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AUG-SEP 2019

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technological skills and workforce needed for success*

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President
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Publisher/Executive Editor
Troy Linker

Managing Editor
Larry Avila

Director, Advertising Sales
Melanie Aylsworth

Contributing Writers
Larry Avila • Lesly Bailey • Lauren Caggiano
John Cain • Jerry Davich • Jane Donahue
Annemarie Mannion • Blair Milo
Bob Moulesong • Philip Potempa
Michael Puente • Jack Walton

Editorial Advisory Committee
Erika Dahl • John Davies
Lorri Feldt • Brett Fuller
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Leigh Morris • Racann Trakas
Michelle Searer • Anthony Sindone
Mary Wellnitz • Linda Woloshansky

Photography
Michelle Hamstra

Magazine Design/Production
Heather Pfundstein

email: news@nwindianabusiness.com

web: nwindianabusiness.com

visit: facebook.com/nwindianabiz

visit: twitter.com/nwindianabiz

visit: linkedin.com/company/nwindianabiz

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► Cover photo
of Robert Migliorini
by Michelle Hamstra



PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Talented developments

Regardless of industry, all organizations need people

Without people, no business would exist. Ultimately, people are the consumers of every product and service, including the most obscure technology. Even in business-to-business sales, people make decisions about what to purchase and when.

All successful companies revolve around human needs and the humans who deliver the products and services that meet those needs.

Employees are people too

Every employee in your organization is responsible either directly or indirectly for delivering your products and services. Employees are attracted to and stay with companies that respect their contributions to the mission of the organization, their contributions to their local communities and their desire for career growth while maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

What do employees need?

Research conducted by the Harvard Business Review asked about 20,000 workers a series of questions about their basic needs. Their research identified work's core needs as:

- **Opportunity** — to move between work and rest
- **Emotional** — to feel emotionally valued
- **Mental** — to have the opportunity for focused work and self-expression
- **Spiritual** — to feel that what they did had purpose or meaning

A significant percentage of the respondents felt their current employer did not meet one of their core needs — not one.

Competitive advantage

Without a clear understanding of the total cost to replace an employee, it is

easy to consider employee benefits and talent development as luxury expenses — as opposed to investments that deliver a competitive advantage. They usually more than pay for themselves by reducing future turnover and opportunity costs.

Each organization should calculate their own numbers, but research shows a general rule of thumb is to expect turnover costs to be about 50% of annual compensation for an entry-level person, 125% for a mid-level person, and 200% for a senior-level person.

Next steps

In this edition of Northwest Indiana Business Magazine, we offer several articles to help our readers anticipate employee needs. These efforts are in line with the Northwest Indiana Forum's Ignite the Region business plan. Its talent goal states: "Expand the talent assets of NWI and strengthen connections to the Region's employers."

The more businesses focus on meeting the needs of their employees, the more likely their employees are to be engaged, loyal, satisfied and energized at work. That result translates into improvements in most key performance measures, including productivity, customer satisfaction, safety and attendance. And those are results worth investing in.

With unemployment running at near-record lows, organizations are competing for great talent. Talk to your employees, and find out what they need within reason to make their work situation the best possible. If everyone is set up to succeed, it's a win-win for all.



READ ON PHONE



► **Troy Linker** is executive editor and publisher of the Northwest Indiana Business Magazine.

AROUND THE REGION

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

LARRY AVILA

Accounting

Charlie Loitz and **Bethany Crose** recently joined McMahon & Associates CPAs in Munster as staff accountants.

Banking

Marija Radiceska recently was named mortgage loan officer at Merrillville-based **Centier Bank**. The bank also announced these executive appointments: **Beverly Strickland** to assistant vice president; **Ashley Fedak** to assistant vice president; **Megan Cleary** to senior compliance auditor, officer; and **Molly Bernotus** assistant vice president, prime-time banker team manager and assistant vice president in the bank's retail sales department. New branch managers also were named: **Monica Abair**, downtown Elkhart location; **Amanda McCord**, South Bend downtown location; and **Linda Risch**, Fishers Crossing location in Fishers.

South Bend-based **Teachers Credit Union** recently appointed a new board member and elected new officers to its board of directors. **David Aranowski**, managing partner with Aranowski & Co. CPAs and Business Advisors in South Bend, was appointed to the TCU board. New TCU board officers include:

Vincent Henderson, chair; **Thea Kelly**, vice chair; **John Myers**, secretary; and **Paul Marsh**, TCU's president and CEO since 2011, will continue as treasurer. **Greg Freehauf**, CFO at Martin's Super Markets, was named to the supervisory committee. Henderson is president at Beacon Medical Group in South Bend. Kelly is assistant general counsel at Cummins Inc. Myers retired as vice president and CFO at Bethel University in 2010. **Rick Van Es** recently was named president of the TCU Insurance Agency.

Construction

Don Hancock recently joined the safety subcommittee of the **Northwest Indiana Business RoundTable**. Hancock is safety coordinator for Pangere Corp., a Gary-based construction services firm. Hancock is a member of Carpenters Union Local 599 and has more than 30 years of experience in construction and work site safety management.

Development

Downtown South Bend Inc. recently named **Amy Paul** director of business engagement. Paul will connect new businesses to available properties, help businesses find solutions, as well as grow partnerships with businesses in downtown South Bend.

Education

Erin Oliver will serve as the **University of Notre Dame's** first assistant vice president for institutional equity in the college's office of human resources. **Trent Grocock**, who serves as the university's associate vice president for financial planning and analysis, was appointed vice president for finance.

Deborah Way recently was appointed education and outreach coordinator at the **Gabis Arboretum at Purdue University Northwest**.

Randa Duvick, a professor of foreign languages and literatures at **Valparaiso University**, was presented the **American Association of Teachers of French's 2019 Dorothy Ludwig Excellence in Teaching Award at the Post-Secondary Level**.

The Lake County campus of **Ivy Tech Community College** recently named its board of trustees for the 2018-2020 term. Members include: **Andrew Kyres**, chairman of the board of trustees and vice president and banking center manager at First Financial Bank; **Jená Bellezza**, marketing and community relations director, Indiana Parenting Institute and member of Gov. Eric Holcomb's workforce cabinet; **Thomas Keilman**, chairman, director of government affairs for BP America,



ACCOUNTING
Charlie Loitz



ACCOUNTING
Bethany Crose



BANKING
Marija Radiceska



BANKING
Beverly Strickland



BANKING
Ashley Fedak

state of Indiana; **Joshua Long**, executive director, Hammond Education Foundation; **Vanessa Allen McCloud**, president and CEO, Urban League of Northwest Indiana; **Pete Smith**, training coordinator and financial secretary, United Steelworkers Sub-District 5; and **Dwayne Walker**, president and CEO, Chicagoland Popcorn.

Ariel Crawley, director of **IvyWorks** at **Ivy Tech Community College Indianapolis**, was awarded the **Tech Educator of the Year** award at



BANKING
Megan Cleary

TechPoint's annual **Mira Awards** for her work and partnership with **Indy Women in Tech (IWIT)** program.

The **Peruvian Consulate General** in Chicago recently hosted a reception for **Purdue University Northwest Professor Jose Castro-Urioste** to honor the 25th anniversary of his play "Ceviche in Pittsburgh" and his professional achievements.

Ivy Tech Community College presented its annual **President's Awards** to a select group of faculty for



BANKING
Molly Bernotus

their exemplary work with students and in their communities. Winners from Northwest and Northcentral Indiana include:

Lake County: **Parnell Jordan**, assistant professor/departement chair, welding/INDT;

Michigan City: **Laura Rosillo**, associate professor, life science;

South Bend/Elkhart: **Monika Champion**, department chair, mathematics; Valparaiso: **Randee Marinaro**, dean, school of nursing.



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Monica Abair



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Amanda McCord

Government

Zachary Jackson was named Indiana state budget director. He has served as the state deputy budget director since 2013.

Gov. Eric Holcomb appointed these Northwest Indiana community leaders to the **Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District** board: Gary Mayor **Karen Freeman-Wilson** (Lake County); Porter County Commissioner **Jeff Good**; St. Joseph County Commissioner **Andrew Kostielney**; Michigan City Mayor **Ron Meer** (La



BANKING
Linda Risch

Porte County); Indiana Department of Transportation Commissioner **Joe McGuinness** will serve as chairman.

Scott Rudd, Indiana's director of broadband opportunities, was appointed to the **Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee**, which operates under the **Federal Communications Commission**.

Health care

Maria Chicchelly was appointed to assistant vice president of patient care



BANKING
Vincent Henderson



BANKING
Thea Kelly

at **Methodist Hospitals Northlake Campus** in Gary.

Hospitality

Merrillville-based **White Lodging** recently named **Kevin Croy** general manager of the Hampton Inn & Suites in downtown Fort Wayne. The company also named **Brian Hutchins** regional vice president, urban and lifestyle, and promoted **Nicole Coghlan** from general manager to regional director of operations, suburban select.



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CONSTRUCTION
Don Hancock



DEVELOPMENT
Amy Paul



EDUCATION
Randa Duvick

Insurance

Ron Turpin, chief financial officer and principal at **Gibson**, is a recipient of the **Distinguished Hoosier Award**. The award is presented by the state of Indiana at the discretion of the governor to outstanding residents for their accomplishments and community contributions.

Law

Jennifer VanderVeen, an attorney with the law firm of **Tuesley Hall Konopa LLP** in South Bend, was

appointed president of the board for 2019-2020 at the **National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys**.

Kristina Kantar, corporation counsel for the city of Hammond, was appointed by Gov. Holcomb to the **Lake County Superior Court**. Kantar takes over for **Judge Diane Kavadias Schneider** who retired in February.

Manufacturing

Thor Industries, the Elkhart-based maker of recreational vehicles, recently

named **Matt Zimmerman** with Keystone RV Co., and **Chris Hermon** with Heartland RV Co., RV group managers. Each will oversee multiple Thor subsidiaries. The company also promoted **Jeff Runels**, president of Keystone RV, to president and CEO of the Keystone RV Co.; **Ryan Juday**, president of CrossRoads RV, to president and CEO of Heartland RV Co.; **Darin Elswick**, general manager at CrossRoads RV, to president of CrossRoads RV.



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HEALTH CARE
Maria Chicchelly

Marketing

Sara Fizer joined South Bend-based marketing firm **Villing & Co.** as an accounting manager.

Nonprofit

Larry Clemens recently was named new state director for the **Indiana chapter of The Nature Conservancy.**

Real Estate

Kimberly Cahill was named general manager of ExecutiveSuites², a new co-working space in Hammond created by ATG Real Estate Development.

Business news

Meyers Glaros Group of Schererville and **Regnier Insurance Services** of Highland recently merged operations. Regnier was established in 1916, while Meyers Glaros Group traces its beginnings to 1931. All employees from Regnier Insurance Services were retained.

Merrillville-based **Lakeshore Public Media** is broadcasting again at full power thanks to a new digital transmitter. Lakeshore spent almost \$400,000 in equipment and repairs, removing its old transmitter and equipment as well as purchasing a new solid-state transmitter. Lakeshore's transmission equipment was damaged in a storm in July 2018, which took the station off air.

The **Indiana Economic Development Corp.** announced June 7 that **Indiana Wheel Corp.**, a joint venture led by China-based Jingu Co. Ltd., will invest \$23 million to purchase, renovate and equip a 300,000-square-foot production plant at 2935 Vanvactor Drive, Plymouth.



INSURANCE
Ron Turpin

The company plans to begin production later this year.

