

WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE

Unique Region Makes New Plans



H heading south out of Indianapolis, the scenery begins to change within about 20 miles. Roads dip into hills, small towns and deep woods throughout southwest central Indiana.

It is an 11-county region with a spectacular landscape, home to the state's largest concentration of state forests, parks, lakes, and protected fish and wildlife areas.

But just as striking as the panoramic views are the impressive educational, community and business strengths in Brown, Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Lawrence, Martin, Monroe, Orange, Owen and Washington counties.

It is the only region in the state with a major research university—Indiana University in Bloomington—and a nearby federal lab at the Naval Support Activity Crane, a U.S. Department of Defense center of excellence in strategic systems support, special missions, weapons and technology support. The third largest naval installation in the world, NSA Crane supports more than \$2 billion annually in defense contracts. More than 1,100 engineers work at NSA Crane, and Martin County, where the base is located, has one of the highest concentrations of science, technology, engineering and math-related jobs in the nation.

Together, the university and NSA Crane employ more than 15,000 people, and the nearly 20 companies that support NSA Crane employ an additional 2,000. There also is a significant life sciences presence in the region, with companies like Cook Group Inc., Baxter and Boston Scientific. Information

Accessible by trail, Brown County State Park's Hesitation Point provides a striking vista of the park and surrounding region. Indiana's largest, most popular park attracts millions of visitors per year.

technology companies call the region home, as do manufacturers such as furniture and electronics supplier Kimball International in Jasper.

Along with IU, Ivy Tech Community College has worked as a local source for education and training. Brown County has long been a tourist destination, and more recently, French Lick with its casinos and nearby West Baden Springs Hotel have captured a growing segment of the travel and hospitality industry.



Leveraging shared resources

In 2012 Lilly Endowment gave a \$50,000 planning grant to the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP) Foundation, which supports the charitable and educational programs and activities of CICP, to conduct a study of the region and analyze its assets, resources, strengths and weaknesses.

Paul Mitchell, who leads CICP's energy cluster initiative, Energy Systems Network, directed the study to catalog the region's prospects and determine if there was sufficient interest to develop a more comprehensive plan.

As a former policy director for economic development, workforce and energy during Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels' administration, Mitchell was aware of the region's strengths, but he wasn't sure that leaders in the region realized just how rare and unique their combined assets could be—or whether they would be interested in joining forces.

"We knew there was a lot of potential in this part of the state," Mitchell says. "We didn't know if the community leaders themselves would come together and have the kind of reciprocity that you see in successful regional efforts."

But the initial planning grant revealed optimism from local leaders and coincided with the expansion of highway I-69 from Evansville to points near Crane and Bloomington. The longest contiguous new terrain interstate construction project in the country would put the region in an enviable position to attract new development.

With a second planning grant of \$650,000 from the Endowment in 2013, Phase II of the planning is underway, with a steering committee of regional leaders and stakeholders invested in the southwest central Indiana region leading the effort.

Tucked amid the trees in Martin County, Naval Support Activity Crane employs more than 1,100 engineers and supports more than \$2 billion annually in defense contracts.

“This is a group that is really excited and dedicated to approaching regional strategic planning,” Mitchell says. “I think they are motivated to build on those assets and market themselves as a world-class region.”

Dan Peterson, vice president of industry and government affairs of the Cook Group and chair of the planning initiative’s steering committee agrees. “The companies in this region face many similar opportunities and challenges.

We’ll definitely accomplish more if we think regionally and work together.”

Clear objectives and common goals

It is a region that Becky Skillman knows well. Born and raised in Bedford, the county seat of Lawrence County, Skillman started her career in public service as county clerk and later represented five counties in the region as state senator.

After two terms as Indiana’s lieutenant governor, Skillman is back to work in familiar territory as president and CEO of Radius Indiana, a regional economic development

partnership working to generate high-quality jobs and raise the standard of living in the area. She’s also on board as an enthusiastic member of the planning initiative’s steering committee.

“This region shares so much in common,” Skillman says. “You only need look at the commuting patterns of the workforce to see how connected we are,” Skillman says, noting that workers at NSA Crane, IU, Cook or Kimball may commute for up to two hours and may traverse more than one county to get to high-skilled, high-paying jobs.

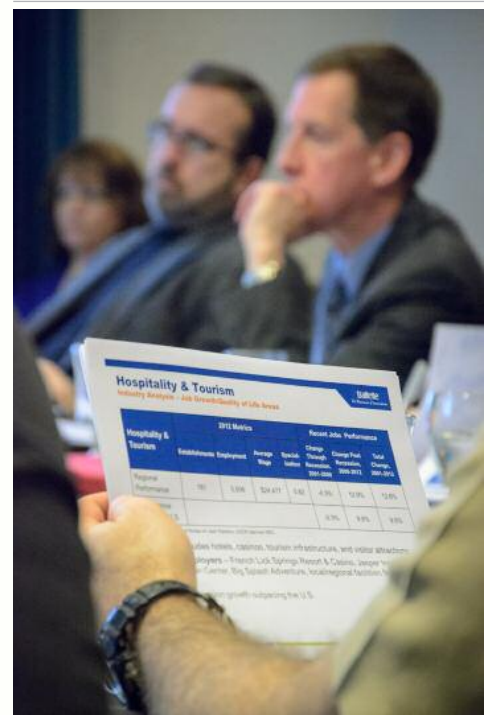
“Another asset that ties us together is the vast number of state and federal lands open to the public across our counties,” Skillman says. “We would love to be known to the nation, and to the world, as a center of innovation and natural beauty.”

