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FEBRUARY / MARCH 2021

Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

1991-2021

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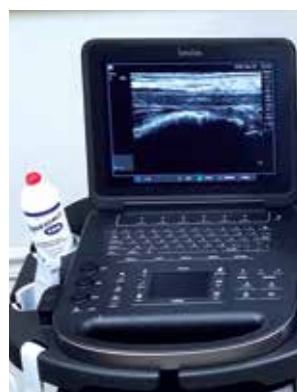


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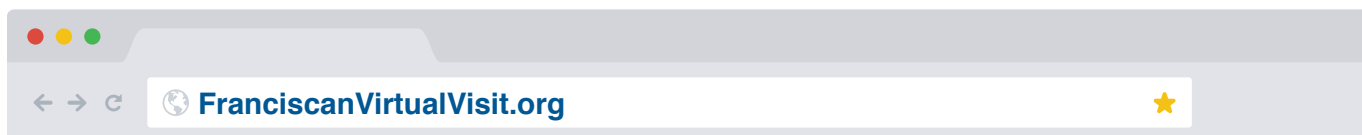


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BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

Readers have until Feb. 12 to vote in our 2021 Best of Business Awards. Go to page 37 for details or nwindianabusiness.com/bestof

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FEB-MAR 2021

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GOOD BIT

\$945M

The amount of the Full Funding Grant Agreement with the Federal Transit Administration for rail expansion projects in Northwest Indiana. **PAGE 17**

IN THIS ISSUE

Global pandemic aside, observers of business activity in Northwest Indiana may say the Region was void of any crisis the past year. After years of planning and discussions, the West Lake Corridor project, the first of two major rail expansion efforts in Northwest Indiana broke ground in late fall. Health care professionals used technology to improve care delivery and reduce costs. The necessity to work remotely saw employers adapt operations to adhere to social distancing rules and innovate to keep employees engaged and productive. Business growth continued as numerous company expansion plans were announced across Northwest Indiana. Proponents of growing Indiana's agribusiness sector developed strategies to push the buy-local movement. As one trailblazing leader who announced intentions to step aside, in another arena, a local entrepreneur gained attention that could catapult her business to the national stage, while another Region native prepared to make his mark as a first-term congressman. The pandemic won't be forgotten nor will the efforts of The Salvation Army of Lake County, which provided aid to those in need. We hope you enjoy this edition of the magazine, the first in our 30th year of operation. Thank you for reading! — *Larry Avila, managing editor*

PICTURE PERFECT



(From left) Michael Noland, South Shore Line and NICTD; U.S. Sen. Todd Young, R-Indiana; Elaine Chao, former transportation secretary; and Bill Hanna, NWI RDA, attend the West Lake Corridor groundbreaking in October. **PAGE 12**

LEADER PROFILE



ANTHONY B. SINDONE

Who he is: Clinical associate professor of finance and economic development, Purdue University Northwest

Where he calls home: La Porte (New Jersey native)

Education: California State University, San Bernardino, and The University of Notre Dame

What's best about NWI: The people, friends and colleagues

What he's reading: "The Deficit Myth," by Stephanie Kelton; "Rage," by Bob Woodward

Favorite music: Eclectic tastes, jazz/blues and Billy Joel

Favorite movie: "The Godfather"

Favorite food: Italian

Favorite saying: "It's all part of the experience."

QUOTE TO REMEMBER

"If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic is helping to make us even stronger and capable of meeting human needs."

— Capt. Brian Clark, coordinator for The Salvation Army of Lake County. **PAGE 39**

AROUND THE REGION



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE

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

LARRY AVILA

Banking

South Bend-based **Teachers Credit Union** recently appointed **Jacquelyn Rucker**, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion; and announced **Jennifer Wagnerowski** of **TCU Investment Services**, recently became a **Certified Divorce Financial Analyst** through the **Institute for Divorce Financial Analysts**.

Simon Coleman, an investment executive with Merrillville-based **Centier Bank**, was promoted to officer of the bank.

Munster-based **NorthWest Indiana Bancorp** and its wholly owned subsidiary **Peoples Bank** recently named three new senior executives as part of a change to its leadership structure. **Robert Lowry** was appointed to executive vice president, chief operating officer; **Peymon Torabi** was appointed the executive vice president, CFO, and treasurer; and **Leane Cerven**, executive vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary of the parent company and bank, was appointed chief risk officer.

Business

Deanna Grimes joined **Chester Inc.** in Valparaiso as a purchasing assistant.

Sarah Ferrara-Hartnett was promoted to sales manager of the furniture division of **Office Interiors** in Granger.

Linda Brooks recently was named CEO of **Baptist Children's Home Inc.** in Valparaiso.

Economic development

Judith Cardenas joined the **Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center** as a business adviser.

Sarah Kovich joined the **South Bend — Elkhart Regional Partnership** as executive assistant and office manager.

The **Economic Development Corporation Michigan City, Indiana** announced **Jalen Boney** as business development manager, and **Clarence Hulse**, executive director, was elected to the **Mid-America Economic Development Council** board.

Education

Jose Padilla was named new president of **Valparaiso University** on Dec. 2. His most recent role was vice president, university counsel and secretary of the **University of Colorado System**. He also spent 15 years in several senior-level administrator positions at **DePaul University** in Chicago.

Indiana University Northwest Chancellor Ken Iwama recently was named to the executive committee of the **Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities**.

Michael Chikeleze joined **Valparaiso University's** faculty as the **Richard C. and Francelia A. Gozon University Chair in Values-Based Leadership**, and the **Rev. Katherine Museus Dabay** recently was named university pastor.

Tékeidra Masters, a student at **Valparaiso University**, was named **Midwest Regional Youth of the Year by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America**.

Ivy Tech Community College, which has campuses in East Chicago, Gary, Goshen, La Porte, Michigan City, South Bend and Valparaiso, recently named **Jo Nahod-Carlin** vice president of recruitment and enrollment management, and **Bradley Watts**, chief data officer.

Raymond Cales and **Eileen Peden**, both students at **Ivy Tech's Valparaiso campus**, finished second in the **2020 U.S. Cyber Challenge National Cyber Bowl**, hosted by the **Center for Internet Security** and one of many events held in October for **National Cybersecurity Awareness Month**.

Sue Ellspermann, president of **Ivy Tech Community College**, recently



BANKING
Jacquelyn Rucker



BANKING
Jennifer Wagnerowski



BANKING
Simon Coleman



BANKING
Robert Lowry



BANKING
Peymon Torabi



BANKING
Leane Cerven



BUSINESS
Sarah Ferrara-Hartnett



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Judith Cardenas

joined the **Presidents Forum Governing Board**, an organization composed of presidents of higher education institutions, foundations and academic support organizations dedicated to the continuous reinvention of higher education.

Christopher Waller, the former **Gilbert F. Schaefer Professor of Economics** at the **University of Notre Dame**, was confirmed to the **Federal Reserve's Board of Governors** on Dec. 3.

Finance

Indiana Trust Wealth Management in Mishawaka recently promoted **Katie Hammond** and **Barbara Fox** to vice president and **John DiMarzio** to information technology manager; and hired **Melinda Brown** to its fiduciary tax staff.

The **Regional Development Co.** recently elected its board officers for 2021. **Mike Riehle**, president of the **La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership**, was named to the RDC's board of directors. The RDC's board officers for 2021 include: **Michael Schneider**, First Financial Bank, chair; **Matt Saltanovitz**, Indiana Economic Development Corp., vice chair; **Scott Casbon**, First Merchants Bank, secretary; **John Matthiesen**, retired from CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, treasurer; and **Rex Richards**, Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce / Valparaiso Economic Development Corp., past chair. The RDC administers the **U.S. Small Business Administration's 504 Loan Program** in Indiana and the greater Chicago metropolitan area.

Greg Hammer, president of **Hammer Financial Group** in Schererville,

completed semiannual training with **Ed Slott and Co. LLC** by participating in a virtual workshop Nov. 5-6. The workshop provided technical training on advanced retirement account planning strategies, estate planning techniques as well as an exploration of recent retirement and tax law changes under both the SECURE and CARES Acts and how it will impact financial planning in 2021 and beyond.

Government

Dave Cunningham recently was appointed fire chief for the **city of Whiting**.

Gov. Eric Holcomb recently appointed two new cabinet positions. **Karrah Herring** was appointed Indiana's first chief equity, inclusion and opportunity officer, and **Katie Jenner** was appointed as Indiana's first secretary of education.

Several Northwest and North Central Indiana representatives recently were named to the 30-member **211 Advisory Board** for the **Indiana Family and Social Services Administration**. They are: **Kimberly Green Reeves**, Beacon Health System, South Bend; **Brian Harvey**, Franciscan Health, Dyer; **Velshonna Luckey**, United Way of St. Joseph County, South Bend; and **Gary Olund**, Northwest Indiana Community Action, Crown Point.

Health Care

Community Healthcare System in Munster welcomed the following physicians and personnel: **Dr. Thomas Wilkins**, family medicine; **Dr. Alaa Atieh**, gastroenterologist; **Dr. Kumar Venkatachalam**, gastroenterologist; **Courtney Schuiteman**, medical geneticist; **Dr. Sean Swearingen**, cardiologist.

Northwest Health recently welcomed the following physicians and medical personnel: **Dr. Reuel Uy**, internal medicine; **Dr. Kalid Adab**, oncologist; **Dr. Daniel De Gala**, internal medicine; **Dr. Ramla Khan**, family medicine.

Franciscan Health recently welcomed the following physicians and medical personnel: **Dr. Majd Kanbour**, cardiologist; **Dr. Luis Lora**, internal medicine; **Dr. Jace Varkey**, family medicine; **Dr. Sueyi Lai**, hematology and oncology; **Sarah Jones**, chief nursing officer, Michigan City; **Dr. Jessica Siegler**, obstetrics and gynecology; **Dr. Emmett Robinson**, internal medicine.

Lynn Kowert, a registered nurse with **Northwest Health — Porter**, recently was presented the **2020 Nursing Excellence Award**.

Nina Stur was named chief nursing officer and vice president of patient care services at **St. Catherine Hospital** in East Chicago, which is operated by **Community Healthcare System**.

Logistics

The **Ports of Indiana**, which operates the **Port of Indiana-Burns Harbor**, promoted **Andrea Hermer** to chief operating officer and hired **James Hall** as general counsel.

Manufacturing

Chip Cable recently was named national sales manager for **Steel Cities Steels Inc.** in Burns Harbor.

Technology

Mike Hecht was promoted to vice president of operations at **E Technologies** in Portage.



EDUCATION
Jose Padilla

Keith Thomason was named director of information security at **Cardinal Point Technologies** in Valparaiso.

Brent Streetman recently joined the **Digital Crossroads** data center in Hammond as senior vice president, and **John Greenwood** joined as chief strategy officer.

Amy Lowery was named vice president of marketing at **APL nextED**, a Valparaiso-based provider of technology services for the education sector.



EDUCATION
Michael Chikeleze

News

US Business Systems Inc. in Elkhart was named a **2020 Elite Dealer** by **ENX Magazine**. The company specializes in print management and IT services. Elite Dealer winners are selected on several criteria, including technical service excellence, marketing proficiency, growth initiatives, technology leadership, industry accolades and philanthropy.

A \$4 million grant from the **U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration** will help



FINANCE
Katie Hammond



FINANCE
Barbara Fox

the **Port of Indiana-Burns Harbor** convert a vacant gravel yard into a multimodal storage facility. The grant will cover construction costs of an 84,000-square-foot warehouse and a 1.65-acre storage pad in the east harbor arm. Public bidding is tentatively set for early 2022 with construction expected to start by spring of that year.