Travel Management Co. of Elkhart has been acquired by **Wheels Up** of New York, a membership-based private aviation company. Travel Management is a wholesale-focused light jet operator. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

The **Economic Development Corp. Michigan City, Ind.**, said **Mikropor**, a Turkey-based company, will invest more than \$400,000 to move its plant from a 75,000-square-foot site to one totaling 175,000 square feet on Ohio Street. The larger space will allow the company to add 10 new full-time jobs.

Peanut butter maker **BNutty** is leasing, renovating and equipping a 16,000-square-foot food production center at 6370 AmeriPlex Drive in the AmeriPlex at the Port business park in Portage. The investment is estimated at \$1.9 million and is expected to create up to 100 new jobs by 2021.

Michigan City Paper Box will invest almost \$500,000 for new equipment into its Michigan City operations, according to the **Economic Development Corp. Michigan City, Ind.** The investment also will help the company retain eight jobs.

Sweden-based global defense and security company **Saab** will bring up to 300 jobs to Indiana once its new advanced manufacturing site is operational. The company will establish a new production facility at the Purdue University-affiliated **Discovery Park District Aerospace** in West Lafayette. According to the state, the Saab facility will support production of the U.S. Air Force's next generation T-X jet trainer. The company is expecting to begin



LAW
Jennifer VanderVeen



REAL ESTATE
Kimberly Cahill

hiring in 2020.

Franciscan Health recently opened a new location for its **ExpressCare** and **WorkWell** office in St. John. The new site at 8345 Wicker Ave. replaces the former site at 11355 W. 97th Lane in St. John, which closed April 12.

Several companies from Northwest Indiana were ranked among the state's top **Best Places to Work** in 2019, according to an annual survey released by The Best Companies Group and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. The Northwest Indiana businesses making the list and their rankings include: Small companies (15 to 74 U.S. employees; 53 companies in category): 4. **Lakeside Wealth Management**, Chesterton; 36. **General Insurance Services**, Michigan City; 38. **Peepers by PeeperSpecs**, Michigan City; 47. **Starin Marketing Inc.**, Chesterton. Large companies (250 to 999 U.S. employees; 23 companies in category): 5. **Centier Bank**, Merrillville. Major companies (1,000-plus U.S. employees; 12 companies in category): 2. **Edward Jones**, statewide (several offices in Northwest Indiana); 3. **Horseshoe Casino**, Hammond; 12. **First Merchants Bank**, Muncie (operates locations in Northwest Indiana).

The growth of the **Ports of Indiana** in recent years is credited to former CEO **Rich Cooper**. The **Inland Rivers, Ports and Terminals Inc.**, during its recent annual conference in Baton Rouge, La., presented its inaugural lifetime achievement award to Cooper. Inland Rivers, Ports & Terminals Inc., which the Ports of Indiana is a longtime member, is a nationwide trade association for users of the U.S. Inland Waterway system.



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MANUFACTURING



Purdue University Northwest has partnered with industry to continually improve course content and laboratories to ensure that graduates are ready to be successful immediately upon entering the workforce.



READ ON PHONE

MANUFACTURING BRIGHT FUTURE

REGION TAKES STEPS TO ENSURE INDUSTRY BUILDS ON TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS, WORKFORCE NEEDED FOR SUCCESS

JERRY DAVICH

Since the first steel mills opened along the Lake Michigan shoreline, Northwest Indiana has repeatedly proven highly adaptable to meeting the needs of manufacturing.

Still this unheralded sector of American productivity continues to be viewed as a dirty, dangerous industry despite the integration of 21st-century robotics, temperature-controlled environments, and careers offering high-tech, high-wage opportunities.

"Indiana is the most manufacturing intensive state in the nation, contributing nearly a third of the total state output and employing approximately 20 percent of the state's workforce," said Brian Burton, president/CEO of the Indiana Manufacturers Association.

During the past decade, Indiana ranked second in the nation in manufacturing job growth despite a national trend of slowing growth in the sector, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In April, Indiana's workforce grew to 3.41 million workers, according to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.

"Manufacturing is alive and well in Northwest Indiana," said Roy Vanderford, director of business development for the Center of Workforce Innovations in Valparaiso. "It remains a major driver of economic health and growth here."

Vanderford said the manufacturing sector is by far the largest contributor to the Gross Regional Product in the Region.

"And, as such, provides a solid base of incomes, wealth and tax support that enables other sectors to thrive," he said.

Training resources

In April, Vanderford facilitated a "Manufacturing-Real Talk" session at the State of the Workforce conference. There he offered insights about a business sector that too many Hoosiers take for granted. For example, Indiana has the highest percentage of jobs tied to manufacturing at about 17 percent, with Northwest Indiana's percentage at more than 13 percent, which is higher than both metro Chicago and the nation as a whole at 8 percent.

While the picture of manufacturing in Northwest Indiana is historically steel and heavy metal — and rightly so with 25 percent of the nation's steel production coming from the Region — hidden beneath this figure are the numerous small- and medium-sized manufacturers that also operate throughout the area.

"We drive by many of these employers every day without having any idea what is going on inside their walls," Vanderford said. "And what is going on is often quite amazing — very clean and very high tech, often integrating creatively with other sectors such as transportation, logistics, health care and agriculture."

The growing challenge in 2019 and beyond is finding young, eager and educated workers to fill the ranks in these manufacturing businesses.

ArcelorMittal, for example, took advantage of the state's Next Level Jobs program by reaching out to high schools and middle schools to help find students on industry-like career paths. This allows students to get hands-on experience while providing them with relevance about skills they're learning at its training center.

"I strongly believe the manufacturing sector will be a strength of Northwest Indiana for years to come. Our population is made up of people who understand how to make things."

—Bert Cook
Executive director
La Porte Economic
Advancement
Partnership

"A pressing issue for manufacturing is securing enough of a workforce that has the technical skills capable of implementing and operating the advances in automation required to remain competitive in a global economy," said James Higley, professor of Mechanical Engineering Technology at Purdue University Northwest. "Many industries have purchased modern equipment, even robots to support automation."

Purdue University Northwest has partnered with industry to continually improve course content and laboratories

to ensure that graduates are ready to be successful immediately upon entering the workforce.

The university's college of technology works closely with local businesses and industry to ensure that its courses are application-oriented and include laboratories with state-of-the-art equipment. This ensures that graduates meet the increased technology demands of

>MANUFACTURING

advanced manufacturing.

"This changing landscape of manufacturing requires a technology strong workforce," said Deborah Blades, director of Industrial Relations and Experiential Learning at PNW. "Introducing middle- and high-school students to one of the many careers in manufacturing, while being transformed by automation, is one step in employing a new generation of manufacturing talent and advanced manufacturing within the Region."

In the most recent statewide survey of Indiana manufacturers, 81 percent reported problems in recruiting young people into manufacturing. For those employers who stated jobs will be decreasing, 60 percent cited that the primary reason is "fewer young people going into manufacturing."

Vanderford said this likely indicates some jobs are being eliminated by automation, and the sector now has entered a period when automation creates jobs requiring technical expertise that are difficult to fill.

Ivy Tech Community College's Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering and Applied Science program offers innumerable courses:

- Advanced automation and robotics technology,
- Precision agriculture,
- Aviation management,
- Building construction management,
- Electrical engineering,
- Electronics and computers,
- Biotech and chem-tech,
- And heating ventilation and air conditioning, among them.

"In addition, we have numerous certifications and certificates that are credentials addressing various high-demand or high-wage positions in the industry," said Sue Smith, vice president of the program. "As far as I know, we are the only college doing this technical interdisciplinary option, and it is, according to other colleges, revolutionizing higher education by aligning it with industry needs."

Ivy Tech's Smart Automation Certification Alliance is a nonprofit foundation with a mission to develop and deploy modular industry 4.0 certifications for a wide range of industries.



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219-663-4991

Dyer

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202 Joliet St
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"We are well into the fourth industrial revolution in manufacturing, and we are working to embed the needed skills into our existing programs," Smith said.

Global competition

Robert Migliorini, president of American Precision Services in Gary, which specializes in machining, grinding, welding and fabrication, agreed that manufacturing continues to be strong

in Indiana, but during the past 20 years, competition has become more global.

"Many decisions being considered by manufacturers are increasingly being made with global implications in mind," he said.

Migliorini said his company is continually training and recruiting so that the company remains competitive and aware of changes in technology.

"We have also made significant

investments in updating our machinery and technology so that we remain a state-of-the-art machine shop," he said.

Athula Kulatunga, department head of Engineering Technology at PNW, said the fourth industrial "revolution" is underway with fast-changing technologies and techniques. Dubbed "Industry 4.0," the segment applicable to the manufacturing industry brings communication technologies, artificial intelligence, internet of things, and smart machines together to create intelligent, lean, and energy-efficient manufacturing. It's all devised to compete in a highly competitive global marketplace.

"The skill gap has been growing for some time," Kulatunga said. "Manufacturing companies complain about the difficulty of finding skilled engineers for current and future needs."

His experiences as an educator in the vocational institute and as a professor at Purdue University in West Lafayette for more than 22 years convinced him to develop a completely different approach to train first-year college students and community youth.

A program called Discipline Specific Skill Acquisition is a college-bound skilled development program where learners become competent and confident in applying fundamental skills related to mechanical engineering technology, electrical engineering technology and mechatronics engineering technology. The DSSA program consists of modules that can be easily altered to fit industry needs and community-based skill development programs.

"We have tested some modules with 13- and 14-year-old students with great success," Kulatunga said.

DSSA graduates possess the basics of modern design, simulation and hardware development tools to adopt new technologies into the existing manufacturing industry.

"The first cohort of the college-level DSSA program graduated in June," he said.

Preserving manufacturing

In late 2018, the Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce established a Manufacturer's Committee to, among other objectives,

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arrange tours of local plants and factories. In May, the committee took 24 Hammond school counselors on a tour of Hammond Machine Works, Beatty Machine/Bemcor and Tri-State Industries.

“The counselors had a multitude of questions, during and after their tours, relative to skills needed for employment,” said Dave Ryan, the chamber’s executive director. “From our recent tours, our manufacturing base in Hammond and East Chicago is bustling, with each of the plant managers currently in a hiring mode.”

Katie Eaton, president of the Michigan City Chamber of Commerce, said much of the workforce now entering the manufacturing sector is unfamiliar with the Region’s manufacturing history.

“While we still have manufacturers that have been in Michigan City for half a century or more — Michigan City Paper Box, Weil-McLain and Sullair to name a few — we also have manufacturers hitting their 20- or 25-year anniversaries.”

She said manufacturers, both old and new, continue to embrace innovative technologies and automation into their production lines.

“With the help of community partners like Center of Workforce Innovations, and state programs like Next Level Jobs, which provide upskilling and training specific to manufacturers, this Region will continue to be an attractive location for manufacturing companies to invest in,” Eaton said.

Bert Cook, executive director of the La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership, points to new production facilities, including Arconic — possibly among the most advanced aerospace manufacturing facilities in the world — adding high-tech sophistication to Northwest Indiana’s long-established manufacturing tradition. Other new additions to this sector include American Licorice, Jaeger-Unitek Sealing Solutions, Revere Packaging and MonoSol.

“While manufacturing has stepped back in parts of Northwest Indiana, this has not been the case in La Porte,” Cook said.

He cites the cross-training of personnel

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to implement new manufacturing technologies in multiple industries, along with manufacturers investing in upgraded equipment and processes. These investments create more efficient and sustainable business models, in addition to supporting their communities through property taxes.

"While it is true that we have workforce issues, so do all communities," Cook said. "I strongly believe the manufacturing

sector will be a strength of Northwest Indiana for years to come. Our population is made up of people who understand how to make things."

