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DECEMBER / JANUARY 2022

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Innovating through storm

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*Stewart McMillan
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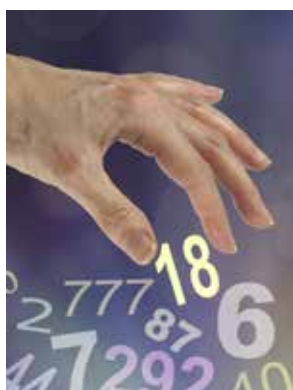


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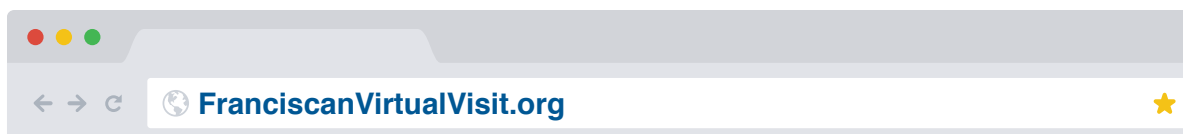


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GOOD BIT

1,000 The number of specially designed bacteria-reducing air filtration units made by HD Industrial in Griffith for meat packing plants in spring 2020. ► PAGE 18

IN THIS ISSUE

What better way to end a year and launch a new one but with a celebration of successes! In this issue, the 2021 Entrepreneurial Excellence (E-Day) Award winners overcame hurdles to end the year strong. Behind the scenes, the Society of Innovators at Purdue University Northwest found five unique Region-originated efforts, which likely will have a broader impact beyond our borders. From experts we learned the importance of succession planning and how accountants can do more than filing taxes and bookkeeping. Workforce shortages are happening everywhere, but training and setting a career path helps with recruitment and retention. Mental well-being of a workforce and ensuring resources are available to help has become a top priority. Laughter is the best medicine for one Region leader. And thanks to organizations, including the Crown Point Community Foundation, funding is available to groups that aid residents. And another achievement, the spotlight is on the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, which just elected its first female tribal chair. We hope you enjoy this issue!

— Larry Avila, managing editor

PICTURE PERFECT



Photo provided by Crown Point Community Foundation

Crown Point Community Foundation commemorated three decades of operation with a celebration in late September, which drew more than 500 people to Bulldog Park in Crown Point. ► PAGE 42

QUOTE TO REMEMBER

“Do not be afraid to take some risks — you are probably underestimating yourself. Be prepared to adapt and change.”

— Amy Perry, E&A Jewelers, co-recipient of E-Day Women-Owned Business of the Year ► PAGE 12

READER POLL

This issue's poll focuses on having a plan ready when a company needs to change leadership.

Tell us what you think by scanning this QR code with your phone.

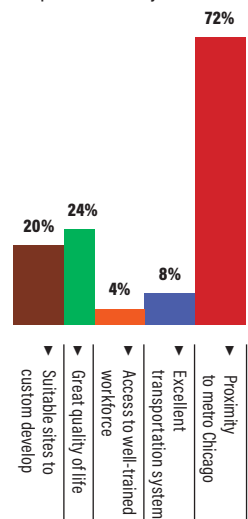


As either an employee or owner, what are your thoughts on your company's succession plans?

STORY IS ON PAGE 32

LAST ISSUE'S POLL

What is the Region's top economic development asset? Full results here: <http://nwib.link/jb6l>



AROUND THE REGION



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

LARRY AVILA

Banking

First Merchants Corp. named **Greg Mather** chief marketing officer. Mather will lead all marketing operations. He has more than 20 years of marketing experience in the financial industry.

Merrillville-based **Centier Bank** announced the following executive and staff appointments: **Glenn Peterson** was named branch manager of the bank's downtown Elkhart branch; **Christine Quanstrom** was promoted to officer of the bank and appointed branch manager of the Crown Point north branch; and **Brian Ternet** was promoted to senior lending officer.

Erin Shaw was named market manager for **J.P. Morgan Private Bank** in Indianapolis. Shaw works with clients across Indiana and Kentucky.

Shari Vermillion was named mortgage loan adviser for Goshen-based **Interra Credit Union**.

Robert Shane was named director for the CUSO (Credit Union Services Organization) Services at **Notre Dame Federal Credit Union**. The credit union recently opened a Whiting branch.

Rick Gard was promoted to vice president, commercial lending at St. John-based **American Community Bank**.

Business

Anthem Inc. of Indianapolis named new executives to its senior leadership team, including: **Pete Haytaian**, who will lead the company's diversified business group and IngenioRx as executive vice president and president; **Morgan Kendrick**, executive vice president and president, will oversee the commercial and specialty business division; and **Rajeev Ronanki**, president, digital platforms.

Some members of the **Northwest Indiana Business Magazine Editorial and Business Advisory Board** recently changed positions. **Raeann Trakas** was named senior community relations representative at **Cleveland-Cliffs** in Burns Harbor. Trakas most recently was director of marketing and membership at the **Northwest Indiana Forum**. **Erika Dahl** joined **Kopka Pinkus Dolin** in Crown Point as marketing content writer. Dahl was the director of communications for the **South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority**.

Katie Holderby joined the **Northwest Indiana Forum** as director of marketing and membership. She most recently served as executive vice president with the **South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority**.

Pulse Technology announced CEO **Chip Miceli** and Vice President **Vince Miceli** were both recipients of **Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards** from the **Daily Herald Business Ledger**. The company has operations in Chesterton.

Julia Plumb was named a business adviser for the **Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center**.

Education

Nicky Ali Jackson, an associate professor of criminal justice at **Purdue University Northwest**, was presented with the **Sagamore of the Wabash** award, the highest civilian honor bestowed by Indiana's governor. Jackson, who also is coordinator of Purdue Northwest's criminal justice program, was honored for her advocacy work, including her role with the **Willie T. Donald Exoneration Advisory Coalition**, a board she created that examines wrongful convictions, connects exonerees with resources and advocates for criminal justice reform in Indiana.

Holly Johnson was named vice president for advancement at **Saint Mary's College** in Notre Dame. She most recently served as chief advancement officer for **Culver Academies** in Culver the past five years.



BANKING
Glenn Peterson



BANKING
Christine Quanstrom



BANKING
Brian Ternet



BANKING
Robert Shane



BUSINESS
Chip Miceli

Susan Scroggins, senior vice president for finance at **Valparaiso University**, was named the 2021-2022 board chair for the **National Association of College and University Business Officers**. **Deb Singer** was named director of graduate programs in the college's school of business.

Patricia Clark, the Rev. John Cardinal O'Hara, C.S.C., Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry and associate vice president for research at the **University of Notre Dame**, received a **Director's Pioneer Award from the National Institutes of Health**.

Karen White-Goyzueta was named vice chancellor of academic affairs for **Ivy Tech Community College — South Bend**.

Finance

South Bend-based **Healy Group**, a financial planning and property and casualty insurance agency, hired **Diane Merrill** as senior account manager, and **Tanja Olson** as receptionist and administrative associate; and promoted **Bekky**



BUSINESS
Vince Miceli

Groshans to senior account manager and team leader, and **Megan Rose** to commercial lines processor.

Government

Gov. Eric Holcomb appointed **Mitch Frazier** chair of the **Indiana State Fair Commission**. He succeeds **Brad Chambers** who served in the post before taking over as Indiana secretary of commerce and CEO of the Indiana Economic Development Corp.

Health care

Northwest Health announced the following staff appointments: **Dr. Issa Rezek**, cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon, Northwest Medical Group - Valparaiso; **Dr. Asma Aziz**, family medicine, and **Dr. Sarah Polistico**, pediatrics, Northwest Medical Group - La Porte; **Dr. Stella Kyung**, cardiologist, and **Dr. D. Owen Young**, colorectal surgeon and general surgeon, Northwest Health — Porter campus in Valparaiso.

Franciscan Health Breast Care Center at Crown Point announced **Dr. Sean DeSilva** is the new program director.



EDUCATION
Susan Scroggins



FINANCE
Diane Merrill

Franciscan Health announced the following staff appointments: **Dr. Bashar Chihada Alhariri**, Franciscan Physician Network Munster Medical Center; **Dr. Ashley Monk**, Franciscan Physician Network Winfield Health Center; **Dr. John Monk**, Franciscan Physician Network Crown Point Health Center; **Dr. Khalid Najib**, Franciscan Health Heart Center Michigan City and Franciscan Physician Network Legacy Hills Health Center in La Porte.

Community Healthcare System announced the following medical staff appointments: **Dr. Amit Kakkar**, interventional cardiologist; **Dr. Rajul Kothari**, gynecologic oncology; **Dr. Sameer Sharma**, gynecologic oncology; **Dr. Jonathan Paul Edgington**, orthopedic surgeon; **Dr. Joshua Park**, otolaryngologist; **Dr. Charonn Woods**, interventional pain management; **Dr. Christopher Aranda**, pediatrician; and **Dr. Donald Graves**, podiatrist.

Manufacturing

Thor Industries Inc. appointed **Christina Hennington** executive vice



FINANCE
Tanja Olson



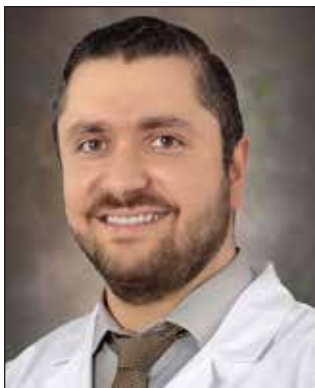
FINANCE
Bekky Groshans



FINANCE
Megan Rose



GOVERNMENT
Mitch Frazier



HEALTH CARE
Issa Rezek

president and chief growth officer of Target, and **Laurel Hurd** segment president, learning and development, for Newell Brands to its board of directors.

South Bend-based **AM General** named Army veteran and seasoned manufacturing executive **James Cannon** its new CEO. He most recently served as CEO of **FLIR Systems**, a publicly traded manufacturer of sensors and unmanned systems for military and industrial customers, which recently was sold to **Teledyne Technologies Inc.**



HEALTH CARE
Asma Aziz

Nonprofit

Dunes Arts Foundation named **Steve Scott** artistic director. The foundation also named **Dale Cooper**, community relations manager for the LaPorte County Convention and Visitors Bureau, **Jodie Taub Pineless**, and **Lisa Torgerson** to its board of directors.

Retail

SpartanNash has promoted **Tyler King** from senior director to vice



HEALTH CARE
Sarah Polistico



HEALTH CARE
Stella Kyung

president, finance and finance business partner for the company's retail business segment.

Technology

Bill Kousoulas was named branch manager for **Pulse Technology's** Rockford, Illinois office. Pulse also has operations in Chesterton.

Naomi Buckta, vice president of sales and marketing at **Wisor Inc.**, joined the advisory board of **APL nextED** in Valparaiso.

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HEALTH CARE
D. Owen Young



HEALTH CARE
Sean DeSilva



HEALTH CARE
Bashar Chihada Alhariri



HEALTH CARE
Ashley Monk

News

Boat maker **Smoker Craft Inc.**'s planned \$12 million expansion in New Paris in Elkhart County could create up to 100 new jobs by the end of 2024. The family-owned company plans to construct and equip a 200,000-square-foot space on its 600,000-square-foot campus at 68143 Clunette St. for additional boat manufacturing and shipping, the **Indiana Economic Development Corp.** said. The expansion is needed to help the company meet growing

customer demand and should be operational by April.

