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in Northern Indiana**

Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

JUN-JUL 2018

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Growth isn't by Chance



Troy Linker

Growth requires planning, collaboration, inspiration and teamwork

"Growth is never by mere chance; it is the result of forces working together" —James Cash "JC" Penney

Growth in its many forms, including business growth, economic growth, and personal growth, is a recurring theme in this issue. I hope you enjoy and find inspiration from our stories in this issue, which shares various ways folks are working together to grow themselves, their companies, and their communities in Northwest Indiana.

Growing Sportsactions or tournacations are a boost to our local tourism economy. During these trips visiting families spend upwards of \$250 per night in our local economy while attending travel sports events. Jerry Davich talks with local leaders about our region's current successes and plans for growing our capacities and reputation as a sports destination.

Lesley Baily interviews several growing businesses and shares with us some of their keys to growth. Each business' focus is different, but share many common traits that any business can implement. Some of these include creating a unique brand and marketing strategy, serving your customer's needs, positioning your business to grow with the local economy, offering an innovative product or service, and building a healthy relationship with your financial institution, so they are on board when you need capital to fund your growth.

Power outage, equipment failure, disgruntled employee, and natural disaster top the list of possible business disruptions, and the list goes on and on. However, your business might not,

unless you have a plan to deal with an unlikely, but not unpredictable disruption to your business. Bob Moulesong shares tips, from local business owners and IT professionals, about creating or updating your disaster recovery and business continuity plan.

Much has already been said about the shortage of qualified workers in our region and around the country. Somewhere along the line, the admirable goal of education for all morphed into the well-meaning but misguided goal of college for all, decimating trades education in high school. Carrie Steinweg talks with local industry professionals who are helping to reverse this trend by leaving their higher paying industry jobs to teach in our region's high school career and technical education programs.

Also in this issue, Jerry Davich introduces us to the Tylka family, who through hard work and family dedication, grew a one-location auto body shop into a six-location, regional chain. In this issue's Making a Difference, Lauren Caggiano profiles the Hire a slicer program, whose mission is to strengthen the connections between recent high school grads and the local business community. In sports, Lourdes Castellanos tells us the story of Whiting's innovative Lake Michigan floating sports water park WhoaZone at Whilala Beach, which exceeded last year's expectations and is growing even bigger this year. Finally, in Viewpoint, George Douglas, senior vice president of Indiana Beverage, shares with us how many local groups are working together to create a regional economic development plan to guide our region as we adapt and grow in an ever-changing economic environment.—Troy Linker

Around the Region

Stay current with local people, news and events

LOURDES CASTELLANOS

BANKING

Trish Reid has been promoted to vice president of Business Banking Administration of **Centier Bank**. Reid has worked in local banking for more than 40 years, spending the last 15 with Centier Bank. **LaKetra Williams** has been named branch manager and officer of Centier's Gary Miller Location. Williams holds a degree from Indiana Wesleyan University and has 15 years banking experience. **Crystal Bynum** has been appointed assistant branch manager of Centier's Strack & Van Til's in-store branch in Merrillville. **Melissa Ewbank** has been named assistant branch manager of Centier's Lowell Branch. Ewbank holds a bachelor's degree in business administration with a focus in finance from St. Joseph's College. Additionally, she is a National Mortgage Lending Service member and a public notary.

BUSINESS

Andrew Robarge has been promoted to office manager of **Commonwealth Engineers Inc.**'s new Crown Point regional branch. Robarge graduated from Tri-State University with a bachelor of science in civil engineering and a minor in

environmental engineering and has spent his career with Commonwealth. Throughout his more than 10 years of consulting experience through project management, Robarge has mastered skills in planning, hydraulic modeling, design, bidding and construction engineering for water and wastewater collection, distribution, storage, and treatment projects throughout Indiana.

Don Babcock, economic development director at **NIPSCO**, has been honored with the 2018 Diolkos Award at the 8th Annual Rail Supply Chain Summit in Chicago. The Rail Summit's Diolkos Award recognizes an individual whose outstanding leadership and vision have highlighted the importance of rail's impact on our economy. The annual summit was held at the Union League Club on May 16th. This daylong conference provided attendees information about prospects and intermodal opportunities in the railroad industry in Northwest Indiana and the Greater Chicago Area.

Dan Forster, a longtime cobbler in downtown Highland, closed shop after more than 60 years of repairing shoes, boots, pumps, purses, luggage, belts and leather jackets. With no one to take over his trade, **The Cobbler Shop** closed in April. Forster's father opened the original cobbler shop from

the front of their house on Highway Avenue before building the storefronts that are there today. After learning the trade from his father, Dan went on to open his own shop out of the Strack and Van Til in Griffith while Dan moved into his father's shop in downtown Highland and also operated Thrifty Kleen Dry Cleaners.

CONSTRUCTION

Tom Hargrove, who served as president of the **United Steelworkers Local 1010**, is retiring after 20 years. USW Local 1010 is one of the oldest and largest union chapters in Northwest Indiana. Members, at ArcelorMittal Indiana Harbor East in East Chicago, elected **Steve Wagner** as their new union president. The union local, which operates out of a hall in Hammond's Hessville neighborhood, also elected **Don Seifert** as vice president, **Don Jones** as recording secretary, **Rosa Maria Rodriguez** as financial secretary, **Max Carrasquillo** as treasurer, **Jayson Culp** as guide, **Jim Gogolak** as inner guard, **Eddie Harvey** as outer guard, **Darrell Reed** as chairperson of the grievance committee, **Matthew Beckman** as vice chairman of the grievance committee and **James Thomas** as assistant grievance committee person. **Ernie Barrientz**, **Luis Aguilar** and



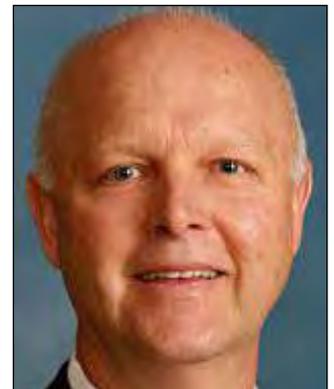
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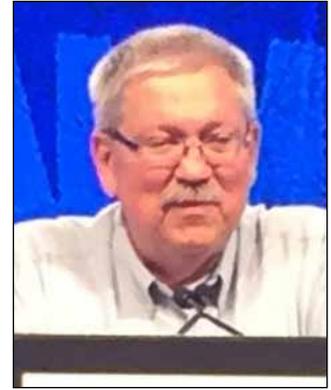
BANKING
Trish Reid



BUSINESS
Andrew Robarge



BUSINESS
Don Babcock



BUSINESS
Tom Hargrove

Otis Cochran III were elected as trustees. Union positions are a three-year term.

EDUCATION

Valparaiso University has appointed **Susan VanZanten** dean of Christ College, The Honors College, effective July 1. VanZanten will be the first female dean during its 50 years as an honors college. She served as a professor of English most recently at Seattle Pacific University since 1993. She holds a doctor of philosophy and master of arts from Emory University and a bachelor of arts from Westmont College.

John Pluckebaum and his son, **Bryce**, honored their wife and mother **Joanne** during **Purdue University Northwest's Day of Giving**. Joanne, who passed last November, taught for more than 15 years at PNW. She had a passion for teaching, was beloved by students, and was awarded teacher of the year. During PNW's annual Day of Giving celebration, John and Bryce honored Joanne by offering a generous gift of support in her name to PNW's White Lodging School of Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) where she taught food and nutrition courses. Michael Flannery, head of the White Lodging School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, says "[The gift] is a wonderful way to honor Joanne. She was a very student-centered faculty member and her students loved her." He adds that the Pluckebaums' gift will assist students wanting to study abroad, as well as those working to combine their HTM degree with an MBA. "We are also

planning on creating a special space for students dedicated in Joanne's honor," he says.

Purdue University Northwest (PNW) is pleased to announce the appointment of **George F. Kacenga**, Ph.D. as its first executive director of Global Engagement effective July 1.

"After a nationwide search among a field of strong candidates, we are excited to have Dr. Kacenga, with his background and expertise, leading our strategic efforts to extend Purdue Northwest's global programs and initiatives," says PNW Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost Ralph O. Mueller. Kacenga most recently served as director of International Enrollment Management in the Office of International Affairs (OIA) at the University of Colorado Denver. During his tenure, he impacted the international student experience from student recruitment through alumni engagement. "I am truly honored to be joining Purdue University Northwest as its first executive director of Global Engagement," says Kacenga. "I look forward to working with the administration, faculty, staff and students to champion the value of international higher education within the university community, and beyond."

GOVERNMENT

Clarend Hulse, executive director of the **Economic Development Corp. of Michigan City** has been elected by the Nominating Committee of the International Economic Development Council to its board of directors. During a two-year term, his main role will be to implement the Economic

Development Action Initiative developed by community stakeholders, engaged by Crowe Horwath LLP. Hulse played a major role in creating 3,500 new jobs and \$300 million in capital investment during his tenure as director of economic development in Jeffersonville. He improved the city's neighborhoods and received recognition by the Indiana Planning Association, winning the 2011 Outstanding Community Initiative Award for creating the Neighborhood Leadership Institute.

HEALTHCARE

Barbara Anderson, of Schererville, Indiana, has been promoted from president and CEO of **Franciscan Health Crown Point**, to the corporate position of senior vice president, operational transformation. Anderson will lead a group of Franciscan management team members to transform the way care is delivered, develop ways to reduce costs, and establish sustainable methods to monitor and control costs in the future. Anderson began her Franciscan career on the accounting staff at St. Margaret Hospital in Hammond and has held numerous management and leadership positions. She became executive vice president and chief operating officer at St. Margaret campuses in Hammond and Dyer in 2004, and then accepted the president's position at Franciscan Health Munster, where she served in that role for eight years before transferring to Crown Point, as president/CEO in July 2015.

Dr. Daniel McCormick, of Frankfort, Ill, has been promoted



EDUCATION
George Kacenga

from hospital vice president of medical affairs to president and CEO. Dr. McCormick received a bachelor of science degree in molecular biology from the University of Wisconsin, a doctor of medicine degree from the University of Illinois, and completed an internal medicine residency fellowship (chief resident) at the University of Minnesota. He also completed a nephrology fellowship at Northwestern University, and received a master of business administration



EDUCATION
Susan VanZanten

degree from the University of Notre Dame. In 2011, he joined Franciscan Health as the president of Specialty Physicians of Illinois, LLC and Franciscan Physician Network of Illinois, before being named vice president of medical affairs in Crown Point in 2014.

