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FEB - MAR 2019

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share experiences of business successes and failures*

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President  
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# NORTHWEST INDIANA BUSINESS MAGAZINE

FEB - MAR 2019

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Northwest Indiana Business Magazine  
905 Joliet St #237, Dyer IN 46311  
is owned and published by  
Linker Media Group, Inc.,  
Troy Linker, President and CEO.

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of Lori Ann Lake  
by Michelle  
Hamstra



PUBLISHER'S NOTE

# Igniting our innovation in 2019

More ways to share local business stories

The mission of *Northwest Indiana Business Magazine* from its founding in 1991 has been to publish stories about people and ideas that inform, inspire, challenge and educate local business and community leaders. We want to help them improve their businesses, the local economy and the quality of life in our Region.

To meet this mission, we choose an editorial theme for each issue. This year in recognition of the NWI Forum's Ignite the Region strategic plan for economic development, we have aligned five of our issue themes with the five broad economic development goals set out in the plan.

Our theme for this first issue of 2019 is entrepreneurship and innovation, and what better way to kick things off than with our profile of Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center's E-Day award winners. These entrepreneurs never fail to inspire us with their determination to succeed and the ways they benefit our local economy and community.

The theme for April is recognizing excellence when we announce the winners of our Best of Business awards. In future issues, we will come back to the other four Ignite the Region goals: business development and marketing; talent; infrastructure; and place making. Visit [NWIforum.org](http://NWIforum.org) to learn more about its strategic plan.

For many years, we have published our magazine articles on our website, as well as in the magazine. In 2019, we want to make these articles more accessible online. Reading the magazine this month, take note of our updated design, which includes a QR code for each story. A quick scan of this code with your phone or tablet's camera opens a digital version of the story on

our website formatted for reading on your device. Most newer phones won't need a special app to scan the code. The built-in camera app should work, but for some older phones, you might need to download a free QR code reader app.

In addition to the magazine's stories, we have expanded our online-only content, including the business news section of [NWIndianaBusiness.com](http://NWIndianaBusiness.com). Multiple business-related news stories are posted daily on topics and issues relevant to Northwest and Northcentral Indiana. It provides readers a one-stop local online business news source.

For those who want a weekly reminder of the Region's top business news, we created the Northwest Indiana Business eNewsletter. It provides a quick and convenient way to stay on top of the week's five most important regional news stories without cluttering your inbox. Visit [NWIndianaBusiness.com/enews](http://NWIndianaBusiness.com/enews) to sign up for our free newsletter.

We hope you like our editorial, design and content delivery changes. Our goal is to provide access, so that no matter how you like to read—in print, online or in an email—and no matter where you want to read—in a magazine, on your computer or on your phone—you can read our stories to help you improve your business, our local economy and the quality of life in our Region.

—Thanks for reading!



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



# AROUND THE REGION

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

LARRY AVILA

## Accounting

**Krugger Lawton CPAs**, an accounting and business advisory firm with locations in Elkhart, South Bend and St. Joseph, recently announced that **Julie Eslinger**, a staff CPA, earned the designation of certified valuation analyst from the National Association of Certified Valuators and Analysts. The CVA is an accreditation for CPAs, which provide business valuation and litigation consulting services. Eslinger has more than 10 years of public accounting experience.

## Banking

**Centier Bank** in Merrillville recently announced the following executive appointments: **Don Baker**, senior partner; **Sharyn Chesna**, senior portfolio manager, business banking department; **Yolanda Estrada**, assistant vice president, processing manager, mortgages department; **Janice Ortbring**, vice president and director of marketing.

Michigan City-based **Horizon Bancorp Inc.**, operator of **Horizon Bank**, has signed a definitive agreement to combine operations with **Salin Bancshares Inc.** of Indianapolis.

Salin Bancshares operates **Salin Bank and Trust Co.**, which had \$918.4 million in assets as of Sept. 30 and 20 banking locations in 10 Indiana counties serving Columbus, Delphi, Edinburgh, Fishers, Flora, Fort Wayne, Galveston, Gas City, Kokomo, Lafayette, Logansport, Marion, West Lafayette and Indianapolis. Horizon Bank in a statement said the merger will enhance its core deposit base and expand its presence in central and northeast Indiana.

## Business

The **Greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce** is in search of a new president and CEO. In its Dec. 10 email newsletter, the chamber said **Rita Mrozinski**, who had served as president and CEO since January 2017, “has moved on from her position with the chamber.” A selection committee has been formed and is actively searching for Mrozinski’s replacement.

**Katie Eaton** was named new president of the **Michigan City Chamber of Commerce**. Eaton most recently served as economic development manager with the Economic Development Corp. Michigan City. Eaton earned her undergraduate degree and master’s degree in

business administration from Purdue University Northwest. She also has served on various boards of directors in the Michigan City area and is a member of the Michigan City Rotary Club, the Indiana Economic Development Association and Women in Leadership La Porte County. Eaton succeeds Mary Jo Orłowski who had served in the role since January 2016 but resigned from the post in September.

## Community

The latest induction into the **South Shore Wall of Legends** took place Dec. 12 at the **Indiana Welcome Center** in Hammond. South Shore Legends honors individuals with a connection to Northwest Indiana who have made their mark on the world through exploration, courage, creativity or innovation. The 2018 inductees include: **Capt. James M. Kirk**, a native of Gary, who was the first enlisted man to fly 50 missions as a tail gunner during World War II; **Lowell J. Thomas**, global adventurer, radio broadcaster and Valparaiso University graduate; and **W.F. (Bill) Wellman**, a U.S. Marine during World War II, a pioneer in tourism in Northwest Indiana who continues



**BANKING**  
Don Baker



**BANKING**  
Sharyn Chesna



**BANKING**  
Yolanda Estrada



**BANKING**  
Janice Ortbring





**EDUCATION**  
Matthew Etchison



**EDUCATION**  
Jeffrey Jourdan



**EDUCATION**  
Michael Nichols



**EDUCATION**  
James Brodzinski

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The **city of La Porte** is among nine Indiana communities that will be among the first in the state to be part of a new downtown revitalization initiative. Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) and the Indiana U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development announced Nov. 19 that OCRA was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the USDA Rural Development to create the **IMPACT Main Street** program, designed to strengthen and protect businesses and create job opportunities.

### Development

**Fulcrum BioEnergy** of Pleasanton, Calif., announced Dec. 13 that it has selected Gary for its Centerpoint BioFuels Plant. The estimated investment is \$600 million, and when fully operational by 2022, the facility could employ up to 160 people. Construction is expected to begin in 2020 and will take between 18 and 24 months to complete, the company said. Once operational, the plant will divert and process about 700,000 tons of waste from the greater Chicago area.

### Dining

**Temple News Agency**, a café and coffee shop in La Porte, now is owned and operated by **J.D. and Jennifer Flynn**. The Temple News Agency marked its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. The Flynnns said they were patrons of the eatery, at 816 Jefferson Ave., before buying the business in September.

### Education

**Valparaiso University's College of Nursing and Health Professions** will begin offering an online, post-professional, occupational therapy, doctoral program in summer 2019. The addition of the post-professional occupational therapy doctorate represents the second doctoral degree at Valparaiso. The online degree consists of 32 credits for those with a master's degree and 42 credits for those with a bachelor's degree.

**Matthew Etchison** was named chief information officer for **Ivy Tech Community College**. Etchison previously served as the college's vice president for information technology as part of the workforce alignment department. As chief information officer, Etchison will serve as the senior information technology administrator for Ivy Tech, providing visionary and operational leadership for strategic planning, implementation and improvement of technologies, solutions and related support services that closely align with the college.

**Purdue University Northwest's School of Education & Counseling** made Indiana's latest top 10 ranking of Indiana collegiate institutions issuing the most teaching licenses, according to the Indiana Department of Education—Office of Educator Effectiveness and Licensing. Purdue Northwest ranked eighth of 46 institutions in Indiana granting teaching licenses, the college said in a statement.

**Saint Joseph's College at Marian University**, a new two-year college launched through a partnership

between Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer and Marian University in Indianapolis has named **Jeffrey Jourdan** executive director and **Michael Nichols** associate director and dean.

**James Brodzinski**, dean of the **College of Business at Valparaiso University**, was selected for a three-year term on the **AACSB Continuous Improvement Review Committee**. The committee oversees processes for continuation of business accreditation. Brodzinski joined Valparaiso University as dean of the college of business in 2012.

**Gwen Stricker** of Whiting was part of a **Ball State University** student team that took second place in the **2018 Charles E. Peterson Prize Competition**.

### Entertainment

**Orestes Hernandez**, formerly vice president of business development at the Coral Gables (Florida) Museum near Miami, was named executive director of the **National Mascot Hall of Fame** in Whiting. **Al Spajer**, who had served as the hall of fame's executive director, will transition to director of community engagement. Other staff include **Ann Canning**, operations manager; **Karen Anaszewicz**, museum office manager; and **Adam Moskalick** and **Alexa Cano**, events staff.

### Financial

St. Louis-based financial services firm **Benjamin F. Edwards & Co.** recently opened its first Indiana



**EDUCATION**  
Gwen Stricker



**ENTERTAINMENT**  
Orestes Hernandez



**HEALTH CARE**  
Jim Concato



**HEALTH CARE**  
Robert Franco

location in Chesterton, which will be led by **Clifford Bryan**, branch manager and managing director—investments.

Elkhart-based recreational vehicle maker **Thor Industries Inc.** named **Mark Trinske** vice president of investor relations. Trinske most recently served as vice president of investor relations for SeaWorld Entertainment Inc. in Orlando, Fla. Trinske earned an undergraduate degree from Arizona State University and a master's in

business administration from the University of Michigan.

### Gaming

**Spectacle Entertainment** of Indianapolis in late November announced that it will merge with **Majestic Holdco LLC** in a cash transaction. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Majestic Holdco owns the **Majestic Star Casino LLC** and the **Majestic Star Casino II LLC**, both in

Buffington Harbor in Gary, as well as a 300-room hotel, 2,000-space parking garage, and a pavilion containing land-based restaurants, bars and meeting facilities.

### Health care

**Franciscan Health's** new \$243 million hospital in Michigan City is ready for business. The facility, which fronts I-94 and took about 2-1/2 years to complete, was scheduled to open

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Jayshree Bhatt



HEALTH CARE  
Stephanie Evanson



HEALTH CARE  
Carolina Ocampo



HEALTH CARE  
Joanne Niere-Ramos

Jan. 12. Franciscan recently dedicated the hospital's chapel, hosted a VIP reception and open house for about 500 people, hosted an open house for staff, and Dec. 8 welcomed more than 3,000 people to a public open house.

**Jim Concato**, director of oncology services at **Methodist Hospitals**, was one of six health care professionals named a **2018 Cancer Control Champion** by the **Indiana Cancer Consortium**, a coalition working to

prevent, control and reduce cancer in Indiana. He was recognized for exhibiting leadership in implementing the ICC Cancer Control Plan through participation in action teams and local cancer coalitions.

