

## Developing Tomorrow's Workers Education, Training Often Start at Basic Level

**E**ducation and workforce development are combined into one driver, or key area in which Indiana needs to excel, in the Indiana Chamber's *Economic Vision 2010*. It's no coincidence that it's the first driver listed.

If pressed to identify just one of the five drivers as being most critical to Indiana's economic future, many Chamber and private sector leaders involved in the effort choose lifelong education and training (and retraining) of the workforce. The two attributes are linked closely in our regional focus counties – Perry, Spencer and Warrick – as well as throughout southwest Indiana.

The three counties – along the Ohio River east of Evansville – are prime examples of the rural nature so prevalent throughout the state. The largest city among the three, according to 2002

population figures, is Tell City, the Perry County seat, with 7,755 residents. Boonville (6,856) is tops in Warrick County, with Rockport (2,146) and Santa Claus (2,129) each comprising just more than 10% of the Spencer County population.

Each county is similar in size – ranging from 381 square miles in Perry to 398 in Spencer. Manufacturing comprises a significant percentage of the business operations. The southeast portion of Warrick, particularly the Newburgh area, has seen growth in population and diversity in business due to its proximity to Evansville and Vanderburgh County.

The challenges throughout much of the region remain at a fundamental level. Enhancing high school education attainment, coping with a growing Hispanic population and addressing literacy needs are among the priorities.

Several efforts are in place, with more on the way. Not surprisingly, partnerships between business and education hold the key to future success.

### The right S.I.N.E.

The Southwest Indiana Network for Education (S.I.N.E.) is a not-for-profit association that tackles education and lifelong learning issues in nine southwest Indiana counties. In addition to Perry, Spencer and Warrick, it serves Daviess, Gibson, Knox, Pike, Posey and Vanderburgh.

S.I.N.E., based in Oakland City in Gibson County, is involved at many levels of the education and training process. Susanne Wilson, business education and adult learning coordinator, says location and history are prodigious obstacles to overcome. The rural nature of the counties and a familiarity, if not acceptance, of economic struggles adds to the challenge.

“Our mission is to create a culture supportive of education. Education is not valued here (the way it needs to be),” Wilson asserts. “It's becoming much more evident that it's difficult to

survive and make a good living with a minimal education.”

She says that 25% of the adult population in the region is without a high school diploma. According to the Indiana Department of Education and the latest census figures, that figure also applies to Perry County. Spencer (18.8%) and Warrick (13.7%) have significantly lower percentages of adults age 25 and over without at least a high school diploma.

The National Adult Literacy Survey includes five levels of literacy in its evaluation. Again,



Whether it's manufacturing organs at Swiss Plywood/William Tell Woodcrafters in Tell City or bathroom fixtures at Peerless Pottery in Rockport, experienced employees must adjust to workplace changes.

**By Tom Schuman**

on a regional basis, the numbers show 44% of residents achieving at just the two basic literacy levels.

S.I.N.E. offers adult basic education programs and GED preparation. It works to train educators to provide them with the knowledge on how to break the cycle of poverty. It established broad-based adult literacy committees in each of the nine counties, with development or enhancement of existing adult literacy centers among the key provisions.

"Counties do have unique needs. Not that those needs don't cross over, but there are distinct needs in each of our communities," Wilson surmises.

In addition to distinct requirements for services, local access is a critical element. Not just one site within a county or city. But bringing the educational opportunities to those who need it most.

"It's hard to get people motivated after doing all the things they need to do, and they're tired at the end of the day," according to Wilson. "Many times these programs have to be workplace supported, taking place on the job site."

## Language barriers

Literacy and adult education are a starting point for some.

For others, English as Second Language (ESL) training is an even more basic area of need. A partner with S.I.N.E. and others in filling this gap is English Works in Indiana. The statewide program, based in Santa Claus, is a partnership of the Indiana

Department of Workforce Development and the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Adult Education.

Individual employees obviously benefit from the ESL training. Companies are also prime beneficiaries, in the form of elevated attitudes and morale, enhanced safety, higher levels of teamwork and increased quality of work and productivity.