New board members and corporate leadership changes have been announced by Kevin Leahy, Franciscan Alliance president and chief executive officer. Appointments to the



GOVERNMENT
Clarence Hulse



HEALTHCARE
Barbara Anderson

Franciscan Alliance Northern Indiana Division Board of Directors include:

Kevin Keough, of Crown Point, a co-owner of **Keough Mechanical Corp.** in Merrillville has been appointed. Keough has had a long relationship with Franciscan Health Crown Point, having served as a member of its capital campaign committee, which raised millions of dollars to expand and improve hospital services. He also serves on

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the Franciscan Health Foundation of Northern Indiana. “I was honored and humbled to be considered the board position for the Franciscan Alliance Northern Division. I look forward to assisting the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration and Franciscan Alliance in achieving their goals and business success,” Keough says.

Carey Ransone, MD, of Long Beach, a practicing urologist for 21 years, and is on the medical staff at Franciscan Health Michigan City has been appointed. He also serves as president and CEO of Progressive Urology PC in La Porte and Michigan City. The Detroit native came to Northwest Indiana in 1996 after receiving his specialty training at the University of Illinois at Chicago. “I was truly honored to be considered for the board. I was truly touched,” says Dr. Ransone. “I am a champion for equality and I live by the adage to treat people the way I want to be treated, as family. I pray that I can uphold the responsibilities of this critical position.”

Ebenezer Tayui, MD, of Flossmoor, Illinois, a 29-year anesthesiology specialist, who joined Franciscan Alliance in 2003 and is on staff at Franciscan Health Dyer, Hammond and Munster has been appointed. “I am humbled and excited to join the board,” he says. “I have been in medical leadership for 15 years, serving as medical director of anesthesiology.” He says his goal is to provide insight to clinical changes providers face and propose solutions. “I also hope to learn how the system functions on a global scale, which will allow me to partner with other leaders to find ways to cope with the constantly evolving health-care industry,” he adds.

Rick Urschel, of Valparaiso, president and chief executive officer for Urschel Laboratories was appointed. Urschel is the fourth generation to lead the family business, which has an international reputation for success in food processing innovation. It is a world leader in the designing, manufacturing and selling of precision food-cutting equipment. The company’s equipment is used by every major food processing manufacturer in the

United States and in more than 120 countries worldwide. “I was rather humbled to be considered for the appointment and plan to offer any help and support I can during my appointment,” Urschel says.

LEGAL

After calling downtown Hammond its professional home for 80 years, the **Eichhorn Law Firm** is relocating

its practice to Hammond’s Oxbow Landing, located just off I-94 East and Kennedy Avenue and adjacent to Carlson Oxbow Park. The 2929 Building is shared with Impact Networking, and ATG Real Estate Development Company, among others. Eichhorn’s Hammond-based attorneys include 11 partners and seven associates, and the new location offers room for future growth. “It’s a great location,”

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NON-PROFIT
Bushra Rehman



NON-PROFIT
Maranda Fishback



PUBLIC SAFETY
Derrick Cannon



REAL ESTATE
Lynn Strantz

says managing partner Greg Crisman. “We’re excited about the move and the prospects it creates for us.” Crisman says the move puts the firm in a more centrally located position in relation to the courts of Lake and Porter counties.

NON-PROFIT

Bushra Rehman has been hired by the **Legacy Foundation** in Merrillville to serve as community development director. She has 19 years of academic and association management experience and previously served as executive director of the Association for Clinical and Translational Science at SmithBucklin Corp. Previously, Rehman also served as administrative director of the Institute for Translational Medicine

and the Clinical Resources Center at The University of Chicago. Rehman earned her bachelor of arts in political science at Adrian College, and her Master of Public Administration at the University of Michigan. Former Legacy Foundation intern, **Maranda Fishback**, has been appointed community engagement coordinator. She previously served as an intern with the Legacy Foundation through the Lilly Endowment GIFT Internship Program. Fishback helped coordinate and execute Legacy’s key events, including its annual meeting, scholarship dinner, and Civic Innovators Convening. Fishback started the foundation’s youth philanthropy initiative, for the Lake County Teen Action Group. In her new role, Fishback will manage three

Legacy programs, including the Lake County Teen Action Group, RiseNWI, and On the Table. Fishback earned her Bachelor of Science in hospital-ity and tourism management from Purdue University Northwest. She recently received a Master of Business Administration from PNW.

NIPSCO is awarding 15 local nonprofit organizations, with its Environmental Grant, totaling \$50,000.

The grants will help fund restoration and education projects throughout Northern Indiana. NIPSCO has awarded \$100,000 in grant money for this mission in the last two years and has been key in assisting 44 projects with their visions.

This year’s grant recipients are:

- **Boys & Girls Club of White County**, community environmental education programming
- **Challenger Learning Center of Northwest Indiana**, Spaceship Earth education programming
- **City of La Porte Park and Recreation Department**, erosion control project
- **Clear Lake Township Land Conservancy**, ecosystem education programming
- **Highland Community Foundation**, community tree canopy project
- **Indiana Dunes Environmental Learning Center**, scholarships for the Stewards of Tomorrow
- **Little River Wetlands**, urban turtle education and conservation efforts
- **Michiana Area Council of Governments**, Partners for



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Clean Air

- **Michigan City Area Schools**, high school environmental restoration team
- **Porter County Parks Foundation**, Sunset Hill Farm County Park Pond restoration phase IV
- **Shirley Heinze Land Trust**, educational guidebook project
- **St. Joseph County Parks Foundation**, nature education and literacy trail
- **Tippicanoe Environmental Lake & Watershed Foundation**, Winona Lake Limitless Park restoration project
- **Trees Indiana**, Woodland trails urban forest education
- **Wildcat Guardians**, Waterworks Dam Portage trail

PUBLIC SAFETY

Police **Lt. Derrick Cannon**, a 19-year veteran of the **Gary Police Department**, is among a select few of law enforcement leaders in the country to graduate from the prestigious FBI Academy. Cannon has served the Gary Police Dept. in all of its major bureaus and most recently served as deputy police chief. He and 222 other graduates of the 271st Session of the National Academy began the 10-week program Jan. 8 in Quantico, Virginia. Cannon is Gary's first graduate since 2010. The department now employs five FBI Academy graduates, all of whom have attended sessions over the past 20 years.

REAL ESTATE

Lynn Strantz, after nearly 25 years in the multiple listing service industry and the last 10 years with **Midwest Real Estate Data**, is retiring. Strantz served as vice president of product management and has been with Chicagoland's multiple listing service since its inception in 2008. Strantz was instrumental in modernizing connectMLS and adding Cloud CMA services, helping to keep MRED at the forefront of emerging real estate technology and predictive analytics.



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Swinging for the Fences in Northern Indiana

Hustling to keep pace with sports tourism boom



Competitors prep at this spring's YMCA Swim at Lake Central High. The competition is one of several sporting events hosted by the region.

JERRY DAVICH

Sports tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry in this country, scoring big points from tiny hamlets to major cities with family-friendly “sportcations” and “tournacations.” Northern Indiana has been stepping up to the plate in recent years to not only get on base with this lucrative market, but to hit

a few homers with its Hoosier-styled “host it and they will come” marketing strategies.

“We’re never going to be Disney, but we are a family-friendly and easily accessible destination that offers trusted, Midwestern values and a solid product,” says Speros Batistatos, president/CEO of South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority.

“We’ve come a long way, and we can certainly do more.”

With the absence of a large-scale convention center or meeting facility, curbing the numbers for convention delegates and corporate professionals, sports tourism has become this region’s steadiest tourism market, he says.

It’s also one of the few industries



This year's Midwest Gymnastics invite drew hundreds of local and surrounding community families to the Jean Shepherd Center in Hammond.

that continued to rack up dividends during the recession a decade ago. Families may have had to cancel

Already in 2018, this region has hosted an exhaustive list of sporting events, including the Midwest

and a paved parking lot.

"It can be a game changer for us," says Weimer, whose market is comprised of 80 percent leisure activities. "What drives our market is the Indiana Dunes."

A feasibility and market analysis study for Indiana Dunes Tourism was conducted by Convention, Sports and Leisure, or CSL. The 159-page report stated there are simply not enough existing facilities for tournament-ready competitions in Porter County.

Weimer's office is currently focusing on partnerships with an outside party to operate a cluster of softball/baseball fields, and possibly with Valparaiso University involving a new swimming pool that could host tournament-style competition.

Utilizing Porter County's natural resources, including the Kankakee River, her office is looking to forge partnerships with outfitters and guides to host tourists who want to kayak, fish and birdwatching.

"Youth sports tourism is not a passing fad. It's bigger than ever," – Lorelei Weimer

their Disney World vacation, but they didn't want to postpone their kids' sports tournaments and related excursions.

"The hospitality industry is happy to see more local municipalities jumping on board," Batistatos says.

The idea is to package the family experience around the travel sport, whether it's baseball, softball, volleyball, basketball, soccer or even chess, disc golf or table tennis. The sport serves as the driver to any tourism destination, and family entertainment is the passenger.

Statistically speaking, parents travel more with daughters than with sons, and those girls are typically teenagers, industry data shows.

Gymnastics Invite in Hammond, the YMCA Swim in St. John, Lutheran Basketball at Valparaiso University, and the NAIA Collegiate Bowling in Highland, to name just a few.

Not a passing fad

"Youth sports tourism is not a passing fad. It's bigger than ever," says Lorelei Weimer, executive director of Indiana Dunes Tourism in Porter County.

In Portage, the Indiana Elite Futbol Club is opening a 56-acre, \$1.5 million soccer field complex on Samuelson Road. Its first phase opens in August with eight soccer fields, and the completed complex will include 13 full-sized fields, a concession stand,



La Porte County's Michigan City Pop Warner football tourney attracts waves of tourists each fall.

"People prefer to have a professional guide for these leisure activities," Weimer says.

The goal of every convention and visitors authority is to attract sports-minded tourists from

outside Northwest Indiana, with expectations that families will stay overnight, or for multiple nights, while frequenting local restaurants and stores.

Tourism officials calculate

potential revenue with an estimated economic impact figure, multiplying the number of hotel room bookings by \$250. This figure includes the cost for a hotel room, between \$120 to \$150 a night, with additional money spent on gas, food, admission tickets, and other items.

To capture this thriving market, communities across northern Indiana are in the process of repurposing their resources to cater to sports tourism.

High on our priority list

"We may have been a little slow to figure this out, but this is now high on our priority list," says Jack Arnett, executive director of La Porte County Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Our problem is that we don't have enough quality facilities."

His office is working on partnerships to upgrade Patriot Park in Michigan City, which includes four baseball diamonds and soccer fields. Other partnerships are in the works

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for a new sports complex in the city of La Porte or Warsaw.

“We’re currently evaluating all of our options and resources,” Arnett says.

One perennial winner for La Porte County is the Michigan City Pop Warner football tourney, which attracts waves of tourists each fall. Also, the wildly successful Dunes Volleyball Club in Rolling Prairie, which will be opening a new facility this summer.