**Robert Franko** was named president and CEO of Valparaiso-based **Visiting Nurse Services of Northwest Indiana**. Franko is a native of Northwest Indiana and previously served as vice president

for development and marketing for Porter-Starke Services from 1996 to 2010. Franko replaces **Leigh Morris** who has served as the organization's interim president and CEO since June.

**Community Hospital** in Munster recently welcomed new physicians to **Community Care Network Inc.** The new physicians are: **Dr. Pratik Patel**, electrophysiologist; **Dr. Jayshree Bhatt**, family medicine specialist; **Dr. Stephanie Evanson**,



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**MEDIA**  
Stacey Kellogg



**NONPROFIT**  
Amy Davis Navardauskas



**UTILITIES**  
Jennifer Montague



**UTILITIES**  
Stan Pinegar

obstetrician-gynecologist; **Dr. Carolina Ocampo**, family medicine specialist; and **Dr. Joanne Niere-Ramos**, family medicine specialist.

**Manufacturing**

**Alliance Steel** of Bedford Park, Ill., finalized its plan Dec. 5 to bring its flat-rolled steel supply and coil processing business to Gary and create up to 130 new jobs by 2023. Alliance announced in July plans to relocate

its operations from Illinois to Gary. Information released by the Indiana Economic Development Corp. said the company will purchase and equip a 250,000-square-foot facility at 2700 E. 5th Ave. in Gary at an estimated cost of \$19.7 million. Alliance expects to begin renovations early next year and begin operating by January 2020.

**LCI Industries** of Elkhart announced Nov. 30 its wholly-owned subsidiary **Lippert Components**

**Manufacturing Inc.** acquired for \$28 million the business and certain assets of the furniture manufacturing operation of **Smoker Craft Inc.**, a pontoon, aluminum fishing and fiberglass boat maker in New Paris.

**Media**

**Stacey Kellogg** has been named editorial director of **Ideas in Motion** of Valparaiso. Kellogg, a Michigan City native, has a Bachelor of Arts degree

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in professional writing from Purdue University. Kellogg most recently served as regional manager, community relations for La Porte Hospital, Porter Regional Hospital in Valparaiso and Starke Hospital in Knox as well as the La Porte and Porter Medical Groups.

### Nonprofit

**Amy Davis Navardauskas** has been named executive director of **The Art Barn School of Art** in Valparaiso. Navardauskas is an established artist in Northwest Indiana and previously served on the leadership team of Lubeznik Center for the Arts in Michigan City, where she served as the marketing director for 10 years.

### Retail

Michigan-based **SpartanNash Co.** announced in late November that it will acquire South Bend-based grocer **Martin's Super Markets Inc.**, a family-owned and operated independent supermarket chain.

Ohio-based **Big Lots** hosted a grand opening ribbon cutting Nov. 30 at its new location at 3201 E. Lincoln Highway in Hobart, east of Southlake Mall.

### Utilities

**Jennifer Montague** has been named vice president of communications and external affairs for **Northern Illinois Public Service Co. (NIPSCO)** in Merrillville. She will report to Violet Sistovaris, NIPSCO president, and be based at the company's headquarters in Merrillville.

**Duke Energy**, which serves about 820,000 customers across central and southern Indiana, named **Stan Pinegar**, formerly vice president of Indiana government affairs, Duke Energy's state president for Indiana, succeeding **Melody Birmingham-Byrd** who is Duke Energy's senior vice president and chief procurement officer. As state president, Pinegar manages state and local regulatory and government relations and community affairs. Pinegar works with the corporate and regulatory strategy teams to advance the company's rate and regulatory initiatives.



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# Making their own way

Region's E-Day award-winning serial entrepreneurs share experiences of business successes and failures

JERRY DAVICH

**L**ike most opportunistic kids, Jeff Conti not only worked on his newspaper route, he also shoveled snow and mowed lawns for his first entrepreneurial experiences.

Conti explored other unconventional ways to challenge himself while growing up in the late 1970s and early

at first. But then I became proficient and, later, a lifeguard," Conti joked, continuing his analogy.

Conti, now 52, owns the Coffee Cabin gourmet coffee business. He opened his first drive-thru location in 2014 on U.S. 30 in Schererville. There are three locations now, with plans to open nine more cabins by April 2019.

His efforts haven't gone unnoticed. Conti was awarded Emerging Business of the Year honors at the 2018 Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards, better known in the Region as "E-Day." Hosted by the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, the 27th annual ceremony honored acclaimed entrepreneurs from across the Region, each of whom embodies what it means to be an entrepreneur.

"It's not an easy life, and it's not for the faint hearted," Conti said. "But I like a challenge, and that's the path I chose."



**“There is a great deal of personal risk and personal sacrifice that goes into being an entrepreneur.”**

—Scott Albanese, founder of the Albanese Confectionery in Hobart

'80s in the Griffith area. He built backyard amusement park rides; he created wood-working projects; and he showed movies inside his father's empty step van, among other endeavors as a young capitalist.

At 17, he launched Minutemen Fleet Services with his father, eventually earning a Young Entrepreneur of the Year award in 1991 for his role in the business. Since then, he has owned three other businesses.

"My parents were both entrepreneurial, but they weren't businesspeople," Conti said. "Management wasn't their thing."

As an older teenager, Conti wanted to pursue a formal education, but he knew he was an entrepreneur at heart. While pursuing an associate degree in engineering, he hustled to earn several patents in his name. He majored in effort at the school of hard knocks and minored in acid-tested problem solving.

"I was thrown into it in a sink-or-swim sort of way, and I nearly drowned

## 'Help people first'

**T**his difficult career path is a familiar one for most "serial entrepreneurs," defined as an elite subset of your everyday, garden-variety entrepreneurs. They share a dogged, business-minded vision of success among other similar characteristics.

"Grit, determination, natural curiosity, hard work and comfort with risk certainly come to mind," said Lorri Feldt, regional director of the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, "also the ability to tolerate failure and to bounce back from it."

These business owners rely on their personal instincts and professional acumen rather than a college degree or formal education.

"We often see entrepreneurship running in families but not so much connected with formal education," Feldt said. "Often I think the kids who

are impatient and easily distracted in school are ones worth watching later in life as natural entrepreneurs. Unable to sit still is not a bad thing, especially



for a business owner."

Serial entrepreneurs share many key traits: a compelling curiosity, time management wizardry, a knack for nurturing personal connections and the ability to end a failed business venture to begin a new successful one. They also change direction without fear, listen to pertinent advice from others and trust their instincts at crucial times.

"Anyone can be an entrepreneur at any point in their life, but most will not because there is a great deal of personal risk and personal sacrifice that goes into being an entrepreneur," said Scott Albanese, founder of the



Albanese Confectionery in Hobart, who earned this year's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Albanese, who started his business with \$10,000 and a candy-coated dream, is a serial entrepreneur who offers simple advice to newcomers.

"Many entrepreneurs make the mistake of focusing on money as their key metric of success instead of focusing on the consumer," Albanese said. "Help people first, and the money will come."

"Before I knew what it meant to be an entrepreneur, I was taught the importance of hard work, accountability and humility," Bombacino said. As a kid, Bombacino watched his father, a Vietnam War veteran, work his tail off every day as a house painter, quitting his corporate job to start his one-man company.

"He taught me I could control my own destiny," Bombacino said. "Seeing him start, grow and manage his own small business prepared me for the tough

exhilarating and so dang fun. You really don't know where life is going to take you," he said. "I never could have imagined that my son would have inspired my wife and I to create a food company for people with feeding tubes—and to take our shot at disrupting the multi-billion-dollar enteral nutrition industry."

**'I was scared to death'**

Lori Ann Lake also traces her entrepreneurial lineage to her father,



The 2018 Entrepreneurial Excellence (E-Day) Award honorees pose for a picture on stage at the awards event in November hosted by Avalon Manor in Merrillville. From left are: Joshua Halpern, Chris Chatfield, Lori Lake, Scott Albanese, Steve Radtke, Sandy Radtke, Dana Conti, Jeff Conti, Tony Bombacino, Julie Bombacino and Chip Lee.

Photo provided by the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center

**'Entrepreneurship is so dang fun'**

For Julie and Tony Bombacino, helping their son, AJ, led to Real Food Blends, meals for tube-fed people, in Chesterton. The 8-year-old boy, who is nonverbal and unable to walk, has been fed through a tube since he was 6 months old.

"After having a 45-minute seizure out of the blue, he failed a swallow study and had to get a feeding tube," Tony Bombacino said. "He's had one ever since, still eating 100-percent Real Food Blends meals."

Bombacino's company was awarded Small Business Persons of the Year at E-Day.

stuff that entrepreneurship has to offer."

He doesn't feel he was "groomed" for entrepreneurship. However, he was around many blue-collar, hard-working people in his family who took a chance on starting their own small businesses.

Bombacino, who was one of the first in his family to attend college, calls himself more street smart than book smart. In his 20s and 30s, Bombacino didn't fear leaving corporate jobs for new startups. He showed similar confidence when he began Real Food Blends with his wife and business partner, Julie.

"To me, entrepreneurship is

George Wood, who owned and operated a Merrillville restaurant. There, she and her five siblings worked at various jobs while absorbing their father's work ethic and small business spirit.

"As a child, I thought I also would run a business someday. Not a restaurant, for sure, but some sort of enterprise where I would be able to work with people," said Lake, president of Intercontinental Subscription Service Inc. in Michigan City.

Although Lake was honored with Women-Owned Business of the Year, nothing simply has been handed to her in life. She learned about her firm by reviewing business contracts,



Elaine Bedel, president of the Indiana Economic Development Corp., right, and Lorri Feldt, left, regional director of the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, pose with Small Business Persons of the Year: Julie and Tony Bombacino, Real Food Blends, Chesterton.



Photos provided by the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center

Joshua Halpern, with wife Ashley, was the Entrepreneurial Success honoree for 2018. Joshua Halpern operates Albert's Diamond Jewelers in Schererville and Merrillville.



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contacting customers and asking endless questions of employees.

In 1995, she started at ISS, expecting to rescue a sinking company, initially known as Hoosier Magazines, after only two years in operation.

“Needless to say, I was scared to death,” she recalled. “However, I was excited at the opportunity to help bring this company out of its slump. I knew this was the right thing to do for my family, the business and myself.”

After a year at the helm, ISS began showing its first profit. By 2000, ISS reached more than \$950,000 in sales, and a decade later, it jumped 20 percent. By 2015, ISS earned \$1.5 million in sales. By 2017, the firm’s net worth skyrocketed 32 percent.

Along the way, Lake attributes her success to daily hustle and years of hard work, key traits for serial entrepreneurs.

“My husband would actually drive myself and our three children around in a big city where I would literally jump out of our van in my business



**Chris Chatfield, right, of First Merchants Bank, Munster, was selected the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center’s Small Business Advocate of the Year in 2018. His wife, Darlene, accompanied him at the Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards event in November.**

suit for meetings, and to make 30 to 40 cold calls within the hour,” she said.

Lake attributes her E-Day award to the same perseverance that rescued her company.