The **Society of Innovators at Purdue University Northwest** recently named its 2020 Innovators. Individual inductees are: **Ken Barry**,

*“Because Goodwill provides
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to follow my dreams.”*
- Rosaelin

Rosaelin is studying Radiology
at Ivy Tech and is on track to
graduate soon!



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FINANCE
John DiMarzio

executive director, City Life Center, Gary; **Magesh Chandramouli**, associate professor of computer graphics technology, Purdue University Northwest, Hammond and Westville; **Emily Edwards**, founder, Emily's Foods / Paradise Icing, Schererville; **Jamie Fankenhauser**, owner, Bun's Soapbox, Valparaiso; **Matt Hanson**, clinical assistant professor of marketing, Purdue University Northwest, Hammond and Westville; **Jake Miller**, owner, JEM Custom Shoes, Michigan City; **Jared**



FINANCE
Melinda Brown

Riddle, professor of English, department chair, Ivy Tech Community College, East Chicago; **Daniel Schultz**, teacher, Hobart High School, Hobart. Team inductees are: **ArcelorMittal**, team led by **Richard Clausius**, East Chicago; **Centier Bank**, team led by **Chris Campbell**, Merrillville; **Economic Development Corp. Michigan City, Ind.** with **Michigan City Area Schools**, team led by **Clarence Hulse**, Michigan City; **Tonn and Blank Construction**, team led by **Jon Gilmore**, Michigan



GOVERNMENT
Dave Cunningham



GOVERNMENT
Karrah Herring

City; and **Top Flight Hockey**, team lead by **Quinton Oster** and **Dan Mikrut**, St. John.

Midwest Truck & Auto Parts of Chicago, a supplier of aftermarket automotive and truck components, on Oct. 29 broke ground on its new 125,000-square-foot facility at the **AmeriPlex at the Crossroads Business Park** in Merrillville. The **Indiana Economic Development Corp.** said the company could create up to 150 jobs by 2024.

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GOVERNMENT
Katie Jenner



HEALTH CARE
Sarah Jones



TECHNOLOGY
Mike Hecht



TECHNOLOGY
John Greenwood

Window + Wall LLC of Chicago is opening a 120,000-square-foot facility in Porter County, which is expected to create up to 112 jobs during the next few years.

Michigan-based **Three Rivers Health** will join **Beacon Health System** of South Bend. The process is expected to be completed by the spring.

NWI BizHub, an online resource for business owners, recently launched in partnership with **Legacy Foundation**, **Crown Point Community Foundation**,

Unity Foundation of La Porte County, **Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center** and the **Center of Workforce Innovations**. The website offers a free network of almost 60 resources and tools to help businesses find answers to resolve problems as well as steps to help startups get operational.

Operators of the **Gary/Chicago International Airport** are hopeful reduced customs clearing times will lead to more international and private

jet business. **U.S. Customs and Border Protection** recently announced the required clearing period for international flights was reduced to 24 hours from the previous 48- to 72-hour notification period. The reduction was sought by the Gary/Chicago International Airport Authority to pursue additional international corporate and private aviation business.

South Bend-based **Elkhart Plastics Inc.** was purchased by **Myers Industries Inc.** of Akron, Ohio. ■

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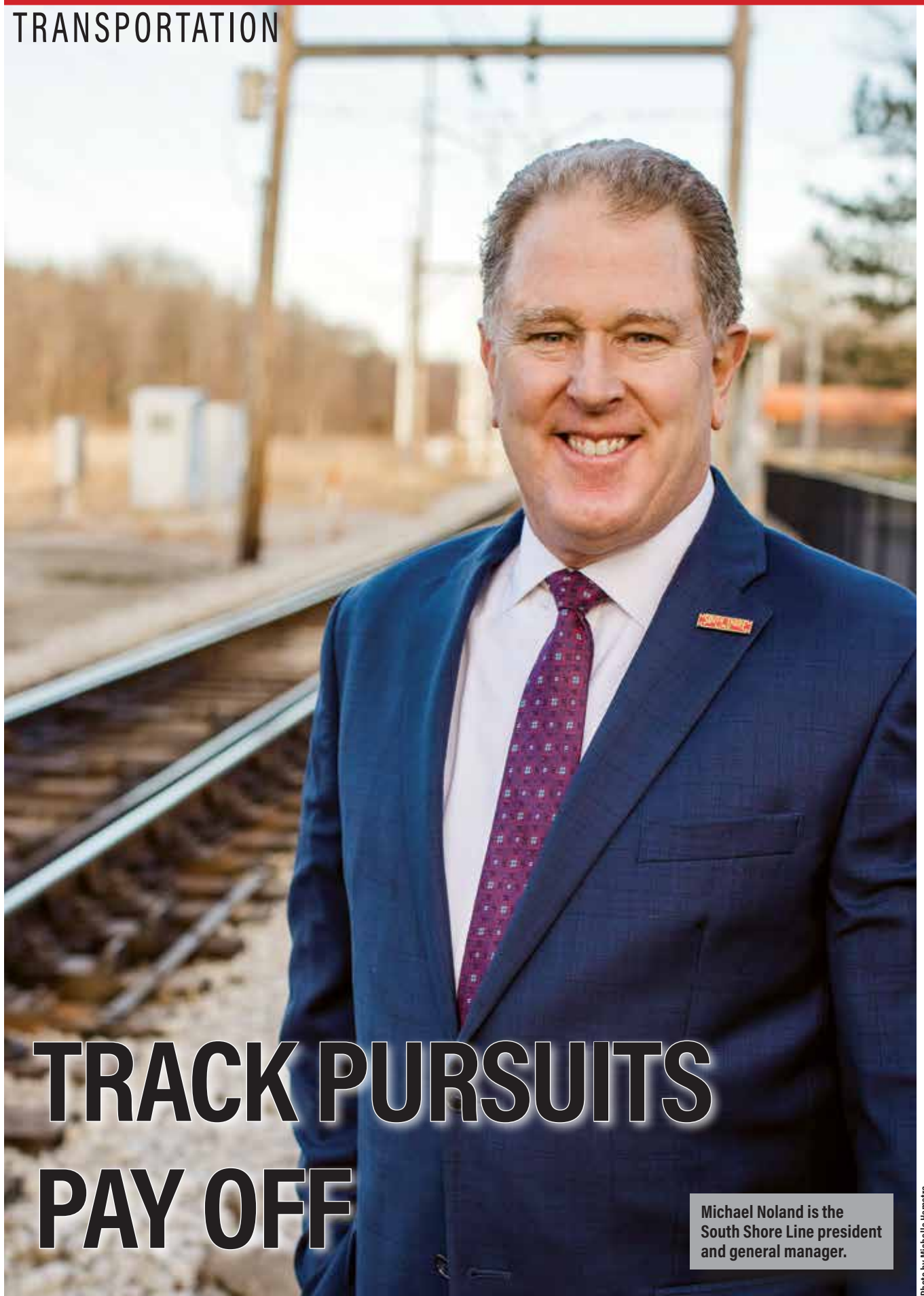
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INTRODUCING

José D. Padilla, J.D.

VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY'S
19TH PRESIDENT





TRACK PURSUITS PAY OFF

Michael Noland is the
South Shore Line president
and general manager.

Photo by Michelle Hamstra

START OF CONSTRUCTION ON WEST LAKE CORRIDOR RAIL PROJECT CATALYST FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE

DOUG ROSS

The initial promise of expanding commuter rail service in Northwest Indiana was simple — transport Hoosier talent to Chicago, where jobs pay an average of 39% more, and bring back that disposable income to the Region.

As it turns out, that original promise is just one of the benefits of the twin projects to expand South Shore Line service.

The two rail projects underway now are the long-awaited West Lake Corridor project extending passenger rail service south to Dyer and the construction of a second set of tracks between Gary and Michigan City. Trains won't have to wait on each other when traveling east to west.

The double-track project promises to cut the travel time between Chicago and Michigan City to 70 minutes. Michigan City would be about the same commute from downtown Chicago as Naperville, Illinois, but with the advantages of lower taxes and easy access to Lake Michigan.

"People don't really measure by distance, (instead) they measure by time," said Bill Hanna, president and CEO of the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority.

Both projects involve laying new tracks for the Region's future and adding new stations along the way. The West Lake project will see four new stations in areas previously unserved by the South Shore Line.

Improved access

Improving transit connections to Chicago is a no-brainer. Chicago is the hub of the nation's third-largest economy and the eighth largest in the world, said Michael Noland, South Shore Line president and general manager.

Doing so will draw Northwest Indiana closer to Chicago's orbit, raising awareness of all the Region has to offer.

"We're already seeing the fruits of that effort," Noland said.

Those efforts are easiest to see in Munster, where a developer is planning a business park focused on research and

development in the health care field at the site of the Lansing Country Club, most of which is in Munster.

Karen Lauerman, president and CEO of the Lake County IN Economic Alliance, and Don Koliboski, LCEA vice president of economic development, are excited about the planned development, which abuts the new rail line.

"You're taking a former golf course and turning it into a business park," Lauerman said. "They want that sort of collegial campus academic setting but in a business park setting."

It is a \$164 million investment, Koliboski said, drawn to Munster in part because of the rail expansion project. And that's just the beginning.

the area near the train stations, along Calumet Avenue and Ridge Road.

"They're going to have to meet our community's expectation for what we want to see," he said.

"It's boring as dust to somebody who isn't interested in land use," Anderson said, but the result of the planning will be the kind of town everyone has asked for.

The train line will complement what's already to come.

Ridge Road is "probably as wide as an aircraft carrier with curb cuts," he said, so expect some streetscape improvements there.

The train's impact on the town "is potentially a big deal for a community," Anderson said.



Photo provided by NICTD

On Oct. 28, Gov. Eric Holcomb was joined by federal and Region officials for a ceremonial groundbreaking in Dyer of the long-awaited West Lake Corridor project.

"Everyone is working together to make this development come to fruition," Lauerman said.

It isn't the first time a proposal has surfaced for the country club grounds, 90% of which are in Munster. But this one fits in with Munster's vision for what development in the area should be like.

"The town of Munster has worked very diligently over the past 2.5 years to achieve what the residents want," Town Manager Dustin Anderson said. The town worked with the community, including residents, business leaders and stakeholders, to build a vision for

Part of the reason is that laying tracks shows a permanent commitment to public transportation that buying buses doesn't.

Bringing the train to Munster is "a very powerful potential economic engine," Anderson said.

"There's a heightened awareness of Northwest Indiana for something other than logistics," he said. Residents don't want more trucks on Calumet Avenue.

"We've done a lot of hard work as a community," Anderson said. "Development around the stations will have to comply with those expectations."

Koliboski said the Saxon Partners development at the Lansing Country Club is intended to draw high-end, high-tech, newer-tech research and development firms and health care specialists.

Lauerman said name a service that is the cutting edge of health care, that is what this big park is looking to become.

The business park will be within walking distance of a South Shore Line train station. A patient could fly to O'Hare International Airport, ride a train to downtown and hop a South Shore Line train to Munster. Or doctors who live in Chicago could easily travel by train between Northwestern University and Munster to conduct research.

The more they get to know Northwest Indiana, the more likely they will be to relocate here, experts say.

"It grows the rooftops; it grows the quality of life," Lauerman said. "When the Regional Development Authority put transit development district funding into place, this is exactly what they're looking for, (because) investment in public infrastructure drives private investment."

Spark for development

That's the promise of what are referred to as transit development districts, the area surrounding train stations along the South Shore Line route.