Plus, the Super Boat Great Lakes Grand Prix along Lake Michigan from Aug. 3 to Aug. 5. And, of course, Notre Dame football games that help book hotel rooms in LaPorte County for fans who can’t find lodging in the South Bend area.

“With the increase in number of available hotel rooms over the past few years, sports tourism helps fill over 31,000 room nights annually,” says Mike Franz, communications manager for Visit South Bend-Mishawaka.

In 2017, more than 92,000 tourists visited South Bend-Mishawaka for



Photo credit: Jeff Gerardi

Boats race across Lake Michigan waters in Michigan City, IN for the 9th Annual Super Boat Great Lakes Grand Prix in 2017. The city is gearing up for this year’s race which takes place August 3-5.

sports tourism, he says.

“South Bend-Mishawaka is a great sports destination,” Franz says. “When the weather is warmer, sports tourism certainly drives even more business to The Bend with tournaments ranging from baseball and

softball to golf and soccer.”

Not only can you find in downtown South Bend the best Single-A baseball stadium in the country, according to BallparkDigest.com, one of the most storied college football programs has called South Bend home for the last

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“Because of this history of sports excellence, sporting event planners continually bring their business to the area, which helps grow sports tourism in South Bend-Mishawaka on an annual basis,” says Mike Franz, communications manager for Visit South Bend-Mishawaka.

130 years.

“Because of this history of sports excellence, sporting event planners continually bring their business to the area, which helps grow sports tourism in South Bend-Mishawaka on an annual basis,” Franz says.

The Bend is the completion of a multi-use sports complex which will bring even more basketball, cheerleading, and volleyball events to the area,” he says.

South Bend’s goal is to always grow the number of annual visitors and

“South Bend-Mishawaka is all about making memories and living in the moment. We believe sports is a great avenue to do both in The Bend,” Franz says.

Built with tournaments in mind

In Hammond, Mayor Thomas McDermott, Jr. is excited to finally open his city’s new indoor sportsplex this September. The 150,000-square-foot complex, with six basketball courts, six volleyball courts, two soccer fields, and other amenities, is located on the site of the former Woodmar Mall.

“It’s being built with tournaments in mind,” says McDermott, a travel baseball coach for 10 years.

The facility costs \$20 million, with half of that figure covered by a federal grant. Hammond city officials are expecting to draw sports travel teams from Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin, in addition from this region.

Hockey is the biggest South Bend sport in terms of annual hotel room nights. Pro hockey will visit South Bend with the NHL Winter Classic scheduled for Notre Dame Stadium on New Year’s Day 2019, pitting the Chicago Blackhawks against the Boston Bruins.

Hockey is the biggest sport there in terms of annual hotel room nights, at roughly 10,000. And pro hockey will be featured there in 2019 with the NHL Winter Classic being played inside Notre Dame Stadium on New Year’s Day, pitting the Chicago Blackhawks against the Boston Bruins.

“Another project that is going to help grow future sports tourism in

room nights with each passing year. Thanks to the variety and quantity of sporting events that South Bend-Mishawaka plays host to each year, this will not be a problem.

This includes marquee events such as the LPGA Symetra Tour: Four Winds Invitational in June, America’s Youth on Parade in July, Motocross of Nations in October, and the U.S. Senior Open in June 2019.



In Hammond, Mayor Thomas McDermott, Jr. is excited to finally open his city's new indoor sportsplex this September. The 150,000-square-foot complex, with six basketball courts, six volleyball courts, two soccer fields, and other amenities, is located on the site of the former Woodmar Mall.

"We're putting it on everyone's radar this spring and summer, so when it opens in September we're ready to go," McDermott says.

He is hoping to see new developments, including hotels and retail stores, after the sportsplex gets established.

In Crown Point, the city's domed Sportsplex and surrounding Legacy baseball fields at Center Ross Park have been attracting thousands of families since 2008. It has become a true destination location for youth sports tournaments.

"The city of Crown Point is looking forward to expanding our sports tourism opportunities beyond the Sportsplex and Legacy fields," says Jennie Burgess, the city's parks administrator.

The Sportsplex is home to both youth and adult soccer, lacrosse, baseball, softball, and football tournaments on weekends from March

through November.

"These tournaments have brought

in teams from all over the United States, and a few teams from

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Canada,” Burgess says. “We continue to promote our local businesses and provide our visitors and guests both dining and shopping experiences only Crown Point can offer.”

Construction has begun on Bulldog Park, which will feature an 80-foot by 200-foot ice rink.

“The rink will bring us the ability to host open skating, skating lessons and hockey games, as well

as tournaments,” Burgess says. “We have sold out 2018 at the Sportsplex, and we are planning to open the ice rink this winter.”

Complacency can kill you

Just north of Kouts, a proposed 63-acre sports park for youth and adult sports is on the table awaiting funding.

“This is a shovel ready project,” says

Craig Kenworthy, vice president of the Porter County park board.

Aukiki County Park, named from a Native American word meaning Kankakee River, would have six soccer fields, four softball fields, two full-size baseball fields, paved parking, ornamental fencing, native plant landscaping, and a detention basin.

Kenworthy, whose two teenage sons play soccer in travel leagues, estimates it would cost at least \$3 million to construct the park, with millions of dollars more to complete it.

Several tourism officials noted the massive Grand Park sports complex in downstate Westfield, located near Indianapolis with a population of 37,000. It has become one of most popular youth sports destinations in the country.

The 400-acre campus features 26 baseball and softball diamonds, 31 multipurpose fields for soccer, football, rugby and lacrosse, as well as two indoor facilities to accommodate year-round play for a variety of sports.

“If I ever have time to visit there on my way to Indianapolis, I do it,” McDermott says. “It shows what amateur sports can bring to a community, and a region.”

In our corner of the state, several sports can add up to big dividends. These sporting events include volleyball, table tennis, disc golf, swimming and bowling.

“Other amateur sports don’t get the same recognition as baseball or softball, but they bring in hundreds of people for their competitions,” says Erika Dahl, director of communications for South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority.

Looking to the future, sports tourism is squarely on the radar of northern Indiana hospitality officials. Each county and most cities are working hard to build new facilities or repurpose existing ones to attract families. They realize that those families will happily go elsewhere to score points with their kids.

“This is an industry where complacency can kill you,” Batistatos says.



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Businesses tackle challenges, embrace growth



Michigan City-based Burn 'Em Brewing is bringing its "disturbed" brand to a new restaurant in downtown LaPorte later this year. (Pictured) Rob Austin, owner/brewer, Matt Zakrzewski, owner/sales, and Steve Murray, owner/brewer, are just a few of the owners of the brewery.

LESLEY BAILEY

For the Burn 'Em Brewing crew, the decision to bring its brand and brews to downtown La Porte was driven by demand and a witty outlook.

"We have been growing at our own pace for the last few years, and only being in part of Indiana, there is still plenty of room for our brand to grow and prosper," says Rob Austin, owner/brewer of the Michigan City-based brewery, which has a team of seven at the helm. "Basically, the demand is

there and we're still having fun doing it, so why not push the envelope a little more?"

The business's growth is just one of the many developing narratives that continue to fold together both challenges and opportunities to yield a tale of prosperity for region entrepreneurs.

While details were still being finalized, Austin says the small restaurant on Lincolnway in La Porte will focus on Burn 'Em's "creatively styled recipes, both traditionally and non-traditionally designed" beers along with

possible guest taps, wine, and cider offerings.

"This establishment will not be called Burn 'Em but will have our brand vibe. The menu will be quicker items," he says. "We will have lunch and dinner and source as many items locally as possible."

Austin foresees some of the project's growing pains, including hiring staff and boosting beer output.

"A key factor is staffing properly. We need our staff to be educated and passionate about what they're



Bob Migliorini launched his Gary-based machine shop, American Precision Services, in 2003 at the age of 50. He is looking to expand again later this year.



Jeromy Montesano and his wife, Crissy, are looking to move the headquarters of their aviation management company, Wingtip Aviation, later this year.

bringing to the customer, and sometimes that is a challenge, getting the right people,” he says.

He attributes the brewery’s growth to its “style of beers, personality of ownership towards customers, high-intensity marketing and general ‘disturbed’ brand.”

“LaPorte County as a whole is growing. We feel we are bringing something unique into an ever-growing unique industry, along with giving the people of La Porte somewhere to eat and drink. We are also very committed to the surrounding community and have no problem saying ‘yes’ to helping where we can,” he says. “I think our track record of helping numerous

organizations is outstanding and really gives the area a sense of our meaning-well approach to occupying business space in town.”

Loyalty sparks longevity

President Bob Migliorini has been bringing a passion and loyalty to American Precision Services since launching the Gary-based machine shop in 2003 at the age of 50.

“When we started the business, there were suppliers that I knew from my past work experience and some of them gave me credit right from the beginning, since they knew me. That’s trusting and loyal,” he says. “Loyalty is huge to me. If you’re very loyal to

customers, they will be loyal to you.”

The business, which manufactures and repairs parts with CNC (computerized) and conventional machines for large manufacturers including in the steel industry, has grown from a handful of employees to approximately 60 today. While the team has remained at the same site in Gary, they have expanded with additional buildings for more work space and have clients across the country. The venture also sprouted a second business, Metalizing Specialists, which is housed in the original building.

“We outgrew our 7,000-square-foot building within a year-and-a-half. We bought another building to add 27,000 square feet and we’re considering adding another building on our property this year,” he says. “As our business grew, we needed more equipment and floor space for a safe environment. We have been answering the needs of customers; it’s been an amazing situation.”

Beyond focusing on loyalty, Migliorini credits his team, quality of service, and business partner Jeffery Keith, VP and CFO, with keeping the momentum going.

“We have an extremely talented work force here from the back door all the way through the front office. I am extremely proud of what everyone does here. We provide excellent customer service,” he says. “Jeff has been key as I am more of a shop person on one side of the business and I don’t have to worry about the finance side as he knows what the bank is looking for; in order to grow, you have to ask for capital.”

Migliorini says it’s “hard to say what challenges” there have been with the company’s growth as he truly enjoys working every day.

“When people say ‘retire,’ I am like: Don’t say that word. I love what I do and love being with my people and love the customers and suppliers.”

Wheels on the ground

Wingtip Aviation, an aviation management company, remains grounded in Porter County with a relocation of its Valparaiso headquarters

to 14 acres on West Street. The plan is to begin construction in June 2018.

“We need more space. We’re going from 2,400 to 10,000 square feet,” says Jeromy Montesano, who owns Wingtip along with his wife, Crissy. “Part of it will be office space and the other will be for airplane parts and ground support equipment.”

“We’re building our headquarters right here, planting roots and staying here,” adds Crissy.

