



NextEra Energy Resources

COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR

GRAND TRANSFORMATION

Igniting Growth in Boone County

By Symone C. Skrzycki



If a picture says 1,000 words, what does a gallery of photos reveal about Boone County, the 2023 NextEra Energy Resources Community of the Year?

Likewise, who better to bring the county to life than some of the people making a difference within it?

Through photos and conversations, *BizVoice*® tells Boone County's story.

Situated just north of Indianapolis, Boone County is attracting businesses of all sizes and sectors, as well as citizens with its increasing list of job opportunities and quality-of-life amenities. The second-fastest growing county in Indiana is comprised of anchor cities such as Lebanon, Whitestown and Zionsville – and smaller communities like Advance, Jamestown and Thorntown.

Perspective: Boone County Economic Development Corporation (EDC)

BizVoice: What are some of the qualities that make Boone County special?

Molly Whitehead, executive director: “What we really pride ourselves on is that we don’t take a cookie-cutter approach here. We consider every company, every project that comes our way on a case-by-case basis. We want to make sure they’re a good fit for us and vice versa. We want to ensure that we can supply the workforce they’re going to have, the amenities and the infrastructure that they might need in order to do business.”

BV: What unique role do small businesses play there?

MW: “Of the businesses here in Boone County, 80% are considered small. That’s typically – by definition – companies that make less than \$5 million or have, say five or fewer employees.

“Something that sets the county apart is – we have a specific staff

member dedicated to small business and entrepreneurship (Claire Gelinas). She goes out and meets with dozens of companies. We have a microloan program. We’ve opened up investment opportunities for our small businesses to help them grow, and some of them will be able to scale up.”

BV: Economic development transcends dollars. How do you characterize it?

MW: “At the end of the day, economic development – whether people realize it or not – touches every aspect of their lives. It’s the taxes that are generated largely from the businesses that help fund our needs and our wants. It helps fund our roads. It helps fund our schools. It helps fund the infrastructure that’s needed in general. And by bringing in businesses and helping those businesses grow, we’re impacting (residents and workers) in a positive way. We’re helping provide gainful employment opportunities for people so that they make a better life for themselves.”

Perspective: Elected Officials

BV: For one county to be elevated across the board, it almost always takes cooperation and collaboration. How has that occurred in Boone County?

Boone County Commissioner Jeff Wolfe: “It starts number one, with our very strong economic development corporation who has worked really hard to bring the communities together, and to work with each of us and the county to say, ‘What is it that we want here? How do we want to grow this county? And how do we want to make this the place that people want to be?’ That cooperation has worked its way into the leaders of all the communities, the cities and towns. We all look to each other and try to do things that are supportive of each other.”

BV: Talk about the Zionsville Gateway area and what it will mean to the downtown business district.

Zionsville Mayor John Stehr: “This is a big deal for Zionsville, and I think that we have to think big when it comes to that



Looking for a scenic workout? Or shopping? Head to Zionsville's Big-4 Trail tunnel or its boutiques and Brick Street Business District.



area of town. And it's not just a gateway as you enter into town; it's got to be thought of as the south village. Everything that we do there between the intersection of Zionsville Road in Sycamore all the way down to 106th Street has to enhance what we have here now. I think we can do that and make it a great element in downtown Zionsville. I call it the south village because I think it's going to have its own identity, but it's not going to compete with what we have here. It's going to enhance what we have here now."

BV: There's a lot of things that have been done in the downtown Lebanon area the last few years. Share what you're doing to make your community the best it can be.

Lebanon Mayor Matthew Gentry: "We've focused on quality of place. We really want to make Lebanon a great place to raise kids, grow up, have a family and (if they do leave) come back as well. So, we focused on our parks. We focused on connecting our Big-4 Trail all the way throughout the community, but also attracting great employers. We focused on bringing companies that pay high wages to support their families, and really just focusing on the community spirit."

BV: What are you most excited about for Lebanon residents and businesses?

MG: "The LEAP District is top of mind for a lot of people right now, of course. This is a state level investment that's going to bring in great high-paying jobs for people in the community, but we'll also attract new amenities and new investments like restaurants, places to shop and eat, spend time with family and friends, and then also more investments in our parks and trails."

Perspective: GR Brands, Zionsville

BV: What attracted you to Boone County, particularly Zionsville?

