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*Thomas Dakich
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Digital Crossroads
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NORTHWEST INDIANA BUSINESS MAGAZINE

JUN - JUL 2019

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► Cover photo of Thomas Dakich by Michelle Hamstra



PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Strategy first

Define ideal prospects, key points of differentiation before committing to specific marketing tactics

Marketing can feel like throwing a dart at a dartboard. You rarely hit a bull's-eye, even a slight miss can dramatically impact your score, and too often, your throw misses the board entirely.

Implementing marketing tactics like social, email, ads, sponsorships, etc., that don't support an overall marketing strategy feels like playing darts blindfolded. You don't know which way to throw your dart, and even if you are lucky enough to hit something, you have no idea if you scored any points.

Strategy is often missing from marketing planning because it is confused with tactics, goals, missions and objectives. Tactics get the lion's share of the attention with most marketing articles focusing their advice on ads, sponsorships, endorsements, email campaigns, media outreach, websites, testimonials, referrals and case studies.

Becoming an industry thought leader isn't a strategy—it's an objective. Serving customers with respect and integrity isn't a strategy—it's a mission. Growing sales in a new market isn't a strategy—it's a goal.

So what is a strategy? A marketing strategy defines your ideal prospect and identifies and communicates critical points of differentiation between you and your competitors. It is an explanation of your plan to reach your objectives. Your strategy is how you are going to get there, not what or where "there" is.

Decide who matters

Marketing pieces that don't speak to their intended audience lack focus. Using an ideal prospect profile as the basis of your strategy helps ensure your marketing is targeted to your ideal prospect. Who is an ideal prospect? For existing businesses, start with your

ideal customers. Sort your customers by most profitable, most sales or anything else that makes sense for your business. Look for customers who want and value your product/service. Use these customers as a model to create a profile of your ideal prospect.

Each profile includes a simple paragraph or two that describes your prospect as if they are sitting across from you. Include a demographic description, an explanation of what they want, a description of their problem(s), an understanding of how they buy and the best way to communicate with them in each profile.



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

Be different

By default, most prospects think that your business is different from the other providers in your industry. An essential part of your marketing strategy is identifying and communicating a simple idea or position that makes your business different from the rest of the market in your ideal prospect's mind. The difference needs to be in the way you sell your service, the way you package your product, the way you do business or your ability to transform the lives of your prospects.

Quality, excellent service and a fair price aren't compelling differentiators—they are expectations. Being different for difference sake isn't enough to separate you from your competitors. The only persuasive difference is one that is valued by your ideal prospects.

Without a blindfold and with a little practice, even inexperienced marketers can hit a few bull's-eyes and win more than they lose.



AROUND THE REGION



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

LARRY AVILA

Accounting

Brandon Underwood of St. John recently passed the exam to earn his certified public accountant designation. Underwood, a staff accountant for almost four years at **McMahon and Associates** in Munster, is a graduate of Purdue University Calumet.

Emily Vargo, a certified public accountant, joined McMahon & Associates CPA PC in Munster on May 1.

Banking

Teachers Credit Union recently promoted **Brandon Hearne** to manager of its Gary service center at 3730 Grant St. Hearne joined TCU in 2016. He started as a relationship representative and manager trainee.

Merrillville-based **Centier Bank** named **Troy Kafka** market president for the greater Indianapolis area.

Christopher Murphy, chairman and CEO of South Bend-based **1st Source Bank**, recently was elected to the board of directors of the **Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago**.

First Midwest Bancorp Inc. named **Doug Rose** executive vice president and chief human resources officer.

BMO Harris Bank recently appointed new regional presidents for its Midwest market. New executives include: **Chris Michalski**, regional president, Minnesota, Kansas, Missouri and Indiana; **Bernard Narine**, regional president, Chicago south region; **Tony Tintinalli**, regional president, Chicago north region; and **Steven Zandpour**, head of U.S. retail specialty sales.

Benjamin Bochnowski, president and CEO of **Peoples Bank** in Munster, was appointed to the board of directors of the **Indiana Department of Financial Institutions**.

Business

Indiana American Water named **Matthew Prine** president of **Indiana American Water** and **Michigan American Water**.

The **Northwest Indiana Business RoundTable** recently named its 2019 executive board of directors. **Jim Jorgensen**, an attorney with Hoepfner Wagner & Evans LLP, joins the board as the association's legal counsel. Other executive board members include: chairman, **Don Bull**, NIPSCO; vice chairman, **Joseph Lampert**, ArcelorMittal, Indiana Harbor; treasurer, **Tim Ross**,

Franciscan Health; secretary, **Dewey Pearman**, Construction Advancement Foundation; executive director, **Andrea Pearman**, NWIBRT.

NiSource Inc., parent company of Merrillville-based **NIPSCO**, announced April 15 that **Kevin Kabat** was elected chairman of the company's board of directors. Kabat has been a member of the NiSource board since 2015. He serves on the company's audit, nominating and governance, and compensation committees. During his career, Kabat served in numerous executive roles, including CEO of Fifth Third Bancorp from April 2007 to November 2015. He serves as a director of Unum Group and is chairman of the board and a member of its human capital and governance committees. In 2016, Kabat became the lead independent director of E*Trade Financial Corp and is a member of its bank board, and its compensation and governance committees.

Pulse Technology, a provider of business technology services and office furniture with operations in Northwest Indiana, was among 23 companies recognized during the **29th annual Awards for Business Excellence**. The awards, presented by the Daily Herald Business Ledger,



ACCOUNTING
Brandon Underwood



ACCOUNTING
Emily Vargo



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Michael Riehle



EDUCATION
Linda Calvin



EDUCATION
Lawrence Hamer



GOVERNMENT
Adam Norman



HEALTH
Andleeb Bangash



HEALTH
Tia Dorn

a Chicago-area business newspaper, recognizes companies for their achievements, growth and community involvement. Pulse Technology was recognized in the family business category.

Leo Correa, CEO **Community Healthcare System's St. Catherine Hospital** in East Chicago, and **Jeff Williams**, general manager **Marcus Allard Rental** in Highland, were recognized as the **Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce's** business persons of the year.

Construction

Jacklyn Graniczny, partner and design director of **Sublime Homes** in St. John, was named among **Professional Builder** magazine's national list of **40 Under 40 rising stars for 2019** in the home building industry.

Economic Development

Janilee Haynes Peterson recently was appointed economic development manager at the **Economic Development Corp. Michigan City, Ind.** Peterson replaces **Katie Eaton**, who left the post to become president of the **Michigan City Chamber of Commerce** in November.

Michael Riehle recently was named president of chamber services for the **La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership**. Riehle has spent 26 years in the financial services industry most recently in banking as a commercial lender. The partnership was launched in February when the **Greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce** and the **Greater La Porte Economic**

Development Corp. announced the organizations would move into a shared location but continue operating as separate entities with separate boards of directors.

Education

The office of **Gov. Eric Holcomb** recently named members of the volunteer **Next Level Teacher Compensation Commission**. The commission has been tasked with delivering its recommendations to the governor and the General Assembly before the 2021 legislative session. Members from Northwest and North Central Indiana include **Jená Bellezza** of Gary, chief operating officer of the **Indiana Parenting Institute**. **Denise Seger** of Granger, chief human resource officer for **Concord Community Schools in Elkhart**, was named to an advisory council to the commission.

Sheila Brillson Matias recently was named executive director of the **Leadership Institute at Purdue Northwest**. She joined PNW in October 2018 and serves as executive director of the **Society of Innovators at Purdue Northwest**.

Lisa Goodnight, a 25-year member of the **Purdue University Northwest** faculty, has joined the senior leadership team as vice chancellor of institutional advancement.

Ivy Tech Community College named **Linda Calvin** vice president for information technology. She takes over for **Matt Etchison**, who became the college's chief information technology officer in December.

Goodwill LEADS Inc. named

David Plesac director of its **Excel** learning center in Hammond and **Theresa Knipe** director of its **Excel** center in Gary.

Mark Budnik, the Paul H. Brandt Professor of Engineering and associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at **Valparaiso University**, was presented with a **National Outstanding Teaching Medal** from the **American Society of Engineering Education**.

The **Purdue University Board of Trustees** approved the official naming of the **Nils K. Nelson Bioscience Innovation Building**, which is under construction on Purdue University Northwest's Hammond campus. The 68,000-square-foot building project broke ground in July 2018 and is set to open in fall 2020. Nelson taught at the university for 29 years and left an \$8 million gift to PNW from his estate, according to college officials. Nelson died in July 2017.

Lawrence Hamer has been named dean of the college of business at **Purdue University Northwest**. He most recently served as a professor of marketing at DePaul University in Chicago. His appointment is effective July 1.

Government

Kimberly Barkman was appointed agricultural education program manager of the **Indiana State Department of Agriculture**.

AgriNovus Indiana, the state's initiative to promote and accelerate the agbioscience growth, added two new members to its board of directors: **Gene Miles**, president and CEO, **First**



HEALTH
Maria Brown

Farmers Bank & Trust, and **Melissa Proffitt**, partner-in-charge of client relations and chair of the food and agribusiness group and energy group, Ice Miller LLP.

The **Indiana Department of Child Services** named **Adam Norman** deputy director of the child support bureau.

Health

Dr. Kalyani Gopal of Munster was presented a **Top 20 Global Women**



HEALTH
Huma Mulk

of Excellence 2019 award in March at the seventh International Women's Day Celebration in Chicago. Gopal also is president of the **SAFECHR Coalition for Human Rights** with offices in Munster and Chicago.

La Porte Hospital recently welcomed **Dr. Andleeb Bangash**, cardiologist, **Dr. Michael Allen**, obstetrician/gynecologist, and **Dr. Tia Dorn**, family practice physician to its medical team.

Franciscan Health recently



HEALTH
Randall Moore

welcomed new physicians to its staff. **Dr. Maria Brown** joined Franciscan Physician Network Coolspring Health Center, and **Dr. Huma Mulk** joined Franciscan Physician Network Franklin Health Center.

Dr. Randall Moore joined **Franciscan Alliance** as senior vice president and COO for **Franciscan Health and Care Solutions**. Moore, who was born in Gary and raised in Northwest Indiana, will be responsible for assisting Franciscan Alliance



HEALTH
Stephen Paul



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HEALTH
Stephen Turner

in improving patient experience and satisfaction with care, improve the health of the population Franciscan serves and reduce the cost of care. He will work with all Franciscan divisions to advance the transformation of the health care system from a fee-for-service to a fee-for-value integrated delivery network.

Three nurses at **Franciscan Health Michigan City** recently were honored by **The DAISY Foundation** as extraordinary nurses. Palliative



HEALTH
Kim Innes

care nurse **Pollyanna McNeil**, behavioral health nurse **Leeane Bolton** and registered nurse **Patty Marsicek** were recognized for the work nurses do for patients and families.

Three new members recently were appointed to **Porter Regional Hospital's Board of Trustees**: **Dr. Stephen Paul**, a gastroenterologist based in Valparaiso; **Heather Ennis**, president & CEO of Northwest Indiana Forum; and **Stephen Turner**, vice chancellor for finance and



HEALTH
Julie Kerns

administration at Purdue University Northwest.

St. Mary's Medical Center CEO Janice Ryba was selected the **Hobart Chamber of Commerce's Business Person of the Year for 2019**.

Methodist Hospitals recently promoted staff executives **Kim Innes, Julie Kerns** and **Dena McCormick** to assistant vice president.



HEALTH
Dena McCormick

Information Technology

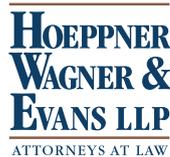
David Hood was named managing

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TECHNOLOGY
David Hood

director of operations for the **Digital Crossroads at Lake Michigan**, the data center under construction in Hammond.

Michael Sikora was promoted to system engineer in the technologies division of Valparaiso-based Chester Inc.