Launched in 2009 with four employees, the company manages clients’ day-to-day flying needs by taking care of everything from helping purchase a plane and maintenance to staffing and flying.

“We now have 33 employees and locations from Houston to Milwaukee,” Jeromy says. “Our real key to success has been, basically, being honest and doing what you say you’re going to do.”

“Also, we have great employees. You take care of them and they will take care of you.”

While their challenges have



Dane Slabaugh, of North Woods Village memory care communities, speaks at the Salute to Business Luncheon after receiving the South Bend Regional Chamber’s Small Business of the Year award.

included growing too fast, having the right tools to run the business, including a credit card for fuel bills, the couple embrace the impact their business has on the region.

“We have relocated nine families to this area. It’s nice to bring people here and have an effect on the economy,” Crissy says. “That’s been eye-opening to have control over that.”



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“We have higher-paid employees; it’s good for the families and the region,” Jeromy adds.

Leaving a legacy

Entrepreneur Dane Slabaugh found his focus after struggling to find the right care for his mother and grandmother who both faced Alzheimer’s disease.

“I have a medical background and have been an entrepreneur all of my life,” he says. “I wanted to do something that would make a difference and leave a legacy when I am gone that will continue to help people out.”

As managing partner, designer and leader at North Woods Village memory care communities, Slabaugh has created a neighborhood concept that provides a safe place for residents as well as education and support for their families.

“What makes us unique is our building design. We have a circular pattern where rooms are all around the courtyard and it’s all secure,” he

says. “These better suits the needs of residents with memory challenges.

“We have smaller neighborhoods to help with levels of care. With the ratios, the nurses get to know residents and all of our staff is trained in memory care.”

Centered only on memory care for all ages, the first location at Mishawaka was launched in 2014, with a site added later in Fort Wayne and now a Kalamazoo, Michigan, community will be opening later this year.

“We tailor our activities to an individual’s needs and guide them to have successful days, keep them from getting frustrated and encourage independence,” he says. “We guide families to help them deal with their side of it.”

Slabaugh sees demand furthering the need for more care as Baby Boomers age and face Alzheimer’s and dementia challenges. He is working with area students as young as middle school age to encourage them

to consider a career in assisted living and caring for others.

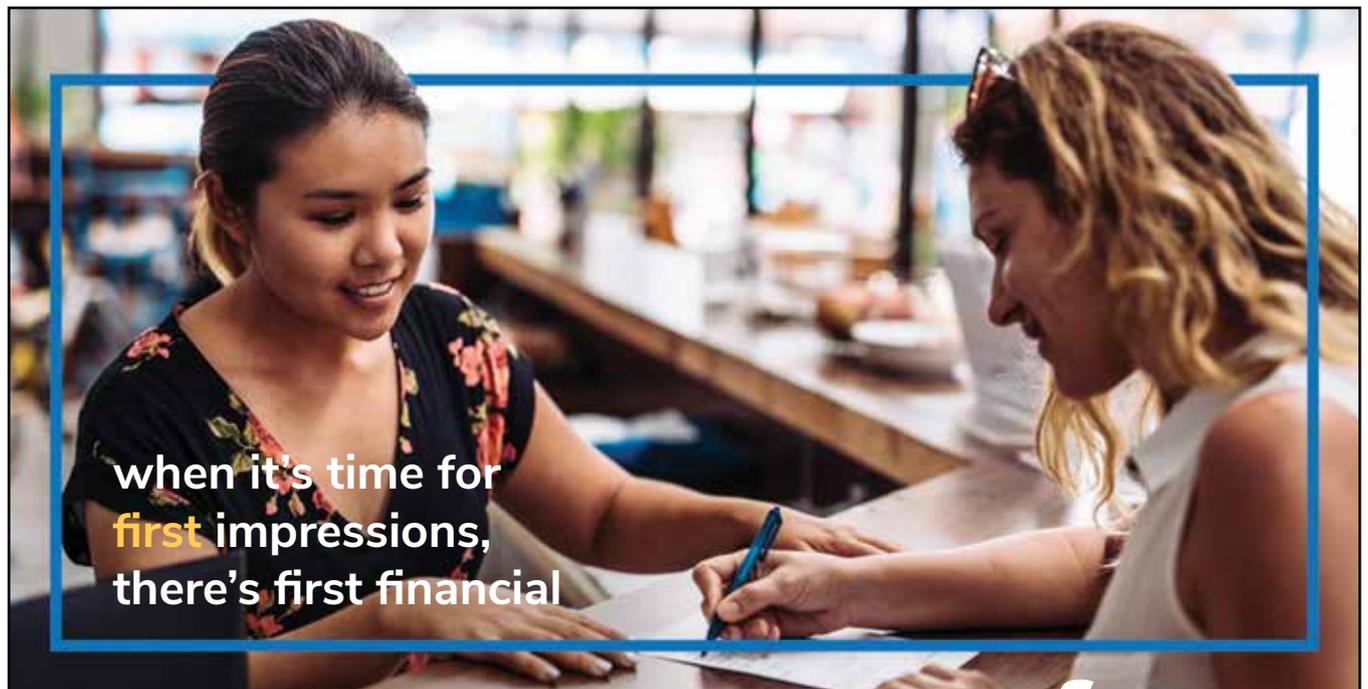
“Our goal and vision are to provide exceptional memory care and become regional leaders,” he says. “We’ve had an impact on the area by giving them a place to take their loved ones and help minimize any guilt they may be feeling. It’s really just a new direction.”

A banking relationship

An honest relationship with a banker is an essential chapter of any business’s growth story.

“It’s about really taking the time to get to know the banker, as well as giving the banker the opportunity to get to know the owner and the business. It starts with being open about both the opportunities and successes the company has had, as well as some of the challenges,” says Jerry Tomasic, vice president – group sales manager, small business banking at Centier Bank.

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bank, the better. Be flexible and open-minded. I think using good professionals and using and listening to experienced advisers always says a lot about a business owner," adds Robert Gardiner, VP, senior commercial loan officer at Horizon Bank.

Banks are an avenue to such financial assistance as conventional loans, lines of credit, commercial real estate financing, Small Business Administration lending programs as well as working with the Regional Development Company in the SBA 504 program.

"Horizon recently launched our InstaCap Business Loan platform, which enables small businesses to apply for a loan up to \$100,000 in less than five minutes and receive the funds for the next business day," Gardiner says of the program that is only open to Horizon Bank customers at this time, but the team hopes to make it available to non-customers later this year.

Kevin Crose, assistant vice president and business banker at Peoples Bank, says in addition to standard offerings, his bank has a health care loan program for those younger doctors and dentists starting out.

At Centier, Tomasic adds the bank has a "comprehensive suite of business banking products and services to provide solutions that help grow businesses, as well as the communities they serve."

"We custom-tailor business services to fit our clients' business models," he says.

A banker can also serve as a connection to other key components of an entrepreneur's team.

"We are a one-stop shop for a small business looking to grow," Crose says. "We'll guide you to the proper people and can help you develop relationships with them as well."

A fervor for small business can be found on both sides of the relationship; entrepreneur and banker.

"When I first started in banking 27 years ago as a branch manager, I was instantly drawn to the small business owners that would frequent the branch. I admired the entrepreneurial

passion they all had, and I truly enjoyed learning about how they started the business," Tomasic says. "Building long-lasting relationships with my clients by getting to know them, and their businesses, is top priority. It's what I love to do!"

"We reinvest in our communities. It's nice to be able to drive down the street and see all of the local businesses that I've helped, or the bank

has helped with an expansion or growth," Crose says.

"Small business owners are the backbone of any community and they generally are hard-working and goal-oriented," Gardiner adds. "Helping these clients achieve their dreams is one of the main reasons I became a banker. I see it as a way of helping not just a single client, but the whole community."

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When Disaster Strikes

How a DRBC plan can save your business



BOB MOULESONG

According to statistics found on Statista (www.statista.com) the cost of a data loss for American businesses is upwards of \$7.35 million – per occurrence. That cost doubled in a 10-year period ending in 2017, because of digital dependence.

When we asked business analysts, managers, and CEO's to estimate the value of their data, they all gave a singular answer. Priceless.

Disaster recovery and business continuity – aka DRBC -- is the way an organization can prepare for and aid in disaster recovery. It is an arrangement agreed upon in advance by management and key personnel of the steps that will be taken to help the organization recover should any type of disaster occur.

Data loss occurs when least expected, for reasons never thought of. That's why DRBC plans must be put in place and practiced. After all, you only get one shot at getting it right.

When the backup doesn't get you back up

ATC Trailers manufactures 5,000 trailers of various shapes and sizes annually. Nestled in Nappanee, it's the mom-n-pop shop that grew to 270 employees and three manufacturing plants all within a few miles.

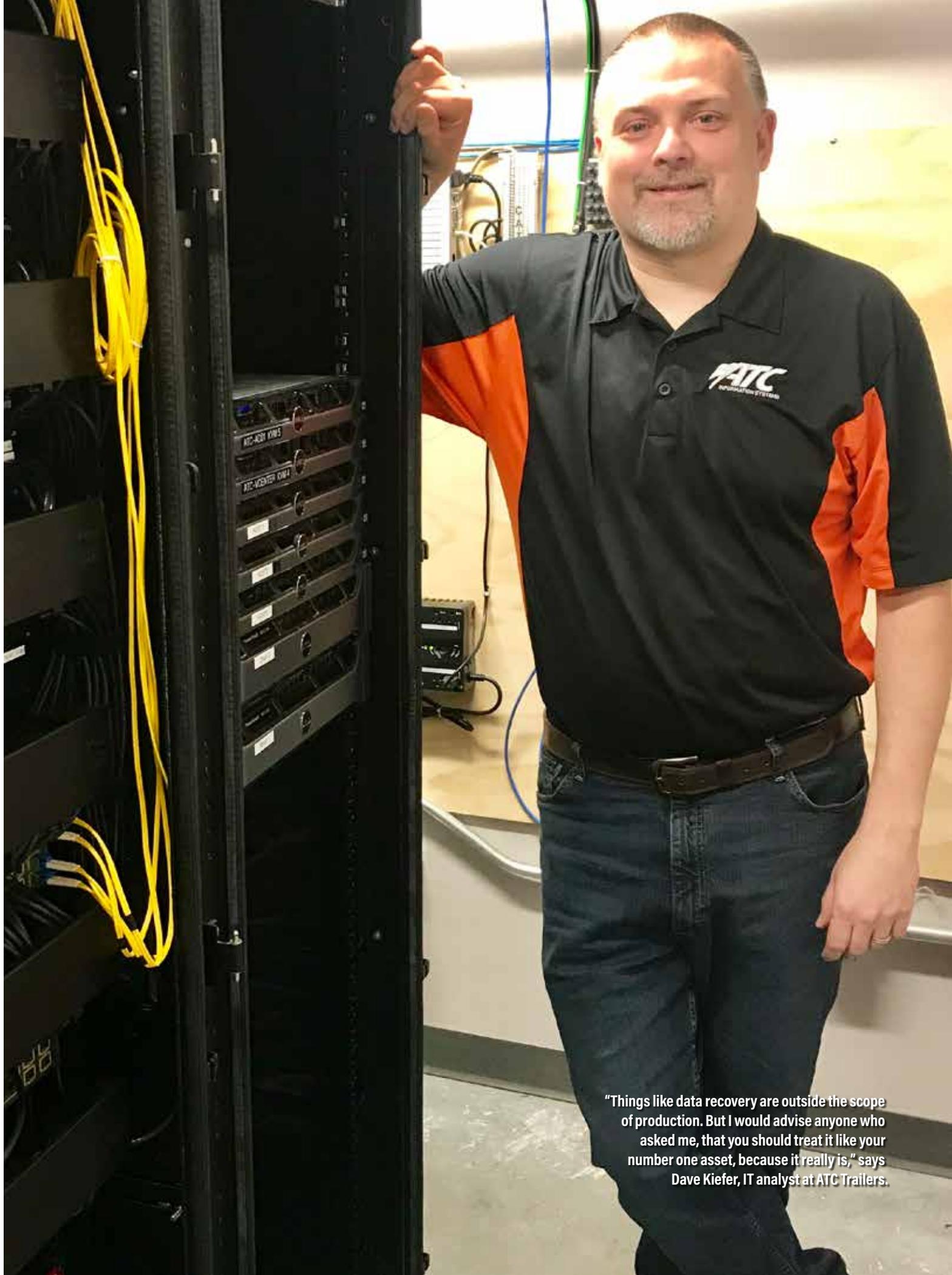
Ten years ago, ATC was 40 percent automated and 60 percent paper driven, according to Dave Kiefer, an IT analyst who joined the company in 2007. "The company was slowly migrating to automation, both in administration and manufacturing,"