Elkhart-based **Patrick Industries** completed its purchase of Nashville, Georgia-based **Coyote Mfg. Co.**, a designer, fabricator and maker of steel and aluminum products, including boat trailers, towers, T-tops, leaning posts, and other custom components, primarily for the marine market. The company also closed on its purchase of **Tumacs Covers**, a maker of custom-designed boat covers, canvas

frames and bimini tops, primarily serving marine OEMs and dealers. Tumacs also has facilities in Indiana, Pennsylvania and a distribution/service center in Michigan.

Northwest Indiana Partners for Clean Air honored the **Ports of Indiana-Burns Harbor** with the **Industrial Award** for multiple clean air projects undertaken by the port and its tenants in 2020.

Work by Michigan City-based **Tonn and Blank Construction** on the

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HEALTH CARE
John Monk

Franciscan Beacon Hospital at 1010 W. State Road 2 in La Porte, landed the company the **Commercial Project of the Year by the Construction Advancement Foundation** in partnership with the **Northwest Indiana Business Roundtable**.

The **Indiana Office of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship** recognized **Ivy Tech Valparaiso's** routing and switching certificate program as a certified **State Earn and Learn** program.



HEALTH CARE
Khalid Najib

Highland-based grocer **Strack & Van Til** is expanding into DeMotte in Jasper County. Indiana Grocery Group, which operates Strack & Van Til, has entered into an agreement to purchase **Tysen's Country Market** in DeMotte.

Elkhart-based RV manufacturer **Thor Industries** purchased Wichita, Kansas-based **AirX Intermediate Inc.** for an estimated \$750 million.

Peoples Bank donated its bank building at 7120 Indianapolis Blvd. in Hammond to **Purdue University**



MANUFACTURING
Christina Hennington



RETAIL
Tyler King

Northwest. Under the terms of the donation, Peoples will continue operating a full-service branch at the location while renting a smaller space inside the building. Purdue Northwest will use the remaining space for economic and community leadership development staff.

Franciscan Health's Catherine McAuley Clinic in Hammond, which opened in 1996, was rededicated and will operate as the **Dr. John Lanman Clinic — Franciscan**

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Health Hammond. Lanman practiced internal medicine in Northwest Indiana for more than four decades and continued treating patients at the volunteer-based Hammond medical clinic until six weeks before his death in 2014 at age 88.

Maria Longas, professor emerita of chemistry at **Purdue University Northwest** who passed away earlier this year, left more than \$700,000 to the university to support student scholarships.

Goodwill Industries of Michiana Inc. opened a new retail store and career center in October at 1547 Pilgrim Lane in the Pilgrim Place Shopping Center on U.S. Route 30 in Plymouth. The store was expected to employ 25 people.

A merger of two Region agencies has created the **United Way of Northwest Indiana**. The new organization, which held a ribbon cutting Oct. 1 to commemorate its launch, was created from the combination of the **Lake Area United Way** and **United Way of Porter County**.

ALDI, which has 80 stores in Indiana, opened a new location Oct. 14 in Chesterton at 750 Indian Boundary Road.

The **Purdue University School of Hospitality and Tourism Management** now is known as the **White Lodging — J.W. Marriott, Jr. School of Hospitality and Tourism Management**. The college's board of trustees approved the name change Oct. 1. **Bruce White**, founder of Merrillville-based **White Lodging** and a long-time supporter of Purdue, requested the hospitality and tourism management school also honor the career and contributions of **J.W. "Bill" Marriott Jr.**, executive chairman and chairman of the board of **Marriott International**.

Notre Dame Federal Credit Union is among the best credit unions to work for in the country, according to the latest ranking from financial trade media outlet **American Banker**. This is the second consecutive year the credit union has made the ranking. Notre Dame FCU is ranked 19th out of 55. ■



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E-DAY AWARDS



Dave Lasser, broker and owner of Commercial In-Sites LLC, earned E-Day's 2021 Small Business Person of the Year award.

Photo by Michelle Hamstra

INNOVATING THROUGH STORM



2021 E-DAY HONOREES OVERCOME OBSTACLES BY TAKING CHANCES, STAYING FLEXIBLE DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

LESLEY BAILEY

The ability to overcome obstacles always has been a top trait for an entrepreneur, but in today's shifting business climate, the E-Day Class of 2021 has been pushed to another level of fortitude and flexibility.

"We have seen pivots and adjustments from our business owners that would have been unheard of just a few years ago, but are now expected and needed to keep moving forward and remaining open," said Lorri Feldt, regional director of the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center. "Our E-Day awards have always been a way to celebrate our entrepreneurs — but today we truly treasure them and everything that they do for our communities even more."

The NW-ISBDC Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards recently marked its 30th year of honoring entrepreneurs and advocates who are continuing to make an impact and contribute to our Region.

While the nine honorees have switched gears in the wake of the pandemic, they also fell back on the lessons they learned from years of experience or their own professional struggles.

Essential industries pivot

Small Business Person of the Year Dave Lasser employed more techniques that were trending anyway, including online signatures and more videos and photos for his real estate team.

"Real estate fortunately was deemed an essential service, but it did affect a lot of aspects of doing business," he said. "COVID accelerated the use of the electronic signature program."

During the early days of the crisis, personal interaction was almost impossible.

"You can't shake hands and say congrats and thank you ... it's not quite the same," Lasser said. "When you go to look at land, you have a caravan to meet there instead of everyone jumping in the same car."

As broker and owner of Commercial In-Sites LLC, which focuses on the sales

reminder to get us out there," he said. "Every year, our summer intern would enter business cards, but last summer, there weren't any cards to enter."

Lasser said referrals can come from the least expected places.

"You can be at a function where you think the person you are talking to would never need to buy a factory, but if you talk to them long enough, you



E-Day Young Entrepreneur of the Year Brianna Hairlson, of Bri's Dance Place, offered virtual dance classes during the pandemic.

Photo provided by Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center

and leasing of commercial, industrial and investment real estate, Lasser has more than 35 years of experience in the industry and in business. While he has found some ways of connecting with clients, business development has changed, but some aspects have remained the same.

"Our rule of thumb had always been you network or there's no work as a

might find out their cousin's husband is looking for one," he said. "Developing a business takes time, and you have to be active in the market and build relationships and work at it."

The pandemic also impacted Advanced Engineering Services Inc., the Emerging Business of the Year, as part of the construction industry.



Photo provided by Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center

Sisters team Erin Lively and Amy Perry, recipients of the E-Day Women-Owned Business of the Year honor, turned to online sales of their gems at E&A Jewelers in Valparaiso.

The company, led by Akhtar Zaman, president and principal engineer, focuses on a specialized field within civil engineering.

“We provide geotechnical engineering, construction materials testing and inspection services,” he said. “It is very important to test and explore the ground to verify that it is suitable to support the intended structures.”

Zaman said the pandemic created a cash-flow crunch for AES as well as a need for qualified staff members within the niche field.

“We were very thankful to have PPP and SBA assistance to continue our operations,” he said. “We are now challenged

with finding qualified staff to expand our business.”

He said the recent growth in new construction has created a high demand for experienced engineering staff in the geotechnical engineering, construction testing and inspection fields.

“We are reaching out to local universities and attending their career fairs to attract talents in the civil engineering and construction majors,” Zaman said.

Zaman said, since launching in 2018, he has found that two words are very important: patience and perseverance.

“Starting and running a business requires a lot of hard work, long

hours, dedication, focus and good team members,” he said. “We all face ‘bumps’ along the way, but you must not ‘give up’ and ride the waves with patience and perseverance.”

Family-Owned Business of the Year Konrady Plastics was busy in 2020 with the creation of personal protective equipment, including sneeze barriers, like those at gas stations or grocery stores. The family component of the manufacturer of machined plastic parts includes owner Bernie Konrady as well as son Paul, president and COO, and daughter Leah, CEO.

“While some of the general machine parts business was lighter in 2020, we

are seeing a pent-up demand for that this year, and we did a lot of sales for PPE — there was a huge pickup for that kind of work,” Paul said.

“Our challenges are very similar to everybody else’s,” Leah said. “We need a skilled labor force.”

She said finding workers with the proper skill set is more challenging today than before the crisis.

“Referrals from inside have really worked well,” she said. “We try to look for the silver linings in unfortunate circumstances and adapt as quickly as possible and be responsive to the needs around us.”

Nonessential industries adjust

Young Entrepreneur of the Year Brianna Hairlson, of Bri’s Dance Place, was able to offer dance classes virtually to stay connected to her young dancers.

“We have become creative in our offerings, hosting e-learning in our 3,800-square-foot building to bring in additional revenue,” she said. “We’re hopeful that we will continue to grow and dance through the storms.”

Hairlson has been cultivating a strong workforce in-house through her own training program.

“We believed in building the next generation, so we have created an internship program where we train the next generation of dancers to be great teachers,” she said. “With this model, we haven’t had too many issues finding reliable workers.”

Hairlson describes her staff as a solid group of employees, who are more like family.

The sister team behind E&A Jewelers in Valparaiso also turned to online avenues. There they spotlighted their one-of-a-kind gemstone pieces and custom jewelry designs featuring lots of colors. Erin Lively and Amy Perry are the recipients of the Women-Owned Business of the Year honor.

“We are fortunate that we haven’t had a lot of changes due to COVID,” Perry said. “We have done more online selling, and social media is a great resource for us.”

Lively got her start in the industry 20 years ago, and Perry developed her own passion for jewelry while looking for a job in her field out of college.

“The best advice I would give entrepreneurs based on our experience is do not be afraid to take some risks — you are probably underestimating yourself,” Perry said. “Be prepared to adapt and change.”

She said the original vision someone may have had may not be the path their business follows.

“Above all, keep moving forward,” Perry said.

Maintaining momentum

Husband-and-wife team of lawyers Michael and Shelice Tolbert have found solace in their roots as a Christian law firm.

“Because of our beliefs and how we approach life, we feel like when everything has fallen down around us, God has a shield over us to protect us no matter what,” Michael said.

Tolbert & Tolbert LLC, the Minority-Owned Business of the Year, continued to stay busy helping community members with legal issues and serving as a mediator.

“We had a moratorium on jury trials, and we are a trial law firm,” Michael said.

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E-DAY AWARDS



Husband-and-wife team of lawyers
Michael and Shelice Tolbert earned the
E-Day Minority-Owned Business of the Year.



Paul, Bernie and Leah Konrady (from left) earned E-Day's Family-Owned Business of the
Year, with Konrady Plastics' efforts in 2020 creating personal protective equipment.

Photos provided by Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center

"We found the opportunity to develop other areas of our business: alternative dispute resolution."

Michael Tolbert is certified to serve as a neutral party to settle cases.

The duo has seen challenges in hiring as they look to fill a paralegal position.

"We make an effort to try and hire from our community while at the same time filling the need of our open position," Shelice said. "We continue to have remote and virtual work life and make sure our staff is comfortable in their work environment."

Whether it is the pandemic or any other obstacle, Michael said the couple remains focused on fulfilling their mission.

"We have been able to help more people virtually and offer these remote services that are done more effectively and cost efficiently," he said. "We understand that as long as we have faith, remain positive and keep an open mind, nothing is going to affect our ability to help our clients."

At the La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership, the team under Executive Director Bert Cook has worked to launch creative ways to help its members and community. LEAP unites the chamber of commerce and economic development sides under one umbrella.

Cook, the Small Business Advocate of the Year, said the virtual events and remote work became the go-to options.

"We worked well remotely, and we will continue some of that as it provides quality-of-life improvements," Cook said. "We have had to reimagine how we do things: 'Why we do events in certain ways?'"

