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FEBRUARY / MARCH 2022

Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

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Better care for residents

*Providers overcome pandemic's challenges
with enhanced services, tools for doctors*

*Dean Mazzoni
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GOOD BIT

\$150M In one year, the Lake County Economic Alliance facilitated this much in investment, creating about 1,110 full-time jobs. ► PAGE 22

IN THIS ISSUE

When it comes to the economy, you could say it's difficult to gauge what it will be like six months from now. To keep the economy moving forward, many will have to contribute. That includes Region health care providers who are enhancing services so residents can access the latest innovations. And it counts on the fact that Northwest Indiana is a destination for businesses that want to tap into the metro Chicago market. Even growth brings its challenges. Industries, including trucking, are prospering. The tricky part is finding people to fill demanding jobs like driving. But this obstacle has led to some creative thinking in sectors from banking to professional services also seeking workers. Others have struck out on their own, including entrepreneur Emily Edwards. And there's good news for Indiana's rural farming communities, which are receiving an economic boost through a new state initiative. New leaders also are finding new ground. Sherri Ziller, CEO of the Regional Development Authority, will oversee the next steps of the multi-billion expansion of passenger rail service here. U.S. Rep. Frank Mrvan discusses what the federal infrastructure bill means for the Region. Then there is Grace Beyond Borders NWI Inc., which is speaking up for those without a voice. Enjoy this edition! — Larry Avila, managing editor

PICTURE PERFECT



Photo provided by Dana Leek / Mirage Studio

Franciscan Health's new \$200 million hospital along I-65 and U.S. 231 in Crown Point is on track for a fall 2023 opening. Real estate professionals say developable land facing I-65 remains a Region hot spot. ► PAGE 26

QUOTE TO REMEMBER

“When these guys (truckers) stop, you lose 30 minutes. It just cost you \$15 to pee.”

— Charlie Gamblin, Teamsters Local 142, Merrillville ► PAGE 18

 **READER POLL**

Employers are making every effort to impress and recruit fresh talent. Tell us how you know your tactics are working. Scan this QR code or visit <http://nwib.link/wwwz>.

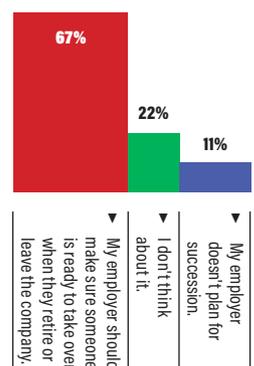


What data do you track to know if your hiring process is effective?

STORY IS ON PAGE 22

LAST ISSUE'S POLL

As an employee, how do you think your company should plan for future leadership? Full results here: <http://nwib.link/jjk8>



What are you most considering in the succession plan for your business?



AROUND THE REGION



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

LARRY AVILA

Accounting

Kruggel Lawton CPAs hired the following personnel:

- In St. Joseph, Michigan: **Paul Erickson**, staff accountant, and **Long Pham**, CPA, senior manager.
- In South Bend: **Laura Borton**, project manager; **Michelle Gantt**, client adviser; **Kate Koval**, CPA, nonprofit management consultant; **Kyleigh Kubik**, staff accountant; **Pamela Kyle**, client accounting and advisory services controller; **Kaylynn Robertson**, business support; **Juliana Romano**, CPA, senior staff accountant.
- In Elkhart: **Erin Graber**, staff accountant; **Stephanie Hershberger**, CPA, CAAS controller; **Brian Ulrich**, CPA, manager.
- In Goshen: **Aaron Lambert**, staff accountant; and **Jamie Lehman**, business support.

Aviation

Jennifer Brock retired in November as project manager at **Sage-Popovich Inc.** in Valparaiso after more than 21 years of service to the company.

Banking

Marcos Nogués was named chief investment officer at **First Merchants Corp.**, parent of **First Merchants Bank**. **Mike Hurst** was named president of regional banking. He will be responsible for First Merchants' markets in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio.

Jennifer Klein was promoted to senior vice president of finance at Goshen-based **Interra Credit Union**. She had served as vice president of finance since 2017.

Merrillville-based **Centier Bank** promoted **Dan Gibson** to director of talent development and named **Debi Gifford** branch manager of the bank's Griffith location.

Business

The Northwest Indiana Business RoundTable named its 2022-2024 executive officers: **Joseph Lampert**, Cleveland-Cliffs — Indiana Harbor, chairman; **Robert Joseph**, ArcelorMittal R&D, vice chairman; **Tim Ross**, Franciscan Health, treasurer; **Dewey Pearman**, Construction Advancement Foundation, secretary; **Jim Jorgensen**, Hoepfner Wagner & Evans LLP, legal counsel; and **Andrea Pearman**, Diversified Marketing Strategies Inc., executive director.

Economic development

The **Indiana Economic Development Corp.** named **Laurel Judkins** executive vice president of external engagement; **Ann Lathrop**, executive vice president of global investments; and promoted **Dave Roberts** to executive vice president of entrepreneurship and innovation. Roberts had served as chief innovation officer since 2016.

Clarence Hulse, executive director of the **Economic Development Corp. Michigan City, Indiana**, completed the **Advanced Economic Development Leadership Program** and was awarded the master of economic development practitioner certificate.

Education

Valparaiso University named the **Rev. Brian A.F. Beckstrom** assistant vice president for mission, church and ministry. Beckstrom previously served as dean of spiritual life and campus pastor at **Wartburg College** in Waverly, Iowa. **Matthew Becker**, a professor of philosophy, and **Stephanie Wong**, an associate professor of philosophy, will serve as **University Research Professors** for the 2022-2023 academic year, a designation that allows the instructors to continue creative and



BANKING
Marcos Nogués



BANKING
Jennifer Klein



BANKING
Dan Gibson



BANKING
Debi Gifford



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Ann Lathrop

original work through one semester of full-time leave with pay or two consecutive semesters with a half-time schedule, plus a \$4,000 stipend.

Matt Presley was named executive director of career coaching and employer connections for **Ivy Tech Community College** at its South Bend-Elkhart campus.

Susan Scroggins, senior vice president for finance at **Valparaiso University**, was named 2021-2022 board chair for the **National Association of College and University Business Officers**.

Several **Ivy Tech Community College** faculty and staff from Northwest and North Central Indiana campuses were presented with **President's Awards**, the school's highest honor. Faculty honorees from the Region are: **Teresa Hallmen**, program chair medical assisting, Lake County; **Rosario Hiestand**, full-time professor early childhood education, South Bend-Elkhart; and **Mitzi Mary Simerlein**, assistant professor liberal and physical sciences, Valparaiso. Adjunct honorees



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Clarence Hulse

are: **Lee Richard Purcell**, communication/PT academic adviser, Lake County; **Fernando Ramirez III**, environmental design, South Bend-Elkhart; and **Thomas Bancsi**, lead occupational therapist, Valparaiso.

Teresa Lubbers, who has served as commissioner for **Indiana's Commission for Higher Education** since 2009, announced in December that she was stepping down from the post at the end of the 2022 legislative session, which is March 14. She previously served as an Indiana state senator for 17 years, representing District 30.

Finance

Ian Forte was named vice president, wealth adviser, and **Michelle Thurin** was named wealth adviser, estate specialist at **Indiana Trust Wealth Management** in Mishawaka.

Government

Gov. Eric Holcomb appointed **Brian Rockensuess** the new **Indiana Department of Environmental Management** commissioner on Dec. 10.



EDUCATION
Teresa Lubbers



GOVERNMENT
Brian Rockensuess

Rockensuess worked in the department the past eight years, including the last five as the chief of staff. He replaced **Bruno Pigott** who left the post to become deputy assistant administrator in the **Office of Water** for the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**. His last day as IDEM commissioner was Dec. 3.

Sherri Ziller was named president and CEO of the **Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority**. She had served as interim president and CEO between January and October after the departure of **Bill Hanna** who took over as executive director of the **Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation**.

Health care

Franciscan Health announced the following staff appointments: **Dr. Tahir Khokher** and **Julia Ross**, nurse practitioner, Franciscan Physician Network Cardiology Crown Point; **Dr. Thottathil Gopan**, Franciscan Physician Network Munster Medical Center; **Dr. Khalid Najib**, interventional cardiologist,



GOVERNMENT
Bruno Pigott



GOVERNMENT
Sherri Ziller



HEALTH CARE
Tahir Khokher



HEALTH CARE
Julia Ross



HEALTH CARE
Thottathil Gopan

Franciscan Physician Network Heart Center Michigan City, and Legacy Hills Health Center, La Porte; **Dr. Kenneth Ramsey**, Franciscan Physician Network Rensselaer Specialty Clinic.

Albert Ferrabone was named director of quality services at **Methodist Hospitals**. He has 25 years of industry experience and most recently served as chief quality officer at **McDonough District Hospital** in Macomb, Illinois.

Munster-based **Community Healthcare System** hired the following



HEALTH CARE
Khalid Najib

medical staff: **Dr. Malak Awad**, rheumatologist, St. Catherine Hospital and St. Mary Medical Center; **Dr. Navdeep Bhatti**, cardiovascular disease specialist, Community and St. Catherine hospitals; **Anna Lakoma**, surgical oncologist, St. Mary Medical Center and Community Hospital; **Dr. Mark Nootens**, cardiologist, Community Hospital; **Dr. Shalini Patel**, family medicine, Community Hospital; **Dr. Victoria Rarity**, family medicine, Community Hospital and Hoehn Medical Center; **Dr. Edward**



HEALTH CARE
Kenneth Ramsey



HEALTH CARE
Albert Ferrabone

Capoccia, urologist, Community and St. Catherine hospitals and St. Mary Medical Center; **Dr. Kevin Parikh**, urologist, Community and St. Catherine hospitals. **Kim Sgouroudis** was promoted to chief nursing officer and vice president of patient care services at St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart. Sgouroudis has worked for the organization since 1986.

Keith Nichols was named CEO for **Northwest Health-La Porte**. Nichols will provide operational leadership for

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HEALTH CARE
Kim Sgouroudis

the hospital and also will be involved in operations at **Northwest Health-Starke** in Knox. Nichols most recently worked in Prescott, Arizona, where he served as the chief operating officer for **Dignity Health, Yavapai Regional Medical Center**, and was responsible for two acute care hospitals and multiple outpatient care sites.

Law

Jamie Woods, an attorney in private practice in St. Joseph County since



HEALTH CARE
Keith Nichols

2001, was appointed to the **St. Joseph County Superior Court** by **Gov. Eric Holcomb**.

