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APRIL / MAY 2020

Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

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and Northcentral Indiana
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2020 Best of Business

*Best of Northwest Indiana Business and Best of
Greater South Bend/Michiana Business Awards*

*Benito Gamba
Gamba Ristorante*



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Left to right: Dan Duncan, Peoples VP, Business Banker with Todd Adams, President of Adams Masonry.

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– Todd Adams, President of Adams Masonry



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As new betting boom takes off, enhanced customer experiences attract new clients to gaming venues

Thank
You FOR
VOTING
US THE
BEST



AS VOTED BY THE READERS OF
Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

THE **BEST** NORTHWEST INDIANA

HOSPITAL GROUP

FITNESS/
WELLNESS
FACILITY

HEALTHCARE FACILITY

Cardiology
Urgent/Immediate Care
Physical/Occupational Therapy
Cancer Treatments
Mental Health
Orthopedics (Runner-Up)



Franciscan
HEALTH

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CONTINUING CHRIST'S MINISTRY IN OUR FRANCISCAN TRADITION



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Plans to bolster town amenities, expand transportation driving new residential construction

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Indiana leaders take preemptive measures as water level continues to rise in Lake Michigan

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Service League of Northwest Indiana considers expansion of fundraising for groups who help others

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Entrepreneurs' decades-long journey culminates with opening of multiple Fluid Coffeebars

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New agency's goal to raise state's profile will attract people and businesses — with help from us all



APR - MAY 2020

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► Cover photo of Benito Gamba by Michelle Hamstra — Gamba Ristorante won best restaurant for business entertaining



GOOD BIT

600,000

U.S. Small Business Administration's estimated number of annual business startups in the country

Story on page 14

IN THIS ISSUE

This edition of our magazine features the annual Best of Business Awards honorees. Our readers cast their votes to decide which companies in Northwest and Northcentral Indiana deserved recognition across 51 award categories. Longtime businesses grew through building strong reputations over years of delivering promised services on time. The Region continues to diversify and change. Examples include the resurgence of casino gaming, driven by legalized sports betting and rampant growth in new residential housing. Preserving the past also has led to redevelopments of historic buildings such as the former Anco manufacturing plant in Valparaiso, which soon will be home to a distillery. The state's Lake Michigan shoreline faces a growing erosion problem, which poses potential dangers to lakefront homeowners and a burgeoning tourism industry fueled by the recent national park designation for the lakeshore Dunes area. And the entrepreneurial spirit is evident in Fluid Coffeebar. We hope you enjoy this issue of Northwest Indiana Business Magazine. — *Congratulations winners!*

PICTURE PERFECT



Photo provided by Journeyman Distillery

Bill Welter is redeveloping The ANCO property on South Campbell Street in Valparaiso with Journeyman Distillery as an anchor tenant. Learn more about the Region's construction projects on page 24.

QUOTE TO REMEMBER

“If you want something great, you have to work at it greatly.”

— Jim Jorgensen, attorney and partner with Valparaiso-based Hoepfner, Wagner & Evans LLP

Story on page 14

LEADER PROFILE



ERIKA DAHL

Who she is: Director of Communications, South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority

Where's home: Crown Point

Education: Bachelor of Arts/Communications, Purdue University (Calumet) Northwest

Best part of NWI: The Indiana Dunes and Lake Michigan

What she's reading: "The Goldfinch," by Donna Tartt

Favorite music: Classic rock 'n' roll (i.e. Led Zeppelin & Pink Floyd)

Favorite app: Pinterest

Favorite pastime: Gardening and home improvement projects

Favorite food: Pasta

Favorite saying: "Buy the ticket, take the ride."
— Hunter S. Thompson



AROUND THE REGION

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

LARRY AVILA

Banking

Merrillville-based **Centier Bank** recently announced the following appointments:

- **Mike McKean**, loan operations officer;
- **Paula Fender**, assistant vice president of credit administration;
- **Lauren Zurbriggen**, financial education and community outreach coordinator;
- **Dana Snyder**, assistant vice president and business banking officer in Fort Wayne;
- **Ryan Glassman**, operations and performance analyst manager at its Merrillville headquarters; and
- **Jessica Higareda**, branch manager of the Martha Street location in Highland.

Sam Boufis recently joined **First Financial Bank** in Schererville as vice president of commercial banking.

Business

Deann Patena was named president and CEO of the Merrillville-based **Crossroads Regional Chamber of Commerce**. She took over Jan. 1 and previously served as chairperson of the chamber's board of directors. Patena

replaced **Sue Reed** who resigned in August. The chamber also elected **David Lasser** of Commercial In-Sites in Merrillville as its 2020 chairman of the board of directors.

Petar Todorovic was named vice president of operations for **Sage-Popovich Inc.**, a Valparaiso-based aviation consulting and asset management firm, which also has flight operations at the **Gary/Chicago International Airport**.

David D. Wilson, retired and former owner of **Monroe Pest Control** in Hobart, recently was inducted into the **Indiana Pest Management Association Hall of Fame**. Wilson is a life resident of Hobart and was the second-generation owner of Monroe Pest Control. He retired in 2000. The company still operates in Hobart and is owned and managed by Wilson's children, **David N. Wilson** and **Kelly Tichacek**.

Economic Development

New members recently were elected to the **Northwest Indiana Forum's** board of directors. They include: **Sean Dardeau**, Porter Health Care Systems; **Gil Rynberk**, Wintrust Commercial Bank; **Anne Van Keppel**, Berglund Construction; and **Matt Vessely**, 1st Source Bank. Board members re-elected to three-year terms include: **Bill Baker**,

Urschel; **Dan Botich**, Short Elliott Henderson; **Anthony Contrucci**, Centier Bank; **Joe Coar**, Tonn & Blank Construction; **Greg Dougherty**, South Shore Freight; **Jim Jorgensen**, Hoepfner, Wagner, Evans; **Stewart McMillan**, Task Force Tips; **Pete Novak**, Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors; **Rex Richards**, Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce/Valparaiso Economic Development Corp.; and **Linda Woloshansky**, Center of Workforce Innovations.

Michele Murday, Northwest Indiana branch manager for **EnviroForensics**, an Indianapolis-based environmental engineering firm, recently was named chair of the **Northwest Indiana Forum's** environmental committee.

Education

Katie Conboy was named president of **Saint Mary's College**, whose campus is across from the University of Notre Dame. Conboy's appointment was announced Feb. 12. Conboy served as provost and senior vice president since 2013 at Simmons University, a women's college in Boston. She begins her new role June 1.

Jeff Lawley, program chair of the paramedic science program at **Ivy Tech Community College's** Valparaiso



BANKING
Mike McKean



BANKING
Paula Fender



BANKING
Lauren Zurbriggen



BANKING
Dana Snyder



BANKING
Ryan Glassman



BANKING
Jessica Higareda



BANKING
Sam Boufis



BUSINESS
Deann Patena

campus, was named **EMS Educator of the Year** by the **Indiana EMS Association**.

Patricia Culligan, the chair and Carleton Professor of Civil Engineering and Engineering Mechanics at **Columbia University**, was appointed the **Matthew H. McCloskey Dean of the College of Engineering** at the **University of Notre Dame**. Her appointment is effective Aug. 1.

Sue Ellspermann, president of **Ivy Tech Community College**, was selected by the **Aspen Institute** to join the 2020-21 inaugural class of the **Aspen New Presidents Fellowship**, an initiative designed to support community college presidents early in their tenure to accelerate transformational change on behalf of students. Ellspermann was one of 25 Aspen Fellows selected from more than 100 applicants. Ivy Tech's Northwest and North Central Indiana campus locations include: East Chicago, Gary, Goshen, La Porte, Michigan City, South Bend and Valparaiso.

Valparaiso University named **David Henreckson** its next Bonnie and Peter

Raquet Endowed Director's Chair for the Institute for Leadership and Service.

Neeti Parashar, professor of physics at **Purdue University Northwest**, and **Jim Dolen**, assistant professor of physics, were awarded a multi-year grant estimated at \$526,000 by the National Science Foundation to work on the Compact Muon Solenoid experiment at CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) in Geneva, Switzerland, and at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Ill.

Engineering

Nate Plooster, was named director of surveying at **Falk PLI**, a Portage-based engineering firm that provides construction, equipment installation and maintenance services.

Finance

Mark Andrews recently joined Mishawaka-based **Indiana Trust Wealth Management** as vice president and wealth adviser. He has 20 years of experience in the wealth management

profession. Andrews will be based in the firm's Muncie office.

Government

Michael Griffin, clerk-treasurer of the town of Highland, was elected chair of the **Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission** for 2020. **George Topoll**, Union Township trustee, was elected vice chairman. Other officers include: **Justin Kiel**, La Crosse town council president, secretary, and **Richard Hardaway**, Merrillville councilman, treasurer. Executive board members include: representing Lake County, **Will Farrellbegg**, Lowell councilman, and **Tom McDermott**, mayor of Hammond; representing La Porte County, **Sheila Matias**, county commissioner, and La Porte Mayor **Tom Dermody**; representing Porter County, **James Ton**, Chesterton councilman, and **Greg Stinson**, Porter councilman. State Rep. **Ed Soliday**, of the 4th District, will continue serving as **Gov. Eric Holcomb's** appointee to the commission. **Diane Noll**,



BUSINESS
David Lasser



EDUCATION
Jeff Lawley



EDUCATION
Sue Ellspermann



EDUCATION
Neeti Parashar

> AROUND THE REGION



EDUCATION
Jim Dolen

Wanatah clerk-treasurer, will serve as immediate past president. New commission members include: **Bill Carroll**, mayor of Lake Station; **Sue Lynch**, mayor of Portage; **Janet Beck**, Pottawattomie Park councilwoman; **Eric Hull**, Burns Harbor councilman; **Wendy Mis** Munster clerk-treasurer; **David Peeler**, Hebron councilman; and **Daina Dumbrys**, Michiana Shores councilwoman. **Mary Tanis**, Dyer councilwoman, was re-appointed to the commission.



ENGINEERING
Nate Plooster

Bryan Langley was appointed senior vice president of defense development at the **Indiana Economic Development Corp.**

Stephen Cox, who took over as Indiana state fire marshal in October, was named executive director of the **Indiana Department of Homeland Security.**

Jennifer Richardson was appointed executive director of the **Indiana Office of Energy Development.**

Bob Grennes was named commissioner of the **Indiana Department of**



FINANCE
Mark Andrews



HEALTH CARE
Zhijun George Guo

Revenue by Gov. Eric Holcomb.

Cameron Clark retired as director of the **Indiana Department of Natural Resources** at the end of March. Clark served the post since 2013 and previously served as the agency's chief legal counsel for two years before being appointed director.

Health care

Staff at **La Porte Hospital** and **Starke Hospital** who went above and beyond for patients were honored for



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HEALTH CARE
Muhammad Alghanem



HEALTH CARE
Thomas Shin



HEALTH CARE
Sandra Wischmeyer,



HOSPITALITY
AJ Buchanio

their work by being selected Colleagues of the Year for 2019. The award honors system employees who were nominated by patients and their peers for providing excellent, compassionate care and service to the community. The winners include: **Lisa Sites**, financial counselor — Colleague of the Year, Starke Hospital; **Evelyn Nevorski**, respiratory therapist — Colleague of the Year, La Porte Hospital; **Chris Atherton**, regional director, cardiology services — Clinical Manager of the Year

for La Porte and Starke hospitals; **Karen Jedrysek**, director of human resources — Non-Clinical Manager of the Year for La Porte and Starke hospitals.

