

# BEDFORD

## Community of the Year

**W**hat do you do when your community loses its largest employer, unemployment numbers skyrocket and the future looks bleak? If you live in Bedford, the answer is simple: Pick yourself up, dust off and figure out something new.

That was the reality for the small city of 14,000 people in south central Indiana during the height of the Great Recession. Auto manufacturing was a major industry – and it was failing with the county’s largest employer, Visteon Corporation, closing its doors, and Dana Corporation in nearby Mitchell departing as well. GM Powertrain Bedford (the remaining auto manufacturer) faced an uncertain future with its parent company in bankruptcy and a reduced workforce.

But that didn’t stop citizens, city leaders, business owners and other partners from fighting to keep their community afloat. And as local business leader Doug Kellams tells it, they dove headfirst into new ventures.

“Instead of us sitting back as a community and (saying) ‘Let’s have our pity party and wow, this has turned out really bad,’ We put our big boy and big girl pants on and said, ‘You know, let’s get through this,’ ” he recalls. “It’s a big picture of how our community came together.”

And they got through it – unemployment is down, new industries are thriving, there’s a renewed focus on the population’s health, particular attention is being paid to education and workforce development, and the city is earning accolades for small business success. To top it off, Bedford was designated a Stellar Community by the state (bringing with it millions of dollars for additional city improvements) earlier this year. Momentum is building.

Everyone involved in this conversation has emphasized that a true community-wide effort was what turned the tide for Bedford.

The following came together to discuss the city’s renaissance:

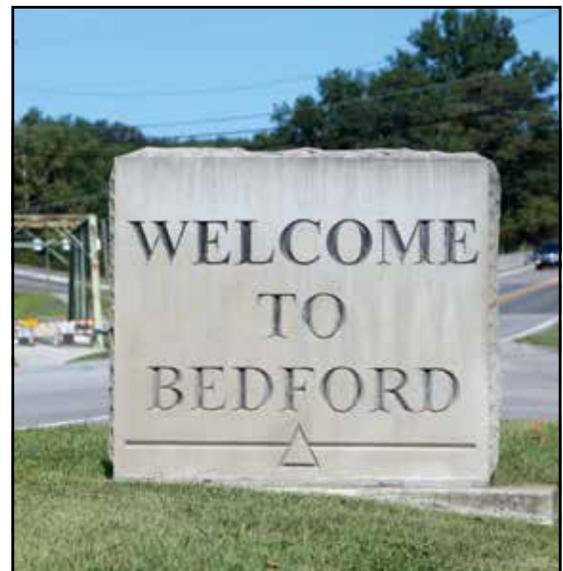
- Mayor Shawna Girgis
- Jamie Medlock, president, Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce
- Becky Skillman, president and CEO, Radius Indiana
- Gene McCracken, executive director, Lawrence County Economic Growth Council
- Eric Marvin, executive director, Lawrence County Tourism Commission
- Doug Kellams, owner, East Gate Business & Technology Center
- Shelley Kenworthy, executive vice president, Bedford Federal Savings Bank
- Joey Elliott, executive vice president, Indiana Steel & Engineering Corp.
- Eric Gonzales, plant manager, GM Powertrain Bedford

Marvin is just a few months into his new role at the tourism commission. He’s excited to promote the changes that are occurring in the city.

“When you boil it down, it’s about community development. Everything you do that enhances your quality of life and quality of place is a positive impact on tourism,” he asserts. “Really, these people are doing my job for me. Honestly, I’ve come in at the right time, because what’s going on right now is going to really have a huge impact down the road.”

### Back from the brink

When the recession first started to affect the city’s auto manufacturing industry, no one anticipated just how bad it could get.



By Charlee Beasor



Mayor Shawna Girgis (left) and Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce President Jamie Medlock represent a group of young, diverse professionals instilling new energy into the city.



**GM Powertrain Bedford is the remaining vestige of the county's once dominant auto manufacturing industry. The plant has garnered over \$300 million in investment from General Motors and is one of only three GM foundries in the country.**

"It gave me great heartburn as lieutenant governor to see such high unemployment numbers in my home county," Skillman laments. "This county's numbers nearly matched northern Indiana ... and that was national news about Elkhart's unemployment rate, and yet we were suffering right here."

GM Powertrain Bedford had cut its workforce to under 400, from over 1,000 in peak times. It was a staple in the community's major industry – and there was no guarantee it would endure.

Plant management and local union leaders joined forces to determine ways to streamline the plant and ensure its survival. McCracken says redefined job descriptions were a major part of the streamlining process. He calls the plant "an example for the country."

