

# Rick Burger:

## A Lightning Rod for Community Enrichment



Working For The People  
And Living The Dream

**W**ithin minutes of meeting Richard (Rick) Burger, district manager for Duke Energy, a timeless business phrase comes to mind: “Service with a Smile.” He brings a positive attitude and contagious energy to each community project he tackles – and there are many.

Proudly, but humbly, Burger serves on the board of directors for 14 organizations. A few of the recipients of his involvement are the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce and Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation (past chairman of each), Junior Achievement of the Wabash Valley and Union Hospital Foundation.

Prior to this interview, an associate suggested with a chuckle to ask Burger about his “fun business cards.” When the topic is broached, he responds with an enthusiastic, “Oh you know about that!” and hands me a card with the following phrase: “Working for the people and living the dream.”

He muses, “I have a stack of those like I do my regular business cards. You always have people asking, ‘How’s your day going?’ and you say something like, ‘Busy.’ I thought, ‘I’m tired of telling people that. We’re all busy.’”

The unique inscription guides Burger’s professional, community and personal endeavors.

**BizVoice®:** What brought you to Terre Haute?

**Rick Burger:** “In 2002, I had an opportunity to come here as a district manager, and I saw a lot of opportunities. That’s why I was really excited to come here. It’s been a perfect fit. And the team of people we have here at Duke Energy is the best.”

**BV:** How many people do you manage?

**RB:** “I don’t consider myself a manager. I consider myself a team person. We have about 80 people in this field location, but we also have two generating stations we partner with a lot: Wabash River Generating Station (in West Terre Haute) and Cayuga Generating Station (north of Terre Haute). It’s interesting because they have at least 100 employees at each generating plant, and when we volunteer (in community programs), their employees are volunteering with us as a team.”

**By Symone C. Skrzycki**

**BV:** You have built a career at Duke Energy over the last 30-plus years. To make that type of

investment, you obviously believe strongly in the company. Tell us why.

**RB:** "I had a chance to interview with Public Service Indiana (which eventually became Duke Energy Indiana) after graduating from Vincennes University. My first job with this company was as an agricultural rep, and it just took off. When I worked in economic development, I got to travel the world to promote jobs and growth in our community. I really enjoyed that job. My areas of responsibility now as a district manager are Clinton, Terre Haute, Brazil and Greencastle. Being a leader down here on this team is so much fun. There is no other job I would want right now."

**BV:** How does Terre Haute compare to some of the other cities in which you have lived and worked?

**RB:** "In 32 years, I've lived in five different communities: Greencastle, Rochester, Vincennes, Lafayette and now Terre Haute. Each is unique, but one thing I've noticed is that there are a lot of needs here. But, we have a lot of opportunities too. We're not a high-income area compared to Lafayette (for instance)."

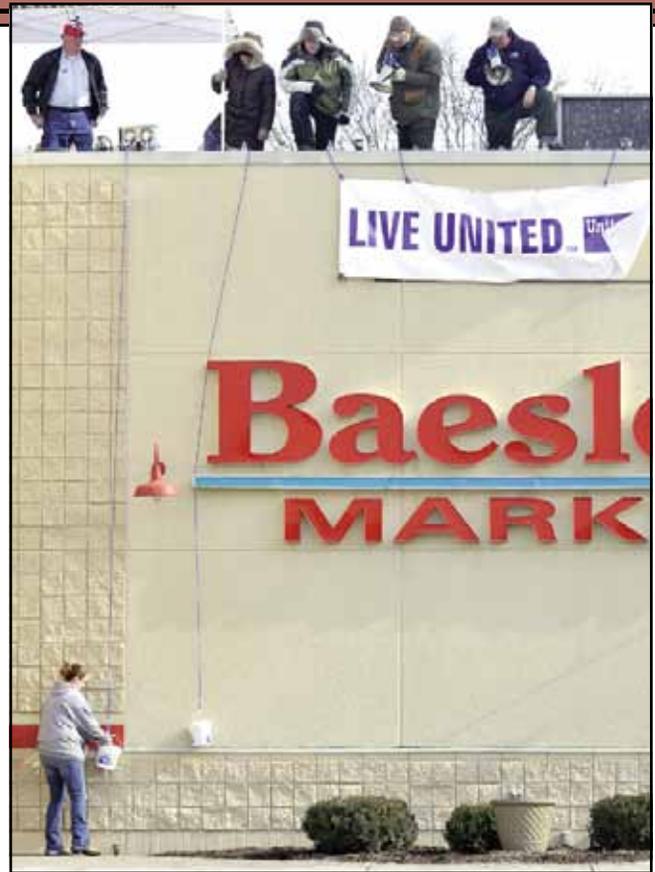
**BV:** Talk about some of the city's other challenges.

