



# FAR FROM STANDING STILL

## Counties Carry on Tradition, Adapt

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Like the rivers that wind their way across north central Indiana, opportunity and activity are in steady motion throughout Cass, Fulton, Miami, Pulaski and Wabash counties.

Longtime assets are being reimagined, and new investments are taking shape – flowing into economic development, workforce training, housing, tourism and quality-of-life initiatives. Local leaders are leveraging collaboration, innovation and regional partnerships to ensure their communities remain vibrant, competitive and welcoming for generations to come.

*BizVoice*® highlights some of the defining qualities of each county and a glimpse at the strategies steering their success.

Funds raised via the annual Cole Porter Classic in Peru are dedicated to improvements and upkeep for the Nickel Plate Trail.

Pulaski County's largest employer is BraunAbility in Winamac. "Basically, any way we can help people with physical disabilities stay active in their communities through automotive mobility solutions, that's where we step in," notes director of brand and communications Megan Wegner.

## Cass County

**Population:** Approximately 37,500

**County seat:** Logansport

**Rivers:** Wabash, Eel

The future is bright at the Vibrant Event Center. Established in 2024, it hosts corporate outings, reunions and weddings along the picturesque Eel River and River Bluff trail system in Logansport's redevelopment district.

People craving a distinctive food experience, they can explore the revamped Logansport Farmer's Market. The permanent fixture is designed for year-round use and will feature a covered market pavilion, incubator kitchen, demo kitchen and community gardening plots.

"What a huge investment in the heart of downtown," remarks Bill Cuppy, executive director of the Logansport-Cass County Chamber of Commerce. "The Cass County Community Foundation got a Lilly Endowment Inc. grant (via the Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow initiative) for \$5 million, and then the city of Logansport kicked in \$2 million more."

Renovating an abandoned mall laid the groundwork for another endeavor. The Junction at Logansport is a regional retail center under redevelopment on the east end of town.

"We just opened our anchor tenant, which is Marshalls," Cuppy notes. "That's been a huge retail (boom) for our little city because you don't normally see Marshalls in places with a population of 18,000."

Also underway are four housing developments in Logansport: Lexington Village (a 52 single-family home subdivision), Patriot Park (encompassing residences, greenspace and playground space), former Jefferson School property (will house a city block of townhomes) and a 75-unit apartment complex on the former Trelleborg factory site.

"We got some IHEDA (Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority) tax credits for the Trelleborg project," Cuppy explains. "We're turning (the facility) around environmentally and will put it to good use."

Creating the next generation of workers in Cass County is also front and center. The Century Career Center, for instance, serves high school students from Logansport Community



Carved by hand 100-plus years ago, the refurbished Dentzel Carousel in Logansport along the Eel River is a National Historic Landmark.



Groundbreaking for the \$26 million Chamberlain Industrial Park. The site, located off of U.S. 31 and State Road 25 south of Rochester, provides a variety of economic opportunities for Fulton, Cass and Miami counties.

School Corporation and several others in the surrounding area. They can choose from career pathways ranging from auto services repair and precision machining to business, health sciences and early childhood education.

"A cool thing we just did is – we found houses that are in desperate need of repair," Cuppy reflects. "The (Logansport) Redevelopment Commission is purchasing the house. The Century Career Center construction pathway will remodel it. Once it's done, we flip it. And the income we earn off the flip, we give to Career Center scholarships and paid apprenticeships."

In the tourism realm, a new art attraction is planned for the county – and beyond. The Indiana Museum of Art founded by local artist

Jason Myers and lawyer Andrew Miller, will open as a regional destination in 2027-28. It will be the state's only museum with a singular focus on contemporary art.

"We (Cass County) are part of the six-county economic development region that includes Fulton, Cass, Miami, Howard, Tipton and Clinton (counties), which is also our READI region (one of 15 state-backed collaborations focused on growth and prosperity)," Cuppy comments. "That's (Indiana Museum of Art) one of the regional things we're working on amongst the counties. It's housed in historic downtown Logansport and is an artist pavilion where they're setting up for regional art and those kinds of things. That's going to be, I think, very successful."



Kids cool off at Peru's new Splash Pad at River Walkway Park.

## Fulton County

**Population:** Approximately 37,500

**County seat:** Rochester

**River:** Tippecanoe

When Michael Ladd moved to Fulton County three years ago, he immediately felt at home.

"The people are amazing," comments Ladd, executive director of Fulton Economic Development Corp. (FEDCO). "I'm from bigger towns. This is actually the smallest town I've ever worked in. And as I walk down the street, a total stranger will say hello. You've lost that in so many communities across the United States. So, the friendliness of the people here is really advantageous."

He cites local restaurants as one of the county's key strengths.