Cook said his group's biggest takeaway from the pandemic has been to continue to evaluate what you are doing and how you are doing it.

"It is human nature to get comfortable and think, we have always done it that way — that doesn't work in this world anymore," he said. "You have to project trends and see what is happening in your community."

Bridging two worlds

Advocate for Youth Entrepreneurship honoree Chareice White works with current and future entrepreneurs.

As the founder and chair of the board of ECIER Foundation, she is bringing experiences and education to African American students. The foundation — Educate, Create, Innovate, Entrepreneur, Relationships — provides scholarships for high-schoolers, initial bank account funds for younger students, exposure to entrepreneurs and new connections to other youth.

"What we do is empower them and teach them about entrepreneurship," White said.

As the regional business development officer for the Community Investment Fund of Indiana, she is also helping small business owners affected by the pandemic, connecting them with opportunities to apply for a loan or grant.

"These are businesses that did not receive federal funding," she said. "I get to advocate for the little ones as well as the seasoned ones."

White said connecting students to business owners can really help them learn about being entrepreneurs and innovators.

"What better way to learn than from those who are facing challenges," she said.

As the 2021 Lifetime Achievement honoree, Stewart McMillan has found that starting in one direction doesn't mean that you know your final destination.

McMillan took the helm of Task Force Tips at the age of 28 after the death of his father, Clyde, who had launched the company in 1971.

To McMillan, the innovation and manufacturing of firefighting equipment seemed like the place that he would stay and then pass on to his own son.

“It is human nature to get comfortable and think, we have always done it that way – that doesn’t work in this world anymore.”

— Bert Cook
La Porte Economic
Advancement Partnership



“Starting and running a business requires a lot of hard work, long hours, dedication, focus and good team members. We all face ‘bumps’ along the way, but you must not ‘give up.’”

— Akhtar Zaman
Advanced Engineering Services Inc.



“We put our expectations on our children to take over the family business,” McMillan said. “When I spoke to my son and he said that this is my book to write, I had the realization that business is a legacy to support our kids doing what they want to do, not what you want to do and that really freed me up.”

McMillan said he essentially retired from one business and started a new one.

Today, McMillan holds the title of chairman emeritus of TFT and chief of the MAAC Foundation, named in honor of his father. The Multi Agency Academic Cooperative is a training facility that connects first responders and allows them to work through real-life emergency scenarios.

“It supports the first responders in our community,” he said. “First responders have had to continue on despite COVID,” he said.

Providing assistance to first responders and helping them understand the value of their contribution has been more significant than he could have ever imagined, McMillan said.

McMillan said being an entrepreneur needs to involve insight and integrity.

“You really have to take the time to look at what is changing and what will affect my business,” he said. “You have to adapt in advance and understand that risk is involved in everything.”

He said business owners must mitigate that risk, while continuing to live their lives.

“If you drill it down, integrity means the willingness to admit you are wrong,” McMillan said. “I have had my direction changed over and over and over by people (who) showed me where I was wrong and how I could take a new path.” ■



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INSPIRED TO OVERCOME

Andrew Cleland, vice president of operations and head of product design at HD Industrial in Griffith, earned a Society of Innovators award for his Opti-Air UV designs.

FROM BEHIND THE SCENES, REGION EXPERTS FIND BETTER SOLUTIONS TO ADVANCING MANY INDUSTRIES



DOUG ROSS

The 2021 honorees for the Society of Innovators at Purdue Northwest have created some impressive innovations.

Together, their ideas have improved lives, protected market share, killed germs and allowed virtual hands-on learning.

Their achievements were celebrated at an induction luncheon in November. The annual gathering brings together business and community leaders from across the Region to celebrate the spirit of creativity and ingenuity of innovative individuals and teams across all industries and backgrounds.

Here the five inductees share their stories of perseverance and success:

Level Up

United Way of Northwest Indiana predecessor Lake Area United Way built the infrastructure for true collective impact and serves as the backbone organization for helping low-income working families. ALICE is the acronym for asset-limited, income-constrained, employed.

In Lake County, that's 29% of families. In Porter County, it's 27%.

Andrea Proulx Buinicki, vice president for workforce initiatives at the Center of Workforce Innovations, was with United Way, helping guide the Level Up program in Lake County at its inception. She's still involved but in a different role.

Jessica Callard, who began with United Way in August 2020, became team manager for the program in February.

With the merger of Lake Area United Way and United Way of Porter County into United Way of Northwest Indiana, the Level Up program will expand into Porter County, Callard said.

"So many people who work in one county live in another," she said. "I think (the merger) will just deepen our ability to help them thrive."

Level Up is the culmination of numerous listening sessions and community impact groups. One work group

suggested a pilot to help ALICE families, who don't qualify for a lot of federal assistance, Proulx Buinicki said.

The goal is to provide better-paying jobs. Getting there might require skill development, training or certification, but the person can't take off work to do it.

The family also might need quality, affordable child care for work or school or training, she said.

"We work with these families in order to help them set goals for employment, find appropriate training, find appropriate funding for that training, to access child care and to access services in the community that are available to them that they did not know about," Proulx Buinicki said.

It's a rewarding experience for the United Way team as well as for the clients they serve, Callard said.

"Every day is really inspiring," Callard said. "Their determination and grit to achieve their goals — it's something every day."

Proulx Buinicki said, in the Region, many people are working hard but are one emergency away from disaster.

Family navigators Talisa Rogers-Hall and Grace Morin also are named in the Society of Innovators team award.

"They are accountability partners, they are researchers, and they are cheerleaders," Proulx Buinicki said.

"They are proactively engaged with every single client."

Callard said Level Up is a team effort. "Everybody has a gift to share," she said.

The original goal was to help 10 families access better-paying jobs and support them through the process. The initial thought was that this would be a sequential process — get a job, then get financial management skills.

The team soon realized these two processes needed to happen together.

ALICE families struggle with budgeting, credit and debt. "They needed to have some resources, some education and some coaching," Proulx Buinicki said.

MORE INDUCTEES

"(Team members) are accountability partners, they are researchers, and they are cheerleaders. They are proactively engaged with every single client."

— Andrea Proulx Buinicki
Center of Workforce Innovations



"(The DexSpan system is) like an erector set how it fits together. It goes in real fast, and it's also lightweight."

— Roger Winter
Wintergreen Construction Co.



"(Students) were thrilled (to get the Bishop Boxes). We had two weeks of activity in the box."

— McKenya Dilworth
Morning Bishop Theatre Playhouse



Funded through grants, financial wellness navigators at organizations that already specialized in those skills were enlisted.

"So many of our clients, their goal is to own a home," Proulx Buinicki said. Several have bought a new home since 2019.

SOCIETY OF INNOVATORS

They had to get their credit in order, make difficult choices about savings and adjust spending accordingly, she said.

New steel

Corporate average fuel economy standards are pushing carmakers into finding different ways to improve gas mileage, so ArcelorMittal stepped up to the challenge. They came up with a way to produce a new type of steel that would improve fuel economy by reducing a vehicle's weight.

Automakers tried aluminum and other exotic metals, but they're not always cost competitive.

"Steel is easily recyclable," said David Price, group manager of automotive product development at ArcelorMittal's global R&D site in East Chicago. "It's the most recyclable material on the planet, but if we make it stronger, we can use less material."

The steel needed to be thinner but still strong.

"Typically, it becomes less formable," so tight corners and tight bends are difficult, Price said. The steels that were available then would crack or break more easily.

Developing a new steel is tricky.

"It's kind of like making bread, and you don't know how much ingredients you need and how long to cook it," Price

said. You might change the ingredients or the temperatures.

Price estimated it took 50 different experiments over 10 months to develop the new blend, working with the chemistry to get the atoms to align properly.

"It stretches a lot more, and you can bend it a lot easier," Price said. "It's called whole expansion, and if you punch a hole in a flat piece of steel, and you bend it into shape, what you don't want is that it starts to crack around that hole."

Price said it helps not only with parts that must be bent, but it helps in the die when you stretch a part because you don't want dies to crack when you stamp it.

"As we got into it, and we had invented previous grades of steel that work," Price said. The steelmaker then took the product to automakers.

The zinc coating for rust protection, combined with welds, made it very brittle. ArcelorMittal researchers had to figure out what was causing the problem and redesign the steel to combat that issue.

Price's team redesigned the steel, changing the ratio of the different alloy agents.

"We're the only ones in North America that make this material," he said. "We're the only ones, in the ArcelorMittal

kingdom that spreads across the globe, that can make this material, and there's nothing equivalent at this time."

Designing the new steel wasn't the end of it.

"We redesigned the chemistry of the steel, which also meant that we had to revamp our lines," Price said. His team worked with an ArcelorMittal plant in Calvert, Alabama, a tiny town with just 609 residents, according to the 2020 Census.

"We spent a small fortune trying to get the line capable," Price said. "We had the design ready about four years ago."

He said the company had to wait until all the improvements were made.

"It took a couple years fixing things on the line to make it all work," he said.

"Now we're qualified and sole supplier for Ford and Chrysler," Price said, for the 2021 Bronco and 2021 Jeep Cherokee.

Air filtration

Tyson Foods gave Andrew Cleland a tight deadline for his award-winning innovation.

It was April 2020, and COVID-19 was devastating the meatpacking industry.

"They were losing people left and right," Cleland said.

They were losing so many people that they would have had to charge customers almost double to add a second shift, sanitizing all surfaces between shifts.

Cleland is vice president of operations and head of product design at HD Industrial in Griffith. HD Industrial operates a custom fabrication shop with everything run by union sheet metal workers. Products include dust collection, air movement and a variety of other uses, from petrochemical plants to steel mills to various other clients.

Tyson reached out to Cleland and asked if he could develop something to help get rid of any kind of bacteria that is on all the surfaces of the building. The company needed the specialized equipment in seven days.

"They wrote me a purchase order I couldn't refuse to come up with a seven-day prototype," Cleland said.

Cleland created his first version, which had germicidal UV bulbs built into it.

"You can actually revolve the air in a given space," he explained.



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Petri dish tests showed Cleland was on the right track.

"They went through the entire unit," he said, testing both before and after his air filtration unit was installed.

"They basically couldn't believe what they were seeing," he said. A meat-packing plant has blood spots, of course, which can hold a lot of bacteria. Cleland's unit ran for 12 hours, and the bacteria count went from 1,400 parts per million to 100 PPM.

"They asked me if I could come up with a better streamlined unit," he said. His company since has produced almost 1,000 units shipped all over the U.S.

"We have taken it, and we have gone to doctors' offices, schools, hospitals" and more, he said.

The units are independent of HVAC systems for a reason. Furnaces and air conditioners cycle on and off. Cleland's Opti-Air UV designs are always on to continuously filter the air.

A third-party testing company validated his product. It uses prefilters, UV bulbs and a final set of filters.



Photo by Doug Ross

David Price, group manager of automotive product development at ArcelorMittal's global R&D site in East Chicago, helped develop a new formula for lightweight steel.

The company took the prefilters out, and they had trapped SARS, bacteria, mold and influenza.

The UV bulbs killed everything, he said, because the final filter didn't find anything.

"It's proven technology that we can move it through," Cleland said. He's developed a third prototype and is working on a fourth.

The third is a bigger industrial unit, handling 10,000 to 15,000 cubic feet



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SOCIETY OF INNOVATORS

per minute, which is a high volume of air. Generation four is a small cylindrical unit that could sit in a little area in a house.