**RB:** "Every community is facing this right now: maintaining jobs. My gosh, just yesterday we had an announcement that CertainTeed (the company opened a \$70 million plant in Vigo County last June that manufactures fiber cement siding for homes) has laid their workforce off (fortunately the 60 workers who were laid off returned to work the following month). Also, we're heavy in plastics here. That business is down too. I'm really active with the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation and the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce, and we're doing everything we can, but there are certain things that are out of your control."

**BV:** What do you see as some of the city's strengths?



One of Burger's proudest accomplishments is the "Business A Level Above" award Duke Energy won in 2008 for advocacy of business growth/development and community engagement.



Burger braves the elements atop a supermarket to raise money for a United Way campaign.

**RB:** "We have a workforce that is willing to show up every day and work hard. I believe that's our ace in the hole. New leadership. The old guard is kind of being changed out."

"One day at a time, this community is making a difference. It's happening. We're doing the right things."

**BV:** How has downtown changed since your move to Terre Haute in 2002?

**RB:** "If you go downtown, you'll see new streetlights, new sidewalks, and you'll see how ISU (Indiana State University) and the city are working to bring the downtown together."

"There are a couple new hotels downtown. And that adds a lot. Wow, what a difference!"

**BV:** You've been heavily involved in the United Way of Wabash Valley and are the incoming president. Name one of your major goals.

**RB:** "Community awareness. You've got to be telling the people in the community what that dollar is going toward every time it's given. And, you've got to do some crazy things! Back when it was very cold outside (in January), we got up on the roof of Baesler's Market starting at 6:00 in the morning (for a 12-hour fundraising campaign). We had buckets hanging over the side to collect donations. Our goal was \$10,000 and we raised \$12,000. The community is still talking about that."



**Burger has never forgotten growing up on his family's farm and enjoys working there in his free time.**

“At five till 6:00, this gentleman – I don't know who he was – drove up and said, ‘I didn't think you guys would still be out here.’ And he dropped a check in the bucket. When we pulled it out, it was a \$1,000 check.”

**BV:** What other community activities are you passionate about?

**RB:** “I'm involved with our colleges (Indiana State University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods). I feel we're really blessed with our colleges here. The other thing I'm really involved in is a new children's museum downtown. We're half a million short of \$6 million raised. We're in the phase of getting exhibits in there now. I'm really proud of that. I've been on this board for four years now, and that to me is one of those things you leave for your kids and

grandkids. That's going to be a great children's museum. We hope to open it by the end of the year.”

**BV:** With so many worthy causes to choose from, how do you decide which to support?

**RB:** “Being a farm boy as I call it, I use the example of a wagon of hay. You can only put so much hay on a wagon before it starts falling off. I firmly believe when I make a commitment to an organization that I will be an active board member. How do I choose? I guess that changes every day, every week. With United Way, it's because it helps so many people. With the local chamber, it's because of how it helps the commercial side and business development.

“If I didn't have my wife's support, I couldn't do it. She shares me with this community, I guess, but she knows I wouldn't want it any other way.”

**BV:** What advice do you give your four children (ranging in age from eight to 31 years old)?

**RB:** “There is one thing I always had on the refrigerator for my kids: ‘The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.’ My daughters – even in their lives as adults today – say, ‘I remember that being on the refrigerator.’”

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