he says. "We progressed at a steady state but didn't have a need of urgency."

Until five years ago, when one of their servers crashed. Kiefer took out the failed hard drive and loaded in the backup. But the server didn't come back up as expected.

"It took us 36 hours to get back to where we were when the original hard drive failed," he says. "We were able to recover everything, but for those 36 hours we were very nervous."

Management decided to build a comprehensive DRBC plan that would copy all data and streamline the process of recovery. "Things like data recovery are outside the scope of production," Kiefer says. "But I would advise anyone who asked me that you should treat it like your number one asset. Because it really is."



"Things like data recovery are outside the scope of production. But I would advise anyone who asked me, that you should treat it like your number one asset, because it really is," says Dave Kiefer, IT analyst at ATC Trailers.

Easy as 3-2-1

Jim Peterson is the CEO and principal consultant at Kinetic IT Solutions located in South Bend. As an IT guru, he preaches the value of DRBC daily. To help convince his clients of the process he professes, he uses it himself for the critical Kinetic data.

"How can I suggest a client use a process that I'm not using?" he asks rhetorically. "I practice what I preach

and use the same process that I always recommend to clients."

The process Peterson described is software independent. "The 3-2-1 rule is a best practice for backup and recovery," he says. "It means that when you build out your backup and recovery strategy you should include the following steps."

1. Keep at least three copies of your data, the original and two backups.

2. Keep the backed-up data on two different storage types. The chances of having two failures of completely different storage types is small.

3. Keep at least one copy of the data offsite. A local disaster could wipe out everything onsite, so keep a copy in an offsite location.

"The 3-2-1 backup rule is a best practice because it ensures that you'll have a copy of your data no matter what happens," Peterson says. "Multiple copies prevent you from losing the only copy of your data, and multiple locations ensure that there is no single point of failure."

An electrifying disaster

Kurt Kruggel is partner and CPA at Kruggel Lawton CPA firm. Their original office is in historic downtown South Bend. With historic buildings sometimes comes historic infrastructure.

"We had a pretty severe power outage in that whole part of downtown," he says. "As a result, we couldn't access our data – backup or current – because they were both affected by the outage."

Kruggel Lawton didn't lose data, but they lost the next most expensive resource, time. "It took us a while to get back up and running," he says. "It was a nervous time until we knew our data was safe and complete."

Kruggel Lawton is a full-service CPA firm. They handle personal and commercial tax returns for hundreds of clients of all sizes. The data collected is not only critical, it's sensitive and confidential. "We decided that an offsite DRBC solution would provide us with security from power outages as well as hardware failures. Now that we have three locations, it's important to be able to access the data from any location."

A hybrid solution that includes onsite and offsite data storage was the best way to go.

The benefits of hybrid

Chris Kotul is the division manager at Chester Inc. in Northwest Indiana. He's a major proponent of hybrid cloud solutions as a DRBC strategy.

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"Keeping your long-term data on affordable cloud storage and your most critical data on a local appliance gives you the best of both worlds," says Chris Kotul, division manager at Chester Inc. in Northwest Indiana.

"There are numerous advantages to a hybrid cloud solution," Kotul says. "Here are a few reasons worth noting."

On-premise appliance costs

"Your local equipment can be used to store the most recent and critical data, so it can be a much smaller backup and cost less than traditional backup appliances used with an onsite only solution," he says.

Cloud storage costs

"Cloud storage costs are at their lowest prices ever," he says. "Keeping your long-term data on affordable cloud storage and your most critical data on a local appliance gives you the best of both worlds."

Recovery time

"Your most critical data is likely to be within your most recent backup," he says. "Since your most recent backups are stored locally in the on-premise appliance, the most common types of data recoveries can happen over LAN speeds and are pulled from high speed storage."

Local and Cloud Virtualization

"Having a hybrid system allows us to perform a virtual boot of backed up systems on the local appliance or in the cloud," he says.

Practice makes perfect

The only way to know if a procedure works is to put it in play. Steve Massa, CEO and president of Golden Technologies in Valparaiso, puts mock-ups into play on a regular basis. "Mock disaster recovery tests are a critical part of any disaster recovery scenario and at Golden Tech we practice them regularly," Massa says. "These tests can be as simple as restoring a small group of files to something as large as a full scale spin up of cloud resources that simulate business continuity processes and procedures."

Massa adds that the frequency of these events can differ based on the accompanying infrastructure technologies that support and prevent outages. "No matter the infrastructure,

the importance of these mock scenarios cannot be understated," he says. "Knowing that your disaster recovery solution and procedures are effective not only provides peace of mind in an emergency but can limit the impact of the disaster by having trained professionals who are prepared to handle the situation."

After all, no one wants to be figuring out how to recover or if they even can recover from a disaster while in the middle of it.

A sticky situation

REV Renegade manufactures high-end RV's at their plant in Bristol. The detail involved creates sophisticated blueprints used in production. Those drawings have become digital over the years.

Mike Sullivan a cost account at REV, shared a lesson learned about data recovery. "We had a fire in one of the buildings that stored finished RV's," he says. "The sprinkler system kicked



“We decided that an offsite DRBC solution would provide us with security from power outages as well as hardware failures. Now that we have three locations, it’s important to be able to access the data from any location,” says Kurt Kruggel, partner and CPA at Kruggel Lawton CPA firm.

in and contained the fire to a singular building. But, as we later learned, the smoke went everywhere.”

The plastics and glues used to build

the RV created a thick, black smoke that wormed through the ventilation system to adjacent buildings. That included the server room that housed

the backup system.

“The smoke was incredibly sticky,” Mike says. “Even when it dissipated, it left behind this sticky residue. It worked its way into desktop computers and ruined the motherboards.”

Sullivan was able to move the backup system to a room that was on a different ventilation system. REV didn’t lose any data, although they lost several desktops.

“We have employee, production, accounting, and HR data, like any company,” he says. “The fire made us realize the importance of a solid recovery strategy. Part of that strategy included the use of cloud technology.”

Testing the process for function and viruses

It’s also important to test backups quarterly or bi-annually. “I have had clients run into recovery issues,” says Joe Grossbauer, security analyst at GNet Technologies. “The most common issue is the backup stopped



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working and no one noticed. It's important to have monitoring set up to automatically alert if there is a problem with the backups."

Most businesses rely on their internal data to continue running smoothly. For businesses that maintain client files, a simple hard drive failure or corrupt partition could put them out of action. "That's why we have both offsite and onsite backup," says Grossbauer. "Onsite backups can be lost simultaneously as the server or computer being backed up. Fire, theft, or even a sprinkler system can damage a server and its on-site backup at once, causing significant downtime."

Grossbauer also stresses knowing that your backups are protected against ransomware. "If a computer is infected and ransomware encrypts the files, it will see the onsite backup drive or network and encrypt that too, spreading the virus." Grossbauer says that spreading ransomware is preventable with an advanced configuration as well as an offsite configuration.



"The most common issue is the backup stopped working and no one noticed. It's important to have monitoring set up to automatically alert if there is a problem with the backups," advises Joe Grossbauer, security analyst at GNet Technologies.

Disaster strikes in every way imaginable. Data recovery means business continuity. But data can only be recovered from reliable backup procedures that are tested and updated as needed.

The examples shared in this article were near misses. But everyone was close to true disaster. It's no coincidence that every near miss resulted in a comprehensive overview and revisions.

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Careers: Take 2

Experience leads the way in education



“These teachers require a college education and a journeyman knowledge level of a career area. They also must have a certain compassion and ability to relate with young adults,” says John Groth, director/principal of Porter County Career and Technical.

CARRIE STEINWEG

It’s been talked about for years in the news and written about in business and trade magazines - there’s a shortage of skilled workers in the U.S.

An ongoing effort to provide high school courses and hands-on training in career and technical education (CTE) is helping to bridge that gap and creating a renewed interest in fields

that are in dire need of skilled labor.