Vanderford, from the Center of Workforce Innovations, said any discussion of manufacturing in this Region must include the impact of neighboring Chicago, the ninth largest economy in the world and the major economic driver for the entire Midwest.

"Manufacturers are already attracting workers from both Illinois and Michigan, with more ... jobs coming to the manufacturing sector than any other sector," he said. "Our competitive business climate in Indiana will continue to be attractive for employers in neighboring states as they look to expand or move production facilities."

The new Ignite the Region economic development plan presents the case for growth of the manufacturing sector as part of a diversified portfolio for economic growth, noting the growth of all sectors accelerated by advances in technology. The plan states: "Tremendous productivity gains have enabled manufacturers to increase output, even as payrolls have declined.

To remain competitive, firms have increasingly turned to advanced processes for better, more efficient production. This too is the case in Northwest Indiana. The Region is a hotbed of companies and centers that are spurring new technologies and innovation."

When asking a group of manufacturers several years ago for a definition of "advanced manufacturing," one employer responded, "any manufacturer who is still in business."

"In large part that's true following the last recession, as employers had to utilize technology to remain competitive," Vanderford said.

Compare that response with the most recent survey of Indiana's manufacturers: "Investment in facilities, machinery and information technology" received a higher response as the most important priority than any time in the last five years of the survey.

"Schools, government and employers are all responding to the needs for upskilling," Vanderford said.

A recent study by the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. ranked Indiana as the most vulnerable state in the nation for job loss tied to automation, largely because of its reliance on manufacturing jobs. However, the report also noted that Indiana has the chance to take the lead in the nation in developing skills that align with new technologies.

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Photo provided by Purdue University Northwest

Dan Buehrle, left, workforce training instructor at Purdue University Northwest, and Rafael Pego de Melo, an advanced manufacturing student assistant, prepare a test in the automation lab. The university's college of technology works closely with local businesses and industry to ensure that its courses are application-oriented and include laboratories with state-of-the-art equipment.

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we should continue to look to that as a great source of pride," Vanderford said.

Several directives and suggestions are aimed at keeping manufacturing the backbone of this Region's economic identity. For instance, a "mindset reset" is needed to showcase manufacturing as a viable career option, not an alternative to college but rather another route to higher education. Also, there is a call to change stereotypical perceptions produced decades ago. Instead, connect manufacturing to areas of student interest such as the green movement and social causes.

Higley of Purdue Northwest said the Region needs a public awareness campaign with the sustained message: "manufacturing is cool."

"The Region has good infrastructure to support manufacturing and the quantity of skilled people is increasing, so I see a bright future for manufacturing in Northwest Indiana," he said.

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EXPERTS SAY A LITTLE CREATIVITY CAN GO A LONG WAY
IN SEARCH FOR COMPREHENSIVE BUT AFFORDABLE BENEFITS

BOB MOULESONG

Offering employees traditional benefits — health care, insurance, savings plans, paid time off — has always been a challenge for employers because of the high expense that comes with them.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, traditional employee benefits represent about a third of an organization's compensation costs. To maximize that return on investment, it's necessary to plan strategically to provide the best options for their workforce but remain cost effective.

Whether the employer is a private university, manufacturer, insurance company or financial institution, professionals in every industry face similar challenges. The goal is to find the best solutions for the right kind of benefits that will contribute to workforce retention and recruiting efforts.

A healthy environment

Valparaiso University is a private college that employs 935 people. In 2015, the school's insurance broker suggested they consider an onsite clinic as a benefit that could reduce health care

costs for both employer and employee.

"When our employees visit the onsite clinic, instead of visiting an urgent care or even a primary care physician, both sides save money," said Scott Harrison, the human resources executive director at the college. "Cost savings are realized in a few ways, (and) our most recent analysis of the plan showed a substantial savings for the university, and a very high satisfaction rating from our employees. It's definitely a win-win."

About 86 percent of eligible employees and their dependents visit the clinic routinely, the university said.



Photo provided by General Insurance Services

LOYEES

Indianapolis-based OurHealth manages the clinic. It charges the school a flat rate based on the number of eligible employees.

"It's a fixed cost every year," Harrison said. "That makes our budget stable, which helps offset other benefit costs that fluctuate annually."

Services available to employees and dependents include wellness checks, vaccinations, acute care for colds and flu, standard children's immunizations, prescriptions and management of certain chronic conditions.

Harrison uses the clinic twice a month. "I pay nothing for quality services, right on campus," he said.

Another innovative benefit that VU offers eligible employees is a

tuition remission/exchange program. Employees can attend courses at the campus tuition free, paying only for books and lab fees.

As their seniority grows, so does the benefit. The exchange portion of the program allows employees and dependents to attend other colleges tuition free. Schools enrolled in the program swap fees and write them off quid pro quo.

Harrison said the tuition reimbursement program is as popular as the clinic.

"Our ability to offer these two benefits helps us attract and retain the type of talent we need in order to remain a premier education establishment," he said. "Conversely, we have found ways to keep the costs relatively low and stable."

A question of culture

General Insurance Services in La Porte assists small- to mid-sized companies in constructing employee benefits packages to help attract and retain top talent. The goal is to find balance between effectiveness for employees and efficiency for business.

"Whenever I sit down to discuss employee benefits with an organization, I always ask about their culture," said Craig Menne, president and CEO. "It's important for a company to understand that the package they offer employees is a reflection of the culture they want to promote."

Menne said this doesn't mean providing exorbitant benefits, which do not fit a realistic budget.

"Smaller companies simply don't have the budget of a large business," he said. "But they can still be creative and innovative in how they show employees that they value them."

Since General Insurance is a small business, Menne uses his firsthand experiences when talking to a company.

"Something very important to younger employees is what the company does

outside of making a product," he said. "Do they get involved in the community? Are they considered a value-added resource that makes the town a better place to live?"

General Insurance offers employees paid time off to volunteer for their favorite nonprofit or other charitable organization. It also matches collections

on "blue jean Friday" and donates the proceeds to those organizations.

"It's not a tremendous amount of money or time," Menne said. "But it tells our employees that we value what they are passionate about, and that we listen. That can mean as much to them as other more traditional benefits."

A different demographic of employees may place a higher value on retirement savings and disability benefits. For General Insurance and their clients, Menne refers to the culture and the tone of the business.

Another creative option General Insurance brings up to companies is the potential flexibility of a 401k plan.

"If the plan is constructed correctly, employees can use matching funds to pay off student loans," he said.

"That can be a very attractive benefit yet doesn't cost more than the original contribution match."

Banking on what's real

According to Chrisanne Christ, senior partner of human resource development at Merrillville-based Centier Bank, the core traditional benefits offered to associates are just the beginning of a continuous journey.

"With the low unemployment rates, people have choices," she said. "Those choices become very important because they identify who the associate is, and who we are (as an organization)."

Centier uses third-party anonymous feedback surveys from employees to gather pertinent data on what



"Something very important to younger employees is what the company does outside of making a product. Do they get involved in the community?"

—Craig Menne
President and CEO
General Insurance
Services in La Porte



Photo provided by OurHealth

Heather Villareal, left, a registered nurse with OurHealth in Indianapolis, tests a patient's blood sugar level. OurHealth manages the Valparaiso University clinic. It charges the school a flat rate based on the number of eligible employees.

is important to them and their lives. That information is cross referenced with benchmark studies and Society for Human Resource Management publications to compile a comprehensive list of what matters to its employees.

"We offer an excellent package of health care, insurance, disability and vacation," Christ said. "Then we go above and beyond to offer benefits that fit our associate's vision on making an impact in the community."

Centier employees receive paid time off to volunteer at local nonprofits. They are compensated for involvement in activities, including the Day of Caring, volunteering at the NWI Food Bank, and Phil's Friends, an organization that supports cancer patients.

"These are benefits that have costs associated with them," she said. "But it's one way we let our team know that, if it's important to them, it's also important to us."

Centier also has teamed with OurHealth to provide health care services to associates. The partnership results in significant savings for the bank and its employees. With multiple participating locations, a clinic is always close and convenient.

The bank also provides paid parental leave, which Christ said is an extremely popular benefit, especially for younger associates who are raising a family.

Care Here is an initiative funded by both associates and management. Contributions from both sides are available to associates in need.

"We've had team members who needed a new furnace right now and didn't have the resources," Christ said. "The Care Here fund is used to help our associates get back on track after such a setback. People donate to help their fellow associates, and that's about as real as it gets."

At the crossroads

According to a 2018 report by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 18 percent of America's large businesses (more than 250 employees) offer retiree health care. That's down 50 percent in the past 30 years.

Urschel Laboratories, with their new state-of-art facility in Chesterton, has taken a different approach to employee benefits.

"Our corporate culture is a long-term vision for both the company and the employee," said James Keilman, the company's human resources executive

director. "When someone comes on board at Urschel, we want it to be a career, not a stop. To encourage that, we offer a rich package of benefits that define our commitment to employees."

Using an old-school approach that harkens back to a different era, Urschel offers retirement health care benefits to eligible retirees. The health care plan in effect during an employees' career consists of low co-pays, deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses.

Tracie Lopez, a senior human resources generalist at Urschel, said the company uses benchmark comparisons to help define what makes Urschel stand out from the competition.

"We strive to help our employees maintain health and financial well-being," she said. "The analytics we use to create our benefits package tell us what employees value the most."

Urschel is an employee-owned business. Employees receive company stock annually as part of its ESOP allocation formula. The stock is sold back to the company at retirement.

A robust 401k plan is another driver of the long-term vision.

Urschel also buys in to OurHealth services for employees.

“As a self-funded health care plan, we experience a cost reduction when employees and their dependents utilize the clinic, and they get the health care they need with little to no co-pays,” Keilman said. “It’s a win-win.”

Urschel also incorporated a workout facility and wellness center when it recently expanded its Chesterton location to encourage employees to live healthier and get more active.

Urschel is reaping the rewards in terms of extremely low turnover, a critical component of the institutional knowledge necessary to remain competitive, company representatives said.

Benefit pyramids

LHD Benefit Advisors in Indianapolis is a full-service employee benefits firm. It works with businesses, which employ between 20 and 2,000 employees, offer-

ing services that range from employee benefits to population health to retirement.

“When we begin working with a company, we discuss a benefit pyramid,” said Ben Fuelberth, senior benefits adviser. “The bottom of the pyramid is the largest band, narrowing as it rises.”

He said the first step is deciding what will be in the largest band, because that’s going to be what impacts employees the most. Typically,

the largest band consists of major medical coverage and disability options.

“Regardless of the employee demographics, those two benefits rise to the top of the priority list,” Fuelberth said. “Depending on the company and their budget, the next two are life insurance

and retirement, usually in the form of a 401k.”

Fuelberth said between a half to two-thirds of employees do not have emergency funds set aside. A January 2019 report from CNBC said only 40 percent of Americans have \$1,000 set aside for emergency issues.

“We talk to our clients about how benefits, such as health care and disability, can be viewed as emergency funds for

health-related issues,” he said. “It’s a selling point to employees and candidates that tells them you’re engaged.”

LHD assists partners in benchmarking their package against similar companies.

“We try to get our partners to the 50th percentile,” he said. “A business can always decide to provide more, if possible, (but) knowing you’re in the midrange of your competition is a solid foundation.”



“When our employees visit the onsite clinic, instead of visiting an urgent care or even a primary care physician, both sides save money.”