Community Healthcare System recently welcomed several medical professionals to the **Community Care Network Inc.**, which is affiliated with **Community Hospital** in Munster and **St. Mary Medical Center** in Hobart. They include: **Dr. Joseph Danavi**, cardiologist; **Dr. Barbara Diakos**, OB/GYN; **Dr. Rose**

Diakos, OB/GYN; **Dr. Neal Shah**, internal medicine practitioner; **Dr. Ted Vellos**, urologist; and **Robert Watson**, board-certified chiropractor, who specializes in sports science and rehabilitative medicine.

Franciscan Physician Network recently hired the following physicians in Michigan City: **Dr. Zhijun George Guo**, neurologist, Franciscan Medical Pavilion; and **Dr. Muhammad Alghanem**, family and geriatric medicine, Coolspring Health Center.

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> AROUND THE REGION



MARKETING
Ryan Zerfas

Franciscan Health Michigan City opened a bariatric services office at Woodland Health Center, 8865 W. 400 N., Suite 125, in Michigan City. The staff includes bariatric surgeons **Dr. Thomas Shin**, who is bariatric program medical director, and **Dr. Sandra Wischmeyer**.

Hospitality

Merrillville-based **White Lodging** named **AJ Buchanio** the company's corporate research and development chef.



REAL ESTATE
John Phair

Law

Elkhart-based **Kruggel Lawton CPAs**, an accounting and business advisory firm, named **Shaun Mawhorter**, a partner in the firm's tax practice. She has more than 25 years of public accounting experience.

Marketing

Ryan Zerfas recently joined Mishawaka-based marketing firm **Blackwood Creative** as vice president of customer success. He will focus on maintaining relationships with clients.



REAL ESTATE
Tim Healy



RETAIL
David Sisk

Nonprofit

Alisa Hecimovich, vice president of **American Precision Services Inc.** in Gary, was appointed chair of the advisory board of **The Salvation Army of Lake County**.

Lake Area United Way recently presented **St. Catherine Hospital** in East Chicago, part of **Community Healthcare System**, with two **Serving Together Achieves Results (STAR)** awards.

The **Heart of Service Award** was presented to **Tracy Sharp** for

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		<p>Design Build Construction Management General Contracting Facility Services</p> <hr/> <p>www.ldconstruction.com</p>

her contributions to reduce infant mortality and raise healthier babies in Northwest Indiana.

The **Best Volunteer Effort** honor went to the St. Catherine Hospital human resources staff, led by director **Dianna Myers**, for organizing a hospital-wide shoe drive, which collected 260 pairs of shoes. They were delivered to Washington Elementary School in East Chicago to help students and families in need.

Real Estate

John Phair, who has served as president and CEO of South Bend-based **Holladay Properties** for 20 years, stepped down from the post in January. Phair now serves as chairman and chief development officer. The company named **Tim Healy**, its chief operating officer, president and CEO.

Retail

David Sisk was named president of Michigan-based **SpartanNash's** military division, which is a distributor of grocery products to U.S. commissaries. SpartanNash purchased **Martin's Super Markets Inc.** of South Bend in November 2018. Martin's operated 21 supermarkets and employed about 3,500 people.

News

The dining and entertainment venue **Amish Acres** in Nappanee near Elkhart was sold at auction Feb. 5 by **Schrader Real Estate and Auction Co. Inc.** for a cumulative total of \$4,425,200. The property and buildings had been owned by the Peltcher family for 50 years who retired at the end of 2019. The auction featured 16 tracts, which included one segment that contained the Round Barn Theater, a 400-seat restaurant, a pair of historic log cabins and other buildings. This tract was purchased by **John Kruse** of Auburn, **Jason Bontrager** of Elkhart and former congressman **Marlin Stutzman** of Middlebury for \$1.55 million.

Mishawaka-based **Zipp Printing** has acquired **CEM Printing** of Niles, Mich. Zipp expects the combined operations will grow the company by about 20%.

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BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS



BANKING / FINANCIAL

Best bank for business

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Centier Bank

Runner-Up: Peoples Bank

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Centier Bank

Runner-Up: 1st Source Bank

Best bank for obtaining a business loan

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Centier Bank

Runner-Up: Peoples Bank

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Centier Bank

Runner-Up: 1st Source Bank

Best bank for customer service

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Centier Bank

Runner-Up: Peoples Bank

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Centier Bank

Runner-Up: 1st Source Bank

Best credit union

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Tech Credit Union

Runner-Up: Teachers Credit Union

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Teachers Credit Union

Runner-Up: Notre Dame Federal Credit Union

Best accounting firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: McMahon & Associates CPAs

Runner-Up: Swartz Retson

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Kruggel Lawton CPAs

Runner-Up: Insight Accounting

2020 BEST OF

BEST OF NORTHWEST INDIANA BUSINESS AND GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA BUSINESS

Our readers have chosen the Best! The honorees selected for the Best of Business this year represent an array of companies, providing a variety of business services across Northwest Indiana and Greater South Bend and Michiana.

More than 100 businesses were recognized in 51 awards across seven distinct categories. Winners were selected by readers, representing the magazine's coverage area, which includes Lake, Porter, La Porte, St. Joseph, Elkhart, Newton, Jasper, Starke, Pulaski and Marshall counties. These annual awards celebrate the outstanding service of local businesses in the community.

"Recognizing and supporting local businesses has always been important, but never more so than during this unprecedented time of disruption," said Troy Linker, publisher of Northwest Indiana Business Magazine. "The honorees were selected before the COVID-19 outbreak, and while impact of this crisis remains fluid, these businesses will need your support more than ever to help them and the nation recover."

Linker said honorees appreciate the recognition they receive for the products and services they provide.

"Business owners and their employees are appreciative of the recognition," he said. "Northwest Indiana Business Magazine congratulates all 2020 Best of Business Award recipients!"



"Recognizing and supporting local businesses has always been important, but never more so than during this unprecedented time of disruption."

—Troy Linker
Publisher, Northwest Indiana Business Magazine



BUSINESS

ATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA BUSINESS AWARDS



Best wealth management advisory firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Kotys Wealth Professionals

Runner-Up: Oak Partners

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Korhorn Financial Group

Runner-Up: Healy Group

Best business investment firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Centier Bank Wealth Management

Runner-Up: Peoples Bank Wealth Management

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Centier Bank Wealth Management

Runner-Up: 1st Source Asset Advisors

BUSINESS / SERVICES

Best place to purchase office furniture

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: HDW Commercial Interiors

Runner-Up: Pulse Technology

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Office Interiors

Runner-Up: Business Furnishings

Best place to purchase office equipment and supplies

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Pulse Technology

Runner-Up: Kemp's Office City

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: US Business Systems, Inc.

Runner-Up: Office Interiors

Best information technology consulting firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Chester, Inc.

Runner-Up: Pulse Technology

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: US Business Systems, Inc.

Runner-Up: Aunalytics

>BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

Best ad agency/marketing firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Group 7Even

Runner-Up: SERA Solutions

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: J2 Marketing

Runner-Up: Vala Marketing

Best graphic/web design firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Group 7Even

Runner-Up: SERA Solutions

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: J2 Marketing

Runner-Up: Vala Marketing

Best commercial printer

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Lithographic Communications

Runner-Up: Largus Graphix Solutions

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Zipp Printing

Runner-Up: Service Printers

Best employee staffing firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Staff Source

Runner-Up: Express Employment Services

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Integritas Search

Runner-Up: Express Employment Services

Best telecommunications firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Midwest Telecom of America, Inc.

Runner-Up: NITCO

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Comcast Business

Runner-Up: AT&T

Best internet provider

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Comcast Business

Runner-Up: Midwest Telecom of America, Inc.

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Comcast Business

Runner-Up: AT&T

ONE CUSTOMER

BUSINESS LEADERS SAY KEEPING YOUR WORD



Anthony Contrucci, Centier's vice president of community and business development, said the bank embraces a corporate culture where employees want to help others.

LARRY AVILA

The annual Best of Business Awards winners for 2020 highlight the best of the best in the Region, but these companies are considered the best for a reason. They have business standards and procedures that make them companies customers rely on.

They also can thank business and community leaders across Northwest and Northcentral Indiana for their ongoing efforts to attract new developments and people to the state. These same leaders say a skilled workforce

and affordable living costs are among the Region's strengths, but the engine of the economy is its diversified, established and growing business base.

From locally-based financial institutions, manufacturers, higher-learning institutions and health care providers to an array of professional services, the community is rich with organizations that built strong reputations during decades of people keeping their word when delivering promised services and completing work on time.

"If you want something great, you have to work at it greatly," said

AT A TIME

KEY TO DEVELOPING STRONG REPUTATION



Photo provided by Centier Bank

attorney James Jorgensen, partner with the Valparaiso-based Hoepfner, Wagner & Evans LLP. The company has operated for 75 years and employs about 25 people, including 11 lawyers between its headquarters and Merrillville office.

No matter the industry, Jorgensen said a step toward a business's longevity is keeping your word with customers.

"Once you establish your niche, you begin to build your reputation through (delivering) timeliness of service and your responsiveness to clients," he said. "That becomes part of your uniqueness."

A strong foundation

Jorgensen has spent his entire 45-year career with Hoepfner, Wagner & Evans, whose managing partner is John Hughes. When Jorgensen joined the firm, it had an established client base and was positioned for growth.

"I was fortunate to come into the situation I did," he said. However, Jorgensen recognized that, to continue the firm's success, he had to develop relationships with people and encourage them to turn to his team for legal services.

This strategy also applied to Larson-Danielson Construction Inc. in La Porte.

COMMUNITY / EDUCATION

Best company to work for

NORTHWEST INDIANA

- Co-Winner: Centier Bank
- Co-Winner: Peoples Bank
- Co-Winner: Horizon Bank
- Co-Winner: Staff Source

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

- Co-Winner: Horizon Bank
- Co-Winner: Centier Bank

Best university to attain an MBA

NORTHWEST INDIANA

- Winner: Indiana University Northwest
- Runner-Up: Purdue University Northwest

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

- Winner: University of Notre Dame
- Runner-Up: Indiana University South Bend

Best university for a technology degree

NORTHWEST INDIANA

- Winner: Purdue University Northwest
- Runner-Up: Indiana University Northwest

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

- Winner: Purdue Polytechnic South Bend
- Runner-Up: Ivy Tech Community College

Best university online degree program

NORTHWEST INDIANA

- Winner: Indiana University Northwest
- Runner-Up: Purdue University Northwest

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

- Winner: Ivy Tech Community College
- Runner-Up: Indiana University South Bend

Best minority-owned business

NORTHWEST INDIANA

- Winner: Chicagoland Popcorn

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

- Winner: Linden Grill

Best veteran-owned business

NORTHWEST INDIANA

- Winner: Veterans' Cafe, Grill & Catering

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

- Winner: Indiana Whiskey

>BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

Best woman-owned business

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: HDW Commercial Interiors

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Anna's Bread

CONSTRUCTION / REAL ESTATE

Best commercial real estate firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: McColly Bennett Commercial Advantage

Runner-Up: Commercial Insites

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Cressy Commercial Real Estate

Runner-Up: Bradley Company

Best commercial construction firm for new construction

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Larson-Danielson Construction

Runner-Up: Tonn and Blank Construction

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Ancon Construction

Runner-Up: DJ Construction

Best commercial construction firm for remodeling or expansion

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Larson-Danielson Construction

Runner-Up: Chester, Inc.

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Ancon Construction

Runner-Up: DJ Construction

Best engineering firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: DVG Team

Runner-Up: Global Engineering & Land Surveying

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Troyer Group

Runner-Up: Lawson-Fisher Associates

Best commercial architectural design firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Chester, Inc.

Runner-Up: Shive-Hattery, Inc.

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Epoch, division of Shive-Hattery, Inc.