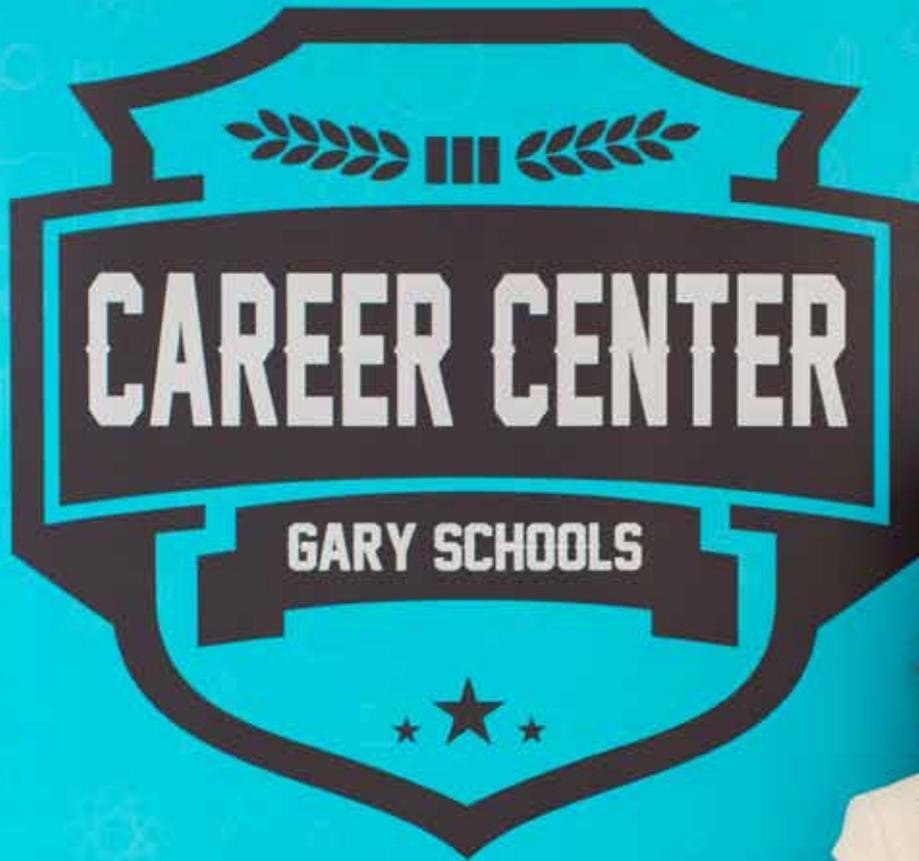
“Sometimes it is difficult to find qualified teachers in career and technical educational areas due to the highly technical knowledge and hands-on skill set these positions require. But these are exactly the type of people we need in order to give students the type of education that is sought after by employers,” says Michelle Meadows, director of career and technical education at the Gary

Area Career Center.

John Groth, director/principal of Porter County Career and Technical Education notes that the reduced salaries can be a barrier in hiring.

“These teachers require a college education and a journeyman knowledge level of a career area,” he says. “They also must have a certain compassion and ability to relate with young adults. It is tough because teacher pay is less than the pay for

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Michelle Meadows, director of career and technical education at the Cary Area Career Center, has built a team of experienced, qualified teachers.



Hannah Celorio, former region chef, shares her field skills with students at the Gary Area Career Center's culinary program.

most skilled craftspeople. Some of my present teachers were fortunate to make good money for several years and are now ready to give back to the next generation and they suffer a pay loss for their altruism, which is

admirable but also a burden."

Although it can take some searching, both administrators have found suitable individuals who have left their fields for the classroom to train the next generation of welders, auto

mechanics, barbers, and health care professionals.

Incorporating life skills into lessons

Hannah Celorio is new to teaching, but not new to working in a school. She joined the staff at Gary Area Career Center in December, after working as a paraprofessional, as a way of combining two of her passions, cooking and teaching.

In 2012, she enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu in Chicago and did externships with such places at the Lighthouse and Strongbow Inn followed by banquet chef positions.

"I've always had a drive for teaching," she says. Her lessons go beyond knife skills, kitchen safety and cooking techniques. They include life skills and she relishes that "motherly" role. "I teach them how to do resumes and be a professional and have confidence and take constructive criticism without being offended," she adds.

The program is in the process of



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"The greatest part is when students return to share their life experiences and success stories and thank me for caring," says Dionne Bass-Grady, cosmetology instructor at the Gary Area Career Center.



Former construction field project manager, Barbara Biernat, left her career to lead the building trades program at the Porter County Career and Technical Center. She and her students are renovating a 1912 train depot at the school's campus. Once completed, it will be used as a new school of cosmetology for the career center.

being restructured and will allow for dual credit through Ivy Tech in addition to industry certifications.

Celorio believes that such practical paths of study are needed for this generation. "I'm teaching all the way around, not just to prepare, but how you shop and make good choices and support local growers and take a stand on where your food comes from," she says.

Dionne Bass-Grady decided to take her talents from the stylist's chair to the classroom, at the Gary Area Career Center to prepare young people for jobs beyond high school.

"I decided to teach because I wanted to give back to my community, to be a leader and a role model. I wanted to provide the necessary tools needed to become successful no matter where they're reared or what challenges may arise, while stressing the importance of jump starting a career while still in high school as I did," the

cosmetology teacher explains.

"As a teacher, it's going beyond textbooks. I teach how to deal with their emotions and how to solve problems. I teach them to become independent, the importance of prioritizing and life skills," she says.

Lending decades of experience to the classroom

At a time in life when others may be contemplating retirement, Barbara Biernat went the opposite direction, diving into a new career where she could pass on her vast knowledge of construction with an audience hungry to learn.

Now in her third year leading the building trades program at the Porter County Career and Technical Center, Biernat brought with her decades of experience in home and commercial building, remodeling, and interior design.

She worked as a field project

manager on the construction of hotels, senior housing, and retail spaces and managed her own company.

Biernat and Groth had previously worked together on volunteer construction projects in the community. When a 1912 train depot was acquired and brought to the Porter County Career and Technical Center property to be renovated in 2014, Groth reached out to her.

The train depot, with the work of Biernat and her students, will be completed this year from an aging 106-year-old relic to a functional space that will serve as the new school of cosmetology at the campus.

Biernat said that the idea of teaching had crossed her mind, but she thought more schooling for an additional degree would be required. In reality, she was able to take a year-long online course that made her eligible to teach construction or building trades.



Bob Phelps previously spent time in the field as a TV news camera-man for WNDU, the NBC affiliate in South Bend, but now lends his expertise to teaching television photojournalism at the Porter County Career and Technical Center.

“I think this kind of education is critical,” she says, noting that some students will have jobs waiting upon graduation. “There’s such a shortage right now in the trades. A few years ago, the idea was put out there that everyone needed to go to college and it kind of killed the trades.”

Welding has long been an area taught at vocational high schools and it’s a field that is starving for qualified candidates to replace those leaving the work force.

Harry Miller’s career stems back to 1969 and he’s been in the classroom since 1977. He started the welding program for Ivy Tech Northwest, restarted the South Bend School system’s welding program, and wrote welding curriculum statewide.

He retired from Ivy Tech in 2006 after 29 years, where he racked up nine state welding championships. With a long tenure in his field and in education, Miller chose to continue to teach, this time at the high school

level and restart Gary’s welding program.

“I have always been the person to reach back and help another, so teaching fell in place for me,” Miller says. “I do have a passion for construction and being a builder and fabricating with welding skills.” He says expertise in welding opens up a lot of doors in the working world.

He’s been around long enough to see big changes in this area of education. “When I first started teaching it was about training for jobs. The vocational college network was established just for that reason,” he explains. “For some reason that changed to more degree programs rather than job and employment preparation. That is starting to change back some with the shortage of skilled labor.”

Miller emphasizes the major earning potential for those interested in trades. “Skilled labor in our area make \$34 to \$44.80 per hour,” he says. “They say there will be a shortage of 200,000

welders by 2020 and that number was recently increased to almost 300,000.”

Lured by the schedule

Like many of the other CTE offerings, most of Bob Phelps’ students at the Porter County Career and Technical Center are with him for two full years as they learn the ropes of television photojournalism. Phelps previously spent time in the field as a TV news cameraman for WNDU, the NBC affiliate in South Bend. The tough and demanding industry comes with unpredictable schedules and long, intense workdays. So, when the opportunity arose for a steady week-day gig as a teacher, it was hard for Phelps to pass up.

“I was inspired by the passion my professors had,” he says. “They worked in broadcasting and production industries, but took their skills and passion into the classroom to inspire the future leaders of the industry.”



"I have always been the person to reach back and help another, so teaching fell in place for me," says Harry Miller, welding instructor at the Gary Area Career Center.

He misses the excitement of the job, but freelance work helps to fill

that void. "Maintaining a connection to the industry is vital to providing

a quality education to my students," he says.

Because today's youth live in a world saturated with technology, media careers have an appeal with teens. "The video production industry is tough to get in to, but students crave technology, so there is a natural interest," he says. "Technology moves so fast, so I love reminding my students that many of them may end up with jobs that haven't been created yet."

He realizes that teaching isn't for everyone and suggests volunteering first at a school to get a feel for it. "There are so many rewarding moments in teaching. When I have students produce a project, putting creativity and hard work into it, and they show it to an audience and get the reaction they wanted - laughter, tears, or applause - I feel like I did my job. I gave them the skills they needed to entertain, inform, or inspire others with a story."

Destined to be an educator

As principal of the Area Career Center in Hammond, Miller oversees a facility that provides career and technical education to students from 12 area high schools in 16 different areas of study, including welding, early childhood education, criminal justice, cosmetology, and graphic arts.

After about five years working in the field of information technology, Miller decided to make the shift into teaching, due in part to the influence of his parents who were both educators. He's an advocate of technical training and even has a daughter who is a student at the school.

According to Miller, all of the programs have proven to have a steady interest, which is reflected in enrollment numbers. "I think a lot of parents have realized that because costs for post-secondary education are so high, they don't want to spend \$100,000 on college if there are better opportunities through another pathway," he says. "I'm a parent of five children and I think the idea that 'college for all is what is best for all kids is not always what's best for all kids."

"To have the opportunity available through earning credit or certificates and to not have college debt, it's something parents need to consider. If these kids can be employed and living independently at 18, 19, 20 years old, that's a good outcome and that's kind of what we're offering here."

Miller explains that the goals of CTE have changed drastically since the school began in 1919 as Hammond Tech. "The biggest change is the focus has been moving from vocational to college and career readiness," says Miller. "The focus in years gone by was gearing up for a job outside high school. It was the short view of things. We try to look at the longer view and what can we do to support students over a career."

Leading the way

Each of these individuals took a leap into education as a second career

with the payoff of inspiring and training the next generation of skilled workers in the region. It was a move that made sense for each of them.

Biernat says she could not be happier with her second career. "I would encourage anyone who has worked in industry to consider teaching. It brings so much value to these kids," she says.

Due to these skilled teachers'

decisions, each year students will move on into the workforce or into the next phase of their education with a foundation and hands-on knowledge that could only be provided by those who had worked in the field.

"The greatest part is when students return to share their life experiences and success stories and thank me for caring and being a valuable source for their future," says Bass-Grady.