—Scott Harrison
Human resources
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LAWFUL ADAPTATIONS

LAW FIRMS COMBINE LATEST TECHNOLOGY WITH TRADITIONAL PRACTICE TO RETAIN, ATTRACT NEW BUSINESS

ANNEMARIE MANNION

Paul A. Leonard Jr. has been practicing law for more than three decades, but he still remembers his first day of employment in a law office.

"I was presented with a Bic pen, a legal pad and a telephone," said Leonard, who still uses those items, but now also uses

technology," said John Hughes, managing partner at Hoeppner, Wagner & Evans, a general practice firm with offices in Valparaiso and Merrillville. "It used to be that every attorney had a secretary, documents were produced by a secretary and letters went out."

Today, email is the most common form of communication, he said.

"It's too easy to respond with whatever the emotion is at the moment and then, perhaps, wish you hadn't," Hughes said.

Leonard agreed, saying the expectation is that answers are expected fast. Gone are the days when he would dictate a letter and let it sit overnight in case he had additional thoughts.

Courtney Smith, an associate specializing in elder and family law for the past two years at Burke, Costanza & Carberry, said sometimes an answer can be provided quickly but others it cannot.

"Sometimes you can reply by email in a couple minutes, and sometimes it takes a couple hours to research and get an answer," said Smith, who lets clients know if she can respond immediately or not.

Benefits to change

Technology might have altered clients' expectations, but it also has provided benefits as some aspects of an attorney's work have become less time consuming and costly.

Filing a deed, for instance, does not have to be done in person.

"Instead of walking over to the courthouse to file a deed, you can submit it electronically, and it's done," Hughes said. "You also save time and money (filing documents electronically) because there are no fees and postage."

Thanks to mobile phones and laptops, attorneys are not necessarily tied to an office.

"It changes how we run our business," said J. Todd Spurgeon, president of the Indiana Bar Association. "I can run my business from my laptop if I need to."

The evolution of the internet brings other new challenges, including easy access to legal documents for anyone who wants them. Attorneys are feeling competition from online legal services.

It's common today that individuals



Attorneys with the law firm of Hoeppner Wagner & Evans primarily communicate with clients via email.

Photo provided by Hoeppner Wagner & Evans LLP

software, a mobile phone and other technology in his office at Burke, Costanza & Carberry LLP. The general civil practice has locations in Merrillville and Valparaiso.

"Right now, I have two computer monitors on my desk with several programs running that give me access to our client databases and legal research," said Leonard, who specializes in family law.

Technology, market forces and clients' needs and expectations have changed plenty through the decades since Leonard first started practicing law. His firm and others throughout Northwest Indiana are adapting to changing forces.

"The main thing that's evolved is

"Secretaries may (work with) three attorneys instead of one," he said.

While the rise of technology has provided attorneys with research tools and other conveniences, it also has changed the expectations of clients who, in an age of Uber and other on-demand services, seek immediate answers to even the thorniest legal problems.

"People expect a prompt response when they send an email or leave a phone message," Hughes said. "Sometimes it's a little hard to think about a problem and give it some time and research."

There's a danger in responding too quickly and not having a thoughtful response, he said.



READ ON PHONE

might try to handle basic legal paperwork on their own, but attorneys say many times they are called to sort out problems created by someone who tried and failed to do it on their own.

"There are some things based on technology that people can do online, like file for divorce, and the court will help (complete the form)," Leonard said.

It's not uncommon, however, for his firm to be presented with divorce cases that come to them mid-stream; or zoning and regulatory cases and landlord-tenant cases in which parties used online templates and ended up with some issue requiring an attorney.

"I think, 'if only they'd taken the time to talk to us, we could've saved them a lot of time,'" Smith said.

Another form of business pressure comes from corporations that are expanding their in-house legal teams.

"They pay the attorneys on staff and then they have control over costs," said Leonard whose firm focuses on attracting clients that don't employ in-house attorneys.

"We go after smaller and mid-size companies because they don't use in-house lawyers or use firms in Chicago or Indianapolis," he said.

Remaining competitive

The desire of corporate clients to better control costs prompted Barnes & Thornburg LLP, a full-service firm that has an office in South Bend, to launch a Legal Operations Department this year. The firm, which has 14 offices across the nation, first noticed businesses wanting more control over legal costs during the 2008 recession.

"All things came under scrutiny as large companies looked at cutting costs and mandating efficiencies," said Jared Applegate, chief legal operations officer for the Indianapolis-based firm.

The department evolved over the past four years as the firm has worked with clients under an initiative branded BT ValueWorks. It establishes alternate fee structures that are not based on billable hours. The fees are customized to each client's unique needs.

"I look at what keeps clients up at night and what they're going to engage in (in terms of legal needs) within the next

year," said Applegate who has a background in banking and finance rather than law.

Applegate, who has a team of six, works with clients to develop a fee structure based on such factors as time, scope of work, client input and even whether the firm is successful in achieving a client's goal for litigation or a transaction.

"We take in a lot of data points to come up with a value-priced fee," Applegate said.

At Barnes & Thornburg, in-house legal executives collaborate with attorneys and full-time legal project management professionals, pricing professionals, and use technology products to address day-to-day business and legal opera-

to the program. More than 200 of the firm's 557 lawyers have received training in legal operations.

The firm is building a new five-story office building 201 S. Main St. in South Bend. It will open in 2021 and is the first new office building constructed in the city's core in the past 20 years.

The new office will allow the firm's Northwest Indiana team to expand.

"Our new location enables us to continue to grow and support the needs of our clients throughout the area," said Philip J. Faccenda Jr., managing partner of the firm's South Bend office.

As the world has gone digital, so have attorneys who use websites and social media to connect or provide helpful



The legal team at Burke Costanza & Carberry in Merrillville have adapted to keep up with technology.

Photo provided by Burke, Costanza & Carberry LLP

tions challenges.

"This firm has always had a creative bone and was positioned to say, 'how can we best serve clients?'" Applegate said. He added that clients appreciate knowing upfront what their legal costs will be and are able to budget for them.

He said it has improved interactions between attorneys and their clients.

"We've removed friction from that relationship (between client and law firm) as it relates to cost," Applegate said.

Since Barnes & Thornburg launched BT ValueWorks in 2016, it has managed more than 370 legal matters. In 2018, \$100 million of the firm's total revenue of \$406 million was attributed

information to potential clients. Some websites provide a contact form for clients who want an initial consultation with an attorney or the opportunity to chat live with a staff person.

Based on his company website, Leonard said, "when they pick up the phone to call us, they already have a pretty good idea of what we can do for them."

The firm also is looking for innovative ways to connect with people online. It has posted quick-tip videos on Facebook with attorneys answering questions about immigration.

"That's made our immigration practice boom," Leonard said.



Rendering provided by Sease Gerig & Associates Public Relations

Barnes & Thornburg LLP is building a new five-story office building at 201 S. Main St. in South Bend. Shown here as a rendering, it will open in 2021 and is the first new office building constructed in the city's core in the past 20 years.

Protecting a profession

Attorneys say operating digitally has benefits, it also poses challenges that law firms and other businesses need to guard against. That includes the

possibility that their computer system and client information might be hacked.

"Business is conducted in a digital age," Leonard said. "We all operate on the internet, and we're all vulnerable."

The choice of a provider for storing information in the cloud was an important decision, according to Leonard who said his firm's business manager thoroughly vetted their cloud storage provider before hiring them.

As the business world changes so do the activities of law firms who tailor their areas of focus according to the needs of clients. During the 2008 recession, Burke, Costanza & Carberry handled a lot of foreclosures. Today, that demand has lessened, and the firm is working more with entrepreneurs, women-owned businesses, immigration, personal injury, environmental and elder care cases.

"Client mix changes with the passage of time," Leonard said. "Our task as attorneys is to constantly retrain ourselves to serve clients."

Employment is an area where Hughes said his firm is finding clients who need assistance.

"People don't stay at the same job the way they used to," Hughes said. "It is important to have a structure to the



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employment relationship.”

He noted that his firm can make recommendations regarding employee handbooks, benefits and obligations between employer and employee.

In the era of MeToo, Leonard agreed that clients are becoming more aware of the consequences of a sexual harassment case. He said employee handbooks should include a detailed chapter on the topic.



“There are a lot fewer phone conversations than there used to be. I’m not sure that’s a good thing. Sometimes picking up the phone is more effective.”

—John Hughes
Managing partner
Hoeppner,
Wagner & Evans

Another area of growth is elder law, according to Smith at Burke, Costanza & Carberry. The firm handled 45 guardianship cases in 2018 and has done 20 so far this year.

To build relationships with seniors, Smith attends local chamber of commerce meetings, does presentations for senior groups and even calls bingo at a senior living facility.

“I make sure I’m connecting with my community,” she said.

The popularity of email and other technolo-

gies has lessened the need for face-to-face meetings or phone conversations between attorneys and clients, but the attorneys agree that these sorts of connections should not be abandoned.

“There are a lot fewer phone conversations than there used to be,” Hughes said. “I’m not sure that’s a good thing. Sometimes picking up the phone is more effective.”

He, and the other attorneys, value their relationships with clients.

“You don’t want to lose that personal contact and personal connection,” he said. “You develop trust, loyalty and respect for each other.”

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A talent for in-demand jobs

Health care, construction industries among those
Region groups developing talent pipelines



Students from area high schools got a sample of life in the trades at the Hands-On Skilled Trades Day event at the Gary Area Career Center in March.

Photo provided by the Construction Advancement Foundation

JANE DONAHUE

When it comes to creating a pipeline of future employees, Hoosiers are getting down to business. And with the Region's growth dependent on a highly qualified workforce, numerous efforts are underway to fill the ranks in Northwest Indiana.

"Access to talent is a primary factor when companies make expansion or site selection decisions," said Linda Woloshansky, president and CEO of the Center of Workforce Innovations in Valparaiso. "The acceleration of Northwest Indiana's economy will be driven in large part by the ability to create, retain and attract a high-quality workforce."

Woloshansky said the Center of Workforce Innovations focuses on what people need to be successful in

the workforce, as well as the solutions employers and economic developers want for their businesses to grow.

"One of the things we look at is what are high-growth, high-demand industries and occupations, and where is there a great return on investment," Woloshansky said. "We are always looking at what training needs to occur for people to get into those jobs, and (how) to build that employee pipeline for employers."

Woloshansky said the Regional Education and Employer Alliance for Developing Youth in Northwest Indiana (READY NWI) is a notable example. The grass-roots initiative aims to ensure Hoosier high school students are prepared with the skills sought by post-secondary institutions and Northwest Indiana employers.

"It's a pipeline development strategy

program that we are excited about, and our schools have embraced," Woloshansky said.

Expanding talent is a key component of Ignite the Region, a strategic plan for economic development in the seven-county Region, including Lake, Porter, La Porte, Newton, Jasper, Pulaski and Starke counties.

"Talent is a key pillar of the Ignite (the Region) plan, and there are a number of things that are occurring that tie into that," Woloshansky said. "One of those things is Graduation Pathways, a new graduation requirement that includes work-based experiential learning for high school students."

Beginning this fall with the class of 2023, every Hoosier high school student must complete academic requirements as well as learn and demonstrate employability skills and



demonstrate post-secondary-ready competencies.

With industries, including health care and construction, showing positive future growth, needs for education and training in those fields are paramount.

Developing health care employees

The Center of Workforce Innovations, the School City of Hobart and Ivy Tech Community College created the Northwest Indiana Healthcare Consortium to build key partnerships with health care providers, including Community Healthcare System hospitals. The consortium serves as a forum for the schools to hear employer needs regarding positions available in health care.

