Gary.

**Cambridge Companies**, a design build contractor with operations in Griffith and Scottsdale, Arizona, is under new ownership. The company recently announced **Jeff Eriks**, a long-time partner in the firm, and son of

company founder **Ray Eriks**, purchased the company with business partner **Bryan Young**. Ray and **Linda Eriks** will consult for Cambridge.

Sales of existing homes in Northwest Indiana ended 2020 on a positive note. **The Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors**, citing **Indiana Realtors Association** data, reported 11,672 closed sales of existing homes between January and December, a 10% increase from 10,608 closed sales logged during the same period in 2019. ■

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# BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

2021  
*Best of*  
Northwest  
Indiana  
Business

## BANKING-FINANCIAL

### Best bank for business

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank

**Runner-Up:** Peoples Bank

MICHIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank

**Runner-Up:** 1st Source Bank

### Best bank for obtaining a business loan

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank

**Runner-Up:** Peoples Bank

MICHIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank

**Runner-Up:** 1st Source Bank

### Best bank for customer service

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank

**Runner-Up:** Peoples Bank

MICHIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank

**Runner-Up:** 1st Source Bank

### Best credit union

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Tech Credit Union

**Runner-Up:** Teachers Credit Union

MICHIANA

**Winner:** Teachers Credit Union

**Runner-Up:** Interra Credit Union

### Best accounting firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** McMahon & Associates CPAs

**Runner-Up:** Swartz Retson

MICHIANA

**Winner:** Korhorn Financial Group

**Runner-Up:** Kruggel Lawton CPAs

### Best business investment firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank Wealth Management

**Runner-Up:** Peoples Bank Wealth Management

MICHIANA

**Winner:** Centier Bank Wealth Management

**Runner-Up:** Korhorn Financial Group



LARRY AVILA

Our readers have come through for us again! They have selected the 2021 honorees for the Best of Business Awards for Northwest Indiana and Michiana. These businesses provide an array of services and products across our coverage area, which 1.36 million people call home.

Honorees were chosen by readers in an online voting process, which began Nov. 30 and ended Feb. 12. Dozens of businesses and organizations were recognized in 51 awards across seven distinct categories in two regions: Northwest Indiana and Michiana.

This year's awards have a unique distinction. It is the magazine's 30th anniversary. But, more importantly, some award winners shared



# BUSINESS

## ESS AND MICHIANA BUSINESS AWARDS

# 21

a feeling of optimism as a return to normal daily life was gaining momentum after more than a year of isolation and limited interaction to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The honorees interviewed this year universally agreed the community got through the crisis by working together. Neighbors helped neighbors and community groups offered a shoulder to lean on.

Countless businesses and organizations also did their part to assist the community during the crisis by donating supplies and other resources to those on the front lines fighting the pandemic.

Being there when their community needed them most is just one example why this year's honorees were selected by our readers as Best of Business Award winners!

### Best wealth management advisory firm

**Winner:** Oak Partners

**Runner-Up:** Edward Jones investments

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Korhorn Financial Group

**Runner-Up:** Guidance Wealth

### BUSINESS-SERVICES

### Best place to purchase office furniture

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Pulse Technology

**Runner-Up:** HDW Commercial Interiors

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Office Interiors

**Runner-Up:** Business Furnishings

### Best place to purchase office equipment and supplies

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Pulse Technology

**Runner-Up:** Kemp's Office City

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** US Business Systems

**Runner-Up:** Office Interiors

### Best information technology consulting firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Pulse Technology

**Runner-Up:** Chester, Inc.

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** US Business Systems

**Runner-Up:** Golden Technologies

### Best ad agency/marketing firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** SERA Solutions

**Runner-Up:** VIA Marketing

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** J2 Marketing

**Runner-Up:** Blackwood Creative

### Best graphic/web design firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** SERA Solutions

**Runner-Up:** Miss Print

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** J2 Marketing

**Runner-Up:** Vala Marketing

## BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

### Best commercial printer

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Miss Print

**Runner-Up:** Lithographic Communications

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Zipp Printing

**Runner-Up:** Lithotone

### Best employee staffing firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Staff Source

**Runner-Up:** Express Employment Services

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Creative Financial Staffing

**Runner-Up:** Integritas Search

### Best telecommunications firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Midwest Telecom of America

**Runner-Up:** Comcast Business

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Comcast Business

**Runner-Up:** AT&T

### Best internet provider

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Comcast Business

**Runner-Up:** Midwest Telecom of America

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Comcast Business

**Runner-Up:** AT&T

## COMMUNITY-EDUCATION

### Best company to work for

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Co-Winner:** Centier Bank

**Co-Winner:** Horizon Bank

**Co-Winner:** Peoples Bank

**Co-Winner:** Staff Source

#### MICHIANA

**Co-Winner:** Centier Bank

**Co-Winner:** Horizon Bank

### Best university to attain an MBA

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Indiana University Northwest

**Runner-Up:** Purdue University Northwest

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** University of Notre Dame

**Runner-Up:** Indiana University South Bend

# NEW OPPORTU

## BEST OF BUSINESS HONOREES DETERMINED



Aaron McDermott prepares a package during a recent GivingFoodsDay corporate packing event at the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana in Merrillville.

Photo provided by Latitude Commercial

### LARRY AVILA

In early 2020, the world was hit with a crisis unlike anything it has ever experienced.

A global pandemic created by the novel coronavirus plunged the planet into lockdown to slow the spread of the disease — ultimately bringing life to a halt. But it did not last as people adapted to new circumstances created by the crisis.

Those shuttered in their homes needed services and goods to live, and organizations large and small found ways to meet the needs of the community.

There was no shortage of innovation and grit from the 2021 Best of Business Awards honorees from Northwest Indiana and Michiana. Operators of businesses as well as leaders from major organizations found opportunities to continue working, while also following newly established health and safety protocols to deliver critical products and services safely for both workers and the community.

Representatives from these winning organizations agree the pandemic

created challenges, but those that persevered emerged stronger.

“I don’t think anyone really was ready to deal with the pandemic,” said Chip Miceli, CEO of Pulse Technology, a provider of office supplies, equipment and IT services, with operations in Chesterton and Illinois. “I don’t think there was ever a time I had to worry about changing how a business is supposed to do business.”

When that time arrived, Miceli knew a business-as-usual-approach would not suffice. That meant going through his client database to let them know his firm was available to help in whatever way they could.

A proactive approach benefited Miceli because his customers needed an assortment of assistance, and the crisis even resulted in some former clients coming back. It turned out, as droves of people were forced to work from home, they needed better equipment from technology to suitable furniture.

“If anything, I think we all learned how to survive,” Miceli said. “We learned how to do things more efficiently and



# NITIES

## TO OVERCOME HURDLES DURING CRISIS



Chancellor Ken Iwama greets faculty, students and staff during the Spring Jump Off at Indiana University Northwest in late February.

Photo provided by IUN

how we could keep customers happy and provide what they needed so they could keep doing business.”

### Rolling with it

Knowing how to evolve in a changing business environment is at the foundation of Goshen-based Korhorn Financial Group. Founder Kevin Korhorn launched his business in 1994, initially to provide financial planning services.

As his client base grew, so did requests for other services, including tax preparation, accounting, book-keeping, and later, personal and commercial insurance. Today Korhorn has 70 employees.

“I’m a dreamer, and back in 1994, if I closed my eyes then, I would see a business like this,” he said of his firm’s array of services. “I wanted to set up a one-stop place where someone could get all of their financial needs done.”

When the stock market hit record-highs in recent years, Korhorn saw a retirement boom, and as the pandemic set in, more people sought advice from financial experts.

“People wanted to know if their (retirement) strategies still worked in the pandemic environment,” he said. “Fortunately, we are built to provide that wisdom to people.”

Because Korhorn serves clients nationwide, he and his team were accustomed to conducting online meetings with clients and for daily business.

“We never quit working during the pandemic,” he said. “We had always embraced adapting to new technology since the company’s founding.”

Jeff Meyers, president of Meyers Glaros Group, an insurance services firm in Merrillville, said, in his profession, embracing technology and flexibility to adapt are business necessities.

“We do whatever we can to make sure we grow together, whether that’s helping them to educate (our clients’) employees, helping (clients) find ways to cut costs, helping (clients) with compliance or a multitude of other things,” he said. “Over the years, we have invested in technology platforms that simplify our clients’ lives and our own, (and) because of these

### Best university for a technology degree

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Purdue University Northwest

Runner-Up: Indiana University Northwest

#### MICHIANA

Winner: Purdue Polytechnic South Bend

Runner-Up: Indiana Tech - Northwest

Indiana Region

### Best university online degree program

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Indiana University Northwest

Runner-Up: Purdue University Northwest

#### MICHIANA

Winner: Indiana University South Bend

Runner-Up: Purdue Polytechnic South Bend

### Best minority-owned business

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Chicagoland Popcorn

#### MICHIANA

Winner: Linden Grill

### Best veteran-owned business

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Cloudbusters

#### MICHIANA

Winner: Indiana Whiskey

### Best woman-owned business

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: HDW Commercial Interiors

#### MICHIANA

Winner: Valley Screen Process

## CONSTRUCTION-REAL ESTATE

### Best commercial real estate firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Latitude Commercial

Runner-Up: Commercial In-Sites

#### MICHIANA

Winner: Cressy Commercial Real Estate

Runner-Up: Bradley Company

## BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

### Best commercial construction firm for new construction

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Larson Danielson Construction

**Runner-Up:** Chester, Inc.

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Ancon Construction

**Runner-Up:** DJ Construction

### Best commercial construction firm for remodeling or expansion

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Larson Danielson Construction

**Runner-Up:** Chester, Inc.

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Ancon Construction

**Runner-Up:** DJ Construction

### Best engineering firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Superior Engineering

**Runner-Up:** DVG Team

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Troyer Group

**Runner-Up:** Lawson-Fisher Associates

investments, we were able to execute a seamless transition to working from home last spring.”

Adapting to virtual meetings also did not take long for Aaron McDermott, co-founder and president of Latitude Commercial in Crown Point. He and his team thrive in environments where face-to-face meetings are essential in closing deals.

