

# Ivy Tech Extends its Education Corridor 'Miracle on Meridian Street'



he red velvet curtains had seen better days, but the “bones” of the building were strong. That was the assessment of Ivy Tech administrators who in 2010 first toured the former Stouffer Hotel property at 2820 N. Meridian St. in Indianapolis. For five years the community college’s two Jeffs—Jeff Terp, senior vice president for engagement and institutional efficiency, and Jeff Bricker, hospitality program chairman—had searched for a site large enough to accommodate the school’s expanding downtown enrollment.

**“Ivy Tech has one of the finest culinary programs in the nation, but it was located in one of the worst facilities,”** says Terp. **“We knew if we were going to meet the demands of the community and the state’s growing hospitality industry, we had to find better space.”**

Classrooms at the current location on Fall Creek Parkway had “maxed out,” according to Kathleen Lee, chancellor of the college’s Central Indiana region. The culinary program was shoehorned into a pair of outdated kitchens, distance-learning offices were scattered across the city, and Corporate College, the Ivy Tech division that designs workforce development courses for industry, had no place to grow.

Everyone agreed that an ideal expansion site would be one that adjoined Ivy Tech’s campus at Fall Creek Boulevard and Meridian Street so students could access the library, bookstore and tutoring programs. The school’s history of “adaptive reuse”—acquiring an old facility and giving it new purpose—prompted the leadership team to look less than a block north to the 13-story building that once was the city’s largest hotel. Home to an urban youth ministry, it had elegant features passed down from another era. Leaded-glass panels,

carved woodwork and a marble fireplace were part of the penthouse restaurant’s decor, salvaged by the hotel chain from the Van Camp mansion that occupied the land in the 1880s. The kitchen was outdated, but once renovated it could serve as a lab for culinary students hoping to work in an upscale dining establishment. Then there was the ballroom, setting for hundreds of proms and receptions in the past. With careful configuration, it could accommodate workshops and business conferences of all sizes.



## Room to grow

**“We kept looking at the site and thinking,** what’s going to happen to this structure that practically sits on our campus?” recalls Tom Snyder, president of Ivy Tech. After 18 months of conversation with the owner, Snyder had his answer. When the building became available for purchase in 2010, Lilly Endowment



**Good news travels fast.** Jeff Bricker and Kathleen Lee field frequent requests from restaurant owners who ask to tour the culinary center. A common comment from visitors: “We’ve heard a lot about this!”

provided a \$22.9 million grant to help the college acquire the property and transform it into a first-rate educational facility.

“We knew it had potential,” says Sarah Hempstead, the architect who oversaw the renovation. “What we really liked was the building’s size. It had rooms large enough to seat 500 people, plus a penthouse that Indianapolis residents were attached to because of its history. One of our first rules was to retain anything that remained from the Van Camp mansion.”

Assets aside, the building presented challenges. “It was out of date and falling into disrepair,” says Hempstead. “The mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems hadn’t been touched in years. We had a substantial amount of work to do, but we felt the location and structure made it a worthy project. The ‘bones’ were excellent.”

**Before Hempstead began her drawings,** Ivy Tech staff members scheduled site visits to community college campuses around the country to learn the successes and mistakes of their peers. The tour took them to Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio and Michigan. “We asked the schools: ‘If you had it to do over, what would you do differently?’” says Terp.



“We all agreed that every building around our perimeter is our responsibility,” says Tom Snyder (left). When the Stouffer property became available, architect Sarah Hempstead and Jeff Terp (right), accepted the challenge to “repurpose” it.

## Raising the roof

### Their findings drove up the cost of the project

but resulted in a facility better than their original vision. They replicated features that were successful at similar schools with similar programs. To attract business clients in need of training space, Hempstead added dividers that could carve the large rooms into a variety of sizes. To accommodate the placement of display monitors over culinary lab stations, she raised the roof of the kitchen wing by four feet. Exterior walls and windows remained intact as much as possible. Inside, the red velvet curtains gave way to the more conservative tones in place throughout the Ivy Tech system. Equipment in the kitchen areas was pricy but met industry expectations and came recommended by the culinary department’s advisory council.

“The joke at the beginning of the semester was that a visitor could identify our faculty chefs because they were the ones with bruises from pinching themselves,” says Lee. “They call the new building the ‘Miracle on Meridian.’ It’s where their dreams finally materialized.”