“Entry level positions that are great springboards to longer-term careers in health care continue to be in demand,” said Tony Ferracane, vice president of human resources, Community Foundation of Northwest Indiana in Munster. “The Center of Workforce Innovations is a strong partner that pulls schools, employers and the government together to tackle regional workforce development issues through career paths, apprenticeships and creative approaches.”

Mary Wallace, director of Community Healthcare System’s School of Medical Laboratory Science, has seen firsthand the importance of developing a talent pool to fill the ranks at area hospitals.

After Indiana University Northwest discontinued its two-year medical laboratory technician program, Wallace said health systems lost a key source of techs coming out of school. That paired with the number of current lab employees reaching retirement age spurred the Community Foundation of Northwest Indiana to create its own program.

“One of our goals is to graduate the students and have them work within our community health care system,” Wallace said. “They are really qualified to work just about anywhere in the country — they get a national certification — but we are finding most of them choose to stay here and work in the Region.”

Rachel Kometz, a 2018 graduate of the program, is a clinical laboratory technician at Community Hospital in Munster.

“The program taught me everything I needed to know,” said Kometz of Whiting. “I like that I really am using everything that I learned in school; the program helped me understand the concept of the job, and it’s exactly what I am doing today.”

The U.S. Department of Labor projects the employment of pharmacy technicians to grow 12 percent from 2016 to 2026. With that in mind, Community Healthcare System recently launched a 12-week entry-level pharmacy technician training program for high school graduates. In addition, the organization also launched a clinical lab assistant training program as a way for Community Hospital in Munster, St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago and St. Mary

Kevin Comerford, director of professional development for the Portage-based Construction Advancement

Foundation, said attracting quality workers into the Northwest Indiana construction industry is among their top priorities.

“We are continuously working on initiatives to build and fill the construction workforce pipeline,” Comerford said.

One key resource is the We Build Northwest Indiana website, which provides information about career opportunities in the Region’s building and construction industry.

“It covers employment opportunities in the skilled trades, which is where the majority of the careers in construction exist,” Comerford said. “Visitors can find information about 20 different construction

“The acceleration of Northwest Indiana’s economy will be driven in large part by the ability to create, retain and attract a high-quality workforce.”

—Linda Woloshansky
President and CEO
Center of Workforce
Innovations in Valparaiso



Nurse Tina Flynn, left, and Munster High School student Alexandra Vjestica check a newborn’s vitals as part of job shadowing at the Family Birthing Center of Community Hospital.

Photo provided by Community Hospital

Medical Center in Hobart to fill entry-level positions with well-qualified candidates in the hospital laboratories.

Building the construction trades

The Department of Labor projects construction employment to experience a 12 percent growth rate between 2016 and 2026.

apprenticeship programs, application information, minimum qualification requirements, interview advice and suggested areas of study that students can focus on while in high school.”

The foundation also sponsors several Construction and Skilled Trades Day events at different venues throughout the Region. In partnership with the



Photo provided by the Construction Advancement Foundation

The Construction Advancement Foundation is one of several groups working with companies and educators to ensure the Region has a skilled workforce today and in the future.

Northwest Indiana Workforce Board and the Joint Apprenticeship Training Centers, the events allow high school students the opportunity to work alongside current apprentices and perform hands-on construction-related activities.

Since their first event in 2017, more than 2,000 high school students from more than 30 Northwest Indiana community school corporations have participated in the event.

Comerford said these events are important steps in the development of future workers.

“The construction industry struggles at attracting high-quality individuals into the workforce,” Comerford said. “I believe one of the primary culprits stems from a one-size-fits-all approach in the public education system to promote college at the expense of vocational learning; this trend to push college as the only viable path to a rewarding career opportunity has had a detrimental effect on our skilled workforce.”

Comerford said there isn’t much exposure for his industry at the high school level, and increasingly, his group and those in his industry are seeing



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"While attracting quality individuals into the construction industry can be a challenge, the good news is we have some of the best construction apprenticeship training facilities in all of the world," Comerford said. "As a result, we have a great track record of developing highly-skilled construction workers (who) know how to build the infrastructure and facilities that keep our nation moving and make our customers profitable."

Paul Tran is an apprentice coordinator and instructor for the Technical Engineering Division, Plumbers Union Local 130 in Chicago. Tran said the apprentice program is market driven, and when contractors call for apprentices, the program opens to new applicants.

"It is a career that demands efficiency and skill," Tran said. "Local 130 works closely to develop the skills of our apprentices as well as offer guidance and mentorship for the challenging situations they face in the workplace."

The job market is becoming increasingly competitive, Tran said, and cultivating employee and employer relationships are critical to future success.

"The number of qualified technical engineers we have tomorrow is dependent on how many contractors can give real working experience to our young folks today," Tran said. "As Northwest Indiana continues to grow its demand for heavy civil and commercial projects, we hope to continue to supply qualified technical engineers to meet their needs."

Jonathan Cardenas, a third-year apprentice from Local 130, works as a technical engineer for Superior Construction in Portage.

Cardenas said the most fulfilling thing about being a technical engineer is seeing numerous projects develop, having worked on projects at Gary/Chicago International Airport and bridges in Gary, Crown Point and Kentland.

"The apprentice program has been a great learning experience," said Cardenas of Hammond. "It has helped me learn about different technologies and how they are applied to complete construction projects."

Comerford said men and women who

enter the construction industry can expect a rewarding career.


"Individuals who complete a registered apprenticeship program will be highly proficient in their craft and become certified," he said. "The skills are not only in high demand, but they are transferable, meaning that they can take those learned skills with them throughout their working life no matter where they live."

Woloshansky with the Center for Workforce Innovations said many great things are going on in Northwest Indiana relative to collaboration and developing talent in the area.

"I would encourage employers to communicate what their needs are and be willing to open up and share this information so the right parties can work with them," Woloshansky said. "There are many resources available."

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Certifiable work ethic

Efforts underway to ensure Indiana's employees develop foundation skills along with technical expertise



Charles Dixon, left, offers guidance to a trainee on how to properly use a router during a workshop sponsored by Goodwill Industries of Michiana.

Photo provided by Goodwill Industries of Michiana

LAUREN CAGGIANO

An organization's workforce recruiting efforts typically focus on technical skills and industry knowledge. But experts say there's more to finding the right worker than looking at a resume.

Individuals with hiring responsibilities say soft skills are in demand. That includes the ability to communicate in writing and verbally as well as recognizing the importance of showing up to work on time.

These qualities are often lacking in today's labor pool, experts say. Several

regional stakeholders, including employers, government, staffing agencies and higher education professionals, are examining this problem and seeking a solution.

George Douglas, senior vice president of operations at Valparaiso-based Indiana Beverage, is among those who have a vested interest in ensuring workers have a multidimensional skill set.

The issue came to his attention about 15 years ago, when the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board's Youth Employment Council introduced the Work Ethic Certificate. According to

Douglas, this program resulted from findings of a survey of companies where decision makers identified qualities they wanted in candidates.

The answer was resoundingly clear: employers want people who can effectively communicate, show up on time and manage their time well, among other things.

Based on that feedback, the board worked with employers and schools to help fill those gaps via the certificate program.

Douglas, who still serves on the board, said the certificate model resonated



READ ON PHONE

with him so much that he introduced it to his workplace.

"So, we brought it back here and put it on our job application," he said. "So, when somebody is applying, if they have (the certificate), we'd like to know about it."

Douglas said it gives preferential treatment to those candidates when it comes to landing an interview at Indiana Beverage.

"Certainly, we want to also reinforce for them, 'hey, this is important, no matter where you go in life and what you do, but it's certainly really important here,'" he said. "And so, we want to recognize the effort they put into building up those soft skills."

Douglas recommends that employers and hiring managers follow suit and prioritize this type of training and education. His advice, "I would start with asking applicants coming in whether or not they have completed the certificate, and if they don't, certainly talk with their schools about getting that program in place."

Time is of the essence and the current robust economy only makes hiring more challenging, Douglas said.

"Everyone's scrambling to find (qualified) employees right now and keep them," he said. "So, as recent graduates are coming out and entering the workforce for the first time, the skills are really important. And reinforcing them can close that loop a little bit."

Bottom-line impact

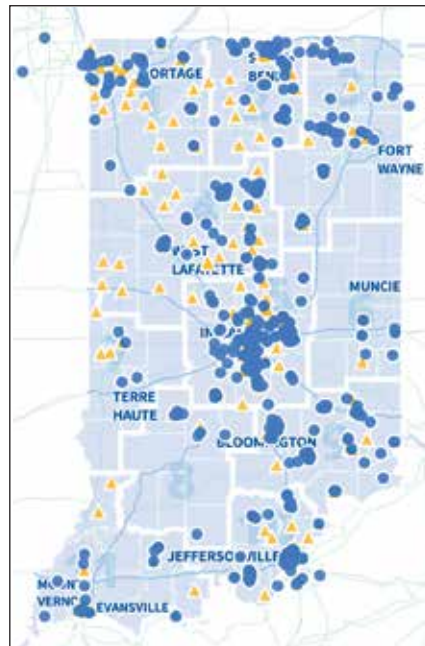
Alyssa Chumbley, co-owner of Express Employment Professionals of Northwest Indiana in Valparaiso, shared Douglas' sentiment. She said their business clients are hungry for employers who boast both strong business acumen and are eager to learn and grow as professionals.

"Candidates who are dependable, coachable and have life experiences in team environments seem to have the highest success rates in not only landing the job but also growing in their careers," she said.

"The willingness to seek constructive feedback, take lessons learned and use them to grow in your industry are soft skills that employers cannot teach, and these skills are typically game changers

to the bottom line."

Still, the supply does not always satisfy the demand, when it comes to quality of talent. She said low unem-



Provided by Indiana Department of Workforce Development

GOVERNOR'S WORK ETHIC CERTIFICATE

► The program that issues the Governor's Work Ethic Certificate was launched by Indiana in 2016. According to the state, in program year 2017-18, 105 schools statewide participated in the GWEC program, with a potential reach of 17,000 high school seniors. The Department of Workforce Development issued 1,695 certificates to the Class of 2018 students. Here the blue dots represent employer partners and yellow triangles represent participating schools.



ployment means that employers are having to come to terms with the fact that they have to be less selective in the hard skills and focus more on the soft skills of candidates, while being more creative in how they can train

and mentor these new team members.

Reaching tomorrow's workers

Officials at the state level are aware of these deficiencies. That's why the Indiana Department of Workforce Development works with high schools to better prepare graduates for the demands and expectations of the workforce. Enter the Governor's Work Ethic Certificate, the program launched by the state in 2016.

Associate Director of Youth Initiatives Chris Fitzgerald oversees the program, which is making an impact in more ways than one.

High school seniors in more than 100 participating schools statewide are graduating with sought-after soft skills and have access to a network of about 100 employers in a wide range of industries.

Besides meeting criteria related to attendance and academic performance, students must demonstrate strong communication skills, perseverance, critical thinking and organizational skills.

And the impact is measured in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

According to the state, in program year 2017-18, 105 schools statewide participated in the GWEC program, with a potential reach of 17,000 high school seniors. The Department of Workforce Development issued 1,695 certificates to the Class of 2018 students.

NWIWB also has its own work ethic certificate, which students in grades nine through 12 can earn. The Region program, which launched in 2016, had 31 participating schools during the 2018-19 school year. The Region program awarded 1,267 certificates.

A total of 553 Northwest Indiana 2019 high school graduates earned the state's work ethic certificate.

Fitzgerald calls it a "working man's degree" because it opens the doors to more opportunity after graduation. That's because the participating high schools, higher educational institutions, employers and other community partners have a vested interest in graduates' futures.