Insurance

Boston Mutual Life Insurance Co. named **Lesley Schafer** senior regional sales director. Schafer will oversee the



Technology
Michael Sikora

company's central region, which covers Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and western Pennsylvania.

Healy Group, a South Bend-based employee benefits, financial services, risk management, property and casualty insurance agency, recently named **Alicia Webber** and **Scott Johnson**, principals in the firm.

News

Several companies from Northwest Indiana were named among the



INSURANCE
Alicia Webber



INSURANCE
Scott Johnson

Best Places to Work in Indiana for 2019. The list includes: Small Companies (15 to 74 U.S. employees), **General Insurance Services**, Michigan City; **Lakeside Wealth Management**, Chesterton; **Peepers by PeepersSpecs**, Michigan City; **Starin Marketing Inc.**, Chesterton; Large Companies (250 to 999 U.S. employees) **Centier Bank**, Merrillville; Major Companies (1,000-plus U.S. employees) **Edward Jones**, statewide (several offices

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in Northwest Indiana); **First Merchants Bank**, Muncie (operates locations in Northwest Indiana); **Horseshoe Casino**, Hammond.

Several Indiana communities, including two in Northern Indiana, are among the 162 **Best Small Cities for Business** in the country, according to a new ranking released by **ChamberofCommerce.org**. The **Michigan City-La Porte area** ranked 83rd on the list. **Columbus** was third on the list, while the **Elkhart-Goshen** area was ninth. Other Indiana communities that made the rankings include: **Terre Haute**, 38; **Muncie**, 107; **Kokomo**, 108.5; and **Bloomington**, 118.

An idea by a group of students from **Hobart High School** to enhance safety for bicyclists took third place in the second **Innovate Within** pitch competition. The statewide initiative to encourage entrepreneurship is presented by **the Indiana Economic Development Corp.**, **Indiana Department of Education** and **Ball State University**. Eleven teams representing high schools from around the state competed April 4 in the final round. LyfePack from Rivet High School in Vincennes took first place for its idea for a tech-integrated, kevlar backpack, which promotes energy efficiency and improves student safety. **Hobart High School's** team included students **Andrew Romes**, **Alex Termini** and **Faith Spencer**. Their idea, called RearVue, would improve bicycle safety through a distance measurement sensor, which harnesses LED technology to warn cyclists of approaching vehicles.

The first new office building to be built in downtown South Bend in more than 20 years has secured a major tenant that will occupy most of the space. The law firm **Barnes & Thornburg LLP** signed a 15-year lease to occupy three of the five floors in what will be called the **Barnes & Thornburg Building** at 201 S. Main St. The building, which is being co-developed by **Bald Mountain LLC**; **Norris Equity Partners** and **Great Lakes Capital**, will take between 12 and 18 months to complete.



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PERFECT TECHNOLO

Hammond's Digital Crossroads in line to meet rising demand for data storage

JERRY DAVICH

Transformational.

Thomas Dakich likes to use this one word to describe the Digital Crossroads Lake Michigan data center in Hammond. Coincidentally—yet symbolically—it is being built on property once housing the coal-fueled State Line Generating Plant, possibly the largest polluter of its time in Northwest Indiana.

“This is part of a technologically transformative effort in Northwest Indiana and also for the state of Indiana,” said Dakich, a senior manager for the data center. “It will make use of multiple resources in a new way that’s never been seen before in this Region.”

Along with CEO Peter Feldman, a New York City-based developer, Dakich and their team are building a 105,000-square-foot data center to potentially serve the increasing demand for data storage. It would help support the countless streaming uses, from music, movies and video games to health care, communications and online services.

Beginning with 10-megawatts of energy capacity, the data center will cater to an evolving digital-age mindset, particularly how businesses store and stream their cloud-based computer needs. It also will help address how tech-friendly consumers are becoming increasingly more dependent on smartphones,

tablets and laptops as the blazing-fast 5G service network begins rolling out across the country.

“Indiana is now being mentioned in national conversations about new technology,” said Dakich, a Merrillville native who lives and practices law in Indianapolis. “It’s now a whole different world for not only Hammond but for our state. Like I said, this will be transformational.”



“The former State Line Generating Plant site is an ideal location for (the Digital Crossroads data center), with the perfect storm of accommodations.”

—Thomas McDermott Jr.
Hammond Mayor

Last year, Dakich and Feldman were searching the Chicago area for a site to build a data center. Then they noticed the city of Hammond’s unsuccessful yet impressive bid proposal for Amazon’s new “HQ2” corporate headquarters.

“The city’s bid proposal really opened our eyes how this data center could work here,” Dakich said.

Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. admitted his staff’s bid proposal for Amazon’s HQ2 was a long shot, considering the national competition, but it highlighted what Hammond could offer.

“The Digital Crossroads data center is the right development,” McDermott said. “And the former State Line Generating Plant site is an ideal location for it, with the perfect storm of accommodations.”

These amenities include lower land cost, uninterrupted power sources, an abundance of Lake Michigan cooling water, and a location along the Midwest power grid with close access to underground fiber-optic connectivity from



The site of the former State Line Generating Plant in Hammond was cleared in 2015 and will be home to the new Digital Crossroads Data Center.

coast to coast, McDermott said.

“It’s a great opportunity for our city,” he said.

What will initially be a \$40 million project could increase to a \$100 million or \$200 million project if the development expands across the entire 77-acre site, McDermott said.

“Our hope is that the entire campus is someday comprised of data centers,” he said.

Dakich said he and his partners are marketing the facility to monster-sized corporations, noting that the center is scheduled to begin operations in the fourth quarter of 2019.

Dakich and Feldman are building the data center based on reams of promising data, existing regional resources, and on speculation that customers will



GIGAL STORM



Photo and rendering provided by Digital Crossroads Lake Michigan

connect with it, literally and figuratively. In other words, build it and they will ... communicate.

Pros and cons

Data center developments tend to accelerate improvements to local and regional infrastructure, with relatively significant demands for water, wastewater, power and fiber connectivity, experts say.

“These demands create opportunities to enhance a community’s infrastructure to accommodate a data center development,” said John Lenio, executive vice president of CBRE, an economic incentives and advisory firm in Phoenix, Ariz.

“The enhancement of a region’s power infrastructure and fiber connectively

can potentially generate interest from other data center developments or technology users,” he said. “Technology companies sometimes make location decisions for projects that need access to high-speed fiber infrastructure.”

Lenio said CBRE has seen this type of driver for economic growth across the country in numerous metro areas when one big development occurs.

Across the country, some elected officials and community members have taken a negative view of all the data centers popping up in their backyards, he said. This boom, however, is sparked by the monster-sized, cloud-based server farms, or “hyper-scale” users, such as Google, IBM and Microsoft, demanding more data storage capacity.

“While data centers are low on new

employment opportunities, relative to office buildings or distribution centers, they do provide relatively significant tax revenues to communities,” said Lenio, who authored a study on data center developments.

Additionally, a data center has relatively low impact on the local school system. Fewer jobs generated by a data center compared to the possibly hundreds generated by office buildings or distribution centers equals less impact, he said.

“This means that the marginal cost of services for the schools is low while the influx of new tax revenues can be substantial,” Lenio said.

Critics have pointed out that data centers do not create jobs or generate new tax revenues for host communities.



Photo provided by Digital Cross Roads Lake Michigan Data Center

The Digital Crossroads Lake Michigan Data Center includes plans for a greenhouse and turning part of the campus into a tech education center for Purdue University Northwest students taking agricultural- and technology-related classes.

McDermott disagrees with the latter claim. He points out that the new data center will replace lost tax revenue from the State Line Generating Plant, which closed in 2012 after paying the city's lion's share of property taxes since 1926.

Lenio said the primary tax revenue generators are real estate taxes on the new data center building, and new personal property taxes on all the mechanical, electrical and IT equipment

that will be installed in the data center. "Communities that (either) have a sales or use tax will have greater tax revenue returns because sales taxes are assessed on equipment that is delivered and installed in a data center," Lenio said. "The sales tax impact could be lower if a state or community provide sales tax incentives."

In January, Digital Crossroads announced it received full financing for the first phase of development from

New York City-based Star America Infrastructure Partners.

In February, the Indiana House of Representatives voted 95-1 to incentivize the data center development through House Bill 1405. The next month, the Indiana Senate voted 46-0 for the bill, which would legally exempt from taxes all data center equipment and most of its electricity, contingent that the center invests up to \$150 million within the next five years.

"The city of Hammond and the state of Indiana have done everything to help us make this happen here," Dakich said.

National boom of data centers

Data centers are facilities containing information technology equipment, including servers and networking computers for data processing, data storage and communications. These facilities aren't "passive bystanders" in any community, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. They contribute financial and other resources while collaborating with local organizations to support their communities. Building new data centers creates more

WHAT IS A DATA CENTER?

Data centers are facilities that house computers that store and process data, anchor our nation's economic growth, bolster job creation, and enable globally competitive innovations.

Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce

demand for expanding and upgrading local roads, power, water and sewage systems. With these improvements, data centers attract other data centers and businesses to communities, the chamber said.

"The number of internet users and the number of applications has been rising exponentially for decades. Consequently, more data centers are created to meet the demand of the rising amount of data that is created and stored," states a 2017 report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, 3 million data centers are scattered across urban and rural areas,



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housing a majority of servers, which are owned or leased by small- and medium-size businesses. The remaining servers located in massive data centers are owned by major cloud providers and national super computer centers.

Digital Crossroads will be one of the largest high-powered independent wholesale data center complexes in the Midwest, according to its website, at www.digitalcrossroadsdc.com.

“With strong and vested partners, including the state of Indiana and the city of Hammond, Digital Crossroads will be able to expedite permitting and zoning, create tax incentives and offer the most competitive power rates in the Region,” the website states.

Dakich confirmed in early April that the center’s permitting process was almost completed, and state legislators, led by Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb, are in strong support of the development. The support comes despite that the most common driver of tax revenue growth is major job creation, which most data centers will not offer.

“For instance, a typical headquarters, manufacturing or shared service operation can have between 200 and 1,000 jobs on site. By comparison, the number of jobs at a typical data center can be anywhere between five and 30,” according to a 2015 study by CBRE’s Data Center Solutions Group.

A recurring criticism asks, “Why give incentives to a data center that employs only 30 people when a state could be investing in a 500-job headquarters?” That capital investment, however, is another driver of tax revenue growth. While low on employment, data centers are highly capital-intensive, the study states.

Most states across the country also are plugging into the data centers bandwagon. Google alone has invested \$13 billion in data centers and related space this year, after investing \$9 billion in 2018, with a presence soon in 24 states.

Digital Crossroads officials hope to expand its data center reach to 400,000 square feet in the shadow of other massive data centers in Chicago, such as the monstrous Equinix Data Center on East Cermak Road.

In March, Digital Crossroads announced the hiring of David Hood as its managing director of operations. Hood has worked in the telecommunications and data center industries for 24 years, according to his online biography.

Hood will oversee a data center on State Line property that once generated more than 600-megawatts of power. Plans call for the new center to

ultimately support multiple alternative energies, including solar and wind power.

Plans also include building a greenhouse and turning part of the campus into a tech education center for Purdue University Northwest students taking agricultural and technology-related classes.

“Purdue is an important part of this project,” Dakich said.



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“Automation and robotics is one reason why data centers like the one going up in Hammond are about to explode all over the industrialized world,” said Mont Handley, entrepreneur-in-residence and associate director of the Commercialization & Manufacturing Excellence Center at Purdue University Northwest in Hammond.

For example, in the U.S., “industrial

robot orders in 2018 grew 24 percent over the previous year in the life sciences, food and consumer goods, plastics and rubber and electronics industries,” according to the Robotics Industries Association and Assembly Magazine.

“This growth in robotics and automation is coming about because of the development of more complex systems called Cyber Physical Systems,” Handley

said. “These CPS require more complex algorithm calculation-computations to physically command the robotics-automation equipment to grasp a part and install it in a car, for instance, on a fully automated manufacturing line.”