What started as a short-term summer project has evolved into what director Timmie Westfall calls a "workplace ESL model for Indiana." Teachers are actually at the business site between September and June, working with employees several times a week.

"They key to our program is flexibility," Westfall explains. "We're not the school in the box."

In addition to coming up with the training model during the initial year of the program, publications and other complementary materials were developed. English Works is not only helping employees upgrade their language skills, but also assisting supervisors in becoming more aware of special needs and even supporting the community in embracing new residents and workers with Hispanic or other backgrounds.

An instructional manual, CD-ROM with PowerPoint training and interactive CD are three components for community leaders to use in forming an outreach organization. Westfall says she has seen many communities try to assist limited English proficient

speakers, but the architect of the effort often gets "burned out" in the details. With the model in place, the focus can be on achieving success in the individual community.

## Return on investment

Since 2000, English Works in Indiana has trained nearly 100 teachers, served 100 companies and taught more than 1,900 employee learners. Southwestern Indiana companies are included in that total, but a strong indication of the impact comes from Kim Reese, training and development manager for Harrah's Casino and Hotel in East Chicago.

Twenty-five students registered for the program, which included a pair of 2½-hour sessions each week for 12 weeks. Nearly three-quarters of the participants had less than a sixth-grade education. Reese says she was amazed at the enthusiasm and desire that the employees/students exhibited.

The end result? A 40% decrease in absences, department managers estimating a 60% increase in teamwork and improved customer satisfaction scores of nearly 6%. The return on investment is approximately \$300,000 for Harrah's.

The future of English Works in Indiana is in doubt, however, as current funding expires in the middle of this year.

(The Indiana Chamber Foundation plans to partner with key interest groups on an in-depth, employer-based

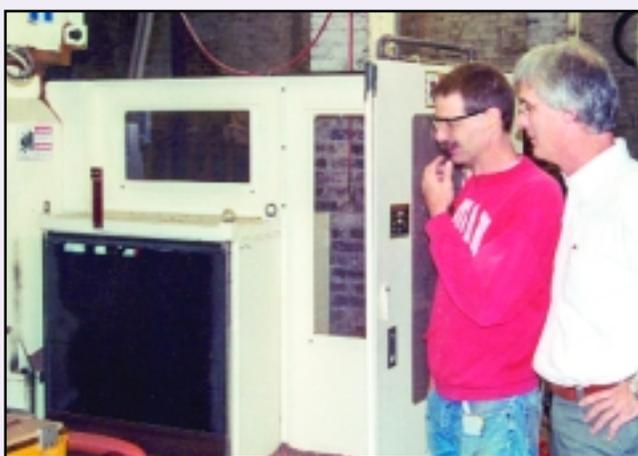
workforce literacy project. Documentation of the needs in Indiana, as well as best practices nationally, will lead to implementation of a workplace-driven pilot program).

## Changing course

Tell City and Perry County are trying to build on the efforts of S.I.N.E., English Works and others through the Perry County Learning Partnership (PCLP). Initiatives include creating a Perry County certification – identifying skills required by workers to succeed in area businesses – and establishment of a learning center similar to ones in place in other southwest Indiana counties.

The needs are evident, claims Bill Borders, president of Swiss Plywood/William Tell Woodcrafters, a contract furniture manufacturer housed in a Tell City building famous for its measurements of floodwaters when the Ohio River overflows its banks. With international competition – not just China, but also Malaysia and the Philippines, he says – "hammering the furniture industry," it's change or don't survive.

"We have to do it a little better, do it a little smarter," notes Borders, who has been with the company since 1977. His brother Gene has been on board since 1964 and their father was a previous manager and owner. "Workers have to be able to deal with mechanization. They're running quarter million,



**Bill Borders, right, says many of his company's employees need computer literacy in addition to wood machining intelligence to excel.**



**English Works in Indiana classroom training helps language proficiency and productivity for employees such as Jose Olmeda (right) at Flexcel, a Kimball division in Santa Claus that produces projection TV cabinets.**



to find people willing to learn. If that person cannot be found internally, we have to go out to find them.”