Today, it employs just over 600 and is one of only three foundries in the General Motors operation. GM has invested \$306 million in the Bedford plant since 2006, with part of that earmarked for components for small gas engines, as well as six-speed and new eight-speed transmissions. The 2012 wages were over \$46 million.

Gonzales points to the community making sure it drives into

**The city diversified into new industries. East Gate Business & Technology Center is home to several technology and industrial companies with defense contracts.**



new industries and doesn't just rely on what's worked in the past.

"I'm really proud of this plant, but I'm proud of what this community is trying to do. I think this community is trying to diversify as they go forward, not just be reliant on General Motors or any particular industry. They're drawing in things that will sustain this community no matter what might come their way," he shares.

## Branching out

One way the city has diversified is to focus on national defense technology. It's in a prime position to do that, in the middle of Indiana's "defense triangle," with close proximity to Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division, Camp Atterbury and Muscatatuck Urban Training Center.

A major player in the city's efforts to build up the defense industry is East Gate Business & Technology Center, housed in the former Visteon facility. It offers manufacturing and office space for technology and industrial companies.

Kellams and his family purchased the building in 2008, with plans to attract a major industrial employer. Timing, however, was not on their side.

"Nobody gave me the memo that the economy was going to tank," he remarks. "My wife and I had already picked out the spot in the office that we were going to live (in case the facility remained empty)."

It never came to that for the family, however. Smaller companies with defense contracts began moving in to East Gate.

"Doug made this huge leap of faith by purchasing that Visteon building. This community essentially had to reinvent itself and understand their strengths and assets and what industry sectors they wanted to go after. That's exactly what happened," Skillman proudly highlights. "Now you see that building, it's not at capacity, but it's getting there."

## Batter up, young professionals

Community leaders have specific passions for certain aspects of the city's growth. Girgis attests hers is education, including the combining of the separate Boys Club and Girls Club into

one organization, which was completed this year.

For Marvin, a new trail system is something he's looking forward to promoting. But he also points to the benefits of attracting younger people to the region through updated amenities.

"Some of the steps that are being taken to attract somewhat of a younger crowd are the keys in all this. Through the Stellar process, we're working on trails, working on adding some of the quality of life (pieces) that are going to attract people here, not only from a tourism standpoint, but also for the people that live here," he contends. "I can't reiterate the teamwork thing enough. I sensed that immediately when I started talking to community leaders here; that alone was what sold me (on the job)."

Skillman detected that increased vibrancy for Bedford when she returned to live and work in her hometown following eight years in Indianapolis.

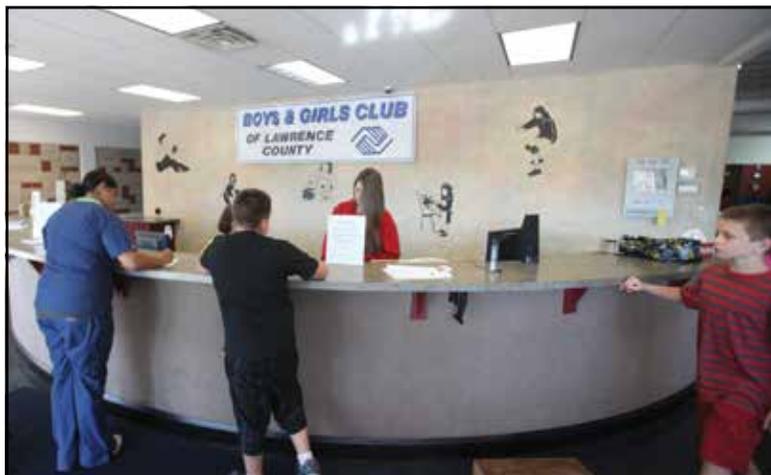
"I had a pleasant surprise when I came home; I felt a much more prominent sense of community here," she describes. "A great deal of credit goes to business leaders and so many young professionals who are engaged in attempting to move the community forward."

Those young leaders include Girgis, Medlock and Marvin. Girgis, the city's first female mayor (and first independent mayor) was just 36 when elected in 2007. Medlock, at age 28, returned to her hometown after being senior policy analyst for Skillman in the Statehouse. And Marvin, 27, spent time in Bloomington before taking the position at the tourism commission in his wife's hometown.

"I do think that Bedford is a place where younger people want to be. ... It's becoming a place where not just my grandparents can be in leadership," Girgis offers. "Young people are stepping up and being leaders."

Medlock notes that people attending her board meetings span from their twenties to those

**One of the ways the community collaborated was by pulling the Boys Club and the Girls Club into one operation, enabling the organization to utilize available resources more effectively.**



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## Built on Solid Rock

One of Bedford's claims to fame is its rich history as the "Limestone Capital of the World." Bedford limestone can be found in monuments and buildings in Washington D.C., New York City, Indianapolis and around the world.