Even the robots that Walmart is installing to clean their stores will require fairly large amounts of cloud server-storage space to navigate and clean each store as directed.

Purdue Northwest’s College of Technology’s Mechanical Engineering Technology & Mechatronics departments is already involved with CPS research and development in regard to manufacturing. There are other applications, too, such as driverless vehicles.

“With the difficulty in finding qualified workers, companies are increasingly turning to CPS-robotics to handle human-predictive labor, like stacking products on pallets or boxing up products for distribution,” Handley said.

This high-tech aspect of data centers will be an important part of moving toward the broader concept of the “internet of things,” where the manufacturing processes, even for smaller businesses, will be automated with greater complexity. This will require capturing and storing more granular bits of data at a greater number of levels or stages of the manufacturing process, which requires a data storage center of this scale, according to Purdue experts.

Purdue Northwest already is teaching students who will be helping to lead this transformation. Positioning the data center in Northwest Indiana will provide businesses and industries the needed technical resources, and intellectual capital, to drive this 21st century transformation.

“We believe there’s going to be enough demand in this Region and beyond,” Dakich said.

While McDermott recognized that his city’s chances were slim to land Amazon’s HQ2, the bid put Hammond in the national spotlight for other projects.

“Only in our wildest dreams did we think our city’s Amazon HQ2 bid would get accepted,” McDermott said. “But realistically, look what we got out of it ... an amazing data center with so much promise and potential.”

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Strong, steady development

Statistics show demands for commercial space stable for Northwest, North Central Indiana



A second office building is under construction in Hammond's Oxbow Landing development off Kennedy Avenue to fill office space demand.

Photo by Carrie Napoleon

CARRIE NAPOLEON

Demand for commercial space is on the rise in Northwest and North Central Indiana as developers and businesses recognize the Region as a cost-effective gateway into the Chicago-area market.

While Northwest and North Central Indiana might not be experiencing the type of growth like the western and southeastern U.S., experts say parts of Northern Indiana are seeing steady improvements and solid sustained gains in the commercial sector.

"You are seeing lower vacancy rates across all property types," said Kelly Disser, executive vice president at Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.-based NAI Hiffman, a commercial real estate firm.

"The industrial market is in a time of historically low vacancy rates" he said. "I am referring to the Northwest Indiana submarket. Also, the same can be said for the entire Chicago market as a whole."

Much is driven by the continuing

rise of e-commerce. Manufacturing may grab a lot of the headlines, Disser said, but there have been upticks in occupancy rates across all commercial property types.

Karen Lauerman, president and CEO of the Lake County Indiana Economic Alliance, and Don Koliboski, the alliance's vice president of economic development, said what they are seeing and hearing from business owners and developers mirrors Disser's assertions.

"Industrial availability is tight across the nation," she said. "We don't see that changing."

Investors are starting to take more notice of Indiana, Koliboski, added.

"We are a more affordable way of being in the Chicago market," Koliboski said.

Lauerman said manufacturing is in good shape.

The change in shifting consumer-buying patterns and continued increase in e-commerce favors Lake County and Northwest Indiana substantially because of the location

to major markets, she said. An existing inventory of vacant but usable spaces translate to quick turnaround times for investors looking to retrofit businesses like fulfillment and delivery centers.

"There is a lot of activity by companies trying to fit the right building," Lauerman said.

Investment opportunities

As investors turn to existing stock to fulfill their purposes, Northwest and North Central Indiana lag behind the rest of the Chicago area when it comes to speculative development.

Disser said there has been a "ton" of speculative development and industrial growth throughout greater Chicago in recent years. However, "there hasn't been that much velocity in Northwest Indiana and North Central Indiana," he said.

Speculative development in Northern Indiana might not be up to speed with other parts of the Chicago area, but it is showing sparks of life.



Lauerman and Koliboski tout the major May announcement by Becknell Development of a 264,000-square-foot light industrial-manufacturing facility at 69th Avenue and Mississippi Street in Merrillville as an example. Expected to open in 2020, the project comes on the heels of the construction of an about 180,000-square-foot panel building near 56th Avenue and Mississippi Street.

“There is always demand for newer products on the market—those that fill the gap versus some of our aged industrial facilities that have been repurposed for newer industrial use,” Lauerman said.

Build-to-suit projects are increasing, she said. A second office building is under construction at Oxbow Landing in Hammond—after the first successfully launched and acquired tenants.

Developers also are looking to repurpose some of the existing aged industrial facilities for newer industrial use, Lauerman said. Projects, including 3600 Michigan Ave. in East Chicago, have transformed once vacant and dilapidated industrial property into a new light industrial business park.

Reinvestment in existing properties crosses commercial lines. After owners invested between \$4 million and \$5 million in renovations and updates to 8585 Broadway in Merrillville, also known as the Chase Bank building, occupancy rates are up.

Examining the Region

Merrillville-based Commercial In-Sites tracks 26 office properties in Northwest Indiana representing a total of more than 1.36 million square feet of space. One new project and four new buildings were added to the report for 2019. Phase 1 of the Cardinal Campus in Highland and 2901 Carlson in Hammond and Phase II of 2929 Carlson.

In 2018, the Twin Towers in Merrillville were removed from the report because of the expected and

now complete demolition of the sites.

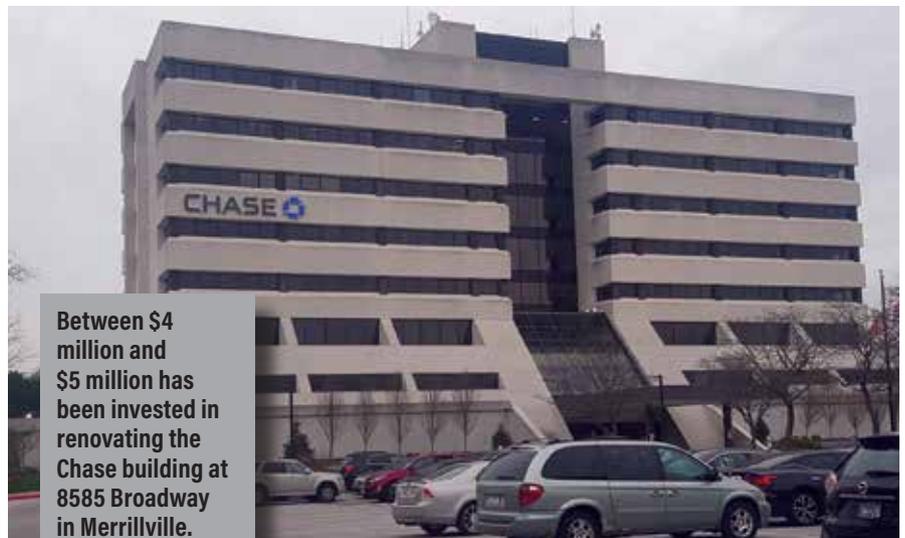
“From Jan. 1, 2018, to Jan. 1, 2019, the office market, as we track it for this report, saw an increase in total vacancy rate from 14 percent to 19 percent. By comparison, CoStar reports that the entire suburban Chicago office market vacancy rate EOY was 14 percent,” David Lasser, president of Commercial In-Sites, wrote in the report.

“We are reporting that nine of these 26, or 35 percent of the properties, are at 100 percent occupancy or reporting zero space vacant. One property is reporting 99 percent occupancy,” he continued. “The nine or 10 reporting 100 percent occupancy is down from 12 properties reporting 100 percent leased the previous year.”

In Lasser’s report, he noted 36 percent of the total market space, equaling 91,916 square feet, is in

“Short of a national recession, Indiana is in a very good space.”

— Karen Lauerman
President and CEO
Lake County Indiana
Economic Alliance



Between \$4 million and \$5 million has been invested in renovating the Chase building at 8585 Broadway in Merrillville.

Photo by Carrie Napoleon

the Merrillville property at 8585 Broadway. Recent renovations to the site are helping to secure tenants.

Another 25 percent of available space in the Region, or 55,512 square feet, is in three new construction buildings, Lasser wrote.

Lake County’s total average vacancy rate on buildings tracked rose from 16 percent to 23 percent, while in Porter County it reduced from 5 percent to 2

percent. This drop was largely because of no new construction in Porter County.

“Based on no current leasing prospects and no other additional new multi-story office buildings ready for delivery in 2019, we expect to see vacancy rates reduce this year,” Lasser wrote.

Average asking full-service gross rents were on the rise. Lasser wrote that year-over-year rents rose 65 cents per square foot from \$23.06 on Jan. 1, 2018, to \$23.71 a year later. Full-service gross rent includes taxes, common-area maintenance, insurance, utilities and janitorial service.

“While the market continues to have a normal pace of local tenants either renewing their leases, expanding or contracting in place and some relocating within the market, we expect to see more and more tenants entering the Northwest Indiana market, some relocating from Illinois and other states, as Northwest Indiana is increasingly recognized as a true Chicago suburban submarket,” Lasser wrote.

Workforce concerns

Whether Northwest or North Central Indiana has the workforce to meet the needs of businesses considering relocation to either region continues to be an issue, experts say.

“(Investors) are always externally conscious and focused on labor availability for certain types of labor, skilled labor,” said Disser of NAI Hiffman. “What’s the availability?

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What's the cost?"

Assessing labor availability, that now starts to include transportation in that same conversation, is something Disser said he has been doing more and more for clients, especially as they look at Indiana.

Proposed expansion of the South Shore Line could play a significant role in increasing office space demand.

"What we are hearing from our Illinois brokers is expansion of the South Shore train will create newer opportunities in the office-space market," Koliboski said.

Stable economy

Nothing on the horizon, short of a national or global recession, should derail the strong commercial growth experienced in the Hoosier state.

In June, the economy will hit a 10-year mark for a positive-growth cycle, tying the nation's longest stretch of economic expansion, which took place between 1991 and 2001, Disser said.

"The last down cycle was so bad we were posed for rebound," he said.

"There was nowhere to go but up."

Some business owners pointed to recent changes in the tax code that have been helping companies grow, Disser said, adding they might have been growing anyway, as indicated by the long-running growth cycle. The new tax environment also may have served as a catalyst in making a positive environment even better, he said.

"Everything that we are seeing now—and I deal with a lot of business owners—in general, the climate is positive," Disser said. "Their businesses are doing well; there is growth across different sectors and sizes of businesses."

Disser focuses on privately held companies with an excess of \$20 million in annual gross revenues. Whether dealing with larger or smaller businesses, that growth seems to be consistent.

The only concern is simply the duration of the long growth cycle, he said.

"At some point, there will be downturn; as of now, everything still seems to be pretty positive," Disser said. "It has kind of been a controlled recovery

coming out of (the) last national recession—that has never gotten too hot or too out of control or too loose."

Lake County Indiana Economic Alliance's Lauerma and Koliboski also caution the strong economy can eventually downturn, so it is necessary to be prepared.

"We hope, with the momentum we have in Northwest Indiana, (Lake) County will stay strong and active," Koliboski said.

Lauerma said some major announcements on the commercial front are expected in 2019. In 2018, about 75 percent of developers and businesses were looking for existing buildings and 25 percent were looking for buildable sites, she said.

The lower cost of doing business attracts people to Northwest Indiana, Lauerma said. Affordability, tax certainty stemming from the statewide budget and Indiana's triple-A bond rating make Indiana attractive.

"Short of a national recession, Indiana is in a very good space," Lauerma said.



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How to fix rural digital divide

Private industry, government work together to bring broadband to more Hoosiers



Bruce Speck, an outside plant project engineer with Intelligent Fiber Network of Indianapolis, inspects a recent installation of broadband equipment at a service building on the grounds of the Lake County government complex in Crown Point.

Photo by Larry Avila

LAUREN CAGGIANO

In rural America, it's often a case of "the haves" and "have nots" when it comes to high-speed internet service—and Indiana is no exception.