A unit could be rolled into a room of a quarantined person with COVID-19.

"When the human takes the filter completely out of there, there's no effect on them removing the filters with a pair of latex gloves, taking out the filter and dumping them into the trash can," Cleland said.

Cleland emphasized the impact of his invention on improving lives.

One story he tells is about an employee with a minor heart problem who went to a workout room for therapy.

Exercising with a mask on isn't the most fun thing to do, Cleland said. He created a unit that would circulate UV-treated air and help with surface contacts.

"It purifies, sanitizes the air in a gym," Cleland said.

The units being produced now range from \$3,600 to \$25,000. Units for home use aren't in production yet.

Aluminum framing system

Roger Winter spent 37 years designing high- and midrise buildings in Chicago and other cities, working with the structure that holds the glass in place on the sides of buildings.

Among his designs was the Great Ape House at Lincoln Park Zoo, which had to be strong enough to keep silverback gorillas from going through it.

"I was never one to do all this cookie-cutter-shape stuff" with glass buildings, he said. Glass buildings, of course, have a lot of glass, but they also come with a lot of framing for support and to hold it all in place.

As president of Wintergreen Construction Co. in Crown Point, Winter is focusing on aluminum framework.

With the catastrophic collapse of wooden decks from rotted materials and other flaws, Winter developed DexSpan, an aluminum framing system that revolutionizes deck and dock structures. Unlike treated lumber, the aluminum won't rot or twist or warp, he said. "We stay flat forever."

Aluminum can be shaped and molded easily, too, for originality in designs.

"We design the dies kind of like Play-Doh molds," Winter said, to extrude the aluminum.

Aluminum is about 40% lighter than wood and can span farther, too. Steel is strong, but when you cut or drill through steel, you're supposed to paint it before using a screw to prevent corrosion, which isn't necessary with aluminum, he added.

"I just started putting paper to pencil about six or seven years ago" and developed the DexSpan system, Winter said.

The DexSpan system was first used for residential decks but now is being used for amenity decks on commercial rooftops and for boat docks as well.

The amenity decks are in several downtown Chicago locations. They also are popular on the east and west coasts.

Winter included integrated handrail systems in the design. The fasteners are all concealed.



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"It's like an erector set how it fits together," Winter said. "It goes in real fast, and it's also lightweight."

The first deck was 51 feet by 16 feet. Once the crew was trained, it was installed in under four hours with just a screw gun.

A wooden deck can take days to build. "We've made many, many improvements since then," Winter said. His team created an installation video to make DexSpan products easier to install.

Bishop Boxes

McKenya Dilworth's innovation was kick-started by the pandemic. Her question: How can children do required art projects at home for virtual learning if they don't have the necessary supplies?

"A lot of young people said, 'Well, we didn't have this. We didn't have that,'" Dilworth, said. When lack of access to supplies deters learning, that's a big problem.

"I love getting packages as an adult, and as a child, I loved getting mail

— anything in the mail," she said. That helped inspire Bishop Boxes, which contain materials necessary to complete lessons for a week or two.

Mailing the packages is expensive, though, and food distribution to students didn't stop during the pandemic, so the Bishop Boxes were picked up along with the food.

"They were thrilled," Dilworth said. "We had two weeks of activity in the box."

Dilworth, executive director of the Morning Bishop Theatre Playhouse, named the boxes in honor of her mother, Morning Bishop.

The Bishop Boxes contained everything from paint-by-number kits to old magazines for collages. The old magazines proved popular.

One of the projects students did was to create a vision board.

"Use your imagination to manifest what you want in your life," they were told. The students clipped photos and text from the magazines and added other material, along with "2021," to construction paper.

"Do you want to graduate? Do you want to have a family? Do you want to have a career?" Dilworth ran through a list of potential abstract ideas. She said students enjoyed finding ways to show what they hoped to become.

Among the other projects was creating wind chimes.

"It was beautiful," Dilworth said. "They understood the scientific element behind it."

Students also put together race cars. Some of the students are virtual learners, but pupils attending school in person put tape on the ground and used their cars to study velocity, aerodynamics and other principles.

Bishop Boxes are still being used.

Dilworth said the parental support her students received is inspiring. The parents helped kids' social and emotion dispositions as they stayed engaged with the arts.

"If there was a positive thing that came out of COVID-19, that was kids connecting with their families," she said. ■

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MORE THAN NUMBER

MODERN ACCOUNTING FIRMS HAVE EVOLVED INTO PLACES

LAUREN CAGGIANO

On the surface, accountants are associated with tax preparation, but this role has become so much more. The modern accounting or CPA firm serves as a resource to business owners on several levels.

Local experts say the scope and scale of modern accounting work will continue to evolve, as will the demands of clients.

A consultative approach

Dan Smogor, a CPA with Kruggel, Lawton & Co. LLC, is an industry veteran and has seen firsthand how the profession has become more hands-on. While business owner clients do consult with his firm about matters related to tax planning and cash flow, he said, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

For instance, last year they assisted with preparing materials for the Payroll Protection Program and other CARES Act programs.

"Now we're spending a lot of time with them on employee retention credits," he said. "Some businesses that

were disrupted — or their chain was disrupted — they might be eligible for employee retention credits."

In other words, these types of assistance go outside the realm of the day-to-day accounting work of debits and credits and looking at balance sheets. They also regularly consult on succession planning for businesses.

"Mom and dad want to sell, and son or daughter wants to buy," he said. "We help them determine the proper valuation, and the right way to buy them out."

In other cases, there might be an occasion to advise on a sale of enterprises as well as mergers and acquisitions. In this case, the small business owners need to be informed of the tax implications, how to best structure the sale and other variables.

Smogor says he's working on an account where one they're acquiring and another they're selling.

"But in both instances, the owner that has 100% wants to still be part of the other business ... so, we're looking at how to best set up the transaction," he said.

Looking ahead

In addition to acting in these capacities, Smogor said he plays the role of student sometimes to act in the best interest of the client.

"Certainly, tax laws get more complicated every day," he said. "When I first became an accountant, it was really all about debits and credits and some of the basics, but it just keeps evolving."

And as the tax code evolves, so do the demands of his client base.

"I would say, as our firm (has) grown, the needs for some of these services just keep ramping up," he said. "And it's great to really be part of providing those services as the clients mature or lead into other different businesses."

He said clients are sophisticated enough to really challenge you to go beyond the debits and credits.

That education goes both ways. For instance, sometimes the client needs to be brought up to speed on issues that might affect them operationally or financially.

"It is crucial the client is informed on the concepts of not only income tax but



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WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

“It is crucial the client is informed on the concepts of not only income tax but also ideas on how to plan for retirement, estate planning and business succession.”

— Terry McMahon
McMahon & Associates



“So oftentimes our role in managing relationships at the local office level is to help a client identify the right question first, and then help them answer their question.”

— Chuck Taylor
CliftonLarsonAllen LLP



also ideas on how to plan for retirement, estate planning and business succession — where it is applicable,” said Terry McMahon, CPA with McMahon & Associates in Munster.

The onus is on the professional, however, to articulate the finer points.

“It is important to have good communication skills to clearly help the client to be successful and minimize their tax burdens,” McMahon said.

Speaking of success, Smogor believes small business owners will have more insight in the future when it comes to managing their day-to-day accounting

affairs. In his estimation, the industry will continue to be transformed by trends like technological tools.

“We’re seeing so much more automation of some of the menial tasks, if you will, for more labor-intensive tasks,” he said.

Getting personal

Still, this doesn’t mean that the human element will be eliminated. In fact, in some ways there’s room for a closer working relationship in his estimation.

“The profession will be more consultative,” Smogor said. “And you strive to do

the numbers well, but you have to keep up with the automation.”

He believes accounting firms will have to be more of a consultant in the future.

“I think as heavy compliance continues to disappear, we get more efficient with automation,” Smogor said.

Chuck Taylor, a CPA with CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, can relate. He said, despite his firm’s large size and stature, they’re known for maintaining intimate relationships with their clients.

“While we’re performing our traditional services of audit accounting and tax, it only made sense from an



Photo provided by Kruggel, Lawton & Co. LLC

Dan Smogor, a CPA with Kruggel, Lawton & Co. LLC, has seen firsthand how the profession has become more hands-on.

efficiency and value perspective for us to begin to offer other services," he said. "And as a firm, ours is probably unique compared to others in that we're the eighth largest firm in the country. And, I think, the only national firm with an office in Northwest Indiana footprint in Northwest Indiana."

According to Taylor, they have a team of 7,400 people between all their locations.

"Our model is to bring all of those resources and services to bear to smaller and mid-size type business when they need them," he said. "So oftentimes our role in managing relationships at the local office level is to help a client identify the right question first, and then help them answer their question."

Leveraging expertise

CliftonLarsonAllen's structure also reinforces their approach.

"We work with just about every industry — construction and manufacturing, for example," Taylor said. "Banking is a separate industry; retail is a separate industry ... our model is to focus on specific industries, and in some offices, we may not have all the expertise, but we'll have the relationship and then bring the industry expertise in."

Regardless of the industry, Taylor said there are a few key themes in their work.

"A big part of our practice is exactly an exit planning or transaction planning, private equity, growth," he said.

Taylor said there's a lot of capital in the markets right now.

"There's a lot of interest from private equity and other types of buyers," he said. "And so, our clients are getting solicited by investment bankers, private equity firms, other types of buyers interested in investing or acquiring their businesses."

That means a lot of what they do relates to helping the client determine their ultimate goals and lay out a roadmap to get there.

Taylor said oftentimes it comes down to life decisions when family-run businesses are concerned. For instance, clients must decide whether they wish to continue to manage the business or do they want to keep the business in the family? Or do they want to sell 100% or part of it?

"And so, while we try to quantify the financial implications, we also try to understand that this is a person's life and advise them in a way that keeps these considerations in mind, because it's a very emotional process," he said.

A seller's market

Despite the psychological weight, Taylor said there's been an increased interest in recent months in selling.

"Historically, I always have one or two clients in that process," he said. "Right now, I probably have 10 clients going through it."

Taylor attributes that fact to the stock market's high valuation. The influx of cash from COVID-19 relief bills and stimulus payments for restaurants help the cause, too.

"Most of these restaurants got three rounds of essentially grants, and (owners) are looking for spots to invest," he said. "And so, there is a seller's market in terms of private companies, and the money's getting funneled in one way or another."

He said private equity venture capital firms are looking at smaller and smaller businesses to invest their capital.

Taylor and his team are up to the challenge of assisting in the tax side of such transactions. And if they're presented with a question or concern that's outside their scope of practice, they can act as connectors.

"We may be in a position that we know the client needs it, but we can't offer it either because it's not a service we offer or it's a conflict of interest," he said. For instance, they might refer clients to an attorney or banker to assist with a specific matter.

Seeking answers

Other times, Taylor's firm may be qualified to offer tax advice, but the individual accountant or CPA might lean on colleagues to provide a more exhaustive answer or approach.

"It could be a situation where I have a relationship with a client because I live down here in Northwest Indiana, but in that particular industry, I don't have that much experience," he said. "We have folks in the firm I bring in to do the work."

In this case, Taylor will manage the relationship while benefiting from a collaborative and team approach.

"Everything we do — because we're CPAs — gets a second set of eyes," he said. "Every tax return that goes out has been prepared and looked at by a second person before it goes out. But the idea is that ... once we know the question at hand, we have a whole team of people who have different answers." ■



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CRISIS TAUGHT EMPLOYERS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS TO CARE FOR THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

ELIZABETH DAVIES

For many years, working as a grocery store cashier was a straightforward job — until one day it wasn't.

