



JoAnn Brouillette is a passionate advocate for the Indiana Chamber, often assisting the organization's team with new and prospective member companies.

# JoAnn Brouillette

## Making the Membership Case

By Charlee Beasor

In a grain elevator in Dunn, Indiana, one would have found a young JoAnn Brouillette with a bottle of Choc-Ola, working the scales in her makeshift office in a supply closet of the grain elevator owned and operated by her father and grandfather.

"I remember it vividly. Back then I would be climbing ladders and climbing up on rail cars," she recalls.

Today, as the third generation to run her family's company, Demeter LP, Brouillette's role involves (slightly) less climbing.

"From an early age, I got involved and I was around the business. I grew up cleaning out grain pits and dumping trucks and sweeping floors to today being the president of the organization and doing everything from long-term strategy to investments.

"Every day is a new challenge. I'm on the executive committee and also on the janitorial committee," she says with a laugh.

Demeter LP owns and operates grain elevators (seven today). The company is a conduit between the farmer and the end user for grain storage and transportation. It also provides a variety of risk management tools. Employing 35 people, the Fowler-based company is 30 miles northwest of Lafayette and about 15 minutes from the company's first grain elevator in nearby Dunn, where Brouillette used

to work and play with her four siblings.

She chuckles as she notes the comparison to the popular Journey song, *Don't Stop Believin'*, when she declares: "I'm just a small town girl."

"It shaped me in a lot of good ways and growing up in a small community was, for me, a major plus. I came from a large family and grew up in our family business."

In 1944, her grandfather started what is now Demeter – named for the Greek goddess of fertile earth – eventually calling his son home from St. Joseph's College to help run the business.

"Together, they bought a second elevator and that was at a day when there was corn that was stored on the cob. And they grew. My dad's really the one that grew the business and we consolidated under the name of Demeter in the 1970s," she explains.

That background of living and breathing the family business as a young child and watching her father and grandfather work together was the foundation for Brouillette's future in agribusiness and Demeter.

She graduated from Hanover College and had been working in the admissions office at her alma mater when her father called and – in history repeating itself – asked her to help him run the family's business in 1986. Brouillette has been president and managing partner since 1996.

"My dad reached out and asked if I'd be willing to come back. It could have been selling ice to Eskimos and I would have done it because I just really thought the world of him and admired him," she relays.

When asked about role models, it's no surprise who is her No. 1.



Brouillette doesn't have a lot of free time with her various roles, but when she can get away she says she enjoys "off-the-beaten-path travel. I've hiked in Patagonia; I've done some fishing off the coast of Columbia; I danced at the Tropicana in Havana."



"It would definitely be my dad. He was my hero from a business standpoint, as well as a human being," Brouillette maintains.

"My dad was one of those people who really just wanted to see people succeed and put people in a position to succeed. He was your biggest cheerleader and he could also come down on you the hardest, but you didn't want to let him down."

### Community spirit

The list of boards and organizations

Brouillette has been involved with over the years is lengthy. Today, she gives her time, talent and energy to several causes, including serving on the Indiana Chamber board of directors and as a trustee for Purdue University.

Her drive to volunteer in her local and statewide community is a trait that was instilled by her parents.

"I've been the beneficiary of living in these communities. I grew up around parents that were very involved, be it the school board, be it the group homes for children or

professional organizations," Brouillette offers.

"I love our communities and I prefer being behind the scenes. . . . I could name a number of names of others that are making a difference. I live in Lafayette and I'm excited about all the things that are going on in our community."

Then-Gov. Mitch Daniels (now Purdue President Mitch Daniels) first appointed Brouillette to the board of trustees of the university in 2006.

"It's great to be part of a team and really wonderful group of people. It's thought provoking; there are always takeaways – not only with Purdue – but a lot of these organizations that I've been honored to be part of. I've gotten a lot more out than perhaps I've been able to give, by learning from different people and being able to apply that to my own business," she notes.

"I could talk all day long about all the innovative things Mitch Daniels is doing to help students be successful in the future and help our university position itself for all the changes that are going on and that are to come within higher education."

### Chamber champion

Brouillette joined the Indiana Chamber board in 2010 and was elected to the Executive Committee in 2014. She has focused many of her efforts on assisting the membership team.

"JoAnn has been able to take advantage of a number of the benefits we offer for Demeter and is able to relay those tangible benefits to new and potential members, thus advancing the mission of the Indiana Chamber," states Brock Hesler, Chamber director of membership.

"We can always call on JoAnn whenever we need help. She really truly understands the importance of communicating the 'why' of membership with the Indiana Chamber and how a company can leverage its partnership with us to grow their business."

Ever humble, Brouillette says she's getting more credit than she deserves. One thing she's not shy about – the importance of strong business representation across the state.

"I see the benefits of being a member of the Indiana Chamber and the more voices we have, the stronger our voice is together. It's important that businesses communicate what our needs are, not at the expense of others, but in addition to them. And communicate not only our needs, but the implications of policies and laws on our businesses," she concludes.