

Lifeline Data Centers  
**COMMUNITY  
OF THE YEAR**

# FALLING INTO 'PLACE'

## Goshen Embraces History, Innovation

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Within the walls of downtown Goshen's historic City Hall, visions to enhance economic prosperity and quality of place come to life.

Atop a desk in Mayor Jeremy Stutsman's office, a sign bears the message: "When you get there, remember where you came from."

He hasn't forgotten. Neither have the many Goshen natives who have chosen to build their lives there or those who have left but later returned.



[View Award Video](#)



Mayor Jeremy Stutsman is proud of Goshen's community partnerships.



Galen Miller, philanthropist and president of Miller Poultry – a small, family-owned operation – points to Goshen’s entrepreneurial spirit and diversity.

“Goshen really is well rounded,” he declares. “We’ve got recreational facilities. We’ve got great restaurants and food. We have entertainment. What are the odds that you’d have 30,000-some people that have recreation, entertainment, culture, economic viability? It’s brought people back.”

It’s a community where diversity is celebrated. Nearly one third of the residents are Latino. More than 100 languages are spoken at Goshen High School. The Maple City Multicultural Festival is a new annual celebration. First Fridays events attract thousands.

Outstanding schools and the Horizon

Education Alliance (HEA) – a community partnership emphasizing lifelong learning – help prepare residents for long-term success.

It’s a place where place-making is paramount. Downtown revitalization has transformed the heart of the city. Businesses, some dating back to the early 1900s, line the streets. Entrepreneurs, striving to preserve Goshen’s history while shaping its future, also are moving in.

“Downtown Goshen was one of those towns that was starting to look blighted 16, 17 years ago,” Stutsman remarks. “Once that revitalization started, we’ve had a lot of younger businesses come in. We worked hard over the years to develop downtown Goshen to feel a little bit more like a park and not kind of that anywhere USA downtown look. We were trying to make it unique.”

## Building relationships

A sense of camaraderie fills the mayor’s office, where Stutsman’s seated alongside business and community leaders.

His bold, colorful suit, hip haircut and pierced ear reflect his individuality. But there’s no mistaking the solidarity he shares with Goshen and its people.

“I was born and raised here,” he notes, proudly adding that his two children are eighth-generation residents.

“For the last 17 years (he graduated from Goshen High School in 1996), I’ve been doing construction work. The vast majority of that has been renovating buildings in downtown Goshen. My family and I were a big part of getting a lot of those buildings renovated and then the streetscaping you see downtown now.”

He took office as mayor in 2016.

“I’m not used to the desk yet!” he quips. “I’m still a pretty active person. I hope I never get used to it actually.”

Today, he plays a different role in laying the foundation for construction projects. In Goshen, a good year when it comes to building permits is around \$35 million. In 2017, the city already has surpassed \$70 million – with more to come.

Quarterly meetings between builders and developers promote open communication.

“They ask, ‘How can we make this city’s regulations get past what we have to do for the state and then make that red tape as minimal as possible for business?’” Stutsman comments. “We’ve made some great strides in that, but there’s more we’ve got to do yet too. It’s changing a longtime culture. We’re getting there. But it’s nice to be able to go in and have those real frank and real discussions from both sides.”

Greg Hoogenboom, president of Hoogenboom Nofziger Corp., likes what he hears. “I think it’s great that we have a mayor who was in the construction business and knows what we go through so well. That’s one of the areas he knows we need to work on and deal with, and he’s worked on some things already.”

## It’s good to be in Goshen

Stutsman designated the current period (beginning in March 2017) as the Year of Goodness in Goshen. It recognizes individuals, organizations and businesses for going above and beyond.

“The kickoff – this was the amazing part – I called one person and wanted to raise money. I was thinking about \$6,000 so I could give 500 bucks to each school in Goshen. Give that to the kids and say, ‘You guys make a committee and do acts of kindness in our community.’ I pitched it to



Flags along the cafeteria wall represent the original home countries of some of the approximately 1,700 students who attend Goshen High School.



Acoustics at the Sauder Concert Hall on the Goshen College campus have been compared to some of the finest facilities in the world.

Galen (Miller). I was just asking him to teach me how to ask for money because I'm new to all of this and he said, 'I'll do it!' And I said, 'Do what?'

