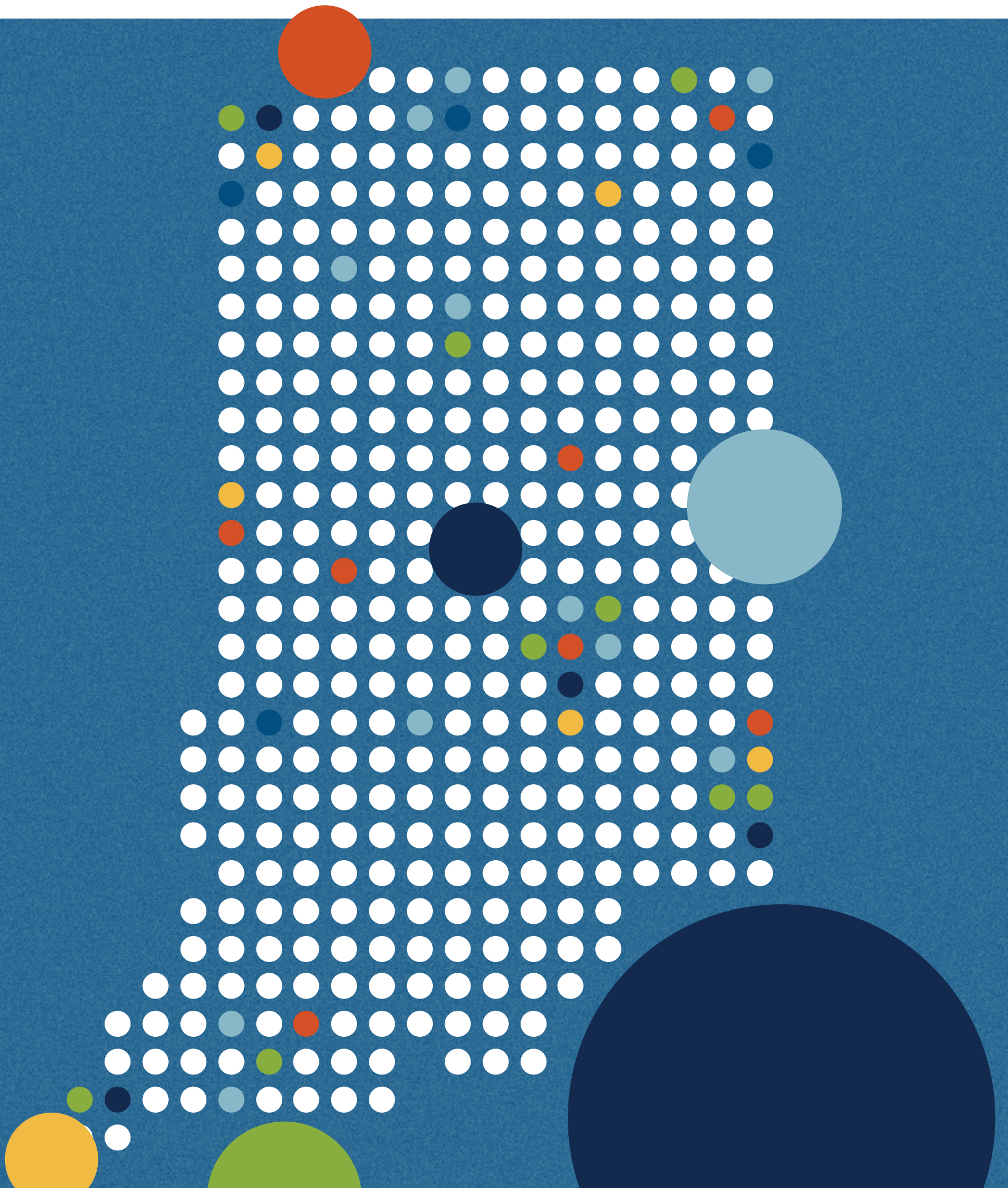

2025

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
INDIANA



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ENTREPRENEUR WHO
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HELP US SHOWCASE
THEM IN NEXT YEAR'S
YEARBOOK.
NOMINATE THEM TODAY.

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DON'T SIT
DOWN AND
WAIT FOR THE
OPPORTUNITIES
TO COME. GET
UP AND
MAKE THEM.”

—MADAM C. J. WALKER

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Economic Development
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ECONOMIC IMPACT

This project used the services of seventeen Hoosier small business owners and freelancers paying them more than \$167,000 in creative fees. The funds enabled these entrepreneurs to buy new equipment, invest in their studios and marketing materials, start new ventures, and grow their teams, hire accountants and assistants.

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INDIANA

“

Main Street entrepreneurs and business owners are the lifeblood of the Indiana economy, representing not just jobs but the unique character of communities across the Hoosier state. The 2025 Yearbook shows off a few of the thousands of stories happening every day across our state. We hope these stories do more than just highlight these leaders, we hope they inspire others to take the leap into starting the next great Main Street business.”

— BRIAN SCHUTT, DIRECTOR,
OFFICE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

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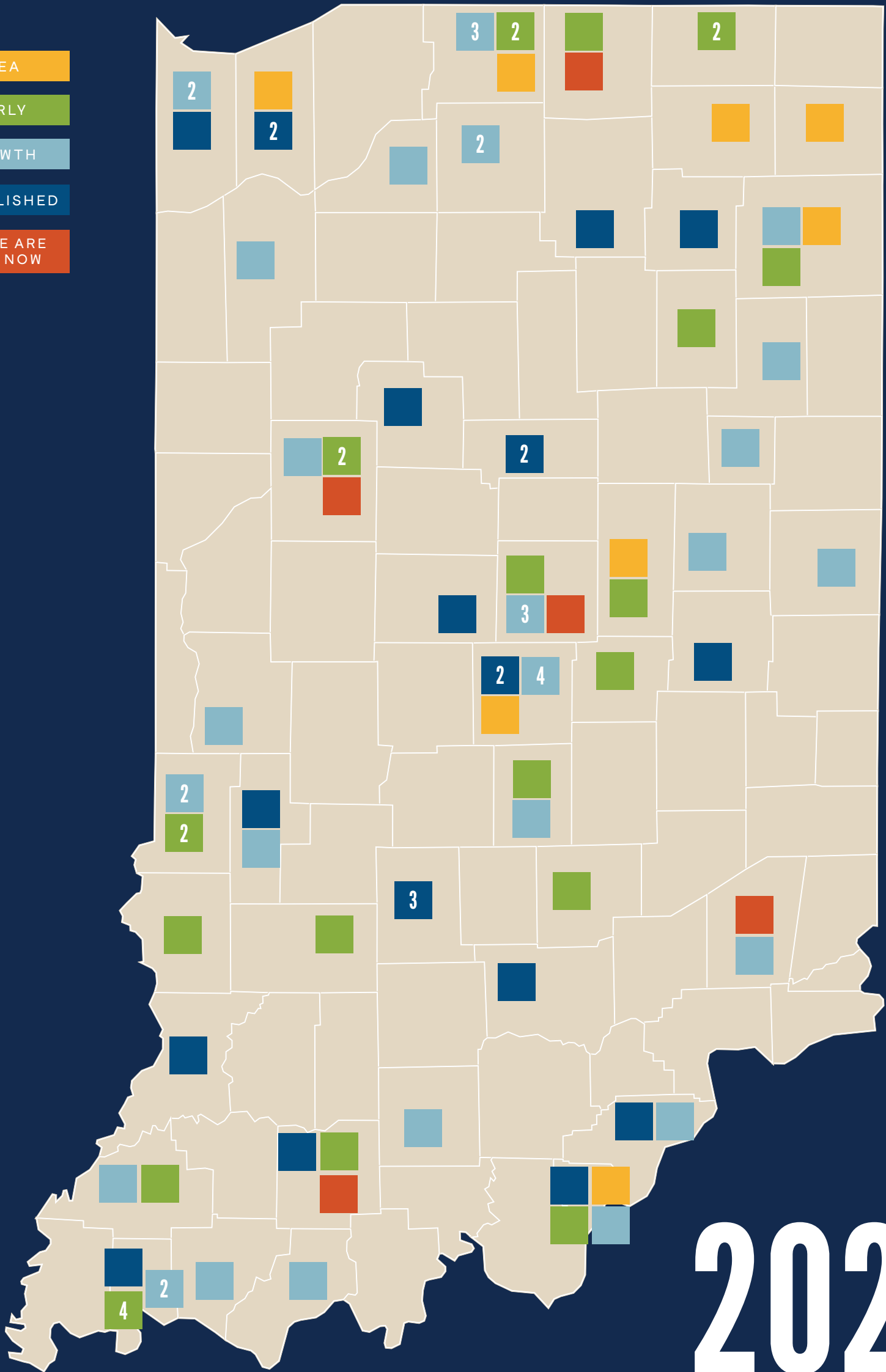
The smartest economic development move Indiana can make is to support its entrepreneurs.”

—DAVID WATKINS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SMALL BUSINESS

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- Indianapolis
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- Jeffersonville
- South Bend
- Patronville

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“

Entrepreneurship is more than a pathway to economic prosperity—it’s the embodiment of freedom, creativity, and hope.

FROM THE GOVERNORS DESK

DEAR READERS,

As Governor of Indiana, it is my privilege to welcome you to the latest edition of Entrepreneurship Indiana. Within these pages, you will discover the courage, ingenuity, and grit that define our Hoosier spirit. Each story celebrates the risk-takers who dare to transform ideas into enterprises, igniting growth and opportunity across our state.

My own entrepreneurial journey began in Jasper, Indiana, where I launched a small auto parts distribution business after graduating from college. With little more than a single-wide trailer and a handful of employees, I learned the importance of perseverance, smart risk management and building relationships based on trust. Those early lessons shaped not only my companies’ success but also my belief in the power of private enterprise to uplift communities.

When I took office, I committed to creating an environment where every Hoosier with a vision can flourish. Our administration has cut burdensome regulations, reformed our tax

code to reward innovation and invested in workforce development programs that connect graduates to family-sustaining careers. We are only just getting started on our strategic approach to ensuring entrepreneurship remains at the forefront of Indiana’s flourishing economy. I am dedicated to supporting innovative startups and main street enterprises in all four corners of Indiana.

Entrepreneurship is more than a pathway to economic prosperity—it’s the embodiment of freedom, creativity and hope. As you turn these pages I encourage you to celebrate the successes and learn from the challenges faced by your fellow Hoosiers. Together, we will continue building a future where every idea has the chance to become America’s next great enterprise.

With gratitude,

Mike Braun
Governor of Indiana

MILESTONE

IDEA

1



GRANNUS THERAPEUTICS

JOHN FOGLESONG, SANKET MISHRA
& BRIAN BLAGG

01 INDIANAPOLIS, MARION COUNTY	City	03 3	Number of employees
02 2021	Founded	04 GRANNUSTHERAPEUTICS.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

\$2.5M NEW APPROACH TO TREATING CANCER RISES FROM INDIANA STARTUP



*raised from various
investors and the
National Institutes
of Health.*

A small company with close links to the University of Notre Dame is inching closer to a drug treatment that can improve life for cancer patients around the world.

Indianapolis-based Grannus Therapeutics is taking a new look at a cancer treatment that gained popularity in clinical trials in the early 2000s, before a number of challenges stopped the studies, says Cofounder, President and CEO John Foglesong.

Massive biotech and Big Pharma companies studied how to stop a particular protein, Hsp90, that helps human cells to replicate and grow, especially fast-growing cancer cells. However, following safety concerns, they didn't follow through on their research, Foglesong says.

The big companies all but abandoned studying how to stop multiple aspects of Hsp90's effects on cancer cells.

Foglesong and his colleagues, Dr. Sanket Mishra, formerly a Notre Dame research scientist, and Dr. Brian Blagg, a Notre Dame professor, launched Grannus in 2021 when they realized they could double down on a much more focused approach to stopping Hsp90, selectively inhibiting the Hsp90β, one of four versions of the protein.

Grannus Therapeutics may be the only company in the world focused on such a narrow but promising aspect, Foglesong says. Hopefully, a larger, more financially capable company will eventually license Grannus' development or acquire the company and fund human clinical trials.

Their drug won't be a cure, but in early tests, their Hsp90β selective inhibitor has shown promise in helping stop ovarian cancer from spreading, and it has the potential to slow the growth of other cancers, including prostate, pancreatic and triple-negative breast cancers.

"We're not talking about a silver bullet that's going to cure cancer," Foglesong says. "We're talking about how you improve the quantity and quality of life for patients."

Last year, Grannus won a pitch contest put on by Elevate Ventures, which eventually led to an oversubscribed \$1 million funding round from Elevate and other investors.

Grannus also has raised over \$2.5 million from the National Institutes of Health, Midwest-focused venture capital firms and several angel investors affiliated with Notre Dame, Foglesong says.

Foglesong says he returned to Indianapolis, his hometown, after working in biotech businesses, in 2019.

The move shocked some friends and colleagues, who believed the West Coast was the place to be for a biotech company, but Foglesong says it's been a good move.

Despite some challenges, "Indy is very different," Foglesong says. "We're a great community. There's a small biotech community here, half-dozen to a dozen startups, much like Grannus, coming out of IU or Purdue, and it's just such a welcoming community, and we're all in this together." ➡

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT
HOW YOU IMPROVE THE
QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF
LIFE FOR PATIENTS.

JOHN FOGLESONG

PATRIOT AERIAL SOLUTIONS

30,000
ACRES OF
CROPLAND
SERVICED

DO-GOOD DRONE COMPANY DELIVERS
PRECISION FOR FARMERS

NICK GROTT

01	KOUTS, PORTER COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	PAS219.COM	Web

“I FEEL LIKE I’M CONTRIBUTING TO SOMEBODY ELSE’S SUCCESS.”
—NICK GROTT



*Patriot’s
business has
grown 127%
year over year.*

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Farms have been fertile ground for innovation for nearly 200 years, since the inventions of the mechanical reaper and steel plow. Now, drones—some the size of a suitcase, others as big as helicopters—have revolutionized the industry.

“From the skies to the soil, our drones bring precision, efficiency and respect to every acre we touch,” says Nick Grott, founder of Patriot Aerial Solutions.

Working closely with farmers, the company tailors overcrop chemical application strategies, giving customers new levels of control and monitoring. Launched less than two years ago, Patriot has quickly expanded. Grott put multiple drones in service, became a drone dealer and now designs and builds custom trailers for drone transport.