Rural areas have been largely left out when it comes to building or improving fiber networks. Federal, state and private businesses are working diligently to ensure Hoosiers in every corner of the state—urban or rural—have access to broadband connectivity. Private industry and federal, state and local government agencies have been working together to close the digital divide, and those efforts are making a difference.

Rural digital divide

While internet use and dependence are not confined to geographic location, rural communities still lag behind urban areas in terms of access to and adoption of broadband connections. And, rural areas get left behind when it comes to connection speed.

According to the Center for Rural Development, about half of rural residents across the U.S. have access to the level of internet service that the FCC states is the benchmark for high-quality residential broadband service in the U.S. A February 2018 government report shows the FCC maintains a speed benchmark of 25

Mbps download/3 Mbps upload (25 Mbps/3 Mbps) for fixed services.

That same report showed about "98.1 percent of the country has access to either fixed terrestrial service at 25 Mbps/3 Mbps or mobile LTE at 10 Mbps/3 Mbps, with that number dropping to 89.7 percent in rural areas."

Wally Tyner, a James and Lois Ackerman Professor of Agricultural Economics at Purdue University, weighed in on this disparity. He co-authored a report ("Estimation of the Net Benefits of Indiana Statewide Adoption of Rural Broadband") with two other colleagues, which was released in August 2018. His findings



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underline the importance of high-speed internet in rural counties.

“Just think about how you use internet every day in your life,” he said. “It’s not always available to people in rural areas, so that means they can’t do things urban dwellers take for granted, like make online purchases, shop for health care, do homework, etc.”

For farmers, that can mean the difference between getting price information or not, he added.

Tyner posits there’s more to this divide than just a nuisance or inconvenience.

“The internet is an essential; it’s not a luxury,” he said. “And if you don’t have it, you get left behind.”

Unfortunately, the reason for the gap is rooted in economics as it relates to population density, or lack thereof.

“The density of houses in rural areas is not high enough to make it pay,” Tyner said. “(Providers) just can’t afford to run broadband (between) 20 and 30 miles to reach the next house.”

It’s just not economically viable, he said.

“So, the big commercial companies aren’t going to do it,” Tyner said. “If it happens, it’ll be the rural cooperatives who are doing it.”

Leveling the playing field

That’s where Tyner’s research is vital. The study analyzed potential costs and benefits associated with broadband installation within the service territory of seven electric cooperatives and extrapolated those findings to the entire state.

“If the rest of rural Indiana is like these seven cooperative service areas, then 27 percent of the \$1 billion per year would be government revenue and health care cost savings, or \$270 million per year,” the report states. “In terms of total net present value of benefits, 27 percent of \$12 billion is \$3.24 billion in added government revenue and health care cost savings.”

Tyner explained the importance of another finding cited in the report.

“For every dollar invested in broadband, (it) results in a four-to-one ratio of investment,” he said. “So that means if you invest \$1, you get \$4 in benefits

to the economy.”

Health care, retail, education and other sectors enjoy the benefits. It doesn’t have to be a case of big businesses alone profiting. In his words, high-speed broadband “levels the playing field” for rural small-business owners too.

Tyner offered a specific example.

“My sister-in-law had a rural business and was lucky enough to have access to high-speed internet,” he said. “She was able to grow it from a small enterprise out of her garage to a full-scale business.”

Tyner said it didn’t matter where she was located because she could do business from anywhere in the world because she was on the web.

In other words, infrastructure can make or break rural residents’ ability to improve their quality of life and economic situation at the same time.

Investing in rural Indiana

James Turner, president and CEO of Intelligent Fiber Network, is acutely aware of this reality. Last year, IFN announced a plan to invest up to \$100 million during the next five years in Indiana, as well as a multi-year, multi-million-dollar network upgrade across the state.

“The upgrades and investments increase capacity, improve stability, and add operational and network efficiency—all of which are geared toward enhancing customers’ service experience,” according to a statement from the company.

Turner said the company’s past is just as important as its future plans.

“We started in 2002 as 20 small independent phone companies in Indiana who got together to create a high-speed network that would make them less dependent on the companies that are sometimes referred to as ‘the bigs,’—AT&T, Frontier, etc.,” he said.

“And from that initial mission, we’ve just continued to grow.”

Turner said the need for high-speed communications and fiber connectivity has “exploded” in recent years and demand is only expected to increase.

He said one reason is that the company’s enterprise customers, which include large health care providers and schools, are resource dependent.

“The business world really can’t thrive or even exist without access to high-speed connectivity,” he said. “That concept has evolved over time.”

Turner said the amount of bandwidth that’s needed today for businesses, particularly a large enterprise customer, is very high.

“And so, having that access through IFN fiber positions all of our customers in a more competitive way,” he said.



“The internet is an essential; it’s not a luxury. And if you don’t have it, you get left behind.”

—Wally Tyner
Purdue University

A team approach

IFN’s business model is innovative because it looks to join forces with local partners already on the ground. These joint ventures help it continue to expand and deepen its high-speed fiber network. The company then can access new customers and extend fiber to new areas. Meanwhile, it also makes investments in network upgrades to ensure reliability, stability and scalability for the future.

For example, in April, IFN announced a partnership with Wabash Valley Power, an Indianapolis-based, A-rated, not-for-profit generation and transmission cooperative. With more than \$1.1 billion in assets, Wabash Valley Power provides wholesale electricity to 23 distribution cooperatives, serving 311,000 businesses and households in Indiana, Illinois and Missouri.

According to Turner, this move was strategic, and he hopes other rural co-ops follow suit.

“These rural electric membership corporations are uniquely positioned to help solve the digital divide issue,” he

>IT COMMUNICATION

said. “Because they have assets in the area, they already have infrastructure built out to rural locations, whether it’s residential or commercial. And so, partnering with the co-ops could provide us both with a unique opportunity to help close the digital divide.”

Getting to the next level

Another stakeholder on the front line of closing the gap is at the state level.

The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), focuses its efforts in rural areas. In 2005, OCRA was established as a separate state agency by the state legislature.

Jodi Golden, the agency’s executive director, said OCRA’s mission is especially relevant when you consider the demographic shift.

“The population is on decline in rural areas and is projected to continue to

be on the decline,” she said. “So, it’s really the mission of our agency to try to help reverse that trend and to provide programs and opportunities for communities to really build that quality of life, to try to help retain and attract the workforce and residents to rural Indiana.”

The broadband issue ties into that, Golden said.

Enter the Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program. Gov. Eric Holcomb announced the program last fall, which calls for \$100 million for the deployment of broadband in rural Indiana.

The initial phase will focus on unserved areas, which are defined by the state as “a census block that does not have at the time of application at least one broadband provider offering actual speeds of at least 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload, or an area where there is not a potential provider for which the census block has been designated through a federal funding program to deploy that minimum level of service by a specified date.”

The goal of the second phase will be to improve service in those areas. Applicants will be the actual service providers or service entities deploying that infrastructure.

The application period closed May 3, and Golden said her agency is eager to see the grant money yield a return on investment.

What might that look like? In her words, “the availability of broadband access would be one metric, but there’s also an education piece to this too, as far as ensuring that residents understand the importance of broadband and how it would impact their community.”

Putting Valparaiso on the map

The city of Valparaiso recognizes that investing in a secure, vendor-neutral fiber optic network, which operates at high capacity, is an effective tool in attracting broadband service providers.

ValpoNet is community owned and operated by the city of Valparaiso. ValpoNet only provides an infrastructure resource through dark



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fiber installation. This infrastructure enables customers in Valparaiso, Center Township and Washington Township to directly lease dark fiber. It allows internet service providers to provide competitively priced broadband, offering community businesses access to a high-speed, high-capacity network at low cost.

Stu Summers, executive director of Valparaiso's Redevelopment Commission, said this investment was made in the name of helping the area compete in the global marketplace. It also is an effective lure to attract more broadband service providers to give residents and businesses competitively priced options for high-speed internet access.

ValpoNet gave access to Northwestern Indiana Telephone Co. (NITCO) of Hebron so it could provide service to East Porter County School Corp. It saved the company from having to install a little more than 2 miles of fiber optic cable to bring service to the school district.

Tom Long, president of NITCO, said that, before ValpoNet, his company only had limited access to potential customers in Valparaiso. The infrastructure investment by the city allows his company, along with other service providers, to offer high-speed internet access throughout Valparaiso.

"Valparaiso was wise to build up a municipal fiber network," Long said. "What their network allows is it invites other providers to come in, which can keep prices down."

To understand the competitive landscape, Summers offered an anecdote related to the development of cities throughout American history. One common denominator was that they had access to ports.

Then came the rise of interstate highways, which explains, for example, Dallas' success. It doesn't have a port but has great interstate transportation access.

"Broadband access is much like water access or highway access," Summers said. "It provides access

to data, high-speed data, and is done with the intent of creating and retaining good-paying jobs in the community."

He said the larger vision behind doing all this is to continue to make Valparaiso an attractive place to live, work and grow.

Long said Valparaiso isn't the only Region community that has invested in a dark-fiber network. He said Chesterton, East Chicago and Munster also have recognized the value.

"It's pretty common out there," Long said of municipally-owned fiber networks.

Long said initially NITCO will market services to business customers but eventually will offer options to residential customers.

Summers said ValpoNet is in the implementation phase, which mean it is signing up customers.

He looks forward to bringing other customers on board for the fastest possible network at the lowest possible cost.



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The Indiana Dunes National Park became the 61st national park when President Donald Trump signed the legislation Feb. 15 to make the designation.

Photos provided by Indiana Dunes Tourism

Name-changing landscape

National park status for Indiana Dunes puts Region’s lakeshore in elite group

JANE DONAHUE

A familiar place has a new name. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore officially became the Indiana Dunes National Park, making it the 61st park to receive national status.

Legislation to change the name was introduced by U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky and signed into law by President Trump on Feb. 15.

“This action provides our shoreline with the recognition it deserves, and I hope further builds momentum to improve open and public access to all of our Region’s

environmental wonders,” he said. Indiana Dunes National Park hugs 15 miles of the southern shore of Lake Michigan and encompasses 15,000 acres of woodlands, prairies, savannas, bogs, wetlands and sand dunes. The Dunes were created when glaciers receded 14,000 years ago, creating white, sandy beaches, which are consistently ranked among the best in the U.S.

“The presence of this place, inspired over a century ago, is clearly one of America’s best ideas.”

—Paul Labovitz
Park superintendent
Indiana Dunes

According to Paul Labovitz, Indiana Dunes park superintendent, advocates have been trying to get national park status for the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore for more than a century.

“The (name) change finished the effort suggested in 1916 by the first director of the National Park Service, Stephen Mather,” Labovitz said. “What a terrific tribute to the neighbors, partners, visitors and national park staff. We are so appreciative to the entire Indiana delegation for their recognition and support of this national treasure.”

While the status change does not bring more funding, the elevation to one of only 61 national parks in the U.S. means that it is part of an elite group.

Magnet for visitors

In the past five years, there have been about 1.6 billion visits to National Park System sites, which include 419 national parks, preserves, monuments, memorials, historic sites, seashores and



battlefield parks throughout the U.S.

“Northwest Indiana has a new feather in its cap, and we all have an opportunity to use the Indiana Dunes to increase our economic development,” said Lorelei Weimer, executive director of Indiana Dunes Tourism.

U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorski shared the sentiment.

“The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore has long been a treasured place for Hoosiers to relax, explore and enjoy all that nature has to offer, as well as a strong driver of our local economy,” Walorski said. “The Indiana Dunes National Park will draw even more visitors from across the country, strengthening Indiana’s economy and boosting the outdoor recreation industry that is so vital to our Region.”

America’s national parks in 2018 exceeded 300 million recreational visits for the fourth consecutive year. It was the third highest record of visits since the National Park Service began keeping track in 1904.