“As I become older and wiser, I am

enjoying that sometimes I do catch a break here and there,” she said.

#### **‘Others have bought into my vision’**

In 2005, Chip Lee didn’t catch a break when he had to make the

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most difficult decision of his life. Lee left his family's business, Congress Enterprises, to launch his own demolition, excavation and trucking company, C. Lee Construction Co. Inc.

"I had to walk away from my family to take care of my family, if that makes sense," Lee said.

He had no capital money, no resources and no idea how to pull it off. "Being an entrepreneur is quite a

daunting task," he said. "I trusted in my faith in God."

As a self-described "Tonka toy kid," Lee first acquired his first six trucks, then hauled into his firm a handful of top-notch employees.

Today, C. Lee Construction Services has 44 employees, and the company has worked on a variety of large-scale projects, including roads and bridges across Northwest Indiana and the

Chicago area. The firm also played a major role in the revitalization of the Gary-Chicago International Airport.

Lee's firm was honored with the Minority-Owned Business of the Year award.

"It's been a humbling and gratifying experience, to be recognized as an award-winning entrepreneur," said Lee, who's 48. "It's a term I don't often use to describe myself. Yet I've learned that you can't be a true entrepreneur unless you can step back from your day-to-day duties to take a big-picture look at your company.

"I learned that my daily decisions directly affect others who have bought into my vision," Lee says.

### 'They will get their nose bloodied'

Chris Chatfield has helped countless serial entrepreneurs transform their visions within the Northwest Indiana business sector. For doing so, he was named Small Business Advocate of the Year by Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center.

"As a commercial lender, it's fun to watch these risk-takers follow their dream," said Chatfield, who works with entrepreneurs as a commercial relationship manager at First Merchants Bank in Munster. "We may not be risk-takers by nature, but we make educated business decisions for our clients, who are visionaries by nature."

For more than 20 years, Chatfield has helped connect clients to resources inside and outside of the bank. On any given day, Chatfield might visit a mom-and-pop retail shop or a large-scale construction site.

"We consider ourselves trusted advisers," said Chatfield, former director of the Small Business Development Center in LaPorte County. "When they start out, they don't know about all aspects, so we bring them along, help them become mature, and ultimately generate wealth and sell the business or pass it along to their kids."

Chatfield, who lives in Michigan City, considers himself a high-powered cheerleader for this elite team of business people who share similar qualities in their strategies.

"They see things differently than how

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others see things,” he said. “They’re creative in their approach, and they will get their nose bloodied to get their business idea realized.”

“Commercial bankers are like psychiatrists,” Chatfield said. “Part of what we do is challenge folks. I try to dissect and pull out of them: Who is your market? How are you getting to them? I feel I have become a pretty good problem solver.”

### ‘An amazing alignment of the stars’

In 1995, Joshua Halpern became his family’s own problem solver during his senior year of college. His market research determined that Schererville would be an ideal site for a jewelry store. The family’s now successful jewelry store in Schererville, Albert’s Diamond Jewelers, is the culmination of Halpern’s business plan thesis.

“I was able to come into a successful family business and take fresh ideas and new energy to help transform it into a more successful company,” said Halpern, 46, who earned E-Day’s



Photo by Michelle Hamstra

**Jeff Conti, owner of the Coffee Cabin, earned Emerging Business of the Year honors at the 2018 Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards. He plans to open nine more locations by April 2019.**

Entrepreneurial Success award. “Our Schererville store came about through an amazing alignment of the stars.”

Halpern, who grew up in his father’s jeweler business, polished his entrepreneurial skills by earning a

gemologist degree in 1996. After joining the family business, he recruited key employees from former jewelry stores in the Region. The family’s two locations offer all things jewelry, from watches to wedding rings, as well

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Chip Lee, owner of C. Lee Construction, Gary, was selected the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center's Minority-Owned Business of the Year for 2018. Lee is shown with his wife, Michelle; son Jace; and daughter Joriana.

Photo provided by the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center

as services such as custom designs, repairs and appraisals.

When asked if he is a jeweler or an entrepreneur, Halpern paused with thoughtful reflection.

"I would say both," he replied. "At heart, I'm a jeweler through and through. But as an entrepreneur, I love to explore new ideas and fresh approaches to what I do."

The Radtke family, owners of Pioneer Lumber in Michigan City, nabbed the honor of Family-Owned Business of the Year at the E-Day event. The company's foundation is built on the merger of two lumber yards by Steve Radtke's father, Herbert. But Steve and wife Sandy have redirected its path over the years.

"Being family-owned means failure is not an option," Sandy Radtke said in her family's 2018 Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards profile, featured on the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center's E-Day Leaders website. "Trying to set it up for the next generation, we don't want to disappoint. It makes you work harder. It's in your blood."



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# Indiana taking lead in farm innovations

Agribusiness entrepreneurs use technology to develop ideas that save them time, money

BOB MOULESONG

**A**griculture is big business in the Hoosier state, and there's still plenty of room to grow.

According to state estimates, Indiana ranks in the top 10 nationally in the 2017 production of corn, soybeans, peppermint, spearmint, watermelon, tomatoes, cantaloupe and pumpkins. Sales in 2017 reached \$31.2 billion, with an additional \$4.6 billion in exports.

Hoosiers are not resting on their laurels. By using a combination of technology, promotion and creative, out-of-the-box thinking, Indiana is making great strides on ways to improve efficiency and yield.

## Out of the labs; into marketplace

John Hanak, managing director of Purdue Ventures, said former Gov. Mitch Daniels initiated the vision.

"Mitch wanted to get technology out of the labs and into the agriculture community," Hanak said. "He wanted to remove barriers so that a business incubator could result in a startup and ultimately a major source of innovative tools and businesses for agriculture."

AG-Celerator is a \$2 million plant sciences innovation fund designed to provide critical startup support for Purdue innovators who wish to commercialize patented intellectual property



**"We want to raise the profile of Indiana when it comes to agribusiness."**

— John Hanak, managing director of Purdue Ventures

or Purdue "know-how" technologies. Funding is considered for innovations that impact life sciences, advancing crop traits, generating higher yields, using big data to improve farm management, finding new uses of plants, using precision agriculture and discovering advanced breeding techniques.

"Every semester, we accept proposals that fit our criteria," Hanak said. "We go through a process to determine which proposals merit additional funds to take their proposal to the next step. Then we award funds to help that idea become a commercial endeavor."

Since AG-Celerator took root in 2015, funds have been awarded to 25 startup companies, including Hydro Grow LLC, Phicrobe LLC, VinSense Technology, Progeny Drone Inc. and Gen3Bio Inc.

"These are great examples of startups with innovative visions to transform waste, convert images into information, detect pathogenies or optimize yield," Hanak said.

"Purdue's intellectual property has incredible value. We want to help our innovators share that IP with agribusiness ventures not just in Indiana but all over the Midwest."

The AG-Celerator process helps startups determine if their idea has legs.

"We want to help innovators understand what the market is telling you about your success chances," Hanak said.



Photo provided by Kyler Laird

AG-Celerator is one of several initiatives at Purdue intended to make agribusiness in Indiana grow and flourish. "We want to raise the profile of Indiana when it comes to agribusiness," he said.

## Future has direction, just not drivers

**W**hen Kyler Laird returned to his Rensselaer roots and took over the family farm, he brought with him the technical knowledge he garnered working at the Purdue School of Engineering.

"I earned a computer science degree at Purdue," Laird said. "Technology, automation and farming have always



READ ON PHONE



**Kyler Laird, right, demonstrates for farmers his driverless tractor at his 1,700-acre farm in Rensselaer. Laird's technology uses signals sent via GPS between the tractor's microcomputer and a laptop.**

been in my blood.”

Laird has taken multiple pieces of farm equipment and used his background to create driverless vehicles. The modified equipment includes a Massey Ferguson 2745 tractor, a MT765 Challenger, and a John Deere 6330 with a Precision Planting-laden 8-row John Deere 7300 planter.

He successfully planted 535 acres on his family farm without sitting in the driver's seat.

“GPS automation has been around farming equipment for a while now,” Laird said.

“I took it to the next step and added the ability to control the transmission,

steering and throttle via automation.”

Laird's technology uses signals sent via GPS between the tractor's microcomputer and a laptop.

“All of the equipment I needed already existed,” he said. “It was a matter of coming up with the correct computations and the most efficient way to implement them.”

Efficiency is what driverless farm equipment is all about.

“Farmers spent a large amount of time riding a tractor,” Laird said. “Now they can have the ability to use those man-hours elsewhere.”

Efficiency in relation to cost control is also critical.

“We envision a farm that hires planting as a service and not having to purchase half-a-million dollars' worth of equipment,” he said.

Laird has teamed up with business partner Craig Rupp to create Sabanto, an initiative to ease the burden of capital expenditures on farmers.

“Machinery is underutilized, and this is our attempt to show how we can better take advantage of equipment,” he said. “For years, I used a 40-foot planter on 1,700 acres. Now we're going smaller with a 30-foot planter and covering 10,000 acres.”

In 2019, Laird plans to plant 10,000 acres from Texas to Canada using

## >AGRICULTURE

driverless equipment to get the word out to farmers nationwide.

### Turning old into new

Many innovations start from scratch, while others are a reinvention. Green Sense Farms is an example of the latter.

“Horizontal farming is an old technology,” said Robert Colangelo, CEO of Green Sense. “What we’ve done is made it into something new—vertical farming.”

Colangelo began with a 20,000-square foot farm in Portage. As the business motto implies, Green Sense maximizes space by using vertical racks filled with hundreds of different kinds of lettuces, leafy vegetables and microgreens. They minimize the dependency on weather by creating an indoor environment conducive to growing the selected crops.

“With an indoor farm, we eliminate the impact of inclement weather,” Colangelo said.

“We provide our own light, temperature and water. By creating an environment conducive to the crops

being grown, we can maximize yield and minimize resources.”

The vertical farm recycles water to minimize the need for outside moisture, although a water source is needed to begin the process. Green Sense uses various colors of LED lighting to bring out the best in the various types of leafy greens being grown.

“Through scientific research, we’ve learned which RBG colors help specific greens produce a higher yield, and we design the lighting based on crop choice,” Colangelo said.

Green Sense sticks to lettuces and leafy greens, preferring to implement their expertise on specific crops.

“Most farmers stick to growing what they know,” Colangelo said. “We’re no different. What we do works very well on our chosen crops, and it allows us to focus on improving our process.”

In the U.S., new vertical farms are under development in South Bend, Michigan and Las Vegas. Overseas, two are underway in China and French Polynesia.

“We’ve worked with companies to determine the best crops for their

needs and help them design the vertical farm based on their desired outcomes,” he said.

Plans include developing farms for botanicals and medicinal plants.

“There is an incredible opportunity to develop environments for medicinal uses as well as food,” Colangelo said.

### Optimizing yield via technology

Born and raised on a Northwest Indiana farm, Sheldon Alt always has had a passion for agronomics. As eastern U.S. regional manager for CropMetrics, he found the right partner.