“We still had deals moving (during the pandemic), and with hundreds of thousands of square feet we manage, we still needed to make sure those operated and were professionally maintained,” McDermott said.

He said, as use of virtual meeting spaces grew, people became more comfortable using technology to conduct business.

“We have been able to meet and network (in some cases) quicker and easier with existing and potential clients,” McDermott said.

His company’s network of resources paid off for many organizations in spring 2020. McDermott and his

team connected Sysco with numerous organizations in Northwest Indiana to distribute more than 15 tons of perishable goods that would have gone to waste.

“We reached out to some of the charities we knew, and within 48 hours, we were able to organize all 15 tons to be given to residents and organizations in Northwest Indiana,” McDermott said.

Having the right people in place contributes to building a strong organization, the experts say. Being community oriented is one of many characteristics sought by leaders as well as a solid work ethic to ensure good service.

Michael Dexter, a financial adviser with Edward Jones in Crown Point, said new advisers to the company are required to introduce themselves in the community.

“It is how all farmers and small businesses in rural areas got to know one another, and that tradition continues today,” Dexter said. Establishing trust with clients takes time, which is why



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he and his firm believe it is important to be a visible part of the community.

Dexter has been in business 32 years and has hired numerous employees with good character in that time, including many who continue to work in Northwest Indiana. Dexter is confident his practice will continue after he retires. His son, Logan, is involved in the company, and his youngest daughter, Leah, a high school senior, is working as an intern and showing interest in joining the business.

Philip Faccenda, a partner with the law firm of Barnes & Thornburg in South Bend, said attorneys at his practice traditionally have always “provided high-quality legal work that is performed with integrity and always with our clients’ best interests in mind.”

The firm also always has employed people who understood fiscal responsibility but were open to growth and continuous improvement.

“This business practice served us well during the 2008-2009 economic crisis

and during the current pandemic,” Faccenda said. “We learned we can effectively work remotely, and as a firm, we should embrace that to accommodate working parents, lifestyle choices, etc., and retain talented team members who would prefer some flexibility.”

Faccenda said planning for the future is a constant at Barnes & Thornburg.

“As with many professions, the practice of law has changed considerably in the last five to 10 years,” he said. “We have to be flexible to attract the most talented lawyers to serve our clients’ needs, (and) we just moved to a new downtown office building that bears our name. Our clients know that we are dedicated to our community, which is also very important to them.”

#### Community anchors

Indiana University Northwest covers 43 acres in Gary. More than 3,600 full- and part-time students are enrolled annually in one of more than several

### Best commercial architectural design firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Chester, Inc.

**Runner-Up:** Shive-Hattery Inc

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Epoch - Shive-Hattery

**Runner-Up:** Ancon Construction

### Best commercial landscaping firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Lakeshore Landscaping

**Runner-Up:** Hubinger Landscaping Corp.

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Foegley Landscape, Incorporated

**Runner-Up:** Pemberton Landscaping

### Best residential real estate firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** McColly Real Estate

**Runner-Up:** Century 21 Alliance Group

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Cressy & Everett Real Estate

**Runner-Up:** Irish Realty

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## BEST OF BUSINESS

### Best residential home construction firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Olthof Homes

**Runner-Up:** Pressel Enterprises

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Place Builders

**Runner-Up:** Devon Builders

### Best residential home remodeling construction firm

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Pressel Enterprises

**Runner-Up:** Apex Construction & Remodeling

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Place Builders

**Runner-Up:** HM Remodeling

## EVENTS-ENTERTAINMENT

### Best restaurant for business entertaining

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Gamba Ristorante

**Runner-Up:** Gino's Steakhouse

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Cafe Navarre

**Runner-Up:** Lasalle Grill

dozen degree programs on campus or one of more than 200 programs available online.

According to recently appointed Chancellor Ken Iwama, IUN recognizes its strong community connection.

"One of the most visible ways we strengthen our ties to the community is by educating its people," he said. "IU Northwest has more than 27,000 alumni, and the vast majority of them live and work in the Region."

He said earnings of those IUN alumni and the businesses that employ them add \$220 million to the local economy.

"Because a vast majority of them stay in the Region after graduation, their extra earnings and other financial contributions go right back into our economy, spurring growth and improving quality of life for all community members," Iwama said.

During his first few months on the job, Iwama said, one of the things that impressed him most was IUN's foundation of academic excellence.

"IU Northwest offers (Northwest Indiana) students a quality education

at an affordable price with access to incredible opportunities," he said. Its association with Indiana University connects it to a higher-learning institution that has an excellent reputation with degrees that are respected throughout the state and world.

Distance or remote learning has been a part of many colleges in recent years, which meant students, staff and faculty were prepared to operate in an online learning environment during the pandemic. Iwama said he and the IUN staff recognize that students miss in-person interaction with their

**"I think everyone recognized we were all in this together and that we had to figure out a way to come out on top."**

— Chip Miceli  
CEO, Pulse Technology

instructors and peers.

IUN is planning for a return to in-person learning and "mostly normal" operations for its fall 2021 term, Iwama said.

He appreciated that IUN, along with the community, recognized the crisis created a situation where "we truly (were) in this together."

"It was so gratifying for me to see how faculty and staff jumped right into their roles as stewards of place," Iwama said. "They were and continue to be caring, understanding and willing to give their fellow humans the grace they need to thrive under extraordinary circumstances."

Taking care of the community is a familiar role for Franciscan Health.

Dr. Daniel McCormick, president and CEO of Franciscan Health Crown Point, said his organization's goal is to make lasting connections with the community "through our hearts, hands and faith."

He said Franciscan is committed to maintaining safety for patients, employees and the community as it provides care.

That is why heightened use of technology became essential at the onset of the pandemic, said Patrick Maloney, president and CEO of Franciscan health Dyer/Hammond/Munster.

"We ramped up our virtual visits and telemedicine to allow us to continue



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to treat our patients,” he said. “We learned quickly how valuable these tools can be when we needed to practice social distancing.”

He said the pandemic “forced our organization to be nimble, reallocating and retraining our team members whose jobs were temporarily unavailable, providing reinforcements as the number of COVID-19 cases we were seeing surged.”

Maloney said Franciscan used technology in new ways to deliver care while minimizing in-person contact and spread of the virus.

“We also made sure they were safe by limiting visitors and providing them with the PPE (personal protective equipment) that was necessary for them to do their jobs and take care of our patients,” he said.

Franciscan Health’s brand is well known in the Region, and its bond to the community has developed over 145 years. The Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration came to the U.S. and started what is now called

the Franciscan Alliance, said Dean Mazzoni, president and CEO of Franciscan Health Michigan City.

“In Michigan City, our hospital treated its first patient in November 1904,” he said. “Ultimately, we want every patient and family member who seeks care in our programs and services to know they are loved by the care they receive and the way in which it is delivered by our great people.”

The pandemic created new challenges, but leaders from the Best of Business Award-winning organizations agree that a united front fueled the community’s willingness to get through the darkest times of the crisis.

Miceli with Pulse Technologies said people recognized they were never truly alone.

“I think everyone recognized we were all in this together and that we had to figure out a way to come out on top, and if could do that together, it would be better for everyone to do it together than to do it alone,” Miceli said. ■

## Best meeting site for large groups

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Avalon Manor Banquet Center

**Runner-Up:** Blue Chip Casino, Hotel & Spa

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Century Center

**Runner-Up:** Gillespie Conference Center

## Best meeting site for small groups

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Gamba Ristorante

**Runner-Up:** Gino's Steakhouse

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Cafe Navarre

**Runner-Up:** Lasalle Grill

## Best caterer for events

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Dimitri's Catering

**Runner-Up:** Comforts Catering

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Cafe Navarre

**Runner-Up:** Lasalle Grill



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Best of  
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## BEST OF BUSINESS

### Best golf course for charitable/business events

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** White Hawk Country Club  
**Runner-Up:** Innsbrook Country Club

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Morris Park Country Club  
**Runner-Up:** Elcona Country Club

### Best photographer for events

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Pete Doherty Images

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Peter Ringenberg Photography

## HEALTH-WELLNESS

### Best hospital/hospital group

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Franciscan Health  
**Runner-Up:** Community Healthcare System

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Beacon Health System  
**Runner-Up:** St. Joseph Health System

### Best health care facility for cardiology

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Franciscan Health  
**Runner-Up:** Community Healthcare System

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Beacon Health System  
**Runner-Up:** South Bend Clinic

### Best health care facility for cancer treatments

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Franciscan Health  
**Runner-Up:** Community Healthcare System

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Beacon Health System  
**Runner-Up:** Goshen Health

### Best health care facility for orthopedics

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Lakeshore Bone & Joint Institute  
**Runner-Up:** Franciscan Health

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** South Bend Ortho  
**Runner-Up:** OSMC

### Best health care facility for mental health

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Franciscan Health  
**Runner-Up:** Porter-Starke Services

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Oaklawn Mental Health  
**Runner-Up:** Beacon Health System

### Best health care facility for urgent/immediate care

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Franciscan Express Care  
**Runner-Up:** Community Immediate Care

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Beacon Health System  
**Runner-Up:** St. Joseph Health System

### Best health care facility for physical/occupational therapy

#### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Franciscan Health  
**Runner-Up:** Community Healthcare System

#### MICHIANA

**Winner:** South Bend Ortho  
**Runner-Up:** OSMC

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## Best fitness/wellness facility

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Community Hospital Fitness Point  
**Runner-Up:** Franciscan Health Fitness Centers

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Beacon Health System  
**Runner-Up:** Eastlake Athletic Clubs

## LEGAL-INSURANCE

## Best law firm for corporate law

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Burke Costanza & Carberry LLP  
**Runner-Up:** Hoepfner Wagner & Evans

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Barnes & Thornburg  
**Runner-Up:** SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn

## Best law firm for business acquisitions and mergers

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Burke Costanza & Carberry LLP  
**Runner-Up:** Hoepfner Wagner & Evans

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Barnes & Thornburg  
**Runner-Up:** SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn

## Best law firm for litigation

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Burke Costanza & Carberry LLP  
**Runner-Up:** Hoepfner Wagner & Evans

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Barnes & Thornburg  
**Runner-Up:** SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn

## Best law firm for estate planning

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Burke Costanza & Carberry LLP  
**Runner-Up:** Tauber Law Offices

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Tuesley Hall Konopa  
**Runner-Up:** Barnes & Thornburg

### ► DID YOU KNOW?

Our 2021 readers' survey includes 51 awards across seven distinct categories of businesses in Northwest Indiana and Michiana.

