

# WAYNE MAKERS

## Innovation, Preservation are Highlights in County

By Matt Ottinger

Sitting on Indiana’s eastern edge, Wayne County is much more than a gateway into the Buckeye state. The county features rural, small town and collegiate surroundings with Earlham College and Indiana University East in its confines, and boasts a low cost of living that’s touted by economic development officials.

Developers and creative thinkers have learned to leverage the county’s offerings to build industry niches as a home for animal food manufacturing, an environmental education center and technology innovator to maximize medical service for its communities.

### COPE ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER: FOCUSING ON PRESERVATION

Students in eastern Indiana gained a valuable resource in 1992, when Jim and Helen Cope – a pair of educators – and botanist Francis Parks transformed the Copes’ Centerville farm into the Cope Environmental Center.

“It was established by the founders to create a center based around conservation of land and environmental education,” explains executive director Alison Zajdel, a Richmond native in her 15th year at the center, which is funded largely by individual donations, as well as some private foundations, corporate donors and grants.

Cope began offering programming and formal partnerships with schools in 1998 and has been growing since then.

“Most of our partnerships are with schools in Wayne and the surrounding counties,” Zajdel reports. “We are an environmental education site, so we provide supplementary education for the schools and

the kids basically come here so we can make their science books come alive.”

The center exposes children to the wonders of nature, conservation camps and the benefits of alternative energy and environmental stewardship. Zajdel estimates the center served about 8,500 youth last year. Furthermore, nature lovers of all ages are allowed to hike on the grounds.

“We also do adult education and in that sense we’re more of a sustainability center, so we’re building Indiana’s first living building challenge project,” she adds. “That’s an

student in the state. The goal is to raise the level of environmental education and promote the Bicentennial Nature Center Network – a coalition of Indiana’s nature centers.

“It’s an honorary deed; there’s no transfer of land, but they can list what county they’re in and the computer will randomly select for them a piece of land in that county,” Zajdel relays. “They’ll get a unique coordinate and a unique identifying number. We don’t collect the children’s information for obvious reasons.”

A child can visit the web site ([www.ilovemylnd.org](http://www.ilovemylnd.org)) and claim a deed to a small

Cope Environmental Center helps Indiana’s students navigate the steps toward gaining an appreciation for environmental stewardship.



aggressive sustainability standard, considered by some as ‘LEED on steroids.’ There are about 300 projects around the world trying the challenge and only eight have met the challenge so far. We’re hoping to have one of the next generations of these buildings.”

### Building through the Bicentennial

Indiana’s bicentennial celebration has served as a springboard, launching many initiatives around the state. Among them is the center’s new Children of Indiana Nature Park – an effort to promote environmental awareness by hopefully providing an honorary deed to a piece of the park to every elementary, middle school and high school

parcel of that land. In the coming years, the deed holders can track the land online and learn about its location, vegetation, animals and more.

A Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust grant gave Cope the ability to hire a project coordinator for two years, although the park will continue indefinitely. Partners on the project also include The Nature Conservancy, the Department of Natural Resources and the Indiana Department of Education. Zajdel credits the Whitewater Valley Land Trust for protecting land along the Bicentennial Legacy Conservation Area (adjacent to Cope Environmental Center).

“The kids can claim deeds until the 1.2



Blue Buffalo is the latest animal food manufacturer to expand into the Richmond area. Shown is land that will soon feature the Midwest Industrial Park, where the company will be locating its new operation.

million deeds are gone,” Zajdel quantifies. “If we run out in 10 years or so, that’s a great problem to have and we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

## **RICHMOND LEADS PACK WITH ANIMAL FOOD NICHE**

Blue Buffalo Pet Products, the nation’s leading producer of natural pet foods, announced in May that it plans to open a new manufacturing facility in Richmond. The Connecticut-based company intends to create up to 165 jobs.

Yet Blue Buffalo is just one of several animal food manufacturers now residing in the Richmond area, as Hill’s Pet Nutrition and exotic animal food maker Land O’Lakes Purina Feed have called the area home for years, as has hog feed producer Maxwell Milling of Indiana.

“In general, they’re drawn to Indiana because of our access to their raw materials,” explains Valerie Shaffer, president of the Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County. “Indiana’s a big producer of corn, soybeans and poultry, which are major ingredients. The ability to source those raw materials locally is a huge draw.”

She notes that Richmond’s position on Interstate 70 is geographically convenient.

“I’d also add that clustering is not uncommon for industries,” Shaffer offers. “If their competitors are successful, that draws attention to a specific location.”

### **Blue skies ahead?**

Blue Buffalo’s announcement drew praise from Richmond Mayor Dave Snow.