Borders says the PCLP is feeling its way through the certification process. It may lead to some changes in high school curriculum, he notes, with the end result being a certificate of completion for those who obtain the education and/or training needed to possess the skills sets required by area employers.

The learning center is expected to be operational in the spring of this year. Perry County is using the model of the Bedford-based South Central Education Association (SCEA), which operates six learning centers in the southern part of the state. Indiana State University serves as the site manager, with company and individual education and training needs met through programs offered by ISU, Indiana University, Purdue University, Ivy Tech State College and Vincennes University.

Steve Ray, director of the SCEA, says his organization serves as a facilitator for company needs – matching the business with opportunities proposed by the educational institutions. The company chooses which partner it will work with. The majority of the training requests are for computer-based skills or increased proficiency in communications or frontline customer service abilities.

Factory closures and high unemployment rates have only fueled the need for the centers, Ray comments.

“We assist in GED preparation and tests, but once people get their GED, they still don’t have the skills to find adequate employment,” he says, adding that additional training and/or working

toward an associate’s degree are the next steps. “We feel this is something we can grow and work on within the counties we serve.”

## Experience, Skills Boost Newburgh Company

**A** Warrick County business has the word “mechanical” in its name, but general manager Steve Yancey says the six full-time people within the company require far more than the typical manufacturing skills.

King Mechanical Specialty in Newburgh provides industrial maintenance equipment for chemical facilities, power plants, contractors and more. It designs and manufactures a variety of actuators, valves and other products.

“We’re not looking for someone to just turn wrenches. While many manufacturers treat such equipment as hardware, we treat it as an instrumentation package,” Yancey asserts. “When we deliver a piece of equipment to the end customer, it has to be correct.”

The economic downturn forced the first layoff in company history several years ago. The six remaining employees all have at least 10 years of experience with the organization. Strong payment and benefit packages have allowed King Mechanical “to keep the good people we have,” Yancey says.

When employees do come to the company, they experience a full year of training. With the workplace and technology changing so rapidly, Yancey believes the learning never really ends. Utilizing online resources and other training methods are strongly encouraged.

His people must be able to make decisions on their own and think on their feet. He’s afraid others aren’t able to say the same as the number of simply incorrect and inaccurate pieces of equipment he receives continues to grow.

“It’s a disturbing trend,” Yancey says. Today’s common complaint that younger workers don’t possess the work ethic of previous generations is not totally to blame, he maintains. “I’m not sure that wasn’t something my father and grandfather didn’t say about our generation. Young people are going to be a very valuable part of our economy the next 15 years or so. I’m sure they’re no different at all from the generations of the 1960s and 1970s.”

**Resource: Steve Yancey, King Mechanical Specialty, at (812) 853-8301**

## Business leadership

A key element already in place could lead to success in Perry County. The business community is leading the way. Company leaders and business organizations teamed together, Borders recalls, to proclaim that these steps were essential for community development.

“The business community has to be actively involved,” he insists, adding emphatically that, “if it’s not in partnership with the education community, it’s not going to work. We have business buy-in. We have local government buy-in. We have all three local school corporations on board. That’s a major accomplishment. We’re absolutely on the right track.”

Ray agrees. “You don’t typically see that, the brainchild coming from the business community and not the education community. That’s one reason they’re headed for success.”

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## Developing Tomorrow's Workers

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Wilson says the same is true with the various S.I.N.E. programs. Business representatives were invited to the table in the early going. The visionary process in determining workplace needs and barriers to solving problems was led by industry.

A Learning Exchange program has proven successful. Teachers and students observe and learn in the workplace, with business leaders coming to schools to talk to students. The program has been taken to the next level with grants for special tasks in which students work directly with business partners on Science Fair or other projects.

"The three-way exchange is OK, but what makes this attractive is the special projects. I was worried we wouldn't have business involvement, but they have been very, very receptive and very, very open," Wilson concludes.