## Best insurance agency for business property and liability coverage

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Meyers Glaros Group  
**Runner-Up:** General Insurance Services

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Korhorn Financial Group  
**Runner-Up:** Gibson

## Best insurance agency for business health and life coverage

### NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Winner:** Meyers Glaros Group  
**Runner-Up:** General Insurance Services

### MICHIANA

**Winner:** Korhorn Financial Group  
**Runner-Up:** Gibson



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# REASONS TO

## EXPERTS BELIEVE PENT-UP DEMAND WILL MEAN MORE VISIT

CARRIE NAPOLEON

**R**egion tourism professionals agree there's a growing urge among people who are eager for a road trip after being couped up at home because of pandemic restrictions.

And while there is optimism that communities may again be able to host festivals and welcome visitors into their towns, how people choose to travel may take a different approach.

According to the U.S. Travel Association's Travel Forecast for 2021, travel spending is expected to increase 23.2% this year after a devastating drop of a negative 45.2% in 2020.

Tourism bureaus in Northwest and North Central Indiana are working to capture their share of that increased spending after a year that has wreaked havoc on the hospitality and tourism industry, waylaying workers and causing businesses like restaurants to close, in some cases permanently.

"There's a lot of cabin fever going on," said Speros Batistatos, president and

miles," Batistatos said. This makes destinations in Northwest Indiana appealing.

One of the major drivers to the Region is the Indiana Dunes National Park.

Batistatos said leisure travel by car with an outdoor focus, and amateur and youth sports are going to be major contributors to the recovery of hospitality and tourism in the Region. The investment by local cities and towns into amateur and youth sports will help usher in the recovery.

"People use their children's team sport as the reason to travel," he said.

### Getting outside

**L**orelei Weimer, executive director of Indiana Dunes Tourism, said the bureau will continue to promote outdoor recreation opportunities as people ease back into traveling. From sledding, cross country skiing and snowshoeing in the off season to visiting the beaches, hiking the trails, and enjoying nature experiences like birdwatching, the area is poised to continue to offer people socially distanced outdoor recreation where they can have fun and feel safe.

Being home to a national park has meant an influx of new visitors to the Region, even during the pandemic. Weimer said they initially expected the boon in attendance to be short-lived after the designation change to national park in February 2019. One of the things learned, she said, is a dedicated group of national park enthusiasts visit sites just because they are national parks.

Weimer describes the dunes as a perfect fit because of the location.

"There are diehard national parks folks, (and) they are not fair weathered," she said. "They will come here in April, (and) they will come in November (because they are a) national park person — they are different."



SWIM



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PLAY

**↑ 23.2%**

According to the U.S. Travel Association's Travel Forecast for 2021, travel spending is expected to increase this year after a drop of a negative 45.2% in 2020.

CEO, of the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority.

In a survey commissioned by the American Hotel & Lodging Association, 56% of respondents said they are likely to travel for a vacation in 2021.

"Americans want to travel by car, (so) they pretty much almost doubled the traditional drive time to just under 500





# TRAVEL

## REASONS FOR INDIANA DESTINATIONS THIS YEAR



PICNIC



HIKE



BICYCLE

provided by Indiana Dunes Tourism and South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority

Weimer said national park enthusiasts are willing to go to the beach, but it is not their lone driver.

“What’s driving them is the national park, (because) they do more in the park itself, hiking and exploring,” she said. “It benefits us (because) the outdoors is safe.”

The Indiana Dunes National Park pulls from a geographical market, including Ohio, Illinois and Michigan. Because of the location, the park can be a weekend trip for national park enthusiasts.

“The drive-in market is always helpful to us,” Weimer said. “In addition to that, we’re not an expensive destination.”

### Adventures close to home

Nicole Lawler, director of tourism marketing and development with Visit South Bend Mishawaka, said the agency has changed its focus to travelers who want to get out but not too far from home. The change accommodates new preferences brought on by the pandemic.

“We mainly focus on drive-in markets for road trips and push our messaging out in a 200-mile radius to the larger cities around us,” Lawler said.

Visit South Bend Mishawaka has switched from mainly promoting events to focusing on outdoor activities such as visiting parks, hiking, biking, outdoor dining, tubing, cross country skiing, ice skating and other such activities.

“Since most events have been canceled for nearly a year, we have really had to get creative with our messaging,” Lawler said.

Her counterparts at the SSCVA and Indiana Dunes Tourism say they too have had to pivot marketing to adapt to the changes brought on by the pandemic.

Weimer said, while spending is expected to be up this year, the first six months of 2021 will remain challenging. When the pandemic began, people were sheltering at home. The desire to get out

of the house and be outdoors turned into a positive for the Indiana Dunes National Park.

“During the height of the pandemic, it was outdoors,” Weimer said. “You really could come and experience an attraction and do it in a safe manner, (so) what we are anticipating is outdoor recreation will be a strength (this year).”

### Incentives for travelers

Weimer said the tourism bureau has expanded its Dunes Deals program from its print format to a digital program. Visitors would receive a coupon booklet when they passed through the gate. The tourism bureau paid the state park to distribute the booklets. The print program ran from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but now the new digitized program runs all year.

“In the midst of the pandemic, we felt like this was so important for the recovery our businesses,” Weimer said.

Businesses can offer discounts through the app at no charge to encourage visitors to venture from the shoreline into the towns to spend their money. The digital format also gives businesses the opportunity to easily change and customize their deals.

“It allows both visitors and residents to use it,” Weimer said. The program also allows the tourism bureau to track how the coupon book is used.

“We will be able to see how successful it is,” she said. “We can share that information with businesses.”

The pandemic hit her agency’s budget hard. Weimer said her organization has shifted to guerrilla marketing in lieu of traditional platforms to get the most from significantly reduced revenues.

Tourism bureaus are funded by the usage tax on overnight stays at hotels.

“We are trying to do things much more grassroots-oriented and organic,”



**“There’s a lot of cabin fever going on. ... Americans want to travel by car, (so) they pretty much almost doubled the traditional drive time to just under 500 miles.”**

— Speros Batistatos  
President and CEO  
South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority

Weimer said. “We see how people are responding to different things we are doing (in) social media and our blogs.”

The pandemic has impacted people economically, but many still want to travel, the experts say.

“What we are finding is there is a pent-up demand for travel,” Weimer said. “I think that will all be beneficial to us, (because) not only are we affordable, we are also a strong family market.”

And of course, being a beach destination remains a powerful draw, she said. Mother Nature also will play a role in how successful the summer season will be.

“Last year we ended up having a really good peak season, (so) I’m cautiously optimistic this year,” Weimer said.

Batistatos said tourism professionals have seen what Americans want and that is a feeling of security. Travelers want to be in surroundings they feel they can control like rentals at Airbnb and VRBO properties, which are seeing an uptick in usage. The industry services two key markets, older travelers more concerned about safety and younger travelers who feel more invincible.

“The research consistently shows us Generation X and the millennials

feel more ‘invincible,’” Batistatos said, adding by and large, COVID is not lethal to that demographic.

“They feel much more willing to take risks and travel, (so) they are the ones getting on planes right now because the pricing is so competitive,” he said.

The South Shore tourism bureau is working to engage those travelers via social media as well as in their native languages, guiding them to the experiences they want.

Baby boomers and their parents are dramatically different, Batistatos said. They do not want to take the risks associated with potentially contracting COVID-19, which statistically hits those age groups hardest.

“It’s different by generation,” he said. “With baby boomers, (marketing) is a much heavier emphasis on cleanliness, cleaning protocols, (but) in a Gen X communication, we are leading with the activity, the new experience, the emotional bonds that bring you close to the loved one you’re traveling with, and that’s different.” ■

## Taking Care of Business.

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# Destination for skilled trades

Region's building boom comes with hurdles in recruiting and retaining talent



Indiana/Kentucky/Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters apprentice classes work on dugout roofs, a community service volunteer project.

Photo provided by the Indiana/Kentucky/Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters

BY LAUREN CAGGIANO

Experts believe a bounce back in the Region's construction trades is inevitable.

Despite suffering the economic effects of the pandemic, Northwest Indiana's building industry is actively recruiting qualified talent to maintain the state's competitive edge.

To understand the current state of the construction industry, Micah Pollak, associate professor of economics at Indiana University Northwest, said people must look at the cumulative effects of the area's changing demographics. For several decades, the Region was losing population, what he refers to as "net domestic migration." However, 2019 represented a turning point.

The 2020 census showed Indiana gained 23,943 new residents, with

almost 10% of those individuals or 2,102 people moving into Northwest Indiana.

## Stronger workforce

"It was (in 2019 that) we had the first positive net migration that we've had as far back as you can easily go in the census," Pollak said. "That means that more people choose to move into Northwest Indiana than leave, (and) that's huge, because even though those numbers are still very small, if Northwest Indiana becomes a place where people want to live and want to locate, we won't be fighting to keep them here."

The Region instead will become a destination for workers.

"They'll want to come here," Pollak said. "That builds a stronger workforce, a stronger network of human capital, and then businesses are more likely to

locate here and expand and take advantage of that talent."

Pollak acknowledged construction companies reduced head count or halted hiring in response to the economic downturn brought on by the pandemic. However, Pollak is confident it only is a matter of time before the construction trades return to the status quo.

"We probably won't get back to our pre-pandemic levels of employment until 2023," he said. "But once we have a majority of the population vaccinated and the virus has died down, it will no longer be as much of a concern. I think we will bounce back pretty quickly."

## Back to 'new' normal

Analysts say widespread vaccine availability could mean a ripple effect in the supply chain, in terms of business



**“For every person (who) enters the trades, five retire. Once all the boomers retire, we’ll be looking at almost 5 million open positions in the construction and extraction industry alone.”**

— “Industrial Safety and Hygiene News” June 2019 article

re-openings and increased consumer confidence and spending.