Marketing

Jillian Koeneman was named senior marketing director of South Bend-based **Holladay Properties** and **Holladay Construction Group**.

Nonprofit

The **Ivy Tech Foundation Board of Directors** named **Constance Brown**,



LAW
Jamie Woods

CPA, chair; **Roland Shelton**, executive vice president, chief strategic business partnership officer, Old National Bank, vice chair; **Patrick Ralston**, retired banking executive, treasurer; and **Lauren Salerno**, attorney, secretary.

Courtney Roberts was named senior vice president of development for **Ivy Tech Community College** and president of the **Ivy Tech Foundation**. She previously worked as director, social impact: global health philanthropic partnerships at **Eli Lilly and Co.** in Indianapolis.



MARKETING
Jillian Koeneman

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NONPROFIT
Courtney Roberts

Kim Olesker was named director of museum operations at **The Barker Mansion** in Michigan City.

Jennifer Trowbridge was named president and CEO of the Crown Point-based **Northwest Indiana Community Action**.

The **Dunes Arts Foundation** elected its 2022 board of directors. Board officers include: **Kathleen Dolio Thorson**, founder and president of KDT Designs Inc., president; **Andy Neal**, director of operations for Northern Indiana



NONPROFIT
Jennifer Trowbridge

Education Foundation, vice president; **Richard Sabones**, retired banking executive, treasurer; **Elise Kermani**, sound media artist and filmmaker and artistic director of MiShinnah Productions, secretary/managing director; and **Steve Scott**, artistic director, Dunes Arts Foundation. Members at large include: **Dale Cooper**, community relations manager, La Porte County Convention and Visitors Bureau; **Clarence Hulse**, executive director, Economic Development Corp. Michigan



TECHNOLOGY
Angela Perez

City, Indiana; **Dale Maher**, real estate agent, Coldwell Banker; **Lisa Torgerson**, seasoned fundraiser for arts organizations in Chicago and member of the DAF development committee; and **Laurie Wink**, public relations.

Technology

Angela Perez joined **Pulse Technology** as an accounts receivable/accounts payable specialist and **Veronica Gomez** as corporate recruiter and **Dawn Reints** as senior account executive.



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Dawn Reints



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News

Near North Title Group of Carmel acquired **Heartland Title**, which will continue operating from Merrillville.

Loans provided by the **Regional Development Co.** created 184 new jobs in Indiana and Illinois in 2021. The Valparaiso-based organization, which administers the **U.S. Small Business Administration's 504 Loan Program** in Indiana and the greater Chicago metropolitan area, had 44 loans approved by the SBA, which brought \$22 million in government funding to its service area.

Providence Bank & Trust, which has Northwest Indiana locations, purchased **Leaders Bank** in Oak Brook, Illinois. Providence Bank & Trust opened in 2004 and operates 15 branches. Its Region locations are in Dyer, Schererville and Munster. Leaders Bank was founded in 2000.

The South Bend-based insurance firm **Gibson** is expanding to Phoenix. It hired **Mike Petefish** to lead the Arizona location.

Katie Rose Boutique, a seller of women's designer fashions, opened in Munster.

NiSource Inc. of Merrillville, parent of **NIPSCO**, was named to the **Dow Jones Sustainability North America Index** for the eighth consecutive year.

Speedwagon Capital Partners of Chicago acquired the former steel bar mill at 3300 Dickey Road in East Chicago for an undisclosed amount. The facility was owned by **Cleveland-Cliffs Inc.** and was included as part of its \$1.4 billion purchase of **ArcelorMittal USA LLC** in late 2021.

Methodist Hospitals opened its latest **CareFirst** facility at 1781 W. Morthland Drive in Valparaiso. It is Methodist's fourth CareFirst facility in Northwest Indiana. The other locations are in Crown Point, Merrillville and Schererville.

The Merrillville-based **Lakeshore PBS** series "**Eye on the Arts**" landed a **Chicago/Midwest Emmy Award** in the outstanding achievement for

arts/entertainment category. This is Lakeshore PBS's first Emmy win after receiving four nominations in the category in recent years.

Discount Tire, an Arizona-based national retailer of tires and wheels, purchased **Tire Rack** of South Bend in December. Tire Rack will operate as a wholly owned subsidiary of Discount Tire, maintain its South Bend headquarters, as well as retain its executive team and 950 employees.

The **Purdue University Board of Trustees** approved a doctorate of technology degree to be offered at **Purdue University Northwest**. The other doctorate offered by the college is a doctorate of nursing. PNW expects to welcome the first students into the program beginning with the 2022-2023 academic year. ■

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BETTER CARE FOR RESIDENTS

PROVIDERS OVERCOME PANDEMIC'S CHALLENGES WITH ENHANCED SERVICES, TOOLS FOR DOCTORS

ELIZABETH DAVIES

The COVID-19 pandemic might have strained health care workers, but it didn't stop industry leaders in Northwest Indiana from implementing new service lines, clinic spaces and technology to improve care delivery.

“Our large baby boomer population, combined with the long-term impacts of COVID-19, have created an increased demand for services that will continue for several years.”

— Ashley Dickinson, Northwest Health

Across the Region, health systems spent 2021 moving full speed toward their market growth goals. And they had good reason for doing so: With Illinois residents sliding across the border in droves in search of lower tax rates and less expensive housing,

Northwest Indiana is poised for significant growth.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported more than 2,000 new residents in Northwest Indiana in 2020, and the state projects 10% population growth by 2050. In particular, Porter County has grown almost 7% the past 10 years, ranking it in the top 10 fastest-growing counties in the state.



All that growth, combined with an aging population, sets the stage for abundant opportunities throughout the Region's health care sector, experts say.

“We foresee the need for health care services continuing to increase throughout Northwest Indiana,” said Ashley Dickinson, CEO of Northwest Health. “Our large baby boomer population, combined with the long-term impacts

of COVID-19, have created an increased demand for services that will continue for several years.”

The pandemic's lingering presence presents unique obstacles as well.

“It's challenging right now, especially with COVID,” said Kim Innes, vice president of business development for Methodist Hospitals. “This is a competitive market. We are trying to secure our place in the market for future growth, while also providing testing and managing higher caseloads in the ICU.”

Despite setbacks caused by the crisis, health systems recently have brought an array of new options closer to home for Northwest Indiana consumers.

“The health care environment is growing at a significant rate here in Northwest Indiana,” said Dr. Scott Samlan, CEO at NW Indiana ER & Hospital. “With the announcements of additional facilities being built by an array of systems, previously, the idea of receiving additional expert-level care meant you would need to cross the border into Chicago to get it.”



have urgent care there if his patients need after-hour care,” Innes said. “We have specialists coming out there weekly.”

It makes it a team-based approach, she said.

“We are a small-enough organization that we can do that, and it’s an advantage,” Innes said.

NW Indiana ER & Hospital

A new concept in care arrived in the Northwest Indiana marketplace in 2020 and has grown exponentially as it developed a reputation for shorter wait times.

“Our goal is not to take down any of the established health care systems here in Northwest Indiana, but to augment the excellent care provided by said systems, and take some of the stress off of them during the pandemic and further in the future,” said Samlan of NW Indiana ER & Hospital in Hammond.

Five emergency room doctors formed the hospital to improve emergency services throughout the Region. Their concept is proving to be an effective one, as they remain organizationally nimble.

“If there is a clinical, operational or marketing decision to be made, we can make it swiftly,” Samlan said. “It really

With the growth in the area, that idea is not as absolute as it once was, he said.

Methodist Hospitals

Methodist Hospitals added a fourth CareFirst facility to its lineup in November, this one serving the Valparaiso market.

The 4,000-square-foot facility houses eight employees, including the full-time offices of Dr. Jonathan Ramos, a family practice physician. Also on site is an immediate care clinic and specialty practices that include orthopedics, cardiology, podiatry and neurology.

The Valparaiso location joins those operating in Schererville, Merrillville and Crown Point.

“We were looking to identify a good market,” said Methodist’s Innes. “We had already expanded out west to Schererville, south to Crown Point and east to Merrillville.”

Methodist also drew many patients from the Valparaiso area, so expanding there made sense, she said. The facility concept is designed to improve patient care.

“We’re really trying to bring team-based care to the outpatient setting,”

Innes said. “We are adding services that are patient-centered, like expanded hours and shorter wait times.”

Methodist also is developing a model where the patient is at the center, and truly the decision-maker, for their care.



NW Indiana ER & Hospital keeps laboratory and imaging on site and ready for use by its in-house physicians.

Photo provided by NW Indiana ER & Hospital

That’s precisely why Methodist chose to base a general practitioner in Valparaiso, complemented by specialists who visit weekly.

“Dr. Ramos is really strong with preventative care, but then we also

makes it easier to adapt to health care trends in the Region.”

Primarily, the doctors hoped their facility would serve as a way of decreasing wait times for emergency patients. And the facility appears to be doing just

HEALTH CARE

“We’re really trying to bring team-based care to the outpatient setting. We are adding services that are patient-centered, like expanded hours and shorter wait times.”

— Kim Innes
Methodist Hospitals



that: Despite having only eight ER beds, the average patient still waits less than 15 minutes to see a doctor.

NW Indiana ER & Hospital keeps laboratory and imaging on site and ready for use by its in-house physicians, making it efficient for doctors to diagnose and treat patients quickly.

When the hospital opened in June 2020, it saw about 500 patients during its first month. Now, however, the hospital averages more than 2,200 patients monthly — a 340% increase.

“We’ve seen a tremendous amount of growth since opening,” Samlan said. “This can be attributed to our past and current marketing initiatives, combined with the overall need for prompt concierge-level emergency care in the Region.”

Community Healthcare System

Valparaiso Health Center inside St. Mary Medical Center opened a 20,455-square-foot addition in June, expanding the hospital’s physical therapy, medical oncology and gastroenterology departments.

“We continue to focus on expanding services in the Valparaiso community that are convenient for the growing population in Porter County,” St. Mary Medical Center CEO Janice Ryba said.

Valparaiso Health Center opened in 2013 with a range of services, including obstetrics, family medicine and medical imaging. Community growth, combined with an aging population, led Community Health System to further invest in the Valparaiso market with its

newest expansion. Ryba reports a 30% increase in demand for therapy services in recent years.

“The addition of physician practices at the site has increased the demand for ancillary services such as physical and occupational therapy,” Ryba said. “As the baby boomer generation ages, the physical issues which accompany the aging process require therapy services.”