Graham Rahal, racecar driver and entrepreneur: "It's a great place to raise a family. For me, that's the cornerstone of it all. I've got two little girls that are one and three. For our businesses, it makes a lot of sense to be in the community, in the area that we're in. That's where 90% of our local clientele would come from: the north side of Indy."

"Even our out-of-state clients that are flying in to come and inspect a car or something, it's a very easy location to get to. Being right off the freeway, right off Zionsville Road and everything else, it just makes a lot of sense fundamentally for what we as a company are trying to do. I think that's the most critical part for us."

BV: GR Brands' announcement that it will locate all of its brands at its new Zionsville headquarters has stirred excitement. Tell us about what's underway.

GR: "It's a variety of brands and growing, but Graham Rahal Performance – a high-end specialty car dealership that's combined with a million other things – that's our biggest brand. The rest are all very complimentary to GRP as we call it. With Rahal Paint Protection (Indianapolis), which is currently based in Carmel, that's a paint protection foam company. That's going to be coming in house (to Zionsville) because for us, a lot of the business we do there has great synergies with what we're doing at GRP. (With the relocation), we've got that all in one facility (along with Ducati and a RIVET Coffee shop), which is going to be huge for us."

"The other building next door is for clients that may have a third or fourth car they need to put somewhere in the winter (for instance) or their motorcycle. In the middle of the building is – I'm going to call it a social club. If you're a storing member, you're automatically a member of the social club. It's members-only upstairs. We're going to have a golf simulator, a racing simulator and a cigar and whiskey bar."

"So, if you want to come and watch sports on the weekend, there's your spot. If you want to come and get some work done in the conference room or you want to host a Christmas party for your company, there's your spot. And the whole back of the building of that area is glass looking out over all the vehicles."

"And of course, I can't forget (brands such as) Piaggio and Moto and Vespa will be in that building. From a design perspective, frankly, I don't know that it's ever been done before anywhere to this level."



Destinations such as Moontown Brewing Co. (housed in a former high school), various concerts venues and Hattie's Coffee House (a new business located in the Legacy District) merge the present and past in Whitestown.



There's something for everyone in Lebanon – whether it's dining at Klooze Brewz brewery and restaurant or playing the day away at Lebanon Memorial Park.

Perspective: Indiana Owned.com and Indiana Gifts

BV: Did you originally move to Lebanon to operate your businesses?

Mel McMahon (co-founder): “It actually was the community that brought us here. The rural environment and schools. My husband, kids and I moved to Jamestown. Eight days later, the world shut down (due to COVID-19).”

BV: How did the pandemic influence Indiana Owned.com (established in 2014) and the formation of Indiana Gifts (launched in March 2020)?

MM: “Indiana Owned.com is a web site that promotes and supports Indiana-owned businesses. We’d been doing that for six years already by the time the pandemic hit.

“We had a lot of product makers that didn’t have retail outlets anymore because retail was shut down. Businesses weren’t set up to sell online then like they are now. We put everybody on one web site.

“(Ultimately with the help of local partners), we came up with an idea for an Indiana Gifts pop-up store on the square in Lebanon. We had a soft opening in October 2022, and our official opening was last November. The response was better than I ever could have imagined. The community support was huge, and a number of people that got off the interstate to come see us were leaving a Purdue game or they were traveling to Chicago or coming home from Chicago. It was huge. And in March 2023, we officially moved both business’ headquarters to Main Street in Lebanon.”

BV: What types of products do you sell?

MM: “It’s a charming little gift shop that’s an homage to Indiana. Tiny – but mighty. We represent over 100 different companies in the store. We have probably 1,000 different products. It varies from planters to kids’ toys (and more). We have tee-shirts, jewelry, bath and body products, food and snacks, and artwork. It’s a little something for everybody.”

Perspective: Second Chance Workforce Partnership – Boone County Community Corrections

BV: A key element of the Second Chance Workforce Partnership is the Maximize Your Potential program. How does it work?

Katie DeVries (quality and compliance coordinator,

drug court coordinator): “(Participants) come into this class and get free food, learn what their strengths are and what makes them unique and useful in the community. That’s something I don’t think they ever really get to hear. It’s cool to see because it’s very positive.