For Grott, who grew up on a farm, the business is personal. “Farmers feed the world,” he says. “Doing something wholesome for them fulfills me. Before, I loved my job, but I didn’t go home at night and think, ‘Man, I did something good today.’ After my first 12-hour day flying this year, I felt full again.”

In Grott’s hands, drones are tools to help farmers protect their yields and their land. Traditional sprayers can use 20 to 50 gallons of chemicals per acre. Drones achieve the same results with just two gallons. Their precision saves money, reduces waste and avoids the soil compaction caused by heavy equipment.

Drones do more than just spray. With specialized sensors, they scout fields, measure crop health, detect pests and disease and provide real-time data to guide crucial decisions. And Grott is collaborating with a Connecticut company to integrate a new class of certified organic chemicals into aerial application methods.

Before Patriot, Grott had experience owning a small business, but launching one of this scale required support. He worked with Eric Beschinski at the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center (Indiana SBDC) to craft a business plan and land some financing. “I knew nothing about going to a bank and what to expect,” Grott says. “The people at Indiana SBDC held my hand every step of the way. I can’t say enough good things about them.”

Though the drone business is competitive, Grott embraces collaboration with others in the space. “Competition is how you make the market fair. That’s how you get better ideas. And I want to sell and service whatever they need,” he says.

He also invests in the future. Grott coaches a local high school drone team, which won a regional championship in its first year.

For Grott, Patriot Aerial Solutions is its own reward: a chance to support farmers in preserving their legacies and improving operations with the smartest of tools. ➡

AIR FORCE VET PLANS TO
REVOLUTIONIZE FLIGHT
TRAINING WITH APP

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

An Air Force veteran from New Albany believes his newly launched app, Proper Pilots, will revolutionize flight training.

Why? Because the app eliminates much of the costly paperwork and legacy software the vast majority of flight schools still use. Students can use the app to find available practice flights and get extra content to help them learn faster, said founder Tim Tweet.

Tweet and his business partner Derrick Simpson went live with Proper Pilots on July 4, 2025. They had nearly 100 users within weeks.

The app also includes a rating system to help students select the right schools for them, an especially important feature for those who may want to take the years-long journey to becoming an airline pilot.

Today, a pilot that starts training has only a 5% chance of being hired by an airline, and a 25% chance of becoming a commercial pilot, Tweet said.

“But when we make that process more enjoyable for the student and the instructor, our instructors stick around longer, the quality of instruction goes up, and so does the safety in aviation,” he added.

The app is free for students and instructors to use. Proper Pilots invoices flight school owners who use the service.

Students still have to spend the required amount of time logging flying hours, but the Proper Pilots app can track those hours, help them find available plans for practice and collect debriefing notes from instructors after each lesson.

With so much to remember, students can easily forget much of each lesson. That learning loss carries over into subsequent practice flights, which means the students have to take more flights than may be necessary, Tweet said. As the app provides extra content, like quizzes, students learn more with fewer practice flights, which can run up to \$250 an hour.

Now Proper Pilots is being used in flight schools across the U.S. and in Australia, France and India. “Honestly, I didn’t expect it to be that quick,” Tweet said.

Yet Tweet said he expects the number of Proper Pilots users to grow exponentially as he looks to partner with universities and larger flight schools. He’s positioning the app as an essential industry resource: “In five years, I think Proper Pilots is going to be the operating system for the global flight training industry.” ➡

PROPER PILOTS

TIM TWEET

01	NEW ALBANY, FLOYD COUNTY	City
02	2025	Founded
03	2	Number of employees
04	PROPERPILOTS.COM	Web

“IN FIVE YEARS, I THINK PROPER PILOTS IS GOING TO BE THE OPERATING SYSTEM FOR THE GLOBAL FLIGHT TRAINING INDUSTRY.”
—TIM TWEET



231 MAIN KENDALLVILLE COWORKING

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

20



entrepreneurs participate in the Business and Entrepreneur Launch Tool Program, a ten-week program to start and grow their small business.

FROM BLIGHTED SPACE TO DOWNTOWN INCUBATOR

Located in historic downtown Kendallville, 231 Main is a not-for-profit coworking space focused on encouraging entrepreneurship by offering various levels of support to small businesses. The concept was initially developed through conversations between Historic Downtown Kendallville (Kendallville's Main Street organization), the Noble County Economic Development Corporation and the city itself. "We wanted to bring some sort of incubator and entrepreneurial workspace that provided the resources which we were lacking in our county," says 231 Main's Manager Kristen Johnson. After meeting with the Indiana Small Business Development Center and other experts to determine small businesses' and entrepreneurs' needs, the committee approached Kendallville's redevelopment commission for funding to purchase an old, blighted car garage.

Each office was reserved prior to the actual opening, and, as a nod to the building's history, auto parts hang on the wall alongside the modern makeover. Occupants of the space include not only paid clients, but also pop-ins who need a place to work for a day. "The goal is to provide an affordable space for founders to work while they build up their business," says Johnson. "Ultimately, the goal is that they will later relocate their business somewhere on Main Street."

Member amenities include a meeting room, conference area, copier and additional equipment such as a T-shirt press and a podcast room. Monthly workshops and networking sessions are offered on various business-related topics, and the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center and Northeast Indiana Small Business Development Center hold regular office hours in the space to help with business resources and mentorship. When the building needed two HVAC systems as part of the remodel, they partnered with trade school Impact Institute to install the equipment as part of their

training. "I told the students, 'when you get out of trade school and are ready to launch your own business, you have a free space here anytime you want it,'" says Johnson.

231 Main has received funding from the Northern Indiana Public Service Company and the Noble County Economic Development Corporation, along with a grant from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation for the Business and Entrepreneur Launch Tool program. This is a partnership between Noble, LaGrange, Steuben and DeKalb counties that offers a ten-week cohort for twenty participants to help them start and grow a small business. "Their cost is only \$125, and they're getting thousands of dollars in resources, including training and one-on-one coaching," says Johnson. "At the conclusion, there's a pitch competition, but instead of giving them cash, we've been able to curate specific awards based on their business needs, such as a chamber membership, staggered rent on storefront properties, small business loans, commercial kitchen access or other tangible awards." ➡

THE GOAL IS TO PROVIDE AN AFFORDABLE SPACE FOR FOUNDERS TO WORK WHILE THEY BUILD UP THEIR BUSINESS.

KRISTEN JOHNSON



LEARN MORE AT: KENDALLVILLECOWORKING.COM

TAILORED BITES

ENTERPRISING FUTURE VETERINARIAN
TURNS PASSION INTO PET FOOD

RUBY CAMPBELL- CARPENTER

01	FORT WAYNE, ALLEN COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	INSTAGRAM : @TAILOREDBITES24	Web

“WHEN I SAW HOW MUCH OUR RESEARCH PAID OFF ... IT HIT ME WE WERE DEFINITELY ONTO SOMETHING.”
—RUBY CAMPBELL-CARPENTER



Campbell-Carpenter was a top 10 finalist, out of 1,000 entrants, in the 2025 Innovate WithIN competition.

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Ruby Campbell-Carpenter knew she had a good idea when dogs randomly preferred the bespoke dog food she and her collaborator created over dry kibble food during a palatability test.

“When we saw how much the dogs liked our recipes and how much our research paid off, that’s when it first hit me we were definitely on to something,” she says. “That, and getting good feedback at the farmer’s market. They were actually buying our product.”

Campbell-Carpenter (North Side High School, class of ‘26) and a classmate developed Tailored Bites, a frozen dog food made with high quality, locally-sourced chicken, chicken livers, green beans, blueberries and more, at Amp Lab at Electric Works, a hands-on learning lab for Fort Wayne high schoolers.

Campbell-Carpenter now runs Tailored Bites alone, but the idea already has been successful. It was named a top 10 finalist out of 1,000 student teams statewide at this year’s Innovate WithIN contest, hosted by the STARTed UP Foundation, and Tailored Bites won the 2025 Fort Wayne Foundry Pitch Competition. She’s also been featured on Fox 59’s morning news.

Campbell-Carpenter says Tailored Bites began as a way to use nutrition to treat her own pet’s specific allergies and skin issues.

It also was a great idea for an Amp Lab assignment calling for students to create a company of their own. “I could finally put my passion for animals toward something at Amp Lab.”

Tailored Bites can be customized, using ingredients such as fish oil for help with allergies and ear infections, or bone broth for joint issues, like arthritis. The meals are portioned and priced according to a dog’s sizes.

Campbell-Carpenter makes every batch of Tailored Bites in the Amp Lab commercial kitchen, and she’s committed to using the highest quality ingredients, and keeping the price affordable.

Pet owners have taken notice. Campbell-Carpenter sold 50 individual meals last summer in a Fort Wayne farmers market, with a 20 percent margin. Amp Lab teachers also became eager customers.

Now working part-time as a vet tech at East State Veterinary Clinic as she finishes her senior year, Campbell-Carpenter expects to incorporate Tailored Bites when she turns 18, and she says she’s about six months away from creating food for cats.

“Later, when I end up becoming a veterinarian, I’ll continue Tailored Bites, and that’s when I’ll really start to grow it and scale it,” she says. ➡

2,600
STUDENTS REACHED
IN THE US AND
CANADA

TRUE BLUE

YOUNG DUO MAKES DIABETES
EDUCATION APPEALING, AND
PROFITABLE

KYLA LA RUE & LYDIA YODER

01	AUBURN, DEKALB COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded
03	2	Number of employees
04	TRUEBLUEEDUCATION.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

When 17-year-old Kyla La Rue’s younger sister, Ava, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age eight, they both learned how little most people know about the disease. Her sister’s classmates were her biggest concern.

They didn’t know why Ava’s arm monitor kept beeping, or why she got to have a snack in class. “It would cause a big distraction, and it was kind of embarrassing for her,” La Rue said.

La Rue and her friend Lydia Yoder, 18, wanted to help. (La Rue’s younger brother has also since been diagnosed). In 2023, the DeKalb High School students developed bingo and card games to teach kids about Type 1 diabetes and distributed them to area schools. Yoder was a junior and La Rue was a sophomore.

“We want to eliminate any stereotypes from a young age,” said Yoder, whose parents are both elementary school teachers and introduced her to creating lesson plans.

The teens also visited classrooms to educate students on the condition. And it worked—kids that age look up to teenagers and pay attention to them. “The questions that they ask are always very insightful,” La Rue said.

Yoder and La Rue then developed the concept in their entrepreneurship class. Teacher Ashley Johnson helped them understand pricing and revenue streams for educational materials, such as sponsorships and advertisements. They were ready to launch their for-profit company, True Blue.

The girls began an educational YouTube channel and expanded classroom materials to a book, coloring sheets and remote learning packs to send out of county. Ten classrooms in DeKalb County became 60 in the U.S. and Canada. Ed-tech companies and healthcare groups came aboard as advertisers.

Johnson requires her students to enter the Innovate WithIN competition for Indiana high school students. The girls won in Region 5 and took home \$2,000. They also received \$1,250 from the Storm Tank pitch competition at Trine University in Angola, Indiana.

As a result, Yoder and La Rue met Brandon Noll, the director of Plug and Play Tech Center, at Huntington University. He expanded their network to include the Eli Lilly Foundation and Parkview Health in northeastern Indiana. Now they are working with an endocrinologist to enhance their content, and with an app developer Noll recommended.

As Yoder heads off to college, she and La Rue continue to pursue their mission to grow True Blue’s reach. They are creating kits for newly diagnosed patients to be distributed in hospitals and ERs starting in early 2026. And last summer, they began drawing a weekly paycheck. ➡

“IN OUR ENTREPRENEURSHIP CLASS, WE STARTED WORKING ON AN IDEA WE WERE PASSIONATE ABOUT AND IT TURNED INTO SOMETHING SO MUCH BIGGER THAN WE EVER IMAGINED.” —LYDIA YODER

99.4%

OF INDIANA
BUSINESSES
ARE SMALL
BUSINESSES



INDIANA SBDC'S
40TH ANNIVERSARY

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHY BY Amanda Duncan & Joe



WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Marc Lebryk

2,200



*loans made and
\$73M distributed
to entrepreneurs
across Indiana's
92 counties.*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE ONE LOAN AT A TIME

Securing capital is one of the biggest challenges entrepreneurs face. To meet the critical need for mission-based funding, Anderson's Flagship Enterprise Center (FEC) founded Bankable as a Small Business Administration (SBA)-certified lender capable of providing flexible microloans to aspiring Hoosier companies.

"We think the best way to make a difference in local communities is through entrepreneurship," says Bankable Executive Director Jennifer Hall. "For that reason, we strive to use all tools and resources available to us to help people grow successful businesses."

The non-profit FEC was created to help offset the economic downturn that occurred in Madison County after General Motors closed its Anderson-based hub in the late 1990s. The expansive property that houses the center has grown to accommodate the second-largest business incubator in Indiana, including coworking space, light manufacturing facilities, private offices, a podcast studio, a commercial kitchen and incubated firms that lease business space.

"We quickly realized that a lot of entrepreneurs were having trouble getting bank loans, especially women, low-income applicants, minorities and veterans," Hall says. "They don't have three years of financial statements to demonstrate profitability, so they resort to using personal credit cards or go online and fall victim to predatory lenders."

In 2010, the FEC board of directors allocated \$100,000 to Bankable to fund the initial loan program.

"We made four loans that first year," Hall recalls. "The second year, we made six. Things just took off from there."

All told, Bankable has distributed more than 2,200 loans upwards of \$73 million to Hoosier entrepreneurs, making it the biggest mission-based lender in Indiana and the third-largest SBA micro-lender in the country. Funds distributed have helped startups and established businesses in all stages of development.

"We're trying to provide real value to business populations that have historically been underserved and disadvantaged due to social or economic circumstances," Hall says.

Prospective borrowers typically find Bankable online or through word-of-mouth referrals from bank partners and other frontline community organizations. As part of the loan package, recipients receive assistance with money management, credit counseling, marketing and coaching to help them make wise financial decisions; in short, to become "bankable."

Funding for Bankable loans comes through a combination of federal grants, bank grants, private grantors, community partners and the FEC's own funds.