Special care was taken to make the kitchens efficient and environmentally friendly. “Our goal is to be a zero-waste facility,” says Bricker. For example, a pulping device reduces food products by 80 percent, and a dehydrating machine turns remaining waste into garden nutrients. Volunteers from Eli Lilly and Company helped build a raised bed during their annual Day of Service, and now students grow herbs for use in the kitchen.





To conserve energy, the lab dedicated to meat preparation was equipped with chilled countertops and cutting boards. “We thought about refrigerating the entire room, but that would require students to wear butcher jackets and gloves because of the cold,” explains Bricker. “This way the students are more agile and the environment is conducive to learning.”

### Unexpected benefits

**The culinary program moved into its quarters** in time for classes to meet in August. The impact was immediate. Enrollment inched close to 900 from 400 the year before, causing Bricker to add 43 percent more lab sessions. The extra space enabled him to implement a scheduling model he calls the “4 by 4” model because it has students taking lab classes four days a week for four weeks. The result is that “it’s possible for them to finish the program in 18 months instead of two years,” he explains. “That should favorably affect our retention rates.”

Snyder admits that retention is an ongoing challenge for community colleges. “Our greatest risk is the ‘wandering student,’” he says. “We want to get students in school and keep them on their career paths.” Motivation to stay in school is the promising job market that awaits them. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted an 18 percent increase in the number of



**Faculty Chef Anthony Blackburn is ably assisted by students** Michelle Phan, Andrew Lewis and Nelly Garcia. Rounding out the curriculum are classes in nutrition, human resources, accounting and restaurant management.

hospitality jobs in the Indianapolis area.

“The genuine hospitality people experience here is a difference-maker in winning convention business and drawing travelers to the region,” emphasizes Leonard Hoops, president and CEO of Visit Indy, the city’s destination marketing organization. “Hoosier Hospitality is a tangible asset for Indy, and students trained at Ivy Tech’s Culinary Center are integral to our future success.”

An unanticipated benefit of Bricker’s block-scheduling plan has been the sense of community that has evolved among students who take advantage of it. Friendships form when classmates progress in cohorts through their courses. They encourage each other and serve as a safety net when someone talks of dropping out. “They feel part of a team,” says Snyder.

### A community asset

**If the new facility is helping to create a learning community** within its walls, it’s also affecting the larger community that surrounds it. Ivy Tech’s expanding campus now stretches into a neighborhood engaged in

revitalization efforts. Chancellor Lee and her staff attended neighborhood association meetings to share their vision and ask for feedback as the Corporate College and Culinary Center project unfolded. “We’ve become involved with the neighborhood’s quality of life plan,” says Lee. “We know the residents are trying to attract businesses back to the area.”

Community and corporate leaders share Lee’s upbeat assessment. Among them, Daniel F. Evans Jr., president and CEO of IU Health, says, “The redevelopment puzzle is really coming together in this area that so many have tried for years to rebuild.” Located just a few blocks north of IU Health’s Methodist Hospital complex, the “Corporate College and Culinary Center is a big piece of the puzzle,” says Evans. “It’s an anchor of stability that will benefit all who live and work here.”

Progress toward encouraging additional economic development is likely as more programs move into the renovated building. The distance-learning department is on pace to relocate in 2013, and Corporate College is up and humming. “Our training programs served more than 25,000 Hoosiers last year in communities across the state,” says Matt Bell, president of Corporate College. “We consult with businesses to identify barriers that inhibit success. Then we design training solutions.”

**Among those who applaud Corporate College’s efforts** to ensure a skilled workforce is Steve Dwyer, president and CEO of Conexus Indiana, an organization that promotes Indiana’s advanced manufacturing and logistics industry clusters. “The variety and flexibility of Corporate College programs get good reviews from businesses in our clusters,” says Dwyer. “Corporate College is critical to our ability to attract, maintain and grow businesses.”

“Growth” is the operative word both for the economy and for Ivy Tech. With statewide enrollment projected to exceed 200,000 in 2014, it is Indiana’s largest higher education institution. “As businesses evolve and expand, so must the programs that Ivy Tech offers to prepare their future employees,” says Snyder.

The Corporate College and Culinary Center facility eventually plans to serve 25,000 persons annually in programs related to healthcare, life sciences, energy, logistics and hospitality. Bricker estimates the hospitality program has the potential to serve 1,500 students and might someday include a boutique hotel. “People used to say, ‘There’s nowhere around here to get a cup of coffee,’” says Lee about the Meridian Street neighborhood. “Now, with the addition of our student-run bakery, they have a place to stop and visit. We expect the building to become a gathering place for the neighborhood and a springboard for discussions about the future.”

