

# WORKFORCE CALLING

## Agency Leader to Focus on Collaboration

By Rebecca Patrick

Fred Payne may be new to the job, but not to the needs of employers and what the modern workforce of today and tomorrow should look like.

Payne, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) as of mid-December, was previously an employment and labor attorney. Since 2008, he worked for Honda Manufacturing of Indiana, LLC (HMIN) in Greensburg; his most recent position was as chief administrator.

It took a lot to lure him from HMIN, where he led the company's business division – overseeing among other areas: corporate affairs, government relations, information services and administrative functions (including human resources), in addition to serving as the compliance officer.

What ultimately piqued Payne's interest to move to state government was the "climate" he would be walking into at DWD; in other words, the challenge.

"Right now, we are in a time we have not been before. Indiana has a low unemployment rate, but we still have jobs to fill throughout the state. This is a unique opportunity to have an impact to help craft a system that can go on and last and reap benefits for years," he explains.

"It was that piece of it that attracted me ... to be a part of helping to grow and evolve a workforce system that I know we desperately need."

### Getting to know

A Louisiana native, Payne holds a master's degree from the University of Northern Iowa and a bachelor's degree from Grambling State University. He went to law school at Indiana University in Bloomington, where he met his wife, Kelly, a graduate student from Michigan. A few years later they married and made Indiana their home.

Payne is admitted to the 7th and 9th Circuits of the U.S. Court of Appeals and the U.S. District Courts for northern and southern districts of Indiana, northern and central districts of Illinois, plus the western district of Wisconsin.

Beyond spending time with his family, a passion of Payne's is hitting the open road. He likes to ride his motorcycle locally in Indianapolis and go on occasional Saturday morning trips with friends. "I try to fit it in as often as I can ... but it's not enough," he laughs.

The book that's had the biggest impact on him is Max Lucado's *Traveling Light*. "It really talks about how you have to de-stress and

prioritize things, and focus on what's in front of you," Payne relays.

When asked what he's most proud of in his professional life, the response highlights traits that are important to Payne.

"I'm very proud that I'm considered a person who is civil. I try to make sure that I have established a reputation of really listening and trying to understand the problems around me and to come up with solutions. I'm proud to work with other people and build consensus."



Engaging with employers is among the top priorities for Fred Payne, who visited with the Indiana Chamber's Executive Committee in January.



### The challenge; the goals

Governor Eric Holcomb has called upskilling Indiana's workforce the defining issue of this decade. To dramatically move the needle, Payne recognizes it will take an all-hands-on-deck approach, working with various other agencies and interested parties.

The priorities for DWD dovetail with what the Governor laid out, as part of his Next Level vision, in the State of the State address:

- Help at least 25,000 of the more than 700,000 Hoosier adults with some college but no degree make the life-changing decision to go back and enroll in postsecondary programs
- Help at least 30,000 of the 475,000 Hoosier adults without a high school diploma gain the education and skills they need to get a better job
- By 2019, increase the number of work-based learning experiences (internships and apprenticeships) from 12,500 to 25,000 – making Indiana a top-five state in this area
- By 2020, help at least 1,000 Hoosier adults in the state's prison system earn certificates and credentials each year, so that they can secure high-demand, high-wage jobs upon release

"Training and education is what the workforce needs, regardless of what sector you are in; all individuals need some type of it. Some of that is direct classroom work and some of that is through work-based learning," Payne notes.

“You need a lot of different types of employees to run an operation. My experience in trying to make sure (HMIN had) the right mix and how to source those (positions) helps me and suits me perfectly for this job.”

### **Engagement, engagement, engagement!**

Connection and collaboration are the two main areas Payne wants to make sure are as strong as possible, noting they will help the agency achieve its objectives.

Direct engagement is what Payne most emphasizes – whether that’s with workforce development boards, employers, service providers and, of course, employees.

“If we are connecting employers and people through engagement, we are understanding the needs of people who come to us for assistance wanting a direct connection to a job or a direct connection to some training,” he begins.

