

ONE BIG DAY

Local Chambers Prepare for Statehouse Return

By Matt Ottinger

Call it a new tradition. The Indiana Chamber of Commerce and Indiana Chamber Executives Association (ICEA) partnered last March to present the 2025 Chamber Day at the Statehouse. And it was a hit for all involved. The 2026 event is now scheduled for January 26, and organizers expect another well-attended and productive gathering.

Justin Groenert, chief strategy officer for the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, is the ICEA board member overseeing Chamber Day at the Statehouse for the organization. He notes the 2025 Chamber Day event was the first time the Indiana Chamber and ICEA partnered on the undertaking, and Groenert believes it yielded positive outcomes, expressing appreciation for Indiana Chamber President and CEO Vanessa Green Sinderson's desire to partner.

"We saw some synergies (between the organizations) and that we could help drive

more chambers across the state to participate alongside the business community as a whole," he offers. "We thought it was a good opportunity, and we're excited about it (for 2026)."

The Indiana Chamber's influence at the Statehouse is beneficial for local chambers statewide that have many other focuses but share a desire to connect with legislators, Groenert asserts.

"When you can put a couple hundred people on the fourth floor for Speaker (Todd) Houston and (Senate President Pro Tempore Rod) Bray for a breakfast and then send the masses to the Statehouse to meet with their legislators, it sends a very clear message that we're engaged, that we're interested in what's going on and that (we're intent on having) our voices heard."

Local flavor

Indianapolis-based Torchbearer Public Affairs represents a host of local chambers of commerce across the state and provides legislative advocacy support. Caryl Auslander, its managing principal, lauds Chamber Day at the Statehouse for helping her clients connect with decisionmakers.

"Any time chambers have the opportunity to coordinate with other chambers is always

helpful, and the opportunity to show up in force to our delegation, to our Governor, to legislators, to the administration, (and show them) how important the business voice is, I think it's always a great opportunity to highlight that," Auslander surmises. "So, I think they really appreciated the opportunity to meet with their delegation, to spend some time communicating with other chamber executives and to really highlight all the important work that the employer community does for the state."

From Evansville to central Indiana and up to northern Indiana, the impact of the 2025 event was truly statewide.

"Attending last year's Chamber Day at the Statehouse was an incredibly valuable experience for me and the Goshen Chamber team," shares Nick Kieffer, Goshen Chamber of Commerce President and CEO. "We appreciated the opportunity to connect directly with state legislators and policy leaders to discuss issues that impact our members and the Goshen business community."

Kieffer remarks that the day's sessions offered insight into statewide priorities and helped him and his team better understand how to align local advocacy with broader legislative efforts.

"Most importantly, it reinforced the



Legislative leaders and representatives statewide took part in 2025 Chamber Day at the Statehouse panels and discussions, taking the opportunity to address issues most pertinent to the business community.

importance of having a strong voice at the table – ensuring that Goshen’s business community is represented in conversations shaping Indiana’s economic future,” he adds. “The relationships and information gained will strengthen our continued advocacy efforts in the coming years.”

Adds Groenert, “Understanding what is going on in the world and being able to articulate it to your members in a way that helps them gain as much clarity as can be found in the uncertainty going on, I think those are really important things to be doing as a chamber.”

And the connection benefits not just the chambers and the businesses they serve, but their representatives as well.

“I think it’s always fun for these legislators to have their chambers of commerce in their home; it’s usually the other way around,” Auslander imparts. “So, to have them at the Statehouse to have such a large group of employers, I think they enjoyed that a lot.”

Issues on the table

Local chambers, and the Indiana Chamber, are in the process of formulating issue priorities for the upcoming session.

“Every chamber is unique and every community is different, but workforce and childcare seem to be the two that kind of always seem to come up every year,” Auslander reports. “And it doesn’t matter if you’re a large regional metro chamber or a smaller community rural chamber, being able to have the skilled workforce that you need is

important to them.”

Groenert says the tax climate, local government and new approaches to economic development are also on the radars of local chambers.

“This session will be important for businesses on several fronts, and we’re excited to engage further with legislators during Chamber Day,” Sinderson remarks. “Steps we can take to ensure our energy future and address healthcare issues like rural pressures and Medicaid cost shifting will all be of great interest for our members.

“Also, developing artificial intelligence regulation that safeguards the public while fostering innovation has potentially a big impact on Hoosier employers.”

Ultimately, the 2026 event is slated to be a hot ticket for local chambers, according to Groenert.

“We all aim to be the voice of our business community and the voice of our community in a lot of ways,” he concludes. “That means these opportunities are really important, and I’m looking forward to a really great event (in February).”

In addition to legislative programming, the 2026 Chamber Day at the Statehouse will feature the Best in Business Awards Luncheon – including the Coolest Thing Made in Indiana and Small Business of the Year honorees – and conclude with an evening reception at the Indiana Roof Ballroom.

Those interested can register at www.indianachamber.com/chamberday.

RESOURCES: Caryl Auslander, Torchbearer Public Affairs, at www.torchbearerin.com | Justin Groenert, Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, at www.evansvilleregion.com | Nick Kieffer, Goshen Chamber of Commerce, at www.goshen.org | Vanessa Green Sinderson, Indiana Chamber of Commerce, at www.indianachamber.com



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