Another critical component for Borders is that the solution is a local one. The ideas coming out of Indianapolis or Washington are not bad ones, he offers, but often times don't apply to rural

areas such as Perry County.

"Solutions pretty much have to start at the ground level and work their way up," Borders contends. "Evansville's problems and solutions are not Tell City's, and Tell City's solution is not Rockport's. There are different sets of circumstances, different industry bases."

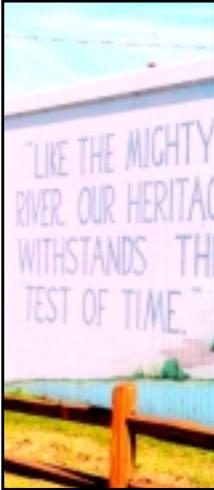
### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** **Susanne Wilson, Southwest Indiana Network for Education, at (866) 380-7463 or [www.sineonline.com](http://www.sineonline.com)**

**Timmie Westfall, English Works in Indiana, at (888) 481-9990 or [www.ciesc.k12.in.us/adulted/](http://www.ciesc.k12.in.us/adulted/)**

**Bill Borders, Swiss Plywood Corp., at (812) 547-2366**

**Steve Ray, South Central Education Association, at (812) 279-4844**



## Perry County

Population (1990) – 19,107  
 Population (2002) – 18,827  
 Population (2010 projected) – 18,709  
 Adults (25+ in 2000 census) – 12,730  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher – 74.8%  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree – 9.6%  
 Per capita personal income (2001) \$22,688  
 Median household income (2000) \$36,246

### Cities and Towns

#### 2002 Population

Tell City – 7,755  
 Cannelton – 1,188  
 Troy – 396

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Perry County	1,080	11.4%
From Spencer County	459	4.9%
From Kentucky	293	3.1%
From Crawford County	95	1.0%
From Dubois County	69	0.7%
From Warrick County	49	0.5%
Out of Perry County	3,253	28.0%
To Dubois County	1,027	8.8%
To Kentucky	855	7.4%
To Spencer County	694	6.0%
To Vanderburgh County	146	1.3%
To Warrick County	114	1.0%



## Warrick County

Population (1990) – 44,920  
 Population (2002) – 53,624  
 Population (2010 projected) – 56,631  
 Adults (25+ in 2000 census) – 34,558  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher – 86.3%  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree – 21.8%  
 Per capita personal income (2001) – \$29,217  
 Median household income (2000) – \$48,814

### Cities and Towns

#### 2002 Population

Boonville – 6,856  
 Newburgh – 3,211  
 Chandler – 3,086  
 Lynnville – 792  
 Eberfeld – 632  
 Tennyson – 295

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Warrick County	3,484	17.0%
From Vanderburgh County	1,736	8.5%
From Spencer County	710	3.5%
From Gibson County	308	1.5%
From Kentucky	190	0.9%
From Posey County	148	0.7%
Out of Warrick County	16,021	48.5%
To Vanderburgh County	13,252	40.1%
To Gibson County	774	2.3%
To Spencer County	488	1.5%
To Kentucky	435	1.3%
To Dubois County	285	0.9%



## Spencer County

Population (1990) – 19,490  
 Population (2002) – 20,353  
 Population (2010 projected) – 20,241  
 Adults (25+ in 2000 census) – 13,498  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher – 81.2%  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree – 13%  
 Per capita personal income (2001) – \$25,144  
 Median household income (2000) – \$42,451

### Cities and Towns

#### 2002 Population

Rockport – 2,146  
 Santa Claus – 2,129  
 Dale – 1,563  
 Grandview – 700  
 Chrisney – 563  
 Gentryville – 257

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Spencer County	2,160	20.2%
From Perry County	694	6.5%
From Warrick County	488	4.6%
From Dubois County	366	3.4%
From Kentucky	285	2.7%
From Vanderburgh County	89	0.8%
Out of Spencer County	4,430	34.2%
To Dubois County	1,452	11.2%
To Vanderburgh County	996	7.7%
To Warrick County	710	5.5%
To Perry County	459	3.5%
To Kentucky	412	3.2%