Kevin Comerford, director of professional development at the Portage-based Construction Advancement Foundation, is cautiously optimistic about a rebound. His organization is a regional construction industry trade association with more than 500 affiliated contractor companies in Lake, Porter, La Porte, Newton, Starke and Jasper counties in Indiana.

Their relationships with contractors mean people like Comerford have their finger on the pulse of the industry. According to Comerford, there is no disputing that 2020 really shook things up, and companies are still reeling from the disruptions.

“Our data indicates that the Northwest Indiana construction industry has experienced about a 35% decline in total man hours in 2020 when compared to 2019,” he said. “The majority of the decline is the result of the pandemic, and the industrial sector seems to be experiencing the brunt of the adverse impact.”

Despite this trend, Comerford said to his knowledge almost all the apprenticeship programs are taking applications. On the talent side, interest in the trades remains, although companies have had to adjust their approach to recruitment.

Comerford is charged with outreach to local high school students. Pre-pandemic, his organization’s strategy relied on interpersonal interaction.

“For example, we’d host a hands-on skilled trades day where they would bus students in, and we’d have all the apprenticeship training programs there,” he said. “And the students would get to talk to the apprenticeship coordinators and trainers (and) learn how to do something hands-on during their time on site.”

However, restrictions imposed by the pandemic meant more virtual interaction, including online interviews with apprenticeship coordinators, among other things.

### Apprentices for tomorrow

Rick Gamblin, who worked in the trades as a journeyman ironworker, is an apprenticeship coordinator. Representing Ironworkers Local #395, he said the economic forecast is largely based on hyper-local data.

“Here in (Northwest Indiana), we have all the steel mills here,” he said. “Most of our work — I’d say 75% to 80% — is maintenance on the steel mills. So, when the steel mills are doing well, we’re doing well, (and) it’s really on a year-to-year basis.”

However, recruitment efforts do not stop during slower economic times, because it is essential to keep the pipeline full when the economy rebounds, Gamblin said. Apprenticeship programs

favorably to social media posts, which meant adapting that tactic especially during the pandemic.

### Reality check

Still, there sometimes is a disconnect between what students envision for a job in the trades versus the day-to-day reality. Gamblin wants to set the record straight.

“I would say the biggest (misconception) is people think that they’re (going) to come here, get accepted (into the apprenticeship program) and just start collecting big paychecks,” he said. “And that’s not how it works in construction.”

Apprenticeships can mean working long days and weekends in challenging conditions.



Photo provided by Ozinga

**Ozinga’s Ready Mix Concrete division in Indiana has tapped the Indiana Department of Workforce Development’s WorkOne program to scout potential labor.**

are typically four years, so you need time to cultivate the next generation of labor.

Gamblin said that, in recent years, his group moved away from using traditional recruitment methods, including advertising in local newspapers. Younger people, he said, tend to respond more

Chris Charters, outreach specialist with Indiana/Kentucky/Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters, said he has encountered those same attitudes from prospective apprentices, along with other challenges.

“The two biggest issues that we’re having right now in the trades are getting

**“ We probably won’t get back to our pre-pandemic levels of employment until 2023. But once we have a majority of the population vaccinated ... I think we will bounce back pretty quickly.”**



— Micah Pollak, associate professor of economics  
Indiana University Northwest

**“ Depending on the region, all trades are having issues with trying to fill jobs, from pipe fitters to welders to electricians. It’s a shallow pool, (and) I think everybody’s kind of in the same boat.”**



— Joe Sanders, executive vice president  
Ozinga’s Ready Mix Concrete division in Indiana

people to show up on time, five days a week and stay drug free,” Charters said. “All of our members go in for random drug screenings, so you have to remain drug free to maintain employment.”

However, apprentices that make the cut can enjoy a bright future, especially as the baby-boom generation phases out of the workplace. Data from the trade publication “Industrial Safety and Hygiene News” frames the story.

“For every person (who) enters the trades, five retire,” per a June 2019

article. “Once all the boomers retire, we’ll be looking at almost 5 million open positions in the construction and extraction industry alone, (and) it’s not just a lack of people of working age to fill these roles, (because) to look at why these boomer-vacated jobs aren’t being filled, we need to look at the next generation of workers — the ones currently in high school and college.”

That is why it is critical to reach high school students who might not continue their education through either

a two-year or four-year college.

Charters estimates that about 30% of Indiana high school students today are not college bound. A certain percentage of that cohort might graduate with a technical honors diploma and related skills. This represents an opportunity for his organization and similar groups that have made a career out of reaching the next generation of skilled labor.

“What we’re trying to do is help these students by directing them into our registered apprenticeship program,” he

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said. “It helps them find a career pathway, something they could get involved with at 18 or 19 years old and continue to pursue for the next 30 years of their life, (so) it’s making a career out of work rather than just holding down a job.”

### Competing for talent

Joe Sanders, executive vice president of Ozinga’s Ready Mix Concrete division in Indiana, is among those who benefits from the recruitment efforts of Gamblin and Charters. Even so, he said it can be tough to attract talent in the Elkhart, Goshen, Mishawka and South Bend areas. That’s because they compete with the recreational vehicle industry for drivers.

Another challenge is construction work is largely seasonal. Sanders said they are up front about that fact.

Also, they try to emphasize that once they settle into a role, it can be a very good career. And like the unions, Sanders said, they have had to rethink how they reach their target audience.

For instance, he has been in contact with several area unions to develop training programs for people who may be inquiring about driver work. They also have tapped the Indiana Department of Workforce Development’s WorkOne program — specifically their veterans hiring program — to scout potential labor.

“We’ve given them our job descriptions, what the job entails, and hopefully, they have prospects that come through, especially veterans (who) may have driven and worked with dig equipment,” he said.

Looking more at the bigger picture, Sanders said the labor shortage is symptomatic of long-standing cultural values that have traditionally steered young people away from the trades. For the past 40 years or so, educators and administrators have stressed the importance of a four-year college education, and therefore, pushed technical training to the margins.

“Depending on the region, all trades are having issues with trying to fill jobs, from pipe fitters to welders to electricians,” he said. “It’s a shallow pool, (and) I think everybody’s kind of in the same boat.” ■

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Photo by Doug Ross

# GREEN JOB GROWTH

## SHIFT TO CLEAN ENERGY SOURCES TRANSFORMING MANY BUSINESS SECTORS IN NORTHWEST INDIANA

DOUG ROSS

Clean energy sources are powering job growth in Northwest Indiana.

According to Clean Jobs Midwest, there were more than 86,800 clean-energy jobs in Indiana at the end of 2019 — more than the combined workforce of real estate agents and brokers, computer programmers, web developers and restaurant servers.

Northwest Indiana is a major hub for clean-energy jobs, with 10,320 at the end of 2019.

Growth in the industry is expected to continue as the shift from coal accelerates.

NIPSCO has placed expiration dates on its final coal-fired power plants.

Schahfer Generating Station in Wheatfield will close its coal-fired units in 2023, with two of the four units closing in December, and the

Michigan City Generating Station will close in 2028, the company has announced.

Schahfer also has two units powered by natural gas, which will remain in operation.

In 2018, NIPSCO announced its goal of becoming coal free by 2028. That was the result of an integrated resource

generating sources. It received real proposals with costs and other details outlined and found that, with advancements in technology, wind, solar and battery technology had become the most cost-effective approach.

The shift to renewable energy sources is expected to save customers \$4 billion during the next 30 years, McElmurry said.

**6,449** Wind-generated energy supports this many jobs in Indiana, according to Clean Jobs Midwest.

plan that must be periodically updated to comply with Utility Regulatory Commission rules, said Tara McElmurry, a spokesperson for NIPSCO.

NIPSCO changed its standard operating procedure for that report and issued a request for proposals for all

“Reliability is fundamental,” she added. “We would not move forward with a plan that wasn’t reliable for our customers.”

Fuel costs account for major savings in the plan. Coal costs millions of dollars, but wind and solar are free once the equipment is installed, McElmurry said.





**NIPSCO's coal-fired Michigan City Generating Station is scheduled to be decommissioned in 2028, the last of the utility's coal-fired facilities when that happens.**

NIPSCO is still working to determine the impact of the change on the company's workforce.

"It's still quite early" to measure the impact, but redeploying and retraining workers could become part of the plan, she said. "Our goal is definitely to minimize impact to positions where possible."

The utility is working with partners who are experts in the renewable energy field to set up additional wind farms and solar arrays.

NIPSCO's first two Indiana-based wind projects — Rosewater Wind Farm in White County and Jordan Creek Wind in Benton and Warren counties — are now online, the company announced in February.

Two future solar farms — Dunns Bridge Solar 1 and Dunns Bridge Solar 2 — are scheduled to become operational in Jasper County in 2022 and 2023, respectively. They will offer a combined 700 megawatts of electricity and 75 megawatts of battery storage.

## Moving forward

"Clean energy goes beyond just wind and solar," said Carl Lisek, executive director of South Shore Clean Cities. "It's a matter of how we fuel and energize our vehicles as well and making sure we're doing that in a way that closes the loop."

He said electric vehicles are a hot-button topic right now, and they can be an excellent choice for reducing emissions and improving air quality, and creating vehicles made with Indiana steel.

"They're made even better when they are charged with renewable sources of energy," Lisek said. "New companies and developments coming into Northwest Indiana are quickly learning the best time to install the infrastructure for EVs and solar, for example, is during the construction phase, and we're seeing that happening more and more."

At Vale View, a commercial and apartment building that opened in downtown Valparaiso last summer, solar panels are used to generate electricity for all common areas in the building, including elevators for the four-story structure and the charging stations for electric vehicles in the underground parking garage.

The white rubber roof has bifacial solar panels, meaning the bottom of the panel is also functional. Light reflected from the roof is also put to work in creating electricity.

"These were the first bifacial solar energy systems for that type of building in the state," said Rich Shields, director of marketing and business development for Chester Inc., which designed the building.

The Welter family, which owns Vale View LLC, is conscientious about reducing the carbon footprint, Shields said.

"We at Chester Inc. are cognizant of the effect on our environment in everything we do," he said.

Chester Inc. is concerned about the environment in each of its three major

sectors — agriculture, information technology and construction.