Stutsman breaks into a grin as the group erupts in laughter.

"We quickly in that conversation went from \$6,000 to \$12,000. I called one other gentleman and we got to \$18,000. I thought, 'That's good for the first year.' So, we were able to give \$1,750 to each school (in the Goshen district). They're going through that process right now: the administrators and teachers.

"They're reaching out to the kids who aren't involved. They're supposed to reach out to the kids that they see potential in that haven't had an opportunity to lead yet and also reach out to kids who may not know – because of their family life – what's it's like to be able to give somebody else something."

And that's important to experience since giving back is part of the community culture.

This spring, employees of Lippert Components, Inc. (LCI) – a global supplier of premium components to the recreational vehicle, manufactured housing and transportation industries – cleaned up the city's parks as part of its "100,000 Hours of Community Service" social responsibility initiative.

"The cool thing is, through Jeremy's charisma and this initiative, we've enlisted at least three or four companies that are doing the same kind of pledges for this year," declares general manager Braden Weldy. "How cool would it be if, by next year, we have 10 companies doing 100,000 hours or 100 (organizations) doing 10,000 hours? That leadership, it guides people and gives them a path. Because people want to do great things. They want to, but how? Sometimes that's the thing slowing them down: How the heck do they do it?"

Nick Kieffer, president of the Goshen Chamber of Commerce,



Picturesque paths and trails connect people and places.

chimes in: "It's not always about the dollars – giving dollars. It's the whole time and talent and treasure aspect of it."

Brian Krider, co-founder of Goshen-headquartered Ben's Soft Pretzels (an entrepreneurial success that has expanded to 86 locations), seconds that.

"Time is our biggest commodity," he asserts. "We can all give time. It's the most valuable thing we have. Money means nothing without time. And you don't know when your time is going to be cut short either. That's what I love about Lippert and some of the really good companies we have in town ... just the power of dedicating some time.

"That's huge. And that's all around Goshen. That – to me – it's

## *Congratulations City of Goshen* on being named Community of the Year!

More than 40 years ago, Supreme opened its doors in Goshen with a dream of building quality, custom truck bodies and solutions to help businesses succeed. Our dedicated employees in Goshen helped us become an industry leader. We are proud to continue to serve this thriving Goshen community.



  
**SUPREME™**  
A WABASH NATIONAL COMPANY

[supremecorp.com](http://supremecorp.com)





This spring, approximately 800 employees of Lippert Components cleaned up the city's parks (and prepared them for use by residents) as part of the company's 100,000-hour volunteer initiative.



Goshen's robust RV and manufacturing industries helped it bounce back from the Great Recession.

amazing. From churches. We've got the Window (faith-based organization assisting those with low income) in town. It helps a lot of people. Good organizations that care."

Weldy taps on the table for emphasis as he adds, "And as a business, we can do that while being a very sound, very good business that continues to grow. It's not one or the other; it's all of it."

### What's old is new

History and innovation are intertwined in Goshen. Weldy doesn't have to look far to find an example.

"That (history). That's cool. That's something I really like – you have buildings with character," he relates. "... Man, when you have

some character in buildings and there's green spaces, it's just so much more inviting and you get that sense of place."

Renovation is turning abandoned sites into economic opportunities. Goshen Brewing Company occupies what was once an industrial building. The Hawks, housed in a former furniture factory, offers low-cost live and work apartments for artists and entrepreneurs.

It's something that millennials and others are looking for.

"Part of this younger crowd that seems to have embraced Goshen enjoys a project. And part of that project is turning historical buildings into something that's useable and maybe even energy efficient and useful again," Hoogenboom surmises.

One of Hoogenboom's current developments is an industrial park



### Goshen: 2017 Community of the Year.

Goshen Community Schools would like to congratulate the city of Goshen for earning the 2017 Community of the Year Award.

At Goshen Community Schools, it's our mission to inspire students to achieve every day as we prepare them for challenges they will ultimately face in the real world. The city of Goshen, like us, is dedicated to achieving greatness and we couldn't be more proud to call it our home.



Goshen Community Schools

Learning Today. Leading Tomorrow.