“Our idea is to provide optimal technologies with local agronomic expertise to provide growers with advanced solutions that are implemented by those experts,” Alt said. “Technology needs to be implemented in ways that are specific to your location, and you need advisers that understand the nuances of your areas, right down to variations in a field.”

CropMetrics focuses on water, arguably the most important variable of the grower’s equation.

“Water can increase or decrease yield more than any other component,” Alt said. “By managing water correctly, we help growers to maximize yield while they minimize cost and risk.”

Products include soil moisture probes, variable rate irrigation and virtual optimizer.

“Our probes can take 1,000 measurements to help determine root depth and water needs,” Alt said. “The data is sent to our database via Wi-Fi technology every three hours. Growers can analyze data in near real-time to control moisture in their field.”

The virtual optimizer is software that integrates data from probes with site-specific updates to help predict future moisture needs. Reporting and record keeping are handled online for reference. Trained local advisers help growers use the data for their specific conditions.

The seamless integration of CropMetrics tools have helped growers reduce the amount of water used because of exact measurements in their fields.



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“It’s the intelligent use of data that makes it beneficial,” Alt said. “Using less water while increasing yield is helping the environment as well as the grower’s profitability.”

Crops benefiting from the real-time smart technology include corn, soybeans, blueberries, potatoes and cotton. The combination of diverse tools and local knowledge allow the software to be modified for multiple conditions.

### Combining promotion, acceleration

**A**griNovus, with headquarters in Indianapolis, helps promote and accelerate the growth of the agbioscience community throughout the state. The concept was so inviting that it hooked Beth Bechdol, a northern Indiana farm girl with a master’s in agricultural economics from Purdue and transformed her into the champion of the endeavor.

“We’re under the umbrella of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership,” Bechdol said.

“AgriNovus will help make Indiana the No. 1 state for the agbioscience community.

In the future, when business people think of Indiana, they will think of unparalleled agbioscience talent and innovation.”

Bechdol sees AgriNovus as a “lot of moving parts” that all benefit the agribusiness of Indiana.

“We are the megaphone for the ag community,” she said. “We’re also the connector of people and organizations to promote ag growth.

“We promote agbioscience career paths and help develop related skill sets. And we inspire entrepreneurs and startups in the ag field.”

A tall order, indeed. But, AgriNovus made significant strides in 2018.

They created the Blue Room and displayed it at the 91<sup>st</sup> National FFA Convention last October.

“The Blue Room is 17,000 square feet of state-of-the-art technology that shows agriculture is tech intensive, modern and innovative,” Bechdol said.

The visual extravaganza includes demonstrations from high-tech ag companies such as Corteva, Elanco, and FMC.

Members of the AgriNovus leadership team traveled to Israel in May to exchange information with ag-tech companies there.

“We discovered we have a lot in common with them, regarding vision for the future of agbioscience,” Bechdol said.

“We hope that our conversations lead to Indiana being a destination for those Israeli companies who are looking to expand into the USA.”

The 2018 Forbes AgTech Summit was held in Indianapolis in September where Gov. Eric Holcomb used the opportunity to share his vision of Indiana’s place in the agbioscience community. AgriNovus participated in discussions on building an AG Innovation Ecosystem with members of other high-tech ag companies. About 500 global agricultural leaders attended.





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# Outside-the-box projects

Companies in Region take innovative approach to traditional construction, renovation projects

LAUREN CAGGIANO

Companies in Northwest Indiana are betting on the area, and the proof is in both recent new construction/renovation projects and ones in the works.

three sectors have accounted for 75 percent of the 8,500 net jobs that were created from 2012 to 2017.”

Several Northwest Indiana companies’ have taken an innovative approach to form and function and

education programming for high school youth.

“At one time, the passenger train depot was the center of the community,” he said. “In fact, my family history is connected to that building.”

When there’s a will, there’s a way, as they say. Groth raised \$300,000 to move the century-old building an eighth of mile along the tracks to the school. According to Groth, the community pulled its weight financially. The donations came from a combination of corporate gifts, individual donors and grants.

Once funded, the students from the building trades program worked for three years to restore the historic gem. He said the restoration process was a learning experience, which challenged them to put textbook knowledge into practice. For example, there was a lot of demolition work needed inside, as well as decking on the exterior.

“It was a great program for my building trades (students),” he said, “because restoration is much different than new construction.”

Another challenge was honoring the building’s rich history while transforming it into a modern salon. Groth said they kept certain original elements, like the tall ceilings with crown molding and antique glass windows.

The building was move-in ready in fall 2018, when it re-opened as The Hair Depot, the classroom for the educational center’s cosmetology program.

Groth said that, while significant progress has been made, they are still looking forward to the final touches. In the meantime, he said public sentiment about the restoration has been positive, and he’s energized by the progress.



Rendering provided by La Porte Hospital



Rendering provided by Fair Oaks Farms

**TOP: La Porte Hospital broke ground on a new \$125 million facility in August. BOTTOM: The Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Fair Oaks Farms opened in January.**

Industries ranging from education to hospitality—and everything in between—have invested resources to build or rebuild high-tech, high-touch, attractive and energy-efficient structures.

This innovation has been done in the context of attracting and retaining customers and talent. According to a September 2018 report from the Northwest Indiana Forum, “Industry-sector job growth has been led by health care, hospitality and retail trade in the Region. Together, these

what these buildings mean for the Region and beyond.

## What’s old is new again

Call it a win-win for the Porter County Career and Technical Education program and posterity. When Canadian National Railroad applied for a permit to demolish the historic depot in Valparaiso, four years ago, Jon Groth knew something had to be done to save it. Groth is the director and principal of the center, which provides vocational and career



READ ON PHONE

**Modernizing health care facilities**

In neighboring LaPorte County, a health system has plans for a new hospital and its public-centric approach—marked by its commitment to remain at its current site at 1007 Lincolnway.

“We set out to design our new hospital in the middle of downtown, because we want to be an important piece of the downtown (La Porte) community,” said La Porte Hospital CEO Ashley Dickinson, adding that the hospital is the largest employer in La Porte.

La Porte Hospital broke ground on a new \$125 million facility in August. Hospital officials say it will be a significant asset to the community, especially when it comes to emergency and acute care.

“We will build a full-service acute-care community hospital,” according to the hospital’s website. “That includes—but is not limited to—the inpatient services we currently offer, including emergency services, inpatient and outpatient surgery, cardiovascular services in a heart center setting, critical care, orthopedic services, birthing and family care services, and others, in addition to all of the ancillary support services for these service lines.”

So, what’s on tap for the design of the future facility?

“From a construction perspective, it’s more complex of a design process,” Dickinson said. “We are really considering the impact of design on providers, but also the flow from the patient’s perspective.”

To that end, she said they engaged an architect who has designed similar projects in other communities and knows how to put the patient experience front and center.

For example, she said plans consider factors like ease of access and time efficiency. Case in point: the heart center concept means patients with any cardiac-related needs will be able to access care in the same area. What’s more, Dickinson said they plan to keep the private patient room concept for the labor and delivery unit. In her words, this plays into the idea of creating a



**Jon Groth, director and principal of the Porter County Career and Technical Education Center, stands outside a converted historic train depot, which houses the school’s cosmetology program.**

Photo provided by Porter County Career and Technical Education Center

“calm and peaceful environment for patients.”

From a design standpoint, the new hospital will include a mix of traditional brick and stone and large windows to bring in natural light. The latter will improve patient experience and overall energy efficiency, per the hospital’s website. Additionally, the hospital is sourcing steel frame supplied by regional steel mills.

This project is slated for completion in summer 2020 and operational by fourth quarter of that year. In the meantime, Dickinson said they have

contracted with several Northwest Indiana vendors to complete construction. They will continue to operate in their current hospital as they build the new one.

Facilities in Gary and Merrillville also have upped the ante when it comes to the health care consumer experience. In summer 2017, Methodist Hospitals announced completion of \$12 million in renovations at its Northlake campus in Gary. The project, which took more than a year to complete, included enhancements to its emergency room and intensive care

## >ARCHITECTURE/DESIGN

unit, along with the construction of a new ICU.

According to Sheila Pochron, Northlake's director of emergency services and critical care, this project was necessary to keep up with the evolving standards of care in the Region.

"We needed to step up our game and give (the community) the quality of care we're seeing in Northwest Indiana," she said.

That means being in tune with the needs of Gary's population. It's no secret that Gary experiences what Pochron referred to as "a high level of trauma," and therefore, the hospital needed the equipment to better address this reality. There has been a "huge push to bring care to the bedside," and these renovations help them better execute on that delivery model, she said.

The renovated emergency department includes 15 large rooms with nurse work stations, along with a centralized station for nurses and physicians with easy access to every

room. It also features a fast-track area for quick treatment of patients with less critical needs.

Pochron said they looked to the Southlake campus in Merrillville to gain insight into best practices for setup. As a result, she said providers are happy with the design because it's intuitive and helps them deliver a higher level of care. They've also been able to expand staff, a boon to both the provider and patient experience.

In October, Methodist Hospitals celebrated the completion of a major renovation of its labor and delivery unit at the Southlake Campus in Merrillville. The unit was renamed the Maternal Infant Care Center to better reflect the scope of amenities onsite, which include six renovated labor and delivery suites, six private post-partum rooms, advanced technology and two fully functional nursing stations, according to a statement from Methodist. This project called for a complete demolition and rebuild of the unit in phases, for a total cost of \$3.6 million. The project

engineer was Stantec in Chicago and the contractor was Berglund Construction, which has an office in Chesterton, per the company's statement.

These projects are the result of the competitive landscape of health care in the state. Facilities all over Indiana are vying for market share, and upgrades and renovations like the ones highlighted are one means to attract consumers. Total health care spending in Indiana was \$5,708 per person in 2016, making it the 13th-highest nationwide, according to a report from the National Care Cost Institute, an independent, nonpartisan research institute based in Washington, D.C.

### Innovation in hospitality

Health care may be a major economic driver in the Region, but there's more to the story. Hospitality is another growing industry, as evidenced by the recent opening of a bespoke hotel. The Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Fair Oaks Farms, which opened in January, is built on an agritourism destination

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According to Fair Oaks Farms' Chief Strategy Officer Michael McCall, the \$16-million hotel is part of a larger guest experience—one that has been evolving for some time. The farm attracts hundreds of visitors a year, he said, but until recently, there was no lodging on site. This presented an opportunity.

He said the concept for the hotel had been under review for five years, and the completed property represents “a missing piece.” His team approached Marriott with the idea, with a caveat.

“We said, ‘we respect your product, but we want this to be a really special product,’” he said.

They came to an agreement, and the hotel reflects certain elements of the Marriott brand with a twist—what McCall referred to as a “contemporary interpretation of a barn.” The hotel is directly connected to Fair Oak Farms' 17,000-square-foot Farmhouse Restaurant, pub and conference center, making it ideal for both personal and business travel.

The hotel boasts 99 rooms and suites.