“(For example) an individual comes in and says, ‘I know I want to become X.’ We let the person know what type of certification is needed, give them a timeframe for when they can expect to achieve that, if they go through the proper training, and let them know what type of jobs would be available. It’s that type of engagement I want to make sure we are driving home.”

For employers, Payne pushes utilizing such initiatives as Indiana Career Ready and Next Level webinars, as well as getting to know your local WorkOne offices.

“This agency provides a variety of data that employers and organizations can use to help them predict where the jobs are going to be. We have a variety of online tools now that have been developed and put in a pipeline that will help employers. . . . I want to make sure we are equipping employers to make good decisions,” he offers.

Payne also requests that the business community be proactive in having a stronger voice at the table. “I want to encourage employers to call us directly. I want to sit down and talk with employers about what they are seeing and hearing, what their plans are and how we can partner with them to achieve their goals.

“I want to assure that this agency continues to be known as one that is connecting people and employers, but also provides a variety of other services that different stakeholders can take advantage of.”

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**RESOURCE:** Fred Payne, Indiana Department of Workforce Development, at [www.in.gov/dwd](http://www.in.gov/dwd)

## **Company, School Form Cohesive Team**

About seven years ago, Jasper Engines & Transmissions hosted its first intern from Perry Central Junior-Senior High School. That student, after earning a degree at Purdue University, is part of the Jasper Engines team.

That only begins to describe the relationship between the Jasper-based company and the school in Leopold – winners of the second School Counseling-Business Partnership of the Year award presented by the Indiana Chamber Foundation in partnership with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.

Jody French, Perry Central principal, says, “It is amazing what can happen when education and business and industry sit at the table together. We are excited about the real-world opportunities we have been able to create for our students.”

French outlines how the partnership has evolved:

- Creation of the student-led Commodore Manufacturing facility, a vendor for both Jasper Engines and Waupaca Foundry. The initial product line was packaging Jasper’s brake pads; assembling transmission coolers was recently added. Students implement their own work processes, quality checks and more.

Luke Bawel, vice president of logistics for the company, has provided invaluable mentoring and feedback, according to French. Bawel notes, “Partnership with Perry Central has been a true match as we are always looking for ways to connect with youth; teaching them not only advanced manufacturing skills but also soft skills that will help them be successful in life.”

- Creation of an Advanced Manufacturing pathway for students through implementing the HIRE Technology curriculum. Jasper Engines sends associates to work with students in the classroom an average of every other week, “bringing the curriculum to life” in French’s words. Students can earn up to 12 hours of dual credit through the program.
- The Work Ethic Certificate program has been in place at Perry Central for three years, with Jasper Engines a key partner since day one. The company has offered financial incentives for students successfully learning the soft skills and committing to working for the company in the future. Students can earn an extra \$3,000 over three years.

The award features a \$1,000 scholarship for a student selected by the school. Steven Parr was on the leadership team that helped start Commodore Manufacturing. He will complete the Advanced Manufacturing pathway and earn 12 credits from Ivy Tech Community College. A current intern at Jasper Engines, he hopes to finish his technical certificate in Manufacturing Production and Operations at Ivy Tech and obtain a full-time position at Jasper Engines.

The Indiana Chamber Foundation has completed extensive research on effective school counseling practices and conducted events to facilitate business-education connections. The award was presented February 7 during the annual Indiana INTERNnet IMPACT Awards event.



Accepting the School Counseling-Business Partnership of the Year award are (from left): Perry Central’s Mary Roberson and Jody French, Susan Remke of Jasper Engines & Transmission and Perry Central scholarship recipient Steven Parr. Shelley Huffman (right) is the Indiana Chamber Foundation director of college and career readiness.

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**RESOURCE:** Indiana Chamber Foundation at [www.indianachamber.com/about/indiana-chamber-foundation](http://www.indianachamber.com/about/indiana-chamber-foundation)