The industry is still active today, though not quite to the extent it once was. But it still plays a large part in tourism for the city and the region.

"A lot of people are interested in our heritage, and obviously the local people are very interested, but we do get people here who are specifically interested in the history (of limestone)," Marvin offers. "This area obviously has a really rich natural landscape and limestone is a huge part of that."

The county celebrates June as Limestone Month with events that highlight local artisans, opportunities for tours, carving demonstrations and even the chance to participate in limestone carving. Nearby Spring Mill State Park also hosts limestone events.

Elliott says limestone attracted his family to the area in the early 1900s and his great-grandfather started the Bedford Foundry & Machine Company.

"At one time, Bedford Stone Working Machinery produced 90% of all the stone machinery in the country. He (Elliott's great-grandfather) wanted to name all his equipment Bedford: Bedford Crane, Bedford Diamond Saw, Bedford Derricks," he notes.

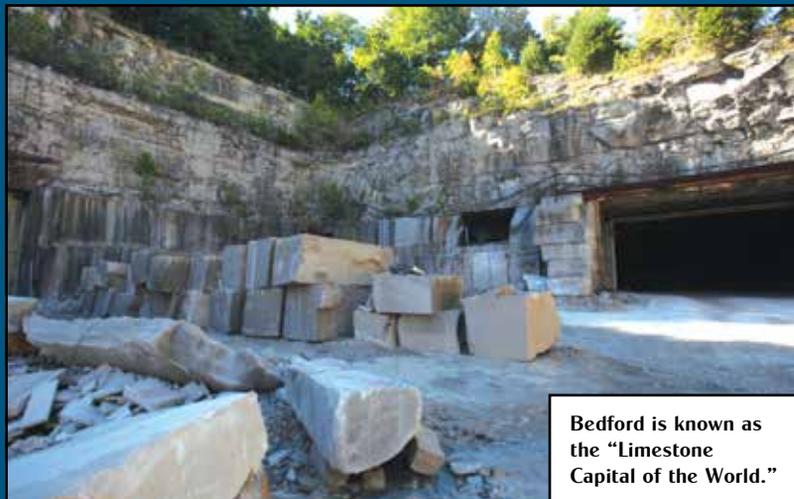
Skillman also recalls that her first trade mission to China as lieutenant governor had a tie to Bedford limestone.

"There's a life-size limestone buffalo in the West Lake Park in Zhejiang province, placed there by (former governor) Bob Orr, contributed by the city of Bedford to commemorate the sister state relationship," she explains. "When I visited for the first time to China, leading a trade mission for the state, the officials there couldn't wait to show me this life-sized buffalo because they knew it was from my hometown."

Medlock points to the sister state relationship with China as something that is still developing and notes that Bedford limestone continues to play an important role.

"Just last year when we were in China, it was the 25th anniversary of the sister state relationship with the Zhejiang province. Bedford limestone was presented as the gift last June, just like it was from Gov. Orr," she shares.

The gift was a five-foot piece of limestone carved into the shape of the state of Indiana with a Chinese proverb that reads "When one has a close friend in this world, the far ends of heaven are like next door."



Bedford is known as the "Limestone Capital of the World."

in their sixties – but really, age doesn't matter when everyone shares the same goal: improving Bedford.

"There's really no age barrier. Everybody really is working together. It's not self-serving to help people; people want to (help), and we have fun with it," she says.

Girgis contends that everything is converging to draw people back home.

"We want to be a place where, yeah, you can go to work here, but you can choose to live here if you choose some other community to work in, or (you can work) electronically, however you do your job," she shares. "We want to be here. To me, that's major progress. Jamie went away, she could be gone too (but she came back). Anything they want to do, they can (do) here."

For people – particularly young people – wanting to stay in Bedford, moving there or returning home is a major change, Skillman attests.

"From a business perspective, nothing makes us happier than a young couple that wants to stay here, raise a family here. I see that happening, more so today than in past decades," she maintains.

## Brand new 'Stellar' impact

One of the first steps the city undertook in 2010 was to update the comprehensive plan. It hadn't been touched in 25 years. Girgis describes getting citizens to buy-in to the process.

"I really tried to reach out in the community, and we could not fit in this building (Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce office); it was all of these people (gesturing to those in the interview), plus a whole bunch of other people. We tried to engage people and get their opinion," she explains.