She said, thanks to this additional space, Community Healthcare System can accommodate a far greater number of (therapy) patients than it had before.

In addition to new space, Community Healthcare System also welcomed new technology in 2021. It introduced the use of automated ultrasound as a tool for detecting breast cancer.

“Dense breasts on mammography can mask or hide a very early, small invasive breast cancer,” said Dr. Mary Nicholson, regional director of Breast Imaging Services.

As a complement to routine mammograms, automated ultrasound could be an option for the 43% of American women with dense breasts. It could identify masses earlier, giving doctors

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more treatment options and patients an improved outlook.

“Community Healthcare System has always generously supported the advancement of excellent breast care for its patients,” Nicholson said. “The addition of automated whole-breast to physician-performed whole-breast ultrasound within the system’s Women’s Diagnostic Centers is another one of its many ways to help as many women as possible optimize their breast health.”

Franciscan Health

In Michigan City, Franciscan Health invested \$20 million to repurpose a building that has been serving the community’s health needs for more than 100 years.

The Homer Street Campus, 301 W. Homer St., has been discussed by both hospital officials and community leaders for several years. It now offers a behavior health unit, including a 14-bed inpatient unit that previously was housed at the hospital’s main campus.

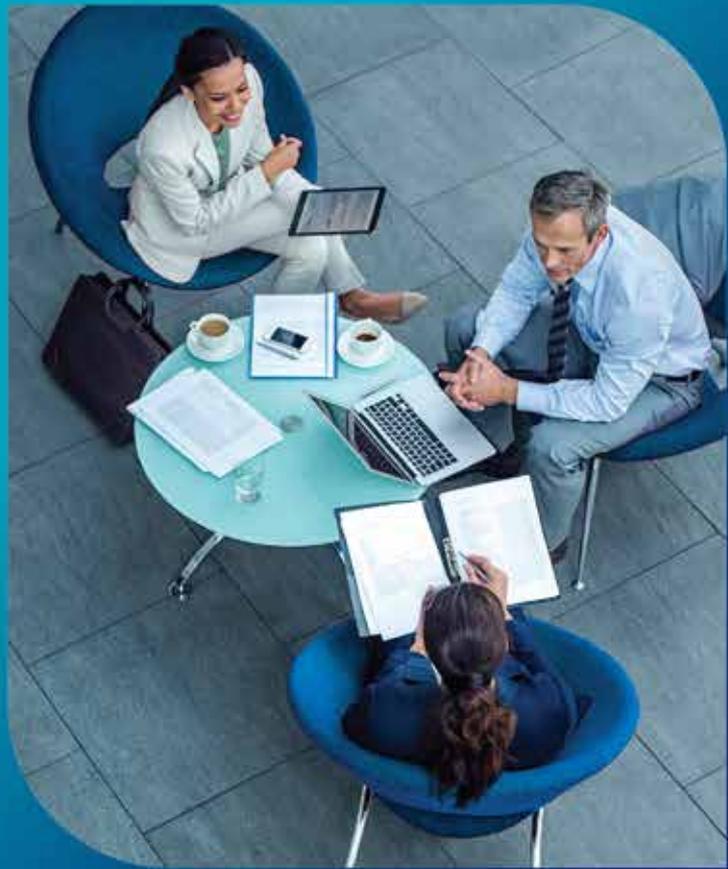
The hospital, which opened a new \$243 million facility facing I-94 in January 2019, can further enhance its care services with its former space.

“With the move of behavioral health services, we have freed space on the Franciscan Way campus to expand with a much-needed 22-bed medical/surgical unit to match the incredible growth and demand for inpatient services at our new hospital,” said Dean Mazzoni, president and CEO of Franciscan Health Michigan City.

Additionally, establishing behavioral health services at its Homer Street campus gives Franciscan the space for projected growth.

“Due to the size of the repurposed facility, relocating this service back to the Homer Street campus allows us to consider growing behavioral health services there in the future to address existing gaps in behavioral health care in our community,” Mazzoni said.

For Franciscan Health, it was important to use the Homer Street campus in a way that would be meaningful to its community. In addition to behavioral health, the campus will include a social gathering space for senior citizens, along with services to coordinate care.



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Photo provided by Community Healthcare System

In 2021, Community Healthcare System introduced automated ultrasound as a tool for detecting breast cancer for the 43% of American women with dense breasts, which can hide an early form of invasive cancer.

It also will provide care to expectant mothers who otherwise might have limited access to health care providers.

Franciscan is one of several area health systems sharing a state grant aimed at reducing infant mortality. Through that, it will offer a program called Protecting Indiana's Newborns that offers about 10 prenatal and postpartum visits with health care providers.

A team of experts work together with low-income mothers to address any health, economic and social risk factors that lead to infant mortality.

Northwest Health

La Porte's Northwest Health introduced a weight loss program in early 2021, rounding out its wellness offerings.

With both bariatric surgery and medical weight loss options, the program was added to Northwest's service lines in

response to the increasing number of obese patients.

Surgical options include the sleeve gastrectomy and the gastric bypass. For those who do not qualify for surgery or want to avoid it, doctors and dietitians collaborate to develop individualized meal, medication and exercise plans.

Northwest's gastroenterology department introduced new technology to improve early detection of colon cancer. All screening colonoscopies at the Porter location include artificial intelligence to help doctors identify

potentially cancerous polyps. Until now, patients needed to travel to Chicago for that technology.

The hospital added an emergency room specifically for its pregnant patients, located in its Birthing and Family Care

Center and staffed by obstetricians around the clock. Rather than being cared for by emergency doctors, expectant mothers now will be seen by doctors who are trained specifically for their care.

In August, Northwest's cardiologists began offering a new procedure to treat severely calcified cardiovascular disease. The technique employs a method that traditionally has been used to dissolve kidney stones but instead aims to dissolve calcium in the coronary arteries by using sonic waves.

The procedure gives doctors more options in treating patients with heart disease, Northwest representatives said.

Looking ahead, it's likely that service lines and options among Northwest Indiana's health systems will continue to grow. Industry leaders know the market has opportunity for expansion during the years to come.

"This focus on compassionate caring will continue to be the cornerstone of all we do," said Northwest Health's Dickinson. "For the next several years, we will respond to the needs of our communities by recruiting more primary care providers while also expanding the scope of specialty procedures and services available in the Region." ■

HEALTH CARE DEVELOPMENTS

- ▶ Methodist Hospitals added a fourth CareFirst facility to its lineup in November, this one serving the Valparaiso market.
- ▶ Five emergency room doctors formed NW Indiana ER & Hospital in Hammond in 2020.
- ▶ Valparaiso Health Center inside St. Mary Medical Center opened a 20,455-square-foot addition in June.
- ▶ In Michigan City, Franciscan Health invested \$20 million to repurpose the Homer Street Campus, 301 W. Homer St.
- ▶ La Porte's Northwest Health introduced new specialized care programs.



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Goods shipped through the Port of Indiana-Burns Harbor, including these large wind turbine blades, are transported to and from the port by trucks and rail.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY'S LABOR WOES CONTRIBUTE TO SUPPLY CHAIN PROBLEMS AS FEW CONSIDER SECTOR FOR WORK

DOUG ROSS

Experts say empty store shelves are the best evidence of the global supply chain struggles.

It's a multifaceted problem, but among them, is a shortage of truck drivers. That issue includes drivers who move shipping containers filled

"It's been a shortage for a couple years now," said Kavin James, academy director for KLLM Transport Services in Burns Harbor. "The more you order, the more truckers you need."

But there are many factors contributing to the driver shortage, including job burnout and low interest among young

"If you have it on your table or in your house, it came from a truck somewhere," said Lynne Rehmel, president and owner of L&R Transportation and Logistics in Valparaiso.

Long-standing problem

Vanta Coda II, CEO at the Ports of Indiana in Indianapolis, sees the trucking industry from an outsider's perspective. Indiana's three ports see ships, barges, trucks and trains daily.

"In Indiana, we grow things, we make things, we move things," Coda said. "Our cargo is typical of what Indiana is — agricultural, energy and manufacturing based, from steel to food products."

Indiana ranks between 12th to 13th as a maritime state across the United States, he said.

Coda said the Midwest is not affected by the container problems out of Asia with consumer goods headed to California.

80,000 trucking workers already are needed, the American Trucking Association estimates.

with imports off massive cargo vessels to those who transport product from warehouses to stores.

The American Trucking Association estimates the shortage at 80,000 workers and growing to 160,000 by 2030. The estimate is based on driver demographic trends as well as expected growth in freight demand.

people starting, as well as remaining, in the field long term, experts say.

An assortment of trucking jobs is available for people considering the profession. From long hauls across the country to regional routes to delivering construction equipment and materials as well as furniture, fuels and packages to someone's home.

L ISSUE



Photo by Rich Allen

"We don't participate in containers at our three Indiana ports," he said. "Where we stand in the supply chain is that first layer of value added from raw products to its first sustainable piece such as taking raw steel and preparing it to go into manufacturing."

Trucks are an important part of that logistics puzzle at the ports. The Ports of Indiana-Burns Harbor typically sees 350,000 trucks each year," Port Director Ryan McCoy said. That's an average of 6,730 trucks per week.

Coda said the supply issues Indiana's ports have experienced the past decade are with personnel.

"Millennials have a 1% identification with transportation and logistics as a career," he said. "We aren't very visible within the job landscape, even though there are really good jobs."

Coda said the port business needs more qualified tradespeople. Port tenants rely heavily on trucks to transport raw materials and products.

"The trucking shortage has been at the top of the list for 10 years," Coda said. "We hear some companies have 100%

turnover annually due to job hopping because the demand is so high."

Karen Orosz, school director at DriveCo in Gary, said people in their 30s is the average age of students seeking a commercial driver's license.

"A lot of times it is a career change," she said. "Perhaps the person has done odd jobs all their lives and wants something permanent."

Orosz said some students have worked in another industry or lost their jobs and want to get into a profession where there is a future.

"We have carrier companies that come in here and present to the students," she said. Those company representatives try to recruit drivers while they're still training.

"Right now, there are so many opportunities out there," Orosz said.

Making sacrifices

Drivers make more money going over the road — the long hauls — because they're gone from home so long.

James with KLLM said single people are best suited for long-haul driving.

He gave the over-the-road lifestyle a try. "I feel trucking is a good starter" career, James said.

James was single his first year as a long-haul driver. He lived and worked out of his truck to save money. With no permanent home, he didn't pay rent, a mortgage or utility bills.

