

# David McKinnis



By Karissa Rector

## HELPING MAKE THE CRUCIAL CONNECTIONS

David McKinnis says he was a typical farm boy, growing up 20 miles west of West Lafayette. His high school class had only 40 students in a building that resembled the schoolhouse in *Hoosiers*.

But he wasn't destined for Bloomington. His strong interests in engineering led him to stay close to home at Purdue University.

McKinnis received three degrees from Purdue and has dedicated more than 30 years of his career to the university. For most of his tenure, McKinnis worked with the Technical Assistance Program (TAP). It assists companies primarily in the manufacturing sector, resulting in thousands of jobs being created or saved within the state.

His current role is special adviser in the office of corporate and global partnerships, a recent initiative to boost Purdue's major strategic partnerships with companies. This, in turn, strengthens the pipeline for students to obtain internship and career opportunities.

### Internship involvement

With a passion for connecting students and employers, it was a natural fit for McKinnis to become involved with Indiana INTERNnet (IIN). Managed by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, IIN is an internship-matching program with a searchable database that links employers, students and educators. The goal is to help create or expand high-quality experiential opportunities within Indiana.

McKinnis has served as the board president for the non-profit organization since it became affiliated with the Indiana Chamber in 2006. His dedication stems from his involvement with TAP and his own personal experience.

"After I received my MBA, I was privileged to take a position at a manufacturing company with no prior experience. I (previously)

worked summers on the farm and never thought about interning or working elsewhere," he admits. "Unlike today, and this is why Indiana INTERNnet is important, people in my position would have had an internship in manufacturing and some sense of what is going on."

From the professional side of the equation, McKinnis recalls, "Prior to its (IIN) founding, I was involved in programs at Purdue University with the manufacturing sector and many of the small companies sought help from me in connecting with students for summer internships. I was able to do that with 10 to 30 companies a year, but it was cumbersome and difficult. We didn't have the technology platform to make it happen. When IIN came along and was able to make connections with students, employers and universities on a large scale, I jumped right in."

Regarding his limited preparation before entering the business world, McKinnis jokes that you would have a hard time finding people with that lack of experience in today's workforce. That is why McKinnis continues to emphasize the importance of IIN. He affirms the ultimate goal is for "undergraduate students in Indiana higher education to have experiences, summer or during the academic year, that prepare them for outstanding careers."

While many young people clearly know the career they wish to pursue, others learn valuable information during their internships.

"My wife is a retired teacher. Some young student teachers decide teaching is not what they want to do. Finding that out after one or two years in your undergraduate education is a lot better than after you have been working in that field for a while.

"Internships can play a role in helping students solidify what their interests are and eliminate what they are not interested in. I want them to have experiences and find out what they like, what they don't like. So, whatever profession they begin, they are productive and ready to go," McKinnis shares.

### Full attention

Board of director engagement is certainly not unique for



David McKinnis has been Indiana INTERNnet board president for more than 11 years.

university and business leaders. While McKinnis has also been involved with the local chamber of commerce among other pursuits, he has a strategic approach to his investments of time and resources.

“There are many different philosophies on volunteering. I have chosen to be involved in few volunteer activities but with a large amount of contribution,” McKinnis reasons.

“IIN has been the case with much support from my employer, my great interest in the cause and significant benefits for Purdue University students. For me, this opportunity is very rewarding and I’ve enjoyed it very much.”

McKinnis explains the greatest responsibility of serving on a board of directors is to ensure the organization’s mission is efficiently and productively carried out. Part of that

responsibility includes confirming the strategic plan aligns with the mission, metrics are on track and the organization is engaged in ongoing and new funding initiatives.

He confirms that the decision to contract with the Indiana Chamber is fundamental and significant to the success of IIN.

Mark Lawrance, Indiana Chamber vice president of engagement and innovation policy, serves as a liaison to Indiana INTERNnet and has worked closely with McKinnis on aspects of the program.

“David has provided great leadership for Indiana INTERNnet for many years. It comes from his genuine passion to help young people get real-world job experience to supplement their education,” Lawrance offers. “He adds a lot of value to the program by thinking strategically and collaborating to bring out the best with various stakeholders.”

### Personal time

Outside of the office, McKinnis enjoys just that – being outside. He bikes, hikes, golfs, sails and more. On a recent trip to Colorado, a perfect place for outdoor adventures, he jokes that his golf bag weighed much less on the way home.

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Carefully listening and offering strategic guidance are among the many attributes McKinnis brings to the table.

When winter comes, McKinnis moves indoors and practices woodworking. He refinishes antique furniture for his wife, Cathy, and builds furniture for his family. One of his upcoming projects is making new arms for his son's deck chairs as the dog confused them for chew toys, he laughs.

Classical music is also one of McKinnis' loves. He and his wife often visit the Lafayette Symphony and occasionally attend the Symphony on the Prairie at Connie Prairie.

"When my wife and I visit our children in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Dallas, Texas, we visit their local symphonies while we're there. They enjoy the music as well."

It's fitting that McKinnis' long-time leadership of Indiana INTERNnet and his dedication to student success has been "sweet music" to many over the years.