

Staying Ahead of the Curve

New Approaches Leading to Big Dividends

By Rebecca Patrick

They're singing a new tune in Wayne County, one they believe resonates loud and clear. "We've changed the way we look at economic development to include a broader focus of initiatives. We are embracing areas such as life sciences, advanced manufacturing and tourism that 10 years ago were probably considered non-traditional segments for us and not given as much attention," offers Dennis Andrews, president of the Richmond-Wayne County Chamber of Commerce and former mayor of Richmond.

This shift in mentality has helped put Richmond and the surrounding communities in good standing. Major hubs for varied business attraction are already in place: the Midwest Industrial Park and Innovation Center, both in Richmond, and the Indiana Gateway Industrial Park in Cambridge City, with more on the way.

Factor in strategic planning, cutting-edge technology and an array of community offerings, and Richmond area civic and business leaders believe they now have a winning lineup for the 21st century.

And it's not going unnoticed.

In "The New Rating Guide to Life in America's Small Cities" by Kevin Heubusch, the atmosphere in Richmond ranks 13th best in the nation – based on criteria including community assets, economics, education, environment, health care, housing and transportation. All things that can make existing companies want to stay, plus put the city in play for companies looking to relocate.

"Last year, we had 39 site visits from companies and site selectors. That's a big thing because if we can get them on our turf to show them what we have, we stand a chance of finding them the ideal situation here in the county," assesses Bill Martus, president and CEO of the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) of Wayne County.

Best practices

Martus believes that the area's main asset is likely its location, situated along Interstate 70 and close to other major roadways. As a result, manufacturing and distribution logistics remain high on the list of interested industries.

Technology is another advantage says Renee Oldham, director of Main Street Richmond-Wayne

Downtown Richmond's Historic Depot District is seeing a resurgence; Earlham College represents one of Wayne County's strong suits: higher education.



County. "We have an amazing broadband system (both fiber optics and wireless) in our community thanks to Richmond Power & Light.

"They did a wonderful job in the connectivity opportunities, especially for potential new companies coming into our community that need that type of access. ... They really have reached out to strengthen the whole county." (Both of the region's industrial parks have wireless systems).

Like much of Indiana, Wayne County epitomized the classic Rust Belt communities: fairly dependent on traditional manufacturing. The picture now, after globalization, is one that clearly shows the need for workforce development.

On the positive side, Richmond has the necessary tools for retraining thanks to its four major higher education institutions: Earlham College, Indiana University East, Ivy Tech Community College and Purdue University.

"It's a huge thing to get our people trained for the type of jobs that are the future. If we have a well-trained workforce, we'll be competitive in the attraction side of things," Martus surmises.

One development that's already made Richmond quite appealing for those in the restaurant industry is the creation of a riverfront district that, regardless of quotas, allows for three-way liquor licenses (wine, beer and liquor) to be purchased by businesses for just the cost (\$1,000) of the actual license.

"This really lends itself to those people who are entrepreneurs, just starting out, and have a restaurant concept that they would like to try," Oldham states. "The ability to add the three-way liquor license component makes them a lot more viable and successful early on."

Familiar places get new look

Currently making quite an impression on the Wayne County landscape are two entrepreneurial brothers and natives of Centerville.

In 2005, Tom and Mike Dickman bought the large Carpenter Building, which had been the site for major bus (school and coach) production until its closing five years earlier.

Despite the condition of the vacant property, Tom Dickman saw promise and had a vision for turning it into the Rose City Business Park.

"I'm a real estate appraiser and knew that the area along I-70 had great potential. However, when we bought it, it was a real eyesore," he admits. "We like a challenge though, too, and are doing a complete renovation."

The makeover – consisting of new landscape, asphalt and exterior to "catch people's attention" – on the approximately 535,000 square foot facility is more than 60% complete, reports Dickman.

In terms of what types of businesses Dickman hopes will make the Rose City Business Park home, it's across the board. "We want to target everybody, but understand that, given the available space, it will naturally have appeal to warehouse distribution companies."

The first tenant, Crate Creations, which makes a variety of wooden crates and displays for supermarkets, came in late spring of this year, with additional companies currently showing interest in relocating to the facility.