The information technology team makes sure old technology is replaced with newer, more environmentally friendly gear when customers need upgrades. Every bit of the old hardware is recycled, down to the bare bones, Shields said.

Chester educates clients on ways to save money and help the environment at the same time.

"You don't need to print every email you get," Shields said. Nor does every computer need its own printer. Managed print services with cloud printing and network printers are more efficient.

## Agriculture adapts

Technology is evolving rapidly in agriculture, too.

"The agribusiness sector has transformed probably threefold," he said.

Chester Inc. helps farmers with irrigation and grain bin storage and handling. Technology has become as important to farmers as the plow.

For irrigators, farmers no longer need to drive out to each field. They can set the controls, measuring the amount of water needed and where it should be directed with a smartphone.

Agriculture is becoming more science than art. Farmers are finding ways to get the most abundance out of their crops as possible. As they're doing that, they're cutting costs and helping the environment at the same time.

"A lot of what we're seeing is farmers going almost exclusively solar now," Shields said. Hog farmers, especially, use a lot of electricity to feed animals and keep them warm. Generating the

electricity onsite is cheaper.

Even if a livestock operation isn't fully dependent on solar, it's moving in the



**"Clean energy goes beyond just wind and solar. It's a matter of how we fuel and energize our vehicles as well and making sure we're doing that in a way that closes the loop."**

— Carl Lisek  
Executive director  
South Shore Clean Cities



Photo provided by Wayne Enterprises / Homely Media

Solar panels on the roof of Vale View, a commercial and apartment building in downtown Valparaiso, are bifacial. Light from the white rubber roof reflects onto the bottom of the solar panel. The panels generate enough electricity to power all common areas in the building.



Photo by Doug Ross

right direction. “It’s still a reduction of the carbon footprint if you’re doing 65% solar and 35% electricity,” Shields said.

### Employment growth

Lisek said it is important to remember clean-energy jobs are not taking jobs away from other sectors.

“The whole idea is to shift the workforce toward jobs that support clean energy, and you do that by having public, private and nonprofit sectors embracing clean energy in their practices and in their planning,” he said. “That’s exactly what we’re seeing in Northwest Indiana, (and) the NIRPC 2050 Plan is an excellent example of that.”

He said clean energy and clean fuels are not an afterthought in planning.

“They’re woven into the long-term planning process,” Lisek said.

In Indiana, solar jobs grew 9% in 2019, Clean Jobs Midwest said.

Zach Schalk, Indiana program director with Solar United Neighbors, is working to boost solar job growth while helping residents, farmers and small businesses

# GROWTH

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The Excel Center provided Kami an opportunity to earn her High School Diploma and start her career as a Welder.



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switch to solar. Solar jobs have doubled in the last few years, he said.

Schalk helped Northwest Indiana form its first solar power co-op and is hoping to start another one soon.

These co-ops bring down the cost of solar installations for group members. By joining together, the members can negotiate group discounts for solar installations.

The first solar co-op in Northwest Indiana chose Indianapolis-based Jefferson Electric.

"It was a tough decision, (because) here were really good companies who all provided really good proposals," Schalk said. Northwest Indiana drew five bidders.

"There's a lot of roofs that could be good for solar," Schalk said.

Homeowners whose roofs are approaching the end of their lifespans would be smart to replace them before putting solar panels up. Solar panels can be expensive, but there are some grants available to help defray the cost.

In Indiana, the biggest challenge is a 2017 law, Senate Enrolled Act 309, which sets a timeline for ending net metering. Currently, net metering is set to disappear July 1, 2022, and there is some uncertainty about what happens next.

Net metering allows homeowners to send excess energy back into the power grid and get credit for it, drawing power from the grid later when it is needed.

"Net metering is kind of the bedrock for solar customer economics," Schalk said.

This summer, the 21st Century Energy Policy Development Task Force is expected to address net metering. Schalk hopes Indiana will decide not to fall behind its peers.

"We actually were ahead of the curve early on in terms of adopting and expanding net metering," he said.

Indiana has some big solar installations, including Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the biggest solar installation of any sports facility, and Indianapolis International Airport, with the largest solar field of any airport in North America, Schalk noted.

As coal is squeezed out of the energy portfolio, there will be real opportunities to continue investing in green jobs and communities that will be impacted by coal's shrinking role.

"We're hearing a lot of buzz about potential programs and funding from the Biden administration," he said. "I hope our state government will be open to accepting these opportunities."

### Environmental benefits

Lisek said clean energy can lead to improved air quality.

"The reality is if it doesn't make good financial sense, no one is going to invest

in it," Lisek said. "What we're seeing now, however, is every major corporation in the U.S. is announcing its decarbonization plan, (and) that's not an accident, and it isn't because it's trendy or popular or solely because it's the right thing to do from an environmental standpoint."

He said businesses recognize clean energy can save money over time and offer excellent return on their investments.

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Wind turbines are becoming a more popular sight in northern Indiana as the shift to clean energy grows. Wind-generated energy accounts for 6,449 jobs in Indiana, according to Clean Jobs Midwest.

Photo by Doug Ross

## Preparing for the future

**A**t Valparaiso University, a new environmental engineering major was started two years ago.

“I believe we are unique” in Northwest Indiana, said Zuhdi Aljobeh, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering.

“Engineers design systems,” he said, and that will include clean-energy systems.

Students are required to take a thermodynamics course that includes information on environmental sustainability, fluidic energy, how to design different elements of wind turbines and more. They will learn about solar energy, too.

VU’s engineering department is doing extensive research on solar chemistry as well.

“Solar chemistry is a little bit different from what most people think of when they think of solar energy,” said Luke Venstrom, associate professor of mechanical engineering. Students and faculty are looking at processes that take water and sunlight, splitting the water — H<sub>2</sub>O — into hydrogen and oxygen.

“There’s a lot of interest right now in using hydrogen for a long-term storage medium. Kind of the holy grail for us is to take the hydrogen and mix it with carbon monoxide.”

The process dates to 1940s Germany, which developed it in response to repeated Allied attacks on refineries, Venstrom said. German scientists were turning coal into liquid fuel. Venstrom hopes to use a similar process to fuel renewable energy.

VU’s solar furnace uses an array of convex hexagonal mirrors to focus solar light into a high-powered focused beam.

The undergraduate students’ research over the past few years is paying off.

“We’ve developed what we call a rotary drum system,” Venstrom said. Think of it as a cement truck on steroids, with about 40 revolutions per minute. A falling stream of particles of sand inside the reactor creates a kind of cloud that allows efficient absorption of sunlight. VU has demonstrated the highest efficiency anyone has ever attempted, he said.

Ten percent conversion of sunlight into chemical form is what researchers

shoot for, Venstrom said. VU has achieved 20%, “which is quite high.”

The problem lies in scaling up the process to see if it would be a commercial success. Cobalt oxide has all the right properties but is not good for the environment. Iron oxide — rust — “is not environmentally dangerous at all” but might be useful even though less effective than cobalt oxide.

Creating models that scale up techniques to see whether they would be commercially viable is an area where Purdue University’s Center for Innovation through Visualization and Simulation excels.

Chenn Zhou, NIPSCO Distinguished Professor of Engineering Simulation and director of the facility, said the center has been working on wind energy, creating a program to train the workforce involved in setting up and maintaining wind turbines.

The program includes creating many simulations so community college students can look at “what if” scenarios for strategic troubleshooting and maintenance.

“A lot of people want to use that now,” Zhou said.

Since 2016, the center has been part of a nationwide consortium aimed at making the steel industry more efficient and more competitive. Research includes areas like applied energy savings and cleaner emissions. New fuel injection technology is among the areas being researched.

Additional work includes energy research, with a large federal grant. Clean energy is a high priority for the federal government.

Lisek said renewable energy and fuel sources also are domestic fuel sources, which means they support U.S. jobs and reduce dependence on imported oil.

“That becomes important not only for supporting our economy but also for energy resiliency in times of crisis, like natural disaster,” he said. “There have been countless studies and white papers written about the important role of alternative fuels in helping save lives during evacuations for East Coast hurricanes when petroleum sources were scarce.” ■

“We’re hearing a lot of buzz about potential programs and funding from the Biden administration. I hope our state government will be open to accepting these opportunities.”

— Zach Schalk  
Indiana program director  
Solar United Neighbors



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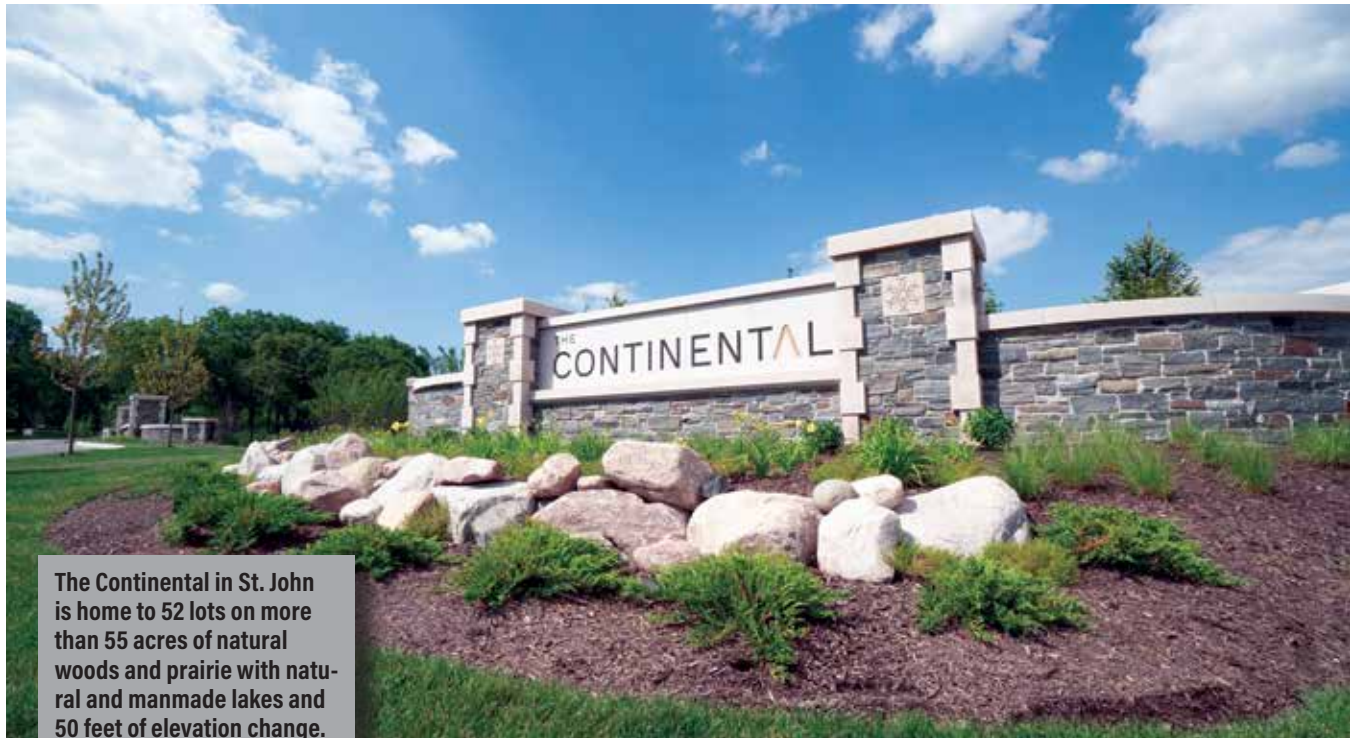


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# Bright future for home sales

Experts say Region's affordability, quality of life keep residential real estate strong



The Continental in St. John is home to 52 lots on more than 55 acres of natural woods and prairie with natural and manmade lakes and 50 feet of elevation change.