"The regional offices of the Indiana Small Business Development Centers regularly refer businesses to us," shares Hall. "We in turn refer clients back to them, creating a mutually beneficial partnership." ➡

**WE STRIVE TO USE
ALL TOOLS AND
RESOURCES AVAILABLE
TO US TO HELP PEOPLE
GROW SUCCESSFUL
BUSINESSES.**

JENNIFER HALL

LEARN MORE AT: BANKABLE.ORG

MILESTONE

EARLY

2

ADAPTA EDUCATION

\$300K

CONTRIBUTION FROM
NATIONAL SCIENCE
FOUNDATION

CHRIS MERRILL

01	SOUTH BEND, ST. JOSEPH COUNTY	City
02	2021	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	ADAPTAEDUCATION.COM	Web

“WITHIN TWO TO THREE MINUTES, ADAPTA CAN CREATE AN INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT FOR EACH STUDENT, SO THE UPPER-LEVEL STUDENTS GET CHALLENGED AND THE LOWER-LEVEL STUDENTS DON’T GET OVERWHELMED.”
—CHRIS MERRILL

CLOSING THE PROFICIENCY GAP IN MATH EDUCATION

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Marc Lebryk

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the proficiency gaps in high school classrooms. Now, it’s even harder for teachers to keep the top students engaged without frustrating their less-proficient classmates into giving up.

“You’re always going to have that, but since the pandemic, it has put a really hard strain on teachers,” Adapta Education CEO Chris Merrill says.

When Merrill taught math, he imagined a digital tool that would help him assess each student’s level and provide individualized feedback. A psychology professor at the University of Notre Dame, Ying Cheng, Ph.D., had the same idea and developed a platform a few years ago with a colleague, Cheng Lu, Ph.D. Merrill met them through Notre Dame’s IDEA Center when he enrolled as an MBA student.

Cheng, also the director of the school’s Learning Analytics and Measurement in Behavioral Sciences (LAMBS) lab, didn’t have time to commercialize her idea into a company, but Merrill did. They launched Adapta Education with a \$20,000 pre-seed and private investment. Since then, the National Science Foundation has contributed \$300,000 to research and development on features teachers have requested.

Adapta allows high school math teachers to tailor an assessment test for each student. Students take the test on the Adapta platform, and it’s graded in real time. Then the platform produces a diagnostic report on each student, indicating areas of improvement.

“The teacher can really teach to the needs of the class, rather than just stick to the script, so they’re using time in the classroom more efficiently,” Merrill says. The report also allows students to receive targeted help in the areas where they struggle.

He says one study showed a five-point increase in test scores among students who used the Adapta Education platform.

Adapta is both adaptive and diagnostic, and Merrill estimates that it saves teachers about eight hours of prep time for each test they create. It covers every high school math curriculum, sourced from university math professors.

Notre Dame’s IDEA Center, which facilitates the commercialization of faculty research, was “very helpful in getting the company off the ground and finding funding for it,” Merrill says. Adapta currently has fourteen customers and expects to grow when the funding environment improves in 2026.

Merrill, a Utah native, is often asked if being in Indiana puts him at a disadvantage running a tech start-up. The answer is no. For one, the proximity to Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis and Grand Rapids offers a wealth of connections within a two-and-a-half-hour drive. Second, he estimates Adapta’s expenses here are a fourth of what they would be in the Bay Area.

“This is a very business-friendly state. You have a lot of people who want to find some way to push the economy forward, and they’re willing to put in the work to do it,” Merrill says. ➡

1500- 2500

BAGS SOLD
WEEKLY

ALL THINGS SNACKS DELIVERS PUFFS, PRETZELS AND EMPOWERMENT

WRITTEN BY EMILY WORRELL PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Two years ago, Mary Jess was on a health journey. She had been working in retail for twelve years and wanted to move into the health sphere, perhaps as a health coach. Turns out she was able to combine her passion for health with her retail experience in the form of All Things Snacks, a healthy snack alternative to popcorn.

“All Things Snacks Corn Puffs don’t have any kernels and are all gluten free,” Jess says. “Some are dairy free, some are sugar free. We just have a lot of healthy options and it’s a fun, tasty, sweet, savory, or spicy snack.”

Among the forty-plus flavors All Things Snacks offers, Jess’s favorite is the cheesy caramel, which is classic caramel with a light coating of cheese. “It’s like the Chicago Mix, which is cheese and caramel but they’re all separate. With this flavor, every single bite has the buttered puff, the caramel, and the cheese,” she says. Some of her other bestsellers include sea salt caramel, pineapple upside down cake, and cheesy jalapeno.

In addition to a business, All Things Snacks is a way for Jess to connect with and support her community. She frequently donates to local silent auctions and fundraising efforts. She also uses All Things Snacks to empower people, especially women, to make money by selling her product at local markets, which was a full-circle moment for her.

“Probably 15 years ago, my family and I were struggling financially, and there was a local bakery that hired me to sell their product at a flea market,” Jess says. “And then I started buying the product wholesale and taking it to other farmer’s markets, and it completely changed our lives financially. So when I realized that other people can now take my product out and make money with it the same way I did, it’s a huge win.”

All Things Snacks has retail stores in Elkhart and Middlebury and is available in Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, Ohio and Kentucky. Jess wants to make it available in even more stores, gas stations and markets.

Her advice to budding entrepreneurs? “Start with what you have, what’s right in front of you, and just do that,” she says. “A lot of people don’t get started because they think it’s so big and scary, but if you just do what’s right in front of you and you do it well, it just keeps expanding.” ➡

ALL THINGS SNACKS

MARY JESS

01	ELKHART, ELKHART COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded / Purchased
03	10	Number of employees
04	SNACKSBYMARY.COM	Web

“WH

ANGIE CAREL CONSULTING

AI CONCIERGE CONSULTANCY THRIVES IN A COMMUNITY CONTEXT

ANGIE CAREL

01	FORT WAYNE, ALLEN COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded / Purchased
03	1	Number of employees
04	ANGIECAREL.COM	Web

“HUMANIZING AI IS NUMBER ONE FOR ME.”
—ANGIE CAREL



Since its launch, AI in FW has brought together 900+ people to explore AI.

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

A pioneering Fort Wayne entrepreneur is helping people and companies understand and deploy Generative Artificial Intelligence, or Gen AI, through community-driven consulting.

“Humanizing AI is number one for me,” says Angie Carel.

After running a traditional marketing agency for 18 years, Carel pivoted to Gen AI consulting in 2023, beginning with a focus on marketing applications of the tool.

“But I quickly realized the companies I worked with needed deeper guidance in understanding AI as a whole,” Carel says.

So, Carel began helping companies integrate AI across multiple departments from HR to production to sales. She noticed fear and resistance to AI in the workplace and to the male-dominated origins of AI innovation.

There was also a palpable misalignment between her values and those of the companies she consulted for. So after six months, Carel completely pulled back from AI consulting and started a free community of Fort Wayne people of all ages and tech abilities to learn about AI. The group, *AI In FW*, meets twice monthly.

“We do in-person only, because we believe, as society moves toward a more digital world, we, as humans, need to form face-to-face connections and energy,” Carel says.

Some of the meet-up attendees began recommending Carel to their bosses, to help them understand Gen AI.

Over the next year, Carel received many consulting opportunities—turning down several so she could stay true to her intentions, she says. Carel also started speaking on panels and podcasts on AI, and she was named to the “Top 50 Women To Watch In AI” list.

To help companies get a grip on GenAI’s positive potential for their specific context, she builds AI literacy strategies and brings teams up to speed on the basics. Then, they discuss the solutions a company wants to build before entering a longer adoption phase.

Only a year into this chapter of her AI consultancy, and completely solo, Carel is on track to outpace the annual growth of the 10-person marketing agency she once led.

Carel also founded Co-Crafted AI Consultancy Collective, a network of independent consultants who collaborate to design tailored AI solutions for organizations. Each member brings unique expertise—from leadership and organizational development to data readiness and beyond.

Carel’s best and biggest discovery so far? She says, “Fort Wayne, Indiana, who you’d think, based on assumptions, might be backwards in tech and such, has shown up like nobody else.” ➡

32

ROTATING TAPS

BARKER BREWHOUSE

BARKER BREWHOUSE BRINGS CRAFT BEER TO EVANSVILLE

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Sean Molin

The vision for Barker Brewhouse was born out of Grant Davis and Scott Schmitt’s shared love of craft beer and their desire to bring more of it to Evansville. “Evansville is the Busch Light capital of the world,” Davis says. “Ten years ago, every restaurant and bar had five or six domestics on tap, that was mostly it.”

Davis and Schmitt visited family in Boulder, Colorado, and were inspired by the booming craft beer scene. “You can stand on one corner and see five breweries,” Davis says. “We thought, ‘Evansville deserves something like this.’”

Davis had been homebrewing for years—and getting rave reviews from friends. Davis and Schmitt built a bar in their barn-dominium just west of Evansville, hosting parties, barbecues and weddings, and serving their original beers. They even created a logo for their establishment, featuring their dog, Leo.

In 2021, Davis was working in construction management and Schmitt was juggling two jobs when they put a bid on an abandoned building on Barker Avenue in Evansville. “It was just a dusty white box,” Davis says. “We had a vision for a brewery, and everybody thought we were crazy.”

The partners developed a business plan, conducted research and commenced renovating the building, with Davis serving as general contractor. They met with Julie Folz, an advisor at the Southwest Indiana Small Business Development Center. Folz connected them with the City of Evansville revolving loan fund, enabling them to purchase necessary equipment. Schmitt enlisted his sister to serve as interior designer.

“Her touch is all over the place,” he says.

“We wanted to hire the professionals to help us, but we wanted to understand every step of the process,” Davis recalls. “As a business owner, you need to have your hands on everything and fully understand what every aspect of starting and running a business takes.”

Barker Brewhouse—a dog-friendly and family-friendly taphouse and nanobrewery—opened on March 14, 2023. Of the thirty-two taps, up to seven are claimed by beer Davis brews himself.

“The first three months were insane,”

Davis recalls. “We’d open at 2 p.m., and we’d have people outside waiting to get in. We learned via firehose.”

The duo intentionally built their staff, hiring on “personality and character” as opposed to industry experience. The approach has paid off. “Two years in, we’ve had zero turnover,” Schmitt says.

The loyalty from the Evansville community has been similar. Their Mug Club, which offers discounts on beer, merchandise and access to special events, has grown to 232 members.

BLOOMFIELD SCHOOLHOUSE LAVENDER FARM & APOTHECARY

THE FRESH, CRISP SCENT OF AGRITOURISM

MARION WIGGINS

01	LAGRANGE, LAGRANGE COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	BLOOMFIELDSCHOOLHOUSELAVENDER.COM	Web

“WE’RE IN A GOOD LOCATION FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT THE AGRITOURISM EXPERIENCE, AND THERE’S ALWAYS A PUSH FOR INDIANA-GROWN AND INDIANA-MADE.”
—MARION WIGGINS



Only lavender farm in U.S. operating in a National Register of Historic Places building.

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson

CdE SCENT DETECTION DOGS

8-10
SEARCHES PER MONTH

2,700
BIRTHDAY PARTIES HOSTED

DEEP BLUE INDOOR PLAY

PATTI FARNSWORTH

01	TERRE HAUTE, VIGO COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	CDEPETFINDERS.COM	Web

“THERE’S A REAL SCIENCE TO IT; YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND HOW LOST PETS BEHAVE AND DEVELOP SEARCH AND RECOVERY STRATEGIES BASED ON THE INFORMATION COLLECTED.”
—PATTI FARNSWORTH



CdE Scent Detection Dogs relies on the services of two specially trained canines to locate missing pets by tracking their scent trails.



BLAZING NEW TRAILS WITH SCENT DETECTION

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Who says you can’t teach an old dog new tricks? Patti Farnsworth spent the COVID-19 lockdown playing “find it” games with her dog, quickly discovering he had an uncanny ability to locate anything she’d hidden. She later became inspired to train Opie and his cousin Opal (both Cirneco dell’Etnas—a Sicilian hunting breed) to detect and track scent trails after experiencing the painful uncertainty of losing a pet of her own.

“Something like that would have been so helpful when I was looking for my lost dog,” she explains. “There’s a real science to it; you need to understand how lost pets behave and develop search and recovery strategies based on the information collected.”

Following guidance from a book about how to become a pet detective, Farnsworth consulted with the Missing Animal Response Network, Pet Search and Rescue and Unlimited Pawsibilities to get Opie and Opal ready to work. In 2024, she contacted the West Central Indiana Small Business Development Center in Terre Haute for assistance with formalizing a business plan for CdE Scent Detection Services.

“They paired me with Indiana State University to develop my web page, and they’ve helped me navigate the challenges of filing articles of incorporation and dealing with new technology,” she says.

Farnsworth relies heavily on word-of-mouth referrals and social media to market her services, handing out cup-coaster cards in lieu of standard

business cards at regional veterinary offices, dog parks, pet adoption events and throughout her community.

“I know for certain these efforts are generating calls,” she says. “I wear shirts with my CdE logo everywhere I go; it sparks conversations and gives me more opportunities to talk about the business.”

Recently retired from a part-time administrative job at age 69, Farnsworth plans to devote her energy to growing CdE to full-time status, working up to conducting a minimum of eight to ten searches per month, and creating a Dick Tracy-style comic strip called Opie Alexander, K-9 Pet Detective for her Facebook page.

“I’d like to train another dog to rotate in and out with the other two, and I’m hoping to find a younger person to mentor who can help with the searches,” she adds.

For Farnsworth, the most rewarding part of the job is being able to bring missing pets home to their worried families. She and Opie received a Best Teamwork award in May from a national organization for locating a miniature Schnauzer stranded in the middle of a creek in the dark in under two hours.

“It was a very powerful moment,” she says. “I counsel owners that it could take days or weeks before they’re reunited with their beloved pet, but I always tell them not to give up hope!” ➡

EMILY CRAWFORD’S MAGICAL INDOOR PLAYGROUND

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Alex Kumar

Emily Crawford interned at Walt Disney World in college, and when she wasn’t dressed as The Little Mermaid or Sleeping Beauty, she walked around and soaked up the theme park’s immersive environment. The elaborate scale stuck with her when she moved back to Evansville, started a family and worked in healthcare and logistics.

When Crawford decided to find a more creative career, she wanted to bring the Disney magic to Indiana. The inspiration culminated in an ocean-themed family entertainment center called Deep Blue Indoor Play.

“Some children in our area will never be able to have a Disney World experience or go to the ocean. I wanted to create a space where every child felt welcome and part of something special,” Crawford says.

The 15,000-square-foot fun zone has four playgrounds, six party rooms, a concession stand, gift shop and nursing rooms for moms. Crawford concepted custom-built play features herself, like slides down from the balcony, a massive Lite Brite peg wall and a multilevel crochet playscape.