>STAFFING & HR

Investing in adult learners

Teaching soft skills to high school students isn't the only focus. Programs for adults also are a priority.

Bob Birge, DWD's chief communications officer, said there is an opportunity for the state.

"Indiana has nearly 500,000 working-age adults without a high school equivalency (HSE) or diploma," he said. "So, when people are looking to fill jobs, they should know we have so many people in our community, (and) we just need to get them the right skills to be able to move up to help fill these jobs."

Birge said that's the focus of the state's adult education programs throughout Indiana.

To that end, he said they teach them basic skills, including soft skills, and the requirements that are necessary to earn a diploma or HSE.

Similarly, under the Next Level Jobs initiative, Hoosiers have access to job training through Workforce Ready grants. This program makes it possible for qualifying Hoosiers to enroll in

Candidates who are dependable, coachable and have life experiences in team environments seem to have the highest success rates in not only landing the job but also growing in their careers."



—Alyssa Chumbley
Co-owner

Express Employment Professionals
of Northwest Indiana

no-cost training programs in any one of Indiana's five high-demand fields: advanced manufacturing, building and construction, health and life sciences, IT and business services, and transportation and logistics.

Hoosiers can earn high-value certificates in these areas at Ivy Tech Community College campuses statewide, and at Vincennes University campuses in Vincennes, Lebanon, Fort Branch and Jasper as well as other approved training providers throughout the state.

On-campus efforts

Indiana University Northwest is in the business of making a brighter future for graduates at the college level.

Sharese Dudley is the director of career services, and her office is charged with helping students gain and retain employment. She said, while gaining a firm command of the hard skills specific to a job is important, it's only part of the story.

"Some individuals are going out into the workplace lacking some of the soft skills, like being able to effectively communicate with others, flexibility, leadership skills, teamwork, team building and time management, etc.," she said.

That's why her team engages students from the time they start their education



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on campus and continues to guide them into their career trajectory. To that end, they offer services and resources like career counseling, career coaching, guest speaker presentations and workshops.

"We really do stress the importance of soft skills and helping them find ways to build those skills, whether it's related to being part of student groups here on campus, and/or taking charge as you are working on a group assignment within the classroom," she said. "We try to make them aware that there are things you can do now (to graduate better prepared for the workforce)."

And these skills are universally in demand across industries and jobs, contrary to what some students might believe. Take accounting for example, she said. Some might assume that this profession requires little interpersonal interaction because it involves a lot of solitary work, but that's not the case, because there's often a need for teamwork and client interaction.

"When you're handling their finances, you need a high level of communication

and trust," Dudley said. "And that can be done, of course, through building interpersonal skills with your clients."

Strengthening communities

Other types of soft-skills education occur outside the confines of a college campus. Goodwill Industries of Michiana is one example of a nonprofit that is elevating community members in a mission-focused way.

"Our mission is about strengthening communities by empowering individuals through three pillars," said Debie Coble, president and CEO. "One is education, two is job training, and the third is job placement."

Goodwill's Community Career Centers play a significant role in building confidence and skills in their clients. These sites bring services to both individuals and business. For example, the centers host job fairs and hiring events for employers, while also assisting individuals in the job search process. Resume writing, interview preparation and development workshops are

just a few of the free services that are made available to the community at Goodwill's retail centers.

Coble said the scope and nature of the services are tailored to the client's needs. Sometimes that means clients need some extra attention or a different approach to help them succeed, especially if they are chronically unemployed or re-entering society after serving time in prison or time out of the workforce.

"So, if somebody needs to do more in-depth case management, our career centers are going to actually refer them into one of our case management programs," she said. "If they choose to enter into that, they'll be with the case manager, and they're going to do an assessment of what their needs are."

Whatever the situation, Coble said her staff will get clients on the correct path so that they can find a job that suits their interests, talents and needs.

"They've been working with staff not only on the soft skills, but in some cases, the hard skills," she said. "We are there to walk alongside during that transition."

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Another way to work

More workers, employers embrace flexible work arrangements and reap benefits of working remotely



Co-working spaces bring telecommuters and entrepreneurs together. Clockwise from left: Kayla Greenwell, greenCOW Coworking community coordinator; Kaje Svendsen, volunteer; Lee Watson, owner; Phylis Mamula, who designed greenCOW's space; and Tiffany Cole, operations director, meet in the Hammond space.

Photo provided by greenCOW Coworking

LESLEY BAILEY

Today's economy is more than finding business opportunities and a qualified workforce locally. The expectation now is to replicate that model for success in a global marketplace.

Thanks to advancements in technology and a changing mindset among workers and companies, it's no longer necessary to house all employees under one roof. As many of today's professionals will say, with a little coordination, collaborative environments that lead to successful outcomes are achievable even when team members are miles apart.

"Remote work is no longer a perk — it's becoming an expectation," said Brie Reynolds, senior career specialist at FlexJobs, an online service for professionals seeking remote and flexible work. "Professionals overwhelmingly say they

expect work to get even more flexible in the future."

Reynolds said between 80 percent and 90 percent of working Americans want to work remotely at least part time, and 68 percent say they expect to work remotely instead of commuting to an office daily.

"The shift towards more remote work is being driven by several large factors," Reynolds said. "The socio-economic makeup of the American workforce is shifting: the rise of single-parent households, women as the main breadwinners, a more global workforce overall and millennials becoming the largest generation in the workforce."

The FlexJobs crew teamed up with Global Workplace Analytics to break down the latest on telecommuting across the country. Among the report's key findings are that regular telecommuting grew 115 percent in the last 10

years; half of the telecommuters are 45 or older; and telecommuters are more highly educated.

"Technology has advanced and improved the way we telecommute now," said Cyndi Harbin, president of NWI Society for Human Resource Management. "All the advances with virtual apps and high-speed Wi-Fi have definitely attributed to why more and more employers are considering telecommuting as an option."

Harbin said this is leading employers to offer flexible work schedules, which is helping to attract, engage and retain the best and most skilled employees.

Benefits for both sides

"From the employee standpoint, flexibility and not commuting into a physical office location help with that work-life balance that everyone is looking for," said Michael Telesky, vice president of sales at UnitedHealthcare





READ ON PHONE

in Chicago. "Job satisfaction is important as it improves performance, and it helps deliver value to have folks out in the field."

Telesky has managed telecommuters and recently has begun telecommuting himself. UnitedHealthcare has been developing and implementing flexible work schedules for more than 15 years.

The team's telecommuting options are continuing to evolve to meet workforce needs.

"There are hybrid work options where they can work at home and at the office," Telesky said. "Employees can have an arrangement where they share the office and flex their schedules."

He said there can be training in the office, and once complete, those employees can be full-time telecommuters.

Tony Marusic, communications director at UnitedHealthcare, said between 35 percent and 40 percent of the company's employees nationwide have the option to telecommute, which contributed to the company landing on Fortune's Most Admired Companies list.

"With 160,000 to 170,000 employees in the U.S., that is a huge number telecommuting, and it saves money on renting office space," Marusic said.

Harbin adds that beyond decreased overhead costs, employers with telecommuting options can use it to attract and retain workers.

"Employers benefit through improved production, attendance and less turnover and decreased employee conflicts," she said. "For employees, telecommuting eliminates commute time and improves concentration through isolation from office interruptions."

Harbin said eliminating commutes and providing a flexible schedule can produce other positive results.

"Flexible work hours help fulfill personal appointments and provide better opportunities to volunteer and give back to the community," she said. "Not having to commute relieves stress, saves on gas and eases the 'what to wear' question, which in turn increases employees' well-being, attitude and loyalty to their employers."

The Global Workplace Analytics and FlexJobs report also found that telecommuting benefits can include an increase

in employee engagement, reduction in technology costs, enhancement in creativity and innovation, expansion without increasing a geographic footprint and a focus on results versus employee presence.

"For small businesses, hiring at-home workers allows them to expand into new territories without opening up expensive offices and tap into a new candidate pool to find the best talent regardless of location," Reynolds said. "For some, having a job they can do from home means the difference between working or not working, including people with disabilities, stay-at-home parents, caregivers or military spouses."

Staying on track

One of the top myths about telecommuting is that employees work less than in-office workers, but they are more productive, Reynolds said.

To stay successful, there are important steps telecommuters can take to remain a productive component of their company.

"You should be able to proactively speak up when you have questions, need to clarify something you're working on, or want to voice your opinion or suggestion for something," Reynolds said. "This sort of proactive communication is key to being successful."

In addition to staying in touch with their company and its leadership, telecommuters need to get expected work completed, Harbin said.

"These two things will build trust with your employer and ensure that although you are absent from the office, you are still connected and accountable to your team, your boss and your employer," she said.

As a telecommuter, Telesky found approaching his day from a certain mindset led to his success.

"My personal advice is to approach the

day the same as you would if you were in an office," he said.

"I used my calendar to schedule time to make sure I was allocating time for my most impactful items throughout the day. I got dressed in business casual, so if I had to jump on a video conference call, I was ready to go."

"I approached it from the same standpoint as I managed my day when I was in an office, but now I was just working from home."

Cultivating culture

On the flip side, employers and company leaders must ensure there is a team atmosphere that extends to their remote workforce.

Telesky said UnitedHealthcare main-

tains its core culture with its remote workers through community and charitable involvement as a team. They find team activities, including charity runs and stair-climbing challenges.

"You have to allow opportunities to get together the office workers and telecommuters to engage in community events," he said.

Technology plays a key role in creating and maintaining connections, Harbin said.

"Conference calls, Zoom, Skype, Facetime, Dropbox, Google apps and instant messaging apps all give the opportunity to meet virtually," she said.

Telesky said maintaining communication is critical.

"You have to continue to have these team meetings and take advantage of technology to connect that way," he said.

Harbin said it also is important to include remote staff in employee appreciation activities and wellness fairs.

"Employers can do this by mailing packages to remote workers that include the same company/logo items given or gift cards for lunch or coffee," she said.

Reynolds with FlexJobs said remote



Remote work is no longer a perk — it's becoming an expectation. Professionals overwhelmingly say they expect work to get even more flexible in the future."

—Brie Reynolds
Senior career specialist
FlexJobs

>MANAGING PEOPLE

workers must feel part of the larger company culture.

"They'll be more engaged and productive if they really feel like a part of something larger," she said. "That might mean occasional meetings or visits to the office or creating an employee resource group for telecommuters by telecommuters."

Harbin said discussion and planning should be behind any strategy.

"Best practice would be to discuss and design your telecommuting plan with your team, maybe by department, prior to 'rolling it out,'" she said. "Continually monitor and evolve your remote work plan. Be clear about expectations and measure performance often."

A special space

Co-working spots are another avenue for telecommuters to have constructive work time while creating ties with other remote workers and entrepreneurs.

"Co-working spaces are a relatively new idea, having only been conceptualized in 2005," said Kayla Greenwell, community

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coordinator at greenCOW Coworking in Hammond. "These spaces, focused on community, fill a much-needed gap in the needs of working professionals."

Places such as greenCOW, Zosco Coworking in Valparaiso and 101Co3 in Mishawaka all offer office amenities along with a community atmosphere.

"Workers have an open space that is, in greenCOW's case, expertly designed to encourage focus, calm and productivity," Greenwell said. "The green in greenCOW stands for the fact that we have real plants in our spaces, something proven to reduce techno-stress and promote positive feelings."

Greenwell said both co-working and telecommuting provide flexibility for workers, who have the freedom to find

places that fit their location and schedule.

The mix of individuals at co-working spots also adds up to a unique perk.