Photo provided by Schilling Development

## HANNA REED

The future of Region home sales is incredibly optimistic, according to the experts.

The number of homes purchased in Northwest Indiana increased last year, data shows.

Bryan Traylor, senior vice president of residential lending at Merrillville-based Centier Bank, said there is a growing trend of people moving out of urban settings and into smaller communities for better quality of life. That trend is especially true as many companies learned during the pandemic that workers can be as productive at home as in an office.

"We've seen a huge uptick in the last couple years of people coming from Illinois and moving to Indiana," Traylor said. "Especially in 2020, when people started realizing that, 'Hey, my job might be in Chicago, but I really don't need to be

there every day. I can work remotely, so I can cross that border into Indiana and have a little bit lower cost of living and definitely more affordable housing and have a better overall work-life balance."

The Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors, citing data from the Indiana Association of Realtors, reported there were 11,672 closed sales of existing homes in its service area, which includes Jasper, Lake, La Porte,

the Realtor's group reported. In 2020, sellers received 96.7% of list price, up 1% when compared to 2019.

Peter Novak, the CEO of the Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors, said there are numerous reasons home sales increased toward the end of 2020.

"We already know homebuyers are coming from Illinois to Indiana, and absolutely, Chicago has everything to do

**↑ 9.3%** The year-to-date median sales price for the Region in December was \$193,000, up from \$176,500 a year earlier.

Newton, Porter, Pulaski and Starke counties in 2020, a 10% increase from 10,608 closed sales in 2019.

The year-to-date median sales price for the Region in December was \$193,000, up 9.3% from \$176,500 a year earlier,

with that," Novak said. "Even before the commuter rail, we have a ton of people who live in Northwest Indiana who are commuting back not only to downtown Chicago but to other parts of Illinois as well for jobs."



Brian Gill, senior vice president and chief retail lending officer at Munster-based Peoples Bank, said communities in the area have always been a draw for prospective buyers.

“Lower taxes have always been (a) nice selling point for the Region,” Gill said in an email. “It is a big-ticket item that is easily marketed to our neighbors to the west, (and) the communities that make up the Region have done a real nice job in developing quality-of-life amenities that will help sustain strong home sales over the next few years.”

Gill said lifestyle centers, walking trails, athletic facilities, youth organizations and many other amenities attract perspective buyers to communities in Northwest Indiana.

### Rail expansion

As the number of people buying homes grows, passenger rail improvements might spark even more demand.

The West Lake Corridor project, which includes a 9-mile rail extension beginning in Hammond, passing through Munster and ending in Dyer, already has lured new development to the Region.

“We are part of the National Association of Realtors, and they’ve done some studies on transit-oriented development, and the findings, at least the way I understand them, there does show a correlation to transit-oriented development and an increase in home values,” Novak said. “So, I think that’s something we certainly view as a positive.”

Region transportation leaders have said the West Lake project and the South Shore Line double-track project, which calls for adding a second rail line and other improvements to an existing service between Gary and Michigan City, could attract up to \$2.3 billion in private investment to Northwest Indiana and bring 6,000 new jobs and \$3 billion in economic impact by 2048.

Northwest Indiana has seen positive appreciation for homeowners the last few years, too, Traylor said, noting that, as the demand for homes increases, so do the prices and the number of homes being built.

“The biggest issue that people are going to have is that, as soon as a home is listed, it sells,” Traylor said. “If it’s

reasonably priced, or even a little above market, it sells quickly because there’s just such a lack of inventory right now.

“Not only are you going to see increased prices and increased demand continue, but you’re also going to see a lot more homes being built just to satisfy that demand.”

Jamie Sulcer, immediate past president of the NWI Home Builders Association and Chicago Title sales

new realm for the builders, for them to find lots that they can build on, have spec homes that they’re selling even before completion, and new developers coming in and putting up hundreds of homes a year,” Sulcer said.

People come into Northwest Indiana from a plethora of locations, not just Illinois, Sulcer said. Business owners

### WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING



**“The biggest issue that people are going to have is that, as soon as a home is listed, it sells. If it’s reasonably priced, or even a little above market, it sells quickly because there’s just such a lack of inventory right now.”**

— Bryan Traylor, senior vice president of residential lending, Merrillville-based Centier Bank



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— Brian Gill, senior vice president and chief retail lending officer, Munster-based Peoples Bank



**“Since we do have that lack of inventory, it really has opened up a whole new realm for the builders, for them to find lots that they can build on, have spec homes that they’re selling even before completion.”**

— Jamie Sulcer, immediate past president of the NWI Home Builders Association and Chicago Title sales manager

manager, said houses are going on the market and being swept up immediately.

As homes sell quickly, Sulcer said the area is looking at an influx of jobs, such as builders and developers, to create more homes.

“Since we do have that lack of inventory, it really has opened up a whole

often move to the area because the Region is a central location near highways, and because the area and the tax rates are business friendly.

“We have great opportunities, because we do still have available land that’s affordable,” Sulcer said. “We’re fortunate because housing has been strong,

## RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE

and housing prices have (gone) up, so when they're selling, they're getting top dollar, but of course, when they're buying, they're paying top dollar."

Additionally, many people looking to get away from urban areas have moved or plan to move to the Northwest Indiana area to decrease their property taxes, even if they continue working in the city, he said.

With current train stations in the area and improvements to Region rail service underway, Traylor said it is becoming easier for people to get to where they need to go.

"It's only making things more and more accessible," Traylor said. "I think that's definitely a contributing factor, (and) it's just so much easier to get to and from downtown Chicago now than ever, and the fact that people aren't having to go every day."

Novak, too, said the enhanced rail development in the Region has "absolutely" contributed to the rising home sales across the area. Novak said, as commuting to Chicago becomes easier,

the Region can expect an influx of people purchasing residential homes in the area, a number that already has been climbing for the past few years.

Novak said additional developments around the rail developments, including walkable areas and diversity of housing offered in the Region, also can increase home sales.

"We've always been supportive of that type of development in Northwest Indiana," Novak said. "It's tying us to Chicago; it's tying us to obviously a world-class business economy, and it's jobs for us, as well."

As many people still commute to Chicago and other areas away from Northwest Indiana, Novak said additional access to getting around will only continue to benefit the community.

"Of course, from our perspective, we want to capitalize on that as best as possible, and this is one opportunity to do that," he said.

"Obviously, the train getting people to Chicago, that's going to be first and foremost, greater access to jobs, but

purely from just a residential home sales standpoint, our hope is that we'll start to see these types of developments occur in opportune places along the rail line that I would imagine absolutely they would appeal to home buyers out of Illinois."

### New construction boom

Jack Slager, development manager at Schilling Development in St. John, also has seen a steady rise in home sales in the Region, even before the announcement of the rail development in the Dyer and St. John area.

"It's continuing, and it will continue to increase," Slager said.

"I think people are catching onto that, and it's just an added bonus for somebody who is looking to get out of Chicago."

He said Schilling Development had not marketed the rail line previously, mostly because they were unsure if the plans were concrete, but now that the project has moved forward, they have begun to use it as a selling point with potential buyers.

Slager said in recent months, prospective home buyers have been contacting his company, asking about proximity of Schilling residential projects to future new Region train stations.

"We are starting to use it as a marketing tool, where realistically, our St. John developments are 15 minutes from a potential train station," he said.

St. John would be positioned well for a potential new development, he said, but that's not the only reason home sales have increased.

In fact, the steady incline began before the rail project started getting more traction in the news, he said.

"A majority of our developments are in St. John along the state line," Slager said. "So, we started to see an increase of Illinois interest and Illinois buyers last year already."

As the years go on, Traylor said Northwest Indiana can expect to continue seeing an upward trend in home buying in the area.

"There truly is a huge demand for homes right now," Traylor said. "The future for Indiana, Northern Indiana home sales is very bright." ■

## Gratitude Changes Everything

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# Lifetime of influence



## Retirement from corporate life means more time for community, family

PHILIP POTEPPA

**H**arnessing new energy opportunities and aligning new business partnerships, both for the benefit of Northwest Indiana, are the creative catalysts Don Babcock says define his 43-year career at NIPSCO.

“I’ve shifted my direction a few times over the course of my work,” said Babcock, 66, who started at NIPSCO as a mechanical engineer in 1977 and retired in early 2021 as director of economic development.

“My last 20 years in my economic development role provided the most challenges and rewards, because I was part of a larger statewide effort bringing businesses to our communities for the benefit of so many,” he said.

Representing the Merrillville-based utility, Babcock said his two decades as director of economic development teamed him with three Indiana governors and state officials to travel the U.S. as well as internationally to encourage overseas businesses to open locations in Northwest Indiana.