James' living expenses at that time included a cellphone bill, food and clothing. A long-haul or over-the-road trucker can make between \$70,000 and \$85,000 annually.

But the lifestyle is not for everyone.

Charlie Gamblin, apprentice trainer for Teamsters Local 142 in Merrillville, said life on the road can be expensive.

"You're working for \$25 an hour, and you're spending \$25 to \$30 a day for

meals and a shower," he said. "A simple shower could cost you anywhere from \$10 to \$15 a day."

For many drivers, they get paid per mile. Delays affect their income.

"These guys show up for a 9 a.m. appointment, and they're loaded at noon," Gamblin said. Or they stop to use a restroom, and it costs them money to slow down, pull into a truck stop, use the restroom and buy a few things, then hit the road again and get the 80,000-pound truck back up to speed.

"When these guys stop, you lose 30 minutes," he said. "It just cost you \$15 to pee."

Gamblin said he sipped on water to stay hydrated, then ate crackers to absorb the liquid so he could keep driving longer.

But there are other struggles an over-the-road driver faces, Gamblin said. If a driver needs a doctor or dentist, scheduling an appointment can be difficult.

"(Drivers don't) know where (they're) going to be in a week or two weeks," he said.

Getting sick on the road is bad, too. "You're lying in the back of the sleeper and sweating it out," Gamblin said.

Drivers can visit urgent care clinics while traveling, but that's different from having a primary care physician who knows their medical history.

Sandy Smith, president and owner of SAN Corp. in Crown Point, said the long-hauler's lifestyle is hard on older drivers.

The average age of over-the-road truckers is almost 50 years old, according to the American Trucking Association.

Smith is in the construction industry. Construction is seasonal, so her experienced drivers know to budget accordingly. Younger people want to work year-round, she said.

Gamblin said younger drivers also want to spend more time with their



Millennials have a 1% identification with transportation and logistics as a career. We aren't very visible within the job landscape, even though there are really good jobs."

— Vanta Coda II
Port Director of Indiana



Photo by Doug Bess

Trucks await their drivers at a truck stop in Valparaiso. Charlie Gamblin, apprentice trainer for Teamsters Local 142 in Merrillville, said life on the road can be expensive.

families, which the over-the-road job doesn't allow.

The ATA estimates almost 1 million new drivers are needed over the next decade to replace drivers who retire, leave voluntarily or involuntarily — because they fail a drug test or have a bad driving record, for example — as well as industry growth.

“The inability to pass a drug test is a big issue,” Orosz said. Marijuana is legal in some states, but it's still prohibited under federal law.”

Orosz said that can trip up drivers using marijuana legally for medical or recreational use while obeying state law where they live.

Finding solutions

The ATA said the solution to the driver shortage will most certainly require increased pay, regulatory changes and modifications to the business practices of shippers, receivers and carriers to improve conditions for drivers.

James has some good news for drivers. “We're doing guaranteed pay, which is like a salaried job,” at KLLM, he said. Overall, truck drivers' pay has increased.

Smith said landing a trucking job with union representation offers perks.

“The union watches out for (its members),” she said. It's good for companies, too.

“Everybody's happy because we all stay within the rules,” Smith said.

The American Trucking Association is pushing for a lower minimum age to drive commercially across state lines. In northern Indiana, the practical implication of the current rule is that a driver must be at least 21 even though an 18-year-old can hold a CDL.

Infrastructure is an issue as well, the ATA reported, with drivers stopping earlier than they need to so they can get one of the limited truck parking spots for a night.

Congestion also can make it difficult for a trucker to make deliveries safely and efficiently.

“Other barriers to entry include the inability of potential candidates to meet carriers' hiring standards for driving record or criminal histories,” the ATA said.

Demographics matter, too. The ATA said women make up only 7% of all drivers, although James said he has seen an increase in the number of women undergoing training.

“A lot of women have to care for kids, so they can't be out every night,” Orosz said. Some might not feel safe at truck stops overnight, either.

Gamblin urged the industry to look at ways to get truckers home more frequently.

“The farther you get from home, the longer it takes you to get home,” he said.

If terminals could be set up for relays, that would be easier on drivers, he said. A driver could go maybe 10 hours in one day, spend the night and be home the next night.

The big money is in driving coast to coast, but that comes at a lifestyle cost, James said.

Gamblin said driving schools often try to sell potential students on the ability to see more of the country, but that's not the way it works out.

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“After about a month, and you’re passing it at 50 mph, 60 mph, that’s all you see,” he said. “Would I love to stop there and spend the day? Well, yeah.”

But that’s the reason people don’t see many trucks near the Grand Canyon.

“You get to see nice places, places you thought you’d never be able to be in,” James said. He enjoyed visiting small towns along the way.

At the Ports of Indiana-Burns Harbor, a 6-acre truck marshaling yard will be built at the southern end of the port under a FASTLANE project, Port Director McCoy said. It will be capable of accommodating 135 trucks across 15 lanes.

The project has obvious environmental benefits by reducing the need for trucks to idle, but it also will improve truckers’ lives by giving them a driver lounge, a patio and a food truck area.

Orosz urged people to explore a truck driver’s life and the industry’s assorted career options. Jobs are available in the trucking industry that don’t require being gone for a week or two at a time, she noted, and truckers don’t



Photo by Doug Ross

Supply chain issues have many causes, a shortage of truckers among them. The ATA estimates almost 1 million new drivers are needed over the next decade to replace drivers who retire, leave voluntarily or involuntarily, as well as industry growth.

need the expense of a college degree. A class is 160 hours. That’s four weeks of schooling for a full-time student driver,

Monday through Friday, or 10 weeks for a driver going part time on weekends and evenings. ■

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CHALLENGES OF BOUNTY OPPORTUNITIES



EMPLOYERS TAP EVERY RESOURCE TO FIND AND RETAIN WORKERS WHILE SOME JOB SEEKERS GO OWN WAY

CHRISTOPHER ADAM

The secret's out: Every industry is facing difficulty finding and retaining workers — and there seems to be no end in sight to the current challenges.

From falling employee engagement to increasing job confidence, industries are struggling to hang on to top talent and attract new faces. But they aren't giving up. Employers are making every effort to impress and recruit fresh talent, including social media, digital billboards and pop-up job fairs.

The professional networking site LinkedIn shows thousands of job openings, but employers often cite few candidates for most postings. So, some employers are turning to more traditional approaches, bringing back job fairs and advertisements.

At the same time, organizations of all sizes are finding current employees who are feeling burnt out or lack engagement. In some cases, well-qualified people simply are deciding to pursue their dreams and venture off on their own. But others are sticking to what they know best.

Strong reputation

Merrillville-based Centier Bank routinely receives workplace awards for its initiatives to retain and recruit workers:

- 2021 Workforce Diversity Award from the Urban League of Northwest Indiana.
- Ranked second “Best Bank to Work For” in the United States by American Banker, and first in the state of Indiana.
- Ranked second “Best Places To Work in Indiana” for large

IFUL



The bank also used employee videos to share personal stories about working for Centier.

“Fortunately, for us, we have a strong reputation and employees who love to tell their families, friends and neighbors about the great workplace community here at Centier,” said Gina Gervais, employment manager/AVP at Centier.

Centier’s human resources team makes it a priority to touch every application that comes into the system. Unlike many other organizations, Centier does not automate.

“We want to carefully look over each candidate’s information and background,” Gervais said. “We want to honor the time they put in to applying.”

She said applications submitted to Centier often include comments that the applicant applied because of a recommendation about the bank’s great reputation.

“We have a steady flow of candidates and low turnover rate, in large part due to word-of-mouth support from our associates,” Gervais said.

Word also has gotten out about Centier’s handling of the pandemic.

“We continue to hear from our team members about how Centier has taken care of them during the pandemic,” Gervais said. “Our bank worked with individuals on their situations to develop best approaches, which included hybrid work schedules where possible.”

She said, if a Centier employee had a position that required them to be on-site, the bank also worked to ensure safety practices and high levels of comfort for employees.

In addition, during the pandemic, Centier launched a diversity council and several associate-led resource groups focusing on the LGBTQ+ community, as well as people of color, veterans, women and employees with disabilities.

“We continue to see growing numbers of associates join these groups and

express interest in the diversity council,” Gervais said. “These have been so very well-received, as have our enhanced efforts toward talent development.”

She said the goal is for each associate to see a clear path to success and growth with Centier.

Employee engagement

There may be no magic bullet to recruiting in the current climate, but overworking employees is a sure path to failure, according to Bob Tithof, president of JMJ Talent Solutions and JMJ Personnel.

His company places thousands of people in full-time, permanent positions each year throughout Northwest Indiana and the south Chicago area. Tithof, who leads an organization that is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2022, said his firm witnesses the overworking challenge daily.

“Since there is a staffing shortage, companies often work the current staff excessive overtime and over five days, creating employee burnout and a decline in quality of life. This is the No. 1 reason we see associates leaving.”

— Bob Tithof
JMJ Talent Solutions
and JMJ Personnel

“Since there is a staffing shortage, companies often work the current staff excessive overtime and over five days, creating employee burnout and a decline in quality of life,” Tithof said. “This is the No. 1 reason we see associates leaving.”

For those who stay, Tithof said employers are finding ways to show appreciation — some of which may not have been policy before the pandemic.

“We also are seeing retention bonuses, lump sum payments, hourly raises and flexible scheduling,” Tithof said. “The biggest push has been the increase of pay to \$15 to \$22 an hour for most of our industrial and logistic positions.”

He said this is a 25% to 40% increase over pre-COVID levels.

For those who decide to leave their positions, Tithof said the current job market is hot with opportunities. He said he is consistently seeing openings with good companies that offer great advancement channels.

companies by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.

- The 2021 Northwest Indiana Business & Industry Hall of Fame Enterprise of the Year.

But it also faced some challenges keeping and finding talent during the past year.

A higher number of associates left during the Great Resignation, which began in early 2021 as the pandemic was subsiding and life seemingly returned to normal. Centier stepped up its efforts to advertise open positions on LinkedIn.

HR/STAFFING

Tithof also is seeing companies try all kinds of different recruiting approaches — from billboards to social media campaigns to street signs and job fairs. “Employee engagement is a key factor before hiring, when starting and while

For 2022, Tithof expects to see more challenges ahead, including the continued need for updated automation programs for recruitment efforts.

“We also thought that the ending of the government-subsidized unemployment would be the catalyst to start the change to having people come in, but we were wrong,” he said. “Employers also will continue to be challenged by the lack of engaged workers.”