Crocheted playgrounds are a new trend. The large-scale, suspended net installations allow kids to crawl, climb, balance and practice motor skills. Deep Blue’s looks like a coral reef and has swings on the uppermost level. Adults are allowed on it, too.

In true Disney style, Crawford went all-out with splashy colors and eye-popping installations. Instead of walking into the party room through a door, kids can crawl through tubes in the wall.

Instead of taking the stairs from the upper floor, they can slide down.

Crawford’s creative instincts hit a sweet spot for kids with autism who benefit from sensory features on play equipment.

“After we opened, I kept hearing that this is exactly what kids needed here. I had no idea how beneficial this business would be for those on the spectrum,” Crawford says.

Her drive and imagination impressed Doug Claybourn at the Southwest Indiana Small Business Development Center. He advised Crawford on a floorplan that would prevent lines and congestion, and hiring teenage employees. The latter has surprised Crawford, who enjoys teaching accountability and responsibility to kids working their first job.

Crawford has made other successful pivots. Though Crawford originally envisioned a majority of walk-in attendance, parties and field trips quickly took the top spot. Now Deep Blue has twelve parties on the average Saturday. With overlapping



BRAND. MARKET. EXPAND. MARKETING CONFERENCE

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY West Central ISBDC



Brand. Market. Expand. brings digital marketing expertise to business owners in rural communities.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL MARKETING DIVIDE

The long-awaited

DU LIT RESTAURANT

PRESTON ZWOLLE

01	FORTVILLE, HANCOCK COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	20	Number of employees
04	EAT-DULIT.COM	Web

“IT’S AN INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCE.”
—PRESTON ZWOLLE



In 15 months, Du Lit has tripled its weekly sales.

SMALL EATERY WITH BIG FLAVORS LIGHTS FORTVILLE’S FIRE

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Marc Lebryk

On an August Friday night, Du Lit is jumping with people lined up to dine at the tiny Fortville eatery with a name that roughly translates to “your fire” in German.

Preston Zwolle started the restaurant in a former bakery in May 2024. At first, he was worried the business would fail.

“Now, it’s actually scary how busy we get sometimes,” Zwolle says.

Years ago, Zwolle bounced around different careers before landing in the restaurant business, managing locations in large restaurants and pizza chains.

A few years ago, he decided to pursue a major health upgrade. Zwolle cut gluten and dairy from his diet. He learned to cook meals with interesting recipes he could enjoy with his family. He lost 86 pounds. Zwolle then started thinking about a menu for his own restaurant, a far-fetched dream at the time. “I didn’t imagine being fortunate enough to open a restaurant,” he says.

Zwolle offered samples of his new recipes to restaurant coworkers, much to their delight.

Finally, after some financial planning, Zwolle took the leap and opened his own place. The menu grew into a large, eclectic array of dishes under categories like “Prereq” (for appetizers), “Wichery” (for sandwiches) and “Plated” for entrees with wildly creative names that don’t shy away from cheese, carbs and veggies but can absolutely be made to accommodate gluten or dairy allergies.

On busy nights, Du Lit is filled with curious customers and a team of cooks and servers hustling with frantic choreography.

“It’s an incredible experience,” says Zwolle, who, as head chef, spends most of his time managing cooks in the open kitchen. “I want to be the fly on the wall. I want to know what it’s like to sit in this chair and watch it happen when we’re all buzzing.”

Du Lit is an unforgettable experience for the senses, from the aromas that greet visitors to the sheer volume of activity, Zwolle says.

Sales have exploded at the small restaurant with 80 chairs in a small town that has embraced Zwolle’s place. “I’m super grateful for everyone who’s supported us,” he says.

In just 15 months, the restaurant has tripled its weekly sales. Du Lit’s success has opened Zwolle’s field of vision.

“I have found over my career that I need a new project after about two years,” Zwolle says. “Realistically, I’d love to have more than one restaurant. The sky’s the limit with this.” ➡

100+
CLIENTS

JESSICA MCCARTIN IS DELIVERING PATIENT-CENTERED HEALTHCARE THROUGH THE DIRECT PRIMARY CARE MODEL.

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Direct primary care (DPC) is a growing trend in American healthcare. The patient-centered model involves paying a monthly membership, which averages \$125, for unlimited appointments and 24/7 access to their doctor. DPC offices don’t accept insurance; rather, the flat fee covers routine and long-term preventative care with the goals of lowering out-of-pocket costs and focusing on overall wellness to avoid chronic disease.

Nurse Practitioner Jessica McCartin opened Elite Primary Care & Wellness in southern Indiana after working in a traditional family medicine office and then an operating room. The doctor’s office left her unfulfilled and disillusioned.

“I was just sick of it. I almost left medicine altogether because it was impossible to provide good care to patients, and just morally and ethically it didn’t meet what I wanted things to look like in health care,” she says. “I was seeing twenty to twenty-five patients a day for an average of five to eight minutes. I knew there had to be something better.”

That’s when McCartin came across the DPC model. She worked in a DPC office in the area and learned the system before opening her own practice in July 2024.

McCartin partnered with local health and wellness businesses to market Elite at info sessions, and the business grew to more than 100

patients through mostly word of mouth. About half of Elite’s clientele comes through partnerships with small businesses who offer a membership in lieu of a traditional health insurance plan.

Most appointments last about an hour, and McCartin welcomes patients to text or email her between appointments. DPC appeals to people who want more time and regular guidance from their primary care doctor on nutrition, fitness, sleep and mental health. McCartin says regular screenings get more attention in the DPC environment, too. “In traditional primary care, a lot of that stuff gets overlooked, and we’re just checking boxes,” she says.

One patient had been taking medicine for high cholesterol for years, but previous doctors hadn’t recommended a coronary artery screening. McCartin did, and it found severe blockage. The patient needed a quadruple bypass surgery and was lucky to catch it before having a heart attack, McCartin says.

Rachael Armstrong with One Southern Indiana began encouraging McCartin to tap into Indiana’s wealth of resources for entrepreneurs. McCartin was then selected as the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC)’s 2025 Startup Small Business of the Year for eliminating barriers to healthcare and making it more inclusive. ➡

ELITE PRIMARY CARE & WELLNESS

JESSICA MCCARTIN

01	NEW ALBANY, FLOYD COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	ELITEPRIMARYCAREANDWELLNESSCLINIC.COM	Web

“I WAS SEEING TWENTY TO TWENTY-FIVE PATIENTS A DAY FOR AN AVERAGE OF FIVE TO EIGHT MINUTES. I KNEW THERE HAD TO BE SOMETHING BETTER.”
—JESSICA MCCARTIN

The average appointment time is one hour rather than fifteen minutes.

HATTIE LOU BLOOMS

HATTIE BENNETT'S LEMONADE STAND TURNED BUSINESS

HATTIE BENNETT

01	FRANKLIN, JOHNSON COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	HATTIELOUBLOOMS.COM	Web

“MY FAVORITE PART IS SEEING PEOPLE BEING SO HAPPY ABOUT THEIR FLOWERS THAT THEY WERE GETTING.”
—HATTIE BENNETT

700+
BOUQUETS
SOLD SINCE 2023

~\$10M
REPORTED REVENUE
IN THE 1ST YEAR

HUNTINGBURG MECHANICAL INC.

BUILDING A LEGACY WITH A NEW SET OF TOOLS

RUGER KERSTIENS

01	HUNTINGBURG, DUBOIS COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	35	Number of employees
04	HUNTINGBURGMACHINEWORKS.COM	Web

“I’VE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE PIECES OF ALL OF THAT, WHAT I LEARNED, AND PUT IT INTO THE BUSINESS NOW.”
—RUGER KERSTIENS

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jay Goldz

Hattie Bennett just wanted a cell phone. She started a lemonade stand to save money, then wondered what else she could sell. She looked around the family’s home in Franklin and asked her mother if she could pick flowers from the yard.

Those became \$5 bouquets for Mother’s Day. They sold out from the family’s porch, and Hattie Lou Blooms was born. Bennett was just ten years old.

With the help of her parents, Bennett kept making floral arrangements in Mason jars with a label in her own handwriting. She sold them at a fitness studio after classes, then at the Bargersville Kids Market. As word got out about Hattie Lou Blooms, she began getting orders. She even booked a wedding gig.

“It was a really opportune and manageable way for her to make money,” says her mother, Kailee Bennett.

The middle-schooler and mother duo expanded into making bookmarks and trinket dishes with flowers, teaching pressed-flower classes and preserving wedding and memorial flowers in frames made by a local woodworker. They also let parents order flowers for teachers during the holidays and have a subscription service. Hattie began donating a portion of sales to charity each month.

At the Bargersville Kids Market, Kailee connected with a young cotton candy maker who was receiving help from the Indiana Small Business Development Center at Butler University.

Kailee reached out and received a business advisor, who said their prices were too low and suggested a pay-what-you-can model. Sales have spiked since then, and most people offer more than \$5.

“Now we always make the sale versus before when we would say a price. People would be like, ‘Well, okay, we’ll come back,’” Kailee says. They have sold around 700 bouquets since that first Mother’s Day whim.

Hattie is committed to growing the business even as she gets more involved with school and sports. Her favorite part is “seeing people being so happy about their flowers that they were getting.” She’s primarily responsible for making arrangements and doing deliveries, and her parents help out when she is busy. They’ve also ensured that she has a proper summer vacation.

“If I make Hattie be at the farmers market every Saturday at 7 a.m., I think she would quit this business. So we just did four Saturdays strategically in July and August, when we have the most flowers,” Kailee says.

Kailee has her hands full, too, supporting not just one child entrepreneur but two—Hattie’s younger brother has started a business with candy vending machines. ➡➡

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY CAVEDA PHOTOGRAPHED BY Alex Kumar

Nearly 65 years ago, Ruger Kerstiens’ grandfather started a homebuilding business. Over the decades, this legacy expanded to multi-family development with an integrated property management company. For years, the only missing piece was plumbing, HVAC and electrical. In 2024, this pain point led the Kerstiens family to purchase a company in the mechanical space, retaining all assets and a majority of the original employees.

Now called Huntingburg Mechanical Inc, Kerstiens, who serves as president, shares that a “majority of our work is actually third party.” In the first year alone, they reported nearly \$10,000,000 in revenue, which exceeded expectations by 42%. This year, they are on track to increase revenue by another 20%. What these incredible statistics don’t convey is how intimidating the initial transition to a new type of business was.

Early on, Kerstiens recalls standing before his employees, some who boasted more than twenty-five years of experience. “I know how to run the operations of a business and you guys know how to do the plumbing, mechanical and electrical,” he remembers telling them. “You let me handle the back end, and I’m going to trust you to handle and make the right decisions in the field.”

This largely sums up Kerstiens’ approach to leadership. He believes in mutual respect and taking care of his staff. “If you trust us, we’re going to invest in you. We want it to be a long-term relationship, rather than a pit stop on your way somewhere else,” he says. “It was a lot of them trusting me and me trusting them.”

Even while impressive stats continue to roll in, Kerstiens is most concerned about doing good work that uplifts the community, while building a company filled with talented, dependable people. For those considering a similar path, Ruger shares this: “Focus on the team members you’re bringing on and make sure they have the integrity you’re looking for, the honesty, the loyalty, because these are people you’re going to be spending the majority of your time with, and you want to surround yourself with people you really enjoy.”

As a student, Kerstiens’ familial background led him to the IU Kelley School of Business, where he graduated with a business management degree. As a freshman, he joined the Real Estate Club. He also participated in the I-Core program, a semester designed to give students real-time experiences that challenge them to solve cross-functional business problems, while developing professional and leadership skills. The education, connections and hands-on learning Kerstiens gained while at IU have served as a launching point for everything since. He says: “I’ve been able to take pieces of all of that, what I learned, and put it into the business now.” ➡➡

CDFI FRIENDLY EVANSVILLE

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson Bibbs

CDFI FRIENDLY HELPS FUND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Securing a loan to get a business concept off the ground is one of the biggest challenges aspiring entrepreneurs face. That's where CDFI Friendly Evansville Region steps in to help.

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are private institutions that meet the financing needs of under-resourced people in urban, rural and Native communities across all 50 states. Although CDFI Friendly Evansville Region isn't technically a lender itself, it has the ability to connect prospective borrowers with other CDFIs that are able to provide more flexible funding than conventional banks and credit unions.

"The CDFI concept actually emerged back in the 1970s as an extension of the Civil Rights movement," says founding executive director Taylor Price. "A group of nuns in Michigan noticed lending disparities for black and brown people in comparison to their white counterparts. They pulled together their retirement funds and gave them to a local bank with instructions to lend to people who have traditionally been overlooked for financing."

Stakeholders convened to launch the Evansville-based non-profit in 2023, installing Price as Founding Executive Director of CDFI Friendly's Evansville Region in February 2024.

Price estimates that there are currently more than 1,400 CDFIs in existence across the United States, many created to meet a specific lending needs. CDFI Friendly Evansville Region acts as a hub to help southern Indiana-based borrowers find CDFIs to work with in the state and elsewhere throughout the country.

"I always say I am a matchmaker, a bridge builder and a storyteller," Price says. "I help connect the CDFIs to the entities that need them by sharing their stories."

Some of these stories include a financially-challenged man looking to buy a box truck to launch his own transportation business, a local non-profit that rehabs blighted houses for families in need to live in and a young woman seeking a safe new space to operate her daycare. Supporting these endeavors not only helps funding recipients pursue their own version of the American Dream, it also benefits the southwest Indiana economy by generating tax dollars and creating jobs.

In her first 18 months as executive director, Price has been able to put approximately 90 prospective borrowers in touch with CDFIs to submit applications for funding. She's hopeful more success stories will continue to pour in.