The design features a contemporary barn exterior, layout and custom interior design. They incorporated a lot of modern materials, McCall said. The hotel's public spaces and guest

bedrooms feature original artwork created by three renowned artists.

“We started within (Marriott's brand guidelines), but we made everything bigger and better,” he said.



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# A higher level of care

Providers say innovative approaches deliver better patient outcomes



Photo by Richard Warner

Kris Jansenvangalen, director of surgical services for La Porte and Starke hospitals, is setting up La Porte Hospital's new robot and positioning it to be used for gallbladder surgery.

LESLY BAILEY

**T**he term continuous improvement once only was talked about in manufacturing circles because those businesses always sought ways to shorten production and delivery times to boost profits.

Now that practice has been adopted by many industries, including health care where positive patient outcomes push innovations by physicians, surgeons and hospitals in the Region.

"Technology can help us deliver care more efficiently. It's better for patients, and it's a better way for them to get back to their families and lives," said Dr. Jeremy Luedtke, who is certified in both general surgery and surgical critical care at La Porte Hospital.

"As specialists, we have to be able to deliver state-of-the art care and be able to designate the right path

for patients in their diseases process. It's really critical," said Dr. Andrea DeLeo, neurologist and director of the Parkinson's disease and movement disorder program at Community Hospital in Munster.

From more advanced robotic-assisted surgeries to treating Parkinson's disease and essential tremors with electrical impulses, Region leaders in the health care industry have advanced techniques and instruments available in their toolboxes to best serve patients.

## Robot assistance for better results

**L**a Porte Hospital is receiving a new robot for surgeons and gynecologists to use for less-invasive procedures.

"It allows us to do a greater complexity of surgery with more precision and smaller incisions," Luedtke said. "It allows us to treat harder cases, and

patients are in the hospital less, have less pain and they can get back to work faster."

It's like all technology—always upgrading.

"While the older version of the robot is fine, it's sort of like having a car from the 1990s. At the time, it has safety features that weren't available in the 1980s, and the car can get you from Point A to Point B, but today's technology allows us to do more," he said. "The new version has better options. The robot we have now has a fixed point while operating. The new one allows me to move it around without having to remove the robot from the patient and re-apply it."

Luedtke has performed more than 500 robot-assisted surgeries and serves as a proctor, traveling to help train surgeons on best practices.



READ ON PHONE

“Utilizing this technology allows for smaller incisions, causing less trauma to tissue and less pain,” he said. “Statistics indicate this decreases hospital length of stay, and I would give a decreased narcotic amount than I would give when doing a surgery laparoscopically or open. In this day and age with narcotic overuse, we need to be aware of that benefit too.”

While some big or emergency cases still require open surgery, Luedtke said he strives to do as many surgeries with robot assistance as he can as he continues to see the benefits for his patients.

“For example, I performed a colon surgery on a patient that was able to be discharged in three days,” he said. “The patient was talking about how the experience, care and comfort were significantly better than the patient’s significant other who had the procedure without robotic assistance. This technology allows patients to get treated for the diseases or problems that they have and back to what they want to be doing, back with their families and back to their lives.”

### New approach to tremor treatment

Deep brain stimulation (DBS) is reducing tremors and medication usage for Parkinson’s patients at Community Hospital’s Munster location. The team spearheading the Parkinson’s disease and movement disorder program is using an innovative treatment with its Infinity DBS system.

“We have tremendously improved almost every patient’s quality of life,” DeLeo said. “It really is revolutionary.”

Target populations for the procedure include those with Parkinson’s disease, essential tremor disorder and dystonia, a movement disorder that includes involuntary movements of twisting or torsion. Patients who have a certain quality of life, no cognitive dysfunction and who are age-appropriate are good candidates for DBS.

It begins with imaging to determine the precise location needed

for implantation. Next, electrodes are surgically implanted into these affected parts of the brain and a neurostimulator is implanted into the patient’s chest. The implanted thin insulated wires contain electrodes that are later programmed to help reduce a patient’s tremors and improve motor skills.

“It really is like a pacemaker for the brain,” DeLeo said. “We’re able to drop doses of medication by about a third and therefore, minimize side effects.”

The hospital’s updated device allows for more precise targeting and steering of electrical impulses, which is on par with Chicago hospitals, says Mary Fetsch, director of marketing and community relations at Community Hospital.

DeLeo said the Infinity device steers the beams or electrical impulses, so that it has a circular 3D signal targeting, which can be used to steer right,

patients, Fetsch said.

“You would not believe the difference in patients’ lives—to be able to walk into a room and not tell that they have Parkinson’s,” Fetsch said.

### Creating connections for care

Franciscan Health and Northwestern Memorial Hospital are uniting to bring another level of neurological services to patients in Northwest Indiana.

Through this collaboration, Dr. Kevin Jackson, a neurosurgeon at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago, will also offer his services at Franciscan Health Crown Point. He focuses on minimally invasive spinal surgery and aggressive spinal tumor resection and complex spinal reconstructions with instrumentation.

“We have the ability to deliver university-level care to a community no matter how far the community is away from the university setting,” Jackson said. “It’s regionalized care for patients. Patients receive the full complement of services, and it’s delivered to a region that didn’t have access to it in the past.”

**“We have the ability to deliver university-level care to a community no matter how far the community is away.”**

— Kevin Jackson, neurosurgeon at Northwestern Medicine



Photo provided by Community Hospital

**Neurologist Dr. Andrea DeLeo works with patient Russ Nelson after surgery using the new Infinity device at Community Hospital in Munster.**

left, up or down.

“We can really fine tune that patient’s benefits from the procedure,” she said. “We have the capability here to implant and program, which is very unique in this community setting.”

The treatment and care advancements can prove life changing for some

The partnership also will provide Telestroke services at the following locations: Franciscan Health Crown Point, Franciscan Health Dyer, Franciscan Health Hammond and Franciscan Health Munster.

This program uses videoconferencing to bring together stroke patients

>HEALTH CARE

in Northwest Indiana with vascular neurologists at Northwestern Memorial. The physicians examine the patient, interpret brain scan results

and make recommendations for treatment directly while consulting with emergency department personnel at the Franciscan Health hospitals.

Jackson says this quick collaboration is vital because the faster stroke patients can be treated, the better the outcomes. Taking time to make several phone calls or initially transporting patients to another facility either with air or ground transportation can slow treatment.

“It may be an hour before someone recognizes something is going on, so there is already lost time before the patient seeks medical care,” Jackson said. “If you live in a somewhat rural community or no matter where you live, if you start developing symptoms, time is of the essence. When you go to an ER that’s conveniently located, there may not be the specialty care needed at that hospital.”

That’s why this partnership is so important to patients in the Region, he said. “We are able to remotely access patients and make determinations and initiate care much sooner,” Jackson said. “We can see the patients, see the images, review data points that have been acquired in the ER and make a



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determination. “Stroke patients are given medications to treat the clot that is causing symptoms, and that needs to be initiated fairly shortly after the symptoms start.”

### Pinpoint focus for the brain

While it has been around for about 50 years, Gamma Knife radiosurgery continues to be upgraded to better treat brain tumors—both cancerous and noncancerous—and other malformations within the brain.

The team at Methodist Hospitals Southlake campus in Merrillville has just begun putting this latest version into practice. It has been offering the technique since 2003.

“This new machine gives us more accessibility and 30 percent more coverage of the brain and part of the neck,” said Laurel Valentino, Methodist’s director of neuroscience. “Methodist continuously tries to bring the best technology locally to people who can’t travel or have the support to do that.

“We want them to have access to this type of innovative therapies.”

Gamma knife radiosurgery uses advanced technology to deliver 192 precisely focused beams of gamma radiation to the affected areas of the brain.

It is used to treat brain tumors, acoustic neuromas (benign tumors), pituitary tumors (abnormal growths in this gland) and facial pain relief from problems with the trigeminal nerve, which carries sensation from the face to the brain.

“It’s bloodless, virtually painless; patients don’t lose their hair from the radiation; there are relatively few side effects; and many patients go back to work and daily activities within two to three days maximum,” Valentino said.

She says this outcome is considered the gold standard because it has been proven over and over again.

“When you are treating a brain tumor, you think about all of that other tissue ... every single brain cell is very important. The idea is to be very precise so that surrounding tissue is not hurt,” Valentino said.

Valentino said it’s possible to treat

single or multiple tumors all in one sitting. “The head frame is put on after the planning is done, and patients can be in and out in about 20 to 30 minutes,” Valentino said. “They come in and go home. This can be instead of brain surgery.”

Valentino has seen how important innovations are to health care standards in her 34 years at Methodist—many of those years in

the neuroscience arena.

“When you have new knowledge, you can put that into better practices,” she said. “When you think of neurosurgery changes ... while you have to open the head for some things, if you can prevent that, you save brain tissue and reduce complications, and patients go home in the best shape they possibly can with as much functionality as possible.”

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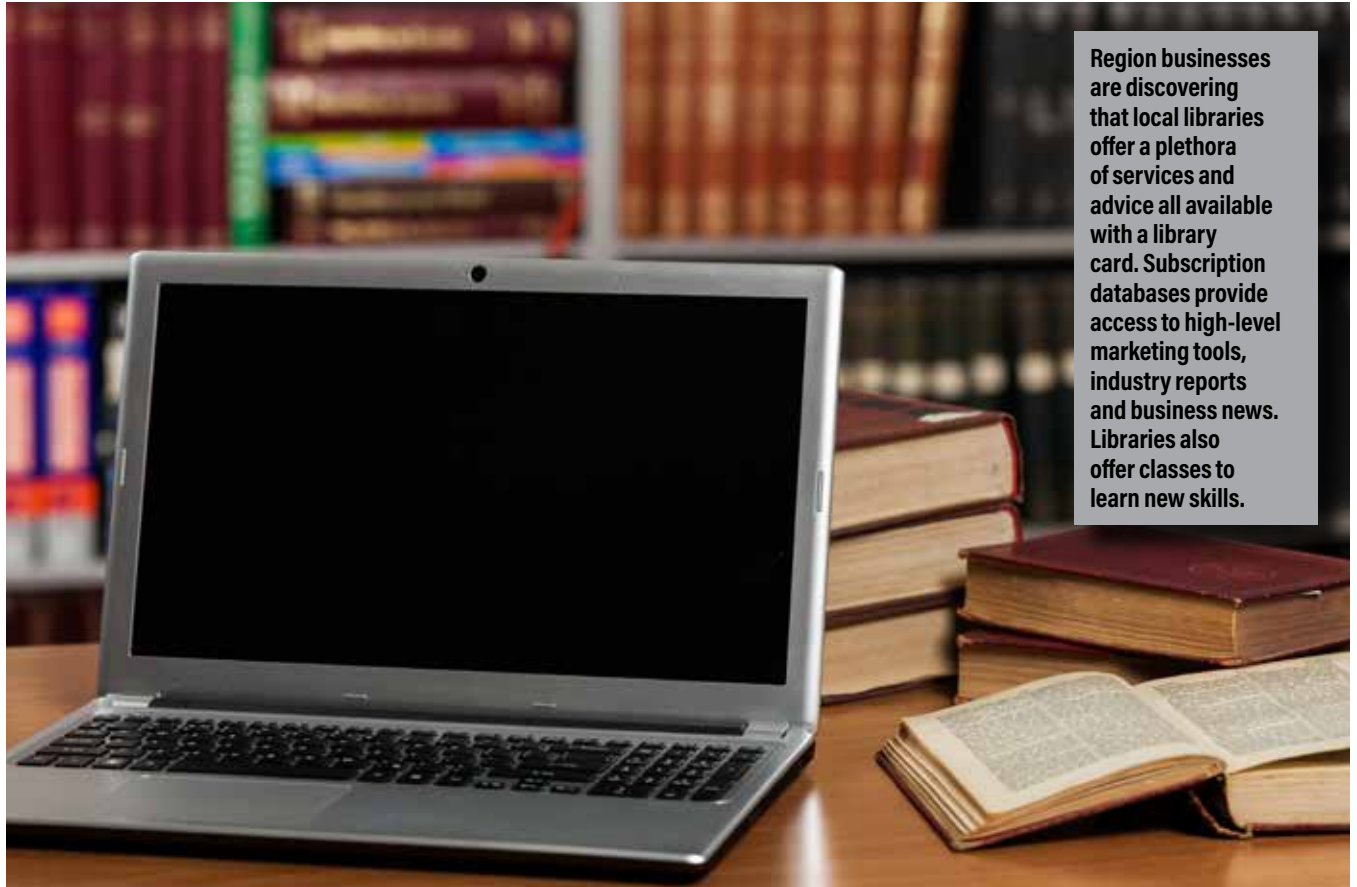
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# A potential literary goldmine