The Dickman brothers intend to be residents of the park as well, as they finalize plans to start their own thermal panel

home building manufacturing business.

"The goal is to have 500 or more jobs upon completion of the park," offers Tom Dickman. "Ultimately, we believe it could spur growth all along that exit, with developers coming in to build restaurant, hotel and retail properties."

Meanwhile, on the north side of Richmond, the Dickmans – Tom, Mike and three additional family members – joined forces with two Georgia businessmen in May to buy the current Reid Hospital campus. The group, Whitewater Living Center, will receive the 46.7 acres owned by Reid and 13 acres of city land the hospital is using. (The hospital plans to vacate the existing campus for its new location by November 2007).

At the sale announcement, Mike Dickman said, "We are excited to begin the process to transform this property into important new uses and to allow for this well-maintained campus to continue being a strong economic center in the Richmond and Wayne County region."

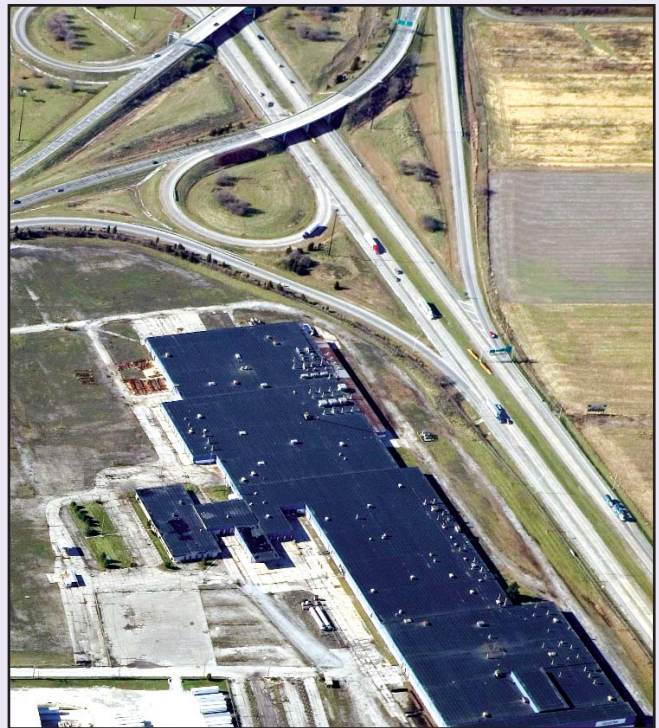
The Whitewater Living Center partners envision the campus will house a mix of economic development efforts: retail, restaurant, office and residential use.

Taking a tour

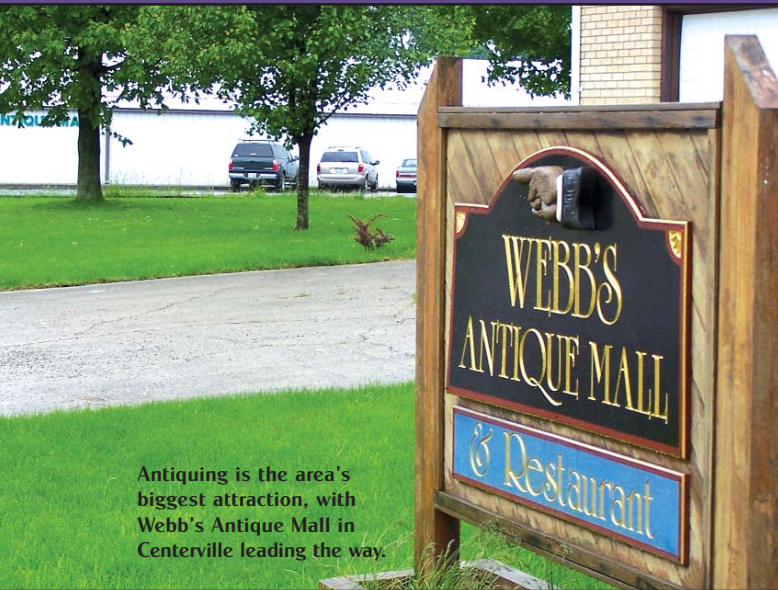
One niche in high gear for Wayne County is tourism. On the state line, Richmond is home to the Indiana Welcome Center.