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

“Most people experienced changes in their work life during (the pandemic). ... They may have liked that freedom and were not happy to go back to former commutes and schedules.”

— Lorri Feldt, Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center



“We continue to hear from our team members about how Centier has taken care of them during the pandemic.”

— Gina Gervais, Centier Bank



“Make sure (your business) is something you will love. It will lessen the blow if the business struggles for a while.”

— Angie Nelson Deutch, Diversity Squared



working,” Tithof said. “We have installed software that aids in communicating at certain key times through software automation and bots.”

He said the software flags issues and surveys certain responses and then a real person steps in to address the issues before an associate quits or leaves.

Tithof said another issue with recruiting that seems to be common across all verticals and professions is candidates who simply fail to show up for an interview. The no-show rate, according to Tithof, has been steadily increasing during the pandemic.

candidates and fighting to keep the great talent they already have on staff.

Niedbalski said risk aversion is playing an interesting part in the current job market. Many people are choosing to stay with their companies and in their roles, given the changing economic market and the ongoing pandemic, he said.

A leap of faith

On the other hand, Niedbalski said his firm also is seeing more people choosing a greater entrepreneurial route.

“We have candidates we work with who are choosing to either start their own

businesses or quit corporate life to go the consulting route,” Niedbalski said.

Other experts are seeing that trend too. Lorri Feldt, regional director of the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, said her office has seen more people opt to leave their full-time jobs for a consulting role where they are free to organize their work days. “Most people experienced changes in their work life during (the pandemic),” she said. “If they worked at home, they may have liked that freedom and were not happy to go back to former commutes and schedules.”

Feldt said extended time away from the office for some professionals also provided more time to reconsider what to do with their careers.

Angie Nelson Deutch of Michigan City left her job at NiSource to become a full-time consultant, specializing in guiding clients in areas of diversity, equity and inclusion, through her company Diversity Squared. She said deciding to give up a steady paycheck was the hardest part about leaving corporate life but worth it for her personal and professional well-being.

The health crisis played no part in Nelson Deutch’s decision to go into consulting. “The polarization of America had everything to do with it,” she said.

Nelson Deutch had been operating her business part time since 2017 but jumped into it full time in September 2021. She admits diving in headfirst might not have been the best choice and suggests to others considering starting a business to plan accordingly.

“Understand the investment and risk you’re taking,” she said. “Think about your health care options if you don’t have a significant other or parent with insurance.”

But most importantly, enjoy what you’ll be doing. “Make sure (your business) is something you will love,” Nelson Deutch said. “It will lessen the blow if the business struggles for a while.”

The right fit

For individuals considering a new job, Niedbalski said the current job market offers candidates a strong opportunity to find a company that is a good fit in terms of culture and advancement opportunities.

He sees more companies giving candidates the VIP treatment when it comes

to interviews, and he is seeing those companies remind the interviewers to make great first impressions.

“The power has shifted, so interviews are as much about companies learning about the candidates as they are candidates learning about the organizations and cultures,” Niedbalski said. “We strongly encourage candidates to do their homework and explore companies and then come to the interviews with questions that will help them learn if the organization and role are good fits.”

There are steps employers can take when competing for workers, he said. Networking is still an effective strategy.

For Integritas, that means staying visible. The organization has been attending and sponsoring local events to tap into the local market.

“Staying connected is really important for organizations as they continue to search for great talent in a job market that is leaning heavily in the candidate’s favor,” Niedbalski said. ■

Managing Editor Larry Avila contributed to this story.



Photo provided by Centier Bank

Centier Bank job applicants often say they want to work there because of its good reputation for treating employees fairly. However, even it wasn't immune from the Great Resignation.

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ALL EYES ON NORTHWEST INDIANA

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS SAY
REGION REMAINS HIGH-INTEREST LOCATION

CARRIE NAPOLEON

Northwest Indiana’s location at the crossroads of America, a ready workforce and proximity to Chicago keeps the Region in high demand for commercial and industrial development, economic development professionals say.

Karen Lauerman, president and CEO of the Lake County Economic Alliance, said the organization is averaging about eight to 10 calls weekly on real opportunities in the industry sector, meaning they are true projects looking at Lake County, Northwest Indiana or Indiana as a whole.

“They are not kicking the tires or asking the preliminary or more general questions of tax climate, incentives, etc.,” Lauerman said.

Logical choice

Lake County and Northwest Indiana rank high on developers’ lists because of the proximity to Chicago and access to two-thirds of the U.S. population/consumer market and multi-modes of transportation options — road, rail, air and port, strong fiber connectivity — especially for e-commerce. Indiana’s better tax climate, workers’ compensation and overall more affordable locations appeal to developers.

“These companies are making significant strategic moves that cost money, and if relocating can give them a better return on their investment, maintain or recruit a quality workforce and meet other key criteria, then the logical choice is Lake County,” Lauerman said.

Between Dec. 20, 2020, and Dec. 20, 2021, LCEA facilitated more than \$150 million in investment, creating about 1,110 new full-time jobs, working on almost \$1 billion in development. The 25 most active projects could result in more than \$240 million of initial capital investment and another 2,000 jobs if and when landed, Lauerman said.

Cold storage is a hot commodity, along with e-commerce. However, it is important to note that manufacturing operations with distribution of product is just as critical.

Lauerman said, for example, the agency is entertaining three leads that are all automotive-related suppliers that need to manufacture and distribute their product.

“So, it’s not limited to big multi-tenant warehouses or e-commerce,” she said. “It’s really about getting a product, whatever that product is, to market.”

Lauerman said Indiana is recognized for its manufacturing capabilities.

“Our workforce knows how to get things to market, so any operation that needs those qualities has an additional advantage when looking in Lake County,” she said.

Lauerman said the Region’s established Class A business parks, those in the planning stages and land along Interstate 65 draw national and international attention, along with any available, developable land space on or just off the Interstate 80/94 corridor, are highly sought after, along with state-line locations. Lake County, with its convergence of infrastructure is conveniently located and meets most site selection criteria.

What the numbers reveal

Aron McDermott, co-founder and president of Latitude Commercial, said in his firm’s annual state-of-the-market report that industrial sales volume significantly declined in 2020, but not for lack of interest from developers and businesses.

Sales volume dropped from \$214 million in 2019 to \$52.5 million in 2020. Price per square foot also declined, dropping from \$62 per square foot in 2019 to \$35 per square foot in 2020.

This is the first time the price for square foot has declined since the first quarter of 2016, according to the market report.

“These numbers should not be viewed as any sort of warning sign as there was a significant decrease in available properties for sale during 2020 as compared to 2019,” McDermott wrote in the report.

Available square footage for industrial property in the fourth quarter of 2020 was at the lowest level since they began recording these figures in 2005, he said in the report. Months on the market hit a five-year low in the first quarter of 2020, increasing slightly in the second quarter and then leveling out for the remainder of the year.

High construction costs and supply chain disruptions are slowing new construction efforts.



Amazon opened a delivery station at the AmeriPlex at the Crossroads Business Park in Merrillville.

Photo by Larry Avila



A 249,600-square-foot proposed facility at 4400 Homerlee in East Chicago is 4.2 miles from the I-80/94 interchange.

Rendering provided by Cornerstone Architects



Midwest Truck & Auto Parts built this 125,000-square-foot facility at the AmeriPlex at the Crossroads Business Park in Merrillville.

Photo by Larry Avila



Photo by Larry Avila

Holladay Properties has two business parks in Northwest Indiana, including AmeriPlex at the Crossroads in Merrillville. Since last October, Holladay has sold 110 acres in Merrillville and another 55 acres under contract pending closing in December.

Lauerman said, while LCEA, developers, companies and others are all ready to land deals throughout Lake County, delays are happening because of short supply on prefabricated concrete panels and steel needed for construction.

Developers are preordering in anticipation of rising costs and tenant demand for space and trying to play the educated guessing game on what will be the next material to be in limited supply and cause potential bottlenecks, she said.

David Lasser, principal broker with Commercial In-Sites LLC, said industrial land in the Region has several primary uses. Manufacturing of raw materials such as steel or plastics is one.

Another use is food processing, such as Albanese Confectionery Group and Domino's Pizza, which manufacture product on site and ship from the location, he said. Then there are companies, including Amazon, that are purely distribution.

The last niche is trucking, with trucking companies looking for terminals and parking areas, he said.

"There's been a boom (in Northwest Indiana) in really all four categories," Lasser said. Other smaller users, such as steel fabricators, and roofing and plumbing businesses, also fall into the arena of businesses that would use land zoned for industry.

In the past 12 months for land zoned industrial alone, no retail or office, Commercial In-Sites has closed on or is under contract on 17 parcels totaling 265 acres. The projects range from 1 to 45 acres.

"In those 17 transactions, we are seeing all of those industrial land uses," Lasser said.

Desirable location

Michael Micka, vice president of development for Holladay Properties, agreed with other experts that the regional market is "pretty hot to say the least."

Holladay Properties has two business parks in Northwest Indiana, including AmeriPlex at the Crossroads in Merrillville. Since last October, Holladay has sold 110 acres in Merrillville and another 55 acres under contract pending closing in December.

Micka said he has worked in the field since 2008, and the average sales are 4 to 5 acres per year. The past 13 months sales have just taken off, he said.

"What's probably been the biggest driver is other developers are starting to recognize the Northwest Indiana market and are bringing more clients," Micka said.

Holladay just completed a 50,000-square-foot project in Portage that was built for six smaller-use tenants. The smaller spaces are filling up as quickly as the larger spaces right now, he said.

New construction requires land, and there are only two ways to get it — green fields that require infrastructure like sewer, water and roadways, or brown-fields, which require redevelopment and possible remediation.

Commercial In-sites' Lasser said there is plenty of activity in both areas. Gary, Hammond and East Chicago have seen considerable activity in redevelopment. Hobart, Crown Point and Merrillville are experiencing a considerable amount of new construction, along with Chesterton, Valparaiso and Portage as well.

The market is clearly along the I-80-94 corridor and the I-65 corridor.

Urschel Laboratories built a 300,000-square-foot facility in Chesterton, and Amazon constructed distribution centers in Merrillville and Valparaiso. There is also a lot of redevelopment and new development in Michigan City and La Porte, Lasser said.

"There are a lot of success stories in both," he said. "From our standpoint, the activity in Northwest Indiana is hot."

LCEA's Lauerman said Lake County's speculative market is actually growing. Dallas-based Crow Holdings Industrial is putting finishing touches on a 279,000-square-foot spec building with the next waiting in the wings.