“People that maybe have had some substance abuse issues and only gotten to work jobs they don’t love or have a passion for, they’re told, ‘You’re very good at this particular skill and here’s how that affects you in your line of work.’ So, if you work at McDonald’s or at a factory (for instance), here’s how you being there makes that workplace better. And here are areas where you should try to focus on what might give you more purpose and more potential.

“Clients taking the class are already employed, but we’ve had a few of them get promotions and they’ll report back to us and say, ‘The class has really helped me with that.’”

BV: What topics are covered?

KD: “They learn about skill building, interviewing, how to cover gaps in their resumes if they’ve had periods of incarceration. There’s a financial wellness piece at the end. Credit scores. Refinancing car loans. Buying a house. It depends on person by person what they want to learn about.

“We’ve done the program for a full year and have had two cohorts. They meet once a month and each session is about an hour and a half.”

BV: Talk about how the initiative helps employers attract, develop and retain talent.

KD: “I think the partnership between us and Boone EDC has really magnified why Boone County is such a good place to live and work. We have employers and government entities that care about all sectors of people, and we want to see those who’ve made mistakes in the past flourish.

“We see the potential in our clients to be rehabilitated and productive members of society. It’s not even just for their betterment, but the community’s because these individuals are working and employers are now getting jobs filled.”

Perspective: Second Chance Workforce Partnership – graduate of the Maximizing Your Potential program

BV: How has this effort empowered you?

Ashley Creasy (joined Ken’s Foods in Lebanon approximately

18 months ago and is a machine operator): “I spent a lot of my pre-teens and teenage years doing drugs and spent a lot of time away (five and a half years incarcerated).

“(Now) I’m really big into learning. In the class, they teach you life skills and how to be a productive adult. How to set goals. Job hunting. Applying for a house. In the last two years, I’ve been building up my credit, I got married and my husband and I will close on a house next month.

“The really big thing – someone not giving up. Buying a house (for instance). I (initially) got denied by several different banks. I didn’t have enough job history or my credit wasn’t right where it needed to be. We’re going to get a lot of ‘Nos’, but when people don’t give up – there’s going to be ‘Yes’ down the road.”

BV: What’s one of your biggest takeaways from the class?

AC: “Re-entry is so important. My main purpose is to show others that life can be different.”

Perspective: Jawbone BBQ

BV: Your business consists of catering (founded in 2014) and a restaurant (established in 2019). What inspired the name?

Brad Thomas (owner): “When I was a kid, Samson was my favorite story in The Bible. And he killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. He’s our logo. I think cooking is a gift from God,

so I wanted to recognize that.

“Food is something that brings people together and it’s just so much fun.”

BV: You spent 28 years in law enforcement in Indianapolis prior to moving to Advance (population of approximately 500) and becoming the town marshal, a role you currently maintain. How does that tie into your work at Jawbone BBQ and in the community?

BT: “When I was in the Indianapolis (Metropolitan) Police Department, my specialty was community policing. So, I worked with the kids a lot. One of the things I wanted to do when I came here is to make sure the kids had food but also build trust with the community. I met them at the school bus stop every morning and passed out Pop-Tarts.”

BV: How would you characterize the business community in Advance?

BT: “It’s really cool. One thing is when we opened a restaurant, real estate and stuff started to move in town. The (local) Chamber helping us has created an energy in a neighborhood that had been sitting, dying. They’ve done so much to help me promote my business. They work really closely with the EDC. I have a small low-interest loan through them.

“One of my goals (in opening the restaurant) was to bring hope to town. And I think we’ve done that.” ■

Bigger by the Numbers

In the past five years, expansions in the county have soared to nearly \$800 million. Among them:

- Ken’s Foods in Lebanon: \$30 million
- NewCold in Lebanon: \$150 million (announced only months after completing its first building in town)
- REGO-FIX in Whitestown: \$3.6 million
- GR Brands (Graham Rahal) in Zionsville: Groundbreaking of new \$22 million, 150,000 square foot headquarters
- FTIC (Fukai Toyotetsu Indiana Corporation) in Jamestown: Multiple expansions

And that’s not all. In 2022, Eli Lilly announced a \$3.5-plus billion investment in its manufacturing facilities at the LEAP (Limitless Exploration/Advanced Pace) Innovation and Research District in Lebanon.