Runner-Up: Ancon Construction



Photo provided by U.S. Business Systems

U.S. Business Systems hosts an after-hours business raffle for employees. The company hosts an assortment of events for employees from chili cook-offs to fantasy football leagues. U.S. Business Systems also encourages its employees to support the community.

The company developed its reputation over time with each building project it delivered on time or sooner to a client, said Terry Larson, the company's secretary-treasurer. Larson-Danielson has been involved in building projects for almost all public-school districts in Northwest Indiana, and throughout its history, has built many high-profile sites around the Region, including the original Porter Memorial Hospital and Civic Auditorium in La Porte.

On the commercial side, Larson-Danielson has built numerous facilities, including for Valparaiso firms Task Force Tips, a maker of water flow products used by firefighters, and Indiana Beverage, a wholesaler and distributor.

"Our reputation is built from many successful projects," he said. "It comes from a core philosophy of exceeding the owner's expectations on performance, quality and value with every project — large or small."

Family-owned Larson-Danielson was established in 1908 and is

managed today by the fourth generation, which includes Terry; his brother, Tim Larson, president; and Mark Danielson, vice president.

A fifth generation also is involved with the business. Terry Larson's son Nick is an estimator with the company, and his son-in-law Jeff Jensen is a project manager, while Tim Larson's son Brian is a project manager.

Danielson's daughter Samantha is an accounting clerk with the firm.

Terry Larson said a company's reputation encompasses everything it does as a business.

"Building a great reputation requires operating with strong ethics and high integrity," Larson said. "A good reputation is important in order to

build trust, and trust is critical to any organization in a growing business."

Beginning with one

Terry McMahon, founder of McMahon & Associates CPAs in Munster, knows the struggles of building a business from scratch. The U.S. Small Business Administration

“Looking back, what helped me get going was that there was a lot of very nice people who gave (my company) a chance to do their tax returns.”

— Terry McMahon
Founder, McMahon
& Associates CPAs



Chef Erik Tannehill conducts a healthy cooking demonstration at the Walker Park Community Garden in Michigan City last summer. The garden and cooking classes are a joint effort of Franciscan Health Michigan City and Purdue Extension, aimed at addressing food insecurity in the community.

estimates that, of the more than 600,000 startup companies that historically launch annually, only about two-thirds survive two years and half of those make it five years.

McMahon defied those odds. He was alone when he opened his business in 1971.

McMahon recalled his first location was an 8-by-10-foot space with a desk and adding machine, inside the office of Paul Ladd, owner and operator of Ladd Realty and Appraisal Co. in Munster.

When he launched his accounting business, McMahon said he was fortunate local competition was minimal at the time, but he knew growing a client base would take commitment and dedication. Completing work for one customer led to a second and more soon followed.

McMahon's business reputation grew not only through successfully providing accounting and tax services for clients but by getting involved with civic organizations, including the Rotary Club.

"I developed a lot of one-on-one relationships with people and just got myself very involved in Munster," McMahon said.

After two years in business, McMahon's client base was large

enough to employ between three and five people to manage the workload. Now almost five decades later, McMahon & Associates CPAs employs 30 people, including 15 CPAs.

He said his company today annually handles 1,300 personal income tax returns and provides accounting services for about 500 businesses.

"Looking back, what helped me get going was that there was a lot of very nice people who gave (my company) a chance to do their tax returns," McMahon said. "I would recommend to anyone starting out that it's very important to form relationships with businesses and people."

Deep roots in Region

Merrillville-based Centier Bank has grown along with the Region. This year marks the 125th anniversary of the privately held bank, owned by the family of Michael Schrage, Centier's president and board chairman.

Centier today has assets that exceed \$4.5 billion, employs more than 1,900 people and operates 64 locations across Indiana.

The Schrage family's roots are deep in the Region. Its members were among the founders of the city of Whiting. And the Schrage family, through their bank, provided financing for what

Best commercial landscaping firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Lakeshore Landscaping

Runner-Up: Hubinger Landscaping

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Foegley Landscape

Runner-Up: Pemberton Landscaping

Best residential real-estate firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: McColly Real Estate

Runner-Up: Century 21

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Cressy & Everett Real Estate

Runner-Up: Irish Realty

Best residential home construction firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Olthof Homes

Runner-Up: McFarland Homes

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Place Builders, Inc.

Runner-Up: Devon Builders

Best residential home remodeling construction firm

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Apex Construction & Remodeling

Runner-Up: Pressel Enterprises

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Place Builders, Inc.

Runner-Up: HM Remodeling

EVENTS / ENTERTAINMENT

Best restaurant for business entertaining

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Gamba Ristorante

Runner-Up: Gino's Steakhouse

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Cafe Navarre

Runner-Up: Lasalle Grill

Best meeting site for large groups

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Avalon Manor Banquet Center

Runner-Up: Blue Chip Casino, Hotel & Spa

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Century Center

Runner-Up: Armory

>BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

Best meeting site for small groups

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Gamba Ristorante
Runner-Up: Gino's Steakhouse

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Morris Park Country Club
Runner-Up: Cafe Navarre

Best caterer for events

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Dimitri's Catering
Runner-Up: Comforts Catering

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Cafe Navarre
Runner-Up: Skillet Restaurant & Catering

Best golf course for charitable/business events

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: White Hawk Country Club
Runner-Up: Innsbrook Country Club

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Blackthorn Golf Club
Runner-Up: Knollwood Country Club

Best photographer for events

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Pete Doherty Images

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Peter Ringenberg Photography

HEALTH-WELLNESS

Best hospital/hospital group

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Health
Runner-Up: Community Healthcare System

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Beacon Health System
Runner-Up: St. Joseph Health System

Best health care facility for cardiology

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Health
Runner-Up: Community Healthcare System

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Beacon Health System
Runner-Up: St. Joseph Health System



Photo provided by Larson-Danielson Construction

Larson-Danielson has been involved in building projects for almost all public-school districts in Northwest Indiana, including Handley Elementary in La Porte.

today is the BP Refinery in Whiting, a major gasoline production center.

The philanthropic work of the Schrages, Centier and its employees is well known throughout the state and to the hundreds of community organizations that have benefited from donations and volunteer time of family members and employees. In 2019, Centier donated more than \$1.25 million to support 800 organizations, while employees gave 20,000 volunteer hours to about 1,000 nonprofit groups.

This level of community connection is part of Centier's approach to raise the bank's brand awareness in the markets where it operates, said Anthony Contrucci, the bank's vice president of community and business development.

"The sense of community we have (comes from) being a part of the community and serving the community," Contrucci said. "It's part of our culture and part of our brand, and it's why we're still here 125 years later."

When people see Centier employees active and working to make their

communities better places, it can attract new customers to the bank.

"When customers see you in the community supporting something, they then want to support us," Contrucci said.

But community involvement isn't just a marketing strategy. Contrucci said Centier embraces a corporate culture where employees want to help others.

This philanthropic mindset also is part of Centier's hiring strategy. It has built a work environment that encourages a giving culture and has positioned it on many statewide and national rankings of best places to work in recent years.

"The right people will create remarkable experiences for our clients if they love (being here) and what they do," Contrucci said.

Building for the future

Franciscan Health, which operates hospitals and medical facilities around the state, is in a unique position in the marketplace as a provider of health care services to thousands

"Our reputation is built from many successful projects," he said. "It comes from a core philosophy of exceeding the owner's expectations on performance, quality and value with every project — large or small."

—Terry Larson, secretary-treasurer
Larson-Danielson Construction





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>BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS

Best health care facility for cancer treatments

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Health

Runner-Up: Community Healthcare System

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Beacon Health System

Runner-Up: St. Joseph Health System

Best health care facility for orthopedics

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Lakeshore Bone & Joint Institute

Runner-Up: Franciscan Health

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: South Bend Orthopaedics

Runner-Up: Beacon Health System

Best health care facility for mental health

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Health

Runner-Up: Regional Health Systems

of people. Though its reach is broad, Franciscan doesn't simply wait for patients to walk through its doors.

"The key to building a good business reputation is to stay true to your mission and values," said Joe Dejanovic, vice president, marketing and communications for Franciscan Health's northern division. "In our case, we are guided by our mission of continuing Christ's ministry in our Franciscan tradition."

That mission means caring for everyone who seeks care through Franciscan.

"Our organization has been around for more than a century, but through all the changes, our values, respect for life, fidelity to our mission, compassionate concern and Christian stewardship have remained constant."

Like Centier, Franciscan understands its people must reflect and execute the provider's core mission. Franciscan employs more than 19,000 people throughout its operations.

"Besides the right skills and education, we emphasize that our employees will be a good fit within the organization,"

Dejanovic said. "That would mean working well within a team environment, a true sense of calling that exemplifies compassionate concern for others and knowing that they make a difference, no matter what their job entails."

Employees and owners with U.S. Business Systems in Elkhart use that same approach with their work and philanthropic activities.

Ron Hulett, information technology project manager, who along with his brother, Tim, and friend Dan Foster, launched U.S. Business Systems almost 30 years ago. The company today employs about 30 people and operates another office in St. Joseph, Mich. Michael Kidd, who joined the firm five years ago, serves as president and CEO.

Through the years, Hulett said his company's reputation grew through its work with customers and ability to deliver expertise and integrity with the products and services it provides.

"In the business world, your word is the only thing you really have to trade

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“In the business world, your word is the only thing you really have to trade on, and if people trust you, and (they) know you’re going to stand behind what you say and sell, the relationship continues to foster.”

—Ron Hulett, information technology project manager
U.S. Business Systems



GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Beacon Health System

Runner-Up: Oaklawn Mental Health

Best health care facility for urgent/immediate care

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Express Care

Runner-Up: Community Immediate Care

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Beacon Health System

Runner-Up: St. Joseph Health System

Best health care facility for physical/occupational therapy

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Health

Runner-Up: Community Healthcare System

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: South Bend Orthopaedics

Runner-Up: McDonald Physical Therapy

on, and if people trust you, and (they) know you’re going to stand behind what you say and sell, the relationship continues to foster,” Hulett said.

There is a family-oriented culture at U.S. Business Systems. It hosts an assortment of events for employees from chili cook-offs to fantasy football leagues.

Kidd said U.S. Business Systems encourages its employees to support the community and provides staff with paid time off so they can volunteer with a community cause or organization even during the work week.

Hulett and his brother enjoy working with children and have given time

and resources to a variety of programs, including the Boys & Girls Clubs.

Hulett said hiring the right people who share his and his brother’s values of helping others and providing service with integrity ensures the company’s culture and reputation will remain even after they retire.

“We want people of high character in as much as they value integrity, honesty and family relationships,” Ron Hulett said.

“We certainly want to surround ourselves with the right people on the skill side but also with the people who have that underlying purpose to do what’s right.”

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President Cary Smith is happy Midwest Telecom of America earned Best telecommunications firm in Northwest Indiana in the Best of Business Awards 2020.