[IBelieveInGoshen.com](http://IBelieveInGoshen.com)





(Downtown Goshen, Inc., Grant Beachy)



(Downtown Goshen, Inc., Lynne Zehr)



Past and present converge in downtown Goshen, where the streets are lined with artistic, dining and shopping outlets. Special events such as monthly First Fridays feature music, food and camaraderie. Myron Bontrager, bottom right, owns The Electric Brew, a popular coffee house.



(Downtown Goshen, Inc., Lynne Zehr)



(Downtown Goshen, Inc., Grant Beachy)







The Thomas-Stieglitz Brewing Co., one of several breweries in the community, offers an opportunity to unwind (*Downtown Goshen, Inc., Grant Beachy*).



Ben's Soft Pretzels began as an Amish farmer's market. Today, it's one of the industry's fastest growing quick-serve food companies.

that will connect with a residential neighborhood, elementary school and trails.

"It's probably the first industrial development in Goshen in a long time," he observes.

Kieffer compares Goshen's various offerings to puzzle pieces, stressing the significance of relationships.

"You have to have a place where people want to be and locate their business or live and raise their family. All of those pieces work together ... we have different opinions. ... We don't always agree. But we understand that it's (about) improvement – continuous improvements."

Lippert is one of many companies experiencing growth.

"In Elkhart County, we know what manufacturing is and it's staying here." Weldy contends. "I know at Lippert, we're very focused on process improvements, so we can keep those jobs and be very competitive. And we're that kind of place in choosing to be here as part of the community. That's very conscious as well."

Krider, who has four sons, calls Goshen a great place to raise kids. He's never seen

anything quite like it.

"It comes down to the people," he asserts. "And the people of Goshen, it's unlike anywhere I've ever been in my travels. I came out of the RV industry, so I spent two weeks out of the month on the road. I've been to a lot of places, and you can't find the quality of people – or at least I haven't seen it yet – in most other communities."

### Happy trails

Connecting Goshen to adjacent cities and towns are 34 miles of designated trails.

"It's a pretty small town. (So, 34) is a big number," Stutsman affirms. "Those are just purely bike trails. It doesn't count all of the trails we added – the sidewalks and all of that type of stuff. So, we're always looking toward making the next connection. We've pretty well connected all of the communities within Elkhart County. All of the communities have come together to get that done. There's a few pieces here and there we're going to finish. We're always looking toward the next project – the next quality of life piece."

Dorothy Shirk moved to Goshen from out of state almost 30 years ago. She's the director of community engagement at HEA (established in 2012), which she emphasizes takes a lifespan approach to education. It's become a valuable tool in helping Elkhart County recover from the Great Recession.

Shirk's passion for Goshen's people and its amenities was evident during a subsequent phone interview.

"What I love about Goshen and my life and how it fits here is I'm an outdoors person," she imparts. "I love being active. I meet a lot of people from a lot of different backgrounds around my activities outside of work. Those relationships that I've created on the golf course, on the tennis court, on the bike trails, at the different parks where I stop, the breweries I hang out in and the restaurants – all of those things – those are actually the relationships that have helped the work."

### Life is sweet

Kercher's Sunrise Orchards has been a family-owned business since 1922.

Maureen Kercher is one of the owners. She marvels at the generosity of Goshen's people and relays a personal example.

"We have a lot of construction out here," she observes (referring to one of the many infrastructure investments in Goshen, this one involving a bridge and road). "The mayor – what a good guy! He could see we were hurting out here. People were having a really hard time getting to us and still are, so he wanted to do something to encourage people to come out. He came up with the Mayor's Challenge.

"He learned when he was a little kid how to break an apple in his hands. With his bare hands, he can break an apple! He challenged all of our customers to come in and try to break an apple with their bare hands and they could put their name in a hat. At the end, he was going to give out a \$100 gift certificate.

As of late September, more than \$2,000 in gift certificates had been collected.

"That's just the kind of mayor – and that's the kind of the kind of community Goshen is," she reflects.

We return to City Hall and Stutsman, who initially hadn't eyed a political career. Involvement with the community through volunteer work changed his mind.

Stutsman: "It was really the relationships that are here. Goshen has come a long way since I was in high school and I wanted to be a part of trying to keep that momentum of quality of life and cooperation going.

"That's one of the good things about Goshen – how many partnerships there are. We all still have our moments where we disagree, but it's a great city for working together."