The Des Plaines, Illinois-based Missner Group broke ground in September on a 249,000-square-foot building in East Chicago deliverable in early 2022.

"Both of these groups have additional spec buildings planned for other locations next year," Lauerman said.

The agency anticipates construction to begin in 2022 on a 1-million-square-foot, under-one-roof spec building in the East Chicago Logistics Center, she said.

"These groups and others know that, in this market, if you build it, they will come,

LAKE COUNTY ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

► Between Dec. 20, 2020, and Dec. 20, 2021, LCEA facilitated more than \$150 million in investment, creating about 1,110 new full-time jobs, working on almost \$1 billion in development.

BY THE NUMBERS

6.4%

Vacancy and market rental rates for office properties in Northwest Indiana remained strong throughout 2020 with a year finish about this percentage. Average market rent remained consistent about \$19.20 a square foot.

7.5%

The industrial market finished 2020 consistent with a steadily rising vacancy rate over five years since 2016's low of 4.75%. The fourth quarter of 2019 was the highest in sales volume for Northwest Indiana in five years.

Source: Latitude Commercial's annual state-of-the-market report

and in many cases bring along suppliers, vendors or clients as well," Lauerman said.

Speculation is not just for big buildings. There are local developers and contractors erecting 15,000- to 65,000-square-foot buildings on spec that don't stay vacant for very long or in some cases have signed lease agreements before completion of the building.

Despite a low inventory of available space, Lauerman does not anticipate a slowdown in demand.

"LCEA and all our partners have been working to create this type of interest and demand for years," Lauerman said. "This is our time to shine and capitalize on all our assets and benefits."

A hurdle for growth

Micka said one of the challenges to creating more inventory is finding the land to build it.

Much of north Lake County is built out, so finding suitable sites for development or redevelopment can be a challenge, he said. As greenfield space dries up, developers are looking more at redevelopment.

"I think that's starting to happen," Micka said. "People are saying, 'hey it's worth the time.'"

Micka worries the cost of construction could dampen growth in the short term. Construction costs for a new building are about 30% higher than there were 18 months ago.

"That's what might force a slowdown," Micka said.

The global pandemic accelerated demand for logistics real estate across the country by increasing opportunity for sales among online businesses, established brick-and-mortar retailers and e-commerce originators, fueling the need for space.

"What is often overlooked is that retailers and grocers always needed warehouses and distribution facilities to serve their network of stores, keeping shelves full and customers happy," Lauerman said. "The pandemic simply accelerated the pace for online purchases and the consumer expectation for same-day and next-day delivery for everything from toilet paper to shoes."

Lauerman said companies shifted from 'just in time' to 'just in case' mode, which requires higher inventory levels resulting in increased demand for warehouse/distribution facilities.

Lori Tubbs, managing broker with McColly Commercial Real Estate in Schererville, also described commercial inventory in Northwest Indiana as tight.

"Most of the product we had on the market is either under contract or going to close, with little available left," Tubbs said.

She said she has been working as much as possible to entice builders and developers to bring new product to market, but it won't happen fast enough to meet demand.

"There are not enough existing builders in this market," Tubbs said, adding she has been trying to pull more builders and developers from out of state to invest in the Region.

Indiana has been doing a lot consistently to attract business to the state over the last decade, she said.

"It's been pretty active since the (Great) Recession," Tubbs said. "We've

always had a lot of companies look to locate here."

Tubbs said businesses seek properties ready to use.

High construction costs have businesses wary of new construction at this time, she said. A few projects are already underway and were able to lock in construction prices before supply chain issues drove them higher.

"Historically folks have wanted to stay near the state line," she said. "Now all of those sites and parcels have been absorbed and are stretching themselves coming east."

Tubbs said that, in the past, developers were not interested in northern Indiana sites east of Interstate 65 but now that boundary seems to be gone.

Heading south on I-65, development focuses on Hobart, Merrillville and Crown Point.

"You won't find developers these days coming in and bringing water and sewer to

a location for development," Tubbs said. "They are going where it exists."

Tubbs said redevelopment of existing sites has been active in recent years. The sites might need rehabilitating but often have equipment such as cranes industrial users need.

Tubbs said she has been vocal about dwindling supplies of commercial sites around the Region.

"We are turning more people away than securing because of lack of property," Tubbs said. ■



► **Aaron McDermott**, co-founder and president of Latitude Commercial, said in his firm's annual state-of-the-market report that industrial sales volume significantly declined in 2020 but that was to be expected.

AGRICULTURAL GROWTH S

FEDERAL PROGRAM MAY YIELD ECONOMIC BOOST FOR INDIANA'S RURAL FARMING COMMUNITIES

LAUREN CAGGIANO

Put simply, agriculture is big business in Indiana and the numbers back that claim.

The sector contributes an estimated \$31.2 billion to Indiana's economy, according to the state. And the Hoosier state is the eighth-largest agricultural exporter in the nation, exporting just over \$4.6 billion in 2017.

The value of unprocessed agricultural commodities sold was \$11.1 billion in 2017. Officials say there is room for growth, and it starts with a boost from the federal government.

"What we're trying to do is pull together all of the people that would be necessary for business growth," he said. "For instance, maybe a business currently in Indiana wants to expand, or (we may) get involved in the recruitment of companies that want to come to Indiana."

Long-term goals

Last fall, the Kankakee-Iroquois Regional Planning Commission was awarded the federal grant, which will fund the implementation of the REDM: a first-of-its-kind process developed in Indiana to assist rural communities in

enhance the local value of the agricultural output.

The goal is to create new markets and income for local farmers, generate more local jobs connected to agriculture, and capture a greater source of revenue for the communities in those counties.

This work is not done in a vacuum — the Rural Economic Development Model was created as a collaboration between the Indiana Economic Development Association, Indiana State Department of Agriculture and the Purdue Center for Regional Development with support from the Indiana Farm Bureau, Indiana Corn Marketing Council, Indiana Soybean Alliance and the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

The model encourages stakeholders to identify the assets and untapped potential that might be lying dormant or under-utilized in their region.

Kettler cited a recent example in North Central Indiana. That area has a strong manufacturing base, but there's more there than meets the eye.

Upon a closer examination, however, there's a significant number of "agricultural assets" there too, he said.

"We need to make sure we spend time developing and focus on what we have here already, to help us inform what we want to be," Kettler said. "That's the idea behind this Rural Economic Development Model."

According to Kettler, another important facet of the grant is that each region has the agency to decide how to best quantify or qualify success.

"What you really want to do is determine what it takes to enhance the value of local production," he said. "And in the case of agriculture, that's probably the production of certain types of crop or livestock."

Kettler said it may also involve bringing in new businesses that can help further growth.



Indiana is the eighth-largest agricultural exporter in the nation, exporting just over \$4.6 billion in 2017, according to the state.

Photo provided by the state of Indiana / Tony Campbell

Enter a \$34,930 grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, designed to assist six Northwest Indiana counties in creating a strategy to leverage the Region's agricultural assets through the Rural Economic Development Model.

Bruce Kettler, director of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, is optimistic about the program's impact.

creating new economic development opportunities for Indiana's farmers.

Specifically, the funding will enable Benton, Jasper, Newton, Pulaski, Starke and White counties to study the agricultural output in their regions. They are charged with identifying opportunities for creating new markets, applications or processing facilities that would

STRATEGY

“It kind of boils down to what success looks like in any of these regions within the state of Indiana,” he said.

Indiana to the world

Although not directly tied to the U.S. EDA grant, the Indiana Grown program is also a venue to bolster the state’s agribusiness scene.

According to Regan Herr, Indiana State Department of Agriculture communications director, Indiana Grown’s 1,800-plus members create, grow or make a wide variety of items to sell.

“Some are large agribusinesses, like Red Gold, some are small one-person (shop) artisans who make soap, spin yarn or raise pasture meats,” she said. “Each member is able to contribute to their local economy by selling their goods or buying their inputs locally.”

Stephen Eastridge, director of the Jasper County Economic Development Organization, is leading agriculture sector growth efforts for Benton, Jasper, Newton, Pulaski, Starke and White counties.

Jasper County is the largest-producing agricultural county in Indiana, boasting commodities such as corn, soybean, beef, cattle, milk production and hogs.

“We have 130,000 acres of farmland in just corn,” Eastridge said. “In Jasper County, we have 91,000 acres in soybeans.”

At any given time, there may be between 38,000 and 40,000 cattle in Jasper County as well as 32,000 hogs, he said.

“When we think about Indiana being this agricultural powerhouse in the Midwest, you have to account for that,” Eastridge said.

Eastridge believes the federal grant represents opportunity.

As an economic development professional, he is concerned with how the community can best leverage its agricultural assets when so much of today’s economic development conversation is focused on manufacturing as the future.



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE



Photo provided by the state of Indiana

At any given time, there may be between 38,000 and 40,000 cattle in Jasper County as well as 32,000 hogs, said Stephen Eastridge, director of the Jasper County Economic Development Organization.

TOP 5 INDIANA COUNTIES IN AGRICULTURAL SALES — 2017

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

COUNTIES	TOTAL RECEIPTS PERCENT OF STATE	TOTAL RECEIPTS 1,000 DOLLARS
1. Jay County	3.4	372,596
2. Jasper County	2.7	298,742
3. Elkhart County	2.7	298,286
4. Kosciusko County	2.7	298,032
5. Adams County	2.5	283,136
State Total		11,107,336

“But the reality, I think, a lot of economic development professionals are seeing today is that (growing manufacturing) doesn’t necessarily make sense for our smaller rural communities,” he said. “We don’t have the population, or the skill sets or education levels to keep up with the growth we’re seeing in manufacturing (in) Indiana today.”

If resources are diverted to strengthen manufacturing, it might leave Indiana’s rural areas behind, Eastridge said.

He said an ag strategy might be the missing piece to create economic opportunities for the state’s rural areas.

Seeking opportunities

To that end, Eastridge said stakeholders must pivot and start thinking about agriculture and food processing agribusiness as a form of manufacturing while taking advantage of the Region’s and state’s strengths.

“We’re trying to marry the strengths that we have in agriculture and

manufacturing together to be more sustainable and resilient for the long run,” he said.

For example, that might mean making connections with people and organizations to see this goal to fruition. Where does our milk go when it leaves our Region, he asked? Where does our corn go?

“We need to start finding the opportunities to start the conversations with companies that currently exist in our county or Region, and the companies that exist outside (it) and begin to develop relationships so that we could attract those businesses to our Region,” Eastridge said. “And that’s really what the grant is about. It’s about creating that plan.”