Hanna said these districts are unique for Indiana.

"It's essentially a TIF (tax-increment financing district) plus income tax," Hanna said. TIF districts are common in Indiana. They leverage the increase in property taxes that development brings to pay for infrastructure within those districts — roads, sewers, streetlights and more. The transit development districts get the additional income tax inside the district as well.

This money can be used for parking, lighting, streetscapes, façade improvements for local businesses and more, Hanna said.

The RDA, as a quasi-state agency, gets to use Indiana's stellar credit rating instead of the local government borrowing the money and having it count against the municipality's debt limit.

TDD funding helps attract developers to the area. "You have to de-risk these projects," Hanna said, especially

in places that haven't seen this scale of development.

"That's sent a huge message to the investment community," Hanna said.

If the initial development surrounding the train stations is done well, there will be economic ripples outside that tight radius. "It's going to make real estate more attractive," Hanna said.

Different stations along the two routes will have different needs.

What's to come

In Michigan City, a new station and parking garage are being developed at the northeast corner of Franklin and 11th streets. That requires acquiring property on that corner, including existing businesses.

The Portage/Ogden Dunes station will have a parking lot on the south side of U.S. 12, requiring an upgraded pedestrian crossing to safely go between the parking lot and the station.

"A road can sometimes act like a wall," Hanna said, so that must be considered. Development surrounding the station will have to account for environmental concerns as well.

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Hammond will get the grand prize, a gateway station that connects the existing east-west route with the new north-south line.

Former City Engineer Stan Dostatni, who died in 2018, persuaded the RDA and the South Shore Line to change their plans for a gateway station in Hegewisch and bring it across the state line into Indiana, Hanna said.

Africa Tarver, Hammond's executive director of planning and development, sees the rail expansion as "huge in the sense that we will see the benefits of this project for years to come."

"We haven't had a major infrastructure project like this in the Region for years," she said.

Hanna believes this is one of Indiana's biggest infrastructure investments ever.

Northwest Indiana already has quality-of-life attractions that include good beaches, parks and trails. Once the rail expansion is completed, more people will come to the Region, she believes.

"The trains run both ways," she said.

Hammond is still mulling options for development around stations.

"You want a development that various groups of people can enjoy," she said.

Residents will see benefits even if they don't ride the train, Tarver said. Some new retailers will be drawn to an area with higher population density, and the train service will be a boost for economic development.

Signs of construction

Chris Beck, chief infrastructure development officer for the South Shore Line, said the railroad already is working with developers, including relocating a retention pond near the Munster/Dyer station.

"We are in lockstep with the opportunity to see residential growth and development," Noland said.

Areas with train stations will benefit but so will other communities.

"Valparaiso is a model for communities an express bus away," Noland said. That connection will bring commuter rail to communities like Valparaiso, La Porte, Hobart and Schererville, he said.

Valparaiso is building a transit-oriented district downtown in cooperation with the owners of Journeyman

Distillery, who are converting the former Anco plant into a new restaurant and distillery. The ChicaGo Dash and V-Line bus services will be based there as well. The ChicaGo Dash offers an express bus to Chicago and to the South Shore Line station at Dune Park in Porter.

Early plans for the South Shore Line expansion included a route to Valparaiso. But it didn't meet federal funding

guidelines, so service to Valparaiso will have to wait.

The rail extension has been talked about in earnest for almost three decades. Former U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, representing Indiana's 1st District, was a driving force in bringing it to fruition.

The roots of the expansion, however, go back even further.

Innovator and investor Samuel Insull talked about the double-track idea a



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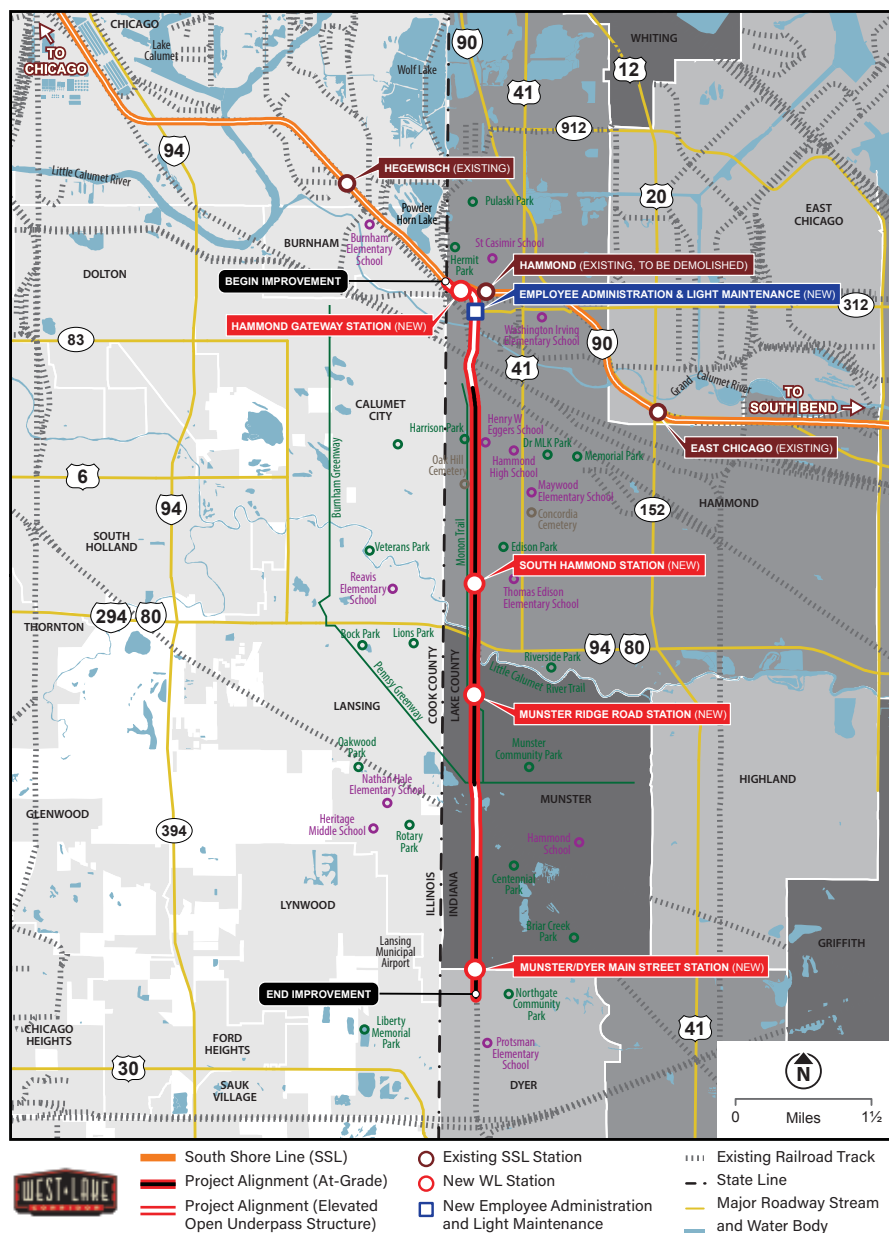
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WEST LAKE CORRIDOR PROJECT MAP

Hammond, Indiana, to Dyer, Indiana



century ago at a board meeting when he owned the railroad, Noland said.

Becoming reality

When the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District was formed to take over the South Shore Line and continue passenger rail service between Chicago and the Region, the rail line was in rough shape.

NICTD's first general manager, Gerald Hanas, worked to improve

reliability and maintainability, Beck said. Hanas said, "Guys we need to get busy. We need to fix these bridges." Many were replaced.

Then attention was paid to train stations.

Beck said when NICTD formed in 1997, the East Chicago station was a plywood box built in 1955 as a temporary station. Since then, new stations have been built — many of them offering high-level boarding so riders don't

need to have steps lowered to board the trains. That makes the trains more accessible and safer while reducing the commute times by speeding the boarding process.

Noland's goal is to make the service faster.

"The infrastructure, the bones of the railroad, are solid," Noland said.

Developing plans for the rail expansions entailed extensive partnerships and input from communities.

"The result is the project you see today is not the same as it was before, when we started," Noland said.

Hanna said the rail project is moving quickly, with a five-year completion expected.

"I think relatively speaking, it's pretty quick," he said.

State officials announced in early January that \$173 million in federal funding was approved for the South Shore Line double-track project. Representatives for NICTD said bidding for the double-track project could start by April with construction the following summer.

This year, the RDA also will be working with communities to set up boundaries for the transit development districts. That process will tell the development community what areas are committed.

Redevelopment commissions might already hold title to some of the properties needed for developments around the stations. In December, Michigan City's City Council authorized the use of eminent domain, if necessary, to speed acquisition of properties for the new station and parking garage. Businesses and residents are being offered relocation assistance when their properties are purchased for the rail projects.

Aggregating properties for redevelopment can be tricky, Hanna said, so redevelopment commissions should see what they can get control of to make it happen.

Even as the rail expansion projects deliver on their promises of making it easier to commute to Chicago and to bring development to the Region, the major players are excited.

"There's been so many plans around here shelved somewhere," Hanna said. "These are going to turn dirt." ■

Illustration provided by NICTD

Victory for mass transit



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE



Passenger rail investment in Region marks largest ever for state of Indiana

MICHAEL NOLAND

Oct. 28, 2020, was a historic day for the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District. It marked the culmination of three decades of planning, behind-the-scenes work and community support for the Region's first new passenger rail line in more than 100 years.

Gov. Eric Holcomb led this celebration where INDOT Commissioner Joe McGuinness, and NICTD's board chairman, signed a \$945 million Full Funding Grant Agreement with the Federal Transit Administration for the project. With \$355 million of federal funds in place, coupled with funding commitments from the state of Indiana, the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority, Lake County and 15 other Lake County municipalities, construction can begin on this new rail line.

The day after the groundbreaking, NICTD issued a Notice to Proceed to the FH Paschen & Ragnar Benson Joint Venture team to finish the engineering design and construct the West Lake Corridor rail project using a design/build construction process.

The real work begins now. NICTD has spent the past year acquiring more than 150 properties for the West Lake project. By early December, NICTD had title on more than 95% of the required properties, and many have already been razed. NICTD hired Indianapolis-based BLN to handle the real estate acquisitions, and all acquired property owners were protected by the Federal Uniform Relocation Act.

FH Paschen & Ragnar Benson is completing the project's engineering design plans and expects to start construction this fall. As part of the design/build construction process, NICTD provided the technical requirements for the project, including 30% engineering design plans. Utility relocation will be a big part of this project. Whether it is NIPSCO, AT&T or municipal infrastructure, much utility relocation will be required. The utility companies and municipalities have been preparing for this project and will continue to work closely with NICTD and its partners to ensure all relocations are executed smoothly.

The corridor might not look like a railroad now, but by late summer, it will begin its transformation to move thousands of passengers boarding at four new

train stations. FH Paschen & Ragnar Benson's plan is to start construction on the north segment of the project in the upland areas in north Hammond, while they continue to work through the Section 401/404 permitting process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. North Hammond is the most complex portion of the project with more than one mile of aerial structure. Once the north section is finished, work will begin on the south end of the project, with the last phase of the construction at the end of the line at the Munster/Dyer border.

At each step, NICTD and FH Paschen & Ragnar Benson are committed to working with each municipality to coordinate construction activity. Detailed maintenance of traffic plans will be executed, and NICTD will engage

in public outreach to make sure it communicates construction plans to all stakeholders. The project should be almost finished by summer 2024, allowing NICTD to do all the necessary commissioning and testing of the new rail line for a planned start of service in early 2025. It is projected that more 1,000 construction jobs will be created by this project, and NICTD will provide more than 7,000 daily passenger trips when service commences.