Best fitness/wellness facility

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Franciscan Omni Health & Fitness
Runner-Up: Crossroads YMCA

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Beacon Health System
Runner-Up: YMCA of Greater Michiana

LEGAL / INSURANCE

Best law firm for corporate law

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Burke Costanza & Carberry
Runner-Up: Hoepfner Wagner & Evans

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Barnes & Thornburg
Runner-Up: SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn

Best law firm for business acquisitions and mergers

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Burke Costanza & Carberry
Runner-Up: Hoepfner Wagner & Evans

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Barnes & Thornburg

ABOUT THE AWARDS

► Each year, The Northwest Indiana Business Magazine surveys readers by asking them to vote for the best businesses throughout Northwest Indiana and Greater South Bend/Michiana. The survey provides readers the opportunity to acknowledge local business leaders who are excelling in their service to the community. The Best of Business Awards promote excellence in innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership in the Region's business community. Read more about the voting process at nwindianabusiness.com/bestof/voting-process

Runner-Up: SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn

Best law firm for litigation

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Burke Costanza & Carberry
Runner-Up: Eichhorn & Eichhorn

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Barnes & Thornburg
Runner-Up: SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn

Best law firm for estate planning

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Burke Costanza & Carberry
Runner-Up: Eichhorn & Eichhorn

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: SouthBank Legal: LaDue | Curran | Kuehn
Runner-Up: Barnes & Thornburg

Best insurance agency for business property and liability coverage

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: General Insurance Services
Runner-Up: Pinnacle Insurance Group of IN

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Healy Group
Runner-Up: Gibson Insurance Agency

Best insurance agency for business health and life coverage

NORTHWEST INDIANA

Winner: Crowel Agency
Runner-Up: General Insurance Services

GREATER SOUTH BEND/MICHIANA

Winner: Healy Group
Runner-Up: Gibson Insurance Agency

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BALANCING OLD AND NEW



The ANCO property on South Campbell Street in Valparaiso is being reborn as a transit-oriented, mixed-use space with Journeyman Distillery as an anchor tenant.

Photo by Lesly Bailey



REGION FIRMS WORK TO BLEND MODERN WHILE PRESERVING A CLASSIC BUILDING'S CHARM

LESLEY BAILEY

Through a modern-day lens, redevelopment and construction leaders across Northwest Indiana continue to examine the rejuvenation of old sites and old structures.

Developers say they take it project by project to determine if structures can be restored or need to be torn down to build new from the ground up.

“There is value and a sense of place to community members who know buildings and grew up around them,” said Brandon Dickinson, Valparaiso’s redevelopment director.

It creates nostalgia for some residents and connects them to growing up, he said.

“If a building is important, it is part of our duty to rehabilitate and preserve those buildings the best we can, if it is financially reasonable to do so,” Dickinson said.

Weighing old versus new

Bruce Stolman, economic and community development director for the city of Whiting, said a team shopped around the former Illiana Hotel that stood on the corner of Atchison Avenue and 119th Street.

“We were looking around to rehab the building as it was pretty cool on the outside but inside had water damage,” he said. “The economics just didn’t work to rejuvenate it, and we started to get discouraged.”

But later, a piece fell from the top of the building and struck the sidewalk.

“Fortunately, no one was hurt,” Stolman said. “Upon further examination, we found the masonry damage was getting worse, (so) we had to declare an emergency.”

The damaged structure had stood vacant for decades and was torn down in 2017. The cleared site paved the way for Holladay Properties to take over the Illiana Building project, which pays homage to the former hotel that opened in 1928.

The five-story multi-use building will feature 4,500 square feet of commercial space on the first floor and 32

ILLIANA HOTEL

► The damaged Illiana Hotel (below top) on the corner of Atchison Avenue and 119th Street in Whiting stood vacant for decades and was torn down in 2017. The cleared site paved the way for Holladay Properties to take over the Illiana Building project, which pays homage to the former hotel that opened in 1928.



Illustrations provided by the city of Whiting



two-bedroom apartments. A lease agreement with Calumet College earmarks about a dozen of the units for foreign exchange students who attend the college with the rest available to the public. The project is on track to wrap up in 2020.

“As much as we wanted to preserve

the structure as it had been part of our community for so long, it just became a danger,” Stolman said. “There is double the parking that the Illiana Hotel had. ... There were fewer cars in the 1920s. You have to have modifications to accommodate modern life.”



Photo provided by Yaney Masonry

John Yaney and his team have tackled projects in downtown Crown Point to restore the historic downtown buildings. Yaney said working to preserve old structures can be more cost-effective than building new.

Igniting a spark

Bringing life back to the ANCO property on South Campbell Street in Valparaiso could cultivate further development in the area, said Rob Thorgren, Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission president.

“Reinvesting in areas that were once busy corridors is very beneficial to the city,” he said. “We have done that in other locations, and we are hoping to have the same results here.”

He said the strategy behind redeveloping the ANCO property is to peak interest in other potential redevelopment sites.

The ANCO site has been vacant since the mid-1980s but now is heading toward a new beginning with plans for a transit-oriented, mixed-use space. Three Oaks, Michigan-based Journeyman Distillery is in the process of taking over the site and its structures as an anchor tenant of the project.

“They have already torn down the buildings that were past the point of use,” Thorgren said. “The ANCO site



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has four buildings, and the plan is to rehabilitate all of them.”

Thorgren said the city is finalizing the transfer of land and the development agreement with Journeyman Distillery.

“Once, it was known that Journeyman was coming to Valpo, other folks came online to express interest in the area,” he said.

Bill Welter, founder of Journeyman Distillery, said his goal in Valparaiso, is similar to the vision he had in Three Oaks, Michigan.

“Our ambition in Valpo, like Three Oaks, is to preserve as much as we can of the original structures,” Welter said. “We believe the buildings in Valparaiso have a story to tell, and our goal would be to complement the buildings with our own uses, but at the same time, let the buildings tell their own stories.”

Welter said it is important to his company’s story, because he believes in authenticity not only in his distilled spirits but in the spaces he occupies.

The vision for the site includes a

restaurant, event space and barrel storage, along with the distillery and brewery. The four ANCO buildings add up to 125,000 square feet of space.

Beyond Journeyman, the city is working to develop housing as well as commercial and retail space in partnership with Indianapolis-based Flaherty & Collins Properties.

“I think we can look to what Bill accomplished in Three Oaks with that rehabilitation and expect it to be just as spectacular,” Thorgren said. “Here, their plan is to keep as much of the original look as possible.”

Dickinson said the industrial look is what a lot of businesses are going for, and often new buildings are built to look like they are 80 years old.

Creating connections

Connecting to the community is key for Welter, who grew up in Valparaiso and had hoped to take First National Bank into the future.

“My grandfather and my dad (Chuck) had a vision of family-owned and

operated businesses that could last for multiple generations, (and) I believe in that same vision,” Welter said.

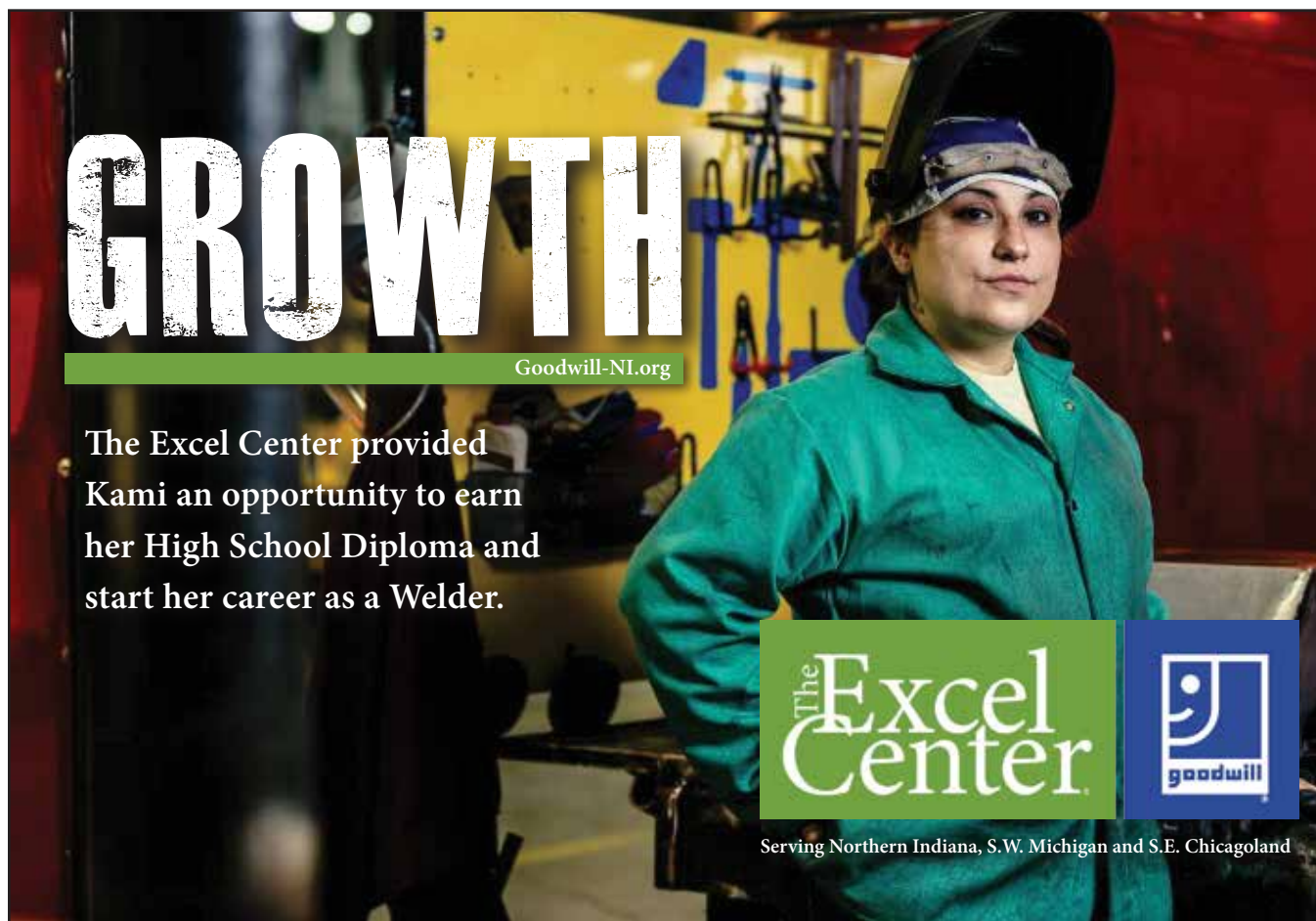
“While my opportunity to take First National Bank into the third generation was cut short when my uncle sold the bank, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to be part of an incredible community and to see what impact we can make.”

Welter said he wants to carry on both the family business tradition and play a meaningful role in the community.

Dickinson said seeing the ANCO site come back is also important to strengthening the city’s ties to its roots.

“It’s a reflection of our community (and to) those who worked at the former windshield-wiper manufacturing plant (who) were proud to work there,” he said.

“Preserving the buildings is a reflection of those who built this community into a desirable place to live and work, (because) it pays homage to the hard-working and great people who have come before us.”




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“We believe the buildings in Valparaiso have a story to tell, and our goal would be to complement the buildings with our own uses, but at the same time, let the buildings tell their own stories.”

—Bill Welter
Journeyman Distillery



Freshening up

Facade and sign grants also help prompt business owners to boost their curb appeal.

In Whiting, Stolman said the program has been available for more than 10 years and most business owners in the downtown district have taken advantage of the matching grants. For the facade grant, the city will reimburse up to \$7,500, depending on the total amount spent.

“It’s tough to maintain these old buildings and expensive, (because) we want them to restore the original look whenever possible, such as masonry work and not cover up with aluminum,” he said. “There’s an application to follow as well as parameters.”

Stolman said, for signs, developers “can’t do some kind of crazy neon.”

If the proposal conforms to the historic guidelines and color schemes, it is approved by the redevelopment

commission,” he said.

Dickinson said the ANCO project reflects how the city can be a vital team member.

“The redevelopment commission has grants that we can put into play for facade improvements, and we have our sign program, (and) obviously, with projects like Journeyman, it takes a little more than a facade or sign grant to make the project work,” he said. “The scope and depth of the project spotlights how the city can participate and be good stewards of public money and participate at a reasonable and appropriate level.”

Beyond the old ANCO site, Thorgren said other areas in Valparaiso are in various stages of redevelopment, including the old St. Paul School at Campbell and Chicago streets, East Lincolnway corridor, the former White House restaurant on Morgan Boulevard and the former Kmart site.