Companies can find wealth of free resources at public libraries



Region businesses are discovering that local libraries offer a plethora of services and advice all available with a library card. Subscription databases provide access to high-level marketing tools, industry reports and business news. Libraries also offer classes to learn new skills.

BARBARA ALVAREZ

A public library might be viewed by business owners and working professionals as irrelevant to their needs. They might even see them as merely a place for young families, students and retirees to borrow books or as a place to hang out.

However, hidden behind the story-time programs and reference materials is a wealth of resources, including business journals, investment portfolios and marketing materials that often go underutilized, library professionals say. And many are available free at local tax-supported public libraries.

Sheila Sieradzki, vice president, community relations at Merrillville-based Centier Bank, has found the Elkhart Public Library an essential partner to the bank's strategy to

create connections with residents. Centier, which has several branches in the Elkhart area, recognizes making community connections and developing credibility is crucial, particularly when you're a new business in the market.

Without a solid network and marketing plan, businesses can sink. Centier Bank circumvented this by leaning on the Elkhart library, Sieradzki said.

"We were paying for databases for marketing and prospect research," she said. "When I found out that we could get (access to) those same databases—and even more—at the library, we canceled our bank subscriptions."

Centier employees can use online library resources for business analysis, industry reports and directories for public and private companies—all

they need is a library card.

"We can create B2B and marketing lists with the library's online resources," Sieradzki said.

"It's great."

Subscription databases provide access to high-level marketing tools, industry reports and business news. Libraries also can be a resource for classes on learning new skills, including social media or Microsoft Excel as well as provide access to computers, projectors, equipment and meeting space.

The greater Northwest Indiana area includes, Lake, Porter, La Porte, St. Joseph, Elkhart, Newton, Jasper, Starke, Marshall and Pulaski counties. They vary in demographics, and the public libraries that operate within them vary in size, which means, depending on the size of the



community (and consequently, the library), resources will vary.

However, there is one constant: librarians are available to assist.

**Forging partnerships**

**D**uring the Great Recession, Elkhart, which is a major hub for recreational vehicle manufacturing, was in the national spotlight for having the highest unemployment rate in the nation at that time, a whopping 20 percent.

The community and RV industry have since recovered, and the public library played a role in revitalization and workforce retraining efforts.

Celine Maciejewski, reference librarian for the Elkhart Public Library, said in the past four years, the library has focused on working with businesses because, when educational organizations and businesses pull together, the entire community grows.

“The public library plays a key role in the development of businesses and vice versa,” she said.

Kiel Seats North America in Elkhart, a designer and manufacturer of passenger seats for buses, coaches and trains, has used the Elkhart library’s instructional classes to train its employees on Microsoft Excel.

The training was so well received that the library and business are partnering again for more workshops. Michaela Oberbauer, general manager at Kiel Seats North America, said the library has been very accommodating

and “will be teaching our employees more advanced Microsoft Excel classes and customized lessons based on our data needs.”

Employees at Kiel will be able to work more efficiently and effectively as a result of these free classes at Elkhart Public Library, Oberbauer said.

Sieradzki said Centier’s relationship with the library grew stronger when they learned they had a powerful goal in common.

“We both want to bring value to the community,” she said.

In February 2018, Centier held a four-week informational session about finance and personal investment. Twenty-five attendees consistently came each week to learn about a topic in a digestible, easy-to-understand manner.

“We even had a grandmother, mother and grandson attend each week: three generations learning together,” Sieradzki said.

Expanding on this partnership, Centier joined with United Way; Lacasa, a nonprofit housing agency; and S.A.L.T. Sisters, a health-food distribution company in Goshen, to host August Empowerment Crocks in August 2018, a weekly program where attendees would learn something that could improve their lives.

Library resources and tools, budgeting and banking, basic home improvement, and how to feed a family of four for less than \$20, were among the topics offered.

Centier offers a book giveaway with the Elkhart Public Library during the holidays. The bank asks librarians to select books for Centier to buy, which are then distributed to families who visit the bank.

At the end of the holiday season, any remaining books are donated to the library.

Because of the success of their relationship with Elkhart Public Library, as

well as the business resources that employees can use, Sieradzki has encouraged other Centier branches across Northwest Indiana to reach out to their libraries.

Several are recognizing the potential in the partnerships.

“(Our) Highland bank has partnered with Highland Public Library to talk about pathways to home ownership, and our La Porte branch is in the process of creating a new series with their library,” she said.

**Plenty to offer**

**T**he town of Brook in Newton County has a population of 1,300 residents—and a library. The Brook Iroquois Washington Public Library might not have all the amenities of a larger public

**“The public library plays a key role in the development of businesses and vice versa.”**

— Celine Maciejewski, Elkhart Public Library



Employees from Starbucks use the Elkhart Public Library for meetings and training sessions. The library sees its role in the business community as key to building long-term success. The library partners with many businesses to add value to its role in the community.

Photo provided by Elkhart Public Library

## >BUSINESS ADVICE

library, but that doesn't mean businesses still can't find useful resources.

Businesses can borrow the library's projector, movie screens and other technical equipment for presentations or other company needs. Businesses also can use the library's free technology classes, as well as partner with the library to use the facility for meetings or special events, said Kristine Wright, director of the Brook library.

Shear Beauty, a beauty salon in Brook, used meeting space at the Brook library to host a spa day. Attendees made face and body scrubs, and learned a few styling tips and tricks from salon staff, Wright said.

DeMotte Public Library in Jasper County participates in the DeMotte Chamber of Commerce's Shop DeMotte and Win initiative. To encourage residents to shop locally, prizes are given to those who present their receipts from local businesses at the chamber office.

But library patrons received a special voucher that awarded them \$10 toward local business shopping

each time they used their library card. The chamber reported that 90 percent of the Shop DeMotte and Win participants included a voucher from the DeMotte Public Library.

This successful partnership between the chamber, library and local businesses, helped the DeMotte Public Library win the chamber's 2018 Non-Profit of the Year Award.

Deborah Kristoff, managing librarian at the DeMotte Public Library, said the library was excited to partner with the chamber and was happy many residents took advantage of the voucher incentive, used their library cards and shopped local.

"We want to encourage our local citizens to learn to appreciate what their local town DeMotte has to offer," she said.

Sometimes the smallest things can make a big difference for a business. For example, businesses can post flyers in a library's lobby and promote their fundraisers for charity on the library's social media pages.

Jacqueline Lipski, librarian at the Hebron Public Library in Porter County, said the area has undergone many economic changes.

"So the library decided to step up and develop partnerships with businesses by being active in the chamber of commerce," she said.

For businesses that have an ongoing partnership with the library, Lipski said the Hebron library can provide free-of-charge printing for their special event flyers. These seemingly small acts can make a huge impact, especially for small business owners, who are pressed for time and money, she said.

**“We want to encourage our local citizens to learn to appreciate what their local town DeMotte has to offer.”**

— Deborah Kristoff,  
managing librarian at the  
DeMotte Public Library



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## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

# Philanthropic muscle



Impact Club Tri Town directs member dollars to under-the-radar charities

LARRY AVILA

Last year, Donna Criner's charity received an email informing her organization it had been selected to give a brief presentation about its mission for a chance to win a cash donation.

Immediately Criner thought the email was a scam but, after doing some research, she discovered the contact from a recently formed Region-based group of philanthropists called Impact Club Tri Town was legitimate.

"From what we were able to learn, it turned out (Impact Club Tri Town) was actually part of a national club (of) business people, entrepreneurs who simply want to make a difference in their communities," said Criner, executive director of Northwest Indiana Cancer Kids Foundation Inc. of St. John.

In September, Criner and representatives from ABRA Inc. and Food Bank of Northwest Indiana gave five-minute presentations to Impact Club Tri Town. At the end of the program, Criner was informed her organization had been selected by club members to receive a \$4,600 donation.

"Before the presentation to Impact Club, our organization just had its major fundraiser, and I was drained, and I thought, 'how am I going to prepare for this (presentation),' said Criner, whose group provides support and assistance to Region families impacted by pediatric cancer. "I must have done really well as we ended up being selected."

Mark Borst, founder and host of Ask NWI, co-founded Impact Club Tri Town in St. John, which launched in November 2017.

Borst said the idea for Impact Club emerged from conversations he had with members of a business networking and idea group with whom he is in regular contact. The idea became Impact Club, whose first chapter formed in northern Virginia in December 2016.

There were 16 active Impact Clubs around the country through early October, and its likely more chapters will form, Borst said.

"It really was just a group of us from this (business) mastermind group talking about what we could do to give back to our communities," Borst said. "What we decided was we wanted to focus on helping the smaller charities."

Joining Impact Club is simple. A member commits to donating \$100 every three months to the club.

a nurse who along with her husband, Mike, launched Hannah's Hope, which provides developmental equipment to children with special needs and connects families by making life and communities more accessible. "I really love this type of fundraising (because) it allowed us to reach donors we may not have otherwise had a chance to share our story with."

Martinez said Impact Club's format also allowed donors to learn about other local charities that they might



The 2017 St. Baldrick's event in Merrillville raised funds for the foundation that benefits pediatric cancer research.

Photo by Jaime Del Rio/Time Shots Photography

All donations are pooled together and members each nominate three organizations. Three of them are drawn at random and then contacted and invited to speak to club members.

Impact Club Tri Town had 46 members through early October, but Borst hopes to grow that number. All donations from club members are given to the selected charity.