"We receive a lot of support from big banks and private family foundations; that's how we stay sustainable right now," Price says. "Whenever external supporters come to visit our region, I drive them by the businesses we've worked with so they get a chance to see exactly where their money is going and who it's helped." ➡

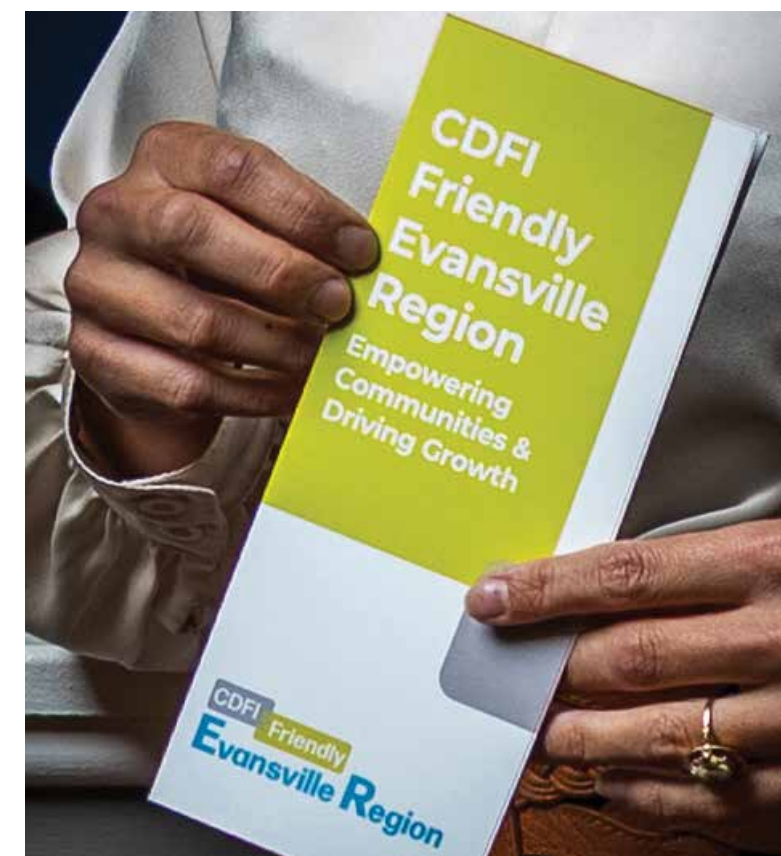
90

ENTREPRENEURS
ASSISTED IN
SUBMITTING
APPLICATIONS
FOR CDFI FUNDING
CONSIDERATION

I HELP CONNECT THE CDFIS TO
THE ENTITIES THAT NEED THEM
BY SHARING THEIR STORIES.

TAYLOR PRICE

LEARN MORE AT: CDFIFRIENDLYEVANSVILLE.ORG



INDIGENOUS ENDEAVORS

KIM LEMING

01	HUNTINGTON, HUNTINGTON COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	INDIGENOUSENDEAVORS.ORG	Web

“AN ELDER ONCE TOLD ME THAT KNOWLEDGE IS NOT TO COVET, BUT TO PASS ON. THAT’S WHAT I DO. I FIND INFORMATION AND I PASS IT ON.”
—KIM LEMING



The company is based in Huntington, Indiana, but works with Alaska Native People and American Indians across the contiguous United States.

SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE SHE’S LEARNED

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

RED DOG DUMPSTERS, LLC

\$200K+

YEAR TWO REVENUE

3.6M

WEEKLY READERS ONLINE AND IN PRINT

SUPR DEE

CLEANER BY THE YARD, TIDY BY THE TON

COLTIN KENNEDY

01	SHELURN, SULLIVAN COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	REDDOGDUMPSTERSIN.COM	Web

“MY PHONE RINGS A LOT NOW AND IT GETS ME EXCITED TO GET MORE BUSINESS AND MEET



CIRCULAR VENTURE LAB

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Kevin Chenault



Indiana high schools are projected to have the IMPACTT curriculum by 2026.

THE CIRCULAR VENTURE LAB MISSION IS TO CREATE, TEST AND PROTOTYPE NEW PRODUCTS, SYSTEMS AND SERVICES IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

LOGAN JENKINS

BRINGING THE ECONOMY FULL CIRCLE WITH CIRCULAR VENTURE LAB

Everything old is new again. By promoting the concepts of reuse, recycle and repurpose, Circular Venture Lab is helping companies and partners reimagine the way they do business.

Landing in southern Indiana by way of California and Colorado, Logan Jenkins founded Circular Venture Lab as a non-profit organization in 2021 while living in Wyoming.

"I wanted to do more with it after I arrived in Evansville in 2023, so I just started meeting with as many community members as I could," he says.

In early 2024, Jenkins proposed several projects to the University of Evansville as a way to work collaboratively with the students and faculty. Through that partnership, he was able to secure \$400,000 in grant funding the same year from the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Small Business Administration Growth Accelerator Fund and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation. In addition to supporting Circular Venture Lab, those awards also allowed Jenkins to launch the Indiana Center for Emerging Technologies.

"The Circular Venture Lab mission is to create, test and prototype new products, systems and services in the circular economy," he says. "Our work reduces the use of new materials needed, energy and water used and waste produced."

Operating as separate entities under the same non-profit umbrella, the Circular Venture Lab and Indiana Center for Emerging Technologies focus on a three-part methodology—inspiration, ideation and impact. Although the Center for Emerging Technologies works across Indiana and around the country to promote technology innovation, sustainable practices, community networks and education development, efforts focus mainly on the southwestern region of the state.

IMPACTT is the center's main project at present, a curriculum designed to introduce students to the process of technology transfer at universities, research institutions and national labs. The program encourages critical thinking and economic development principles.

"We developed the program in partnership with the University of Evansville and the STARTedUP Foundation," Jenkins says. "The curriculum is under development; by Spring 2026, it will be available to students in 110 Indiana high schools."

With an eye toward early-stage companies with growth potential, Jenkins vets prospective partners who find him through referrals, startup accelerators and venture capital firms. Community partners and student interns help increase awareness about what both organizations are doing.

"Our newest program through the Center is called Accessible Innovation, where we're empowering community members and entrepreneurs across Indiana to pursue innovation in the disability technology space," Jenkins says. "That's opened up so many new partnerships with organizations across not only the state, but throughout the Midwest, and it has great potential to become a national program." ➡

LEARN MORE AT: [CIRCULARVENTURELAB.ORG](https://circularventurelab.org)

KINGDOM KIDS LEARNING HOME

CRYSTINA DIAZ

01	KOKOMO, HOWARD COUNTY	City
02	2022	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	THEKINGDOMKIDSLLC.COM	Web

“WE ARE MORE THAN A DAYCARE. WE ARE A PLACE WHERE CHILDREN FEEL WELCOMED, WHERE THEY CAN LEARN AND GROW WITH THE HELP OF PEOPLE WHO CARE.”
—CRYSTINA DIAZ



Owner Crystina Diaz has built a reputation within the Kokomo community for providing strong academic curriculum and high-quality care.

TAKING A LEAP OF FAITH

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam

TOOLSEY

75%
AVERAGE
QUARTERLY GROWTH
BY MID 2025

SPEEDY SALES CONVERSION PLATFORM
SERVICES THE HOME SERVICE INDUSTRY

DAN JOHNSON

01	FISHERS, HAMILTON COUNTY	City
02	2022	Founded
03	15	Number of employees
04	TOOLSEY.COM	Web

“I LOVE BUILDING THIS
COMPANY IN INDIANA.”
—DAN JOHNSON



Toolsey is
partnering with
building and
construction
materials
giant Owens
Corning.

MILESTONE

GROWTH



BACK WOODS TRADING CO.

BRANDING HATS FOR BRANDS ADDS UP BIG

LUKE TALLEY

01	KOKOMO, HOWARD COUNTY	City
02	2024	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	BACKWOODSTRADINGCO.COM	Web

“I THINK THERE’S ONLY ONE OTHER COMPANY IN THE U.S. DOING [LEATHER CUSTOMIZATION IN COLOR].”
—LUKE TALLEY



Sales are projected to more than double, from \$70,000 in 2024 to \$150,000 in 2025.

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

As an avid hunter and outdoorsman, Luke Talley trademarked the logo for his company, Back Woods Trading Co., even before he came up with a business idea. His branding instinct would be key.

Talley began selling handmade wooden boxes for use as cocktail smokers. He tried his hand at branding the boxes with a logo using a laser engraver. Then, he experimented with imprinting faux leather hat patches.

In 2023, Talley learned to use an industrial machine to sew real leather patches onto hats. Making more patches with his logo—or images of elk, deer and even Sasquatch—he began selling ballcaps and beanies at expos and festivals.

Business really ticked up in 2024 when he demo’d his capabilities to other expo vendors. “We go in and sell our own brand, and while we’re there, we hit [potential customers] up and try to sell them stuff with their companies’ custom logos,” says Talley.

Back Woods Trading Co. won \$10,000 in a Shark Tank-like competition in Kokomo called “The Drive” in 2024, which encouraged him to do more. Talley bought embroidery equipment in June 2025, so his company could make more customized products. “We can take a color image and transfer it to a leather patch, which is kind of cool,” says Talley. “I think there’s only one other company in the U.S. doing that.”

In 2024, Back Woods Trading Co. generated \$70,000 in sales. Since founding, they’ve made and shipped over 10,000 hats all over the U.S. and Canada. The company now sells leather customizable hats, flasks, bourbon glasses, apparel and more.

In January 2025, Talley opened a Back Woods Trading Co. storefront in downtown Kokomo, where he welcomes customers to sidle up to candle and leather goods bars to make their own products, or watch his team make leather hats or embroidered shirts.

Talley’s also developed partnerships with other local stores, and he projects his business will make \$150,000 in 2025. He’s considering licensing deals and more.

Talley also said the pace of Back Woods Trading Co.’s growth so far has been beneficial. “I think we’re growing at a steady and gradual pace that’s giving us the opportunity to build a foundation as we develop.” ➡

8,000

POUNDS OF CORN STOVER PROCESSED PER HOUR BY FIBERX

FIBERX IS HELPING FARMERS AND CONVERTING CORN STOVER INTO CLEANER PRODUCT

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Indiana farmers harvest a billion bushels of golden corn annually, but the leftover corn stover—corn stalks, husks, cobs and leaves—holds the promise of agricultural innovation for FiberX, a Merrillville company.

Launched in 2022, FiberX buys stover from farmers and converts it into ingredients that can eventually replace or reduce petroleum-based elements in manufacturing, chemical and consumer products. This leads to healthier products and farms and a new revenue stream for farmers.

“We want to make this residue a new cash crop for Indiana’s farmers,” said FiberX CEO David Skibinski.

Historically, the stover left over after Hoosier corn farmers harvested their 5.3 million acres annually has been left to decompose and feed the soil. Today, due to high harvest yields, it can be too much stover before the next year’s planting, he said.

FiberX buys stover from farmers, has it transported to its pilot plant in Merrillville and breaks the stover down into biodegradable fibers and powders for manufacturing and chemical processes.

“Those powders can be added to plastics, making them twice as strong and 50 percent more rigid,” Skibinski said. “In some cases, companies eliminate the use of petroleum to make the plastic. When we work with bioplastics, and we help them reduce their costs of goods, which opens new markets because their products can be more competitive in the plastics industry.”

FiberX has been working with an artificial turf company to use its fiber as an additive to reduce the use of petroleum-based rubber in their turf with FiberX’s biodegradable powder.

Even skin care companies, most of which use petroleum-based feedstocks, can use FiberX products as feedstock for their ultraviolet ray protection products.

FiberX also has been working with researchers at Purdue University to break stover down into three components: cellulose, hemicellulose, which helps the corn plant’s structure, and lignin, a polymer that helps keep plant cells together.

All three components can be used elsewhere. The lignin can be depolymerized, or broken down even further, and more than 40 components of lignin can be optimized for chemical and manufacturing uses, such as industrial resins, adhesives and epoxies, Skibinski explained.

FiberX started in Hammond before moving its operations to Merrillville, where it created a fully automated plant.

That plant has grown from processing 50 pounds of stover an hour to processing up to 8,000 pounds an hour, and, as the demand for FiberX products grow, there are plans to process up to 70,000 pounds an hour in a site closer to the corn farms, Skibinski said.

“We are creating a new industry, founded in Indiana, with a new company and with new products that have never been introduced to the world before,” he said. ➡

FIBERX

DAVID SKIBINSKI

01	MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY	City
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ESO SUMMIT

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Amanda Duncan*

120 +



*organizations
attended the
inaugural ESO
Summit in 2024*

THE ESO PLAYBOOK IS ABOUT IDENTIFYING GAPS IN THE ENTREPRENEUR ECOSYSTEM SO WE'RE NOT DUPLICATING EFFORTS BY CREATING SOMETHING THAT ALREADY EXISTS.

ERIC BESCHINSKI

LEARN MORE AT: IEDC.IN.GOV

WHEN ESOS REFINE THEIR NICHE AND WORK TOGETHER, SMALL BUSINESS WINS.

By design, Indiana's entrepreneurial ecosystem reaches every corner of the state. Hundreds of entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) form the country's best network for small-business owners. Last year, the IEDC and the Indiana Small Business Development Center launched a new program to coordinate efforts between ESOs and enhance the entire ecosystem's power and efficiency.

The inaugural ESO Summit took place in Fishers during Global Entrepreneurship Week in November 2024. More than 200 participants from Hoosier ESOs came together to connect, collaborate, and compare notes on resources and strategies, with the goal of eliminating redundancy and building resilience in the ecosystem.

The day was an invigorating gathering of thought leaders, innovators, and ecosystem-builders, culminating with an address by David Watkins, the IEDC's Senior Vice President of Entrepreneurship and Small Business. "Supporting entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship is a team effort that requires ESOs in every part of the state," Watkins shared. "ESOs know their communities and how to serve them. The summit provides a space for best practices and ideas to be exchanged to support entrepreneurs all the better."

All attendees took home the new ESO Playbook, a lean Canvas-style guide adapted for ESO development from idea to impact. (It's also available online to download—see the QR code on this page.) Others left with proven solutions.

Eric Beschinski, the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Navigator for the Northwest Indiana SBDC, connected with some of the numerous ESOs in his region and came away with a better understanding of why co-working spaces aren't thriving there. Together, they concluded that because real

estate is affordable, many entrepreneurs have a home office. Therefore, co-working spaces should serve the market by offering other types of value.

"It was an a-ha moment, and now we can ask what co-working spaces should look like in the future," Beschinski said.

The summit builds on the IEDC's effort to encourage collaboration through the Community Collaboration Fund in recent years. CCF provided grants to ESOs for joining forces on new workable solutions, programming and initiatives. "That's intentional, to encourage ESOs to participate in the ecosystem," Beschinski said.

Strong, connected ecosystems are crucial for economic development, and they are comprised of groups that find a niche where they can provide the most value.

Follow this QR code to download the IEDC's Playbook for a guide to optimizing your ESO. ➡



RANDOM FILL-UPS

~70

CUSTOMERS
SERVED A DAY

FILLING UP WITH FOOD LOVE

RANDOM PHILLIPS

01	EVANSVILLE, VANDERBURGH COUNTY	City
02	2020	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	RANDOMFILLUPSFOODTRUCK.COM	Web

“I DON’T WANT THIS BUSINESS TO STOP WITH ME.”
—RANDOM PHILLIPS



Phillips converted a used recreational vehicle into a food trailer with plans to create generational wealth.