One day, customers were coming through the line with standard fare: milk, bread, cereal and apples.

Then, they were doubling up on toilet paper. Some came through with carts of it — until no one was buying toilet paper anymore, because there was none to be had.

People were talking about some far-away illness happening in some far-away land. Things like that simply didn't happen here.

Until it did.

Almost overnight, the world shut down. People were told to stay in their

homes, wear face masks to purchase the most basic of essentials and sanitize everything. Soon, it seemed everyone was safe in their homes,

except the most crucial of workers who needed to keep society running: doctors, police officers — and grocery cashiers.

No longer was this a 9-to-5 gig. While the hours might have stayed the same, suddenly the job was coming home with its

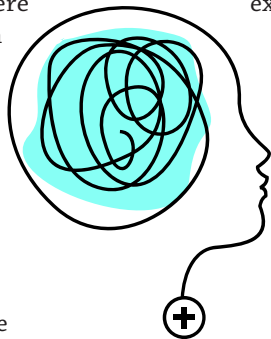
hourly workers, long after they clocked out. They think of the time they scratched their face without sanitizing their hands that day — would it turn into COVID-19? Then there was the man

who refused to wear a mask. What if he was infected?

Those questions, and thousands more, haunted Northwest Indiana's essential workers throughout the early days of the pandemic. Now, almost two years later, the coronavirus remains a daily presence, but guidance on how to manage it continues to change.

For employees returning to the workplace after time away, along with those who never left, the strain of pandemic life is overflowing into the job.

"People are overwhelmed and worn out in the workplace because of lack of staffing and commitment of employees," said Chandra Lyles, manager of psychiatric social services for Community Healthcare System's Behavioral Health Services. "People have experienced losing multiple loved ones in a short,





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As time went on, it seemed to include lack of socialization and isolation as an indicator for treatment as well, she said.

Traditional sources of emotional support haven't always been readily available during this time, either.

"Patients have experienced increasing anxieties related to fear of catching the virus from loved ones, as well as not being able to be around loved ones because of possibly passing the virus," Lyles said. "This increase has been apparent in adults, elderly and younger patients."

Now add in limitations to traditional face-to-face therapy because of transmission concerns, and a large population of overstressed employees are unable to work through their emotions in typical ways.

That's also the reason mental health issues are increasingly emerging in workplaces, said Julie Kissee, administrative director for the Franciscan Health employee assistance program. The added stress of life, combined with increased social isolation, means that many workers spend their time teetering close to a breaking point.

That might manifest into a meltdown over a broken copy machine, or an outburst after a dropped call. Professionals who normally act with logic find themselves resorting to emotional responses.

"We can't control our emotions as well because we have nowhere else to go with them," Kissee said. "The changes we've made for safety measures have had a snowball effect on our spiritual, physical, emotional and mental health."

She said people need to focus on mindfulness and being in the moment and resiliency.

Kissee, whose organization provides mental health support to health care workers at Franciscan but also to businesses in a range of industries, says that all employers have the ability to boost their

staff's mental health — but that it begins at the top.

"Leadership is key in validating that their workforce is valued and being heard," she said.

That means management needs to be visible and engaged with employees. Leaders should look for ways to empathize and be flexible in job sharing or remote work options.

Also, incorporate well-being activities into the workplace with regular breaks and possibly a specific area for employees to go to unwind. On-site respite rooms often have low lighting, meditation literature, gratitude journals or yoga mats, Kissee said.

Employees might need additional training to boost de-escalation or conflict resolution skills, she said.

Caring for workers

Pandemic-induced stress is a top reason companies such as Northwest Indiana's Strack & Van Til have been keeping tabs on the mental pulse of their workers.

"A lot of employees, especially in the beginning, didn't know what to expect in dealing with the public and different mask mandates," said Derek Kinney, chief human resources officer for Highland-based Strack & Van Til. "In the beginning, there was a lot of angst over the unknown."

The 20-store grocery chain responded initially with safety measures aimed at protecting their workers. The number of customers in the store were limited; masks were required; and plexiglass shields were installed around cash registers.

Strack & Van Til followed with an aggressive internal marketing campaign that

promoted the company's employee assistance program. Through that, both employees and family members can access mental health services at no cost.



"People are overwhelmed and worn out in the workplace because of lack of staffing and commitment of employees."

— Chandra Lyles
Community Healthcare
System's Behavioral
Health Services

unexpected period and not been able to properly celebrate their home-goings."

She said there also has been an increase in drug and alcohol use to cope with changes, losses, isolation and restrictions due to the pandemic.

Assisting employees

More than 60% of employees nationwide say that poor mental health has negatively affected their job performance during the pandemic. Likewise, 40% of workers are fighting job burnout.

Those numbers arose from a survey completed by mental health benefits provider Lyra Health and the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions.

"The demand for mental health treatment has increased dramatically since the onset of COVID," Lyles said. "In the beginning, it seemed that more people were seeking treatment due to unexpected losses of loved ones, which cause depression in many."

“The changes we’ve made for safety measures have had a snowball effect on our spiritual, physical, emotional and mental health.”

— Julie Kissee,
Franciscan Health



“What has been most helpful has been the fact that our employees understand that they are not alone in working through this pandemic.”

— Robert Pastoor
University of Saint Francis



Then earlier this year, the grocery chain rolled out a counseling telemedicine service to its 2,800 employees. The new service, free to access, allows workers to talk through their stress with mental health professionals from the comfort of their own homes.

“Our people are on the front lines, and they work very hard,” Kinney said. “They’re dealing with the stress of COVID and the stress of the world. It’s been very popular among our employees.”

Indeed, coronavirus stress is different for essential workers whose professional lives were turned upside down during the pandemic. While neighbors were working from home in pajamas, they were stripping down in the garage and changing clothes before they walked into the house — all to prevent the virus from making it home to their loved ones.

“Doctors, nurses and other frontline health care workers have struggled with

significant mental health challenges during this pandemic,” said Ardyth Cutler, director of employee benefits for Community Healthcare System, which has hospitals and clinics throughout Northwest Indiana. “It is more important now than ever that employees know all the available resources to help support them and that they are easy to access.”

The problem is not unique to this Region. In 2020, Mental Health America surveyed more than 1,000 health care workers and found that 93% were stressed, 86% were anxious, 76% were exhausted and 75% were overwhelmed.

They reported insomnia, headaches, stomachaches and fatigue — particularly among nurses. Almost half of those same nurses said they did not have adequate emotional support.

Knowing these statistics, Community Healthcare System doubled down on

its mental health support programs for employees.

Its employee assistance program developed a 24/7 text-based counseling service specifically for health care providers and is providing peer support groups. It provides articles and webinars specific to COVID and health care workers.

Beyond that, Community Healthcare’s human resources department has asked its employees what topics they would like to see addressed. They now are providing seminars on specifically those issues: stress management, dealing with difficult people, fatigue and compassion burnout.

Last winter, as health care workers battled yet another COVID surge, the health system hosted winter wellness raffles with prize packages to lighten workplace burdens.

Even beyond the walls of essential workplaces, mental burnout is becoming a greater issue for employers nationwide. Almost 30% of Americans say their mental health has gotten worse since the pandemic began, yet only 14% have sought out professional counseling, according to research company Ipsos.

That means it’s truly up to employers to identify warning signs of mental health declines. Today’s managers are being called upon to view their workers as complete people, not just as employees who arrive for a shift to complete a task.

“Employers should check in with staff on a regular basis to gauge how staff is doing and to inquire of any concerns or challenges they may be having,” said Lyles, of Community Healthcare System. “Be available, have an open-door policy and offer as much support as possible so that they know they are not alone.”

Lyles suggests organization’s should allow staff to take personal time if



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needed and provide emotional support as well as keep an open line of communication without judgment.

Simple changes

From an HR perspective, that line of thinking also is good advice. Strack & Van Til's Kinney says that a company doesn't need to have many employees or a comprehensive employee assistance program to make a difference.

He suggests listening to employees — and listening to understand, rather than listening to respond and don't assume you have all the answers. Kinney said employers should thank workers for their efforts and acknowledge the sacrifices they make on behalf of the company.

"Just listening and making simple changes will make a big difference to your employees," he said.

At the University of Saint Francis, there is concern for mental health among not only employees but students as well.

Whether it's incoming freshmen who are treading into a school year unlike any other or outgoing seniors who are job searching during a pandemic, stress and anxiety levels are high all around.

Based in Fort Wayne with a location in Crown Point, USF has shifted its policies along with changing local and national guidance throughout the pandemic. Teachers worked remotely and in-person. Students have been masked and unmasked.

"We have had to be very nimble in our approaches of the past year and half," said Robert Pastoor, chief of staff and vice president for student affairs. "That has helped us operate as normally as possible given the circumstances."

Pastoor says that USF has implemented one thing that goes beyond any safety measure or employee assistance program. It's instilling a sense of community among its staff and students, one that reminds everyone they are going through the ups and downs of this pandemic together.

"What has been most helpful has been the fact that our employees understand that they are not alone in working through this pandemic," Pastoor said. "There is safety and strength in numbers."

60% This percentage of employees nationwide say poor mental health has negatively affected their job performance during the pandemic.

Indeed, no workplace is unique in encountering this new challenge. Mental health problems are rising across all sectors, regardless of positions.

"It's not just health care providers," Franciscan's Kisse said. "It's not just

teachers. It's not just first responders. We are seeing the same types of behavior in every single field of employment.

"That's a testament to how this crisis has impacted the world." ■

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SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION



EXPERTS SAY PLANNING,
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WHEN TOP-LEVEL LEADERS CHANGE

DAN DORFMAN

No matter the size of an organization, its leaders must prepare for transitions and succession as inevitable parts of the business cycle. CEOs eventually decide to move on via retirement or taking on fresh professional challenges.

Experts say proper planning can help avoid the potholes that can arise during a leadership transition.

"Change is really scary for some people, and I'm not sure why, as I have never been afraid of getting a new car," said

to an organization and the value to the employee that way it becomes accepted."

Like clockwork

Randall speaks from recent experience. He was promoted last spring, requiring a move back to the U.S. from China where he had been working.

"Moving from one continent to another creates its own unique challenges," Randall said.

As Randall moved into his new role, there were corresponding personnel moves in the U.S. and Asia to main-

"There wasn't a lot of time to prep," he said. "The good thing was, with me leading the Asia organization, (it) allowed me to be part of the process and developing our plans for the year already, so I did have a step up being an internal person as we had that understanding of what our plan was for that year not only in Asia but globally."

Randall recalled how the transition occurred as markets were recovering after the lowest points of the pandemic. He had to oversee supply chain challenges and develop strategies to get factories going.

"That was happening all during the transition, which to me was critical that we had global alignment on what our priorities were and making sure we were continuously talking as a team to make sure that we were all aligned as we moved forward," Randall said.

He said he took a lot of feedback during his first days in office, in what he saw as a key component in the transition process.

"I did a lot of listening not only to my staff, but at every level, through town halls and Q&A events," he said.

Randall believes the path he took built rapport with people at all levels in the organization and helped him establish personal relationships.