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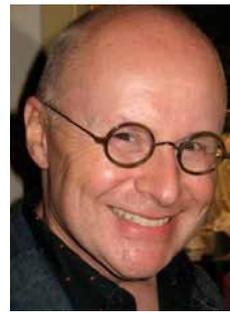
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Things to Do and See



John Cain



Jack Walton

An update on art and entertainment options across the region

Northwest Indiana

JOHN CAIN

Acorn Concert Series at Gabis Arboretum

The former Taltree Arboretum presents its summer-long concert series beginning June 2 with Echoes of Pompeii, a ten-piece band that will give fans the sound of Pink Floyd. Also on the concert: Obsessive Compulsive Distortion. June 30 brings Chicago-born blues singer Wayne Baker Brooks to the stage. A Chicago Blues Hall of Famer, and the youngest son of blues master Lonnie Brooks, Wayne Baker Brooks has performed with such notables as Buddy Guy, Koko Taylor, Bo Diddley, and many more. Also on the concert: The Blues Project, a youth music program based in Valparaiso, whose aim is to pass on the music and history of the blues to the next generation of musicians. Other concerts include Mr. Blotto and Gato on July 28, Carl Weathersby with the Corey Dennison Band on August 25, and concluding with Mississippi Heat and Funky Mojo Daddy on September 22. For the full schedule: 219/462-0025 or www.taltree.org

South Shore Summer Music Festival

The 12th annual South Shore Summer Music Festival will feature free concerts by the Northwest Indiana Symphony in six communities across Northwest Indiana during July and August. The series opens on July 21 at the Town Complex Grounds in Cedar Lake. On July 28, the Symphony heads to Crown Point for a concert on the lawn at Franciscan Communities.



Dennis Crane

On July 28, the Northwest Indiana Symphony heads to Crown Point for a concert on the lawn at Franciscan Communities.

Other concerts include the Indiana Lakeshore at West Beach on August 3, Griffith's Central Park on August 4, Hammond's Wolf Lake Pavilion on August 10, and Schererville's Redar Park on August 11. The Porter County Community Foundation will present an additional concert in Valparaiso on August 8 at Central Park Plaza. More summer concert information is available at the Symphony office, 219/836-0525 or www.nisorchestra.org

Dunes Summer Theatre Summer Series

"Noises Off" provides a glimpse into the world of theatre. The audience will witness both the rehearsal process and what goes on behind the scenes once the curtain is raised. The play opens the night before the first performance and the cast is hopelessly

unready. Baffled by entrances and exits, missed cues, missed lines, and bothersome props, including several plates of sardines, Lloyd, the director, is beyond frustrated. Seen from backstage, Act 2 provides a view of the dysfunctional relationships between cast members. Romantic rivalries, lovers' tiffs and personal quarrels lead to offstage shenanigans, onstage bedlam and the occasional attack with a fire axe. Act 3 occurs during the play's final run, where relationships among the cast have frayed considerably, and the set is breaking down. While the actors remain determined to cover up the mounting chaos, it's not long before the plot and script are utterly abandoned in this hilarious comedy. June 22 through July 8.

Dunes Summer Theatre continues its summer series with two performances of the multiple Tony Award-winning

Broadway musical “Man of La Mancha” starring artistic director Jeffrey Baumgartner and featuring classical Spanish guitarist Peter Aglinskas on July 13 and 15. Six quirky adolescents compete in “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,” July 20 through August 5, approaching the competition with all the ferocity of athletes in a state-wide championship. “Charlotte’s Web” is brought to life for young audiences and their parents August 3, 4, 10 and 11. The story centers on Wilbur, young Fern’s pet pig, spared from slaughter by her father, who allows Fern to nurture the piglet into adulthood. When Wilbur is sold to Fern’s uncle, he is left yearning for companionship. Wilbur is sadly snubbed by the other barn animals, until a spider named Charlotte, befriends him. Upon Wilbur’s discovery that he is again intended for slaughter, Charlotte promises to hatch a plan guaranteed to spare his life and win him friends. For more information: 219/879-7509 or www.dunesartsfoundation.org.

Greater South Bend

JACK WALTON

Running from June 8-17 at South Bend Civic Theatre, is British playwright David Hare’s *Skylight*, which examines the complicated dynamics between ex-lovers attempting to reconcile. SBCT’s musical offering for the summer is Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe’s *My Fair Lady*, from July 13-29. George Bernard Shaw created the unforgettable characters Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle for his dramatic play *Pygmalion*, but Lerner and Loewe fleshed them out and gave them timeless songs including “The Rain in Spain,” “I Could Have Danced All Night” and “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face.” Find out more at www.sbct.org.

The Elkhart Jazz Festival has become a huge event over the last three decades, and this year’s shows take place from June 22-24 at the Lerner Theatre and other stages across the city. Friday’s headliner is contemporary guitarist Lee Ritenour, known



Peter Ringenberg

Dancers from Southold Dance Theater performing at the Chris Wilson Pavilion at Potawatomi Park in South Bend, part of the Community Foundation Performing Arts Series.

for dozens of solo albums and literally thousands of sessions as a sideman. Saturday, it’s the timeless New Orleans musical gumbo of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. The Sunday feature is the United States Air Force’s Shades of Blue Jazz Ensemble. Like always, the 31st annual event includes bands from almost every jazz subgenre performing through the daytime and well into the night. Check out the full schedule at www.elkhartjazzfestival.com.

Merrimans’ Playhouse at 1211 Mishawaka Avenue in South Bend is the hip spot for smaller jazz gigs. Tenor saxophonist Geof Bradfield brings his quartet on June 20. The Dean’s List, a swinging quintet led by guitarist Danny Dean, appears on June 30. The charming old-time guitar/ukulele duo Victor & Penny plays on July 14. On July 20, it’s Brad Linde’s Team Players, a group which blends jazz music and sports themes -- the latest project is inspired by bowling. Mexican-American drummer Gustavo Cortiñas leads a group on July 26, and violinist Stanley Chepaitis fronts a trio session on August 2. Visit www.merrimansplayhouse.com for tickets or more information.

Every summer, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County presents several free performances at the Chris Wilson Pavilion at Potawatomi Park in South Bend. The first three

events of this year’s Community Foundation Performing Arts Series showcase the wide range of entertainment on display. The University of Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival’s Touring Company kicks things off with a performance of “The Merchant of Venice” on July 21. The IUSB Jazz Orchestra follows on July 28 with a concert of big-band and swing favorites. On August 4, Southold Dance Theater takes the stage for a recital of ballet and contemporary dance. Two professional guest artists take starring roles, but the rest of the dance responsibility goes to Southold students, in what has become one of the series’ biggest annual draws. Learn more at www.cfsjc.org.

Anyone looking to venture a little farther afield can catch a couple of the Midwest’s most highly regarded bluegrass festivals. They’re rosinup the bows in Wakarusa, Indiana for the Wakarusa Bluegrass Festival, running June 8-10. This year’s performers include high-profile acts such as Kody Norris and the duo Feller and Hill. Another opportunity to catch the “high lonesome sound” comes July 22-28 when the Marshall Bluegrass Festival enlivens Marshall, Michigan for a full week. Both festivals offer overnight camping options. For information, go to www.wakarusabluegrass.com and www.marshallbluegrassfestival.com.

A New Motor in Rusty Chassis of Family Business

Tom & Ed's Body Repair sons take the driver's seat



When Tom and Ed's Auto Body hits a speed bump, brothers Andy (left) and Geoff (right) know to lean on their dad Tom (center), for guidance.

JERRY DAVICH

In 2009, Tom Tylka was ready to call it quits.

He had enough of the pressures, the headaches and the endless responsibilities to run his successful but stressful business, Tom & Ed's Auto Body Repair Services. After operating his firm for more than a quarter century, Tylka figured it was time to sell it.

"I kept asking myself, 'Why am I doing this to myself and my wife?'" Tom recalls.

Before he could list it on the

market, he got a call from his younger son, Andy.

"Dad, what do you think if I got into the family business so we can keep it going," asked Andy, who was working in the entertainment industry in Indianapolis.

His father replied, "You don't want to get into this."

"Let's talk about it," insisted Andy, who's business-minded, college educated, and loves new challenges.

The father and son met for dinner. It didn't matter that Andy wanted nothing to do with the family business

while growing up. It didn't matter he knew nothing about the auto body repair industry. It didn't matter he had to live in his parent's home for a couple of years.

They decided to give it a go.

"The rest is history," Tom says. "Our history."

Andy began learning about the family business and the industry overall. Then he began making changes, from digitizing the firm's invoice and billing system to expanding to new locations across Northwest Indiana.

A couple of years after Andy joined

the team, Tom's other son, Geoff Beckett, joined, first as an employee, then as a manager. Together, the two sons installed a new motor on the rusty chassis of the family business.

"He's the smart brother," jokes Geoff, 37, a former construction worker.

"But he's got the good looks," jokes Andy, 35, whose job oversees all six stores.

In addition to the original shop in Schererville, which has expanded from 2,500 square feet to 14,000 square feet, other shops are located in Crown Point, Burns Harbor, Cedar Lake, Valparaiso and Merrillville, employing more than 50 workers in all.

"We like to tell customers about my dad's success story," Andy says while giving a tour of the spacious Merrillville shop.

It's located behind the Bozak Motors dealership on U.S. 30. Inside this impressive building, state-of-the-art upgrades and old-school elbow grease go together seamlessly, like a new side panel on an old pickup truck.

Still, the company's smallest shop in Crown Point, in business for nearly 20 years, remains the busiest. The average bill at any shop is \$3,800, taking five business days to complete. Not on Saturday, though. The firm is now closed that day, another of Andy's upgrades.

"I thought I'd have a heart attack," Tom says, only half-joking.

But, as Andy points out, the move has boosted employee morale, and business overall.

"I trust Andy with the numbers," Tom says.

Tom, who's now 68, no longer works from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day, as he did for too many years.

"I've kind of developed my own job while staying out of their way," Tom says.

However, he still enjoys being involved in the business.

"To make sure everything gets done right," says Tom, who lives in Crown Point with his wife Debbie. "She still does our bookkeeping."

When the family business hits a speed bump or turns a dangerous corner, Andy and Geoff know who to lean on for guidance.

"We ask dad," Geoff says. "He has a mind that just knows how to solve problems."

"They still have to learn how I learned - by hard knocks," Tom says.

Tom opened his first shop in 1983, the same year Andy was born.

"The family joke is that the business was the best thing to happen to dad that year," Andy jokes.

In 1986, Tom bought out his original partner, Ed. But he couldn't afford to change the signs and company stationary, so he kept the firm's name, Tom & Ed's.

"If anyone calls and asks for Ed, we know they're selling something," Geoff jokes.

Looking to the future, both Andy and Geoff have young children.

"I named my 2-year-old son Tom," Andy says, "so we won't have to change any signs."



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Collaboration Leads to Incubator Program

Preparing graduates for the workforce

LAUREN CAGGIANO

It takes a village to ensure our youth get on the right path after high school. At least that's the idea behind the La Porte Community School Corporation's Hire a Slicer (www.hireaslicer.com) program and website. Through partnerships with local entities like the Greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce and the Greater La Porte Economic Development Corporation (GLEDC), their mission is to strengthen the connection between recently graduated seniors and the local business community. The goal is to prepare La Porte High School graduates ("Slicers") for the many challenges of college and careers.