The Double Track Northwest Indiana project will be a traditional design-bid-build project, with construction expected to begin this summer. NICTD anticipates construction of the double-track project taking two years to complete, with service expected to begin by fall 2023.

As with the West Lake project, property acquisition is well underway with demolition and utility relocation commencing as well. NICTD expects more than 16,000 daily passenger trips on the South Shore Line when the double-track improvements are completed.

The West Lake Corridor and the double-track projects were the cornerstones of NICTD's 20-year strategic plan that was adopted in 2014. These visionary plans that offered transformative growth and investment opportunities are now realities. Both projects are the largest transit infrastructure investments in the history of the state of Indiana, and it is our hope it will bring additional dollars in the future to further enhance commuter rail service in the Region. ■



► **Michael Noland** is president of the South Shore Line and Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District.

“The West Lake Corridor and the double-track projects were the cornerstones of NICTD's 20-year strategic plan. ... These visionary plans that offered transformative growth and investment opportunities are now realities.”

Telemedicine movement

Industry finds virtual visits more than just pandemic trend, along with other new approaches

CARRIE NAPOLEON

Northwest Indiana health care professionals are embracing the increased use of telemedicine and the benefits it offers both consumers and providers.

While around for years, the use of telemedicine has grown exponentially during the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus. Region health care providers and insurers say telemedicine is here to stay.

Dr. Mustafa Nakawa, a Methodist Physician Group family medicine practitioner, said telemedicine is the big movement now even though the concept is not new.

Nakawa said the increased usage of telemedicine during the pandemic emerged as the insurance industry elected to pay for those visits the same way it would for regular in-office doctors' visits.

Before the pandemic, use of telemedicine was primarily by younger and more

the pandemic, Nakawa said his office was asking patients to move to telemedicine. Today many of his patients are requesting it.

Nakawa said, as a physician, he recognizes the difficulty some of his patients have, especially senior citizens and the disabled, just to get into his office for a traditional visit. Once at the office, patients can spend an hour or two in the office for the visit, time spent waiting their turn, filling out paperwork and checking out.

Telemedicine creates a simpler more efficient and convenient way to see patients and get them the care they need.

"It's a win-win for everybody," Nakawa said. He expects telemedicine's use to grow even after the pandemic subsides. Nakawa said the future of health care will involve telemedicine and some sort of new "concierge"-type medical care.

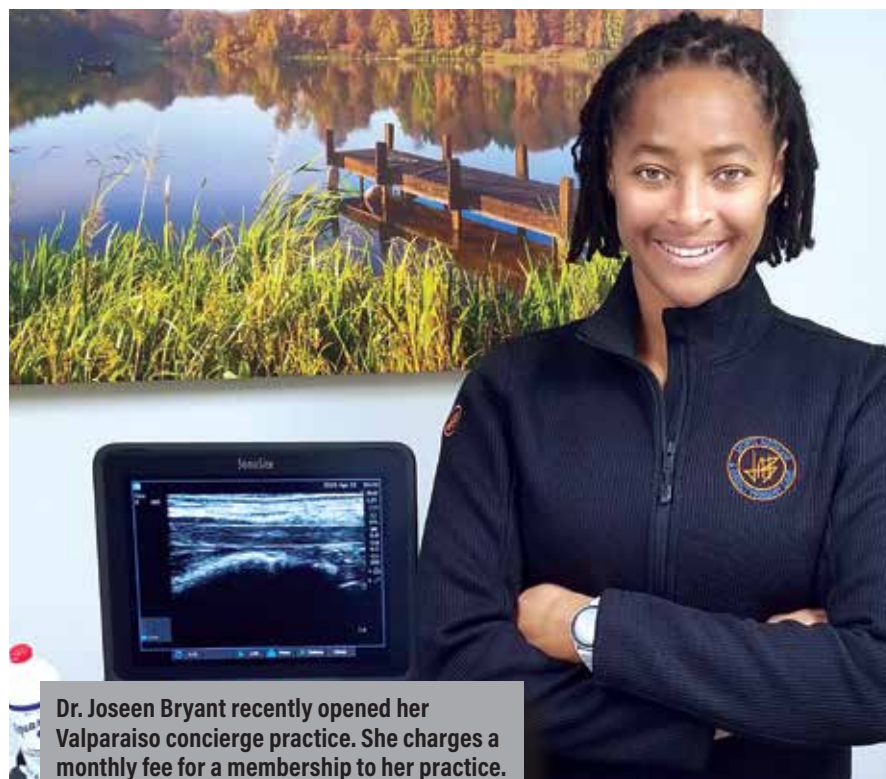
"In five years, the hope with telemedicine is getting more connectivity between patients and physicians," Nakawa said.

Evolving care delivery

Dr. Joseen Bryant has found the concierge approach to providing health care services to her patients is the way to go. Bryant said the model reduces costs for both her and her patients while improving client services and access.

Bryant, who does not accept insurance, charges a monthly fee for membership in her practice. That fee allows the member unlimited health care visits, virtually, in person or, if necessary, in their homes. Any necessary testing not included in the membership is provided at cost, Bryant said.

She started her new Valparaiso practice before the initial wave of the pandemic and also increasingly has used telemedicine, which already was a part of her practice, instead of in-person member visits.



Dr. Joseen Bryant recently opened her Valparaiso concierge practice. She charges a monthly fee for a membership to her practice.

Photo provided by Dr. Joseen Bryant

The Centers for Disease Control in February advised consumers and health care providers to adopt social distancing practices, recommending virtual clinical services.

During the first 13-week period of 2020, telehealth visits increased by 50% over the same period in 2019. By the end of March, that rate increased to 154%, according to the CDC.

tech-savvy people. Conventional patients were more concerned they would not receive adequate care virtually.

"When the pandemic hit, they didn't have any other option," Nakawa said. Patients reluctant to use telemedicine overall are now embracing the option.

"I'm getting from the patient that it makes their life and care much easier," he said. At the beginning of

"I'm doing a lot more virtual visits, telemedicine and teleconferencing," Bryant said.

The doctor said patients can text her or call and employs teleconferencing tools and video calling. She said the pandemic has helped patients see the value of the ability to virtually meet with a health care provider.

"They've been very receptive," Bryant said. "I think the convenience of it a lot of people appreciate, (and) there hasn't really been a downside with this pandemic."

Bryant compares herself to the "old-school family physician." Each of her patient members have her direct line and can call or text with questions or concerns.

"You have that familiarity," she said. "You see your physician go that extra mile."

If the practice were more of a traditional insurance fee-for-service-type practice, it would have a huge impact on the bottom line and keep the clinic from embracing new technologies like telemedicine, Bryant said. Being a cash-based direct service provider represents a significant cost savings to members. It also means patients no longer wait days or weeks for appointments.

"A lot of folks come to like the membership model when they understand what it is," Bryant said.

While some of her clients do have traditional health insurance, she advises those who do not to consider a catastrophic insurance plan that would cover costs associated with an unexpected illness or accident.

"I can't take care of a heart attack in the clinic," Bryant said. She can, however, perform cutting-edge ultrasound-guided injections used often in sports medicine.

Bryant said people can expect to see more options for concierge medicine as time goes on.

"This is definitely the way health care is going to turn eventually," Bryant said. "The winds of change are definitely coming."

By cutting out insurance, the practice cuts out the overhead and complexities that go along with billing and coding for insurance purposes.

Bryant said that alone is the equivalent of three employees her clinic does

not need to hire. Those savings are passed on directly to patients.

"It's just a simpler model," Bryant said.

The model also stops those "surprise bills" to patients for costs or services that may not be covered by their insurance, or that were once covered at a certain rate and that rate has been reduced. She said it is difficult to walk into a traditional doctor's office and find out up front what your portion of the fees will be because it depends on how the doctor codes your case.

"I was part of that system, (and) I was trained to up-code everything as much as possible to squeeze the most out of each patient (visit)," Bryant said. "I just love direct primary care, (because) it just eliminates that."

THE EXPERTS

"We don't think about virtual banking, it's just banking. That's how we are approaching virtual medicine, (and) many believe the success will come when we make it disappear into the comprehensive health system."

— Dr. Randall Moore
Senior vice president and COO
Franciscan Health and Care Solutions



"Virtual care is going to be part of how we interact with patients going forward. ... We could be two or three years out from uses of virtual care we haven't even thought of yet."

— Tom Kunst
CEO
UnitedHealthcare of Illinois and Northwest Indiana



Bryant describes the direct-service model as a "breath of fresh air." As a doctor, she believes she can build relationships with her clientele.

"I get to treat people and practice medicine the way I thought I was going to do when I left medical school," she said.

Rethinking processes

Dr. Randall Moore, senior vice president and COO for Franciscan Health and Care Solutions with the Franciscan Alliance, said he has a passion for redesigning models of care and putting

people at the center. Telemedicine will be part of the system's future.

"This is where we're heading at Franciscan," Moore said. The onset of the pandemic was a significant accelerator to what the organization wants to happen anyway: a complete system transformation. A month into the pandemic, Franciscan went from a handful of virtual visits a day to 3,000 telemedicine visits a day systemwide.

"We are going from a provider hospital-centric model to a full patient-centric care health continuum," Moore said.

Experts say navigating the current health care model is complex because there is a lack of real coordination of



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↑154% By the end of March 2020, telehealth visits were up 154% over the same period in 2019, according to the CDC.

to access team care, they had to come to physical sites and hope the specialists were present at the same time.

While Franciscan was planning for increased use of telemedicine, COVID-19 expedited the move. Now various interdisciplinary doctors and pharmacists can come together in the same meeting and be connected to the hospitalist and nurses tending to a patient bedside.

"They are all seeing the patient at the same time," Moore said. During the pandemic when patients are not allowed visitors, a family member overseeing the care of their loved one also could be looped into the call.

During a traditional hospital stay, patients could have five different doctors coming into their rooms at five different times, sharing what could be perceived as five different messages. By having all the disciplines needed together at the same time, the message to the patient is

more direct. The different physicians can work together to set a patient's care plan.

Having that type of continuum of care and the access to telemedicine also helps patients get out of the hospital a day or two earlier and remain fully connected with hospital caregivers. For example, COVID-19 patients can be sent home with a tablet and a pulse oximeter to finish their last few days of recovery and remain connected to hospital staff.

Telemedicine also improves the care patients need after a hospital visit. Moore said providers can never guarantee a patient released from the hospital will make the appropriate follow-up appointments. Keeping them connected through telemedicine helps them get the necessary care.

"We can quickly escalate their care if the need is there, and 99 times out of 100, they won't end up in the hospital (again)," Moore said.

Telemedicine takes the burden off the hospital stay.

"The hospital itself doesn't have to be used as much as it used to be," Moore said. Staying out of the hospital then negates the high costs while improving value and improving safety.

"Forget COVID, this is going to continue and focus on the most common causes of hospitalization: COPD and congestive heart failure, which in non-COVID years trade places (as) the No. 1 and No. 2 reasons for hospitalizations," Moore said. "Both conditions don't deteriorate in minutes or hours, (because) it's usually a day or more."

Historically, insurers have not paid for telemedicine but will pay for hospitalizations. With the coronavirus, they are seeing the value of change.

"I would say again, all of us wish (the coronavirus) never came," he said. "But you look for the silver linings. It has forced us to move into models that are actually more valuable."

Moore said, because of the pandemic as part of the CARES Act, Medicare



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created parity in payment for telemedicine visits, which helped to fuel its acceptance among health care providers. Early on in telemedicine, those reimbursements were not there for health care providers.