St. Paul Square now features a

condominium community ready for residents, while the site of the restaurant is waiting for a new phase.

“The old White House restaurant is one of those situations where it’s too far gone,” Thorgren said. “We have tried redeveloping the site, but the structure is going to have to come down at some point.”

Thorgren said the Urschel family is studying the best use of space at the former Kmart and the adjoining properties. “That could be a big development in the city’s future,” he said.

Specialized skills

In Crown Point, John Yaney and the Yaney Masonry team have taken on many restoration projects, including the antique mall on the square and various buildings at the Lake County Fairgrounds.

“We have completed multiple levels of masonry and stone restoration projects on restaurants such as Tavern on Main, and up-and-coming businesses opening in old historical buildings in downtown Crown Point,” he said.

Yaney said working to preserve old structures can be more cost-effective than building new and can be more environmentally friendly.

“We are re-using existing materials instead of creating more,” he said. “By preserving the efforts that were poured into the creation of these historical buildings, we are preserving the legacy of these buildings.”

Yaney also highlights how working with historic structures can be a delicate balance and present challenges.

“You have to be cautious in this type of work as to not further harm the integrity of the structure around the areas of work,” he said. “Matching and sourcing in terms of color, look and material can be a challenge.”

In business for more than 30 years, Yaney has watched the industry continue to evolve.

“The fall of the availability of tradesman and companies that still do this type of historical work has changed over the years,” he said. “Tradesmen skilled in the art and knowledge of the historical restoration trades are becoming scarcer, (and) being a multi-generational company, we continue to pass down the trade.”

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AS NEW BETTING BOOM TAKES OFF, ENHANCED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES ATTRACT NEW CLIENTS TO REGION'S GAMING VENUES

DOUG ROSS

The advent of sports betting has been a game-changer for Northwest Indiana casinos. The new revenue stream has helped them draw in customers who are new to the gaming experience.

Earlier this year, Indiana ranked fourth nationally — behind Nevada, New Jersey and Pennsylvania — in sports gaming, said Dustin Gouker, analyst with the PlayUSA.com Network, which reports on regulated online gaming in the United States. PlayIndiana.com, one of its affiliates, is specific to the Hoosier state.

Indiana could overtake Pennsylvania, which has a much larger population and launched sports betting a year ahead of Indiana, Gouker said. “They’re ahead of the curve right now,” he said.

And that was just a few months after Indiana started allowing casinos to partner with sportsbook operators like DraftKings and FanDuel. DraftKings, the market leader, operates under Ameristar Casino’s license. FanDuel partners with Blue Chip Casino Hotel and Spa.

“The FanDuel sportsbook has just been a home run for us,” said Brenda Temple, Blue Chip’s vice president and general manager.

Blue Chip is seeing younger, more professional customers since betting on sports began last fall, Temple said. The

sports bar has been popular with this customer demographic. That new amenity brings in new customers who might not otherwise have come to the casino.



“Indiana has been remarkably progressive in the way it has managed its sports betting industry, rivaling New Jersey as the most forward-thinking legal jurisdiction.”

— Dustin Gouker
PlayUSA.com Network

Horseshoe Casino in Hammond, one of the biggest in the Midwest, has likewise seen an influx of gamblers. The casino led the state in sports betting in January, with \$13.7 million in bets. That generated \$1.8 million in gross receipts, Gouker said.

Proximity to Chicago gives Horseshoe a big boost, he said.

Football was a big draw for sports gaming in January and early February, with the playoffs leading up to the Super Bowl generating buzz and bets. Basketball is popular, too, so March Madness has been popular.

Horseshoe’s 60 feet of screens at The Venue let people watch multiple games and enjoy what Horseshoe decided to call Mad Marchness, General Manager Dan Nita said.

Opening the door

A landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2018 opened the door to sports gaming nationwide. Previously, Nevada was the only state that could offer it.

Gouker credited Indiana’s regulators for their foresight.

“Indiana has been remarkably progressive in the way it has managed its sports betting industry, rivaling New Jersey as the most forward-thinking legal jurisdiction,” Gouker said. “Indiana has put together a pretty good model that has been primed for growth.”



Indiana’s law fosters competition, Gouker said. By allowing Oscar betting, Indiana has shown its willingness to open new markets, which helps both casino operators and the state’s revenue. New Jersey and Indiana were the only states in 2020 to allow bets on who would take home an Academy Award.



READ ON PHONE

SBOOKS WAVE



Photo and rendering provided by The Zimmerman Agency/Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana



HARD ROCK CASINO NORTHERN INDIANA

► The new \$300 million Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana at the intersection of Burr Street and I-94 in Gary is scheduled to open in 2021. The land-based casino will replace the Majestic Star riverboat casino in the city's Buffington Harbor area. Pictured above, from left: Seminole Tribe of Florida Chairman Marcellus Osceola, Marlon Jackson, Executive Vice President Spectacle Entertainment and General Manager Majestic Star Casino Jahnae Erpenbach, Jackie Jackson, Tito Jackson, Chairman and CEO Spectacle Entertainment Rod Ratcliff, Vice Chairman Spectacle Entertainment Greg Gibson.

“The Indiana Gaming Commission is focused on accommodating innovation,” said Sara Tait, agency executive director. “The IGC has demonstrated a willingness and ability to facilitate discussions about new technology, which is going to be key as demographics change, (and) certainly we’re seeing more emphasis

on amenities than would have been the case 20 years ago, and we anticipate that will continue to be an important component of the industry.”

After the first Indiana casinos opened in 1995, state taxes on them quickly became one of the state’s top revenue sources.

“It’s an ever-changing industry that is increasingly more competitive,” said Speros Batistatos, president and CEO of the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority.

Among the changes have been creation of a mobile app for Hoosier gamblers. They can place their bets



Photo provided by PR Chicago/Blue Chip Casino Hotel and Spa

Blue Chip Casino Hotel and Spa in Michigan City is seeing younger, more professional customers since betting on sports began last fall, said Brenda Temple, vice president and general manager. The sports bar has been popular with this customer demographic.

anywhere in Indiana but not outside the state, Gouker said. He estimated 80 percent of sports bets are placed online, but casinos still get their cut because the sportsbook operators must work under

a casino's license, he said.

"If gaming is like anything else in society, it's going to be driven right into your handheld device like everything else," Batistatos said.

Catering to market needs

Customer service is also partly responsible for Horseshoe's success, Nita said.

Horseshoe is consistently honored as one of the best places to work in Indiana, and that begins with very selective recruiting and extensive training.

The casino, which is open 24/7, rewards team members based on customer service ratings.

Blue Chip also focuses on providing excellent customer service, Temple said.

"This is an industry that's all about competition," Batistatos said. "You've got to continue to evolve and present new and competitive products on the market."

For Blue Chip, the evolution has included a major expansion of event space. Blue Chip added 15,000 square feet last year and offers 45,000 square feet for gatherings of all sizes.

"A lot of trade conventions, trade groups, social groups we brought here, they outgrew us," Temple said. "We were a victim of our own success, so they left us. But now they're coming back."

Regional conventions find Blue Chip less expensive than Chicago. Business travelers and others who attend shows and meetings there enjoy a stop in the casino, Temple said.

Batistatos sees the Blue Chip expansion as a lost opportunity for Lake County.

When Star Plaza was built at I-65 and U.S. 30 in Merrillville, it was the market leader for events. When the hotel and convention center were razed, no one stepped up in Lake County to replace it.

"I've been saying since 1999 we need to have a municipally owned convention center," Batistatos said. "Now we're seeing the result of a failure in a public policy point of view."

"We've lost hundreds of millions of dollars in our convention business" and seen the decline of restaurants and retail shops in the area because Lake County has refused to pass a food and beverage tax to fund a new convention center, Batistatos said.

"Our refusal to do the right public policy is enriching a hotel and casino in La Porte County," he said.



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Enhancing visitor experiences

Public investment pays off, Batistatos said. He cited the sports complex in Crown Point, downtown park in Valparaiso, cleaning up Lake George in Hobart and the Mascot Hall of Fame and lakefront park in Whiting.

A big private investment in Lake County is the construction of the new \$300 million Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana at the intersection of Burr Street and I-94 in Gary. When it opens in 2021, the land-based casino will replace the Majestic Star riverboat casino in the city's Buffington Harbor area.

A second phase of construction will include a hotel and parking garage.

The casino is expected to include more than 2,100 gaming positions as well as sportsbook.

Ameristar Casino Hotel East Chicago was the first in Northwest Indiana to move gaming operations onto dry land when a \$15 million renovation in 2018 created a new high-limit room, featuring 95 slot machines and 14 table games, including 12 blackjack and two baccarat tables.

Don't expect Horseshoe to move to dry land because of the casino's earlier major expansion.

"You as a guest wouldn't know you're on water," Nita said. "We're not going on land because we spent a half billion dollars already."

Indiana's 1993 legalization of casino gambling required floating casinos that would cruise — even though Blue Chip became known as a boat in a moat because it couldn't get out onto Lake Michigan.

The intent was to control access to casinos to the duration of the cruise. The law was later eased to allow customers to come and go at will, then to allow casinos to operate on land.

The changes made casinos more customer friendly.

At Blue Chip, "we are a service-driven property. We are a service-driven industry," Temple said.

She expects entertainment options and online offerings to expand.

Horseshoe is intentional about making customers aware of their offerings.

"We will put our food offerings very visible on our casino floor," Nita said.

The more often customers come to the casino, the more they see what Horseshoe has to offer.

One of the challenges casinos face is enhancing the customer experience.

"I think there's an opportunity to enhance the socialization of gaming," Nita said.

When customers come to the casino in groups, they often go their own way on the casino floor, place their

bets and rejoin later. Nita sees an opportunity.

"We have to do a better job of trying to keep groups of people together," Nita said.

The casino industry is also trying to figure how to capitalize on skill-based games, but current products aren't overly compelling, he said. The popularity of mobile apps like Scrabble and Candy Crush show there's customer demand though.

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When compared to neighboring states, Northwest Indiana's relatively low home prices, good schools, scenic national park, easy access to transportation and numerous other attractions continue to make it a place where people want to buy a home, raise their children or retire, real estate professionals say.

The Region has experienced a strong housing market and rising prices in recent years, but as positive as that is, it has pluses and minuses depending on a person's situation.

"It's amazing the growth that's happened in our market," said Bill Vossos, managing broker for Keller Williams Realty NWI in Schererville. "It's good if you're a seller (but) bad if you're a buyer."

In a not new but ongoing trend, people are continuing to relocate to Northwest Indiana from Illinois.

"We've been seeing an influx of people from Illinois for a while, and it's continuing to increase," said Jack Slager, development manager for Schilling Development in St. John. "Now we see people coming from farther away."

People moving into Indiana from Illinois traditionally are from the just-over-the-border communities of Lansing and Crete, but now many are relocating from more distant cities such as Homer Glen and Palos Park, he said.

"They're looking for lower taxes, more house for their money in terms of dollars per square foot — just more bang for their buck," Vossos added.

The experts say some of Northwest Indiana's housing growth may be attributed to people looking to escape high taxes, pension and debt woes, traffic congestion and other problems in Illinois. Vossos and others in the real estate industry add the exodus to Indiana might be credited in part to efforts by Indiana boosters to make Illinoisans more aware of the Region's assets.

Come to Indiana

A prominent initiative is the Move to Indiana digital marketing campaign sponsored by the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority, which promotes the Region as a bedroom community to Chicago.

Touting lower taxes, a cheaper cost of living and amenities such as Lake Michigan beaches, the marketing effort





READ ON PHONE



Photo provided by Sublime Homes

is targeted at attracting young married couples and empty nesters to leave Illinois for Indiana.

