

# Indiana Furniture

## Preserving the Past, Enhancing the Future

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

When Indiana Furniture (originally known as Jasper Novelty Works) was established in 1905, many of its investors were German immigrants with a robust work ethic and remarkable woodworking skills.

More than a century later, and still headquartered in Jasper, Indiana Furniture has built a reputation not only for its craftsmanship, but also deep community involvement.

It manufactures commercial office furniture such as conference tables, filing and storage solutions, and seating. Customers range from state and federal government entities to banks, law firms, learning spaces and more. While the business doesn't encompass classroom settings, it manufactures products for a variety of education environments such as administrative offices and lounge areas.

"Obviously, there's a lot more automation today in the process, but as you put together (products) – especially some of what we call our traditional desk – there's still a lot of craftsmanship and attention to detail that's very important," remarks President and CEO Max Verkamp. "That's something that has definitely carried through from our founding all the way through today."

Indiana Furniture's workforce consists of approximately 330 employees, with nearly all located in Indiana.

"A majority of them live in DuBois

County where Jasper is located. But we do have employees that are driving from surrounding counties. They'll drive 45 minutes up to an hour to come work in our facilities," Verkamp proudly relates.

Volunteerism is woven into the workplace culture. Indiana Furniture's activities encompass 75-plus entities.

"We get lots and lots of donation requests," Verkamp notes. "One of the key factors is, 'Do we have employees that are engaged with this organization?' (Since) we have a limited pool of time and money, our (approach) is, 'Let's be focused on those organizations that our employees are passionate about because that's how we want to spend our dollars and how we want to support them.'"

### Building confidence

The commitment to making a difference starts with Indiana Furniture's workforce.

Employee appreciation events include an annual cookout featuring a cornhole tournament, peer-to-peer recognition programs, festive dress-up days and a free turkey or ham for each employee (their choice) at Thanksgiving.

"We're a smaller manufacturer here in the Jasper area, and we're competing against larger manufacturers," Verkamp remarks. "It's important for us to have those real touch points with our employees because they have a choice where they can work, and we want them to feel like, 'Hey, this is a place I can find a home and make a career at.'"

Within the community, Indiana Furniture supports Young Women LEAD, a national nonprofit that provides life-changing and experiential leadership events for high school females that take place online, and on the campus of colleges and university partners.

"The annual Young Women LEAD Conference exposes (teens) to women that have been very successful in their careers," Verkamp asserts. "And (provides an opportunity) really to look and see potential role models that they could have as they advance their careers beyond high school."

Over the past 14 years, Young Women LEAD has hosted 60 live events involving 43,500 girls. For the past 11 years, Jasper has been among cities taking part. Indiana Furniture is a strong advocate.

"The Young Women LEAD conference is organized by SOAR, a yearlong leadership development program for local young professionals," Verkamp asserts. "Typically, you're going to see women probably in their late 20s to early 40s."

"We've (Indiana Furniture) had women go through the SOAR Program. The women are working together. (It promotes) cross-functionally with other women that are in different industries. Different functions. And building relationships that not only help them during the year in the program, but also carry them forward – because they now have people they can reach out to with questions they might have on their career or business situations they might be facing."



A countywide "career cruise" introduces students to potential career opportunities. Indiana Furniture participates with employee volunteers and a financial contribution.



Students at a Jasper High School manufacturing class learn various facets of design while producing a pouffe. An Indiana Furniture product engineer assisted in the project.

## Mentoring, music and more

Indiana Furniture also supports Mentors for Youth of Dubois County, which matches individuals (ages 6 through 14) with adults.

“We have some employees that are mentors to children in the program,” Verkamp comments. “I’ve personally been on the board in an advisory position. We’ve done various employee fundraisers.” One example is an employee auction with showroom furniture where Indiana Furniture donates all of the proceeds to Mentors for Youth.

Giving back to local schools is another priority.

“We financially support a lot of those activities – whether it’s high school band, sports, the arts, post prom,” Verkamp explains. “We know that a lot of our employees are volunteering with their kids’ activities.”

## Environmental sustainability

Green practices are top of mind at Indiana Furniture. All of its product lines, for instance, are Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) level certified. It encompasses more than 100

measurements in three areas of material sustainability, environmental impact, health and wellness and social impact.

“The BIFMA LEVEL program is looking at holistically as an organization, how are your products made?” Verkamp observes. “Are they made in a sustainable way? Are you taking advantage of recycling? Are you meeting indoor air quality requirements?”

“But it also looks at do you understand your energy usage? Are you monitoring that? Are you looking at ways to improve that? What are you doing to support your community? So, this level program looks at all of those categories, and then you go through and you score. If you get enough points, you can consider yourself LEVEL certified. There are three levels in certification: 1, 2 and 3. All of our products are Level 1.”

Environmental stewardship was at the forefront when Indiana Furniture recently consolidated its operations.

“We previously had four separate manufacturing facilities – all in DuBois County,” Verkamp imparts. “A couple years ago, we started a project to exit our two oldest facilities. At least parts of both of those

were over 100 years old.”

In April, Indiana Furniture completed moving all operations out of its original manufacturing building, a four-story building in downtown Jasper, to one campus with newer buildings. Now, there are two buildings on one campus.

“We’ve gained a lot of efficiency and capabilities by moving out of a four-story environment. When we look at our sustainability by consolidating into one campus, we used to be driving semis through the county multiple times every day, taking product and components around. All that is now eliminated because we’re on one campus. It’s a small, but important thing.”

Reflecting on Indiana Furniture’s past, Verkamp notes, “It’s sad that we’re leaving kind of (literally) where we started – but this company has been one that’s always persevered, adapted to the times and adjusted. And to me, this is just one of those (moves) that now sets us up for decades to come into the future – that we can continue to be a viable employer, a viable (goods and service provider) to our end users like we have for the last 118 years.”

**RESOURCE:** Max Verkamp, Indiana Furniture, at [www.indianafurniture.com](http://www.indianafurniture.com)

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