“America’s national parks are national treasures that tell the story of our nation and celebrate its beauty, history and culture,” said David Bernhardt, secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. “I am pleased that so many Americans and visitors from around the world continue to take advantage of the affordable and accessible recreational opportunities provided by these sites.”

Dan Smith, National Park Service deputy director, said millions of visits to our country’s national parks annually “continue to affirm that Americans are in love with their public lands and hold dear the stories of our nation embodied in the natural, cultural and historic landscapes we protect in the National Park System.”

Tourism is big business

Locally, visitors to the Dunes won’t see any significant physical changes except for new signage. However, local



Photos provided by Indiana Dunes Tourism

The effort to designate the Dunes a national park began in 1916 by the first director of the National Park Service.

experts are betting on an increase in visitors.

Tourism is the state’s 11th largest industry, with visitor spending in Indiana totaling \$12.7 billion in 2017, according to the most recent results released by the office of Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and the Indiana Office of Tourism Development.

Indiana Dunes is the No. 1 tourism attraction in the Hoosier state, attracting 3.6 million visitors in 2018—that’s without the national park designation.

“We could not be prouder of Visclosky’s efforts and the work our National Park Service members have done to make this a reality,” Weimer said. “This will be a significant boon to Indiana’s economic development, specifically tourism, which already

pumps \$476 million into our economy annually.”

Weimer said tourism is one of Porter County’s fastest-growing industries, responsible for 1,000 tourism-related businesses and more than 5,500 jobs. And while the name change is recent, Weimer said her office has seen the benefits of the designation.

“We’re already getting visitors who

are coming to see the new national park—during winter—which is outside of our peak season,” Weimer said. “The designation is a big deal, and we expect many people to add the Indiana Dunes National Park to their bucket lists.”

Online they are seeing the boost as well. Overall total social media impressions for Indiana Dunes Tourism were about 2 million in 2018. Within a month of becoming a national park, Indiana Dunes Tourism totaled more than 718,000 social media impressions.

Spero Batistatos, chairman of the Dunes National Park Association, said the name change will allow potential visitors to understand what Indiana Dunes has to offer.

“The word ‘park’ has a certain appeal and to add that little four-letter word brings the power and enthusiasm that the traveling public perceives,” Batistatos said. “The name change helps us tell the story of this incredible asset better.”

Batistatos said there is so much more to the lakeshore than its beach, and the national park designation will help convey that.

“In essence, we have had many millions of visitors a year, but they have not fully explored the entirety of the park and all of the attractions that are within the park,” Batistatos said. “I am talking about the flora and fauna



THE STAMP

► Here’s the stamp for the Indiana Dunes National Park you’ll want for your national park passport. The date is up to you!

>TOURISM

and dunes environment.”

Batistatos said the name change will hopefully encourage people to lengthen their visits because there is so much to see and do at Indiana Dunes National Park.

“We are focused on getting people to recognize that there is a whole lot more there than a beach,” Batistatos said. “I think the word ‘park’ positions people to be more serious about exploring what the offerings are and what experiences they can have here.”

Capitalizing on designation

The Indiana Dunes might be the most recent park added by the National Park Service, but the St. Louis arch on Missouri’s riverfront is also a relative newcomer. The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial was designated the Gateway Arch National



“We all have an opportunity to use the Indiana Dunes to increase our economic development.”

—Lorelei Weimer
Executive director of
Indiana Dunes Tourism

Park in January 2018.

Samantha Fisher, director of communications for the Gateway Arch Foundation, said that, at the time of the designation, the park was under a major construction project. A grand re-opening took place in July 2018 to unveil a \$380 million renovation of the 91-acre park, 46,000-square-foot visitor center and complete overhaul of the Museum at the Gateway Arch.

“As a result of the renovations and the significant media attention on a local, regional and national level, visitation has been up about 30 percent over previous years,” Fisher said.

Fisher said an area they expect to

see grow in terms of visitation is from international travelers who tend to choose their park destinations based on titles.

“The Gateway Arch has long been recognized as a national icon and re-naming allowed the park to align with the way visitors were connecting to the site,” Fisher said.

Weimer said the Hoosier state is ready to embrace visitors and welcome them to discover what the Indiana Dunes National Park has to offer.

“What we’re excited about is that visitors who see the Indiana Dunes almost immediately realize how deserving of this status we actually are,” Weimer said.

Labovitz is optimistic the national park designation will provide an economic boost.

“Indiana Dunes National Park is a major economic driver for the Region and state,” Labovitz said. “When you think about our quality of life here, the presence of this place, inspired over a century ago, is clearly one of America’s best ideas.”

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Felicia Kuschel, Group 7even account director, works on a social media video.

Photo provided by Group 7even

PERSISTENT SOCIAL GAINS

F A C E B O O K ~ I N S T A G R A M ~ S N A P C H A T ~ T W I T T E R ~ G O O G L E



INDUSTRY LEADERS OFFER INSIGHT ON HOW TO BUILD CUSTOMER BASE WITH TARGETED ONLINE CONTENT

LESLEY BAILEY

Sharing social through content creation, remaining responsive, audience identification and analytical-based ads remains a significant component of marketing for businesses of all sizes, experts say.

“Social media is not just important, it’s the largest piece of the puzzle right now especially for brick-and-mortar stores,” said Mat Barbur, co-founder of True Mtn Social in St. John. “They’re battling online stores, and they need to prompt a commitment from people to get in their cars, drive to them and go through the entire buying process versus just clicking online and having it there in days.”

Barbur said businesses need a social presence to build trust.

“Social media allows businesses to document who they are and why they are special,” he said. “It’s all about building trust and a community that rallies around the business.”

Michelle Andres, president of Group 7even in Valparaiso, said social media is where it’s at in terms of brand building.

“I think consumers nowadays are more educated, and they want to purchase from businesses they believe in and that share common values,” she said. “You can’t do that with just traditional marketing.”

To remain relevant in the social media game, marketing industry leaders spotlight how companies can strengthen their social presence by embracing the latest trends and best practices.

In the moment

The story format is sweeping through all social media channels as an engaging avenue to connect with audiences through such platforms as Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat. How long they last is the key difference between posts and stories.

“The story format is a big trend,” said Grant Mielke, owner and manager of Elkhart-based Vala Marketing. “It’s

really echoing how content is getting shorter.”

He said the content only is there for 24 hours, and then it’s done.

“It helps level the playing field,”

Mielke said. “It’s way easier for a small coffee shop to put in a 10-minute time investment than for a larger company like McDonalds to do something as they have strict content standards to follow.”

He said shorter-length story content is another equalizer allowing small and medium businesses to compete and show value.

Barbur said stories allow people to be in the moment with you.

“It’s not pre-planned,” Barbur said. “Videos are less edited, and it’s happening right now.”

He said it helps viewers feel special because they caught before it disappeared after 24 hours.

“Facebook and Instagram have made stories top priority as it’s the first thing you see on the platform,” Barbur said.

Andres said businesses have a brief window to capture audiences.

“We are so overloaded with information (that) you are trying to capture these micro-moments,” she said. “People pick up their phones or devices about 150 times a day (and) you have about three seconds to capture their attention.”

Know your audience

Seth Spencer and his team at SERA Solutions home in on analytics to assist companies with social media marketing.

“We are a very analytical company, (and) now more than ever users and consumers expect a high-quality

experience and relevant content,” said Spencer, who is founder and CEO of the Michigan City-based business. “Digital marketing can be a very cost-effective and data-centric way to market.”



“Sharing important updates or stories makes it special rather than just posting as many times a day as you can.”

—Seth Spencer
Founder and CEO
SERA Solutions

Spencer said tools, including artificial intelligence and analytical platforms, can assist with ad optimization by helping tailor images and headlines to certain segments of the population. He said one in four Facebook pages uses paid advertising and that trend is likely to continue.

“It helps to get to know certain attributes of your customers,” he said. “We can use AI in real-time to create ads based on 10 different images or descriptions, and AI can display a combination of images and headlines that is most likely to affect that person on the other side.”

Spencer said that’s where personalization is effective as people are seeing images

or headlines that matter to them.

Part of knowing your audience is embracing flexibility and being willing to test out content—whether it’s through organic or paid content.

“It’s quick to try out things and find ones that perform better than others, and then you will know your audience better than ever, and your audience will appreciate getting the content it wants,” Spencer said. “Everyone is happy there (and) the mindset of continuous improvement through trial and error is low risk.”

Andres said entrepreneurs can relate to their audience by simply reaching out to current customers.

“To know your audience, you don’t need a big budget,” she said. “You can talk to the people (who) you are already serving.”

Andres suggests business owners should ask their customers why they

>MARKETING

are buying and what attracted them to their business.

"You can get an idea of who they are and why they came to you," Andres said.

She said creating focus groups with family and friends is another approach to get more insight on how people think.

While attracting new customers is important, businesses should also focus on those showing interest in their product or service.

Spencer said people who are often overlooked are those who already know a brand and are engaging but not purchasing.

"Re-marketing is important to someone who is already looking at your website but didn't check out or didn't contact you," he said. "A strategy can be offering a sweetened opportunity with a special offer."

Word of mouth

The social aspect of social media is especially beneficial for businesses that respond, engage and communicate with their audiences.

Barbur recommends acknowledging all reviews on social media regardless of whether they are positive or negative.

"If someone is leaving you a positive review, you have to show interest and thank them," Barbur said. "Something such as: 'Thank you for the review, I appreciate it.' You have to acknowledge them."

He said business owners should treat bad and good reviews equally.

Responding to reviews can be an avenue to building brand ambassadors and micro-influencers who will share their experiences with your business online. Micro-influencers are social media users who may have smaller followings but can still have an impact on a brand.

"You have to start small," Barbur said. "You should reach back out to them when you have something such as an event coming up and offer them a VIP ticket."

Barbur said micro-influencers can sell products.

"This is especially important if you

are a very small fish in a very large pond," he said.

Spencer said testimonials, customers' experiences and asking customers to post reviews on Facebook can assist with social proofing. This is a way to scale up word-of-mouth through social networks, which can lead to increased awareness of your business.

"Customers are doing the ad for you, and it can be free advertising," Spencer said. "It's no longer about just a service or product but the company behind that and how others are affected, enjoyed or felt about the business."

Andres said there is nothing better than getting people to talk about your product.

"It's like a movie review when your best friend tells you a movie was amazing," she said. "Social does this for brands."

Staying on best social track

Short, subtle and not too serious are the way to go when it comes to social media marketing.



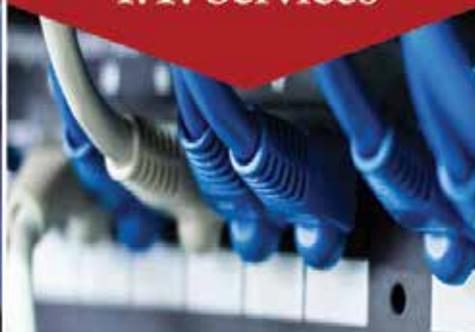
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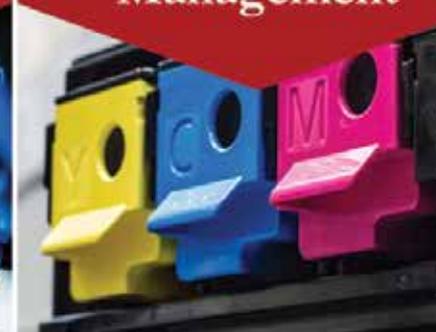
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The rule of thumb is short and sweet videos that are less than a minute, said Andres, who notes video is expected to be 80 percent of the content on Facebook by 2020.

"It's all about embracing these micro-moments," she said. "On Facebook, the majority don't listen to any volume, so you have to be sure that you are embracing captions and other techniques to offer a visual experience."