“We’re trying to tie ourselves closer to Chicago,” said Peter Novak, CEO of the 3,000-member Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors. “We’re a Chicago suburb. That’s how we look at it.”

To make his point, Novak notes it takes longer to drive to downtown Chicago from some Chicago suburbs, including Naperville or Barrington, than it would from St. John or Dyer.

“The commute time is comparable or less,” Novak said. “That (a long commute to Chicago) is one of the biggest misconceptions about Northwest Indiana.”

If recent statistics are any indication of an ongoing trend, Illinois’ population exodus might continue to benefit Indiana.

The last time Illinois had a population increase was in 2013, and since then, the number of people calling the state home has decreased by 223,000 residents, which includes births, deaths, and domestic and international migration, according to census data. Illinois lost an estimated 51,250 people, or 0.4% of its residents in 2019.

That exodus might seem like a potential boon for Northwest Indiana, except that most of the Hoosier state’s growth isn’t in the border area with Illinois but in central Indiana.

“In (Northwest) Indiana, we’re concerned about population losses ourselves,” Novak said. “Indiana is more stable, but looking to the future, that (population loss) may affect us as well.”

Growing state

The Indiana Business Research Center reported in 2018 that Indiana’s population is expected to grow by 660,000 residents or 10% by 2050.

“The Indianapolis area is a large driver of that,” Novak said.

Just as in Illinois, older industrial cities in north Lake County have witnessed population declines, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

In 2018, Hammond, which is the Region’s largest city, had a population of 75,795 residents compared to 76,418 in 2017. East Chicago’s population went from 28,168 residents in 2017 to 27,930 residents in 2018.

By contrast, some communities in south Lake County are experiencing growth. St. John’s population surged to 18,047 in 2018, up from 17,209 in 2017.

“St. John and Dyer are prime locations,” Novak said. “A lot of that has to do with traffic patterns. There are a lot of ways (from those communities) to get into and out of Indiana.”

St. John is where Schilling Development has been operating for 120 years. Slager said about half the company’s customers come from Illinois and half from Indiana.

“We have local buyers who are moving up in their housing,” he said.



“A lot of my Illinois buyers have some connection to Indiana. They grew up or went to college here, or they’re marrying someone from here.”

—Rim Maurukas
Newcastle Homes

More home for the money

Schilling is the developer behind The Preserve, a high-end residential development in St. John. The 400-lot subdivision is being built out in phases with about 50 lots becoming available each year.

The company’s website advertises lots, including a 4.9-acre site for \$248,000 or a 2.62-acre property for \$188,000.

“It’s a nice community,” Slager said. “We try to preserve some of the natural areas, so there is open space and maybe some hiking or biking trails.”

Custom builders are constructing the homes in The Preserve. Rim Maurukas who operates Newcastle Homes is one of them.

“It used to be that most of my buyers came from Indiana, but now it’s a mix,” Maurukas said. “A lot of my Illinois buyers have some connection



Photo provided by Schilling Development

The Preserve is a high-end residential development in St. John. The 400-lot subdivision is being built out in phases with about 50 lots becoming available each year.

to Indiana. They grew up or went to college here, or they're marrying someone from here."

Whatever their ties to the area, Maurukas said many want the sort of upscale, custom houses he builds, which cost in the range of \$550,000 to \$1.2 million. The houses generally have four bedrooms, three-and-a-half baths, large kitchens with islands, and second-floor laundry rooms.

Those prices are well over the median home price sold during the past couple of years in Northwest Indiana but less expensive than a similar house in many desirable suburbs in Illinois.

Novak reports that a median home price (for a house with three bedrooms and two baths) during the past couple of years was about \$175,000 in Northwest Indiana compared to \$200,000 in Illinois.

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Amy Alexander, sales and marketing director at Sublime Homes in St. John, said her company is building houses in St. John, Crown Point, Munster, Valparaiso and Michigan City. Sublime is a land developer and custom and semi-custom builder.

Like Newcastle Homes, her company's new houses range in price from \$600,000 to \$1 million.

Those lofty prices for new construction are still less than what the same type of new house might cost in the Chicago area's more expensive suburbs, she said.

"The new construction is going to be a teardown, or you're going to have to go very far west or very far north (of Chicago)," she said.

Eddie Castellanos, executive officer of the Home Builders Association of Northwest Indiana in Merrillville, said affordability is a main draw for Northwest Indiana.

Affordable homes

High-end custom houses ranging from \$500,000 or more might be a hot commodity in the Region, but new homes in the \$250,000 range or less also are available, he said, but that depends on what a buyer wants from location to size to number of bedrooms.

Even so, he said that the area's housing boom has made it more difficult for first-time homebuyers, particularly in hot communities close to Illinois, to find affordable housing.

He cited a recent conversation at a Realtors meeting as an example.

"Realtors were asking each other 'Do you have anything coming up in Whiting that isn't on the market because I have buyers that really want to buy there,'" Novak said.

"I think a lot of people would like to buy new construction, but finding one that's affordable is very hard," Vossos added. "They (buyers) are going to have to leave the border towns and go farther east to Merrillville or Crown Point."

Castellanos said young people, like many throughout the country, have challenges to face, including high student loan debt.

"I see that the average age for buying a first house is around 35 to 40," he said.

“Twenty or 30 years ago, you could be (in your 20s and buying your first house.”

Vossos said he hears resistance from buyers about going farther east. He said many communities, both near and farther from the Illinois border, are making public improvements that have the potential to lure people east, and which will improve the quality of life in various communities.

Passenger rail expansion

One factor affecting quality of life in Northwest Indiana is transportation. Plans to improve the South Shore Line’s service east of Gary is getting major support. In mid-February, the Federal Transit Administration put the double-track project into its final engineering phase.

The \$416 million Double Track Northwest Indiana project would allow the commuter rail to build a second set of mainline tracks between Gary and Michigan City. It also would make improvements at five stations, expand station parking lots, build nine new

platforms and close 21 at-grade crossings in Michigan City. Railroad officials have said a second set of tracks would allow trains to run faster and more reliably.

The double-track project is expected to receive the FTA’s full funding approval in the spring of next year, and completion might occur in fall 2023, or 2024, depending on what obstacles might affect construction.

Another project to improve commuter rail access also is advancing. In October, the FTA selected the \$816 million West Lake Corridor project for its final engineering phase.

West Lake will be a new 8-mile rail link between Hammond and Dyer, along with four stations and a connection to the existing South Shore route to Chicago.

In a signal of the importance of these projects, the FTA gave both high ratings for local financial commitment, with state and local funding providing 62% of the projects’ cost. In past years, the usual split between federal and local funding for transit projects was 50-50.

There are myriad other examples of how individual communities are building assets that will likely be attractive to potential residents.

For example, Merrillville’s Parks and Recreation Department broke ground in December on a new \$24 million community center, developers said. The 90,000-square-foot facility will feature a gymnasium with three basketball courts, six volleyball courts, a running track, fitness area, rock climbing wall and a multi-function event center that can be rented for weddings and other gatherings.

Projects like these and many others are expected to benefit businesses that have invested in Northwest Indiana for the long haul.

One of those is Schilling Development, which is developing properties it purchased decades ago.

“We’re developing land now that has been in their hands for 40 years,” Slager said.

“They had the foresight to see where growth would come.”

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VANISHING SHORES

INDIANA LEADERS TAKE PREEMPTIVE MEASURES
AS WATER LEVEL CONTINUES TO RISE IN LAKE MICHIGAN

ERIKA WURST

Every morning Geof Benson wakes in his Beverly Shores home and reaches for his phone.

The fate of his quaint, scantily populated town rests on information he relies on at www.windfinder.com. Then he holds his breath and hopes for the best.

For Benson, this routine is as common as grabbing a cup of coffee. However, on one recent morning, the long-time Beverly Shores resident was very rattled.

The website, which specializes in wind and wave forecasts, is Benson's go-to

resource "for predicting what's coming at you." During one recent morning, Benson noted Beverly Shores residents and their neighbors were going to be in for a wild ride.

"This is predicting a lot of wind," said Benson, also executive director of the Dunes Learning Center in Chesterton. "And it's not going to do us any favors."

Lake Michigan water levels are at their highest point in three decades, according to government officials. That fact has led to extensive beach erosion in some areas of the states that share

its more than 1,600 miles of shoreline, including 45 miles in Indiana.

The mild winter hasn't helped matters in Indiana. Limited ice development meant no annual natural barrier to protect the lakeshore from fierce winds, which has wreaked havoc on many lakefront towns, including Beverly Shores, Ogden Dunes, Portage and Long Beach.

This crisis has the state's attention as the devastated shoreline is placing communities as well as a lucrative tourism industry at risk.



Gov. Eric Holcomb took this photo of a section of the Lake Michigan shoreline above Long Beach during his recent tour of the lakefront to view erosion damage.



Provided by Gov. Eric Holcomb's office

State acts with executive order

Gov. Eric Holcomb, Indiana Department of Homeland Security and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, as well as local and federal agencies, are working together to save the state's Lake Michigan shoreline to keep communities and their residents safe. In late February, Holcomb signed an executive order, which outlined the state's plan to address the problem.

"Our administration has been monitoring the erosion along the Lake Michigan shoreline, but I wanted to see the damage firsthand," Holcomb

said, who in late February did an aerial survey along the lakeshore to view the erosion damage.

Photos taken by Holcomb detailed the erosion around Beverly Shores. In his executive order, Holcomb directed state agencies to collect damage information, which could lead to a declaration of disaster emergency along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

He also outlined steps the state will take to assist the affected parts of the shoreline and to preserve "one of our state's crown jewels for all those who live, work and play along the shoreline."

Holcomb's order calls for the IDHS to notify the governor's office if the damage criteria, set by the federal government, is met. That threshold would allow Indiana to apply for federal disaster assistance so the governor can declare a disaster emergency. He also ordered IDHS to seek other federal funding, programs or assistance that might be available for short- and long-term mitigation projects.

Holcomb's order directs the DNR to expedite its review and granting of governmental permits requested by property owners so they could begin any work to protect their property from further damage due to erosion.

The state is facing a major hurdle in its efforts to address lakeshore erosion and making a disaster declaration.

David Hosick, IDHS spokesman, said the challenge is that the problem has occurred over time and not tied to a single event such as a storm or other natural disaster, a requirement by statute for any disaster declaration.

However, the governor's executive order means the state now is regularly monitoring the condition of the Lake Michigan shoreline as well as keeping watch of any damage to property or public infrastructure because of erosion. If a major issue

arises, the state can respond, and if problems worsen, it could lead to a disaster declaration and federal assistance, officials said.

In the meantime, state leaders will continue working with local and federal partners to find solutions and to have resources available to assist affected communities. And while the process is in motion, Indiana shoreline residents, including Benson, can only wait and hope for the best.

Benson said the Army Corps of Engineers predict the lake will rise another foot in the next year, making grave matters even worse. "It's been a very interesting time," he said.

Lakeshore's importance

At the beginning of 2020, Lorelei Weimer, executive director of Indiana Dunes Tourism, was riding a high.

In the previous year, about 3.6 million visitors came to the Indiana Dunes National Park. It became the country's 61st national park in February 2019.

A single word change in the park's name led to a visitor spike of between 25% and 30%, Weimer said.

"But now, a year later, we're facing this situation with the erosion," she said.

Rising water levels, combined with more precipitation, intense storms and manmade structures obstructing the natural flow of sand, paint a bleak picture.

Drone footage taken in November 2018 led Weimer to predict that a certain dune would soon breach, leaving a nearby pavilion on an island of its own. Less than a year after she made others aware of her concern, the inevitable came true.

"I'm trying to tell people we're not crying wolf," she said. "You can look at that

pavilion on a little piece of land now. I just hope we don't lose the building. It's only been around for 10 or 15 years."