"The more members, the bigger the donations are to charity," Borst said.

Mary Martinez, co-founder of Hannah's Hope in Portage, was the first organization to receive a donation from Impact Club Tri Town.

"I learned a former co-worker of mine was part of the club, and she made the nomination," said Martinez,

not be aware of that also are doing good in the community.

Borst said long-term plans for Impact Club Tri Town are to create a space on its website where information on all the charities who presented to his club can be found.

"When we had our first meeting, our members didn't know much about the variety of charities in the Region, so one hurdle we want to help with is letting the community know these charities are out there and are doing good work," he said. "Everyone wants to be philanthropic but can't always give thousands of dollars, but through Impact Club, you can chip in \$100 a quarter and see how that donation along with others can make that great impact."

## NORTHWEST INDIANA

JOHN CAIN



## OUT

**International Film Festival**

Valparaiso University's annual International Film Festival continues this quarter with two films followed by group discussion with foreign language professors. Each is free and open to the public. The 2017 French film "Jeannette, the Childhood of Joan of Arc," will be screened at 7 p.m. Feb. 22 in the Neils Science Center. Timothy Tomasik, chair and professor of foreign languages and literatures, will discuss the film. On March 29, the 2012 Chilean film, "No," will be shown at 7 p.m. Alberto Lopez Martín,

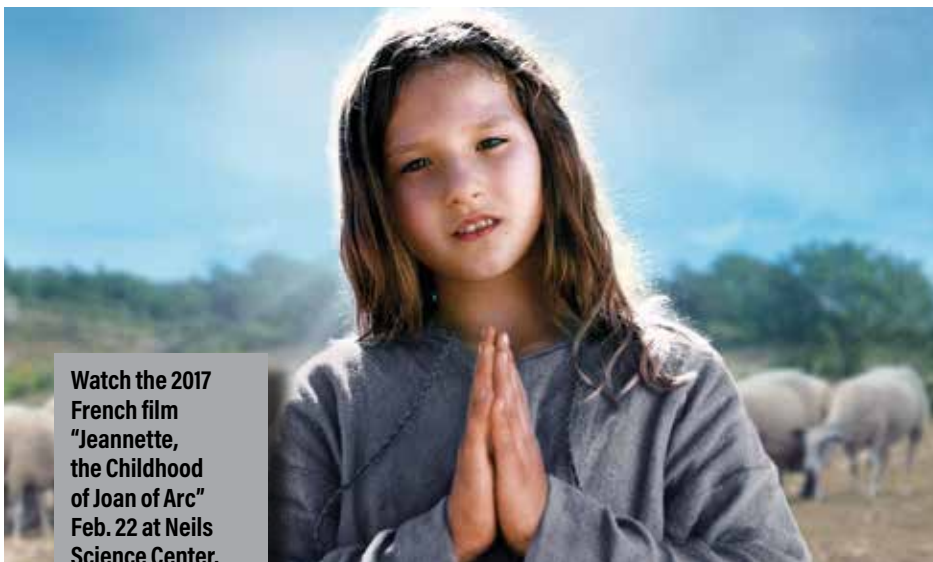
thinks he's Teddy Roosevelt, and his great-grandfather used to scalp Indians for pleasure—but his world is turned upside down when he realizes that his dear aunties have been poisoning lonely old men for years. When Mortimer's maniacal brother Jonathan returns on the night the aunts were planning to bury their latest victim, Mortimer must rally to help them and protect his fiancé, all while trying to keep his own sanity. March 1-10 at Footlight Players in Michigan City. (219) 874-4035 or [www.footlightplayers.org](http://www.footlightplayers.org)

and The Pea," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" yells "Dinosaur!" instead, and Rumpelstiltskin helps turn all that pesky gold into straw. You might think you know your fairy tales but not the way Dad tells them. March 1-17 at Chicago Street Theatre. (219) 464-1636 or [www.chicagostreet.org](http://www.chicagostreet.org)

**'A Doll's House'**

This classic drama by Henrik Ibsen, published in Norwegian in 1879 and performed that year, focuses on the ordinary family of bank lawyer Torvald Helmer, wife Nora and their three small children. Torvald thinks he is the ethical member of the family, while his wife assumes the role of the pretty and irresponsible spouse who flatters him. Into this arrangement intrude several hard-minded outsiders, one of whom threatens to expose a fraud that Nora once committed without her husband's knowledge. When Nora's act is revealed, Torvald reacts with outrage and renounces her out of concern for his own reputation. Utterly disillusioned by her husband, whom she now sees as a hollow fraud, Nora declares her independence from him and their children and leaves, slamming the door behind her. Ibsen is often called "the father of modern drama" because he helped popularize realism. Ibsen took the world by storm with "A Doll's House," which was controversial at the time. Nora's door-slamming exit from her marriage is sometimes described as a shot heard around the world. April 4 through 14 at Theatre Northwest Black Box Theatre on the campus of Indiana University Northwest. (219) 980-6808 or [www.iun.edu/theatre](http://www.iun.edu/theatre)

Visit the South Shore Arts regional calendar to learn more at [SouthShoreArtsOnline.org](http://SouthShoreArtsOnline.org).



Watch the 2017 French film "Jeannette, the Childhood of Joan of Arc" Feb. 22 at Neils Science Center.

Photo provided by Arte France

an assistant foreign language professor, will lead the discussion. (219) 464-5341 or [www.valpo.edu/vuca](http://www.valpo.edu/vuca)

**'Arsenic and Old Lace'**

Mortimer Brewster is living a happy life. He has a steady job at a prominent New York newspaper, he's just become engaged and now he gets to visit his sweet spinster aunts to share his good news. Mortimer always knew that a bit of madness ran in his family—his brother

**'Bedtime Stories'**

Written by retired high school theater director Ed Monk, "Bedtime Stories" is about a dad who comes home from work to find his pregnant wife tired and not feeling well enough to put their three children to bed. Each wants him to tell a different bedtime story, which he does. But hilarity ensues as Dad gets fuzzy on the details and creative with the classics: a prince with a snoring problem spices up "The Princess

TAINMENT

# ABOUT



## GREATER SOUTH BEND

JACK WALTON



READ ON PHONE

### On stage at Notre Dame

The defending NCAA champion University of Notre Dame Women's Basketball team is not the only source of excitement on campus these days. Notre Dame's DeBartolo Performing Arts Center is stepping up its game as well with a busy slate of events. Feb. 15 and 16, Irish Theatre of Chicago presents Owen McCafferty's "Mojo Mickybo," a play about two boys growing up in the violent Belfast of 1970. Broadway star Renée Elise Goldsberry performs Feb. 23. On March 5, mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard takes a break from her starring role as the title character in the Metropolitan Opera's staging of Nico Muhly's "Marnie" to perform a concert at DPAC, accompanied by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra. Legendary composer Philip Glass makes a rare appearance as a performer March 30. He will play the piano part in some of his chamber works in the first half of the concert, and the second half features the world premiere of a piece Glass composed for percussion quartet Third Coast Percussion. Irish Theatre of Chicago returns April 4 through 6 with Conor McPherson's play "The Weir," in which a group of people gathered together in a pub tell each other a series of ghost stories. (574) 631-2800 or [www.performingarts.nd.edu](http://www.performingarts.nd.edu)

### Illusionist comes to Elkhart

The Lerner Theatre in downtown Elkhart welcomes illusionist Jay Owenhouse on Feb. 15. Comedian Tim Hawkins performs Feb. 23. Elkhart will be smelling "T-R-O-U-B-L-E" on March 1, when country music superstar Travis Tritt comes to town. From March 8 through 10, local theater company Premier Arts presents "Seussical the Musical." Comedian Lewis Black performs his hilariously crabby commentary March 29. The

Temptations give a concert April 7 at the Lerner. Only one original member remains from the quartet's heyday, but Otis Williams and the other current Temptations have not changed their winning formula a bit from the Motown days. (574) 293-4469 or [www.thelerner.com](http://www.thelerner.com)

### Laugh, cry at Morris

Comedian Sebastian Maniscalco performs Feb. 21 at the Morris Performing Arts Center in South Bend. On March 2, maestro Alastair Willis and the South Bend Symphony Orchestra will play works by Rachmaninoff and Brahms. Goofball comic Jim Gaffigan comes to the Morris on March 6. The Morris will be transformed into 19th Century France from March 19 through 24 for a run of "Les Misérables." The South Bend Symphony Orchestra returns April 13 for a concert that includes two compositions by contemporary composer Mason Bates, alongside a performance of the Beethoven Symphony No.7, the latest installment of the SBSO's complete Beethoven symphonic cycle. (574) 235-9190 or [www.morriscenter.org](http://www.morriscenter.org)

### 'Horrors' at Bristol Opera House

Elkhart Civic Theatre will be filling the Bristol Opera House with laughs for two consecutive shows. First, "Little Shop of Horrors" runs from Feb. 22 to March 9. The musical, written by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, is part horror show, part farcical comedy, part rock opera. It's been a regular feature of American theater since its debut in 1982. One of Neil Simon's lesser-known plays, "Proposals," follows from April 4 through 14. Set in 1953, it's a family drama with a lot of humor but several more serious

underlying themes. (574) 848-4116 or [www.elkhartcivictheatre.org](http://www.elkhartcivictheatre.org)

### Sights, sounds at Museum of Art

At the South Bend Museum of Art, a new installation is in the Project Room from South Bend-born video



Photo provided by Becca Fay

Mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard performs March 5 at the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center.

artist Mike Amato. Titled "Sounds Like Dancing," the work consists of two video creations that will run through April 7. Also see the sculptures by Mike Slaski through April 7. (574) 235-9102 or [www.southbendart.org](http://www.southbendart.org)

### Music shop brings in live shows

In Goshen, the hip record store and music venue Ignition Music Garage is under new ownership. In recent years, Ignition specialized in bringing Americana-style bands to play in the store, but now there is much more diversity—including blues, heavy metal, reggae, jazz and folk acts. Frank Vignola's Hot Guitar Trio will visit the store March 2. (574) 971-8282 or [www.ignitionmusic.net](http://www.ignitionmusic.net)



READ ON PHONE

MADE IN INDIANA

# A convenient smoothie

Entrepreneur offers bag of fresh ingredients for good health

CARRIE NAPOLEON

**G**reen smoothies have been a part of Allyson Straka's life for more than a decade.

The single mom and certified holistic health coach drinks at least one green smoothie a day in her effort to eat clean, natural, nutrient-dense, healthy foods.

Her advice to anyone who wants to improve their health is to do the same. Now this entrepreneur is looking to make it more convenient for people to do just that through her company The Frozen Garden, which specializes in 100-percent natural, locally sourced when possible, frozen fruit and vegetable smoothies, and in 2019, other similarly focused products.

Straka said she listened to her clients complain about not having the time to make fresh smoothies or watching the ingredients spoil in the fridge. She initially began making a frozen smoothie mix for her clients, and in 2016, began selling the smoothie mixes from the mini-fridge in her studio, and then online.