"They have the benefit of working in a community of others from a variety of different fields," Greenwell said. "The buzzword for the general idea of this aspect is 'cross-pollination.' We have members from a wide variety of fields, including health care, insurance, business consulting, career coaching, resume writing, and even a bona fide magician and fire eater."

Greenwell said that, every week, co-working space members connect and work in the same space.

"Their individual expertise helps individuals to expand their horizons, and it may even change how some view their work, adapting methods across fields to be more efficient and effective," she said.

Embracing the future

With employers such as UnitedHealthcare having many telecommuting positions open across the country, the option continues to

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grow and develop in today's working culture. The UnitedHealthcare team is looking to start positions as telecommuting from the start, even doing training in a remote setting.

"Remote job listings increased 48 percent between 2016 and 2019, and 43 percent of people report being able to work remotely some of the time, compared with just 9 percent in 1995," Reynolds said.

The idea that telecommuting is only for working parents and senior-level professionals who have "put in their time" at the office are just myths, Reynolds said.

"The genie is out of the bottle, and it's not going back in," said Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics. "Eight in 10 employees say they'd like to work from home at least some of the time."

Lister adds another 30 percent would take a pay cut for the privilege.

"I think over the next five years, working remotely will become so ubiquitous we will no longer feel the need to put a label on it," she said. "It will just be one of the many ways people work."



Photo provided by UnitedHealthcare

Michael Telesky, vice president of sales for UnitedHealthcare, works from his home office in Chicago. Telesky recently began telecommuting. UnitedHealthcare has been developing and implementing flexible work schedules for more than 15 years.

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Making trays in Portage

Israeli-based MCP finds perfect location to build on manufacturing success of food storage containers



Brooke Kubath, left, human resources manager, and Eyal Tenenbaume, CEO of MCP Performance Plastics Ltd. of Portage, teamed with employees to develop the company's core values. They are displayed as murals along the hallways of the facility.

Photo by Phil Potempa

PHILIP POTEPA

Eyal Tenenbaume, CEO of MCP Performance Plastic Ltd. in Portage, beams when a client or new acquaintance recognizes the distinct style and design of the tray and container products his company manufactures.

Throughout the company's 42-year history in Israel, where primary manufacturing headquarters are based, MCP has been known for the specialized compartment thermoform food-packaging trays, especially those used by the major airlines for in-flight food service.

"We are the developer and manufacturer of advance custom co-extruded thermoplastics for a wide range of packaging solutions for the food industry," said Tenenbaume,

who originally hails from Israel and joined MCP in June 2007.

"But throughout the years, needs change, and now the food-service containers for airlines like American and United have become a much smaller part of our business," he said.

"Today, we make trays used for everything from muffins baked by large commercial bakeries to the compartment containers used by Seattle Sutton Healthy Eating for client meal distribution."

The three types of materials manufactured by MCP to create the more than 200 unique container designs are Crystallized PET (CPET), Amorphous PET (APET) and

Polypropylene (PP). Clients choose from varied products appropriate for a range of temperature needs, especially

freezing, as well as refrigeration and oven/microwave suitable use. While most of the trays created are intended to be covered with a sealed film wrap, other variations also can be paired with snap-on lids.

"Our trays are made so they can be used for a complete cycle of use from frozen product to oven or microwave for heating and then the food can be consumed right from the container," Tenenbaume said.

MCP estimates it produces between 150 million and 200 million trays and containers annually for global sales, but between 50 million and 60 million of those pieces were manufactured for U.S. orders before 2017.

"With so much of our business based in the U.S., the company knew we needed to expand to an additional location," said Tenenbaume, who served as MCP's vice president for marketing and sales

MCP PERFORMANCE PLASTIC LTD.

► The Israeli company, which recently opened a Portage location, estimates it produces between 150 million and 200 million trays and containers annually for global sales.

for exports while in Israel before becoming CEO of MCP's U.S. production facility in Portage.

"When we examined where our customers are based, the Midwest was the best place for us," Tenenbaume said.

Tenenbaume narrowed possible locations in both Illinois and Indiana for MCP's new Midwest plant, but it was the support and invested interest of Portage officials and the business community that impressed him most. MCP's Portage facility at 6750 Daniel Burnham Drive, Suite E, in the Ameriplex industrial park, includes a large warehouse and manufacturing units, office space and room for future expansion.

"MCP came to Northwest Indiana as an Israeli company looking for their first U.S.-based production facility," said Amy Parker, business development manager for the Portage Economic Development Corp. "Their company invested more than \$11 million in a 91,000-square-foot building in Ameriplex, (and) today MCP is the gold standard for extrusion and thermo-forming equipment

supplying custom ready-made meal trays for industry."

Parker said Tenenbaume, who lives with his wife and two children in Munster, and his company have been an ideal addition to Northwest Indiana.

"The city of Portage and Portage EDC are happy to have a diverse and global company like MCP reside in our hometown," Parker said. "Portage continues to grow in the global economy, which includes MCP, who is an environmentally aware company, a local steward for our community, and we are very excited to see them continue to grow and call Portage, Ind., home."

Once the company committed to Portage, the first employee Tenenbaume hired was Brooke Kubath of Chesterton as human resources manager.

"When I was hired, there were only two employees, myself and Eyal," Parker said. "Now we have more than 20 employees and growth with seven work shifts."

Tenenbaume says, within five years, manufacturing operations in Portage will double with a continued emphasis



MCP estimates it produces between 150 million and 200 million trays and containers annually for global sales.

on using recycled production materials.

"MCP uses recyclable and environmentally friendly packaging materials in accordance with both European and U.S. market demands," Tenenbaume said.

Tenenbaume and his employees also enjoy the creative aspect of the company's product possibilities.

"Even though we have a beautiful catalog of more than 200 designs in all shapes, sizes and colors, we can also create unique products based on a customer's design request," Tenenbaume said.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

OUT

'The Smell of the Kill'

The Towle Theater in Hammond presents Michele Lowe's dark comedy, "The Smell of the Kill," Sept. 6 through 22. Take three delicious, malicious wives — add three miserable, unloving husbands — and chill. The play focuses on Nicky, Debra and Molly, who have tolerated one another during monthly dinners for years. While their unseen spouses play golf in the dining room, the women exchange confidences, revealing for the first time that all three of their marriages are on the brink of disaster and that all three women are facing the challenges of their lives. When the men mistakenly lock themselves in a basement meat locker, the women are faced with a decision: should they leave the men on ice or let them thaw? Call (219) 937-8780 or visit www.towletheater.org.



Courtesy of Judith Mayer Creative

► "The Smell of the Kill," will play Sept. 6 through 22 at the Towle Theater in Hammond. Call (219) 937-8780 or visit www.towletheater.org.

'Billy Bishop Goes to War'

Head to Michiana Shores in La Porte County for Dunes Summer Theatre's final production of the season. "Billy Bishop Goes to War" is a musical drama with a comedic heart that tells the story of World War I Canadian ace pilot Billy Bishop. First assigned to fight in the muddy trenches, Bishop quickly becomes frustrated. In July 1915, after watching a Royal Flying Corps aircraft return from a mission, Bishop reportedly said, "I'll bet you don't get any mud or 'horse pucky' on you up there. If you die, at least it would be a clean death." He was soon transferred to the RFC, where his subsequent no-holds-barred missions earned him the honor of being the highest scoring ace in the RFC, second only to his nemesis, Germany's

Red Baron. Mike Nichols directed the New York production of this original two-man show. One member of the cast plays the part of Bishop in word and song, although he is also called upon to dramatize 17 other parts; the second cast member accompanies on the piano as well as sings. Performances run Sept. 13 through 22. Call (219) 879-7509 or visit www.dunesartsfoundation.org.

Music of John Williams

The Northwest Indiana Symphony performs two opening concerts of the 2019-20 season Sept. 19 and 20 at Living Hope Church in Merrillville. Widely regarded as one of the greatest American composers of all time, John Williams has composed some of the most popular, recognizable and critically acclaimed film scores in cinematic history. In a career spanning six decades, Williams has won

24 Grammy Awards, five Academy Awards and four Golden Globe Awards. With 51 Academy Award nominations, he is the second most-nominated individual, after Walt Disney. Hear selections from "Star Wars," "Indiana Jones," "Jurassic Park," "Superman," "Harry Potter" and more in this tribute to an American icon. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Call (219) 836-0525 or visit nisorchestra.org.

'The Mousetrap'

Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" opened in London's West End in 1952 and has been running ever since. A group of strangers is stranded in a boarding house during a snowstorm, one of whom is a murderer. The suspects include a newly married couple who run

the house, a spinster with a curious background, an architect who seems better equipped to be a chef, a retired Army major, a strange little man who claims his car overturned in a snow drift and a lawyer who makes life miserable for everyone. Then a policeman arrives on skis, and the lawyer is killed. To get to the rationale of the murderer's pattern, the policeman probes the background of everyone present, rattling skeletons. The play has a famous twist ending that audiences are traditionally asked not to reveal after leaving the show (don't Google it if you want to be surprised). Memorial Opera House presents the play from Sept. 27 through Oct. 13. Call (219) 548-9137 or visit www.memorialoperahouse.com.

Visit the South Shore Arts Regional Calendar for more information on current exhibits, concerts, plays and other arts events at SouthShoreArtsOnline.org.

Performing Arts Series

Every summer, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County offers its Performing Arts Series at the Chris Wilson Pavilion adjacent to the Potawatomi Park Zoo in South Bend. It features a variety of arts organizations in free performances. On Aug. 17, the South Bend Chamber Singers revisit old music by the Shakers during "Simple Gifts," selected and conducted by the group's distinguished director Nancy Menk. The series culminates with the Aug. 24 concert by the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Maestro Alastair Willis. Along with a full program of shorter classical pieces, the concert also features what is becoming a can't-miss opportunity for local musicians: the play-along. Area amateurs can download a score and rehearse with the SBSO in advance of a live rendition of a well-known composition. This year, it's expanded to two

ENTERTAINMENT

ABOUT



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play-along works: Edvard Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" and the "Mambo" sequence from Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story." Call (574) 232-0041 or visit www.cfsjc.org.

Live music at The Acorn

The Acorn, just north of the Michigan border in Three Oaks, features Chicago-based collective Surabhi Ensemble on Aug. 18. The group seeks to foster world peace via the universal language of music, specifically genres rooted in India, Spain and Senegal. On Aug. 22, Al Stewart comes to the Acorn. He'll always be best remembered for his lovely 1976 hit, "The Year of the Cat," but his long career has involved quirky other ideas such as "Down in the Cellar," a 2000 concept album all about wine. A couple of topnotch tribute acts follow, with Eagles tribute band Heartache Tonight on Sept. 27, and Shaun Hague playing the role of good old "Slowhand," better known as Eric Clapton, in a tribute show titled "Journeyman" on Oct. 4. Call (269) 756-3879 or visit www.acornlive.org.

Stand-up comedy showcase

Elkhart Civic Theatre recently offered a six-week workshop in stand-up comedy, and its participants get to try out their material onstage at the Bristol Opera House on Aug. 24 for ECT's "Summer Stand-Up Comedy Showcase." It's a fine (and presumably hilarious) way of keeping the theater in use during the off-season. Call (574) 848-5853 or visit elkhartcivictheatre.org.

Community theater

South Bend Civic Theatre's selection of Pierre Corneille's "The Liar" is a testimony to the timeless appeal of a well-written farce. First staged in 1644, "The Liar" lives again at SBCT from Sept. 6 through 15. It's not surprising that "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" has

made a successful transition to a musical format: Quasimodo and Esmeralda have always carried all the drama and intrigue of operatic characters. SBCT presents the musical version of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" from Oct. 4 through 20. Call (574) 234-1112 or visit www.sbct.org.