At some point, Moore said the thought of telemedicine will simply become medicine, like how virtual banking progressed.

"We don't think about virtual banking, it's just banking," Moore said. "That's how we are approaching virtual medicine, (and) many believe the success will come when we make it disappear into the comprehensive health system."

Industry changing

Tom Kunst, CEO for UnitedHealthcare of Illinois and Northwest Indiana, agreed virtual care has been around for a while, but the utilization has been very small.

"COVID really has been an accelerant," Kunst said.

Kunst said telemedicine visits reached their peak during the pandemic around April, but demand for virtual care remains high.

"Virtual care is going to be part of how we interact with patients going forward," Kunst said

While most people still might want to go to a traditional provider, some national telemedicine providers can fit the bill for many telemedicine needs.

Kunst said one of the bigger positives of COVID-19's impact on telemedicine is the increase in tele-behavioral services. Kunst said often people do not feel comfortable going to the office of a mental health provider. That reluctance can mean conditions are left untreated, potentially leading to greater problems.

"We really have a suite of solutions to meet consumers where they are at," he said.

Kunst said there is a perception that younger people feel more comfortable with telehealth. But UHC has learned during the pandemic that telehealth utilization has been across all age groups.

"Consumers are pleased," Kunst said. Telemedicine can expand access, manage chronic conditions and improve outcomes, which benefits patients, providers and insurers. "We could be two or three years out from uses of virtual care we haven't even thought of yet," Kunst said.

Consumers and the health care industry overall are slowly embracing virtual care.

"United's view on this is we believe this will be part of those benefit packages going forward," Kunst said.

Some terms regarding reimbursements may require revisions, but Kunst said there is an opportunity for telemedicine to expand.

Consumers still want that personal relationship with their local physician

but can turn to virtual health providers for minor conditions such as pink eye. Employees are going to begin demanding this type of care.

"My prediction (is the) entire industry is going to embrace it," Kunst said. "I view this as industry moving (because) COVID to me really has been an accelerant, (so) it's not going away, (and) it will be a mainstream part of the system going forward." ■

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PUTTING HUMAN RESO

LEADERS SAY FOCUS ON EMPLOYEE SAFETY AND SATISFACTION ESSEN

CHRISTOPHER ADAM

Employees matter — especially during a pandemic.

This lesson was quickly learned by organizations and companies as the crisis forced major changes for businesses and their employees.

A focus on employee well-being is one of the predicted workplace trends listed by the Forbes Human Resources Council. Organizations across Northwest Indiana also are making that a priority as more emphasis is expected to be placed on the human element as the pandemic subsides.

Plan priority

If you own a home or a business along the coasts in Florida, it's wise to have a hurricane plan. Knowing what to do during that kind of crisis is common sense there. And while it is unlikely the Region will ever face that type of weather, experts say crisis planning is essential in a world of uncertainty.

That goes for having a plan for employees when crisis strikes, too.

"I think this is much like the pandemic, where a large number of organizations and businesses did not have a clear plan in place when it came to preparing for a public health crisis," said Erika Staszewski, an executive recruiter with Integritas Search LLC, a recruiting organization in South Bend. "Those that seem to have thrived are the ones that quickly created a plan for operations and staff, and then made adjustments as the pandemic progressed."

Staszewski said businesses that learned about available government assistance weathered the pandemic more successfully. She said dollars provided through the CARES Act supported salaries during tough times and kept employees on the payroll.

The employees at Integritas work on staffing support for a variety of industries



and positions, including those in manufacturing sites and office locations.

"The pandemic has shown that communication and trust are imperative across all industries," said Mike Niedbalski, founder and president of Integritas. "In manufacturing, customer service and offices, employers had to set up protocols to ensure employees were safe and kept informed during an evolving situation."

Niedbalski said they have seen an increase in employee satisfaction for their clients with more team members working from home.

"This has clearly shown a pent-up demand for remote work," Niedbalski said.

Another theme they have noticed during the pandemic: caution. The recruiting team at Integritas said fewer people have been applying for posted jobs during the crisis.

"Instead, we have been helping our clients find passive talent, who may be looking for other work but have

been cautious because of the uncertainty with the pandemic," said Pete Owsianowski, business development director at Integritas.

First things first

To facilitate social distancing and minimize exposure during the pandemic, new employees at Munster-based Peoples Bank have been completing their onboarding virtually. Each employee is provided personal space in a private area within each of his or her respective training locations where they can login and work independently. This way, they can interact with others in the same onboarding session while still maintaining safe social distancing practices.

"Our dedicated team has continued to provide great service throughout the pandemic," said Ben Bochnowski, president and CEO of Peoples Bank. "Our You First Banking brand is a promise to always put customers first, and we knew

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we had to keep our employees safe without sacrificing the customer experience.

"With regard to new employees, we always followed safety guidelines and were able to shift to virtual onboarding in many cases."

In lieu of their normal in-person orientation, the Peoples Bank human resources team created an onboarding slide presentation that helped communicate important information and guide new employees through the process. To limit fatigue that is sometimes caused by remote learning, they also reduced the overall duration of the program and have been providing more frequent, individualized follow-ups for employees to address any lingering questions or concerns.

When leadership first learned about the pandemic and shelter-in-place orders were enacted, Peoples Bank organized an internal task force that, in accordance with the CDC's recommendations, immediately began creating

protocols to address pandemic-related issues affecting their workforce.

"These protocols included policies that all employees were expected to acknowledge and abide by," Bochnowski said. "We had three guiding principles at the forefront of every decision, in this order: ensure the health and safety of employees, customers and communities; ensure the stability of operations; and manage risk for future stability."

Bochnowski said the goal was to incorporate safe practices, avoid service disruption and continue to provide the best banking experience possible. The task force continues meeting weekly to discuss the status of the pandemic and sends out regular communications to all employees informing them of protocol changes and related issues.

One of the core values for Peoples Bank is community.

When the pandemic struck the Region, and amid the nationwide movement calling for social change, Peoples

Bank created an employee-led diversity, equity and inclusion team.

"This team's goals are to develop a framework of diversity, further diversify our workforce, identify potential internal barriers to success, and enhance current policies to better embrace the diversity already present at the bank," Bochnowski said.

Recently, the committee achieved the first of its successes by presenting to their executive committee a proposal to eliminate credit checks from the bank's hiring process. This is even more important now, since the pandemic is expected to bring an increased number of talented, qualified applicants who are experiencing its residual effects.

The protocol change allows for a more inclusive process that will benefit both the bank and candidates applying for positions within the bank for many years to come.

"This pandemic has affected our economy in a number of ways, and the DEI team has done a great job jumping in and addressing these issues head on at a time when our communities need it most," Bochnowski said. "Economic recovery from the pandemic will require all of us working together, (and) the more we include people in the recovery, the more prosperous we will all be."

Communication lines

According to Mirko Marich, president of Staff Source in Hammond, communication has been key during the pandemic. He said his leadership checked in with team members via phone and video.

"This went a long way with our employees," Marich said. "Communication has always been vital to successful productivity in our office."

Providing feedback and celebrating successes has a strong effect on performance," he said.



“The pandemic has shown that communication and trust are imperative across all industries. In manufacturing, customer service and offices, employers had to set up protocols to ensure employees were safe and kept informed during an evolving situation.”

— Mike Niedbalski

Founder and president of Integritas Search

experts say those issues are amplified during the pandemic because of remote-work situations.

For South Bend-based 1st Source Bank, the answer has been an increased emphasis on outreach. They have made a concentrated effort to touch base more frequently with new hires via phone, video chat and mailing information packets.

“It has been important to maintain close contact, using technology, to increase support and decrease added anxiety due to being onboarded in entirely different ways during a pandemic or working remotely,” said Dan Lifferth, senior vice president for human resources at 1st Source Bank.

Lifferth said those same processes extend to established employees who were forced to work remotely because of the crisis. He said 1st Source leaders have been frequently touching base with direct reports via video conferencing.

“We also build in team engagement events using video conferencing, get

“During this pandemic, employees need constructive criticism and positive feedback now more than ever,” he said. “Acknowledging the struggles and successes has helped our employees stay focused and motivated in these stressful times.”

When it comes to clients, many for Staff Source are essential businesses. So, while the organization slowed down at the onset of the pandemic during mandatory shutdowns, Staff Source never stopped working, company executives said.

Marich said Staff Source has been conducting more phone screens and

video interviews via a variety of platforms. “Internally, most of the best practices we would recommend are things that should always be in place, but some may not have been a top priority in the past,” Marich said. “Health and safety of staff and visitors must be a priority.

“When employees don’t feel their safety is a priority, it can cause unnecessary stress, which in turn has a negative effect on productivity.”

Optimizing outreach

Starting a new job can cause some anxiety for a new hire because of the unfamiliarity with new processes, but

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all team members on a video call, deliver box lunches to their home(s) or remote working location and conduct fun engagement events while enjoying a home-delivered box lunch,” Lifferth said.

“Leaders also maintain a current list of all remote workers and schedule reminders to consider the impact of decisions to them and how to ensure successful inclusion on all communications and events.”

Lifferth also said other tactics include:

- Inviting all employees to regular town hall meetings conducted via video conference with senior leaders; ensure they are given opportunities to ask questions and get answers; and demonstrate a sincere interest in them one-on-one and on group video calls.
- Hosting fun video engagement events, where employees go around and have all remote team members answer an engaging personal question while on a team video chat.
- Celebrating and highlighting wins via video.
- Setting the expectation to have cameras on when in a call to achieve the full interpersonal experience.
- Surveying employees and giving them feedback on the survey and setting goals to improve engagement.

Lifferth said 1st Source has used gamification to improve employee well-being during the pandemic. They have introduced games during video calls and meetings to create a better team environment and make the overall remote work experience more enjoyable and fun.

Lifferth said, however, it is imperative not to lose sight of the company’s goals, mission, values and accountability principles.

“However you built in two-way communication before, it is important to triple that when in a remote-working experience,” Lifferth said. “We have done this through surveys, feedback and setting goals to improve engagement.” ■



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Region's building boom

Expansion of logistics, manufacturing paints bright future for commercial development



Alliance Steel relocated its corporate headquarters and opened a new, state-of-the-art service center in Gary, which will employ up to 130 workers.

Photo provided by Alliance Steel

LAUREN CAGGIANO

In recent months, vacant land in Northwest Indiana near desirable commercial locations has not remained that way very long.

Despite nationwide economic stagnation, the Region's commercial real estate boom appears poised to continue in the months ahead, experts say. Several mixed-use developments are under construction in many communities, including Valparaiso, La Porte, Whiting and Portage.

The anticipated growth is having a ripple effect, driving investments in infrastructure, too, experts say. Case

in point: The South Shore Line's \$764 million West Lake Corridor project is expected to create a faster, more cost-effective and more reliable form of transportation to Chicago.

Economic development and community leaders agree the future looks bright for commercial real estate development in Northwest Indiana.

Major milestones

Matt Saltanovitz, director of northwest region business development at the Indiana Economic Development Corp., is not surprised by the recent spike in activity in the commercial market.

"During a time of tremendous uncertainty, Northwest Indiana continues to secure positive economic momentum as businesses across the U.S. and around the world leverage our state's pro-growth business climate and our Region's skilled workforce and close proximity to major markets to fuel their success," he said.

He cited specific examples of companies driving growth. In 2020 alone, firms, including Ekos Window + Wall, Corsicana Mattress Co. and Mesa Associates, chose Northwest Indiana to locate or expand their operations, while Midwest Truck & Auto Parts

and Alliance Steel celebrated major milestones.