“This is a huge breakthrough for the city of Richmond and our entire area,” he said in a statement. “It has been made possible by a new era of partnerships between the city, the county and our economic development corporation. Blue Buffalo’s commitment to Richmond is a testament to this area’s viability for job growth.”

Partnership was required, according to Shaffer, because upgrades needed to be made to Gaar-Jackson Road in order to make it truck-grade and accessible by all tenants in the industrial park. With the road passing through Richmond, Centerville and the county, several government entities needed to work together.

“I was very pleased this project was a catalyst to get that road completed to support existing industry,” Shaffer reports. “With Blue

Buffalo coming in, it will be another attractive selling point for the lots left in the park.”

She adds that in addition to a commitment to build out infrastructure, an “aggressive” incentives package was offered, including a city-funded rail spur and conditional tax credits from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation.

### **Richmond rich in opportunity**

Drawing workers to the area remains a focus for Shaffer and the county, as opportunities abound for those seeking employment.

“We’re not unlike other rural areas across the state, where we have more job openings than people to fill them,” she concludes. “We have over 500 job openings in the community right now, and we’re looking both inside and outside of Wayne County to fill those positions. We’re consistently ranked in the top 10 least expensive cities. ... We like to use that to show we’re a prime place for relocation.

“We have lost major employers over the years, but have counteracted that by bringing in new manufacturers that tend to be smaller, but a lot more diverse. So for us, that gives us more security when one industry sector is experiencing a difficult time. Others can help fill that void.”

## **REID-ING THE RESULTS**

Everyone has an urgent need for doctors at one point or another. But for some who may lack convenient transportation, or simply don’t live near a medical facility, the circumstances are compounded due to the inconvenience of traveling to the doctor’s office or hospital.

Richmond-based Reid Health strives to tackle this issue. Its new Reid HealthNOW program is the latest development, allowing patients to use an app to consult with a medical professional using a mobile device or computer.

“One of the goals is to provide innovative technology to our patients,” reports president and CEO Craig Kinyon. “A lot of our lives are conducted on these rectangles (mobile phones), and they’d like to use that to speak to a physician. More and more, that’s the expectation of millennials and people who have grown up with these devices. It saves them time, like shopping online, and they’re accustomed to how fast things can be done over the phone.”

### **In practice**

Reid Health is one of only five organizations in Indiana launching

Continued on page 78



Reid Hospital has taken full advantage of opportunities in telemedicine to enhance convenience for its patients. Its Reid HealthNOW app allows patients and practitioners to communicate via mobile devices.

this type of initiative as part of a statewide pilot program. Reid physicians will provide coverage for the pilot, powered through a partnership with American Well – a national telehealth services provider.

“It’s generally for lower-level issues, like calling in a prescription, referring you for over-the-counter products, or any number of things,” Kinyon says. “Obviously, if you have a laceration, they wouldn’t deal with that.”

Reid Health serves a six-county area (four in Indiana, two in Ohio) – much of which includes rural locales. While Reid HealthNOW is convenient for those with long commutes to the hospital, Kinyon

believes such technology could be used by patients everywhere.

“I think it fits well with the rural community, but it’s not limited to that,” he asserts. “Let’s look at Indianapolis; sometimes to get from one side of Indy to another could take 45 minutes, depending on the traffic.”

He poses an example in which a doctor could evaluate an infection or a rash via a phone’s camera and then determine the severity or contagiousness.

Kinyon reports some health practitioners may have been skeptical, but others have found it’s not a far cry from services they were already offering.

“Feedback has been very positive,” he relays. “The providers went through their thoughts on this and wondered if they could provide good medicine by doing this. It was interesting that when they talked among themselves, they realized they were already doing this, since they take calls from patients at night or on weekends, talk to them over the phone to get a history and decide what to do. Well, this just adds video to it.”

### App-rectiating technology

While the technology will vastly enhance efficiency in dealing with medical professionals, Kinyon notes the next step is educating the public how it works. He adds that patients have to be willing to try it.

“Health care is a more personal issue, so people have to be comfortable talking about it over the phone, and with doctors they may not know at first,” he offers. “‘Can they really help me?’ Those thoughts are potential barriers to getting started. But there will be a point in time where it makes a lot of sense to try it.”

*The Reid HealthNOW app can be downloaded for free via the App Store. Virtual visits are available at all hours.*

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**RESOURCES:** Craig Kinyon, Reid Health, at [www.reidhealth.org](http://www.reidhealth.org) | Valerie Shaffer, Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County, at [www.edwc.com](http://www.edwc.com) | Alison Zajdel, Cope Environmental Center, at [www.copeenvironmental.org](http://www.copeenvironmental.org)