

Spotlight on Small Business

Governor Gives State Update, Chamber Honors Small Business Leaders

By Rebecca Patrick

“We’re proud of Lilly, Mittal Steel and others, but the future of the state rests with small business success,” proclaimed Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels in his address to the state’s small business leaders who gathered at the Indiana Chamber’s recent *Small Business Day at the Statehouse*.

Indeed, small business represents the number one employer group in the state, with more than half of the Hoosier workforce employed by a small business.

Welcome changes and resources

The governor spoke of several state initiatives in place to improve the small business climate, including efforts administered by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC).

“We formed IEDC to go after jobs of all kinds — and have now lowered the eligibility threshold (to 75 employees for the EDGE Tax Credit). You no longer have to be a big business or one organized for collective bargaining to get the attention. At IEDC, no investment is too small,” Daniels asserted.

“It used to have to be 100 jobs before (the state) showed interest, but the number of jobs is only one factor. A smaller number of high-value jobs are as important. We need these types of jobs every bit as much as traditional jobs.”

Regulatory reform has been another top priority for Daniels.

“We expect regulatory service to be fast. Time is money; money waiting on a permit, etc. can impact hiring an employee or making a different type of investment,” he explained. “We also expect regulatory policy to be predictable. We don’t want to change something in six months time (and have to go back to employers).”

It’s the entire mentality associated with regulatory compliance that the governor has strived to change.

“In our administration I’ve said, ‘You’re coaches, not cops. Our job is to inform,’” Daniels declared. “For example, IDEM (the Indiana Department of Environmental Management) is there for free compliant advice ... there are so many rules to follow.

“I’ve never met an employer yet that wants to pollute the environment or hurt an employee.”

Communication upgrade

Despite improvements, Daniels readily admits there are areas in which the state needs to improve — specifically in organization and getting the word out about opportunities.

“Federal SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) grants are an area in which there is real value.

The state’s failure to compete for those is unbelievable. We had less than 40 applications last year. Every other state had five to six times more than that,” Daniels reported.

“There can be free money waiting there. ... I encourage small businesses to look into SBIR grants.”

Automatic tax abatement is another avenue for small businesses to pursue. Yet, said Daniels, only one percent of the state’s companies take advantage and those are big businesses.

“You can invest up to \$2 million without have to kiss anyone’s ring. Anyone anywhere is eligible for this personal property tax abatement,” Daniels affirmed. “We want you to add that new piece of equipment, that new wing, that new component. A business shouldn’t be taxed — as historically has been the case — for the sin of doing what you should do.

“Government can enable economic growth if it does its job well.”

Chamber recognizes excellence

Hoosier small businesses on the right path were honored by the Indiana Chamber at a luncheon held in conjunction with *Small Business Day*. Cannon IV, an Indianapolis-based provider of computer printing and imaging solutions, and Family Express, a small chain of convenience stores and fueling centers headquartered in Valparaiso, were named Indiana’s Small Business of the Year and Entrepreneurial Spirit Award winners, respectively.

Gov. Daniels stresses the state’s commitment to Hoosier small businesses.





Two unique aspects of Family Express: trucks that deliver food daily to locations and its own brand of coffee.

AuthorHouse in Bloomington and Excellon Technologies in Fort Wayne were also recognized as finalists for Small Business of the Year.

Cannon IV

Once a grassroots office supply business, Cannon IV today has 100 employees at its 40,000-square-foot facility in Indianapolis.

The company integrates best-in-class systems from leading manufacturers, such as Hewlett Packard and Panasonic, to improve document workflow and increase efficiency. Schools, businesses and governments across the U.S. call on Cannon IV for printers, copiers and computer supplies.

In the face of an ever-changing industry, Cannon IV's winning combination is its commitment to employees, customers and the community. "When others in the imaging business were downsizing to stay competitive, Cannon IV opted to instead dramatically change its approach," stated Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar.

"They re-engineered the company's focus from a 9-to-1 ratio of products to services to one evenly split. This allowed Cannon to keep its staff and even add to it. It was a harder road, but it paid off big time for Cannon and its employees."

Offered Cannon IV Vice President Jim Jones, "I think we've been successful because we've focused on what's most important — our people; they come first. I believe in doing the right thing and good things will come."

Family Express

Family Express Corporation was given the Chamber's first Entrepreneurial Spirit Award for its vision in growing the company.

Founded in 1975, Family Express today has 47 stores in 22 communities in northwest and north central Indiana.

Cannon IV believes in putting employees first; the company's headquarters on Indianapolis' near east side.

"Thirty years ago, the principle focus was survival," recalled Gus Olympidis, president and CEO of Family Express. "Today, the focus is to stay the course in building a future one relationship at a time, one customer at a time. Even though we have 14 million customer occasions every year, we constantly remind ourselves that customers are precious ... so we never ever take them for granted."

At any Family Express store, on display are many of the company's own private brands — including JAVA WAVE gourmet coffees as well as Cravin's Market, a line of sandwiches and bakery items. Also unique are the Family Express Moo trucks that deliver perishable goods daily.

However, it's what the company terms its "living brand" — the Family Express employees who embrace customer service — which Olympidis ranks as its biggest advantage. "We have assembled a team that has intellectual curiosity, a positive personality, sensitivity to community and a general inclination towards having fun," he enthused. It takes about 100 applicants to find a Family Express employee.

"Family Express' passion for customer service, its distinct private brand of products and the latest in technology conveniences have helped the company grow and prosper," Brinegar noted. "It's an inspiring success story."

INFORMATION LINK

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Also at *Small Business Day*, six state legislators were given the Indiana Chamber's 2005 Small Business Champion Award for their dedication to bettering the state's business environment for small employers. The honorees were:

- Sen. Gary Dillon (R-Pierceton), District #27
- Sen. Brandt Hershman (R-Monticello), District #16
- Sen. Lindel Hume (D-Princeton), District #34
- Rep. Tim Harris (R-Marion), District #31
- Rep. Sheila Klinker (D-Lafayette), District #58
- Rep. Eric Turner (R-Marion), District #32