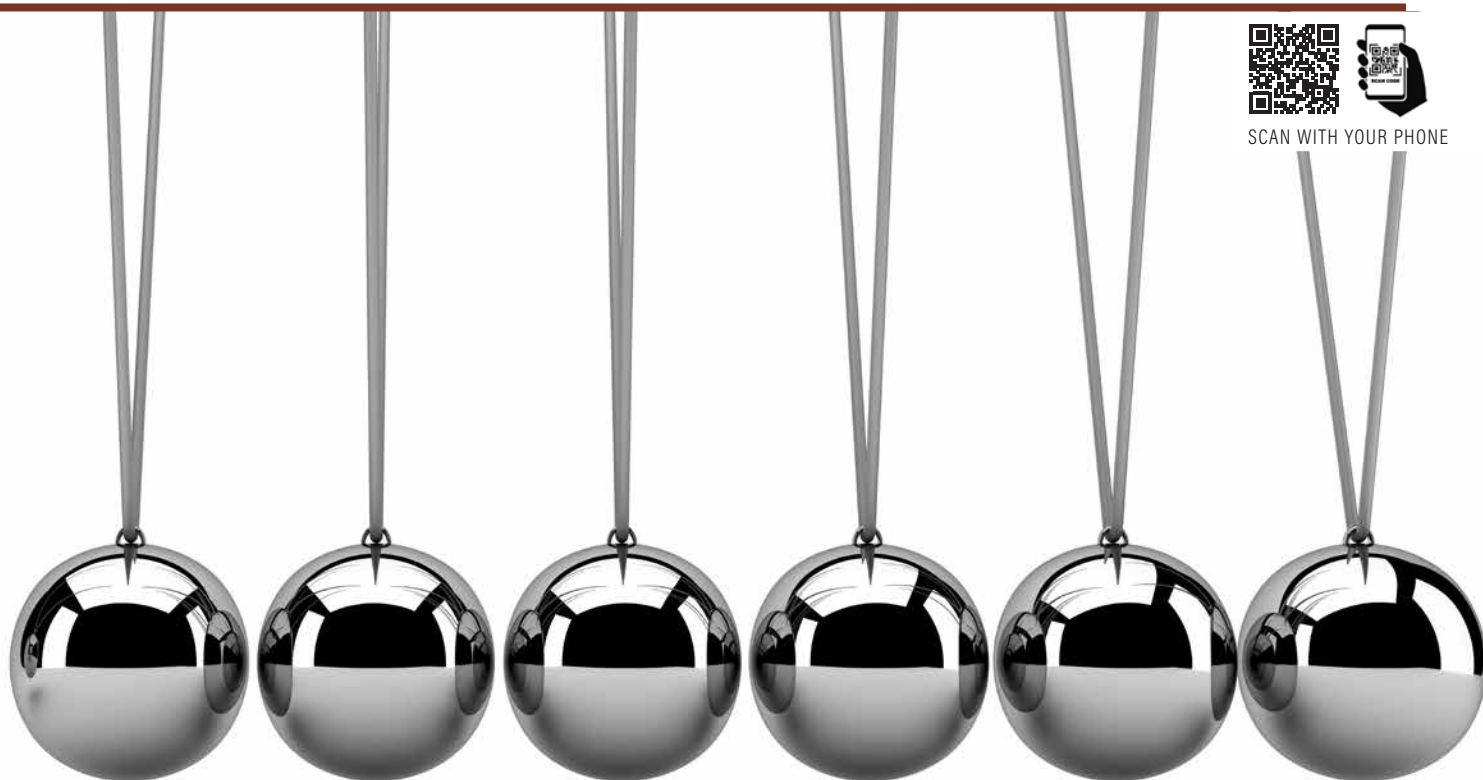
"We try to take a simplistic, fact-based approach in how we communicate change and why it is important with the value to the customer and the value to an organization and the value to the employee that way it becomes accepted."

— John Randall
Sullair

John Randall, president and CEO of Michigan City-based Sullair, a firm with offices in the U.S., China and Australia. "We try to take a simplistic, fact-based approach in how we communicate change and why it is important with the value to the customer and the value

tain communication and continuity. This ensured visions were aligned, and leadership's goals and plans were followed.

Randall said his rapid-paced promotion worked well because of his familiarity with the organization.



"That way I can feel comfortable talking with anybody and within the organization or outside the organization can feel comfortable talking to me," he said.

Proper planning

Randall became the new leader of Sullair, a large corporation with about 1,000 employees, but proper succession planning also is vital for small companies. There are about 24 million family-owned businesses nationwide, according to the Family Business Institute.

George Carberry, a Valparaiso-based attorney with Burke Costanza & Carberry, emphasized the importance of transitions, especially at family-owned organizations. He mainly represents closely held businesses.

"You put your family at a position of disadvantage if you haven't planned for this or thought this through during your lifetime," Carberry said. "In my view, it is part of being a good entrepreneur and being a good business leader to anticipate succession planning and try to implement it."

Carberry said there will be consequences if proper planning is not done for family-owned organizations.

"What happens typically then is the family is scrambling as they try to find another business, perhaps a competitor,

to acquire the assets of the business," he said. "If you are a competitive business, you are going to look at acquiring the business at a fire-sale price."

Carberry said it is the responsibility of the people close to the owners — perhaps an attorney or accountant — to have the plans in place.

"The challenge is to impress upon the owners of the business they really do need to consider succession planning not just for the welfare of their families but for the welfare of the workers they employ and their families," added Carberry, acknowledging some owners are more receptive than others to this conversation.

James Jorgensen, a Valparaiso attorney with Hoepfner

Wagner & Evans, said he tells clients they should have a firm understanding about why the succession planning is occurring at this moment in time and develop a timeline.

Jorgensen, who pointed out the overwhelming number of business clients in Northwest Indiana are small businesses, said he often counsels clients to start the process at the end and then produce a plan to get there.

"Where do we ideally want to wind up, and the question is how do we work toward that? Rather than starting at the front and saying we need to do something without particularly knowing what it is," Jorgensen said.

He said the goal becomes what does the client want to accomplish and the corresponding timeline to achieve those goals.

For family-owned businesses, Jorgensen said there is often a child who is in position to take over and the question becomes the timing of when someone will take over.

However, if there isn't an internal candidate, the question becomes whether the owners are interested in selling the business.

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SUCCESSION PLANNING

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY



“In my view, it is part of being a good entrepreneur and being a good business leader to anticipate succession planning and try to implement it.”

— George Carberry
Burke Costanza
& Carberry



“In succession planning, the sooner you can do it, the better understanding for every entity, you have a different timeline but at least you could start on it.”

— James Jorgensen,
Hoeppner Wagner
& Evans



“Within the firm, we believe it is important to allow younger attorneys to develop relationships with our firm’s clients.”

— Carly Brandenburg
Eichhorn
& Eichhorn

“If they are looking to sell it to a true outside buyer, then succession planning is not so much an issue going forward,” Jorgensen said. “It is an issue of how do you maintain the status quo until you can sell the business.”

Jorgensen said a secondary question emerges if the owners want to sell to someone involved in the business but not necessarily a family member.

“What skills does that person have, what do they need to learn and when will they be ready,” Jorgensen said. “In all likelihood the “mom-and-pop” sellers are going to have to fund a portion of the purchase price, and so they have a very strong need to make sure that, after the sale, the company begins to run smoothly.”

Making plans

At a larger corporation, Jorgensen said a succession plan is likely to be made outside the Region, but the same format is likely to be followed. The decision-makers still will need to make a determination about whether



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someone is in place to take over or if there is someone who can be groomed to take over. If those two options aren't available, an individual will have to be tabbed from outside the company ranks.

No matter the size of the company, Jorgensen sees a universal challenge.

"In succession planning, the sooner you can do it, the better understanding for every entity, you have a different timeline but at least you could start on it," Jorgensen said. "The ones that have struggled are the ones that have waited too long."

One company looking at succession in execution, not in theory, is Hammond-based law firm Eichhorn & Eichhorn.

Carly Brandenburg, an Eichhorn attorney, said the most important thing any company can do is properly train and mentor its employees to reach the next level.

"Within my law firm, we do this by involving our associates in every aspect of our work," she said. "For instance, we typically have an associate accompany

a partner to trial, hearings, depositions and important client meetings."

She said associates learn by observing and helping, which equips them to one day take the lead.

"The same is true with respect to client relationships. Eichhorn has been able to work with many clients over (the) decades," Brandenburg said. "Within the firm, we believe it is important to allow younger attorneys to develop relationships with our firm's clients."

This helps the clients see that they have a next generation of attorneys who will be able to rise to meet their needs and future challenges, she said.

Looking to the future, Carberry said some clients are considering an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) as a way to go forward with succession.

"They say I don't have anyone in the family who wants to take this over, and I have a good group of employees who have been loyal and been here for a while, and I am going work through an ESOP plan, and essentially I am going to

make them the owners of the business," Carberry said.

Carberry said, in the mechanics of an ESOP plan, the third party sells his or her interest, and there is a vehicle set up for employees to become the investors of the business.

"It can be very useful in succession planning," he added.

Carberry explained a potential downside to an ESOP could be if employees aren't as interested as owners thought, or there are family members who might not be willing to sell shares to the ESOP because they want to hang on to them. An ESOP works better when all the shares are put out for sale, he said.

Overall, Jorgensen strongly advocates putting a succession plan in place with careful planning.

"When you wait too long, you may have the inability of the current owners to continue in place," he said. "You may lose an opportunity in the market because you might not have been able to respond to it as quickly as you might have if you have had different leadership." ■

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Anna Weber, supervisor for laboratory services at Community Hospital (right) educates Melody Palmer, medical laboratory scientist, about a portable clinic analyzer that runs a variety of tests, such as blood gases.

Photo provided by Community Hospital

LARRY AVILA

Before Anna Weber graduated from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terra Haute in 2016, she completed an internship at St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart.

What Weber didn't realize at the time was that she was starting her career path in health care.

"I was pursuing a degree in biology but wasn't sure what kind of job I wanted to do," said Weber, 28. "It's why I decided to do an internship at Community Healthcare System, and I guess, from there it's how I got hooked in."

During her internship, Weber shadowed physicians who practiced an assortment of specialties and discovered she really enjoyed working in a medical setting. That's when she learned about Community Healthcare System's Professional Development Program and decided to enroll in medical science lab training.

"I thought it may be something ... I would enjoy because it allowed me to use all (of the) science knowledge I learned in school," Weber said.

As she was completing the 11-month program, Weber worked for Community while not in class and, by June 2017, she landed a full-time job with the health system.

"Medical scientists are in short supply, and Community always is seeking candidates to fill positions," Weber said. "I'm thankful for what the hospital system did for me and how it set a path for my future growth."



Weber was promoted to a managerial role in July 2019 and now serves as a supervisor for laboratory services at Community Hospital. She oversees 15 people and has opportunities to work with students going through the same professional development program she completed.

"I've really enjoyed everything I've done and experienced so far and look forward to what the future holds," Weber said.

Success stories such as Weber's are what Tony Ferracane enjoys hearing. He is vice president of human resources for the Community Foundation of Northwest Indiana Inc., parent company of Community Healthcare System.

Community's professional development program has been in place for about a decade, Ferracane said. Besides laboratory science, it offers programs for clinical assistants, EMS training, pharmacy practice residency, pharmacy technician and phlebotomy training.

Ferracane said other Region-based health systems offer similar professional development programs.

Community decided to offer the training when laboratory training programs began leaving the Region, he said. Providers began recruiting outside Northwest Indiana and internationally to fill support medical positions.

"International recruitment just became too expensive, which is why we decided to develop our school," Ferracane said.