Being entertained remains at the core of why people are on social, Andres said. "You need to think entertaining, (and) you don't want to just post a flier," she said. "You need to engage the audience and make them want more."

Mielke said social media can't be viewed the same way someone views a magazine.

"If you post only sales or specials," he said. "It's almost like a ticker on a digital sign, and that is never going to work."

Mielke said an informational video showing a product in use can be an entertaining and subtle way to spotlight a product.

"If you are a company selling knives, make a video of a chef making an interesting dish using the knives tastefully and have a link to purchase the knives in the description," he said. "The audience is getting value from it ... it's about amplifying."

Barbur said part of the entertainment component is not focusing on perfection but on just being people.

"My advice is to not take yourself too seriously," he said. "It's OK to see employees having a basketball game off the clock or in the lunch room laughing."

Barbur said the human element is important.

"Employees doing something silly ... people react to that," he said. "Have human content that you don't run through a series of filters ... be humble and don't take yourself too seriously."

Businesses also really can build a level of confidence through social media.

Spencer said it's important to focus on quality not quantity.

"Sharing important updates or stories makes it special rather than just posting as many times a day as you can," he said.

Social shouldn't be seen as the whole enchilada—both in crafting content

and as a marketing tool.

Andres said social media can be viewed as an appetizer.

"(But it's) not also dinner (or) dessert," she said. "You have to pull them in and leave them wanting more—maybe pulling them toward your website."

Andres said entrepreneurs think everything is important and that they need to get it all out there.

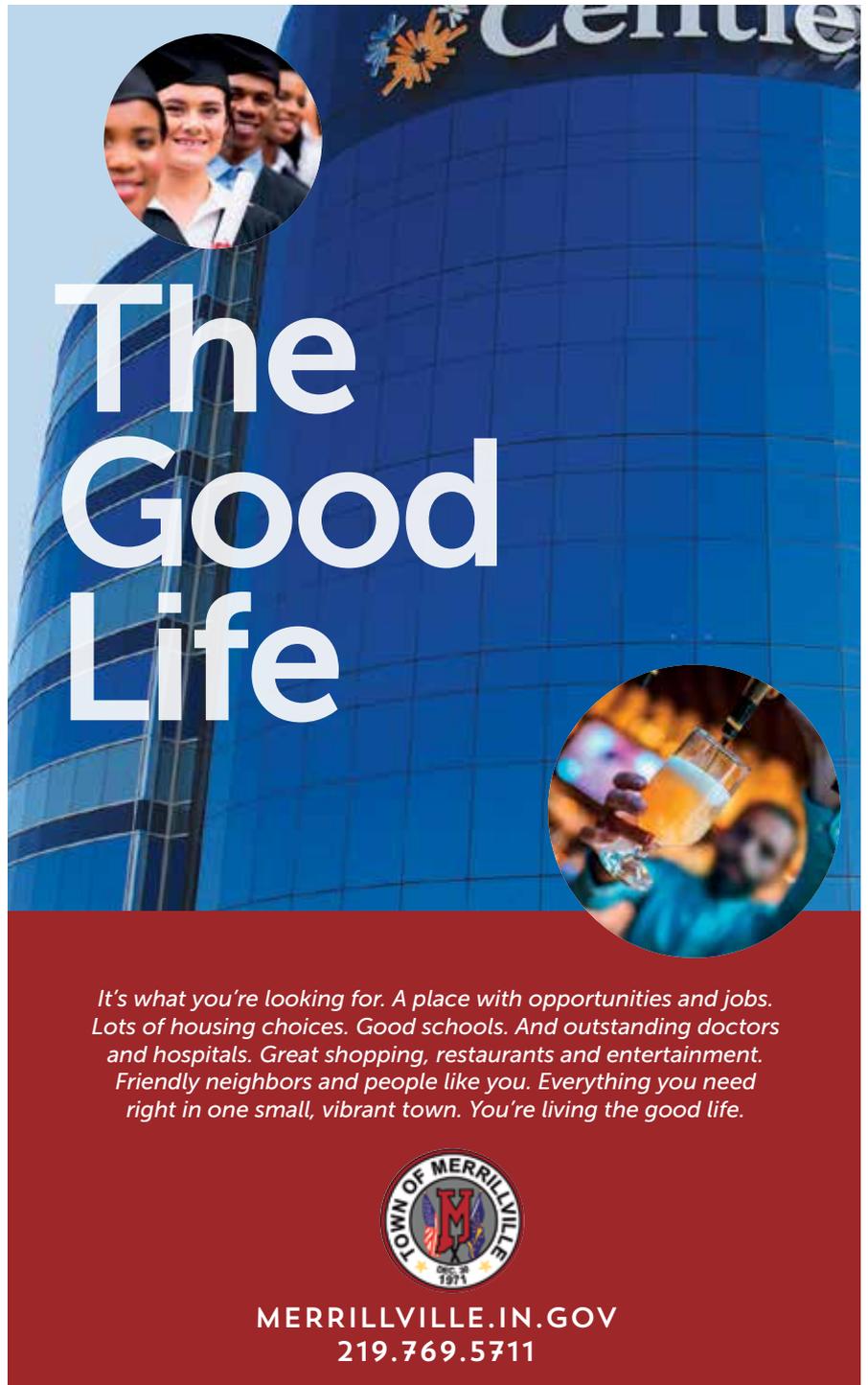
"It's about knowing how to use it and

use it as a tease," she said.

Andres also believes social needs to be matched with other forms of marketing.

"To me, social is not a standalone medium but should be reinforced with some traditional medium," she said.

"You want your audience to think that they have heard about you a lot—on social, a billboard, an ad ... It's an integrated mix."



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EVENTFUL IM

Setting special events apart takes time and plan



ANNEMARIE MANNION

If this year is anything like the past 24, thousands of people will descend on downtown Whiting over three days in late July. They will devour Eastern European food, imbibe some brews or wine, watch a parade and take part in a pierogi-tossing competition.

Yes. That's right—pierogi tossing.

Organizers of the annual Pierogi Fest take pride in incorporating a bit of wacky fun as part of the annual celebration of Eastern European cuisine and culture.

"We wanted to have an ethnic festival that acknowledged customs and took a light-hearted view of those customs," said Thomas Dabertin, chairman of

Pierogi Fest and one of its co-founders.

This year the fest is celebrating its 25th year July 26 through 28 in the downtown business district.

While the focus is on fun, organizers take Pierogi Fest seriously. It attracted about 350,000 people last year, and organizers said, throughout its history, it has promoted local businesses and expanded awareness of Whiting.

Making memorable events

Creating a successful event takes a lot of hard work and organization, getting feedback from attendees and local businesses, focusing on what makes the event unique, and keeping it fresh, said Dabertin and other festival

and event planners.

Dabertin credited Pierogi Fest with putting Whiting on the map and with enhancing the business district.

"It created an awareness that Whiting even existed," said Dabertin of the festival's success in promoting the city. He said it had a lot more vacancies and less foot traffic in its business district a quarter-century ago.

The effect goes beyond the business district.

"It's helped sell homes and bring in new residents," Dabertin said. "It has had a huge impact."

Every year organizers ponder what elements made their events successful and what needs to be improved.





PROVEMENTS

ning and continual improvement, organizers say



Planning for next year's Pierogi Fest will begin virtually the day after this year's event concludes. The fest relies on a dozen planning committees and 600 volunteers.

"We're very hard on ourselves," Dabertin said. "We review everything we did. ... We tear it apart and see what we can do better."

One element that has changed at Pierogi Fest, based on feedback from businesses and attendees, is signage. Through the years, the organizers received complaints that people could not see directional signs.

In response, organizers tried larger signs, brightly painted signs and sandwich boards, and still the problem

persisted. The problem was solved when they hung signs cut in the shapes of clothing on a mock clothesline over the streets.

"We learned that the only way for a sign to be seen in a crowd of 350,000 is to look up," Dabertin said.

Keeping the festival unique is also important to making it great. This year, the event will have more than 90 vendors and 1,200 different food items for sale.

Organizers limit duplications of foods sold so that attendees aren't coming across typical fest fare—elephant ears or funnel cakes—every few feet.

"People know they're going to find

great food and great variety," Dabertin said.

What worked, what didn't

The sort of close evaluation that Pierogi Fest undergoes annually is like the analysis done for events planned by Valparaiso Events, a nonprofit that organizes the annual Popcorn Festival. The event will return Sept. 7 for its 41st year. It will feature 250 arts and crafts booths, 35 food booths, kids' games, two live music stages and a Popcorn Parade.

The festival, which pays homage to Orville Redenbacher who built his popcorn empire in Valparaiso, brings about 65,000 attendees to town.



Pierogi Fest celebrates Eastern European culture and draws hundreds of thousands of people to downtown Whiting every July.

Photo provided by the Whiting Robertsdale Chamber of Commerce



Photo provided by Downtown South Bend

Visitors explore one of the many booths at Art Beat, which is one of downtown South Bend's biggest events, drawing about 15,000 people.

After every festival, the organizers convene a Popcorn Summit. They invite local businesses to give their feedback.

"We go category by category and look at what worked and what didn't," said Jenny Bennett-Beschinski, event coordinator for Valparaiso Events.

She agreed with Dabertin that one element of making an event great is to keep it fresh so that people don't get bored or feel it's too much like any other event they might attend.

"We change it up every year," Bennett-Beschinski said. "It's a balance between keeping what people love, like the parade, and changing up what's tweakable."

This year, for instance, the festival will feature a Friday food truck rally.

Entrance to Popcorn Festival, as well as to all the other 90 events that Valparaiso Events plans, including farmers markets, concerts and movies are free, which Bennett-Beschinski said is a strong part of their appeal.

Kylie Carter, director of marketing and events at Downtown South Bend, agreed that keeping most of their events free and family-focused is a big part of what makes them successful.

"If an event is free, that's something families are always looking for," Carter

said.

She also said adding new elements every year attracts new and repeat visitors.

"You have to make it worth it for people to choose to attend your event over all the other things they might do," she said.

About 200 restaurants, shops and attractions call downtown South Bend home. Some sponsor events and others host activities that tie in to an event's theme.

She advises businesses to make sure their events are interactive.

"It should be something that's active not passive," Carter said. "You can just do a coloring page or, a lot of times, a business will

have a craft (for kids) in a corner of their business."

Carter said it doesn't have to be costly.

"It's just something to add to the experience," she said.

One of Downtown South Bend's biggest events is Art Beat, a one-day arts festival that this year will take place Aug. 17 on Michigan Street.

In its 15th year, Art Beat brings in about 15,000 visitors and 1,000 artists.

To attract a range of artists showing and selling their creations, organizers

only charge a \$10 application fee.

"It's a way to help artists be a little brave and to show their art," Carter said.

Downtown South Bend organizes about 100 events a year. All of them are geared toward promoting the downtown business district.

"Our No. 1 goal is to change perceptions of Downtown South Bend," Carter said. "For many years, South Bend had a perception of being a dying city."

Carter said every event meshes with that overall goal.

"We'd never have an event that doesn't drive people to our (downtown) businesses in some way," she said.

As with the pierogi and popcorn fests, post-event analysis helps organizers in South Bend better understand what draws people to their events. Carter said her organization measures attendance by going on the top of a parking garage and estimating the number of people in a block and then extrapolating the number from there.

They also talk to businesses, survey visitors and do a staff debriefing.

"It's very important that we learn as much as we can, so we can make events bigger and better every year," Carter said.

Honoring businesses

Not all events are geared toward attracting the general public. The Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards Luncheon for example is targeted at a business audience.

The awards, bestowed by the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, have been given every year for the last 25 years. They recognize small businesses and innovative startups within a seven-county area in Northwest Indiana that have at least a three-year track record of growth in sales or employees and strong growth potential.

Attendees enjoy the personal stories about how the honored entrepreneurs started their companies and continue growing them.

"It's really a storytelling event," said Lorri Feldt, regional director of the small business center. "I think that's what people really like."

