



# Stu Phillips: Boonville

## 'Long-term Prospects are Excellent'

**S**tu Phillips' family roots in the Boonville area go back to the 1860s. The business and community leader says, "I can't imagine living somewhere else." Phillips operates two adjacent businesses – Industrial Woodkraft, Inc. and Truss Systems, Inc. – employing about 80 people. He is also active in buying land and property for minor subdivision development and as a long-term investment. Among his community involvements: chamber of commerce, community foundation, economic development advisory commission, redevelopment commission, youth community center, St. Mary's Health System.

*BizVoice* spent some time with Phillips discussing business and community issues. His comments and observations include:

**BizVoice:** Tell us about Industrial Woodkraft (Phillips started the company in 1979)?

**Stu Phillips:** "Some classify it as part of the pallet industry, but it's really a niche. We produce all the skids for all the coal products for Alcoa's Warrick operations. We have another plant that serves Alcoa in Tennessee. About 60% of our business comes from Alcoa.

"The niche is that this sometimes requires special machinery. There's not just one machine out on the market that will do what we need done. We're successful in the niche because we can design and manufacture our own production equipment. We've built some fairly sophisticated pieces of machinery."

Phillips describes Truss Systems, founded five years ago, as a regular truss plant with "state of the art, new equipment, computerized and constantly looking to upgrade."

**BV:** Talk about the importance of diversity in your business interests

**SP:** "You can get yourself too involved in a single business. When you have the ability to diversify, it's a good move. Owning land today is a good hedge against inflation."

**By Tom Schuman**

**BV: How competitive is business today?**

**SP:** “Everything is competitive. It’s a case of knowing your industry, knowing your competition, knowing your market and how you fit into these. You have to be the best you can be at whatever you do. I know it sounds ‘clicheish,’ but I really believe that.”

**BV: What are the advantages of your location?**

**SP:** “I located here to be in close proximity to our large customer base, but I like the rural type community. Like any community, there are some drawbacks, but the overall business climate here is excellent. I like the people here. You find that good midwestern work ethic here for the most part.”

**BV: What are some of the challenges in Boonville and Warrick County?**

**SP:** “Being in the southern part of the state, we like to feel we’ve been left out of some of the funding the rest of the state gets. A couple of major road projects – highways 62 and 66 – are 30 years overdue. Upgrading Indiana 62 from Evansville to Chandler to Boonville will open up this area for development.

“Sewers, or the lack thereof, have been a major problem. I believe we had the longest ban in the state, not being able to add because of not having any capacity. We are updating and adding capacity.

“The sewers, the roads, starting a new industrial park. Things are starting to happen here. The long-term prospects, I think, are excellent.”

**BV: So many manufacturers are facing stiff threats from international competition. How does that impact your business?**

**SP:** “In my types of business, international competition is not an issue. With the effect it has on some of my customers, there is some connection. But I have absolutely no control over that. My business is very regional in nature.”

**BV: What are the prospects within the county?**

**SP:** “It’s a good area to start a business with the potential economic growth here. Warrick County has been one of the fastest growing counties in the state, primarily in residential. We’re trying to put ourselves in position to attract industry and commercial development.

“That’s needed to diversify the tax base and create jobs for the kids who graduate and want to stay around here to work.”

**BV: Is cooperation as good as it needs to be to allow the area to move forward?**

**SP:** “There have been some turf issues. We’ve made some headway working through the chamber and other organizations. Our government affairs committee at the chamber wasn’t seeing cooperation among local political entities. With new officeholders coming in, many times long-range planning seems to go by the wayside. But the awareness of people working together is at a much higher level than in the past.”

**BV: Why is it important to be involved in the community?**

**SP:** “I’ve dedicated a lot of time the last 10 years to community efforts. If you don’t get involved and try to make things happen, then you don’t have a right to complain.”



**Two companies, along with property developments and investments, keep Stu Phillips busy in Boonville.**