GENESIS: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

\$12,000



*awarded to
entrepreneurs in
the last two years*

EIGHT-COUNTY STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVE BOOSTS BUSINESS BUZZ

Launched in 2007, Genesis: Pathways to Success recently outgrew its home with the Ripley County Community Foundation (RCCF). Under the energetic leadership of Executive Director Clar

TAY'S AUTO DETAILING

GOOD COACHING + GREAT HUSTLE =
ENTREPRENEURIAL EXCELLENCE

TAYLOR BURNETT

01	FORT WAYNE, ALLEN COUNTY	City
02	2022	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	TAYSAUTODETAILING.COM	Web

“FREEDOM IS WEALTH. BEING MY OWN BOSS AND HAVING THAT FREEDOM IS THE GREATEST PART OF THIS JOURNEY.”
—TAYLOR BURNETT



Tay's Auto Detailing makes special trips to Michigan, Illinois and Ohio to serve clients.

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Taylor Burnett spoke with us about Tay's Auto Detailing from the inside of a car, rag in hand. "I've always had this hustle," she said, proceeding to clean while fielding questions for the entirety of the conversation.

For Burnett, cleaning cars was a side gig while she worked full time at Fire Police City County Federal Credit Union. When the Credit Union fired her in 2022, Burnett officially launched Tay's Auto Detailing. "Oprah wasn't Oprah until she got fired," Burnett laughed. "And Taylor wasn't Taylor."

Burnett was on unemployment when she started her business. "It was a little nerve-wracking," she said. On a friend's recommendation, Burnett visited the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center (NIIC) in Fort Wayne, where she met Rosalina Perez, director of the Women's Business Center.

"I see Rosalina as my coach," Burnett said. "She helped me think through a lot of situations that sometimes made me nervous at first... she's given me books to read about launching a business. She always tells me that you've got to be willing to do the work."

With Perez's mentorship and Burnett's trademark spunk, revenue from Tay's Auto Detailing has doubled every year since it launched. In the process, Burnett has expanded her service area to include Indianapolis, where her fiancé, Alma, lives, and has become the most

referred detailer in both markets. She even makes special trips to Michigan, Illinois and Ohio to serve clients.

While Taylor still handles most of the detailing herself, she has 40 people on the payroll, but not under contract, who can help when volume gets high. "At my stage of growth, I'm struggling with finding help that's consistent and high quality," Burnett said. "I know that I need help, and I can't do it alone, but it's hard to let go of the reins."

But Burnett is too in love with the independence of entrepreneurship to consider going back to work for someone else. "Freedom is wealth," Burnett said. "Being my own boss and having that freedom is the greatest part of this journey."

In 2024, Burnett saw the fruits of her labor recognized by the larger business community, winning the 2024 Mirro Award for Entrepreneurial Excellence from the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center. "I feel like this award recognizes the hard work of Rosalina and myself," Burnett said. "You've got to be a little crazy to be an entrepreneur. You have 17,000 bad days in a row, but you have one good moment and it's like, 'Yes, keep going!'" ➡➡

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Marc Lebryk

When Chris Egge and Doug Collett started Sycamore Seal and Stripe in early 2023, they made three decisions that would later significantly grow their business.

The two-person team based in Terre Haute invested in community relationships, turned to a Hoosier-made asphalt sealing product that is far safer than anything else on the market, and began giving away lots of information, even if it did not guarantee any business.

"We believe in being a good steward of where you live and where you work, and the reputations we already had before we started the business is what helped get the momentum rolling," said Egge, who is very active on the local parks board and fraternal organizations.

The company also got a boost with a Spark Revolving Loan from Thrive West Central's Spark Revolving Loan Fund. Thrive's fund was created to encourage entrepreneurship in the area, adding value to the region's economic base.

In 2022, Collett, a civil engineer by training, and Egge, experienced in project management and logistics, began tossing around ideas about starting a paving business, "even though we didn't know anything about starting a business," Egge laughed.

They formed Sycamore Seal and Stripe in 2023 and took it full-time a year later. Within two years, Sycamore grew from a side business

sealcoating asphalt lots and driveways to a full-time residential and commercial asphalt maintenance company that handles massive projects.

In July 2025, Sycamore began its largest project yet, repairing and striping a 90,000-square-foot parking lot for an aquatics center owned by a local school district.

One of the secrets to Sycamore's success is an innovative product called Pitch Black, an asphalt emulsion sealer that protects asphalt areas and makes them more aesthetically pleasing.

Pitch Black, made by Black Shadow, in Auburn, Indiana, is free of carcinogens, does not burn the skin or eyes of workers applying it or have an noxious odor, and it's superior to the environmentally-harmful coal tar, Egge shared.

Another pillar of Sycamore's success has been its commitment to content marketing. The company's social media posts are filled with information prospective customers can use when planning asphalt maintenance and similar decisions.

"When we educate people on the benefits of a seal coat, or preventative maintenance, then the sales come organically," Egge said. "If you're giving them something of value, then that sticks with your brand." ➡➡

SYCAMORE SEAL AND STRIPE

CUSTOMER EDUCATION AND
SAFER PRODUCTS PAVE THE
PATH TO SUCCESS

CHRIS EGGE & DOUG COLLETT

01	TERRE HAUTE, VIGO COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded
03	2	Number of employees
04	SYCAMORESEAL.COM	Web

<

SOCKET SHIELD

ALEX OLIVER & AUSTIN OLIVER

01	BOONVILLE, WARRICK COUNTY	City
02	2018	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	SOCKETSHIELDUSA.COM	Web

“[OUR BUSINESS] HAS DEFINITELY BROUGHT OUR BROTHERHOOD—AND OUR WIVES AND NIECES AND NEPHEWS—CLOSER.”
—ALEX OLIVER

BROTHERS IN BUSINESS

WRITTEN BY JENNY WALTON PHOTOGRAPHED BY Gabrielle Minion

Austin Oliver first dreamed up the idea for Socket Shield back in grade school—a simple yet clever protective guard designed to cover electrical outlets and keep homes safer. Now,

BUTTA'S BETTER BBQ

RODNEY & CATHERINE HILL

01	TERRE HAUTE, VIGO COUNTY	City
02	2022	Founded
03	6	Number of employees
04	BUTTASBETTERBBQ.COM	Web

“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT FOOD. IT’S ABOUT CONNECTION, ENCOURAGEMENT AND HONORING OUR SON’S LEGACY.”
—CATHERINE HILL



In early 2025, the Hills received a \$42,000 grant from United Way to fund essential catering equipment and a new van, giving the business a major boost.

CATHERINE AND RODNEY HILL'S JOURNEY TO BUTTA'S BETTER BBQ

GOODWIN RV

90%

OF WORK IS
THEIR MOBILE
SERVICE

JUSTIN GOODWIN

01	BLUFFTON, WELLS COUNTY	City
02	2023	Founded
03	2	Number of employees
04	FACEBOOK.COM/P/GOODWIN-RV-100093280754720/	Web

“WORD OF MOUTH AND DOING GOOD WORK ARE MY TWO MAIN SOURCES OF INCOME.”
—JUSTIN GOODWIN

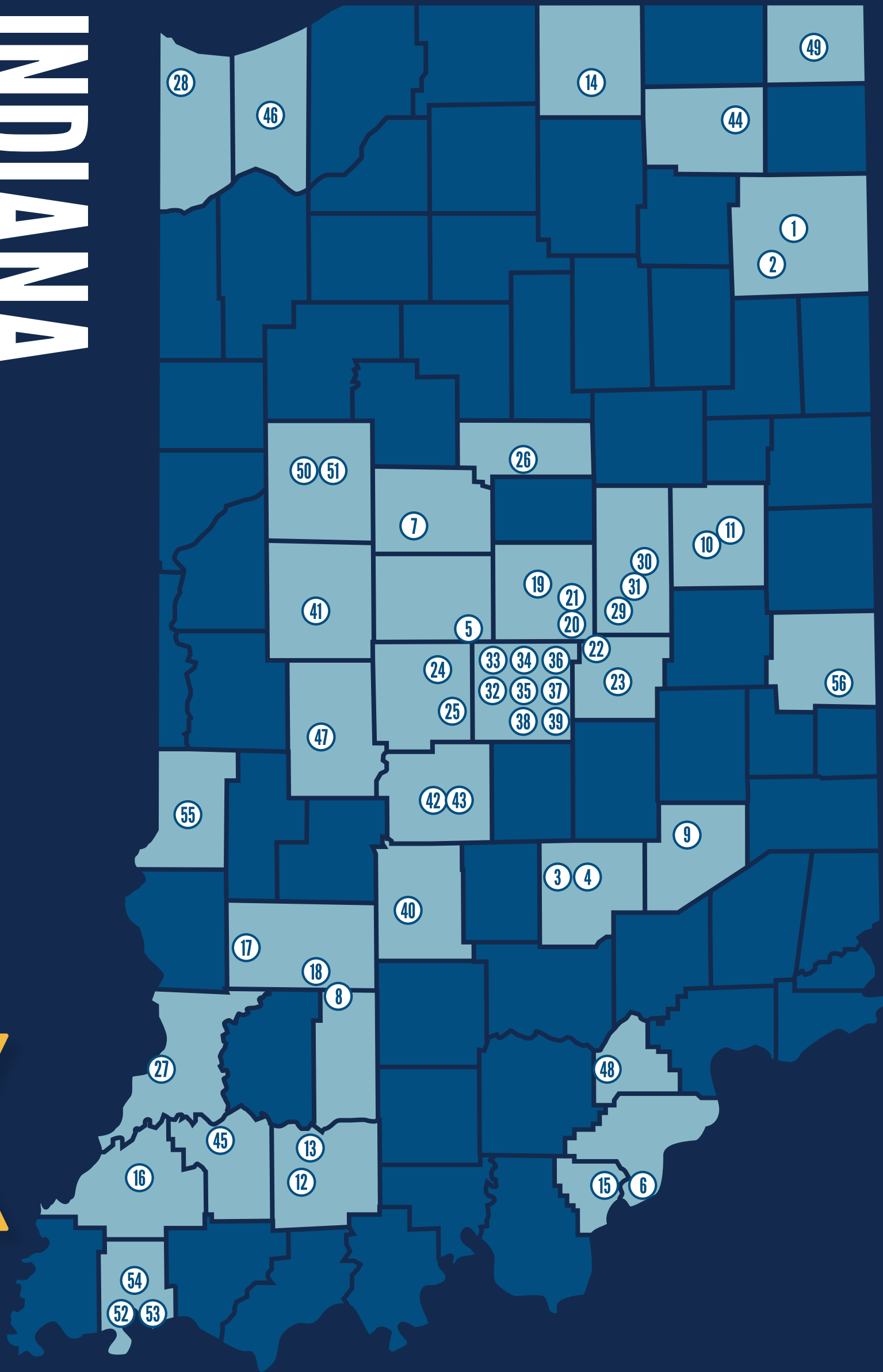


Goodwin RV has doubled its revenue growth in both years.

INDIANA COWORKING PASSPORT

56

LOCATIONS



WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

SHARING THE COWORKING WEALTH

For entrepreneurs and small business owners who use shared coworking spaces, the Indiana Coworking Passport (ICP) expands access to office options across the state.

After he founded the Launch Fishers coworking space in 2012, John Weschler reached out to MatchBOX Coworking Studio creator Jason Tennenhouse in Lafayette to confab about the industry.

"The coworking concept was still relatively new to Indiana then and just starting to catch on," says Rachel Drake, Launch Fishers director of marketing and communications. "John and Jason realized that someone who was trying to build a business in a specific Indiana city was probably going to have contacts they needed to see and work with in other locations as well."

The resulting ICP, established in 2014, allows members of any participating coworking facility to access other participating spaces anywhere in the state once a month at no additional charge. Drake and Launch Fishers Executive Director and CFO David Bolling oversee the program with input from more than fifty participating hubs.

"Entrepreneurs are often traveling, and having expanded access to coworking spaces with the same resources they enjoy at their home location is really useful," Drake explains.

There's no cost for the coworking facilities to participate in the reciprocal program, and each location has the freedom to communicate about the feature in its own way, a marketing advantage they can use to attract new members.

"The other big benefit is access to like-minded people," Drake says. "Once a year, we try to host a summit for the coworking space operators to get together, share best practices and learn from each other. It's a great opportunity to interface with other people who are working in the same environment."

ICP passport holders simply go online to find a list of participating spaces and fill out a form to request access for a specific date, along with any special accommodations they might need. The system then sends an email to the home location and the requested location for verification.

Drake says the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and Indiana Small Business Development Centers have been big proponents of the ICP program, touting it to the coworking spaces themselves and the entrepreneurs who use them.

"We'd love to see even more spaces join in and explore the possibilities of forming some regional coworking groups," she adds. "We're all Hoosiers, and we're always looking for new ways to connect people." ➡



The Indiana Coworking Passport allows members of a participating coworking space to make use of any other participating space in the state once a month at no additional charge.

LEARN MORE AT: INDIANACOWORKINGPASSPORT.COM

ALLEN - FORT WAYNE

01: NIIC Shared Workspace

02: Start Fort Wayne

BARTHOLOMEW - COLUMBUS

03: Propeller Makerspace

04: The Workshop

BOONE - ZIONSVILLE

05: zWORKS

CLARK - CLARKSBURG

06: Elevate @ Bolt + Tie

CLINTON - FRANKFORT

07: Ironblock Studio

DAVISS - ODON

08: The Lock & Key

(Cowork @ WestGate)

DECATUR - GREENSBURG

09: The Studebaker Studio

DELAWARE - MUNCIE

10: Innovation Connector

11: Madjax / the CO:LAB

DUBOIS - HUNTINGBURG

12: Current Blend

DUBOIS - JASPER

13: Livewire Coworking

ELKHART - GOSHEN

14: Launchpad Goshen

FLOYD - NEW ALBANY

15: The Root

GIBSON - PRINCETON

16: The HUB 127

GREENE - LINTON

17: Open Desk

GREENE - NEWBERRY

18: Battery Innovation

Center, Inc.