Nancy Sartain, leisure market manager for Richmond-Wayne County Convention & Tourism, says the organization receives 8,000 inquiries annually, which breaks down to approximately 30 per business day.

Heading the list of attractions is Antique Alley, a section of U.S. 40 – aka the National Road – that is famous for its many



When the renovation is complete, the Rose City Business Park, off of I-70 in Richmond, hopes to house 500 or more jobs.



Antiquing is the area's biggest attraction, with Webb's Antique Mall in Centerville leading the way.

antique shops. Centerville, which is home to Webb's antique mall, Indiana's largest, is considered the hub of activity and was voted one of the "Top 10 Antique Destinations" by *Midwest Living Magazine*.

"Antiquing is definitely how we pull most of our visitors into the county. Because of the number of antique dealers in the area, visitors can't do it in one day, so we encourage them to spend one or two nights and take it all in," Sartain explains.

Coming in a close second to antiques is the historic National Road itself, which like Richmond, celebrates its 200th birthday this year.

"You wouldn't believe the number of people who come into the welcome center that are traveling the entire route of the road from Cumberland, Maryland to Vandalia, Illinois," Sartain notes. "They just want to get off the interstate, see real America and experience the first federally funded highway, and travel on the road that the pioneers did."

"The architecture along the national road is just fabulous," she continues. "Centerville has architecture that you don't find anywhere else in Indiana; the row houses with archways connecting row houses with archways."

Another popular attraction is the Levi Coffin House in Fountain City. "It's the Grand Central Station of the Underground Railroad as more than 2,000 slaves were ushered through the house to freedom, and not one was ever captured," Sartain recounts. "It's a beautiful facility where you can see the actual hiding places of the slaves."

There's plenty more history to tap into as well. "We're trying to build upon the jazz heritage from Gennett, the Richmond company that produced many early recordings of jazz," Martus notes. "We want to build on things like that to further attract people. We recognize that tourism is a big part in the total scheme of things here."

Adds Andrews, "Tourism business has an important impact on sustaining as well as expanding local businesses, especially retail. Those dollars are an infusion to our economy."

Other initiatives, success stories

The revitalization of downtown Richmond is another significant focus.

The Innovation Center, in place for two years now, helps new entrepreneurs who have ideas that they need to work on or expand, similar to an incubator-type operation.

Oldham reports that that the facility is 80% occupied and includes three companies. "We also have 22 businesses that we're currently working with that are in some stage of developing an idea or working on a business plan that have expressed interest in starting a business in our community."

Investments are also taking place in what is known as the Historic Depot District, which comprises four city blocks and includes the 1902-built Pennsylvania Railroad Station as its focal point. "We've seen new businesses come in, new retail establishments, housing and entertainment components to an area that really has taken about 20 years to see come to fruition." Oldham states.

The life sciences arena is also seeing more activity.

"Taconic Farms, a supplier of lab animals to universities and drug manufacturers for research, just opened up around the first of the year out in the Gateway Park. That is our first attraction of an outside life science group," Martus notes. "We are trying to grow what we have in life sciences and also do some things on attractions."

Martus also tells of a rather unique initiative involving Japanese companies.

"A couple of years ago, a local Japanese company had space available in their operation, which led to starting up a foreign parts incubator. The original idea was to attract to this area the small suppliers to the Japanese automakers," he explains.

"We now have four Japanese companies in that incubator. ... These small companies really had never been out of Japan before and don't know how to operate offshore. They come here without good language capabilities, not knowing how government works or how to do business here. With this incubator, we are able to help them get established."

One of the Japanese companies has expanded to the point where it is on the verge of outgrowing its space, so the local EDC is assisting with determining where the next move will be.

"The nice thing about working with these businesses is that, in Japan, these types of small companies communicate with each other, so when they have a success over here, they all know about it," Martus explains. "Then when that company is ready to come to the U.S., they will likely come here."

With so many varied and viable initiatives, Oldham believes that Wayne County's greatest niche may be that it has created an environment in which opportunity exists.

"We want to make it easy for people to invest money. We want to make this a place where people can make money," she declares. "We want to make it easier for them in a variety of different spectrums across the board, whether it's a mom-and-pop business or a life science company. There's a place for all of them here."

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