Midwest Truck broke ground in October on a new 125,000-square-foot facility in Merrillville at the AmeriPlex at the Crossroads business park. The company plans to hire up to 100 people.

Alliance Steel relocated its corporate headquarters and opened a new, state-of-the-art service center in Gary, which will employ up to 130 workers.

Pro-business climate

This trend comes in the context of bigger-picture growth, according to representatives at the Lake County IN Economic Alliance. Established in 2013, LCEA is an independent 501c3 nonprofit, nonpartisan economic development organization for Lake County and its 18 communities.

"The cost of doing business compared to our neighbors is less when you look at the tax climate," said Don Koliboski, vice president of economic development. "The property tax cap means we have tax certainty, (and) for companies that are looking to do business (here), they find that attractive, because you know what your tax bill is going to be from year to year."

When comparing Indiana to Illinois, which is experiencing a budget deficit and revenue problems, elected officials there likely will either explore tax hikes or spending to address cash shortfalls. Indiana ranked ninth as a best tax environment in the U.S. based on the 2018 State Business Tax Index by the Tax Foundation.

Koliboski said an unpredictable tax climate might be a deterrent to companies looking to locate or relocate operations in a particular location.

Location, location, location

Karen Lauerman, LCEA president and CEO, described the commercial real estate market in the Chicagoland area as "tight."

"Now granted the south suburbs like Joliet and areas like southeast Wisconsin have land availability, but they don't have the proximity that we do to Chicago," she said. "And so, with land being tight, the next best location would be what we call the

eastern suburb of Chicago, which is Lake County (Indiana) and adjacent counties, so you're looking at all of the benefits of being in the Chicagoland market, without being in Illinois."

Real estate developers are riding this wave, too, she said. They recognize desirable land for commercial development is in short supply and want to stay ahead of the curve.

Lauerman said developers try to plan ahead.

"So, we have more developers from either national or Midwest firms working in Lake County now than we've had probably in the last six years," she said. "They're taking a look at Lake County in particular, because we are the closest to Chicago."

Distribution brings opportunity

E-commerce also is an essential part of the supply chain. Lauerman said no doubt the pandemic changed the way people shopped, and consumer numbers reflect that trend.

"According to the Department of Commerce, online sales soared a record 44.4% in the second quarter of 2020," she said. When you break it down, that means almost \$1 of every \$5 is spent online.

But there is more to this statistic.

"You're talking about an e-commerce supply chain, which is equally important when you're talking about business-to-business or traditional retailers expanding their online presence," Lauerman said. "And it's not just the e-commerce side, but other businesses and manufacturers are all becoming more confident in their outlook with vaccines on the horizon and then, of course, you've got the suppliers of packaging and other services that support the e-commerce retailers (added to the mix)."

Parcel delivery giant UPS's decision to set up shop at the Gary/Chicago International Airport points to this, according to the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission.

"UPS is expanding its express air network to Gary/Chicago International Airport to help businesses in Northwest Indiana and the Chicago area successfully position themselves in the fast-paced e-commerce market," the agency said. "In addition, UPS is leasing 14,000 square feet of office space in the Gary-Chicago airport's passenger terminal."

Michael O'Connor, vice president of development and leasing with South Bend-based Holladay Properties, said sectors such as logistics and distribution and businesses seeking to support those companies want to cluster together.



THE EXPERTS

"The cost of doing business compared to our neighbors is less when you look at the tax climate."

—Don Koliboski, vice president of economic development
Lake County IN Economic Alliance



"Indications are economic conditions will strengthen in the second half of 2021 and continue to strengthen in 2022."

—Terry Larson, secretary/treasurer
Larson-Danielson Construction Co. Inc



"I think a lot of the activity is driven by changes or new activity, new volume in distribution, in both post-consumer products and business distribution," he said. "This is really driving a lot of the activity that we're seeing, (and) there's changes in how we are acquiring goods, and therefore, the way goods are distributed."

BIG DEVELOPMENTS



Photo provided by Lake County IN Economic Alliance

SULLAIR: In 2019, Sullair, an industry leader in innovative compressed air solutions, announced it was making a major capital investment to expand its North American operations and headquarters campus in Michigan City.



Photo provided by Larson Danielson Construction

BOSAK HONDA: In 2019 the Michigan City Development Commission approved a \$3.8 million project for the demolition of the building at the Bosak Honda dealership on Highway 20 and construction of a new building at that site.



Photo provided by Corsicana

Corsicana Mattress Co. announced in August 2020 it was investing \$8.6 million in a 165,000-square-foot facility at 755 S 500 West in Pinola near La Porte. The site is on track for an early 2021 completion.

At a crossroads of activity

O'Connor said his firm has benefited from this momentum. For example, AmeriPlex at the Crossroads in Merrillville is a hot commodity. Located near Route 30 close to the Indiana-Illinois border, the complex spans about 350 acres.

O'Connor said wins like Midwest Truck & Auto Parts are just the beginning.

"There's additional activity at AmeriPlex at the Crossroads for users acquiring land sites," he said. "We've got a 35-acre site under contract for a distribution business, (and) we've got a contract for about 50 acres for a pharmaceutical business."

O'Connor said an existing building owned by the town of Merrillville (in the business park) is in the process of being sold.

"So, there's just quite a bit of activity in Merrillville," he said.

O'Connor is also bullish on the long-term forecast for the Region, noting that

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the boom should last for some time.

"I think that the investment being made in improving the South Shore Line service to Chicago will have a big impact," he said. "They're going to add capacity so that the speed of the trains and the frequency would also increase, making it more viable for people to commute, and I think that's going to be a real plus."

A strong post-pandemic economy

Terry Larson, secretary/treasurer with Larson-Danielson Construction Co. Inc. in La Porte said Northwest Indiana is gaining attention from outside the state.

"We have seen more interest this year than ever before from Illinois companies looking to move operations to Northwest Indiana," he said. "Not only is our tax and regulatory environment much friendlier to business, but many point to the quality of life in Northwest Indiana as a draw as well."

And much to the benefit of Larson's firm, he said historically low interest rates are motivating companies

to make moves. He also cited projections that bode well for his portfolio of clients.

"Despite the economic impact of the pandemic and the uncertainties it has created with the economy in 2020, indications are economic conditions will strengthen in the second half of 2021 and continue to strengthen in 2022," he said. "The financing and tax advantages currently available are helping many companies position themselves for a strong post-pandemic economy that is expected to develop starting late next year."

Michigan City flourishing

If 2020 is any indication of the future, Michigan City may be in for another robust year.

Clarence Hulse, executive director of the Economic Development Corp. of Michigan City, Ind., reflected on 2020 — and beyond. At the current rate, he said the boom could continue well into 2023.

"In terms of projects, we've had a very good year, almost like a regular

year," he said. "We started off with a bang — one relocation and a hundred jobs, more or less, and by the end of the year, we had another relocation bringing 120 jobs."

Hulse said Michigan City saw several business expansions in 2020, and various projects in the downtown area and southern section of the city, including "shops, restaurants, medical clinics, a grocery store, etc."

"So, from that perspective, 2020 blew our expectations in terms of investment," he said. Breaking that down into economic impact, Hulse said that translates to \$40 million in deals and more than 500 new jobs in Michigan City in 2020.

Capitalizing on existing assets will help the city's boom continue, Hulse said.

"We've always had great assets," he said. "We've got a great lakefront, casino and hotel, and so I think by repackaging and marketing those assets and getting the word out to people, that's going to generate a lot of interest." ■



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State officials say agriculture contributes \$31.2 billion annually to Indiana's economy.

Photo provided by Indiana Grown

CRISIS SPARKED CONSUMER MOVEMENT TO SEEK FOOD AND OTHER PRODUCTS MADE CLOSE TO HOME

HANNAH REED

Anne Massie has something positive to say about the pandemic. When the COVID-19 virus put the world on lockdown to slow the spread of the disease in early 2020, Massie said it sparked a buy-local movement. People wanted to know where their food and other items were coming from and sought to support businesses close to home during the crisis.

This sentiment was shared statewide, which benefited Indiana Grown, a state initiative to encourage residents to buy, sell and share food and products made in Indiana. Massie, president of the Northwest Indiana Food Council

and owner of Grounded Earth Farm in Crown Point, has been a member of the organization since it launched in 2015.

"As farms and small businesses were able to pivot their business to be online or to offer curbside pickup, they seem to have actually done better because of the pandemic and had increased business," Massie said. "A lot of farms and small businesses that sell value-added food products are definitely seeing continued support and continued business throughout the pandemic."

Massie said, as far as food, the pandemic showed people that the national supply chains are much more fragile than they believed, causing

an increase in appreciation for local purchases.

"We saw grocery store shelves were empty, meat packing workers couldn't go into work because of unsafe conditions, and when that happened, we saw a lot of small businesses and small farms step up to try to fill that gap," Massie said.

Buy local

Indiana Grown is a program with more than 1,700 members and 50 business partners, including farmers, farmers markets, distributors, breweries, grocers, hospitals, restaurants and other supporting organizations. The statewide branding initiative aims to form a clear

designation of local Indiana products, according to its website.

Products from Indiana Grown can be identified by four categories: 100% from Indiana, prepared in Indiana, an Indiana Grown partner or Indiana Grown members.

Indiana Grown celebrated its fifth anniversary in July 2020. Its program director, Heather Tallman, said the support to local farmers and producers across the state has been strong for many years and grew stronger amid the pandemic.

"Though there was not a shortage of proteins available at the grocery store, many consumers did shift their shopping patterns to more local offerings," Tallman said. "You might say there was an increased sense of awareness about local agriculture and farmers markets in 2020."

Purchasing Indiana Grown products supports fellow Hoosiers while also supporting job creation and the building of sustainable communities. It also helps preserve Indiana's agricultural heritage, according to the organization.

"As our access to technology grows and communities form more and larger farmers markets, it is easier for consumers to not only find local farmers and producers in their areas, but it's easier to interact with them and make purchases," Tallman said. "Whether it's through an online marketplace, a farmers market visit or a trip to your local grocery store, it is easier to find local food than it was even 10 years ago, (and) so if that is due to an increased awareness about local agriculture or an increased desire to support the local economy — Indiana Grown supports this."

Stronger communities

Massie said support for local businesses and farmers has been great amid the pandemic, and she hopes it continues as the crisis subsides.

"There's a lot of hope that the change in consumer behaviors to buying more local and getting to build those relationships with local business owners will stick after the pandemic is over," Massie said.

Massie also noted there was an increase in people who signed up for subscriptions to Grounded Earth Farm

during the summer months as Hoosiers sought to secure a food supply.

Through community-supported agriculture, or CSAs, people can buy a subscription to receive a share of a farm's harvest. After paying upfront at the beginning of the year, families receive a weekly delivery or pickup of produce as vegetables come into season and are harvested by the farm.

"Once the pandemic picked up, we sold out right away," Massie said. "We probably could have doubled our membership if we wanted to, but we couldn't, just because of our size."

She started a waiting list in 2020 that spilled into the new year.

"I think (people are) starting to realize that in order to make sure that you are secure, we have to have these localized relationships again," Massie said.

Massie said several customers who have health issues were able to avoid going to the grocery store when the pandemic started by ordering through farmers and picking up with either no contact or safe contact.

In addition to creating curbside pickup services, Massie said farmers were able to assess areas in which they could assist their community and took action.

"A lot of farmers, when they saw this was happening and that the supply chains were breaking down and grocery store shelves were empty, a lot of them put in extra refrigerated space, invested more into their farms, expanded what they were growing and really tried to expand their businesses to help their communities out," Massie said.