HAMILTON - CARMEL

19: Platform 24

HAMILTON - FISHERS

20: Indiana IoT Lab

21: Launch Fishers

HANCOCK - FORTVILLE

22: Fortville Business

Center

HANCOCK - GREENFIELD

23: Idea Co-op

HENDRICKS - BROWNSBURG

24: Elevate Office

- Brownsburg

HENDRICKS - PLAINFIELD

25: Level Two Coworking

HOWARD - KOKOMO

26: The Shared Drive

KNOX - VINCENNES

27: The Pantheon

LAKE - HAMMOND

28: Commercialization and
Manufacturing Excellence
Center

MADISON - ANDERSON

29: Flagship Enterprise Center

30: InerG Impact

31: Work, etc.

MARION - INDIANAPOLIS

32: 16 Tech Innovation District

33: Cowork 1010

34: The Haverstick

35: Nexus Impact Center

36: Refinery46

37: Speakeasy

38: {the study} cowork @

UnionCampus

39: Switchboard

MONROE - BLOOMINGTON

40: The (Dimension) Mill

MONTGOMERY - CRAWFORDSVILLE

41: Fusion 54

MORGAN - MARTINSVILLE

42: Launch Martinsville

43: The Source

NOBLE - KENDALLVILLE

44: 231 Main Kendallville

Coworking

PIKE - PETERSBURG

45: Elmer Buchta

Technology Center

PORTER - VALPARAISO

46: Zosoco Coworking

PUTNAM - GREENCASTLE

47: Tenzer Hub For

Entrepreneurship

SCOTT - SCOTTSBURG

48: Mid-America Science Park

STEBEN - ANGOLA

49: Cowork Steuben / Steuben

County Cowork

TIPPECANOE - LAFAYETTE

50: MatchBOX Coworking

Studio

TIPPECANOE - WEST LAFAYETTE

51: Purdue Railyard

VANDERBURGH - EVANSVILLE

52: Cowork Evansville

53: The Foundry on Main

54: US Incubator

VIGO - TERRE HAUTE

55: The Station

WAYNE - RICHMOND

56: Main Street Resource Center

JEDTV SPORTS NETWORK

NOW STREAMING: FRIDAY NIGHT HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS FRENZY

SAM MICHEL

01	HAMMOND, LAKE COUNTY	City
02	2020	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	JEDTV.COM	Web

“IN EARLY 2024, WE SIGNED WHAT WE BELIEVE IS THE FIRST-EVER HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS STREAMING NETWORK DEAL.”
—SAM MICHEL

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

In Indiana, never underestimate the power of high school sports: they provide weekly entertainment, instant community and civic pride in the smallest of towns. So in a culture accustomed to media at our fingertips, fans are chomping at the bit for greater access.

No

INDIANA ENTREPRENEURSHIP SCORECARD

➡ **INDIANA WAS RANKED #2 IN THE
COUNTRY FOR THE BEST STATE TO
START A BUSINESS IN 2024**

➡ **ONE OF THE HIGHEST RATES OF
BUSINESS SURVIVAL AFTER THE
FIRST YEAR**

➡ **INDIANA IS HOME TO MULTIPLE
TOP-TIER RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES
DRIVING INNOVATION AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

SCORING INDIANA'S BUSINESS SUCCESSES

The Indiana Entrepreneurship Scorecard is a county-by-county assessment of the business activity happening across Indiana. Compiled by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), it captures multiple factors to consider in supporting entrepreneurialism in Indiana. "We look at capital access, such as the number of loans and innovation grants and try to identify hotspots of entrepreneurial activity," says David Watkins, Senior Vice President, Entrepreneurship & Small Business at Indiana Economic Development Corporation. "Whether this be private, philanthropic or government, we try to empower stakeholders to take a look at their own county or community and get a sense for

INDIANA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (INTAP)

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

97



small businesses around Indiana were awarded with funds in the 2025 yearly cycle.

TAPPING INTO NEW RESOURCES

Taking a small business to the next level often requires more help, resources and technical assistance than owners have on hand.

Created in 2017 as a way to contribute to the costs of entrepreneurial growth and improvement projects, the Indiana Technical Assistance Program (INTAP) awards eligible applicants up to \$15,000 to go toward qualified professional and technical vendor services.

"The INTAP team operates out of our lead center in Indianapolis," says Indiana SBDC State Director Jon Myers. "Our small business programs manager oversees the bulk of registrations and manages the flow of the project; our South Central Region Office and Ivy Tech help with the financial piece."

Small businesses that are Indiana SBDC members can submit INTAP applications early in the year. Volunteer judges from across the statewide entrepreneurial ecosystem then review the entries and determine allocations of up to \$15,000 in award money, notifying recipients in the spring with a caveat that all funds must be used before the end of the same calendar year. Applicants are responsible for drafting project proposals and securing quotes from Indiana-based vendors.

"INTAP is there to help businesses generate technology, IP, patents, prototypes and other services," Myers explains. "The program isn't a grant because it pays directly to the vendor, not the applicant. There's also an expectation that the applicant will provide some of the funding as well; INTAP just helps fill the gap to get projects across the finish line."

For the 2025 cycle, the program received 142 applications and distributed \$1 million (mainly from state funding) through sixty-seven awards. In the past, INTAP has supported equipment training for staff, provisional patents, grant writing, AI models, software integration and app development.

"One of the most impactful awards we made went to a company that used the money to establish an inventory control system," Myers recalls. "It really helped that business solve a problem, and it helped them grow."

Regional Indiana SBDC offices offer INTAP information sessions to share best practices and help interested businesses put their best foot forward on the application.

"Our business advisors, chambers of commerce and ecosystem navigators working with incubators, maker spaces and coworking facilities throughout the state always want to connect small businesses with resources that can help them grow," Myers says. "If we identify a client or an entrepreneur as a good candidate for INTAP, we will certainly let them know and encourage them to apply."

In the future, Myers would like to see more funding for INTAP to subsequently increase the number of awards distributed, or perhaps to feed a second application cycle each year.

"When you're trying to grow a business, every little bit helps," he says. ➡

INTAP IS THERE TO HELP BUSINESSES GENERATE TECHNOLOGY, IP, PATENTS, PROTOTYPES AND OTHER SERVICES.

JON MYERS

LEARN MORE AT: [ISBDC.ORG/PROGRAMS/INTAP/](https://sbdc.org/programs/intap/)

LAUNCH JOHNSON COUNTY



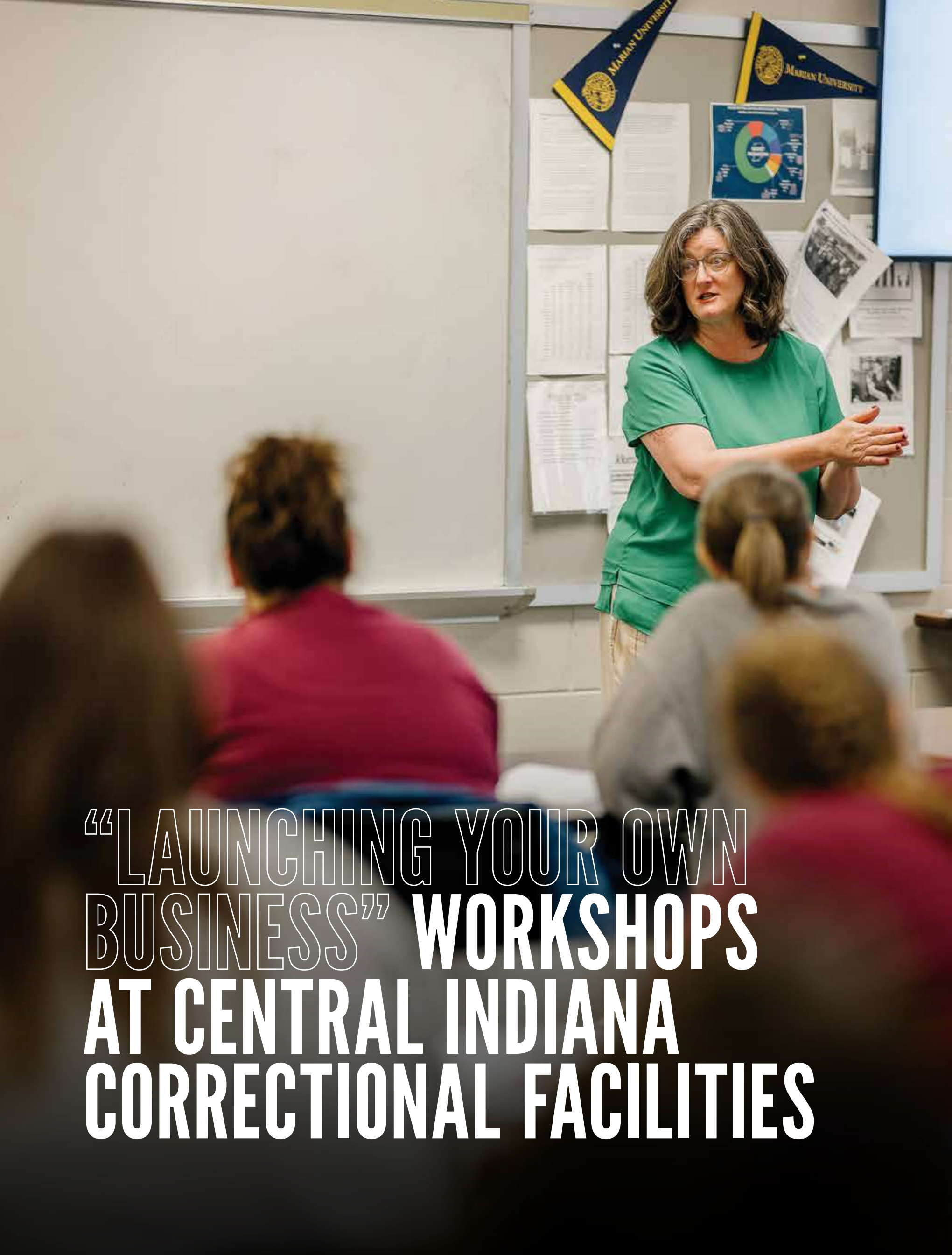
WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHY BY Chad Williams

LAUNCH JOHNSON COUNTY SETS ENTREPRENEURS UP FOR SUCCESS

Every business starts with the seed of a great idea. To nurture those seeds, the Greater Franklin Chamber of Commerce, Franklin College and the City of Edinburgh teamed up in 2024 to create Launch Johnson County, a collaborative effort to support aspiring local entrepreneurs.

"Two of our community leaders, Jeremy VanAndel and SaraBeth Drybread, came to us with this idea to help launch new businesses in Johnson County," says Rosie Chambers, Greater Franklin Chamber of Commerce President and CEO. "We typically work with businesses after they've been established, but didn't really have any programming in place to help startups find their footing."

With a \$35,000 Community Collaboration



“LAUNCHING YOUR OWN BUSINESS” WORKSHOPS AT CENTRAL INDIANA CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH PHOTOGRAPHED BY Sean Molin



As part of her Indiana Small Business Development Center job duties, Business Advisor Tressa Mazhandu conducts “Launching Your Own Business” workshops several times a year at three Central Indiana correctional facilities.

MY HOPE IS THAT AT THE END OF A SESSION, THESE PEOPLE HAVE A MUCH CLEARER VIEW OF HOW TO GET A BUSINESS GOING AND WHAT THEIR NEXT STEPS NEED TO BE.

TRESSA MAZHANDU

ISBDC WORKSHOPS SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURIAL ASPIRATIONS

Organized by Indiana Small Business Development Centers (Indiana SBDC), the “Launching Your Own Business” workshop doesn’t just share practical advice with incarcerated individuals—it also gives them hope for a better future.

In addition to her other Indiana SBDC job duties, Business Advisor Tressa Mazhandu travels to three Central Indiana correctional facilities—the Indiana Women’s Prison, the Heritage Trail Correctional Facility and the Plainfield Correctional Facility—several times a year to conduct the two-hour sessions. Ultimately, the initiative aims to equip participants with the practical knowledge and skills they need for successful entrepreneurship.

“We recognize that for some people, self-employment is the best means to acquire income after they’re released,” Mazhandu says. “It’s very important for people to get accurate information; there are a lot of misconceptions circulating about self-employment.”

As a former Ivy Tech Community College instructor, Mazhandu feels comfortable in the classroom setting, and is one of several Indiana SBDC advisors who currently conduct the workshops for aspiring business owners in locations all around the state.

Adapted for correctional facility audiences, the “Launching Your Own Business” curriculum follows an eight-chapter Indiana SBDC workbook called “A Guide to Starting a Business” that Mazhandu hands out to all session participants. The first chapter is a self-assessment that helps attendees zero in on their professional goals and identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

“If the group is small enough, I like to make it interactive and get a feel for what kinds of businesses they are interested in pursuing,” Mazhandu says. “If someone says they want to start a food truck or fix

cars, for example, I try to work that into part of my presentation.”

Subsequent chapter slides touch on how to do market research, where to find helpful resources and managing operating costs, legal structures and business registrations. Mazhandu says the sessions she’s done thus far have been met with positive feedback.

“When I’m finished with the presentation, people always thank me for coming and tell me they find the information really useful and informative,” she says.

The more workshops Mazhandu does, the more interest in them seems to grow. For her, the most rewarding part of the project is knowing she’s planting seeds of knowledge that can make a real difference in someone’s life and future.

“There are always a few people in each class who I feel like the information truly reaches,” she shares. “I can tell when someone is interested, taking notes and really taking it seriously. My hope is that at the end of a session, these people have a much clearer view of how to get a business going and what their next steps need to be.” ➡

LEARN MORE AT: [ISBDC.ECENTERDIRECT.COM/EVENTS](https://isbdc.ecenterdirect.com/events)

KAREN'S UPSCALE RESALE

20%

INCREASE IN
INVENTORY AFTER
RELOCATING

116

ACRES MOWN
WEEKLY

ELKINS MOWING & LANDSCAPING

LARRY SCHWARTZ

01 EVANSVILLE, VANDERBURGH COUNTY City

02 2008 / 2022 Founded / Acquired

03 4 Number of employees

04 FACEBOOK.COM/KARENSUPSCALERESALE Web

PURE GREEN FARMS

GREENHOUSE LETTUCE LEAF-OUT
DISRUPTS PRODUCE MARKET

2.5M
POUNDS OF
PRODUCE SOLD

20+
PRODUCTS
AVAILABLE

HYMN & HERD FAMILY WINERY

JOE MCGUIRE

01	SOUTH BEND, ST. JOSEPH COUNTY	City
02	2018	Founded
03	13	Number of employees
04	ENJOYPUREGREEN.COM	Web

“[HYDROPONICS ARE] A GAME CHANGER THAT FIELD GROWERS ARE GOING TO HAVE TO GET USED TO.”
—JOE MCGUIRE

MILESTONE

ESTABLISHED





STATE SMALL BUSINESS CREDIT INITIATIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO PHOTOGRAPHED BY Marc Lebryk

HOW PENNY TRACKER AND PROJECTIONHUB ARE HELPING INDIANA SMALL BUSINESSES PUT THEIR BEST FINANCIAL FOOT FORWARD

The Indiana Economic Development Corporation is ensuring Hoosier entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses are beyond ready when seeking capital. Through Indiana's State Small Business Credit Initiative Technical Assistance (SSBCI TA) program, small businesses benefit from no-cost training and customized solutions from providers who are themselves small businesses, including Penny Tracker and ProjectionHub.