A committee selects winners in

various categories based on nominations. "If we don't have a (nominee) with a great story, we don't do that category that year," Feldt said.

Pulling off a big event isn't easy. Feldt recommends getting help by making partnerships.

"We've benefited from having a wonderful committee involved in event planning as well as selecting the winners," she said. "We have amazing sponsors—many come back year after year, and some are new each year."

To help tell the stories of local businesses in a compelling way, they rely on local media, including Lakeshore Public Media and VIA Marketing, which produce the videos and provide marketing materials for the program. The focus on storytelling appeals to Jim Jorgensen, a partner in the law firm of Hoepfner Wagner & Evans LLP, which has offices in Merrillville and Valparaiso. He's attended every E-Day luncheon except one.

"The E-Day conference introduces us to a remarkable group of individuals who demonstrate creativity, perseverance and great skills," he said. "They are an inspiration to all."

Planning an event

For businesses and others planning their own events, Rachel Snyder, banquet manager at Horseshoe Casino in Hammond, is ready to help. She works with customers to organize events for as few as 100 people to as many as 700 and more. She plans about 100 events annually, at least 40 of which are business events.

She has advice for those looking to organize a private event at the casino. One tip is to plan ahead, especially if you're hoping to host a gathering on a busy day.

"If you want a Saturday or Sunday, you need to call seven or eight months ahead," she said.

It's also important to know the type of event, the theme, about how many people will attend and about how much you want to spend.

"It makes a difference if it's a high-end cocktail party or if it's a meeting for people after work," Snyder said. A typical per-plate cost at the Horseshoe

ranges from \$35 to \$100, depending on the day of the week and other factors, she said.

At one of its recent events for its top players, Snyder said they brought in aerialists, jugglers and fire breathers. For a customer hosting a Kentucky Derby Party, the casino created three different signature cocktails.

Whether putting together festivals or private parties, the organizers of

them said an event is special when it is unique.

For anyone seeking to emulate the success of Pierogi Fest, Dabertin suggested thinking about what will make an event different and to be open to improvements. He even has "secret shoppers" attend Pierogi Fest to give him their feedback.

"I tell them, 'Don't tell me what's good. Tell me what's wrong,'" he said.

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James Berman and wife Lizbeth Bryant named each of the five guest rooms at their Valparaiso Inn after their grandchildren: The Stella, The Gianna, The Julia, The Madeline and, pictured here, The Kara.

Photo by Philip Potempa

Unexpected innkeepers

Valparaiso Inn Bed and Breakfast offers guests 130-year historical perspective

PHILIP POTEempa

A stroll in Valparaiso's historic Washington Street District in 2012 led couple James Berman and Lizbeth Bryant down a path they never expected. The Mother's Day walk was the inspiration for eventually buying a 130-year-old three-story mansion.

The eight-bedroom landmark residence built at the turn of the century was once owned by the president of Valparaiso University. It was for sale and in much need of renovation. They dreamed of turning it into a bed and breakfast like the ones they often liked to stay.

"When someone asks us about what

experience we had prior to beginning this establishment, our answer is 'we ourselves have stayed in more than 30 similar lodging ventures during our own travels and definitely, we know what we like, and especially, we know what we didn't like about those experiences,'" Berman said.

Five years later, the couple celebrated the Valparaiso Inn Bed and Breakfast's grand opening Sept. 5, 2018.

But not without a lot of work. They invested more than \$400,000, an amount even more than what they paid for the house at 301 N. Washington St., a couple blocks away from the Porter County Courthouse.

Berman did much of the renovation and remodeling except for the plumbing and the heating and cooling upgrades. There was plenty to keep him busy.

"The house didn't have central air conditioning and only utilized individual window units," Berman said. "The furnace system was also antiquated and used a gravity heating method using large grated vents in the floor."

While the house has the capacity for eight large guest bedrooms, each with its own attached full bathroom, city rules allow for only five rooms to be used for paying guests.

"We are a licensed lodging business



as recognized by the city officials, and therefore, we adhere to all of the codes, health inspection considerations and enforced zoning,” Berman said.

Bryant said she assisted her husband with the interior decorating and furnishings, which span antiques and heirlooms to some more contemporary selections to ensure the comfort of their guests. Berman does much of the cooking, with his gourmet breakfasts a highlight. Bryant helps with the cleaning and laundry, and assists with the business paperwork.

Berman, who also works as a licensed therapist, and Bryant, who is an English and writing professor at Purdue University Northwest, are originally from Virginia and will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary in August. Now they are innkeepers too.

Together, they have shared in the adventurous duties of researching the history of the home, as well as the tedious tasks, such as stripping away

four layers of wallpaper.

The house was constructed about 1900 by Dr. Horace Evans and his wife, Anna Maude Skinner Evans, while Horace was teaching at Valparaiso University before he was named its president.

“We have discovered so much history surrounding this house, especially during the years 1923 to 1926 when it was the residence of the president of Valparaiso University,” Bryant said. “Now, we are adding our own family history to this home. Each of the guest rooms are named after our grandchildren.”

The names, according to their website at valpoinn.com, are Stella, Kara, Julia, Madeline and Gianna.

The cost to stay per night ranges



VALPARAISO INN BED AND BREAKFAST

► **James Berman** and **Lizbeth Bryant** remodeled the historic 130-year-old mansion at 301 N. Washington St. www.Valpo.Inn.com or 219-242-8934.

between \$160 and \$200 based on double occupancy and depending on the season and the day of the week. Guests can enjoy the other rooms in the house, such as a sitting room, formal living room, elegant dining room and a solarium. Meals, including breakfast, are served from fine China with full formal place settings, which include crystal stemware.

“My goal is that we eventually are running at least 50 percent capacity at all times rather than to have lags between guest stays,” Berman said. “Our next phase of further improvements will have us working

in the yard and with the landscape. Ultimately, we’d like to have more events booked as well as weddings, parties and receptions.”

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NORTHWEST INDIANA

JOHN CAIN



READ ON PHONE



OUT

Symphony's free summer concerts

The 13th annual South Shore Summer Music Festival will feature free concerts by the Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra during July and August in six communities across the Region. The series opens July 20 at the Town Complex Grounds in Cedar Lake. On July 27, the symphony heads to Crown Point for a concert on the lawn at Franciscan Communities. Other concert locations include the Indiana Dunes National Park at West Beach

Baitz and directed by Susan Padveen at the Dunes Summer Theatre in Michiana Shores. This smart, entertaining play explores family dynamics when prodigal daughter, Brooke, returns home to share her imminent book release. It chronicles events surrounding her late brother's act of rebellion, which shattered more than lives. Desperate to keep her book shelved forever, Brooke's high-profile, conservative parents (best friends of Ronald and Nancy Reagan) agonize before unfolding

the true details of a tragic wound they don't want reopened. Brooke's often inebriated younger brother add a healthy dose of family discord to this play. Next up is the perennial favorite, Rodgers & Hammerstein's "South Pacific" for one weekend only, July 26 through 28. Bring the kids out Aug. 2 through 10 for "Hansel and Gretel Go Cajun."

This twist on a fairy-tale favorite follows Hansel Jo and Gretel Lou as they journey into the Louisiana Bayou in search of a legendary long-lost pirate treasure. Don't miss this down-home, foot-stompin' romp through the swamp, featuring a dragon who roars, a princess who snores, a handsome brave knight and swash-buckling sword fights. (219) 869-7509 or www.dunesartsfoundation.org.

charm and talent. The magic returns July 12 and 13 for the company's annual Shakespeare in the Park production at Central Park Plaza. This year's offering is "The Tragedy of Macbeth," first performed circa 1606, which dramatizes the damaging physical and psychological effects of political ambition on those who seek power for its own sake. Of all the plays that Shakespeare wrote during the reign of James I, patron of Shakespeare's acting company, "Macbeth" most clearly reflects the playwright's relationship with his sovereign. The play tells the story of a brave Scottish general, Macbeth, who receives a prophecy from a trio of witches that he is destined to become King of Scotland. Consumed by ambition and spurred to action by his conniving wife, Macbeth murders King Duncan and takes the throne for himself. Wracked with guilt and paranoia, he commits more murders to protect himself from enmity and suspicion and soon becomes a tyrannical ruler. The bloodbath and consequent civil war swiftly take Macbeth and Lady Macbeth into the realms of madness and death. In the backstage world of theater, many believe that the play is cursed and will not speak its title aloud, referring to it only as "the Scottish play." Over the course of many centuries, "Macbeth" has attracted some of the most renowned actors of their time to the roles of the title character and that of murderous Lady Macbeth. "Out, out damn spot!" If you don't want to brave the elements, Chicago Street Theatre performs the play indoors at their theater, July 18 through 21. (219) 464-1636 or www.chicagostreet.org.

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



Dunes Summer Theatre starts its season with "Other Desert Cities." Shown is a photo from the 2018 summer production of "The Spitfire Grill."

Photo provided Dunes Summer Theatre

on Aug. 2, Griffith's Central Park on Aug. 3, Hammond's Wolf Lake Pavilion on Aug. 9 and Schererville's Redar Park on Aug. 10. The Porter County Community Foundation will present another concert Aug. 7 at Central Park Plaza in Valparaiso. Concerts start at 7:30 p.m. (219) 836-0525 or www.nisorchestra.org.

Dunes Summer Theatre lineup

Kick off your summer June 28 through 30 and July 5 through 14 with "Other Desert Cities," a drama by Jon Robin

Shakespeare in Valparaiso

Chicago Street Theatre in Valparaiso never fails to enlighten us with its

ENTERTAINMENT

ABOUT



GREATER SOUTH BEND

JACK WALTON



READ ON PHONE

Live music at Acorn Theater

A visit to the vibrant little city of Three Oaks, just 20 minutes over the border into Michigan, makes for a nice drive this time of year. It's also an excuse to see what's happening at the historic Acorn Theater. The venue regularly hosts live theater and cabaret events, along with a plethora of musical acts. Usually, the docket is extremely diverse, but for several weeks this summer, the Acorn is transforming into a virtual juke joint, with a long roster of A-list blues performers coming to the stage. On June 14, it's the Cash Box Kings, one of Chicago's top bands. Sounds from the heyday of the Allman Brothers will be the prevailing tone of the evening June 19 when the Allman Betts Band comes to the Acorn. The band includes children of original Allman Brothers members Dickey Betts and Gregg Allman. On June 22, the unique Belgian harmonica ace Pierre Lacocque performs with his band Mississippi Heat. Author Bill German, best known for his Rolling Stones memoir, "Under Their Thumb," appears for a reading, storytelling and book signing session June 28. A talented son of Muddy Waters plays July 13: Joseph "Mojo" Morganfield and the Mannish Boyz stay rooted in Muddy's history while adding a 21st-century twist. Blues meets classical music with the intricate arrangements of Corky Siegel's Chamber Blues on July 20. John Mayall, the British band leader who gave Eric Clapton and Mick Taylor some of their first gigs, performs July 28. (269) 756-3879 or www.acornlive.org.

No rest for South Bend-area theater

The South Bend theater scene slows down a bit over the summer, but all four major local companies have at least one offering. From June 21 through 30, The Acting Ensemble presents Harvey Fierstein's new play, "Casa Valentina,"

at their Studio 217 main stage. The plot focuses on straight men who dress up in drag in a private club of sorts at a hotel in the Catskills. (574) 807-0108 or www.actingenensemble.com. Elkhart Civic Theatre moves from its usual location at the Bristol Opera House to the larger Umble Center on the campus of Goshen College for performances of "The Music Man" from July 12 through 14. (574) 848-4116 or www.elkhartcivictheatre.org. South Bend Civic Theatre also is doing a musical. SBCT's staging of "Oliver!" runs from July 12 through 28 in Wilson Auditorium. (574) 234-1112 or sbct.org. From Aug. 8 through 18, Michiana Playmakers are putting on "Pulp," a comedic spoof on the detective genre, by Joseph Zettelmaier, at LangLab in South Bend. The gist is that all four primary suspects in a murder case are pulp fiction writers. www.michianaplaymakers.org.