Business obstacles

Mylese Tucker, owner of Nature's Cupboard, with locations in Michigan City and Chesterton, said she, too, saw an increase in business at the beginning of the pandemic, but has seen sales return to a normal pace.

"Business went crazy. We were doing curbside pickups for people, we offered delivery as

well ... because we started wearing masks almost immediately, a lot of people said they felt more comfortable shopping in our stores," said Tucker, who is a member of Indiana Grown. "Business was really crazy and busy for maybe a month, and then after things started to loosen up (in the spring), things started to get back to normal again."

Tucker said the uptick in online shopping has been hard, and as a small store, it is difficult to curate an online presence.

"If more and more people (switch to) online grocery shopping, we'll never survive," Tucker said. "Are little businesses like me even going to survive? Or is Amazon going to take over the world?"

Sara Stewart, president and founder of the Unity Gardens in South Bend, said the community gardens have worked with Indiana Grown for about four years. Stewart said she has experienced more people purchasing plants and compost supplies from Unity Gardens, though at the beginning of the pandemic, sales decreased by about 40%.

"People wanted to stay in, they didn't want to go shopping," Stewart said. "The farmers market, though a great alternative, was just not something on the top of their minds."

Stewart was troubled by declining sales for her business, she also was concerned about the rising problem of people who were going without food. Unity Gardens provides food for people in need, Stewart said, and while there was a decrease in revenue, the ability and

need for free food was increased during the crisis and still lingers.

As the situation worsened, Stewart looked past her own business issues and focused on helping those in need and began growing more food.



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE



"Whether it's through an online marketplace, a farmers market visit or a trip to your local grocery store, it is easier to find local food than it was even 10 years ago."

— Heather Tallman
Program director
Indiana Grown



Photo provided by NWI Food Council

Anne Massie, president of the NWI Food Council, shows some produce at Grounded Earth Farm in Crown Point. She said subscriptions were up for her farm's harvest.

"I said, literally, 'if we're going to go down, we're going to go down growing food,'" Stewart said. "So, we put greens everywhere in the garden, things you could plant in March — peas, greens, whether they are mustard, lettuce, chard, all of that, (and) we had our 7-acre, big urban ecosystem, just absolutely planted and full in March and April, and it paid off."

Stewart said business began to pick up as people started purchasing plants and worm compost, causing sales to go higher than normal.

As the Unity Gardens harvested winter plants, the hope was sales of produce along with products made with honey would help the organization's finances.

"The bees are working regardless," Stewart said. "Our honey and our products we make out of the honey or beeswax, like our candles and soaps and hand balms, are really keeping us going."

Preserving the momentum

As small businesses do their best to survive, Rebecca Miller, like many others, said her business also has seen



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more residents from her community buy local to help neighboring farms and other businesses. She also is a member of Indiana Grown and owner of Miller's Goats and Gardens in Lakeville. She hopes heightened community patronage continues as normal daily life resumes.

Miller became a member of Indiana Grown last spring, and Miller's Goats and Gardens sells products at the River Valley Farmers Market in South Bend.

"I think people are trying to help their neighbors, support local people," she said. "Plus doing produce, that's always a really important thing for people to buy locally — they know where it's coming from, they know how I grow it, so that's a good thing."

Miller's Goats and Gardens customers have an option to buy online with curbside pickup, but Miller said she finds people prefer making purchases in person.

"People still seem to want to come in and physically see things and talk," she said. "When you are buying from people who are making or growing things, what

they're selling, it is a connection, (so they want) to come in and talk to you about it. They get to know you, and you get to know the customers, too.

"(So) even though we're keeping distance and everything like that, you're still able to connect."

To keep the buy-local movement going, Tallman said Indiana Grown will continue providing resources to consumers to educate them on the effects of their purchases, while also assisting them with finding farmers in their area.

"Consumers should pattern their shopping habits in the way that makes them most comfortable," Tallman said. "If they prefer an online method, there are so many options there from buying direct from farmers through an online platform to online 'farmers markets' like Hoosier Harvest Market and Market Wagon."

Tallman also noted that, while Indiana Grown created maps, trails and guides to help consumers find wineries, breweries, distilleries, landscape nurseries and Christmas tree farms, members

gravitated toward a protein guide, which was widely popular on social media. The protein guide represents a fraction of the more than 56,000 farming operations in the state but allows people to see producers near them.

"(The past year) reminded us that our members are resilient and so is this industry," Tallman said. "How they grow may have a different direction for a while, but many of our members shifted in such a way that they are seeing growth."









Awareness is high surrounding buying local, and it has benefited many businesses, including Massie's. However, she noted many farmers also are still struggling, so the trend will need to continue to aid those challenged to make ends meet.

"The challenging thing about telling the story of farms adapting and doing well during a pandemic is, I don't want to blow over the fact that farmers are still struggling," Massie said. "Just because there's been an uptick in the buy-local movement, there's still a long way to go." ■



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LEADER PROFILE

Workforce champion

Linda Woloshansky's dedication to nonprofit raised bar on employee training

PHILIP POTEPA

Linda Woloshansky knows Northwest Indiana is a region of strong work ethics and hard workers, because she has years of firsthand experience.

"We have evidence that, when competing for jobs in other parts of the country, our Northwest Indiana folks often have a leg up on other candidates due to our work reputation," said Woloshansky, president and CEO for the Center of Workforce Innovations in Valparaiso. "This has also been echoed by site selectors when sharing reasons about how this attribute is an important feature of why companies want to locate here."

"It is also fascinating that so many family businesses stay in the family for generations."

Woloshansky pointed to the Schrage family, which has owned Merrillville-based Centier Bank for 125 years.

"While we don't have large national corporate headquarters located in Northwest Indiana, our advantage is the strong family businesses, which are not likely to move to another part of the country, and they feel very committed to their employees," she said.

Woloshansky's own career commitment for two decades has been to lead the team at CWI. In 2020, she announced her retirement. She will help with the transition and selection of a successor.

Launched in 2000 as the Workforce Investment Board for Jasper, La Porte, Newton, Porter, Pulaski and Starke counties, the organization was created to bring private-sector leaders together with

policy makers. Community leaders from business, government, education, economic development, labor and community-based organizations came together to analyze regional labor market trends, needs and issues to develop strategic workforce solutions.

Today, that mission has expanded to include empowering regional workforce through high-quality career advising, skill building and efforts to increase post-secondary credential attainment. The staff has found success developing strategic action plans grounded in both quantitative and qualitative data.

"CWI has grown significantly the last 20 years," said Glenn Todd, board chair of CWI.

"Linda led the charge on growth that now includes providing support to the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, operating and oversight of nine WorkOne Centers and 15 adult community learning centers across our seven-county Region," he said. "It was also her vision and leadership acumen that helped launch READY NWI, a talent-alignment coalition of K-12 education systems, CTE programs and post-secondary schools in Northwest Indiana. Her expertise and overwhelming passion for workforce and education issues was evident."

The CWI board is working with a national search firm to find Woloshansky's successor. She will stay on with the organization during the transition and introduce the next leader to the community, colleagues and contacts throughout the country.

Born in East Chicago, Woloshansky lived in Gary and later Merrillville and is a graduate of Indiana University. She continued her education at Purdue University, Valparaiso University, as well as Harvard, where she received a certification in negotiations. She credits her parents with instilling in her a strong work ethic. They led by example. Her mother was "a devoted

"My time at CWI has been a pure joy because of the incredible staff I work with who are dedicated to improving the lives of others."

— Linda Woloshansky
President and CEO
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homemaker,” and her father was a welder in the steel industry “who never missed a day of work.”

In the last 20 years, Woloshansky has witnessed multiple generations impact an ever-evolving workforce.

“I find our younger employees are more direct about their expectations, which can be a benefit to an employer who both listens and values input on how the workplace can be improved,” Woloshansky said.

“They also value their personal time more than their older counterparts and have a clear sense of their work/life balance.”

When her role ends at CWI, Woloshansky expects to do consulting work, as well as travel with her husband to visit friends around the country, as well as fine-tuning culinary skills and spending time with their three grandchildren.

“My time at CWI has been a pure joy because of the incredible staff I work with who are dedicated to improving the lives of others,” Woloshansky said. “CWI has helped thousands of people develop skills, which has allowed them to take advantage of opportunities



Photo provided by the Center of Workforce Innovations

Linda Woloshansky, center left, president and CEO of the Center of Workforce Innovations in Valparaiso, hosts participants of the Midwest Urban Strategies group in February 2020 to share what they considered best practices by CWI.

leading to their successful careers and provided equity to those who otherwise would be forgotten and left behind.

“I am also proud of the talent alignment

pipeline, which we spearheaded 10 years ago, that is also resulting in improved graduation rates, attainment of credentials and better jobs for young adults in the (Region) economy.” ■



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Ready for next challenge



Mrvan: Role as township trustee prepared him to follow in Visclosky's footsteps



Congressman Frank J. Mrvan (center) was sworn in Jan. 3 to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Photo provided by Frank J. Mrvan

LARRY AVILA

Frank Mrvan understands all too well the hurdles some people face just to get through daily life.

Those obstacles might include not having enough money to either pay for rent, electricity or food, and in some instances, all the above. For the past 15 years, Mrvan's role as North Township trustee has been to assist those in need

in East Chicago, Hammond, Highland, Munster and Whiting.

The job isn't easy, but Mrvan found fulfillment in the grassroots work helping residents find solutions to their problems. It also proved an effective training ground for his new job as representative of Indiana's 1st Congressional District.

"I helped people find solutions from local, state and federal avenues, and

made sure people could transition from being in financial crisis to getting back to work," said Mrvan, a Hammond native. "Serving as township trustee trained me and gave me the experience to be able to understand people's struggles and what we need to do for the Region and other communities to ensure all the lifeboats are lifted at once."

By that Mrvan means helping set policies and priorities through legislative action to create and preserve good-paying jobs, protect the domestic steel and manufacturing sectors, ensure federal dollars flow into the Region to maintain critical infrastructure, and make higher education and health care more accessible to the underserved.

He recognizes it's a tall order, but Mrvan said he's ready for the challenge. And as he works toward his goals, he will make the first steps toward making his own mark on the 1st District. Fellow Democrat Pete Visclosky of Gary had represented the district since 1985. He chose not to seek reelection.

"When I ran for township trustee, many people said I was able to win because of my relation to my dad (Frank Mrvan Sr., a long-time Indiana state senator), but that motivated me to work hard and prove to people I was more than Frank's son," Mrvan said. "Pete was a productive



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representative and an icon for working men and women, so as I hit my marks, where steel interests are protected, more young people have access to education, and I can work to bring our communities together to focus on doing what's best for all of Northwest Indiana every day, then I'd say I would have stepped out from under (Pete's) shadow."

After winning the position in the fall election, Mrvan spent time in Washington, D.C., learning about the role. He also secured a post as co-chairman of the Congressional Steel Caucus, which works to promote and advance the interests of the domestic steel industry and steelworkers.

Visclosky, a former chair of the Congressional Steel Caucus, said Mrvan is a good fit for the position and knows he will represent the 1st District well.

"(Frank) has proven throughout his career to be one of the most sincere, decent and honorable individuals I have ever met," Visclosky said. "I know he has the character and skills to excel as a member of Congress."

Mrvan recognizes it also will be important to get to know Indiana's other U.S. representatives and find ways to help the state as well as Northwest Indiana.