"To be able to provide a healthy convenient solution for people is amazing," Straka said. "We have awesome customers who love what we are doing."

Making healthy smoothies with local organic fruits and vegetables a convenient choice became Straka's focus. The chief smoothie officer tested flavors in her kitchen with a simple \$20 blender. A network of local farmers in northern Indiana and southwestern Michigan have been tapped to provide the freshest fruits and vegetables.

"That was our big thing, to be able to support local farmers," Straka said.

Frozen Garden smoothies rely on the flavor of the fruits and vegetables. Produce is flash frozen as soon as it is received. In many cases, that is the same day the fruits or vegetables are harvested. The only additional flavors in the smoothie blends come from seeds and spices. There are zero added sugars or flavorings, she said.

Flash freezing right after harvest captures the most flavorful fruit in season and locks in the nutrients, which begin diminishing once the produce is harvested.

Along with cultivating a network of farmers, Straka said she had to find her way onto store shelves. The first grocery stores to carry Frozen Garden smoothies was Strack & Van Til, she said.

Mike Nisevich, sales manager for Strack & Van Til, said Frozen Garden's mission mirrored that of the grocer's.

"We call out we are Indiana made. (With Frozen Garden) we saw an opportunity to take an item still in its infancy and partner with that local business," Nisevich said.



► **Allyson Straka**, founder and CEO of Frozen Garden, went from selling green smoothies in a mini-fridge to offering them on the shelves of more than 100 grocery stores.

Strack & Van Til gave Frozen Garden needed exposure for their produce while providing a few insights into distributors who could carry the product.

"They fulfill a niche for people looking for some healthy alternatives," he said.

Straka said the relationship with Strack & Van Til helped them connect with Midwestern distributor Dutch Farms. Now she has two national distributors helping place Frozen Garden smoothies on store shelves.

A little more than two years after selling her first smoothie in her studio, Frozen Garden smoothies can be found in more than 100 grocery stores in the Midwest, New

England and Mid-Atlantic regions.

She attributes the success of her company to hard work and sticking to what she believes. Straka said more and more consumers want to know from where their food comes and from what it is made. Health-conscious consumers are swapping out processed, chemical-laden food products for organic, whole foods.

While the company is profitable on the retail side of things, Straka said it will take a little longer to reach the black on the wholesale side. She expects wholesale profitability in 2019.

"I feel like I'm helping to change the food system," she said. "I'm really trying to make healthy food convenient for them."



Photos provided by Frozen Garden



OFF HOURS



# House calls to Guatemala

La Porte Hospital doctor travels to Antigua to help people get health care

MICHAEL PUENTE

**A**t La Porte Hospital, Dr. Neil Wangstrom delivers patient care with the aid of state-of-the-art technology and trained medical personnel.

But every February, Wangstrom, an ear, nose and throat specialist for more than 20 years, leaves his comfort zone to help those with limited access to doctors and medicine.

“You’ve got to be open about the whole situation,” the ENT-otolaryngologist said. “Someone with OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) wouldn’t do well down there.”

Since 2010, Wangstrom has traveled to Antigua, Guatemala, with other doctors, nurses and specialists to provide much-needed medical services and surgeries to men, women and children who have little or no income. This mission work is through the Houston-based group Faith In Practice.

“The mission of Faith In Practice is to improve the physical, spiritual and economic conditions of the poor in Guatemala through short-term surgical, medical and dental mission trips and health-related educational programs,” according to the organization’s website.

Faith In Practice began in the early ’90s to help orphans and people in need through a partnership with the Franciscan brothers. The nonprofit sends doctors to Las Obras and Hospital Hilario Galindo, among other locations.

Wangstrom became involved after he was invited to go on a mission trip by a colleague about nine years ago.

“It turned out to be a pretty good experience,” Wangstrom said.

Volunteers include doctors who specialize in orthopedics, gynecology, urology, dental, and ear, nose and throat.

“I’m with a surgical team that goes to Guatemala,” Wangstrom said. “There is usually about 48 to 50 people. We bring down a variety of people. Sometimes spouses go along, and they are part of

the cooking team.”

Wangstrom said the medical professionals who decide to go, pay their own expenses. “It’s a giveback to people outside the country, a Third World country,” he said. “The people of Guatemala are very nice.”

Liz Sawaya, a clinic manager with Porter Health and a colleague of Wangstrom, said those he works with enjoy listening to stories about his

As a veteran missionary, Wangstrom knows what to bring along.

“The first year I went down there I needed a headlight. The headlights down there were terrible,” he said. “Now, I bring my own headlight with me. You don’t want to go into surgery without the tools you need.”

The first few days are set aside meeting with patients and evaluating their immediate medical needs.



**Dr. Neil Wangstrom, an ear, nose and throat specialist at La Porte Hospital, has traveled to Antigua, Guatemala, the past nine years.**

Photo provided by Dr. Neil Wangstrom

mission trips and admire his dedication to providing care to people in need.

“The time he gives and the passion he has for delivering care to these individuals who otherwise could not afford it is remarkable,” Sawaya said. “His commitment to helping others in this way is inspiring.”

Wangstrom said the surgical area of his Guatemala mission trips is in a monastery, which also is home to children. Some of them were abandoned by their families, and several have assorted conditions, including cerebral palsy.

Once on the ground, the team readies their treatment space and prepares to meet patients. While the monastery is in a city, many patients often come from “the bush,” or outlying regions.

“(People seeking care) are coming from 10 to 12 hours away, and a lot of times that’s walking,” he said.

Of the 60 to 70 patients Wangstrom might see during his 10-day stay, about 20 to 30 might need surgery.

One of the more memorable patients Wangstrom saw during his mission travels was a child with a large cyst in the middle of his upper lip. “It was difficult for him to even eat,” he said. “We fixed him up and made his life a lot better.”

Some of the patients, Wangstrom said, often suffer from lung problems.

“A lot of the people don’t have chimneys in their homes,” he said. “They’ll just build a fire right in the room. We see a lot of people with inhalation smoke problems.”

Wangstrom said he does mission work to give back. “It’s a really positive feeling helping people and not getting paid for it,” he said. “It is faith based, but you don’t have to be religious to go on the trip.”



VIEWPOINT

# A plan to 'ignite' change

Collaboration essential to growing community that encourages opportunity for everyone



► **Don Babcock** is a member of the managing board of the Northwest Indiana Forum and director of economic development for the Northern Indiana Public Service Co. (NIPSCO) in Merrillville.

**C**ompetition compels us to excel—that is the nature of free enterprise—but competition between individuals alone will not often produce meaningful change across an entire region. Cooperation, respect and teamwork are required to create a vibrant, enticing, community of like-minded individuals who are out to change the world.

This is not a new belief, in fact Margaret Meade is often quoted as

saying, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

People visiting or even passing through Northwest Indiana often wonder how there could be so many amazing assets concentrated along the 45 miles of shoreline just east of Chicago.

Northwest Indiana is truly a natural wonder created by Lake Michigan. And men over the centuries have built roads, rail and industries that created powerful economies that expanded and contracted depending on national and international markets and the effectiveness of local leadership.

Unfortunately, since the late 1970s

Northwest Indiana has simply not lived up to its potential. Well, all that is about to change due to a new commitment to regionalism and mutual success.

The Northwest Indiana Forum is leading a bold, new initiative that will literally “Ignite the Region.” Throughout most of 2018, the forum along with our regional partners, municipalities and businesses, spent countless hours crafting a Regional Economic Development Plan.

This plan promises to give a platform to transform the seven-county Region to the next level. Reading through Ignite the Region: Northwest Indiana’s Strategy for Economic Transformation, you will see a play book of action-oriented, regional initiatives that will attract investment and talent at a more rapid pace.

Ignite the Region is a starting point to build upon the great work already happening in our area.

We cannot fix all the problems and challenges facing the Region right off the bat, but we can embark on a journey with a broad and inclusive group of leaders to make meaningful, sustainable change.

Our leadership team is committed to the hard work and thoughtful planning that will continue to propel us forward.

To that end, we are committed to reporting our progress each year to the broad community as we march forward. We

wholeheartedly encourage others to join us in creating a place known for being inviting and creating hope and opportunity for all.

To learn more, visit [www.nwiforum.org/economic-initiative](http://www.nwiforum.org/economic-initiative).

**“Northwest Indiana drives its vibrant and inclusive communities by creating the most dynamic economic environment of the Midwest.”**

## IGNITE THE REGION

### The vision

Northwest Indiana drives its vibrant and inclusive communities by creating the most dynamic economic environment of the Midwest, fueled by innovation, diversity and talent.

### The outcomes

- Renewed population growth
- Higher-wage job creation
- Vibrant real estate development/redevelopment
- New business formations and successes
- New innovations fostered locally

### Five pillars or goals

1. Business development and marketing: Promote robust and sustainable growth by engaging in a proactive, economic development program that supports business retention, expansion, creation and attraction.

2. Entrepreneurship and innovation: Foster robust entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems to propel future economic growth.

3. Infrastructure: Ensure that Northwest Indiana’s infrastructure meets the needs of a 21st-century economy.

4. Talent: Expand the talent assets of Northwest Indiana and strengthen connections to the Region’s employers.

5. Place making: Create the amenities and places that enhance Northwest Indiana’s appeal to diverse groups of people.

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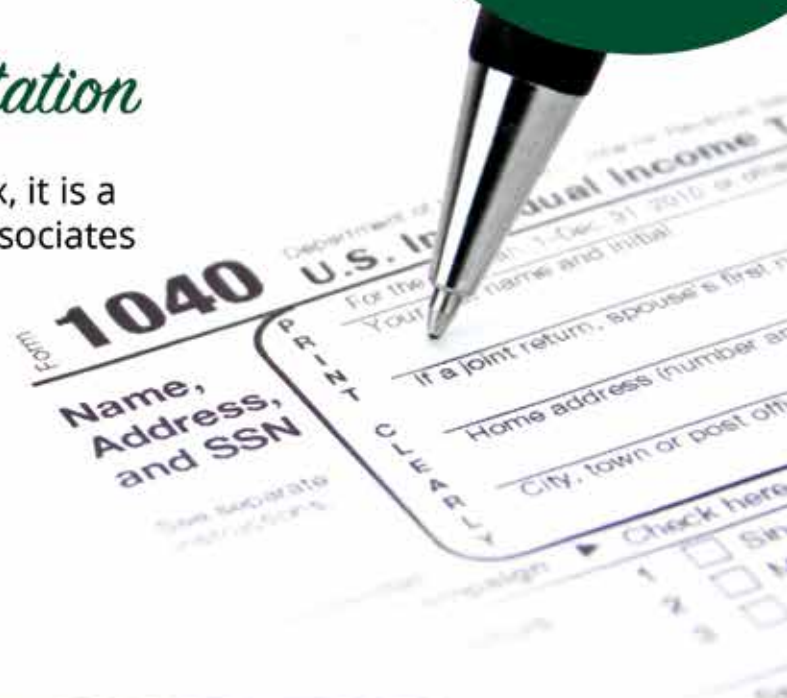
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