Phase II of the plan will include

creating clear objectives and a timeline for developing entrepreneurial clusters in life sciences, energy, defense and information technology. Goals also include aligning education and workforce development programs with employer requirements, studying how federal laboratories connect with communities around the country, and enhancing technology transfer through stronger linkages between the federal laboratory at NSA Crane and research and business development activities at IU.



Cook Medical’s world headquarters in Bloomington is home to nearly 2,500 employees. That’s more than the total population of the nearby town of Spencer, Ind. (RIGHT) The planning initiative’s steering committee meets regularly to discuss southwest central Indiana’s opportunities and assets, including the region’s growing hospitality and tourism industry.



As a member of the steering committee, Skillman traveled throughout the region with Tina Peterson, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County, conducting “listening sessions” in communities served by 11 community foundations.

Each community foundation within the region is tackling different challenges in different ways, but each ranks education, workforce development, employment and quality of life as top priorities, Peterson says.

That’s true even in Bloomington, where IU has long provided both an economic and cultural base, says Bill Stephan, vice president for engagement at IU. Attracting and retaining high-skilled employees to work at the university and feed entrepreneurial growth in Bloomington, for example, has been an ongoing issue.

“We have a world-class university in a region with a great quality of life, but it’s still a struggle to attract and retain the necessary talent,” Stephan says. “We’re excited to bring IU’s vast intellectual and creative resources to the table as we work together to create a comprehensive plan for our region.”

Interesting demographic challenges exist across southwest central Indiana. Twenty-five school corporations serve the region, which has a total population of 400,000 people spread across a mostly rural area. There are 48 incorporated towns and cities; only three have populations of more than 12,000, with Bloomington the largest at 81,000, followed by Jasper with 15,000 people.

Yet the region also is just an hour away from three major metropolitan areas, including Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Louisville.

“We sit right in the middle of everything, a heart with all these different arteries,” Tina Peterson says. “We have all been part of regional efforts but have not formed an identity of our own. We just haven’t had the opportunity to bring those resources together, and that’s really what the Endowment grant allows us to do.”

It is unlikely that a similar effort could have been undertaken without the grant, Skillman adds. “These are rural counties with limited funding,” she notes. “We recognize that this is a very rare opportunity.”

Hope and opportunity

While investment in the southwest central Indiana region planning effort is new, the Endowment’s support for leveraging regional resources to create greater opportunities is not.

More than 23 years ago, the Endowment embarked on five phases of the Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT) initiative, which helped launch or support community foundations that serve every one of Indiana’s 92 counties.



Battelle Technology Partnership Practice Senior Program Manager Deborah Cummings shares research findings and facilitates a steering committee discussion of the region’s economic development strategy.

Those community foundations—including those in the southwest central Indiana region—make a local impact, serving as conveners on community needs and as vehicles for formulating strategies and marshalling resources. Over time, the assets of the community foundations regularly participating in the GIFT initiative have grown—from approximately \$30 million in 1990 to more than \$1.5 billion today—proving that the community foundation model

has been an effective way to enhance the prosperity and quality of life in Indiana communities.

Building on that success, the Endowment in 2007 began a series of efforts to work with selected community foundations to help Indiana communities maximize compelling opportunities and distinctive advantages in their regions.

The first was a strategic collaborative initiative called Economic Opportunities 2015 (EcO15), designed among other things to take fuller advantage of the location of a new Honda manufacturing plant and the expected expansion of the operations of Cummins Inc. in a 10-county region of southeastern Indiana. Spearheaded by the community foundation in Columbus, EcO15 has

addressed critical education and workforce development issues in the region and helped align education and workforce development programs with employer needs.

In 2009 the Endowment worked with the community foundation in Fort Wayne to create the Talent Opportunity Success 2015 (TOpS) initiative to expand the availability of high-skilled workers for an 11-county northeast Indiana region. While TOpS has benefited a broad range of constituents, it was designed to have a special focus on the region’s significant defense and aerospace industry. That same year, the Endowment helped the Kosciusko County Community Foundation establish the OrthoWorx initiative focused on maximizing orthopedics-related opportunities in the Warsaw community, which is known as the Orthopedics Capital of the World. OrthoWorx has given orthopedics companies a venue for shared community goals, educational efforts and philanthropy.

It’s still early in the planning process, and the southwest central Indiana region has different geography and resources, but strategic partnerships among the strong community foundations, educational institutions and the corporate community can provide similarly successful results, says CICIP President and CEO David Johnson.

“The region stands to gain an identity and a brand that will help define it for the future. What is this region going to be known for? What is its potential for economic development?”

Those are questions these efforts ask people to consider, according to Johnson. “It forces people to stand back and consider their future, but it’s also a validation of potential and of hope and opportunity,” he says.



Steering committee members Becky Skillman (LEFT) and Tina Peterson traveled throughout the region to conduct “listening sessions” with local residents. “We would love to be known to the nation, and to the world, as a center of innovation and natural beauty,” says Skillman.