After two previous attempts at major funding from the state, Bedford was chosen as a Stellar Community by the Office of Rural and Community Affairs earlier this year. Between the money from the state and fundraising efforts locally, the city has over \$19 million available for a number of improvements and upgrades.

The Stellar Community program began under the direction of then-Lieutenant Governor Skillman. She affirms it was "a little strange for me to be on the other side of the table" in determining the winning communities, of which there are just two each year (the other 2013 recipient was Richmond).

"But as I sat back to witness the entire presentation, I was blown away. By Bedford's presentation, this (win) was so obvious. Putting

this presentation together did not happen overnight; there were years of work that were leading up to the finale, if you will,” Skillman recalls.

“Let me just say, as the president and CEO of Radius Indiana (an eight-county economic development initiative), we are reaching out to companies in the state, country and world and Bedford makes our job much easier because they understand if you improve your quality of place, it makes quite a difference in the competition for new jobs.”

Members of the private sector dug into their pockets to help fund the Stellar investment. Medlock points to an example of how the business community stepped up.

“Last year, one of the communities that won, they had one company that gave a million dollars. We don’t have that here, but we said that doesn’t matter, we can go collectively. This is a community project. So, everybody has ownership and we actually raised more than that (million) without (just) one person writing us a check,” she shares. “We’re certainly not afraid of hard work in this community.”

Kenworthy and her husband, Jack, run Bedford Federal Savings Bank, the only locally-owned community financial institution. She put it simply about their efforts for the Stellar fundraising: “We love this place.”

“One of the main focuses of our bank is to take care of our community, whether that’s to help somebody get their first home, or get a joint project with the Boys and Girls Club. We

make sure our employees are involved,” she adds. “A lot of young people, they’re starting to get it. They’re starting to understand that it’s important. We want our young people that leave to feel like they want to come back home.”

Kellams looks back on his efforts for community improvement.

“If you’re passionate about your community, it comes so easily,” he notes. “It goes back to helping the youth of our community. . . . You want some way to just put a mark on that, say ‘I was involved in that.’ ”

Lawrence County also offered a \$500,000 match for fundraising efforts.

## Bright futures anticipated

The Stellar investment will be utilized over the next three years. Physical changes to the city will include updates and refurbishments to existing buildings in the downtown square. Limestone gateways and murals will welcome visitors; streetscapes will be created with the use of planters and the redesign of streetlights and sidewalks; parking flow (including a new lot to ease congestion) and traffic patterns will also get an update; and senior apartments will be constructed.

An historic train depot will be converted into a trail head for the new four-mile Limestone Trail system. It will also house the Lawrence County Tourism Commission offices and provide space for a farmer’s market.

One of the things that the leaders are most excited about



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is the educational opportunities that will be created through the Stonegate Arts & Education Center, set to replace an old building on the square.

Stonegate will offer a space where educators and industry can collaborate on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers. The space will also lend itself to partnerships with nearby Oakland City University, North Lawrence Career Center and Radius Indiana.

A new advanced manufacturing effort from Ivy Tech will tackle the skills gap. It's an eight-week program that will provide education and skills for students going into advanced manufacturing. Duke Energy and Ivy Tech are collaborating with leaders in four regions of the state to develop the initiative.

"These skills will be built around local needs, what we need right here," McCracken emphasizes.

### 'Breeding a new confidence'

McCracken sums up what Bedford's stellar year means for the future.

"I just think success begets success. It's a snowball effect; as we start doing these improvements, we've seen more interest in downtown than ever before because of the (Stellar Community) announcement," he shares. "We've got the seeds;

got the water; now we're just waiting for it to blossom."

For Girgis, one of her main focuses for the city's future is on education.

"I really do get excited about the future of kids, of education. Education – it's the thing that can really just change your life," she says. "There are too many people right now that really struggle in our community. Zero (people struggling) is the perfect number; that's my dream. I know we won't reach it all, but I think this gives us a real good platform to spring from."

Elliott indicates that Bedford is poised to capitalize on the momentum.

"I've seen in my lifetime here a lot of different people in different positions do a lot of good things. I don't know that I've seen a group that has more cohesively worked together in trying to obtain certain things, and one of the key words is confidence. That people start having confidence in what these people are trying to do," he asserts.

"I think that's one reason in such a short time, they've made a tremendous turnaround. People are doing something good ... there's confidence, which can go an awful long way in making an individual or community successful. That's the key that I see – it's breeding a new confidence the community hasn't had for a while."



Civic leaders and citizens gathered in September for a luncheon to officially announce Bedford as the Indiana Chamber's 2013 Community of the Year. Among the attendees was former Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman (top left), who returned to her hometown to lead the eight-county economic development initiative Radius Indiana.