Beach access points, which allowed wheelchair-bound visitors to enjoy views of the lake and the sunsets and



"Our administration has been monitoring the erosion along the Lake Michigan shoreline, but I wanted to see the damage firsthand."

—Gov. Eric Holcomb



Photo provided by Geof Benson

Efforts are ongoing to protect the Lake Michigan shoreline in Beverly Shores. A little more than \$52,000 has been raised by residents to repair three scours impacting Lake Front Drive. Scours are localized losses of soil ruining the road.

the sand, are completely under water because of high water levels.

Despite issues caused by rising water levels and erosion, there are reasons to remain optimistic, Weimer said. The park has 15 miles of beaches, and not all of them have been impacted in the same way.

Focusing on the positive is critical for Weimer, whose office works to draw visitors to the dunes and Indiana's lakefront.

If visitors don't come, the Region's businesses will be affected.

"These visitors come into our community and eat at local restaurants, shop our local retail (and) stay at our hotels," Weimer said.

Pushing tourism

To keep visitors coming, Weimer and her team regularly reach out to hotels and make their presence known on social media, letting potential guests know it is business as usual.

Speros Batistatos, president and CEO of the South Shore Convention and

Visitors Authority, is fully aware of the erosion problem but doesn't think it will slowdown beachgoers.

"I'm not sure how familiar visitors are with (the lakeshore) erosion," Batistatos said. "They don't know that there is 15 less feet of beach than there (were) five years ago."

Batistatos wants the shoreline preserved and remains confident the Indiana Dunes National Park will continue attracting visitors.

Visitors might view the national park designation and Lake Michigan as the major draw, but Batistatos said there is more to be seen and experienced in Northwest Indiana.

"I see this (situation) as a silver lining," he said. "Not to downplay erosion, (because) it's absolutely important, but this will necessitate the visitor to find other things to do. Like, let's go bird watching in one of the greatest migratory bird stops in America. ... There's other stuff to do (in Northwest Indiana) besides get sand in your shoes and go home sunburned."

Community copes

Reality for Benson and his Beverly Shores residents, however, is more complicated than a slightly smaller beachfront.

Decades ago, many residents lost beachfront homes, and the prospect of losing the town's major road becomes more real as water levels rise and more shoreline disappears.

It has become such a reality that Benson and his crew tie yellow ribbons to trees close to the coast's edge. If the trees eventually fall over the shore wall, Lake Front Drive will need to close for repairs.

"The transportation and utility backbone of our town is in constant jeopardy," he said. "If we lose this road, the consequences will be catastrophic to our community, and the cost to move forward from there will be far higher."

A little more than \$52,000 has been raised by Beverly Shores residents to repair three scours impacting Lake Front Drive. Scours are localized losses of soil ruining the road. The raised funds only cover half of one scour's repair. The town will likely have to refinance its debt and hope for reimbursements to fix them all.

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Editor's note: Information for A&E was compiled before calls for social distancing. Please confirm details before attending.

'West Side Story' in concert

Experience forbidden love, fierce family loyalties and a ruthless feud between two urban street gangs through the iconic music of Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story." This legendary, Broadway-shaping musical interpretation of "Romeo and Juliet," with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, comes to life in two concert performances by the Northwest Indiana Symphony at

7:30 p.m. May 14 and 15 at the Auditorium at Living Hope Church in Merrillville. Guest vocalists and the Symphony Chorus will perform memorable hits, including "Maria," "Tonight," "Something's Coming," "America," "Cool," "One Hand, One Heart," "I Feel Pretty," "Somewhere" and "A Boy Like That." Guest vocalists include Brittany Hebel as Maria; Erich Bucholz as Tony; Kate Tombaugh as

Anita; and Bill McMurray as Riff. (219) 836-0525 or visit nisorchestra.org.

'Guys and Dolls'

Considered by many to be the perfect musical comedy, "Guys and Dolls" ran for 1,200 performances when it opened on Broadway in 1950. It received almost unanimous positive reviews and won a bevy of awards, including Tonys, Drama Desks and Oliviers. Frequently revived, the show has been produced with numerous all-star casts. Adapted from Damon Runyon's short stories of the 1920s and

'30s, "Guys and Dolls" is set in a world of gangsters, gamblers and other habitués of a mythical New York underworld. Frank Loesser's brassy, immortal score combined with the Runyonesque dialect makes "Guys and Dolls" a genuine crowd pleaser. See it at the La Porte Little Theatre from May 8 through 17. (219) 362-5113 or laportelittletheatreclub.com.

'Daddy Long Legs'

A heartwarming Cinderella story about a witty and winsome young woman and her mysterious benefactor, "Daddy Long Legs" is based on the treasured 1912 novel by Jean Webster that inspired a classic 1955 film. Set in turn-of-the-century New England, the musical tells the story of orphan Jerusha Abbott and her mysterious benefactor, who she dubs "Daddy Long Legs" after seeing his elongated shadow. Under the conditions of his largesse, Jerusha sends him a letter once a month, describing her new-found experiences with life outside the orphanage. Cast in the spirit of Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters and "Downton Abbey," "Daddy Long Legs" features music and lyrics by Tony Award-nominated composer/lyricist Paul Gordon ("Jane Eyre"), and Tony-winning librettist/director John Caird ("Les Misérables") and is a "rags-to-riches" tale of newfound love. Find it May 1 through 17 at the Towle Theater in Hammond. (219) 937-8780 or towlentheater.org.

'God of Carnage'

Originally produced in French as "Le Dieu du Carnage," the play by Yasmina Reza is the story of two 11-year-old boys, Ferdinand and Bruno, who get into an argument because Bruno refuses to let Ferdinand join his "gang." Ferdinand knocks out two of Bruno's teeth with a stick. That night, the parents of both children gather to discuss the matter. Ferdinand's father is a lawyer who is

never off his mobile phone; his mother is in "wealth management" (her husband's wealth, to be precise), and consistently wears good shoes. Bruno's father is a self-made wholesaler with an unwell mother. His wife is writing a book about Darfur. As the evening groans on, the meeting degenerates into the four getting into irrational arguments, their discussion falling into the loaded topics of misogyny, racial prejudice and homophobia. The original cast included Jeff Daniels, Hope Davis, James Gandolfini and Marcia Gay Harden. All four actors were nominated for 2009 Tony Awards, with Harden winning for Best Leading Actress in a Play, and Reza for Best Director and Best Play. Find it April 17 through May 2 at Chicago Street Theatre in Valparaiso. (219) 464-1636 or visit chicagostreet.org.

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

Umphrey's McGee comes home

In the late 1990s, Umphrey's McGee was playing at places like Orbit Music & Video and Mickey's Pub in South Bend. Now, the quintet has become internationally famous on the jam band scene. The stars return to their hometown for a gig April 5 at the Morris Performing Arts Center. The South Bend Symphony Orchestra and South Bend Civic Theatre team up for a joint undertaking of "West Side Story" on April 18 and 19 at the Morris. Actors from SBCT portray Tony, Maria and the Sharks and Jets to the accompaniment of the orchestra's live symphonic score. Comedian David Sedaris performs his one-man show April 20. "Waitress," a musical by Sara Bareilles and Jessie Nelson, runs April 24 through 26. The centerpiece of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra's concert May 2 is a performance of



► **The Northwest Indiana Symphony** performs two concerts of music from Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story" in May at the Auditorium at Living Hope Church in Merrillville.

ENTERTAINMENT

ABOUT



GREATER SOUTH BEND

JACK WALTON



Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, featuring guest piano virtuoso Jon Kimura Parker. On May 4, it's a children's program, "Baby Shark Live." (574) 235-9190 or morriscenter.org.

Students shine at Notre Dame

The DeBartolo Performing Arts Center on the campus of the University of Notre Dame is wrapping up the semester with showcases of some of the college's own talent. On April 17, the Notre Dame Symphony Orchestra presents a program that includes a complete performance of Gustav Holst's "The Planets." From April 23 through 26, Opera ND stages a triple bill of one-act operas: Gustav Holst's "Savitri" and Gian Carlo Menotti's "The Telephone" and "The Medium." April 28 is the date of this year's Notre Dame Jazz Bands Spring Concert, in which three student ensembles perform pieces by composers ranging from Duke Ellington to contemporary writers. Classical stars of the future will come to Notre Dame to perform during the 47th annual Fischhoff National Chamber Music Association Competition from May 8 through 10. (574) 631-2800 or performingarts.nd.edu.

Crystal Valley Concert Series

For anyone craving chamber music beyond the Fischhoff Competition, a new series of chamber music performances will happen in Middlebury. The Crystal Valley Concert Series welcomes pianist Giacomo Scinaro for a recital April 5. A rising star, Scinaro's recent recording of Muzio Clementi sonatas on Sony Classical is receiving glowing reviews. Three of the most prominent area classical musicians — oboist Jenet Ingle, pianist Mariah Boucher and violist Rachel Goff — play trios May 2. Ingle and Goff are keystones of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, and Boucher is the accompanist for

South Bend Lyric Opera. On May 17, award-winning Ann Arbor-based Koinonia Trio comes to the series' venue at the First United Methodist Church in Middlebury. (574) 825-2585 or crystalvalleyconcert.com.

Acting Ensemble returns

Acting Ensemble celebrates its relocation to a new home at 602 E. Mishawaka Ave. in Mishawaka with two staged readings. On April 13, it's Philip Dawkins' "The Gentleman Caller," and May 11, Manuel Puig's "Kiss of the Spider Woman." Dawkins' play imagines discussions between playwrights Tennessee Williams and William Inge. Puig's classic work is about the conversations between two prisoners in Argentina. (574) 807-0108 or visit actingensemble.com.

nuns from the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing who have been secretly making their own wine. (574) 848-4116 or elkhartcivictheatre.org.

Live blues in Mishawaka

For decades, the Midway Tavern in Mishawaka has been a go-to spot for touring blues acts, and the modern-day juke joint is showing no signs of slowing down its booking schedule. On April 18, singer, guitarist and all-around character Eddie "Devil Boy" Turner and his band the Trouble Twins bring their rambunctious act to town. Soulful frontwoman Robbin Kapsalis and Vintage #18 perform April 25. On May 9, it's Vinny & the Jelly Rolls, a power trio from Indianapolis. Reverend Raven & the Chain Smokin' Altar Boys unleash their trademark

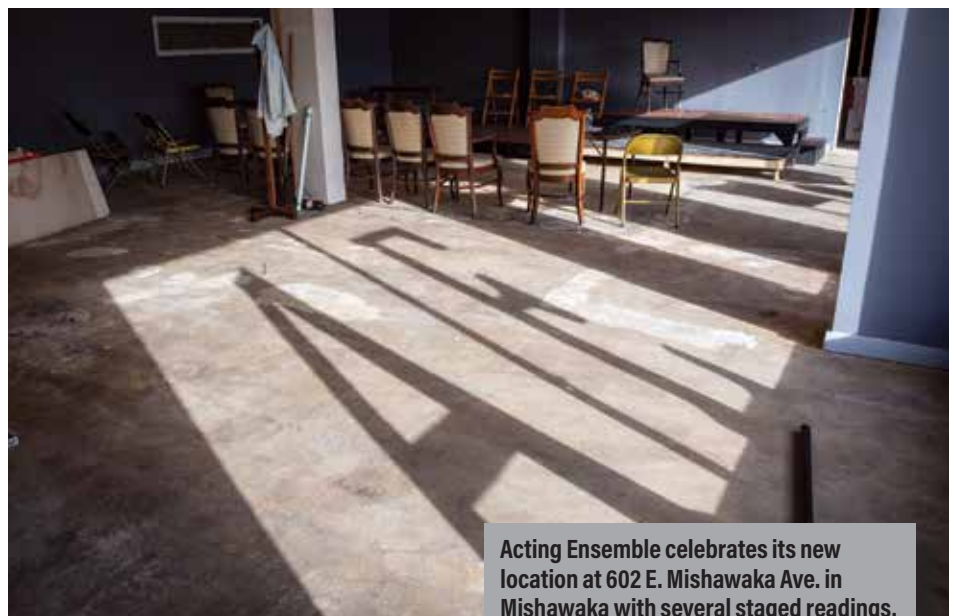


Photo by William Heimann

Acting Ensemble celebrates its new location at 602 E. Mishawaka Ave. in Mishawaka with several staged readings.

