

# CLEARING A PATH FOR MAIN STREET

## New Office of Entrepreneurship to Help Small Businesses

By Matt Ottinger

Various stakeholders – the Indiana Chamber among them – united during the 2025 Indiana General Assembly around creating the state’s first Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation. That policy ultimately passed in Senate Bill 516, authored by Sen. Brian Buchanan (R-Lebanon), and was enthusiastically signed into law by Gov. Mike Braun.

A career entrepreneur, Braun spoke to Indiana Public Radio of the new office’s potential impact on small businesses, stating, “I just want to help them make it through the gauntlet of survival, where they don’t get much attention presently.”

Indiana Chamber President and CEO Vanessa Green Sindere anticipates far-reaching impact.

“This office will create economic opportunities in every community in the state, including those that may have been previously underserved.”

### A friend with experience

In particular, the office, which reports directly to the Secretary of Commerce, was created to support Main Street businesses – a critical sector making up 99% of the businesses in Indiana. Working with local ecosystem leaders, the office is expected to support the growth of entrepreneurship, improve the support of existing Main Street businesses and address the critical challenge and opportunity of retiring owners over the coming decade.

In July, Governor Braun appointed Indianapolis entrepreneur Brian Schutt as director. “Main Street” is a niche Schutt knows a great deal about. He and a partner founded Homesense Heating and Cooling in 2009, for which he recently became a minority owner. He expects lessons learned from 16 years of operating the business will serve him well.

“We came into that business without a great degree of depth of knowledge,” he shares, calling it a “bootstrap startup” that will certainly influence his perspective in his new role. “Having signed the front of the paycheck, I understand the reality of a lot of business



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– Brian Schutt  
director of Indiana Office of  
Entrepreneurship and Innovation

owners who we’ll be serving.

“I understand how complicated and busy it is, and oftentimes the state is an afterthought in terms of being a partner, so I’d like to think it will help shape how we’ll come alongside as a partner in being nimble and relevant to the degree we can find avenues in how the state can play a role to reduce friction or increase tailwinds.”

### Refining support

Schutt is also co-founder of Refinery46, a coworking space focused on home services and building trades, which was created as Homesense was growing.

“Through the normal course of doing business, we developed collaborators and referral partners and realized that concentrating those people and having density in one place created efficiencies in a multitude of ways,” he reflects.

He credits other coworking spaces around the state, calling them “critical hubs,” doing similar work and intends to encourage them through this new office.

When asked about fostering entrepreneurship and helping small businesses in rural areas of Indiana, Schutt reiterates, “Main Street businesses will be the focus of this office.”

“Entrepreneurship is a component, but many of those people are business owners,” he clarifies. “It has an outsized impact in rural Indiana where Main Street businesses make up the majority of employment.”

He anticipates partnering with small business development groups, coworking spaces and local chambers of commerce to

connect with businesses and collaborate.

The Indiana Chamber is also poised to support the state’s new office with programming and resources to augment its efforts.

Sindere shares, “There have already been early discussions on that, which is a natural partnership for us given 80% of our members are small businesses.”

### Youthful exuberance

Schutt has been a board member for the STARTedUp Foundation and the Orr Fellowship, and engaging Indiana’s young people in entrepreneurship will be part of his work.

He points to STARTedUP and its Innovate WithIN pitch competition as being “critical on the front end of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.”

“We need to have more seeds in the ground,” Schutt notes, adding High School Hustle and Junior Achievement are other beneficial organizations. “Getting the concepts of business startups, entrepreneurship and business ownership to become more a part of early-stage curriculum and thinking is important.”

He references STARTedUP’s mantra to encourage students to see problems as opportunities.

“If you have that mindset, you never run out of opportunities,” Schutt asserts.

A Purdue University graduate, Schutt also believes there is an important role for higher education institutions.

“One of the things we’ll focus on is entrepreneurs in the late stage of owning – this idea of entrepreneurship through acquisition,”

he relays. “So, how can we connect with Main Street businesses across the state and help better prepare them for exit?

“I think the university side could come into play by elevating that idea within their programs and curriculum ... that might not necessarily be for undergrads, but for working professionals; that’s an idea we’d like to explore.”

### **Across sectors**

Most importantly, Schutt anticipates using the office to help businesses adapt, asserting “the business cycle is moving faster than ever.”

“Adaptation to things like (artificial intelligence) is requiring

more, and so doing business as usual creates a headwind and not everybody wants to change fast,” he imparts. “So, I think there’s a cultural component that is going to be challenged, and doing business as usual is going to put you out of business pretty quickly anymore.”

As far as what sectors will likely most benefit, Schutt says he’s currently “sector agnostic” and just wants to be as impactful as possible.

“I have more questions than answers now and more sort of curiosity than prescription ...” he concludes. “My goal is to connect and listen to as many of the people in the ecosystem as possible and get out to main streets across the state.”

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**RESOURCES:** Brian Schutt, Indiana Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, at [www.in.gov](http://www.in.gov) | Vanessa Green Sinderson, Indiana Chamber of Commerce, at [www.indianachamber.com](http://www.indianachamber.com)