In February, Babcock, received the state’s highest civilian honor, the Sagamore of the Wabash award, which was presented to him by former Indiana Secretary of Commerce Jim Schellinger at a ceremony in Indianapolis on behalf of Gov. Eric Holcomb during an Indiana Economic Development Corp. board meeting. Schellinger presented the award to Babcock prior to stepping down March 3.

“Very few people exemplify the true meaning of the word ‘leadership’ more than Don Babcock,” Schellinger said. “I don’t take Don’s service to the state of Indiana for granted, (because) the impact he’s had on the lives of Hoosiers will be felt for generations to come.”

In addition to working with Holcomb, Babcock also worked closely with previous Indiana governors Mitch Daniels and Mike Pence.

Babcock said that, while at NIPSCO, he witnessed the evolution of the energy industry over four decades.

“When I started with NIPSCO, it was because I was interested in all of the future possibilities for sources of energy,” Babcock said. “I was especially interested in what was the new horizon of nuclear power. But Jane Fonda and Three Mile Island changed all of that and opened up a new direction in this field.”

As director of economic development, Babcock assisted businesses considering locations in Northwest Indiana with natural gas and electric rate incentives. His alliance with state officials and Indiana’s Triple-A credit rating made promoting an Indiana address “an easy sell.”

Hoist Liftruck Manufacturing Inc. in East Chicago, Pratt Industries in Valparaiso, MonoSol’s Duneland facility in Portage, and Marbach Engineering & Surveying in Michigan City are just some of the new businesses Babcock says he is proud to have helped bring to Northwest Indiana.

Babcock said his work on the managing board of directors of the Northwest Indiana Forum, the seven-county regional economic development organization, and serving as chair of the forum’s Ignite the Region initiative, Northwest Indiana’s strategy for economic transformation, were important communication tools for his success.

“Our strategies and achievements, including during my three years serving as chair, led to many firsts for our organization and meeting our mission of the Northwest Indiana Forum,” Babcock said. “Ignite the Region was the first economic development plan with a broad support by the entire Northwest Indiana Region.”

While retired from corporate life, Babcock plans to continue his

commitment with the Northwest Indiana Forum and Ignite the Region.

“Don Babcock is an amazing asset to Northwest Indiana,” said Heather Ennis, president and CEO of the Northwest Indiana Forum. “He spent his 40 years at NIPSCO finding good people and helping them to move the Region and the state forward.”



**Gov. Eric Holcomb, left, poses with Don Babcock recipient of the Sagamore of the Wabash award, Indiana’s highest civilian honor.**

Photo provided by the NWI Forum

Ennis said Babcock is recognized for his work and contributions to economic development efforts in Northwest Indiana but also has been a mentor to many economic development professionals.

Babcock, who lives in Michigan City with his wife, Sue, a retired teacher, said he also is proud of his work with the Michigan City Redevelopment Commission and the Boys & Girls Club of Michigan City.

“I don’t know how much I will slow down during my retirement, because I still plan to be involved with our communities throughout Northwest Indiana,” Babcock said. “But I know I’ll enjoy more time with my wife and family, including my daughter Julie, and also my son Ryan, who just gave us all the joy with a new grandson.” ■

# Furniture made to last



Chesterton's Circles in the Wind serves as outlet for Indiana Amish hand-built creations



Photos by Doug Ross

Circles in the Wind sells heirloom-quality furniture built to the customer's specifications. A desk drawer with inch-thick sides shows the quality of the northern Indiana Amish craftsmanship offered at the downtown Chesterton store.



## DOUG ROSS

Going from the electronics business to working with Amish craftsmen is quite a switch, but it has worked out well for Steve Beigle, who owns Circles in the Wind.

The furniture store sells made-to-order furniture produced by Amish carpenters in northern Indiana.

Beigle said he was the Midwest sales and marketing director for a Fortune 500 company and needed to jump off the fast lane.

In 2016, his file cabinet fell apart, so he sought a replacement. He found what he was looking for and more.

"Let's buy the store," his wife said.

On Jan. 3, 2017, he opened Circles in the Wind at 206D Calumet Road, Chesterton, to sell furniture that is expected to last for generations.

When customers walk into the store, they're greeted by a dog wagging its tail as well as a human's friendly "hello." Beigle said he won't pressure shoppers; he just answers any questions they might have.

"We don't sell anybody anything," he said. "We help them find pieces that make their house what they want it to be."

The store ships furniture around the U.S.

"Our business grew 40% last year because of COVID-19," Beigle said. "Dining room tables and chairs are selling like hotcakes."

People who are CHOOSING not to venture out want a nice home to stay in, he said.

"We have so many people working from home now," of course, so sturdy, efficient desks and comfortable chairs are in demand, he said.

Beigle recently talked about Amish craftsmanship with a customer. He pulled out a desk drawer, described how it was balanced well and easily glided in and out and pointed to the sides of the drawer, noting they were an inch thick.

At Circles in the Wind, customers choose their favorite style or design, the type of wood they want and a custom stain for their furniture. The furniture is generally ready in six to eight weeks.

Heirloom-quality furniture made especially for a customer can take longer.

Reaching the Amish shop can take time, too.

“Sometimes it takes me three or four days to get ahold of them,” Beigle said.

He picks up orders himself, chatting with his suppliers and often being invited to stay for supper.

LaVern Beechy, of L.A.M.B. Woodworking in Shipshewana, describes Beigle as a good customer. “He’s good to deal with.”

“He does whatever it takes to please the customer,” Beechy said.

Beechy’s shop specializes in office furniture and occasional tables.

“We use all hardwood, solid wood, except maybe a back panel on a bookcase,” Beechy said. “It’s done by hand. We pay attention to detail.”

It is furniture that will be around for the next generation, he said.

Circles in the Wind customer Sandy Oseguera of Portage knows that to be true.

“My daughter’s already put in dibs on (a) chair (I bought from the store),” she said.

But Oseguera is in no hurry to part with it.

“It’s my favorite chair. I sit in it probably five, six hours a day,” she said.

Her introduction to Circles in the Wind began when she and her husband were doing extensive remodeling.

“We totally remodeled our house in Crown Point, and we were looking for a specific table and chairs,” she said.



**“We don’t sell anybody anything. We help them find pieces that make their house what they want it to be.”**

— Steve Beigle  
Owner  
Circles in the Wind

After visiting several stores, she was frustrated. “Then I thought I could just have one custom made.”

She saw a roadside ad on Indiana State Road 49 for Circles in the Wind.

“Just for grins and giggles, we went over there, walked in, and bought a table and five chairs.”

It was a perfect fit for their remodeled kitchen.

When Oseguera and her husband moved to Portage, a desk was broken in the process. Circles in the Wind and one of its Amish craftsmen solved that problem.

Some stores sell furniture that is covered with laminate or low-quality veneer, she said. That is not the case at Circles in the Wind.

“You have to wait for custom-made furniture, but so be it,” she said. “It’s well worth the wait.” ■

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# Strategic new beginning



## Bill Hanna ready to help community as leader of White Family Foundation

PHILIP POTEPPA

**B**ill Hanna's decade as president and CEO for the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority included both strategy and investment to provide what he describes as "a brighter future for connecting communities."

second term," Hanna said. He cites the East Gate Plaza and former County Seat Plaza projects in Valparaiso as two lasting landscape impressions during his time on the Valparaiso mayor's team.

"I like the process of strategic planning and preparing for the future."

Hanna resigned from the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority with his final day Feb. 12 to accept his new post, which started Feb. 15, as executive director of the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation in Merrillville.

"Bill is a catalyst for progress and good things," said Mike Banas, director of communications and corporate affairs for White Lodging. "On behalf of the Dean and Barbara White Foundation, we're glad to have him in this role."

Established as a private foundation in 1998, the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation has more than \$20 million in assets. It has helped many organizations with contributions to community projects around Northwest Indiana, including the renovation and refurbishing of the Lake County Courthouse in Crown Point. During the past two decades, grants and capital campaign contributions to other organizations have included \$2,375,000 to the Crown Point Youth Sports Commission, \$250,000 to the Culver Educational Foundation and \$250,000 to Crossroads YMCA for an expansion project.

Entrepreneur, billboard and hotel visionary Dean White died in 2016 at age 93, and wife Barbara died in 2018 at age 92. The couple's philanthropic legacy continues with their four children and the White Family Foundation.

"I've known Bruce White and his wife, Beth, for some time with the rest (of the) White Family, and like Dean and Barbara, they continue to be living examples of the importance of dedication to Northwest Indiana communities and organizations, doing what

they do with a passion to help others," Hanna said.

"I was honored to be asked if I'd be interested in this new position, and I'm excited to begin the new assignment," Hanna said. "For many years, there'd be occasions I'd be at the Radisson Hotel in Merrillville for a function, and I'd see Dean at the restaurant of the hotel having his breakfast, and I'd stop by his table to say 'hello' and talk with him."

Hanna explained the Dean and Barbara White Foundation has been guided by a board, which includes Dean and Barbara's sons Bruce and Craig.

"My strength and knowledge in strategic planning and looking to how to best benefit for planning for the future is where I see myself to help guide the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation," Hanna said. "I share the same passion as everyone on this team."

Hanna is pleased with his accomplishments during his 11 years with the RDA and learned from teamwork with the seven board members, including chair Don Fesko, who he described as "a guiding force." Fesko is president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Northwest Indiana Inc.

Hanna said the federal funding for the South Shore double-track project as it advanced with the RDA's influence allows Northwest Indiana to benefit because of its proximity to Chicago.

"Success comes from partnerships with local, state and federal officials, and during my time with the RDA, we saw more than \$1 billion in shoreline development projects, including Wolf Lake (Memorial) Park in Hammond, the East Chicago North Harbor redevelopment as shoreline, Whiting Lakefront Park, Marquette Park in Gary and Gateway to the Indiana Dunes in Porter County," Hanna said. "Now, it's time for someone else to continue this rebirth of the RDA with the continued strength of strategic planning for the benefit of communities and the economy." ■



**Bill Hanna began his new post Feb. 15 as executive director of the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation.**

Photo provided by White Lodging

"I had a total of 11 years with the RDA, and prior, I was city manager for the city of Valparaiso with Mayor [Jon] Costas for his full first term and part of his

# The foundations of charity



Nonprofits say they rely on unsung support from those organizations that offer financial backing

CATHERINE MCCOY

**M**ore often than not, community members view the good work performed by nonprofit organizations and rightfully applaud their commitment to improving lives day in and day out.