A shot in the arm

Superintendent Mark Francesconi has been in the district for seven years and has served for four years in his current role. He says during his tenure the district has focused on engaging the local community because that's where the greatest need lies. Case in point: The results of a workforce task force led by the chamber indicated areas for improvement when it comes to access to quality talent. Jobs are open, but they have trouble filling them with qualified individuals. In his words, the Hire a Slicer initiative is a "shot in the arm" for the area.

"Basically, what we're trying to do is align local efforts with workforce and graduation pathways," he says. "We're looking from within to develop a process to engage businesses."

Francesconi says the program, which has evolved over the last year or so, is the brainchild of La Porte High School



Hire a Slicer program partners gathered in April for the official launch of its web site. (Left to right: Rita Mrozinski, Pres., Greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce; Matt Presley, English Department Co-chair; Mark Francesconi, Supt. La Porte Community School Corporation; Bert Cook, Exec. Dir., Greater La Porte Economic Development Corporation.)

teacher Matt Presley. The educator was named Workforce Teacher of the Year in 2015 by the chamber. As part of the award, he was presented with two checks—\$500 for the program and \$500 for him personally. Presley opted to donate the entire \$1,000 gift to develop the Hire a Slicer website.

Forming soft skills

But what stake does Presley, an English teacher, have in economic development? It turns out there's more than meets the eye.

"Hire A Slicer gives students the opportunity to prepare resumes for a real audience," Presley says. "It provides them with a direct link to meaningful employment in our

community. Likewise, it allows employers to connect with Slicer seniors and alumni. This service strengthens the connection between our school and our business community, and it fills jobs."

The strategic focus is what makes Hire a Slicer unique. Francesconi says while many employers are looking for technical skills, soft skills are harder to come by these days. That's why it's never too early to impart these skills to students, as Presley does in his classroom, while also pulling in experiences from the outside world. Through his class, students work in the community through mentorships based on their career interest.

"Not only do we talk about

workplace skills, but I ask my students to demonstrate them through their experiences,” says Presley. “My class ends with students giving a presentation to a panel of community members. Again, these presentations reinforce the workplace skills instruction I do in the classroom and help to build my students’ confidence as they enter the workforce.”

Measuring success

According to Francesconi, Presley has been instrumental in preparing students for next steps, while also interfacing with employers to get the most out of the website. Today, the site functions as both a job board and a way for students to showcase their resumes, while addressing a larger issue, meeting future state requirements.

As Presley notes, new graduation pathways for the state of Indiana, that will affect the graduating class of 2023, will require schools to track student progress through their chosen career pathway. He says among the requirements, students must learn and demonstrate work-readiness skills while pursuing a service or work-based learning experience. “Hire A Slicer can be an effective and essential part of this process,” he says.

That may be the near future, but Francesconi has his eyes on the past and present, too. He says the school system has already experienced success stories. Those include students pursuing internships, securing guest speakers from local companies, and coordinating teacher visits to worksites so they can better understand the demands of 21st century jobs.

There have been other wins, too, in the form of relationship building. “We’ve had some businesses that we had little engagement with (prior) that hired students for internships or full-time positions,” he says.

Looking to the future, Francesconi says he’s extremely pleased with the collaboration of the school system and its partners to produce a more qualified and appealing workforce. He also expressed excitement about the recent formal launch of the Hire a Slicer website, with the program’s partners.

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Whiting WhoaZone Stays Afloat

Water park proves profitable despite doubts



Photo Credit: Kale Wilk, Times of Northwest Indiana

Whiting will expand its WhoaZone floating sports park, on Lake Michigan, this summer.

LOURDES CASTELLANOS

Widely known for its out-of-the-box approaches to events and attractions, the city of Whiting has become the small city with big ideas. Its annual Pierogi Fest, Wickedly Whiting, and the WhoaZone at Whihala Beach sports park have put the city on the attraction map.

Last summer, WhoaZone's floating sports park on Lake Michigan, proved to be a positive move for the lakefront and city.

"I think we're using our resources

now, and the lakefront is an amazing resource," says Whiting Mayor Joe Stahura. "We spent considerable dollars to build the infrastructure out at the lakefront park."

Those dollars have transformed the rock-piled lakefront to a sandy scape in the foreground of the Chicago skyline. During the summer, it features cabanas, sand volleyball courts, food concessions, grilling and boat launch areas.

But Stahura's goal, he says, is always to draw consumers to the business district and help the survival of local

businesses. "We knew once we were done with the physical components (of the lakefront), that we would then experiment programming the park to see what was the best way to bring people from the community," he explains.

"We wanted to put some inflatable waterslides on the beach to add some color and animation," he says. Through research, the city discovered Wibit, a company which provides aquatic sports parks. Within weeks after making contact with Wibit, the city entered into a three-year trial agreement to

open WhoaZone at Whihala Beach in the summer of 2017.

The completed, assembled inflatable sports park was little more than an acre and only 100 feet from the beach. It's secured and anchored in eight feet of water. The obstacle course consists of slides, trampolines, monkey bars, balance beams, hurdles, and a wobble bridge, which are just a few of its components.

Children must be at least seven years old, 45 inches tall, and must be able to swim. Life jackets are required and provided, and the layout includes four areas, varying in levels of difficulty. Entry to the water park is \$20 per guest per hour. Additional water sports at WhoaZone include paddleboards, corcls, and kayaks.

Stahura admits the idea did not immediately resonate with many of his constituents. "Whiting's a frugal town and people said, 'no one is going to pay \$20 an hour.' Well, we proved that wrong." Nearly 21,000 visited WhoaZone last summer, exceeding expectations. The overwhelming interest has led to an expansion of this year's water park, which will increase

the capacity from 120 guests to 150 per hour.

"And of course, everybody said 'the lake's just too rough,' and I think that the technology and the way they (Wibit) set it up, proved that they could handle that," Stahura adds. "It was an enormous success and we're looking forward to the expansion," he adds.

When out of towners arrived, and could not secure entrance, advance registration was added through their web site www.whoazonewhihala.com.

According to the agreement, Whiting will not see a profit directly from the water park until 2020. "They (Wibit) paid for the capital costs of the investment and they get to keep all the profits. After the third year, we'd start sharing revenue after they recoup their capital costs," he explains.

Stahura says the \$260,000 investment in capital costs, made by Wibit, led to more than \$400,000 in revenue during its first summer. "There's no cost to the city," he says. "They (Wibit) handle all the transactions and all the employment," he adds.

Wibit builds, manages, and maintains the water park. It provides

lifeguards and hires up to 35 local high school and college students to work within the park. At the end of the season, the company disassembles the park and then rebuilds each year.

The mayor argues, Whiting is still benefiting from the water park. "We have seen a significant increase in parking revenue. It went up by 50 percent," he says. Lakefront parking is \$3 per hour or \$15 for the day.

"We know the attraction added visitors to the lakefront, which we hope then equated to more revenue generated in the business district too. I've heard positive feedback from the merchants," he says.

Stahura is pleasantly surprised by the age ranges of those visiting the attraction. "The really cool age group is the high school and college-aged kids. This is something excitedly new to them. Whether the water is cold or warm, doesn't make a bit of difference to them," he says.

"You see a couple old timers, like me, and they look a little more tired coming off than the young kids. But it is pretty cool to see the broad spectrum," he says.



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The Making of NWI's Regional Economic Development Plan



George Douglas

Strategy will lead to sustained prosperity and opportunity

GEORGE DOUGLAS

From the beginning, this great country has looked to the west for expansion and economic opportunities as part of our Manifest Destiny. This contributed, in many ways, to the official adoption by the Indiana General Assembly in 1937 of Indiana's motto, "The Crossroads of America," because of the North-South and East-West highways that easily facilitated the movement of people and goods through the state. This motto implied that Indiana was a pass-through state, though, and not necessarily a destination. Fast forward to today, and we can see how Indiana has capitalized on its centric location and significant investment in the development of infrastructure to transform our state economy. Through planning and seizing opportunities, Indiana has become a destination for people to live, work, go to school, and recreate.

In Northwest Indiana, we know that our region has undergone an amazing transformation during the last century because of our close proximity to the economic engine of Chicago. Thus, as a region, we transitioned from an agricultural base to manufacturing. We developed assets and infrastructure across the region, such as the Port of Indiana, Chicago/Gary Airport, South Shore Line, Class I freight railroads, interstate highways, etc. As a result, communities grew and businesses flourished. That is until about three decades ago, when noticeable changes in the steel industry had lasting and profound effects that rippled throughout the region.

Though things have greatly improved since then, as a region we still continue to lag behind the country, the Chicago MSA, and the rest of Indiana during this post-recession recovery. Many of those indicators are outlined in the One Region 2016 Indicators Report

"We need a roadmap that will help guide us on to a path that will lead to sustained prosperity and opportunity for the entire region" —George Douglas

(www.oneregionnwi.org) and on the region profile from the NWI Forum (www.nwiform.org). What I want to share, though, is the exciting steps being taken to create a better, more promising, economic path forward for Northwest Indiana that can complement the efforts and successes of the RDA and NIRPC.

This path is in the form of a truly first-of-its-kind regional economic development plan for Northwest Indiana. The NWI Form has raised over \$240,000 from more than 60 regional businesses and stakeholders to engage an economic development specialty consulting firm, TIP Strategies, to champion the planning process and facilitate the plan for the seven counties that make up Northwest Indiana. TIP Strategies has over 20 years of experience developing, and more importantly implementing, similar plans around the country.

Over a six-month engagement, TIP

Strategies will be using a three-phase planning model of discovery, opportunity analysis for the next five years, and finally implementation strategies with milestones. What is unique about their planning approach is the creation of strategies that are adapting and growing in an ever-changing economic environment. These strategies are designed to build upon themselves like a foundation, with collaboration and execution from the many regional stakeholders.

Today, Northwest Indiana is at a crossroad. We have an opportunity to change some of the negative trends and accelerate improving ones. To do this, though, we need a roadmap that will help guide us on to a path that will lead to sustained prosperity and opportunity for the entire region. With active engagement of key regional stakeholders through the planning process, we will have strong advocates and champions for creating a plan that is a reflection of ourselves as a region. I am excited and optimistic in the power of unity, and I am confident that we can achieve anything we want regionally, as long as we work together with respect and empathy toward one another.

George Douglas is senior vice president of Indiana Beverage. Prior to his current position with Indiana Beverage, Douglas was the operations manager for the Natural Ovens Bakery in Valparaiso. He also worked as assistant city planner and economic development planner for the City of Valparaiso, and as a case manager for PACT Bradley Center in Michigan City.

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