Eastridge said he and the coalition of counties he’s working with, have 14 months from the receipt of the award to have the plan in paper form. Once a strategy is in place, the next phase is implementation.

From there, Eastridge hopes to sort out a few unknowns sooner rather than later.

“There’ll be dollars on the back end for things related to workforce training for specific industries that we might call out in the strategy,” he said. “Eventually, we’re going to need money to do the plan.”

He hopes by November, he will have a plan and be collaborating with partners at both the state and local levels.

“Our hope is that different private partners might be interested in seeing this move forward and getting their help and financial backing to move this strategy forward as an entire Region,” Eastridge said.

Paradigm shift

Connie Neinger, an economic development consultant assisting Eastridge and his team with the planning, said the paradigm needs to shift when it comes to emphasizing manufacturing as the way forward.

“As we started talking about rural development, we realized that our conversations in economic development are always about manufacturing,” she said. “We started looking at food processing as a different form of

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“As we started talking about rural development, we realized that our conversations in economic development are always about manufacturing. We started looking at food processing as a different form of agriculture, of economic development and a different form of manufacturing.”

— Connie Neiningger
Economic development consultant



“We’re trying to marry the strengths that we have in agriculture and manufacturing together to be more sustainable and resilient for the long run.”

— Stephen Eastridge
Jasper County Economic
Development Organization



agriculture, of economic development and a different form of manufacturing.”

One specific vulnerability is that Indiana exports many of its agricultural products out of state.

“From an economic development standpoint, the more dollars we can keep in our communities, the better it is,” she said. “We want those economic development dollars to circulate.”

One means to that end is to add more value to the raw products produced here before they are shipped elsewhere.

“That’s going to help our communities thrive,” Neiningger said.

She said the U.S. EDA grant provided the means to analyze those assets and help Eastridge and his coalition better understand what’s missing from the mix so they can fill in gaps.

For instance, they heard from one company in Indiana that uses a lot of corn.

“So, we took a step back and thought ‘here’s an opportunity,’” she said. “If we can help connect them to the growers to grow the type of corn they need, it’s going to help our farmers, our landowners, our companies, our employers, our transportation, etc.”

Neiningger said it will help across the board.

“And plus, we think it will help eliminate some of this supply chain disruption that we have seen in the past couple of years with the pandemic,” she said.

Neiningger said it doesn’t take much to move the needle to effect positive change.

“If we can just bring in a small percentage of the raw material that is being shipped from outside of the state, that could add millions and millions of dollars into these rural communities,” she said. ■

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LEADER PROFILE

Longtime RDA leader steps up

Sherri Ziller, who was there from beginning, offers plan for future development in Northwest Indiana



Sherri Ziller was named president and chief executive officer in October of the Regional Development Authority after serving as interim president and CEO of the organization.

Photo by Philip Potempa

PHILIP POTEMPA

Sherri Ziller is ready to chart the course for the next milestones of the Regional Development Authority, which was created to connect the communities of Northwest Indiana.

Ziller was named president and chief executive officer in October after serving as interim president and CEO of the organization after the departure of Bill Hanna in February 2021.

“The RDA has been around for 15 years, and I’ve been there every step of the way,” Ziller said. “The RDA was created to invest in transformative regional infrastructure projects that will make Northwest Indiana economically vibrant.”

She said the legislation that created the RDA directs the organization to focus on the Region’s unique resources, including the Lake Michigan shoreline and proximity to Chicago.

“These kinds of assets can’t be duplicated anywhere else and so should be fundamental building blocks of our economy,” Ziller said. “This is tough work, and we’ve come a long way since 2006.”

Ziller said the RDA has accomplished much under its prior leaders and by fostering regional cooperation.

Before she worked for the RDA, Ziller was a teacher at Kaplan College. After a decade in education, she decided to pursue a career in the public sector.

Ziller was named to the leadership post after a search of candidates and an interview process conducted by the RDA board of directors. RDA Board Chairman Don Fesko announced Ziller’s appointment after the October RDA board meeting.

“For the past 15 years, Sherri Ziller has been a high-performing leader in advancing the RDA,” Fesko said.

“I am confident she will successfully lead her team and the organization to enhance the quality of life and economic growth in Northwest Indiana.”

Ziller, along with Hanna during his 11 years with the RDA and the rest of the team, hail the strides the organization already has made.

“As to milestones, there’s our first big project, the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk (Trail),” Ziller said. “When we — I mean the RDA, Portage, the U.S. Corps of Engineers and both state and federal park services — started it, this was a heavily contaminated industrial site.”

Today it’s more than 50 acres of national park, she said.

Completion of the runway extension at the Gary/Chicago International Airport ranks as another crowning achievement.

“It was the city of Gary, the RDA and the Federal Aviation Administration



partnering to get the project done, and it was a big lift,” she said. “The airport’s business has grown, and it attracted a second fixed-base operator, and has seen new infrastructure built and even established a U.S. Customs facility to now allow for direct international flights.”

A lifelong resident of Northwest Indiana, Ziller was born and raised in Hammond. She graduated from George Rogers Clark High School in Whiting and earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Purdue University Northwest in 2006 and a master’s degree in education from PNW in 2012.

Ziller said, while the concept of the RDA has remained the same since it launched, the mission “adapts to the requirements of the Region.”

She said the RDA’s charge is to provide funding for regional investments that communities on their own might struggle to execute. One example, she said, is the West Lake Corridor expansion of the South Shore Line.

“Even the largest local governments in Northwest Indiana would be hard-pressed

to fund this (railway) project strictly from a financial point of view,” Ziller said.

She said asking one of these local governments to make that kind of commitment with “its own scarce resources beyond its borders” seemed out of the question. But the RDA stepped up and made an annual commitment of up to \$8 million a year for 30 years for the project.

“We were able to team with civic and community leaders to build an alliance of 14 communities to add their own skin to the game, which in turn demonstrated to state and federal authorities that we were serious and got them to provide funding as well,” she said.

She said signing full-funding grant agreements with the Federal Transit Administration to lock in federal matching dollars for the West Lake Corridor project and double-track expansion of the South Shore commuter rail system easily ranks as the RDA’s “biggest milestone yet.”

“Those two projects are going to attract tens of billions of dollars of investment to Northwest Indiana over the next two decades,” Ziller said.

“In fact, it’s already started in Michigan City and Portage and Hammond and Munster, and we are working to attract developers to even more of our South Shore communities.”

Ziller said the RDA also has been given the task of establishing Transit Development Districts, or TDDs, around all the South Shore Line stations in Lake and Porter counties, as well as in Michigan City and South Bend.

“It’s still an ongoing process, though we expect the first TDDs to come on line in 2022,” Ziller said. “Once established, these districts will provide funds for the RDA to support development in the TDDs, so I expect we will be pretty busy working on that front for the foreseeable future.”

Ziller and her husband of 13 years, Zach, reside in Crown Point with their 8-year-old son Robbie.

“I continue to be humbled that the RDA board of directors trusts me with this important role,” Ziller said.

“It’s rewarding and challenging in a positive way, and a good fit overall.” ■



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Former social worker develops healthy, good-tasting snack food

MICHAEL PUENTE

For 15 years, Emily Edwards ran a private practice as a social worker to assist people going through tough times.

But a few years ago, she began to feel a sense of burnout.

"I still wanted to help people but not from a mental aspect," Edwards said.



"Growing up in Mississippi, I realized at an early age and spending time in the kitchen with my mom that food is a universal connector for people."

She believed, if she could create something healthy that could be shared with others, it would be another way to help people by providing healthy food options that wouldn't ruin their waistlines.

With that, Edwards began developing a new healthy snack food that was both delicious and nutritious.

She recalled time spent with her mother growing up in Philadelphia, Mississippi. "My mom baked, and she played around with recipes," Edwards said. "I can remember me as a young child sitting on the countertop waiting for her to finish with the cake batter so I could lick the wooden spoon."

Edwards said her mom's kitchen was a gathering place with the aromas, the baking and the love.

"Those were my first experiences with sharing and realizing how food unites

people," she said. "When I was creating this product, I really wanted to be able for my target customer, which is millennial mothers, to be able to recapture those moments and be able to share them with their children around food and realize that food can be healthy but still sweet."

Edwards began Paradise Spreads in March 2018, but it took her 18 months to develop the final product for mass consumption. She traveled monthly to the department of food science at Purdue University in West Lafayette to perfect the product.

"It was a wonderful experience," she said. "I learned so much about food, including food safety."

Edwards said food safety is really the No. 1 thing.

"You learn what ingredients go together," she said.

As for Paradise Spreads, Edwards said it's healthy and goes with pretty much anything.

"The main ingredient is from a sweet plant-based spread with pea protein that you can use on just about anything," she said. "It has protein and the other ingredients that are all natural."

She said it's a spread, so people who like peanut butter or Nutella but want something different with no allergens, no preservatives and no additives might want to have Paradise Spreads in their pantries.

Paradise Spreads come in an 8-ounce jar or in a small snack pack. They also come in three flavors:

strawberry, chocolate and caramel sea salt vanilla.

"You can spread it on bread, bagels, pancakes, waffles, in-between two cookies," Edwards said. "I have an uncle (who) puts it on crackers."

Edwards runs Paradise Spreads from her home

base in Schererville, while her spread is produced in Valparaiso.

Her products are available online at spreadparadise.com or at eight Strack & Van Til locations in Northwest Indiana.

Darian Collins of Merrillville is a big fan of Paradise Spreads.

"A few years ago, I had a really bad sweet tooth," Collins said. "I was looking for some options, something that I could have but not have the calories."

Collins said she enjoys the salted caramel with pretzels or apples. She also puts it on crackers.

Anytime she buys Paradise Spreads, Collins said she feels good knowing she is supporting a Northwest Indiana-made product.

"Emily is very dedicated, very determined," Collins said. "She has a very, very good product."

Collins appreciates that Edwards' product is available at Strack & Van Til.

"It's very popular, and everyone that I introduce it to, they really like it," Collins said. "I'm just waiting for the rest of the United States and world to catch up to the greatness of this product."

Edwards' goal is to do just that over the next five years.

"We're still local, so coming up next year, we're going to look to expand regionally and throughout the Midwest, and then, we would like to go national," Edwards said. "The ultimate goal would be to grow the company big enough that we could sell it." ■

"The main ingredient is from a sweet plant-based spread with pea protein that you can use on just about anything."