It was natural for Community to develop partnerships with the Region's colleges through the years, including Ivy Tech Community College, Purdue University Northwest, Indiana University Northwest and Valparaiso University.

"A lot of our (education) partners need access to clinical rotations so students can complete their education," Ferracane said.

Beyond health care

Ferracane and others who are in the profession of hiring workers recognize there are more workforce needs outside of health care. He said the state views potential workers as either college ready, career ready or work ready.

"If someone is college ready, (the system) can help someone get the experiences they need, but then there are some people who won't go to college and there are a lot of jobs out there that don't require that level of education," said Ferracane, who has worked with various workforce groups through the years. "There are whole areas in health care (beyond the medical side) where we'd love to get more people interested in like coding and billing."

He said these types of jobs require some training and certification, but

NIPSCO is in line to buy the power from the Dunns Bridge solar farm.

"The solar farm covers 5,500 acres and will have 2.4 million panels," Clarida said. He needs people to install the panels as well as its supporting infrastructure.

Installation began in the fall and will gradually ramp up, requiring more workers. Clarida said, when the project hits its installation peak, it will need as many as 400 people.



Photo provided by Ivy Tech Community College

Staff and faculty at Ivy Tech Community College in Valparaiso tour the campus' new nursing lab.

after a year or two of training, a person can be prepared to work in the nonmedical side of health care.

"These kinds of jobs may be right for high school graduates who aren't college ready, and they're just as important as nurses," Ferracane said.

Green energy boom

Jim Clarida has an immediate need for workers. Clarida is program manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 531, which covers La Porte, Porter, Starke and Jasper counties.

IBEW Local 531 is providing the labor for the massive Dunns Bridge Solar Project in Jasper County, which will be completed in two phases. Phase one will have 900,000 solar panels in 2022. Phase 2 will have 1.5 million solar panels in 2023. When completed, they will generate 700 megawatts of electricity, enough power for 210,000 single-family homes. Merrillville-based

But when this project is completed, more will follow, he said. The Dunns Bridge project is the perfect opportunity to gain entry-level experience and start a path to becoming a journeyman electrician.

"This is not just a one-and-done opportunity for someone," Clarida said. "They're multiple projects throughout Indiana creating jobs."

Clarida said the renewable energy industry can provide a long-term career with planned projects in Indiana and other parts of the country during the next several years.

"Someone can get into renewables through (Dunns Bridge) and work in it for their entire career," he said. "Just in the next five to seven years, there are many opportunities coming online, not just in solar but in wind."

IBEW has partnered with the Valparaiso-based Center of Workforce Innovations to help the organization find entry-level workers.



Photo provided by Ivy Tech Community College

The new manufacturing lab at Ivy Tech Community College's Michigan City campus provides equipment to give students hands-on training.

Lisa Daugherty, president and CEO of CWI, understands the growth potential of renewable energy.

She said CWI is working with high schools in the area to find young adults who might be interested in learning skills needed to improve their ability to land good-paying jobs without having a four-year degree.

"We've found more young adults are interested in short-term stackable credentialing so they can earn income now, but then gradually increase their skills and become more qualified for other jobs that may come up," Daugherty said. "In the long run, an individual's earning capacity is higher with a four-year degree, and we absolutely want people heading in that direction, but some (young adults) aren't ready for that, so why not create these short-term opportunities so they can gradually work toward something better."

Clarida said IBEW isn't having trouble finding people but recognizes it isn't immune from the problem other sectors are facing now to fill jobs.

"While we understand some industries may pay better on day one than (IBEW's entry-level jobs) can, we believe what we can offer is a career path with long-term opportunities with really good wages and benefits," Clarida said.

Specialized training

When a worker is involved with IBEW or similar organization, it opens doors to specialized training.

The Construction Advancement Foundation in Portage has worked with

skilled trades on developing members' skill sets, including project management, and safety and estimate training.

Specialized training has keyed on trades professionals who may be further on in their careers, said Kevin Comerford, director of professional development at CAF.

"More of the union trades people coming to this (specialized training) typically already have a handle on their skilled trades," he said. "It's more people who want to continue working but want to transition into a safety (role) for a company."

Comerford said there has been growing interest in getting more entry-level trades professionals' additional education. He has been involved with Purdue University Northwest, which has developed a program to help journeymen complete a bachelor's degree.

The PNW program with the trades shortens the time required to complete a bachelor's degree. Someone can earn a degree through this initiative in about 2.5 years, he said.

"Contractors saw a need for this program because, while they were learning the skills for their trade, they weren't getting the other training they

needed in organizational leadership, site layout and scheduling," Comerford said. "This program supplements their apprentice training and prepares them for the things they will need to do as superintendents."

Enhanced learning tools

Before someone can set a career path, additional education beyond high school is likely necessary, workforce experts say.

Ivy Tech recently opened a nursing simulation lab at its Valparaiso campus and a manufacturing lab at its Michigan City campus.

In the case of the nursing simulation lab, the larger space in Valparaiso enhances the training students receive while they are on campus, said Aco Sikoski, chancellor of Ivy Tech's Valparaiso campus.

Sarah Darrell, a simulation instructor at Ivy Tech in Valparaiso, said the nursing lab provides an environment where students can practice giving medications and other scenarios they may encounter while on the job.

"When you actually can do something, it sticks and you remember it," she said.

Jennifer Furmanek, dean of Ivy Tech's School of Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering and Applied Science, said the manufacturing lab provides more training space.

She said Michigan City-area employers asked Ivy Tech to create more opportunities for training, which led to the development of the manufacturing lab.

Furmanek said La Porte County is home to numerous air compressor manufacturers.

"They reached out to us, explaining some of the available employment pool

was missing some of the educational background," she said. "So, they asked us to create a space that provided a better atmosphere for training." ■



"There are whole areas in health care (beyond the medical side) where we'd love to get more people interested in like coding and billing."

— Tony Ferracane
Community Foundation
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New leader says about time



Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians elects first woman as tribal chair

PHILIP POTEMPA

Rebecca Richards is proud of both her family heritage and her new groundbreaking leadership role: tribal chair of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians.

Elected in August, Richards is the first woman to serve as chair since the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians received federal restoration in 1994.

“Our tribe has gone through so much in the 26 years since being restored federal

but it was time for a woman to lead our nation and my opportunity to work for my people,” Richards said.

Richards is the daughter of Bonnie and Tom Drake. Her mother is a tribal citizen, as are both her grandparents Luella and Morris Lewis.

Richards grew up in Hartford, Michigan, and later graduated from Western Michigan University. She moved to Hawaii and worked for GEICO insurance after college, but she came

our businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic but also ensure we meet the needs of our nearly 6,000 Pokagon citizens,” he said. “Through her leadership, we will continue to be a good neighbor to the communities in which our citizens reside and maintain strong government-to-government relationships at the local, state and federal levels.”

As chair of the 11-member tribal council, which is elected to staggered, three-year terms to govern the Pokagon Band, within the tribal council, other executive officers serving include vice chair, secretary and treasurer.

“Our tribe is a sovereign nation residing in Michigan as well as the only federally recognized tribe in Indiana,” Richards said. “We generate the funding for the services we provide our citizens, everything from tribal police and housing support to medical services, from our successful business operations such as Four Winds.”

Richards’ husband of 14 years, Sam Richards, a retired police officer, and the couple’s daughter Myah, 13, were both involved and supportive during campaigning for the tribal council earlier this year before Richards election.

“I consulted with my family, and we all knew what a big job this is,” Richards said. “Using my own family, including my grandmother, as one of my role models, we all believed it was time for a new chapter, and this was the opportunity to bring leadership from a fresh perspective.”

Richards said she is proud of how the Four Winds properties are more than a brand. They also incorporate the importance of traditions and customs based on tribal heritage, which is even apparent in the architectural design at each of the gaming destinations.

Her goals during her tenure are to continue to lead and guide during the challenges of the pandemic while overseeing the levels of government services for her citizens, including housing, social services and education. ■



Rebecca Richards is the new tribal chair of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians.

Photo by Philip Potempa

recognition,” Richards said. “We have had many accomplishments with a lot to be grateful for, but I felt it was time for a change in leadership at tribal council.”

She said she made a “pledge of honesty, integrity and transparency while keeping all citizens’ interests in mind.”

While calling on her 25 years of experience and knowledge working for the band, Richards also serves as the CEO for all four of the tribe-operated Four Winds Casino gaming properties in New Buffalo, Hartford and Dowagiac in Michigan, and the South Bend sister property.

“Women have always supported our leaders, or been in supporting positions,

back when the tribe was restored federal recognition in 1994.

In 1995, she started working as a grant writer for the tribe.

Before her election, Richards served as assistant government manager for the band, only leaving for a short stint to work as a grant manager at the Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan.

John Warren, the previous chair for the band, says Richards is prepared for her new role.

“Having served our tribal nation for more than 25 years, Chairwoman Richards has the knowledge and leadership skills to not only lead our tribal government and guide

His side job? Laughter

Hobart chamber director wants companies to succeed and to put the fun back in business

MICHAEL PUENTE

When Tom Byelick took over as executive director of the Hobart Chamber of Commerce last May, he planned to put his experience in corporate America and small business consulting to good use.

Byelick has a knack for public relations and bringing people together, something that serves him well at the chamber. But he wanted to do more than just having social gatherings where people mix and mingle.

"Typically, chambers of commerce are meeting places for businesses, and they basically turned into more social gatherings," Byelick said.

His mission is to take it back to the original intention of chambers: to help businesses and to increase revenue.

"I think there's an opportunity for entrepreneurs and small businesses in particular," Byelick said.

Of course, business meetings and networking events can be on the stuffy side. But Byelick has an antidote for that: comedy.

Since 2014, Byelick and his business partner and soulmate Michele Gonzalez Piskol, an education consultant, have produced Tomfoolery Fun Club. It puts on PG-rated comedy shows throughout Northwest Indiana.

The idea sprung early into Byelick's and Piskol's relationship when the two just wanted something fun to do without having to shell out money for gas, parking, dinner and a show in Chicago.

"There was just a total dearth of casual entertainment options," Byelick said. "You could go see a play at a performing arts center, or you can go to Chicago anytime, but locally on a Saturday night, you might go see a band at a bar."

Byelick recalled telling Piskol how he always wanted to do a comedy show.

"It just brings people together to have fun," he said. "Michele encouraged me

to put on a show ... so, on the back of a cocktail napkin, we sketched out what we wanted to do."

Byelick and Piskol hosted their first show at Rodney's Sports Bar inside Langel's Pizza in Highland.

"We envisioned this variety show with a few comedians and a live band," Byelick said. "Neither one of us had any experience in entertainment."



Photo provided by Tom Byelick

Since 2014, Tom Byelick and his business partner and soulmate Michele Gonzalez Piskol, an education consultant, have produced Tomfoolery Fun Club.

He ran meetings in corporate America, and Piskol ran a classroom for many years.

"We just threw caution to the wind," Byelick said. "We did one show, and people really enjoyed it."

The couple have done more than 100 the past eight years.

"And it has just turned into a true joy," Byelick said. "It's one of those jobs that feeds your soul."

For Byelick, hearing folks come out for a night of good, clean fun is worth all the effort.

"When I hear people roaring with laughter, I just look at Michele and say, 'Are you hearing this?' Just to see them escape their woes for a couple of hours, it's a great feeling of satisfaction," Byelick said.

Piskol sees her partner Byelick as a sort of a superhero with an alter ego who can be serious when he needs to be and not-so-serious when the time is right.