Elkhart Jazz Festival returns

The 32nd annual Elkhart Jazz Festival takes over the city from June 21 through 23. Jazz groups from a range of subgenres play at numerous downtown Elkhart venues throughout the weekend. Headliners, including Hot Sardines and Davina & the Vagabonds, perform June 22 at the Lerner Theater. The biggest star of this year's festival is Gregory Porter, playing the Lerner as the Friday-night main event June 21. Porter has become arguably the top singer of the current crop, with two Grammy wins and an additional couple of nominations in the Best Jazz Vocal

Album category. After the festival has left town, the Lerner also has a musical and a country star as summertime highlights. "Footloose: The Musical" runs from July 12 through 14, and then Jo Dee Messina gives a concert Aug. 3. Messina scored big in 1998 when her album "I'm Alright" spawned a whopping three No. 1 hit singles on



Photo provided by Acorn Theater

Live music returns in June to the Acorn Theater in Three Oaks, Mich.

the Billboard country charts. She's added three more appearances on the top of the list as well. (574) 293-4469 or www.thelerner.com.

For the budget minded

Audiences on a budget always appreciate the return of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County's Performing Arts Series. Not only is the entertainment high quality, but all the shows are free and open to the public at the Chris Wilson Pavilion, adjacent to Potawatomi Park Zoo in South Bend. This year's series kicks off July 20 in swinging big-band style with the Indiana University South Bend Jazz Ensemble. The Fremont Park Shakespeare group performs July 27. South Bend Civic Theatre belts out its summer musical, "Oliver!" on Aug. 3. A multi-age troupe from Southold Dance Theater presents a mixed program Aug. 10. (574) 232-0041 or www.cfsjc.org.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

A place to make ideas bloom

ArtHouse in Gary place to build community, express culinary creativity with business support

MICHAEL PUENTE

Chastity Shelby isn't playing around when she divulges the secret ingredient to her wildly popular tea.

"Love," she said while giggling.

However, Shelby isn't far off.

In February 2015 when her then fiancé James fell ill, Shelby mixed a glass of tea.

and five lemonades, which are offered in 15 restaurants in the Chicago and Northwest Indiana areas. Since August 2018, the Shelbys have been producing and distributing Love Tea out of ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen in Gary.

"We were doing OK, but without the ArtHouse, we definitely would not be able to produce at the level we are now," James Shelby said. "We are constantly growing."

He said the business is adding new accounts monthly.

"We're able to sustain and supply the demand," James Shelby said. "Without the ArtHouse, we wouldn't be able to be where we are now. We are forever indebted to ArtHouse."

The success of Love Tea is exactly what promoters of ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen in Gary had in mind when the idea was first broached. Its founders wanted to create a space that drew in the community for dialogue, entertainment and fine dining, but also be an incubator for business.

"Not only is it a beautiful piece of public art, but it's a culinary incubator, and it's a place where we have our micro-business program," Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson said. "So it's a place where people can really develop and hone their dreams to sow in this community."

The city of Gary applied for a grant through Bloomberg Philanthropies, which former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg created.

The city of Gary beat out 200 other cities to garner a grant to transform an underused downtown Gary building to establish ArtHouse on 5th Avenue east of Broadway.

The city of Gary partnered with Theaster Gates, artist and professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. Additional funding also is provided by the John

S. and James L. Knight Foundation's 2015 Knight Cities Challenge.

In December 2015, ArtHouse issued a request for qualifications for two public art commissions: one to illuminate the exterior of the building and the other to enhance its façade. More than 40 applicants from around the world submitted applications.

In June 2016, ArtHouse announced the winning team: Ripple + Wilson and the LIGHT LAB concept.

Today, the re-imagined building is a colorful, gleaming jewel with thin, bright lights on the exterior. In fall 2018, Michael Bloomberg visited ArtHouse to see the facility himself.

"Even though it's a piece of public art, it brings life to our community every day," Freeman-Wilson said.

Chastity Shelby said partnering with the city of Gary helped open doors for Love Tea.

"They've definitely connected us to a lot of people around the city and directed us in the right direction business-wise," Chastity Shelby said. "They didn't just give us a kitchen to work out of, they are also directing us along the way, giving us tips."

Promoters of the Gary International Black Film Festival also use the ArtHouse.

The film festival operated a once-a-month gathering at ArtHouse called "Film and Food Series" in 2018.

"The ArtHouse is in the front door of Gary, which makes it extremely important to be successful," said Walter N. Jones, board chair of the film festival.

During its gathering, ArtHouse provided a chef on staff to help provide the meals during the showing of an independent film.

"The chef was able to pair the menus to the film, which was great," Jones said. "ArtHouse has a potential to be one of Gary's greatest assets."



Executive Chef Lamar Moore works at the Art House: A Social Kitchen in Gary.

Photo by Eva Collins

"It came out really great," James Shelby said. "Then when people came out to the house, she would make some, and they would enjoy it."

That gave James an idea for Chastity's tea.

"We approached a local restaurant to see if they would try it out," James Shelby said. "It sold out on the first day."

The Shelbys, who are now married, were asked to make more of their popular tea—a lot more.

So, they went to work creating gallons of their product they call "Love Tea."

They are up to three trade-secret teas



LEADER PROFILE

Space dreams started here

Family values, Midwest work ethic helped shape seven-mission career of astronaut Jerry Ross

LARRY AVILA

Few people can say they've orbited the planet in a space shuttle. Crown Point native Jerry Ross is among that elite group of individ-

determined to make sure their children got a good education, but they also were supportive to us to stretch our wings and encouraged us to pursue what we wanted to do."

In Ross' case, he wanted to work in the space program but not necessarily as an astronaut. Growing up, he collected news articles about the early days of the nation's space exploration efforts. That's how he got hooked.

"By the time I got to the fourth grade, I knew I wanted to go to Purdue (University), and I wanted to become an engineer and get involved in the space program ... there were no astronauts (at that time) because no one was using that word then."

Ross never forgot his Midwest upbringing, which impressed on him that working hard brings rewards. From his travels around the world, Ross said the reputation of the Midwest work ethic is well known.

"It's a unique quality not only of people from Indiana but from people of the Midwest," he said. "People I've met talk about it a lot."

Ross logged a total of 58 days in space during seven missions.

"Though you train for a long time to go into space, it's still an extraordinary experience when you actually do it," he said.

Janet Ross Rattazzi, Jerry's sister who lives in Crown Point, said she and her family are proud of her brother's accomplishments. Rattazzi said her brother is just as proud of her and their other sister, Judi Futa, who lives

in the South Bend area, of their choice to become teachers.

"(Jerry) is still that very down-to-earth person from Crown Point, Ind.," Rattazzi said. "It's still surreal to us that he launched into space seven times and (did) many space walks."

She recalled the nerve-wracking experience of her brother's first shuttle mission. When the engines fired, the ground shook even though spectators were a safe distance away from the launch site. "My sister and I would say to each other, 'why would he want to do this?'" Rattazzi said.

Jerry Ross hasn't forgotten his roots. In 1999, he returned home for the grand opening press conference of the Challenger Learning Center in Hammond, which draws thousands of students annually to learn about the discoveries and scientific importance of space exploration.

Hammond's center is one of 43 in the country.

Ann Vassar, a flight director and crew leader at the Hammond center since 2008, said the Hammond center's founder, Lisa Austgen, a teacher, was a colleague of Rattazzi's at Lake Street School in Crown Point. Vassar said Ross has visited and spoke at the center through the years. She said the Region is fortunate to have an astronaut who calls Northwest Indiana home.

"In our lobby, there's a painted picture of Jerry Ross, and we point out to

kids that he's from the Region, and we tell them, if they keep working on their dreams like Jerry did, good things will follow," she said.



Signs around Crown Point pay tribute to astronaut and city native Jerry Ross, a veteran of seven space shuttle missions.

Photo by Larry Avila

uals. A retired Air Force colonel, Ross is a veteran of seven shuttle missions. His last flight into space was aboard the Atlantis between April 8 and 19, 2002.

For Ross and other astronauts who have had the opportunity to fly in space, they recognize getting there is no easy task. Ross persevered and received his first mission aboard the space shuttle Atlantis, which launched Nov. 26, 1985, and returned Dec. 3, 1985.

Ross said being born and raised in Indiana as well as the influences of growing up around a strong family structure shaped his work ethic, which defined his professional life.

"My grandparents and parents were all very hard-working people," Ross said. "My mother and dad, they were



“Though you train for a long time to go into space, it’s still an extraordinary experience when you actually do it.”

—Jerry Ross
Retired Air Force colonel



VIEWPOINT

Students' ideas, passion lead classroom direction

Seeds of entrepreneurship can be planted early but might not include a college education



► **Daniel Schultz** is an engineer and entrepreneur turned teacher at Hobart High School. Schultz, a graduate of Purdue University, is an Indiana native. He lives in Hobart.

It's 10:30 p.m., and I'm exhausted. When I try to sleep, I find myself thinking about the next day's commute into downtown Chicago.

Every day I wondered why I spent so much time and money to earn a college degree—so that I can get a job to pay for my college education.

This dilemma is what pushed me into entrepreneurship.

No matter how much time and effort I dedicated to my job, I felt it went unnoticed. Then one day, I decided that I wanted to work for myself, and employees would enjoy working with me.

I quickly realized my passion.

Creating a business from scratch is exciting. I liked that there was nobody to go to with questions. I fell in love with the process. Branding, logistics, graphic design, coding, finances, budgeting, networking, creating, managing, etc.

That's what entrepreneurship is, mostly learning to mitigate risk, but simply do the things that most people are not willing to do.

I believe the combination of my athletic career, coaching, management experience, ownership experience, and depressing corporate experience, shaped me into a teacher with a unique perspective.

First, I don't believe college is for

everyone. I have many friends I went to college with who went into the trades, have zero student loan debt and earn six figures. I, on the other hand, graduated with six figures of student loan debt, hated my job and made nowhere near a six-figure income.

That's the value I believe I bring to the classroom. I've learned it's the pursuit of knowledge that drives me—I love learning.

When a position was offered to me at Hobart High School, it made sense for me.

Not only did the job give me the time I needed to continue running my own businesses, I had the opportunity to use my management/teaching skills to constantly create new things.

This is especially true in my entrepreneurship class and a class called engineering design and development, which is a Project Lead the Way course where the instructor is more of a facilitator.

The students spend an entire year identifying a problem and designing a solution—whether it is a product, service or system. At the end of the year, they leave the course with a testable prototype.

Students start reading and listening to understand rather than to respond. I try to keep students engaged by making real-world connections for what they are doing. I also create a competitive atmosphere—not only

between groups within the class but by entering pitch competitions throughout the year.

My class recently entered the Innovate WithIN competition, a state initiative to inspire innovative thinking in Indiana's students.

This year's Innovate WithIN competition included more than 500 students on 150 teams from almost 100 Indiana high schools. I had 12 teams in the competition, including one that finished third place overall.

To date, my students have won about \$7,500 in prize money and own a provisional patent on their product.

These students also signed up for three additional competitions with about \$80,000 in prize money on the table. They also have been invited on an all-expenses paid trip to meet the CEO's of Google and Dell and are pitching on a Shark Tank casting call.

It is my philosophy that we don't give kids enough credit.

I've been teaching for a year, and I have students I would hire over professionals I have worked with

in my career. The best I can do is point them in a direction and offer help along the way.

I don't want students leaving my class after completing the same project that is being done at thousands of schools nationwide each year.

Their ideas and passions lead the curriculum, and they leave my classroom as marketable and interesting people.

“I have students I would hire over professionals I have worked with in my career. The best I can do is point them in a direction and offer help along the way.”

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