Time for jazz

The modernistic jazz of the Jacob Victor Quintet is on the docket at Merrimans' Playhouse in South Bend on Aug. 15. John Matthias, a professor

Greene returns to Merrimans' with his quartet Oct. 11. Every Tuesday night, proprietors Stephen and Mary Merriman host an open jam. Call (574) 329-3430 or visit www.merrimansplayhouse.org.

Performing arts at Notre Dame

The University of Notre Dame's DeBartolo Performing Arts Center kicks off its 2019-20 Presenting Series with Leslie Odom Jr. on Sept. 20. He originated the role of Aaron Burr in Lin-Manuel Miranda's massively popu-



Alastair Willis directs the South Bend Symphony Orchestra at the 2018 Community Foundation of St. Joseph County Performing Arts Series at the Chris Wilson Pavilion in South Bend.

Photo by Peter Ringenberg

emeritus from Notre Dame's English department, curates a special evening Sept. 5 called "Poetry, Books and Jazz." On Sept. 13, pianist Javier Red performs with his new band, Imagery Converter. The group's debut album, "Ephemeral Assumptions," marries traditional jazz sounds with a 21st-century aesthetic. The authoritative saxophonist Chris

lar "Hamilton," a portrayal that won Odom a Tony and a Grammy. On Sept. 29, it's a recital from classical pianist Conrad Tao. For two performances, Oct. 3 and 4, the Indianapolis Ballet presents a program featuring a variety of choreography by the legendary George Balanchine. Call (574) 631-2800 or visit performingarts.nd.edu.



READ ON PHONE

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Helping one worker at a time

We Connect serves as bridge to an array of services from counseling to finding a home for employees

MICHAEL PUENTE

When Paige London was going through her divorce last year, she felt hopeless and suffered some health issues as a result.

"I was not doing well. There was a lot of pressure on me. I felt alone," said London, 26, of La Porte, who was married for

from finding apartments to financial literacy programs.

"We're getting ready to do a wellness program with one of (our) clients," she said. "We do just about anything."

We Connect is an Employer Resource Network patterned after a 2008 Michigan workforce development initiative. Similar concepts are active in seven states and in development in three others.

According to the Employer Resource Network-USA website, ERNs are a "public-private consortia whose purpose is to improve workforce retention through employee support and training."

Stakeholders can include small to midsize companies, private nonprofits, community colleges and vocation training organizations, along with local, regional and national foundations.

A member of the Greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce board of directors, Jackie Dermody believed the area was ready for We Connect since workforce development and worker retention is a priority for the Region.

"The reason we started this in La Porte is because we're looking at having enough people to fill the jobs (in the area) and what are the reasons people aren't working," she said. "Like a lot of communities, people have crisis and issues, (and) we felt that it was a great opportunity for us to develop something and get on board with the We Connect program."

We Connect today works with five companies in the La Porte area. The nonprofit is supported by fees and grants.

"When we meet with clients, we frame it three ways: One, we're available to help with their employees anything they may need help with. Period," Jackie Dermody said. "There's a multitude of things we can help them with."

Jackie Dermody's background is in criminology. She spent 22 years as a

probation officer in La Porte working with both juveniles and adults.

"I've always worked with people having struggles and issues," she said. "People don't often know what is out there and how to get the help that they need."

Tom Dermody is a former Indiana state representative and now a Republican candidate for mayor of La Porte.

The Dermodys operated SevenOKs, a small manufacturing firm in La Porte for seven years, which made insulated food delivery bags. The company employed 47 people until Sterno bought it in 2017.

Courtney Parthun assists the Dermodys in their mission. She worked for the couple's manufacturing operation in human resources from 2013 until April 2018 for the new owner. Then she joined We Connect as a paid employee.

Jackie Dermody said sometimes clients just need help finding training or assisting people to better understand their employer's benefits package.

"We're here to help (clients) with issues they are experiencing but also assist (people) if they want to skill-up, go back to school, get more education, help them navigate their employee handbook, their benefits," she said. "A lot of times people don't know what is available to them through their work."

While both Tom and Jackie believe in the mission of the organization, Jackie said, if her husband wins the La Porte mayoral election, he will step down from We Connect. Neither are paid by the organization.

"Tom and I both feel the mission of We Connect is important to our community," Jackie said. "We recognize the struggle employers are having when it comes to keeping employees working."

"Our goal has been to create an organization that helps create and maintain a sound workforce for employers in our community."



Tom Dermody and his wife, Jackie, left, started We Connect in July 2018. They hired Courtney Parthun, right, to help them realize their vision for a well-supported workforce.

Courtesy of We Connect

four years. "I really just needed some guidance (from) an attorney who would work for me."

London didn't seek help from a friend or her employer but instead turned to We Connect of La Porte.

"Just the fact that someone was there and could do those things for me when I felt I couldn't was an enormous help," said London, a mother of two young children. "It has honestly changed my views on people."

Tom Dermody and his wife, Jackie, started We Connect in July 2018.

Jackie Dermody, president of the nonprofit, said her organization has assisted people with an array of services



OFF HOURS

Presidential history

Former bank executive's campaign memorabilia feature election items from 1840 to modern era

LARRY AVILA

Calvin Bellamy will strike up a conversation with anyone, but when politics come up, a long chat most likely will ensue.

"I grew up in a political family, so politics always was of interest in my home, and it was a regular topic around the dinner table," said Bellamy, former CEO and chairman of Bank Calumet and Bank Calumet Inc. These days he's a partner with the law firm of Krieg DeVault, which has offices in Merrillville and Chicago.

Bellamy's profession might have changed, but the Hammond native with a law degree from the University of Michigan never lost interest in politics. That's what has fueled his hobby of collecting presidential nominee campaign pins and other memorabilia since the 1950s.

Bellamy said he obtained his first presidential election items in 1956 when the campaign for Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34th president, stopped in Hammond. The oldest item in his collection is a campaign button from William Henry Harrison, the ninth president. It was given to him when he was in high school by an American government teacher, whose family owned it since 1840.

Every presidential election year since 1956, Bellamy made a point to gather campaign items from the presidential nominees. He either asked campaigns directly or received donations or gifts from people aware of his hobby. He focused on presidential nominees to keep his collection manageable.

Not until years later did he organize his collection and place it into cases, which he displays on a wall in his home office.

"When an election would come up, I'd get a few buttons and put them in a drawer, but after a while, I began to think about how interesting (displaying the collection) would be to visualize

American history," he said.

Other fans of the hobby share a similar sentiment, said Tony Lee of Titusville, N.J., president of the Big Apple Chapter of the American Political Item Collectors. The group has been around since the 1940s. The international organization has about 5,000 members worldwide, but most are in the U.S.

Lee said club members are a mix of historians, political junkies, antique lovers and collectors. During organization events or conventions, collectors come together, set aside their political ideologies and simply talk politics or collecting.

During club gatherings, it's not unusual for an ardent President Donald Trump supporter to have lunch with a Bernie Sanders backer, he said.

"They may be talking because they may both be collectors of Teddy Roosevelt and both admire him, and they'll talk about him," Lee said.

Bellamy considers some of the items in his collection special because they were personalized for him. One is an autographed photo from Harry Truman, the 33rd president. The other is an autographed photo from longtime Minnesota senator and former Vice President Hubert Humphry. Bellamy's wife surprised him with it as a birthday gift years ago.

"I worked on Humphry's (presidential) campaign in '68, and my wife years later wrote to him and asked for a photo and got it," Bellamy said.

Bellamy, 77, said his collection will

span 46 presidential campaigns by the 2020 election. He will keep collecting but recognizes he will be 82 by the 2024 election. He is open to donating his collection to an organization or an individual on the promise they will maintain it and appreciate its historical significance.

Bellamy has no one in his family to pass his collection to. He's been in touch with the Lake County Historical



Photo courtesy of Calvin Bellamy

Museum and Hammond Public Library, which has a history room, but neither have the room to display it.

"The trouble with a collection like this is that it takes up so much space," he said. "I would love to see this collection go to someone who could display it, but for now, I'll continue to enjoy it."

VIEWPOINT

Collaboration essential



READ ON PHONE

Working together to build 21st-century workforce will fuel innovation, diversity, talent

BLAIR MILO

There's an African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

As Indiana works to fill more than 1 million jobs during the next decade, attracting, developing and connecting talent for a 21st-century workforce has never been more crucial for growing Hoosier prosperity. Our ability to meet this opportunity relies squarely on our ability to go together. Collaboration across industries; amongst public, private and not-for-profit sectors; and with local, regional and state leaders all working together is crucial. "Ignite the Region," Northwest Indiana's strategy for economic trans-

formation, is a critical playbook that empowers each member of the team required to achieve the vision of a dynamic region "fueled by innovation, diversity and talent."

Indiana will always be home to me. But as we think about how we attract new generations to call the Region home, we must ask ourselves, "What inspires others to choose Indiana?"

A 2017 survey by Area Development magazine indicates people heavily weigh quality-of-place amenities, including public transit, bike lanes and trails, when choosing where to live. That is why communities and regions must also make them top priorities if they want to remain competitive.

On April 29, 2019, Gov. Eric Holcomb approved the state budget. It included an additional \$205 million for improvements to the South Shore Commuter Rail Line connecting Hoosier communities to downtown Chicago. Double tracking and other station improvements will mean faster commute times, improved safety and connecting Region residents to high-wage Chicago jobs, and Illinois residents with the opportunity to join Hoosier communities at roughly 40 percent less the cost of living. These improvements also increase access to the newest national landmark, the Indiana Dunes National Park!

Cyclists, joggers and families wishing to enjoy a walk together are soon to have greater access to bike lanes and trails spanning several counties. Through funding from the Next Level Trails grant, the Region is extending four area trails, including Pennsy Greenway Northwest Trail, Marquette Greenway, Veterans Memorial Parkway Trail and the Erie Trail, which not only closes gaps in the trail system and better connects area communities, it makes our Region that much more desirable for individuals and families to choose to live, work,

play and learn.

Along with local and state government investments to attract talent, regional business, education, economic development and other partners are developing a 21st-century workforce by teaming up to provide unique learning experiences,

growing the skills needed for increasing levels of new jobs. Since the launch of the Next Level Jobs initiative, more than 4,100 individuals from the Region have expressed interest in earning a career certificate in a high-wage, high-demand career field, representing more than 12 percent of leads generated across the state. Additionally, increasing numbers of high

school students are learning essential skills in hands-on career and technical education programs while earning wages or college credit.

One such example is the Porter County Career and Tech Center, where a student is accepted into programs supported by area companies. Employers like Task Force Tips or Urschel Laboratories provide real-world career training, wages and college credit from Vincennes University. And students simultaneously complete their high school diplomas.

Partnerships like these ensure students gain awareness and earlier access to needed skills to thrive in an evolving world of work, and businesses can access a skilled and ready workforce.

The comprehensive Ignite the Region plan provides clearly defined goals. They allow us to set a clear course on where we need to go and how we collectively accomplish bold achievements, which no one can fulfill alone. With Ignite the Region as our guide, Northwest Indiana will go far, because we are equipped to go together.

With Ignite the Region as our guide, Northwest Indiana will go far, because we are equipped to go together."

—Blair Milo

Former mayor of La Porte



Blair Milo was appointed Indiana's first secretary of career connections and talent by Gov. Eric Holcomb in July 2017.

Photo provided by State of Indiana

formation, is a critical playbook that empowers each member of the team required to achieve the vision of a dynamic region "fueled by innovation, diversity and talent."

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