"He's kind of like Superman, 'right?'," she said. "You can have the day job and then you can be doing something that makes your eyes sparkle with excitement."

She said Byelick is adding to the variety of life.

Byelick said he tries to keep his Tomfoolery activities separate and away from his role as director of the Hobart chamber.

John Yelkich, president of the Hobart chamber board, says so far, there's been no issues with Byelick in his after-hours comedy activities.

"As executive director, he's brought a fresh view and a lot of new ideas," Yelkich said. "He's looking to do some different things and explore different ideas and different viewpoints."

Yelkich said Byelick thinks out of the box.

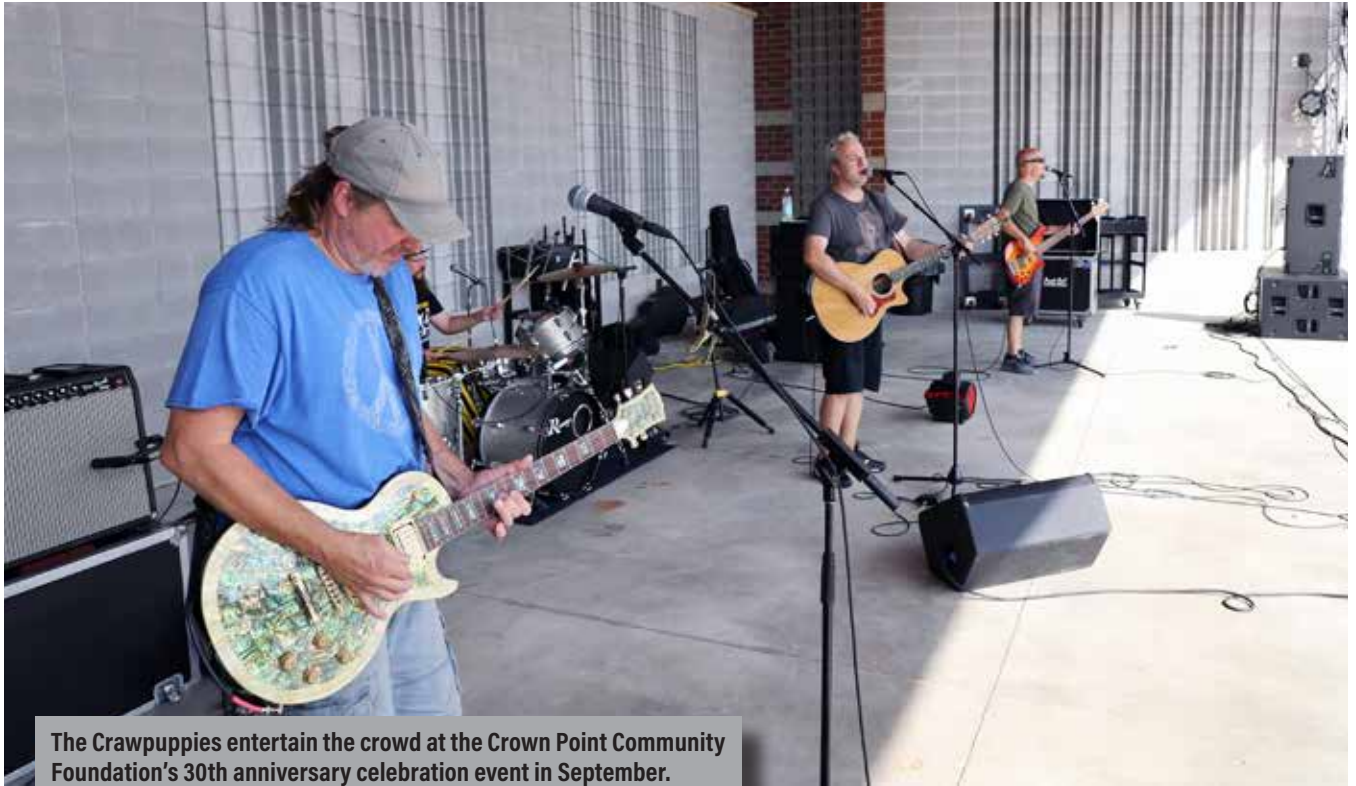
"He's not confined to the old chamber-of-commerce model," Yelkich said. ■



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Three decades of giving

Crown Point Community Foundation directs resources to improve southern Lake County



The Crawluppies entertain the crowd at the Crown Point Community Foundation's 30th anniversary celebration event in September.

Photo provided by the Crown Point Community Foundation

JESSICA TOBACMAN

If a community organization in southern Lake County needed funding for a special project, it's very likely the Crown Point Community Foundation would be on a short list of resources to contact.

For the past 30 years, the foundation has issued grants for an assortment of initiatives to help the community. Representatives for the organization say there is no shortage of needs.

"Our mission is to enhance the quality of life for residents within the organization's service area to keep communities vibrant," said Mary Nielsen, president of the foundation. It serves Crown Point, Winfield, Lowell

and Cedar Lake and is in the square in downtown Crown Point at 115 S. Court St.

The foundation commemorated three decades of operation with a celebration in late September, which drew more than 500 people to Bulldog Park in Crown Point.

An event highlight was a charity drawing for six attendees to each award a \$5,000 grant to their organization of choice. The recipients included St. Matthias Church for a community outreach program; Indiana Elite

FC for soccer education; the St. Jude House for family violence prevention; the Community Help Network for their Buddy Bags Program, which feeds

hungry students outside of school; the Boys & Girls Club of Cedar Lake; and the Pets for Vets program.

"(The foundation) gave \$30,000 for 30 years," said Chrisanne Christ, the foundation's board chair and senior partner in human relations at Centier Bank.

CPCF provides grants to more than 100 area nonprofits for projects or programs for community residents, including housing and shelter, food banks and pantries, and youth development in three cycles each year. Applications are due to the organization Feb. 1, June 1 and Sept. 1. A grant committee reviews applications, and those meeting funding guidelines are presented to the foundation's 19-member board for approval.

The foundation has three functions: working with donors to establish permanently endowed funds; providing

CROWN POINT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

► For the past 30 years, the foundation has issued grants for an assortment of initiatives to help the communities of Crown Point, Winfield, Lowell and Cedar Lake.

grants for community programs, projects and needs; and acting as a community leader and convener, bringing others together.

The Boys & Girls Club in Cedar Lake is among the many organizations assisted by the foundation. The Cedar Lake club received funds to update its kitchen with new refrigerators and purchase food.

The foundation also has funded placement of signage along trails to notify people of community locations, including downtown areas and other points of interest.

The foundation also awards scholarships to high school seniors and adults. The CPCF board votes on them, then matches grantees with the scholarships, Christ said.

"Adult learners have more responsibilities," Christ said. "Life can be hard."

The foundation wants money to go back to the organizations it supports rather than pay for administrative costs, including salaries. Christ said only 1% of the foundation's money goes toward

operating costs, and the rest is reinvested into the community.

Nielsen said the foundation has supported numerous initiatives that have benefited the community.

"I'm most proud of working with so many generous residents in the community that support our mission," she said. "There are a lot of people who love living here and giving back to the community."

According to the Indiana Philanthropy Alliance, there are 94 nonprofit community foundations in Indiana, with one in every county of the state. They are all charity groups that are tax exempt and publicly supported.

The pandemic has led to changes in how people interact. The foundation has learned to adapt.

Nielsen said the past two years have been very different.

The crisis has pushed many community groups to their limits just to ensure those with the greatest needs had enough to eat and access to care.

"CPCF has created a collaboration with other community members," Nielsen said. The foundation has provided groups and members of the community with personal protective equipment and dealt with food insecurity.

"COVID changed the whole environment we're living in and funding," Nielsen said. "CPCF has helped to support critical needs related to COVID."

She encourages residents to get involved and make the community a better place for everyone.

"We're all in it together," Nielsen said. "We want to see good things happen where we live." ■



"We're all in it together. We want to see good things happen where we live." Mary Nielsen, president of the Crown Point Community Foundation.

— Mary Nielsen
Crown Point
Community Foundation



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Shrinking workforce here to stay



Time is now for all industries to rethink hiring strategies

TROY LINKER

The shrinking workforce is a looming issue companies face in today's economy. Still, it is a mistake to think it was caused by the pandemic. Or worse yet, that it will be fixed once the crisis subsides.

Companies are having difficulty finding qualified workers to fill their available jobs. Unfortunately, many employers have grown accustomed to or ignored this difficulty for too long, and they're now ill-equipped to address it. The majority of this problem stems from an aging population and other economic shifts. However, there are many other contributing factors specific to each company's situation.



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

People shortages predate pandemic

"The U.S. labor shortage is reaching a critical point," reads a shocking but not surprising headline from a recent CNBC article. It confirms what we all know: the reaction or, as some would say, overreaction to the pandemic has damaged the workforce.

But this headline wasn't from this week, this month or even this year. It was from a report published July 5, 2018, six months before COVID-19, social distancing, masking and government stimulus became topics of conversation in almost every household in the country.

Yes, the pandemic has accelerated the existing trend, making this problem

more visible, but jobs have grown faster than the workforce for many years.

More jobs than workers

Jobs were growing faster than the population in 2018, and it is true today. The Bureau of Labor Statistics first reported that job openings eclipsed the available labor pool in 2018. April 2018 closed with 6.7 million job openings. May 2018 ended with just over 6 million people the bureau classifies as unemployed, continuing a growing trend of jobs growing faster than the labor pool.

According to the government, employment projections for 2030 show the number of jobs is growing faster than the population. Between 2020 and 2030, the bureau projects 11.9 million new jobs will be added to the economy, but only 8.9 million new workers will enter the workforce over the same period. This growing gap between jobs and available workers will continue to exert upward pressure on wages and make hiring difficult for the foreseeable future.

Lower workforce participation

A common misconception is that younger people are not joining the workforce at the same level as past generations. Workforce participation rates for people between 24 and 55 years old have been consistently in the low- to mid-80% range during the past couple of decades. It is projected to be at 81.4% through at least 2030. By comparison, between 1950s and 1970s, the participation rate for this age group was in the mid-60% range. The rate didn't jump to the 80% range until the 1980s and 1990s when the baby boomers and more women entered the workforce.

So, if younger workers are employed at about the same rate, what is driving the workforce participation rate

down? One of the significant factors is the aging population. The workforce participation rate of people age 55+ has risen by almost 7% since 2000. Fewer workers in the 24- to 55-years-old age range lowers the overall workforce participation rate.

According to the BLS, the overall workforce participation rate, which it defines as the percentage of the population 16+ that is working or actively looking for work, is expected to drop by 1.4% from 61.7% in 2020 to 60.4% in 2030.

The shrinking workforce is here to stay, and it's unlikely the trend will turn.

Positions open longer

It's time for employers to take a more proactive approach when it comes to this issue. We should all prepare ourselves for a future where jobs will go unfilled for prolonged periods. It's our collective responsibility as leaders in our organizations to start thinking about turning around company cultures that have traditionally been dismissive of a shrinking workforce.

We need to be smart about our hiring practices and realize that mid-career candidates might be more expensive, but they bring more productivity and flexibility to cover open positions, which helps to justify their higher expense.

The future workforce will have fewer entry-level positions. Instead of just bringing someone on board for a particular role that needs filling, we also will need to consider their ability to take on multiple jobs and cross-train. So, when future workforce shortages happen, we will have trained people who can move around the organization filling in the gaps made by open positions.

The good news is that there is still time to prepare for these changes now before they become more drastic. ■



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