"First and foremost, the 750,000 people who elected me to represent the 1st District are my priority, but it's also important to develop relations with the Indiana delegation and the state of Indiana," Mrvan said. "Making sure we have a strong economy will take working across both sides of the aisle, and I understand it will be a fight every day for the 1st District's priorities, but it will be important to blend those priorities with the state and nation, but as those things conflict, I will advocate for the 1st District."

Mrvan said the task he will miss the most at his former post as trustee will be the ability to immediately assist a constituent with an issue.

"I'll miss the fruitfulness of being able to instantaneously assist someone in a desperate or challenging time," he said. "As a member of Congress, I'll still be able to help people, but it will be by setting policy for economic development, and educational and health care access, (so ensuring) these things (happen) motivates me to be a better member of Congress." ■

"Making sure we have a strong economy will take working across both sides of the aisle, and I understand it will be a fight every day for the 1st District's priorities, but it will be important to blend those priorities with the state and nation."

— Frank Mrvan
Representative of Indiana's 1st Congressional District



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SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE

National competition shines spotlight on resident's haircare product line

LARRY AVILA

Alexis Stanley's career took an unexpected turn after an incident with a hair stylist.

According to Stanley of Merrillville, her hair was severely burned by a stylist who used tools that were too hot. She immediately looked for products to repair the damage but to no avail.



That's when Stanley, a registered nurse, decided to create her own haircare product at home. After some trial and error, she discovered a formula that worked. The discovery eventually led Stanley to launch her own business and haircare product line UniQurl in 2018.

UniQurl has an online following, but Stanley now has an opportunity to expand distribution nationally. She and three other

grateful to Sally Beauty (Supply) for seeing that."

The former nurse learned about the Cultivate program through 25bwb.org, a website dedicated to highlighting the achievements of black women in the beauty industry.

Stanley continued to produce her products herself until the volume became too much to manage. She said in late 2019 and early 2020, she began working with a "trusted manufacturer in Illinois" to help meet growing demand for her products.

Cultivate is an accelerator program, presented by Sally Beauty Supply and Cosmo Prof, to help women grow their beauty-product businesses.

"We are amazed by the ingenuity found among female entrepreneurs who are consistently finding creative ways to meet consumer demand during the ongoing pandemic," said Pam Kohn, senior vice president and chief merchandising officer at Sally Beauty Holdings. "We're proud to be part of each of these brands' incredible journeys in bringing the latest DIY trends to market, particularly at a time when salons and consumers are seeking new solutions."

The other finalists were:

- True + Pure Texture, owned by natural hair expert, stylist and salon operator Pekela Riley of Jacksonville, Florida;
- Peculiar Roots, founded by Tara Darnley of Greensboro, North Carolina;
- Pattie Yankee Products, founded by New York-based nail artist Pattie Yankee.

Stanley, who worked as a nurse for five years in Crown Point and Gary, and the other finalists attended a four-week virtual Cultivate boot camp in late fall. The participants attended sessions covering merchandising, social media, marketing, ecommerce, store operations and entrepreneurship.

Each segment of the boot camp was selected to ensure each business is set up for success and longevity in the beauty industry, according to Sally Beauty Supply.

Stanley put her training to the test Dec. 3 when she and the other finalists made presentations to senior-level

Sally Beauty and Cosmo Prof executives at the Perfect Pitch Capstone event. They will have a chance to receive in-store distribution of their products in select locations.

The winner of the pitch event will be announced in February, according to representatives for Sally Beauty Supply, and were not available as of press time.

Store distribution could prove game changing for Stanley and the other finalists. In 2018,

the program transformed the Curlanista and PuffCuff brands into household names, boosting those products' sales by 3,771% and 88% the past year respectively, according to Sally Beauty Supply representatives.

Stanley recognizes what is at stake and is up for the challenge.

"If I am selected, I will continue to work with Sally Beauty to have our products available at select Sally Beauty locations within the first 18 months," she said. "Together, we will continue to grow our customer base and increase brand awareness to a broader audience." ■



“Winning this designation gives me confirmation that I am indeed offering new and innovative products to meet unique demands of textured hair-care.”

— Alexis Stanley
UniQurl founder

entrepreneurs from around the country are among the 2020 Cultivate Cohort, a designation that already has yielded some benefits. She received a \$15,000 grant and training to develop her business skills.

"I have worked very hard to stand out in the market, and winning this designation gives me confirmation that I am indeed offering new and innovative products to meet unique demands of textured haircare," Stanley said. "I am

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

It takes an army



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE

The Salvation Army of Lake County overcomes hurdles to aid community during pandemic

CATHERINE MCCOY

The Salvation Army of Lake County's decades of helping those in need around the Region prepared it for the difficult year that was 2020.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit earlier in the year, many Northwest Indiana families found themselves with-



► **Capt. Brian Clark**, coordinator of The Salvation Army of Lake County.

out paychecks. They faced hard choices when it came to daily life. Some had to choose between paying an electric bill or buying food, which led many people to seek help from The Salvation Army — some for the first time ever.

As businesses cut back operations and furloughed workers during the crisis, The Salvation Army of Lake County saw demand for services increase 500% between March and June. Requests for aid pushed the organization to its limits, but leaders vowed to continue providing relief to the community.

"The Salvation Army has stood alongside anyone needing emergency assistance and relief during the toughest of times," said Capt. Brian Clark, coordinator of The Salvation Army of Lake County. "There are many nonprofits that have closed their doors during the pandemic, (but) The Salvation Army community centers in Lake County and elsewhere have remained open and stand ready to help."

The Salvation Army found ways to continue delivering services. A hot lunch became a to-go box delivered through

a window because of health and safety protocols to slow the spread of the disease. Mobile food trucks delivered 100 lunches daily. Christmas presents were shared through their Angel Tree program. And community members received assistance through social services.

No one is exempt from diseases, disasters and emergencies, Clark said. No generation has avoided crisis, and current and future generations shouldn't expect to either.

"We must do everything that we can to prepare ourselves for times like these to occur ... and they will happen again," he said. "The Salvation Army will be standing ready to help our neighbors who are in need during any crisis."

Volunteers and donors are always a key component to the services of The Salvation Army of Lake County, and in the wake of COVID-19, they are even more critical. The Red Kettle campaign during the holiday season normally accounts for about 70% of fundraising for the year, but restrictions from the pandemic reduced that number significantly.

The Salvation Army continues to provide services to those in need, but without the contributions from their neighbors, those services for the new year will be limited, Clark said.

"Whether it's individuals or businesses who give to support The Salvation Army's work, they are every bit as responsible for helping their neighbors in need as the organization's employees and volunteers,"

said Kevin Feldman, director of development for The Salvation Army of Lake County. "The good work cannot be accomplished without them."

Even through the pandemic, the mission of The Salvation Army has remained constant.

"If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic is helping to make us even stronger and capable of meeting human needs," Clark said. "Besides our prayers that the pandemic will cease in 2021, we also hope that many new individual and corporate partners will join with us to help restore the individuals and families hurt most by COVID-19, (because) their needs will continue for some time after the pandemic has ended." ■



The Salvation Army's Red Kettle campaign during the holiday season accounts for 70% of its annual fundraising.

Photo provided by The Salvation Army

Commemorating 30 years



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE



TROY LINKER

I left the conference room fuming, not at all concerned about how hard the door closed behind me. Returning to my office, I wrote the date May 1, 2015, on my white board. It would serve as a reminder and to mark the beginning of a six-month evaluation



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

period before leaving a company whose mission I respected and where I had spent 17 mostly happy years. Six months later, I looked at that date one last time before signing my resignation letter and beginning my journey to become publisher of *Northwest Indiana Business Magazine*.

Ten years earlier, I moved to Dyer, but not being from the Region, my connec-

tions to the business community were limited. I did not realize that, in 1991, Glee Renick-May, then with *Indiana Business Magazine*, partnered with the Northwest Indiana Forum to launch the biannual *Northwest Indiana Magazine*. It focused on local business successes and the strengths of the Region's economy. I also didn't know that, in 2002, *Northwest Indiana Magazine* had increased its frequency to four issues annually and changed its name to *Northwest Indiana Business Quarterly*.

It is fair to say that *Northwest Indiana Business Magazine* would not be celebrating its 30th anniversary if it were not for the confidence and chutzpah of Glee Renick-May. I never met Glee. Sadly, she passed before I had the chance, but I can tell you she seemed to be my kind of gal! She believed in *Northwest Indiana Business Quarterly*

and, by extension, the Region so much that she refused to let the magazine die with *Indiana Business Magazine* in 2009. In the middle of the 2008 Great Recession, she bought the magazine from Curtis Publishing. Using grit and more than a little determination, she guided the magazine from its founding in 1991 to its 25th anniversary in 2016.

I learned about Glee and the magazine when I met her husband, Conrad, shortly after her death in early 2016. Conrad's goal was to find someone to carry on the magazine. He saw her fight to keep the magazine going from her hospice bed in their living room, demonstrating how much she loved it and the Northwest Indiana business community. His goal was to find someone to carry on the magazine's mission. He was not interested in selling to someone who wanted to merge the magazine into another publication or to shut it down. Instead, he sought someone who wanted to run it, not just own it!

At the same time, I was looking for a new opportunity. I wanted to lead a small team where my publishing experience and skills could impact success without the interference and bureaucracy of a large organization. Conrad said Glee guided us to each other from above. I am not sure I will go that far, but we did learn Glee's favorite aunt was my childhood Sunday school teacher years ago. Coincidence or fate? You be the judge.

Before purchasing the magazine, I worked with Conrad as the associate publisher. I wanted to talk with the advertisers, writers, editors, photographers, and most importantly, readers to learn more about the magazine's



reputation. Everyone I spoke with during those first few weeks was complimentary of the magazine's editorial reputation. Which — with the support of my wife, Lee Ann, and her steady job with benefits — gave me the confidence to take a risk and purchase the magazine from Conrad.

In the weeks and months that followed, I recognized the magazine's ability to spotlight the issues and people important to our Region, which is the foundation of its positive reputation. Living up to this reputation is our daily goal and a guiding principle for our future growth plans.

As my confidence in *Northwest Indiana Business Quarterly* grew, I decided in 2018 to expand the publishing schedule from quarterly to bimonthly. In recognition of this change, we removed quarterly from the magazine's title — although many folks continue to call us NWIBQ — adopting our current title *Northwest Indiana Business Magazine*.

I never would have predicted the day I decided to leave a company I loved that, nearly six years later, I would be blessed with a new mission and a new company I love even more!

Many thanks to our readers and our advertisers for supporting the magazine for 30 years. We are committed to showcasing the activities and business professionals who are moving our community forward for many years to come! ■

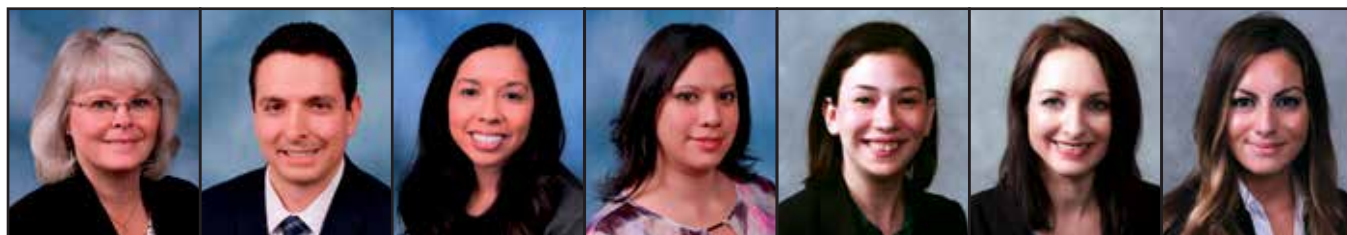
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