

# 2011 Volunteer of the Year

## Jim McKinney

By Matt L. Ottinger



**J**im McKinney, president and CEO of Evansville-based Regency Properties, has been at the top of his company for nearly two decades. Yet, business continues to change for the organization that now develops and manages 31 commercial centers in eight states.

“We recently purchased four new properties in Florida and Mississippi,” reveals McKinney, who joined Regency in 1977. “We go into smaller communities and buy, renovate and re-tenant – it has been successful, even lately in a recession.”

He adds the company has acquired seven properties in the last 10 months and is looking for more. Regency also has a residential division that owns apartment complexes in several cities in Indiana and Illinois.

“Our focus, our drive has been what we’ve defined as the county seat program. It’s a focus that we have with a passion. Many people like looking at the properties in larger communities; in the smaller communities, mayors and economic development people are thrilled companies are willing to come in and invest,” surmises McKinney, citing three shopping center locations in Seymour and two in Lebanon as Indiana examples.

“We recognize that schools, arts, recreation are part of the quality of life in the community. We also know the shopping environment is part of that quality of life,” he continues. “We’re thrilled to be able to invest and participate in those communities. We hold events at our centers, in which we bring in the whole community. That’s one of our ways of giving back.”

McKinney and Regency also contribute in a variety of ways in his hometown of Evansville. He has been deeply involved in numerous efforts at the University of Southern Indiana, including funding to establish the McKinney Entrepreneurial Lab as part of the College of Business.

### Chamber engagement

In addition to the activities with his own organization and community, McKinney has been a strong ally for the Indiana Chamber for more than 20 years.

“I’ve been involved with the Chamber for a long time,” he relays. “My first real engagement was when Ron Reherman, then president/CEO of SIGECO (now known as Vectren), asked if I’d help him organize a membership drive down there (in Evansville), so we set up a phone bank.”

McKinney notes the story “causes me to chuckle” when he thinks about how his efforts paved the way for a pleasurable West Coast trip.

“I got the most new members of anyone on the panel – 21, I believe – and won a free trip on American Airlines,” he says. “So we went to San Diego, thanks to the Indiana Chamber. Then (Reherman) recommended me for the board. I’ve been active and joined the executive committee several years ago.”

McKinney comments there are many reasons behind his motivation for getting associated with the Chamber – chief among them its collective vision.

“I initially got involved because I was very impressed that the Chamber was a well-focused enterprise that was true to its mission,” he declares. “I saw that the Indiana Chamber was very clear in its direction and goals, and committing a wonderful effort toward helping business. Knowing (the Chamber was) so well-run gave me belief that my time would be used well.”

McKinney notes a distinction between the Chamber

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The Village Commons shopping center on the Lloyd Expressway in Evansville is one of more than 30 facilities managed by Jim McKinney (left) and the Regency team.



## McKinney

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and other groups.

"I've been involved with myriad different civic organizations and have seen some that are well-funded, but lack direction and so they're still asunder," he clarifies. "The Indiana Chamber is a great return on my (time) investment."

McKinney has served on the Chamber's education, economic development and tax committees, among others. Over the past year, he has been a valued member of the *Indiana Vision 2025* task force, the group developing a new long-term economic development plan for the state. Additionally, McKinney assists the membership team in soliciting and retaining members in the Evansville area.

"Jim has been an outstanding, highly contributing member of our board of directors," praises Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar. "Some of the same attributes that make him successful in his business – paying attention to detail, asking the difficult questions – are included in what he brings to the Chamber. Jim is a true ambassador for the Chamber who embodies the term 'business leader.'"

### Company benefits

McKinney explains his company's involvement has opened the doors to the human resources assistance the Chamber provides its members – something he believes has been



McKinney has always offered valuable input during his service to the Chamber, including during this meeting of the *Indiana Vision 2025* task force.

exponentially beneficial.

"The number one benefit for our direct involvement has to do with what George Raymond (Chamber vice president of human resources and labor relations) has done in regard to human resources – understanding laws, providing resources and being readily available to assist us when we've had issues within our HR area," McKinney asserts. "There are also periodic courses and education seminars that we've taken advantage of."

He firmly believes that the Chamber's overall impact is critical to businesses like his.

"In my opinion, the bigger benefit (of the Chamber) is more ethereal; it creates an environment in the state where

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we've been able to thrive and be prosperous," McKinney shares. "The tax environment, regulatory environment, keeping the Legislature focused on commerce and economic prosperity; throughout the Midwest, Indiana is perceived as being the best run state and the best state with regards to finances. The Chamber didn't do it by itself, but it's certainly a key partner in that. We gave support to the governor and others who were focused on those areas."

The personal relationships have also been an asset.

"I've met people (through Chamber involvement) I'd never have known before: Steve Ferguson (Cook Group, Inc.), Mike Wells (REI Real Estate Services), Kevin Brinegar, the lobbyists here – it's been a wonderful opportunity to meet people on the board," McKinney says. "Mike Blakley (Blakley Corporation) now sells quite a bit of carpet to our company; I didn't know him before. I've developed many friendships and affiliations here."

McKinney sums up by articulating the pride he feels in being part of the Indiana Chamber.

"I enjoy the reward of seeing something good happen, and this organization is a facilitator in that," he concludes. "And it's nice to know that I've had input in that. It's been very rewarding."