Yet still, there is an army of unsung contributors working behind the curtain. Without funding and active volunteers, many nonprofits could not support the level of need around the state and Region, nonprofit executives say. And because of the support of foundations, like the John W. Anderson Foundation in Valparaiso, organizations can fulfill their missions to meet community needs.

During the past 50 years, the foundation's trustees remained true to Anderson's vision while supporting more than 245 charitable organizations annually, said John Diederich, a trustee with the foundation. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Northwest Indiana, Meals on Wheels of Northwest Indiana and St. Jude House are among the Region-based groups that have received the foundation's support through the years.

"Since 1954, we have grown into what we are today," said Ryan Smiley, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs

of Greater Northwest Indiana. He said his club, originally launched as the Boys & Girls Club in Gary, was named after John W. Anderson.

Anderson was the reason the club was started, and thus began the Boys & Girls Club history in Northwest Indiana, Smiley said.

The John W. Anderson Foundation formed on Sept. 18, 1967, shortly before his death, according to historical information from the organization. Anderson, an industrialist who specialized in producing automotive parts and accessories, developed the replacement windshield wiper blade, specifically the ANCO line, which is now owned by the First Brands Group.

Anderson, who patented more than 100 inventions, launched Anderson Co. in South Bend in 1918 but later relocated his business to Gary. He was a noted philanthropist who advocated for improving communities with an emphasis on youth initiatives.

The Anderson Foundation has been one of the longest supporters of St. Jude House in Crown Point since it opened in 1995.

St. Jude House, a shelter for women and children, addresses the public health emergency that is domestic

violence, and serves as a resource for the prevention, education and awareness of domestic violence. St. Jude House provides services to those whose lives have been touched by abuse of any kind.

Buffy Adams, St. Jude House director of development, said the Anderson Foundation not only helps "keep the doors open, but they also help keep the doors in working order or help replace the door when necessary."

Meals on Wheels of Northwest Indiana uses foundation support to grow strategically as well as run its services.

During Meals on Wheels of Northwest Indiana's first day of service, it served three meals. However, because of support from the Anderson Foundation and other contributors through the years, the organization will reach 9 million meals served in 2021.

"Our vision for Meals on Wheels is to continue to ensure that no one who needs a meal delivered to their door, goes without, regardless of their need," said Sandra Noe, the organization's executive director. "Support from grants help(s) us to make that happen, (and) it allows us the funding to expand services to other regions in Northwest Indiana and to impact more individuals." ■



Renovations to the St. Jude House's family TV room were made possible by the John W. Anderson Foundation.



Photos provided by St. Jude House

# Tips for meeting virtually



Pandemic forces organizations to learn new ways to successfully gather online

RAEANN TRAKAS

**W**hen COVID turned the world upside down in March 2020 and in-person meetings became impossible, the Northwest Indiana Forum successfully pivoted to virtual networking to keep our businesses informed on important issues.

In a normal year, the forum hosts about 20 in-person events to encourage regional partnerships through networking and to educate an array of

legislative or business topics to help the Region's economy flourish. Since health concerns made it impossible to meet, we sought other methods to keep our membership engaged. Zoom became our new platform and friend. To date, the Forum has presented 30 virtual meetings, one hybrid (in-person/virtual) event and five economic

development site selector conferences reaching well over 2,000 participants.

Although I can't officially claim Zoom master status, I want to share some best practices, which may make your virtual meetings run smoother or perhaps ease your trepidation on hosting your sessions. There are different platforms to use: Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and GoToMeeting, and while these tips will reference Zoom, they are universal across all platforms.

## Know your audience

**R**egistration is an important part of planning any event, even virtual programs. The Forum's Zoom pricing package has a 100-person limit, which

gave us restrictions on a few meetings. If your meeting exceeds 100 attendees, it is recommended to move to the webinar format instead of the meeting format.

An old dog can learn new tricks. Even after hosting well over 30 virtual meetings, we partnered with the Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors on a webinar with more than 300 attendees. Sara Perazzolo, director of marketing for GNIAR, enlightened me on the "register" feature in the Zoom meeting setup. By activating this feature, the host can create a registration page with company/event branding graphics to promote the event. Once the guest has input their information, this feature will automatically send an email confirmation with Zoom link and code to the participant.

## Host a practice session

**S**chedule a practice session with all participants. Walk through the agenda, allow presenters to test the screen-sharing component and test run any videos that will be aired. Due to lack of travel, many of the economic development meetings moved to virtual. Serving as Zoom master for a few conferences, I was able to move site selectors through eight breakout rooms with each room featuring two or more economic development professionals. Pre-conference practice sessions were vital to a successful conference. Much was learned in practice, especially with videos, if the speaker is muted then the video is muted. It is better to learn this in practice versus in a live setting.

Breakout rooms are a great tool to encourage small group discussions and private conversations within a larger

virtual meeting. This feature is easy to set up within Zoom by checking a box and designating the number of breakout rooms needed. An important tip, the person hosting the meeting should not be responsible for moving participants throughout the breakout rooms. Designate a person for this task to ensure smooth room transitions and flow of the overall meeting.

Screen sharing: have materials ready to be easily accessible and shared.

Attendees do not want to wait and watch a search for documents.

## You're on mute!

**T**hat's the catch phrase of 2020. At the start of Zoom meetings, the feature to mute all lines upon entry was used, but in time, our secret sauce became to open the Zoom meeting five minutes before start time. This allows attendees to greet each other, have some fun banter and for the host to provide updates on future meetings or events.

## Keep it brief

**O**ne-hour meeting times seem to have the best success. Start on time, keep the agenda flowing and allow for a question-and-answer period. Be prepared with backup questions if attendees are not talkative. If conversation is flowing, continue the meeting or discuss scheduling a follow-up meeting.

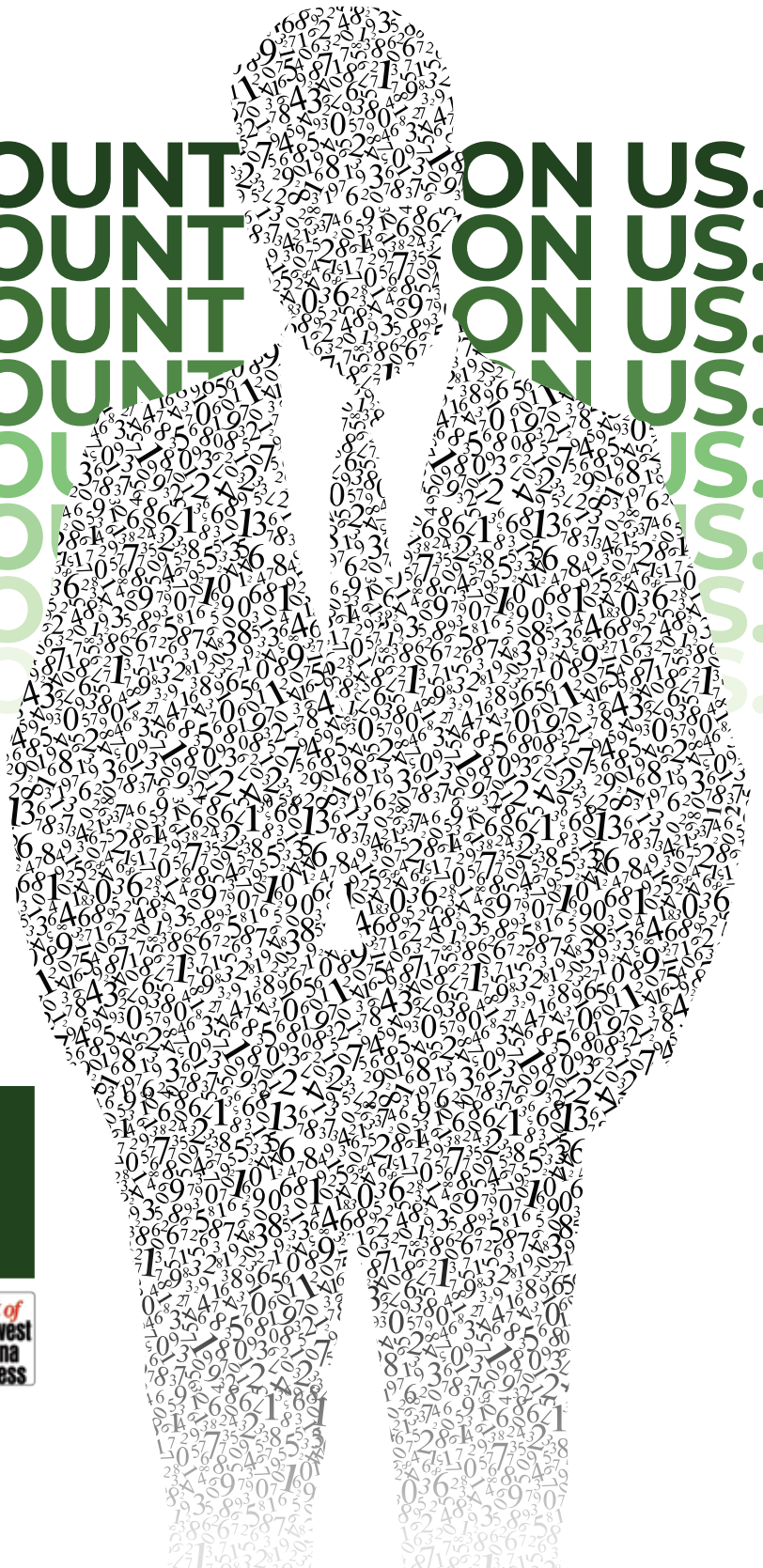
I look forward to the days when we can come together again at our favorite Region establishments and discuss business in a more personal atmosphere, but until those days return, virtual platforms are here to stay. Relax, be prepared, and remember to unmute your line. ■

**“In time, our secret sauce became to open the Zoom meeting five minutes before start time. This allows attendees to greet each other, have some fun banter.”**



► **Raeann Trakas** is the director of marketing and membership with the Northwest Indiana Forum.

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