Kari Johnson noticed a lack of financial literacy among small businesses and inadequate financial documentation that was preventing access to funding. In 2020, she launched Penny Tracker, LLC, which offers bookkeeping services for small businesses along with QuickBooks training. With that expertise, Johnson was hired by the Indiana Small Business Development Center to teach QuickBooks.

"That opportunity allowed me to pivot from doing people's books to being a trainer," she says. Johnson was the recipient of an Indiana Technical Assistance Program (INTAP) grant which she used to produce her first online course covering foundational bookkeeping for small business owners.

With her passion for teaching, Johnson created a proprietary two-day workshop curriculum that schools entrepreneurs and small business owners in bookkeeping and accounting. "I'm addressing the challenge that many people struggle with—understanding financial reports and building strong bookkeeping skills," she says.

Then Johnson developed a hybrid (remote/in-person) curriculum that resonated with small business owners. Soon the East Central Small Business Development Center asked her to design a workshop for use statewide.

She works with clients to set up templates and the software integrations that

work specifically for their businesses. "I'm really excited about that component, and there will be a big need for this," she says. "After two days of my class, they get the basics of how the software works, but then can use it to make it work most efficiently for them."

Founded in 2012 by Adam Hoeksema and his brother Brandon, ProjectionHub helps small businesses construct cash flow projections that are attractive to potential lenders. "We tell the story in a way that's based on reasonable assumptions," says Adam. "The lender needs research and historical performance, and we're trying to show how a company's cash flow can repay a loan in the way the lender wants to see."

Prior to launching ProjectionHub, Adam worked as a lender for twelve years and Brandon was a software developer. "We started building out custom models that we eventually put up for sale on our website," says Adam. Services now include custom financial modeling, industry-specific templates, comprehensive Small Business Administration (SBA) loan process consultation and research-grounded financial assumptions. Says Adam: "We're expanding our services throughout the SBA process by assisting our clients from initial idea to securing the loan." ➡

AFTER TWO DAYS OF MY CLASS, THEY GET THE BASICS OF HOW THE SOFTWARE WORKS, BUT THEY CAN USE IT TO MAKE IT WORK MOST EFFICIENTLY FOR THEM.

KARI JOHNSON

LEARN MORE AT: [IEDC.IN.GOV/SSBCI/SSBCI-TECHNICAL-ASSISTANCE](https://iedc.in.gov/ssbci/ssbci-technical-assistance)

CLUTCH FABRICATION AND DESIGN

OLD SCHOOL SKILLS MEET TECH
AT EXPANDING FAB COMPANY

JOSH & ROSE SMITH

01	BLOOMINGTON, MONROE COUNTY	City
02	2014	Founded
03	7	Number of employees
04	CLUTCHFAB.COM	Web

“WE JUST TRY TO DO GOOD WORK AND KEEP OUR NAME GOOD. THAT’S ALLOWED US TO REALLY HAVE GOOD CUSTOMERS WHO TRUST US.”
—JOSH SMITH



Clutch has averaged 8-10% annual growth.

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Alex Kumar

Josh and Rose Smith have used old-school skills to build a fast-growing company, Clutch Fabrication and Design, but they expect new technologies to frame up an even bigger future.

Josh Smith launched the Bloomington-based company in 2011 as an LLC before he and his wife, Rose, a co-owner, incorporated in 2014.

Clutch designs, creates, installs and maintains everything from metal hand railings to awnings, from architectural touches like ornate doors and decorative gates to mailboxes, counter-tops and rustic and modernist furniture. They also consult on a wide range of structural designs.

“I don’t know if there’s really anybody I would call a competitor that does exactly what we do,” Josh says. “There are others doing similar stuff, but they’re mostly smaller scale.”

Their customer base is 60% to 80% residential, with most of the balance in commercial work, but they are moving toward growing the commercial side, Josh says.

Except for the years 2023 and 2024, when most construction-related companies saw business drop, Clutch has averaged 8 to 10% annual growth, according to Rose.

Most of their work has been in Central and Southern Indiana, and growing alongside Bloomington-based builders has helped build their reputation, Josh says.

“We just try to do good work and keep our name good,” he says. “That’s allowed us to really have good customers who trust us.”

They built Clutch’s reputation the way they handle their projects: one step at a time and with a lot of skill.

“The first ten years were lean years because we started with nothing, buying every single tool; every single thing was purchased,” Rose says. “Then, we increased our work over the months and years.”

New technology is likely to take their successes to a new level, according to Josh.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is streamlining their administrative operations, while new technologies have significantly cut time spent on projects.

A new computer numerical control tube cutter transforms designs into everything from details like tabs and slots to lengths of tube neatly and accurately. What previously took four hours can now be done in ninety minutes, Josh says, freeing up that team member to work on other projects.

It also creates new revenue streams. Most companies don’t have such equipment, so they will pay Clutch for their services, turning new equipment into competitive advantages.

Clutch’s growth projections are as solid as structural steel, Josh says, with growth likely to double in the next year or so.

“Now people are spending more,” he says. “We’re set with our people and our technology and the customers to start really ramping up.” ➡

EARTHWISE FINDS GREENER PASTURES WITH THRIVA

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Scott Severson grew up on a 23,000-acre farm in Northwest Indiana that his father managed. In 1997, Scott and his wife, Annmarie, would return to his old stomping grounds, this time as environmental consultants for its new occupant: Fair Oaks Farms.

The Seversons had recently launched EarthWise, a consulting firm specializing in sustainable environmental and engineering solutions, out of their one-bedroom apartment. Their work to that point had come primarily with municipalities and industries to find agricultural uses for waste byproducts.

Their relationship with Fair Oaks Farms established a foundation of dairy industry clients that would enable EarthWise to grow to seven employees, move into a traditional office space in Valparaiso and expand their offerings into a new area of potential revenue.

Over its twenty-eight-year history, EarthWise has helped dairy clients with everything from water monitoring to CFO regulatory compliance to renewable natural gas projects.

In 2019, Bos Dairy, Fair Oaks Farms’ parent company, faced a challenge stemming from the sheer amount of cow manure their feed stock produced. “We’re constantly searching for value in waste streams,” Annmarie says.

In partnership with Bos Dairy, EarthWise developed a process to produce a liquid ammonium nitrogen fertilizer derived from on-farm generated manure. While nitrogen fertilizer is inexpensive for large-scale farming operations, it represents a major expense for organic farmers. EarthWise saw a golden opportunity.

In 2019, EarthWise met with Lorri Feldt, Regional Director of the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, who connected them with the resources needed to develop their idea.

Scott likened the arduous process of developing a product for market with approaching a seemingly never-ending series of pastures. “When you come to a fence, you can see across the pasture to the next fence, but you don’t know what’s on the other side,” Scott says. “When you get to the next fence, you ask yourself, ‘Am I going to open this gate or not?’ We’ve had people helping us at each gate.”

In 2025, EarthWise opened another gate, launching Thriva, an organic ammonium nitrogen fertilizer.

Thriva helps clients lower manure handling costs and promote environmental compliance. And, because Thriva is approved for use in certified organic production by the Organic Materials Review Institute, it can be sold to organic crop farming operations and home gardeners as a 100% all natural, organic fertilizer.

Thriva earned EarthWise Indiana’s 2025 Innovative Small Business of the Year Award from the Indiana Small Business Development Center—and a visit from Governor Mike Braun. “The recognition this past year has been a shot in the arm,” Annmarie says, “and validation for years of hard work that got us here.”

Earth

A large photograph of Patrick Henshaw, a man with curly brown hair and a beard, wearing a colorful plaid blazer over a white shirt. He is sitting in a brown leather armchair, smiling and looking towards the right. He is holding a black microphone in his right hand. A smartphone is resting on the arm of the chair next to him.

RENDER CAPITAL

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPH BY Charlie Garwood, Courtesy of Render Capital

TOP 10%



performance of the world's venture capital funds, according to Cambridge Associates' recent benchmark data.

LEVERAGING INDIANA'S UPSIDE MARKET WITH LOYALTY

It's not every day that an investor turns down a \$100 million exit offer.

THE FROZEN GARDEN

400%
GROWTH OVER FIRST
FOUR YEARS

1,800
INDIANA HOMES
POWERED ALL YEAR

GAI ENERGY

FROM LOCALLY-SOURCED PRODUCE
TO MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR HEALTH
FOOD COMPANY

ALLYSON STRAKA

01 VALPARAISO, PORTER COUNTY	City
02 2015	Founded
03 10	Number of employees
04 THEFROZENGARDEN.COM	Web

“HOPEFULLY, IN FIVE YEARS,
WE’LL BE FIVE TIMES THE
SIZE WE ARE NOW.”
—ALLYSON STRAKA



*The Frozen
Garden began
in 2015 with
a 500-square-
foot kitchen.*

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Gabrielle Minion

When Allyson Straka started Frozen Garden in 2015, she and two team members could produce up to 200 frozen smoothie pouches a day.

Nine years later, the company has ten employees and can make over 1,000 smoothie packages a day with the same three-person smoothie team. The last four years has seen the Valparaiso-based company grow 400% from the first four years, and Straka projects they'll reach seven times growth over the next four years and reach eight figures in annual revenue.

"It all started with getting people back into their kitchens, making real food from scratch instead of all the highly processed foods," Straka says.

In 2015, Straka launched Frozen Garden, using a 500-square-foot space rent-free for six months. She and her team began cutting lots of locally-sourced vegetables and fruits, flash freezing them and using environmentally friendly packaging.

Clients from a healthy eating company Straka previously owned began buying her new products, and the business grew, stocking grocery shelves and picking up high-end hotels, including some in the Marriott Bonvoy line.

The COVID-19 pandemic convinced Straka to focus exclusively on direct-to-consumer instead of stocking the shelves of hundreds of grocery stores, especially as more people chose to have food delivered to their homes.

Today, about 90% of Frozen Garden's business is direct-to-consumer, with the remainder in high-end hospitality locations, but Straka says she expects that to change to a seventy-thirty split in a few years.

Frozen smoothies make up 87% of her company's revenues, while other products, like rice and quinoa bowls, overnight oats and healthy deserts called "Delites" make up the rest.

A massive change Straka made was taking on strategic partners and investors in late 2024. Turning to the Indiana Economic Development Center and the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, Straka reconsidered her company's ownership, and she brought on Wade Breitzke as a partner and his firm, WeCreate Media, to handle marketing and strategic partnerships.

"At the end of 2023, I basically had the realization I had taken Frozen Garden as far as I could on my own, and I needed to get to the next step," Straka says.

Expanding into partnerships has moved the company to a much higher level, with visions of an explosion in revenue and more in Frozen Garden's future.

"Hopefully, in five years, we'll be five times the size we are now; even more than that is what we're really shooting for," Straka says, mostly made possible with the strategic partnerships. "It was definitely a piece which we were missing significantly." ➡➡

WRITTEN BY MEGAN FERNANDEZ PHOTOGRAPHED BY Marc Lebryk

The political headwinds have shifted around renewable energy. Federal funding and incentives are being slashed, and Hoosier solar energy companies face opposition to what some consider a "blue state" technology, according to Chris Rohaly, founder of solar supplier GAI Energy.

But Rohaly is persevering—and is optimistic about the future of clean energy in Indiana. "We're going to survive the environment. The value is going to be undeniable to all involved," he says. "In spite of tariffs and labor-market barriers, the continuing steep increases in energy demand and conventional utility pricing will continue to make self-generated power a viable option."

GAI is a solar energy system pioneer in Indiana. Started in 2008, the company designs, installs and maintains solar systems and microgrids for commercial, agricultural and residential clients.

The family-owned company has built a reputation for quality and customer service. Every project exceeds Indiana's standards, written before solar installations were common, and complies with the stricter best practices outlined in the 2020 National Energy Code, Rohaly explains.

Though there is much misinformation about the effect of solar fields on farmland, Rohaly understands some of the public's distrust. "Many homeowners nationally were taken advantage of by a large solar company a few years ago. The company used deceptive sales tactics, targeted the elderly and saddled people with debt," he says. That company shut down after a flurry of

state-level lawsuits. Many of their victims have turned to GAI to fix their broken systems.

"That's what has kept our phone ringing off the wall this year," Rohaly says. "We're local and they can trust us."

Interest in residential solar surged this year as the cut-off for federal tax credits moved up to the end of 2025. GAI believes it is poised to thrive without those incentives, too. Unlike competitors, the company handles a range of project scales, from a small 10 kilowatts installation to industrial-sized megawatt systems, as power bills are increasing across the board.

Recently, GAI designed systems for a solar project developer working with two large manufacturers in Indiana. And a Colorado client hired GAI to outfit a new "community resilience center"—a school gym that can double as a storm shelter, complete with solar and battery backup.

"I'm excited about the increasing sophistication of what we're able to offer, like an inverter battery system that makes it easy for people to check their power load from their phone," Rohaly says.

Rohaly credits the Indiana Small Business Development Center for its support as GAI refines its target markets. Says Rohaly, "the market data that is available through them is pretty amazing." ➡➡

CHRIS ROHALY

01 FLORA, CARROLL COUNTY	City

HOPWOOD CELLARS WINERY

GROWING A HOBBY
INTO A LIVELIHOOD

16 ACRE
VINEYARD &
PRODUCTION
FACILITY

20-30
(PET) PATIENTS
SERVED DAILY

LATIMER ANIMAL HOSPITAL, LLC

GROWING A COMMUNITY-
ROOTED VETERINARY
PRACTICE WITH HEART

RON HOPWOOD

01	ZIONSVILLE, BOONE COUNTY	City
02	2012	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	HOPWOODCELLARS.COM	Web