'Drinking' at Elkhart Civic Theatre

From May 1 through 10 at the Bristol Opera House, Elkhart Civic Theatre presents Tom Smith's "Drinking Habits," a farcical comedy about two

antics May 16. Reverend Raven is the leader and guitar slinger, but featured harmonica ace Westside Andy always threatens to steal the show. (574) 255-0458 or themidwaytavern.com.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Commitment to serve

Service League of Northwest Indiana considers expansion of fundraising for groups who help others

ALICIA FABBRE

Service League of Northwest Indiana has come a long way from its beginnings in 1935, when a group of women got together to help a children's home.

One of the area's longest-serving volunteer groups, the league today supports numerous Region organizations, including Meals on Wheels of Northwest Indiana, TradeWinds, Camp Millhouse, Exceptional Equestrians, Loaves & Fishes, Mommy's Haven, St. Jude House and Region Kids for Comfort.

organizations to support causes that help women and children.

For Adam Akan, seeing his mother's involvement and what the league does in the community served as inspiration to start his own not for profit, Region Kids for Comfort. It supports families in Northwest Indiana. The league counts Region Kids for Comfort among its partner groups.

"My mom's commitment to the Service League is part of what inspired me to build my organization," said Akan, now a sophomore at St. Ignatius College Prep

donated funds to help care for special needs babies at Nazareth Home and to assist the Area Career Center purchase art supplies for students with moderate to severe mental disabilities.

The group also has aided organizations such as the Down Syndrome Association of Northwest Indiana, Fair Haven Rape Crisis Center and the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana.

"As a group we can really make an impact in the community by going out and finding these organizations that need help ... whether it's a small project or a larger project," said Gloria Morris, president of the Service League of Northwest Indiana. "Every single project that we participate in makes an impact in the community to support women, children and families."

While the Taste of the Region is the group's main event, members also raise funds to benefit area organizations throughout the year. At the group's monthly meetings, for example, members donate to a selected project or organization. The league also is considering adding another larger event, though not on the same scale as the Taste of the Region, to raise additional funds to benefit organizations serving Northwest Indiana, Morris said.

Service League of Northwest Indiana has about 30 active members. Those interested in joining are nominated and then are asked for a resume and letter of intent to ensure they understand the commitment required.

Members attend monthly meetings and regularly volunteer with the Meals on Wheels program or at Westminster Soup Kitchen along with participating in other volunteer opportunities or fundraising events.

Volunteer opportunities are periodically available for nonmembers who wish to be involved with the league but cannot commit to becoming a full member.



Service League of Northwest Indiana presents TradeWinds with a check for \$2,000. From left: Diane Dorney, TradeWinds; Michelle Miller Hand, Service League; Trish Vigland, TradeWinds; Gloria Morris, Float Sixty; and Lisa Tatina, TradeWinds.

Photo by Deb Kiefer, TradeWinds photographer

"Our mission is to help the community," said Brenda Richter of Dyer. She has served in many capacities, including president, during her 18 years with Service League of Northwest Indiana.

The organization traces its roots to 1935 when a group of Hammond women joined forces to support the Bethany Home for Children. Originally called the Bethany League, the group changed its name to the Service League of Hammond in 1938 and eventually became known as the Service League of Northwest Indiana.

The not-for-profit group, comprised of women, partners with other local

in Chicago. "They're just a great organization and have helped so many people over the years."

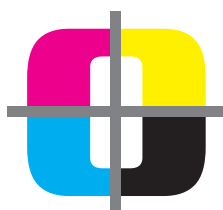
Akan was among the people who helped at the club's annual Taste of the Region fundraiser. The event, now in its seventh year, is the group's largest fundraiser. Proceeds from the event are poured back into community organizations.

The 2019 event brought in \$80,000 for grants that benefited 35 Region agencies. The grants, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, typically are earmarked to support specific projects within each organization. For example, the league



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BUSINESS PROFILE

Brewing up success

Entrepreneurs' decades-long journey culminates with opening of multiple Fluid Coffeebars



Charles and Alison Scates opened their first Fluid Coffeebar location in Valparaiso in 2016.

(Photo provided by Charles Scates)

LAUREN CAGGIANO

Husband-and-wife team Charles and Alison Scates know how to go with the flow — they operate their personal and professional lives with a fluidity of sorts. Enter Fluid Coffeebar, the couple's caffeine-centric venture that's enjoying a period of rapid growth.

The Scateses developed a reputation for their brewed beverages and brunch menu at their original cafe at 159 Lincolnway in downtown Valparaiso, where they opened in 2016. They expanded in 2019, with a new roasting operation in the historic Eagle Building at 518 Franklin St. in Michigan City's Uptown Arts District.

The couple will soon open a third location at the Vale View Apartments at 260

Franklin St. in Valparaiso, which they say is part of their entrepreneurship journey 20 years in the making.

Before setting out on their own, they both had careers in other industries. As they raised their children, Alison sold antique furniture and artwork online, and Charles worked in the building industry.

"We had wanted to start a coffee shop (a) long time ago, prior to Starbucks taking over the world," Charles Scates said. "It just didn't, didn't work out at the time. But when the time was right, we were able to just kind of pick up where we had left off."

Scates said he and his wife make a great team, romantically and as business partners. It helps that they share the same values.

For example, their beans are responsibly sourced — which speaks to their socially conscious ethos in general.

"When we first opened, we set out to try to have local connections the best we could, and that's what we've done with the baked goods and suppliers," Charles Scates said. The couple sourced seasonal ingredients from regional vendors, and their food menu changed with the seasons. Meanwhile, they also made a conscious effort to accommodate vegetarian and vegan lifestyles.

People come for the perk up and stay for the food and the lively atmosphere, Scates said.

He said coffee aficionados say they can taste the difference when it comes to direct-trade coffee versus traditional lines. Not only does this distinction ensure the



READ ON PHONE

coffee farmer is treated and compensated fairly, Scates said the quality and flavor are superior to other market alternatives.

The Scateses have moved several times through the years but decided to return to their Northwest Indiana roots to start their business.

“We opened Fluid in Valparaiso, because we saw the potential in downtown,” Scates said. “And in downtown Michigan City, it’s the same thing. There’s a revival there.”

Katie Eaton, president of the Michigan City Chamber of Commerce, said the Scateses have played a role in this momentum.

“Fluid Coffee is a wonderful addition to our Uptown Arts District,” she said. “Downtown areas that thrive on foot traffic depend on having a variety of businesses to keep customers in the area longer.”

Eaton said having a strong mixture of service, retail, food and beverage businesses allows consumers to spend more time in a concentrated area that meets several needs.



FLUID COFFEEBAR

► Charles and Alison Scates expanded to two locations in 2019 when they opened a new roasting operation in the historic Eagle Building at 518 Franklin St. in Michigan City’s Uptown Arts District.

“Fluid also meets the need of a quick meeting space, allowing community members and BUSINESS members to connect with one another while enjoying a specialty drink or bite to eat,” Eaton said.

“Fluid Coffee is a welcome addition to our community.”

Scates said the response in Michigan City has been positive. Similarly, having their own in-house roastery has been a boon to operations.

“We’ve been able to cut out even more of the middleman,” he said. “So now we’re roasting the coffee specifically to the way that we like it.”

That milestone certainly helped take Fluid to the next level, but Scates is equally concerned with elevating the coffee industry has a whole.

“You’ve seen craft beer just kind of blow up in the last 10 to 15 years,” he said. “Prior to that, nobody even knew (what) craft beer was, and now it’s a household name.”

Scates said microbreweries and breweries are popping up on every corner, and it’s been a good thing overall for the industry.

“We’d like to see that happening with specialty coffee,” he said. “We would really like owners to really consider using better-quality beans.”



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VIEWPOINT

NO MORE SECRETS:

INDIANA'S THE BEST

New agency's goal to raise state's profile will attract people and businesses — with help from us all

I am thrilled to begin my new role as secretary and CEO of the Indiana Destination Development Corp. (IDDC). For those who don't know, before accepting this new role in November 2019, I served as president of the Indiana Economic Development Corp. for more than two years.

I look forward to using my previous experience and building on the relationships made with partners across the state to help the formation of the new agency.



► **Elaine Bedel** is secretary and CEO of the Indiana Destination Development Corp.

For background, the IDDC is a new public-private government entity that was approved by the Indiana state Legislature in 2019 and will enable us to brand, promote and tell Indiana's authentic story.

The current Indiana Office of Tourism Development (IOTD)

will evolve into the new organization, effective July 1, creating a seamless experience for our tourism and talent attraction partners.

I am fortunate to already have this strong and knowledgeable tourism team by my side during the transition, and I am confident that the IDDC will further increase our ability to attract visitors to the state.

As we prepare for the July 1 incorporation date, our entire team is diligently working to research, plan and select both the corporate and foundation boards that will help govern the new corporation and take Indiana tourism and attraction to the next level!

Indiana has worked hard to position itself as one of the strongest and most business-friendly states in the country, and we cannot afford to lose our momentum. With record-low unemployment numbers, lower than even the national average, we need more workers to fill the jobs available. That is where the IDDC comes in!

People want to relocate and live in a place that has a high quality of life, with great restaurants, outdoor adventures and a thriving community environment. Indiana has all that and much more. As Hoosiers, we know we have an incredible story to tell, but we need to be much more intentional about sharing it with the rest of the country and the world. If we do this the right way, we will be able to attract and retain more businesses, talent, students and visitors to our great state.

In my current and previous roles, I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of business leaders and job creators who often are considering calling Indiana their new home. During those interactions, there seems to be a consistent takeaway: when they try to attract out-of-state talent, the candidate does not know much about Indiana.

Thankfully, it is not that the candidate has a bad perception of the state, they just have no perception at all. This is precisely where the IDDC can help. Our top priority is to create a strong statewide brand and to creatively market it so that businesses no longer have that problem. Our state has all the amenities and quality of life initiatives

that people are craving; now we just need to take those experiences and expose others to them. And that includes educating our current Indiana residents, along with out-of-state visitors. Indiana is the best kept secret in the Midwest, but we want that secret shared!

To accomplish our goal, we are going to rely heavily on our state partners, because every single person in the state is a stakeholder. Creating that lasting impact in communities will require every single Hoosier voice working together and sharing the good news. State government, local government, education entities, local communities and businesses, many of whom are already working to lift our state for future generations, will be heavily involved in this effort. And I encourage those who have been on the sidelines to reach out to our team so we can involve you too.

Indiana has grown and advanced in so many ways over the years, and through

all the changes, we have maintained our Midwestern Hoosier values that prioritize family, friendship and community. The combination of that all makes Indiana a great place to live.

For me, my Hoosier pride has never faltered. I have lived, worked and raised a family in this incredible state for my entire life, and I wouldn't have it any other

way. It has been a tremendous honor, and one I never could have expected, to serve our state the last few years in government. I'm excited to share this story with others, and I look forward to seeing what the IDDC can accomplish with everyone in the state working toward a common goal.

“As Hoosiers, we know we have an incredible story to tell, but we need to be much more intentional about sharing it with the rest of the country and the world.”



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