— Emily Edwards
Paradise Spreads



Photo provided by Paradise Spreads



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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Help for those in most need

Grace Beyond Borders provides hope to homeless, those struggling with addiction



Marcus Martin is the executive director and founder of Grace Beyond Borders NWI Inc.

Photo provided by Grace Beyond Borders NWI Inc.

PHILIP POTEMPA

Investing his time to volunteer on holidays has become an annual tradition for Marcus Martin, executive director and founder of Grace Beyond Borders NWI Inc.

The nonprofit was incorporated in 2013 to combat homelessness, mental illness and addictions in Northwest Indiana.

“We are an organization fighting hopelessness, helplessness and helping with survival by connecting the often-invisible homeless population in East Chicago and surrounding cities,”

Martin said. “The homeless population is not restricted to only those struggling with mental illness and addictions.”

Grace Beyond Borders has provided services to a range of people: from college students, teachers and professors to business staff and even those employed and working — all of whom ended up homeless.

Martin said homelessness in small cities and towns is “invisible,” compared to large cities such as Chicago, and that homeless people “aren’t just those who panhandle.”

“In our communities of Northwest Indiana, most of our homeless neighbors rarely ever panhandle,” Martin said. “Individuals struggling with substance abuse are who comprise the majority of panhandling.”

He said the homeless experience feelings of embarrassment, shame, hopelessness, privacy and failure, which is why they try to stay under the radar from public view.

“We often don’t see those who sleep in garages, vacant apartments, abandoned and personal vehicles, public parks and behind businesses, using businesses’ outdoor outlets to charge phones and to plug in their space heaters,” Martin said.

Martin grew up in East Chicago and said he has fond memories of the racial diversity of his neighborhood while graduating from East Chicago Washington High School in 1971. He continued his education at Texas Christian University where he graduated in 1975 with a bachelor’s degree in physical education and biology.

From November to December 2018, Martin designed a fundraiser to focus on the homeless plight in Northwest Indiana, a campaign he called “A Night Without A Home.” Martin slept overnight in 30 different locations to better know “invisible neighbors” who spend their lives seeking shelter.

“I learned from a homeless veteran that he would take a shuttle bus, free of charge, from a local NWI casino, travel to Chicago, and sleep overnight on the CTA Red Line train,” Martin said. “And another homeless client said that he stayed overnight in a port-a-potty — all scenarios I replicated to experience it for myself.”

The unconventional “A Night Without A Home” raised funds for the down payment on the purchase of a 6,000-square-foot vacant medical

building at 513 W. Chicago Ave. in East Chicago. It was renovated and transformed to an emergency shelter for women and children to end homelessness.

“Volunteers are the heart of our mission growth, and this organization could not progress without the dedicated time and services provided from businesses, churches, individuals and families,” Martin said.

He said, during 2020-2021, a total of \$78,824 equivalent in-kind volunteer hours were contributed by churches and businesses to his organization.

Claude Powers, president of Powers and Sons Construction of Gary, one of the many businesses that has assisted Martin’s organization, is one of Martin’s board members. Powers describes him as “a leader by example” who is the “guiding force” of more than 100 dedicated volunteers.

“Being born and raised in Gary and currently living in Merrillville, I wanted to serve on this board and support Marcus,” Powers said. “I have had the privilege of knowing Marcus Martin for over 30 years.”

GRACE BEYOND BORDERS NWI INC.

11,756

meals served at Grace Beyond Borders outreach activities and programs

► The nonprofit at 1207 E. Chicago Ave., East Chicago, was incorporated in 2013 to combat homelessness, mental illness and addictions in Northwest Indiana. Learn more at gracebeyondborders.org or 219-392-9932.

Powers first met Martin when he served on the board of managers at the John Will Anderson Boys & Girls Club in Gary.

“There, Marcus caught my attention with his dedicated passion for making a difference with our youth,” Powers said. “Years later, I saw the same passion and commitment to make a difference with the homeless and hungry when he saw a void that needed to be addressed and he founded Grace Beyond Borders.”

Powers said Martin is a rare individual with a heart of gold who, along with his wife, willingly sacrifices his own comforts daily to answer his spiritual calling to be a servant to those in need.

Martin and Powers said the largest and most crucial support for the organization came from Foundations

of East Chicago. Since 2014, FEC has contributed consistently to guarantee both viability and sustainability.

“The board of directors of this foundation and their staff have recognized and supported our mission work to address the homeless crisis in East Chicago and supported our women and children mission by signing 20-year and three-year mortgage loans most recently on February 26, 2020, for our former medical center as the culmination of a seven-year vision,” Martin said.

He said the organization’s challenge over the next three years is its capital campaign to raise \$2.3 million needed for five years of the operational expenses for a 24-7 mission to assist the community’s chronically homeless, hopeless and helpless neighbors. ■



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Federal infrastructure bill will lead to many improvements from mobility to broadband

FRANK MRVAN

As the representative for Indiana's First Congressional District, I believe our people and talented workforce are the fundamental strength of the economy in Northwest Indiana and our entire state.

Throughout my career, I have supported the skilled labor provided by our invaluable unions, the abilities of our workers, and small businesses and entrepreneurs to create more good-paying jobs.



► **Frank Mrvan** is Indiana's 1st Congressional District representative, which includes Lake and Porter counties and most of western La Porte County.

That is why as a member of Congress and the co-chairman of the congressional steel caucus, I was proud to vote for the recent Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which was signed into law and is anticipated to bring \$8 billion in funds to Indiana for improvements to our roads, bridges, mass transit, ports, airports and expanded broadband internet. This law will immediately benefit our workers and the domestic steel industry, which are vital to the strength of our Region.

From union halls, steel mills and manufacturing centers to local municipalities and business networks, our nation has been talking far too long about the need to support workers by making desperately needed investments in our infrastructure and broadband technology. According to the latest report from the American Society of Civil Engineers, 23% of the roads in Indiana are in such poor condition that drivers pay an extra \$638 in car repairs each year, and 6%

of the bridges in Indiana were deemed structurally deficient.

Northwest Indiana's economic infrastructure and transportation assets have the potential to greatly benefit from the passage of the IIJA. For example, the recent investments of over \$1 billion into the South Shore Line by way of the West Lake Corridor Project and the Double Track Northwest Indiana project will transform the availability of good-paying jobs in the Region's economy.

A similar opportunity presents itself at our Northwest Indiana airports. According to the Federal Aviation Administration under the IIJA, the Gary/Chicago International Airport is expected to receive \$763,000; the Porter County Regional Airport is expected to receive \$295,000; and the Michigan City Municipal Airport is expected to receive \$159,000. Major initiatives and investments have been completed at the Gary airport in the past decade, including the completion of the extension of the runway and the establishment of a U.S. Customs facility. We must continue to work with the city of Gary and all our regional airport officials to draw attention to these assets, and harness the impact of these investments to create improved hubs for businesses and good-paying jobs.

Additionally, one of the greatest economic assets in Northwest Indiana is the 38 miles of our shoreline along Lake Michigan. We are so fortunate along our shore to have the indispensable workers at the Ports of Indiana-Burns Harbor to move goods and commerce to and from our Region. I

also am grateful that the Indiana Dunes was named our nation's 61st national park. And the recent \$17.8 million grant awarded to support the Marquette Greenway Project will provide a wonderful recreational activity for all residents and visitors to our Region. This grant will be used to complete the remaining 20 miles of the Marquette Greenway, a planned 60-mile bicycle/pedestrian path around Lake Michigan in Indiana that connects our lakefront communities and our national park.

I also am pleased that the IIJA includes increased funding for broadband infrastructure and improved access to the internet. Far too many individuals in Northwest Indiana and throughout our state do not have access to the internet, especially during the pandemic when it is so crucial for online access and video conferencing for health, educational and economic endeavors.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic remind us that health, safety and economic prosperity are inextricably linked.

While there are great challenges that confront our economy today related to inflation, supply chain bottlenecks and adjustments to workplace environments, I believe that the IIJA will assist our Region, state and nation in confronting these challenges. As the executive branch and

department agencies work to implement this law, I will continue to work to ensure that these funds are expended in a transparent, expeditious and fair manner that promotes the growth of a more equitable economy that works for everyone. ■

“I was proud to vote for the recent Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which ... is anticipated to bring \$8 billion in funds to Indiana for improvements to our roads, bridges, mass transit, ports, airports and expanded broadband internet.”

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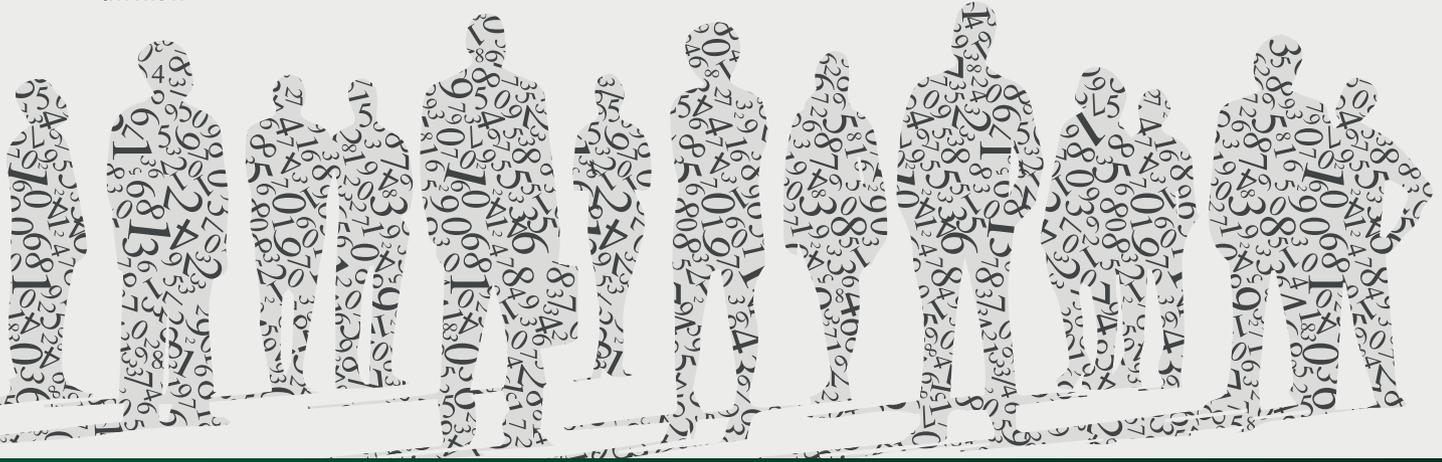
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