"We've got some amazing restaurants. Coming into a very small, rural county like this, you'd never expect to find some of these high-class little restaurants we've got," Ladd reflects. "Most of them are clustered in downtown Rochester. But we've got a couple wonderful restaurants over in Akron, which is a very small town (approximately) 10 miles away. So, they're kind of spread out."

He adds that the Nickel Plate Trail, a 40-plus mile corridor stretching from Kokomo in Howard County to Rochester, is "amazing."

"We get people riding their bicycles from Kokomo up here to have lunch and then they ride back. We've also got some wonderful parks, a nice 18-hole golf course here in town (Rochester) and Lake Manitou, which is incredible."

A \$2.5 million READI grant is driving an innovative childcare program to address

the pervasive childcare crisis facing the area — like so many others throughout the nation.

"Our Rochester Community School Corporation Superintendent, Jana Vance, is going to use that money to physically expand a childcare facility program she's already got going," Ladd offers. "What makes this program unique and really cool is she has some childcare professionals coming in to help her and she's allowing students who are interested in childcare to come in. If they complete the program, they graduate high school with a childcare certificate. It's amazing because most kids walk out of there and don't know what they want to do and college isn't for everybody. But if the kids want to step out and (say), 'This is as far as I want to go. This is my passion in life,' they're ready."

Collaboration among Fulton County's regional partners benefits the state as a whole, Ladd explains.

"We work closely with one another on our projects. I'm involved in some transportation studies where we're trying to unify all the different public transportation groups here in the region."

As for the future, Ladd says the county is "popping."

"Fulton County has a long history of stagnation, and it's been about two or three years (that we've been turning some things around)," he contends. "I've got the opportunity of a hotel coming in. I'm working right now with five different companies that are interested in coming into Rochester and Fulton County. We've got a couple that want to go (elsewhere) in the county, which is exciting. The last couple of years I've had to

concentrate on Rochester since that's the county seat and the heart of everything, so we've had to (address improvements).

"But (this year), FEDCO will step out into the county and start working with the other communities a little bit harder and more often to do some housing. We've got three housing projects that are underway right now and another one's coming in. We did a study about a year ago. We need 650 housing units in the next five years. I think we're going to make that goal with no problem."

## Miami County

**Population:** Approximately 35,000

**County seat:** Peru

**Rivers:** Eel, Mississinewa and Wabash

Perhaps best known for its rich manufacturing history and prowess, Miami County also has a famous moniker: Circus Capital of the World.

"It's a community that has a lot of tradition," remarks Jim Tidd, executive director of the Miami County Economic Development Authority. "From the amateur circus we have here (in Peru) in July to the birthplace of several artists including (legendary songwriter) Cole Porter. We have a lot of great tourism activities as well. We've recently built new pickleball courts, a skate park and sand volleyball courts (for instance)."

A housing initiative in 2024 revolved around a new 1,170-unit development along the Riverwalk in Peru; it's currently fully occupied.

"And we're getting ready to break ground on a new 100 (-unit), single-family home development in the south part of Miami

County. These will be single-family homes through the READI program,” Tidd shares.

Miami County’s location plays a pivotal role in the businesses and individuals it draws.

“We say that Indiana is the Crossroads of America because of the interstate systems,” Tidd observes. “But when you look at Miami County, we’re really the Crossroads of Indiana because we have two major four-lane U.S. highways that intersect right in the middle of Miami County: U.S. Highway 31 and U.S. Highway 24. And of course that provides great accessibility to South Bend, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne and Lafayette. The community is very well positioned. We’re working to try to attract and retain more industry and business – and have some unique things happening in that regard.”

Recent expansions include two radiopharmaceutical production companies: AZIsotopes and SpectronRx – both located near the Grissom Air Reserve Base in Bunker Hill.

“There’s not a whole lot of communities that can say, ‘Hey, we’ve got a 12,500-foot runway in our community that can do everything from air cargo to aircraft maintenance to general aviation type of aircraft,’” Tidd remarks. “It’s a unique opportunity and that also led to the isotope and nuclear medicine manufacturing (growth). The airport here and the access of that runway offers the isotope manufacturers the opportunity to fly shipments in and out to help offset that short shelf life (for medical treatment).

“It’s the largest runway in the state,” he continues. “We’re trying to grow the aerospace industry and aircraft maintenance, and we’re also in the process of trying to have Grissom certified as an FAA spaceport (designed for launching or landing commercial spacecraft).”

Tidd notes that, at the same time, a lot of the area’s traditional manufacturing businesses – “in the value-added agriculture and just regular machining and those kind of things” – are also expanding and doing well.

Among them is Smithfield Foods, a well-known packaged meat company with a location in Peru.

Reflecting on what links Miami County’s various initiatives together, Tidd declares, “I just keep thinking, ‘impact.’ It’s making an impact with housing. You’re making an impact with industry. You’re making an impact with people, with the medicine side of things.”

## Pulaski County

**Population:** Approximately 12,441

**County seat:** Winamac

**River:** Tippecanoe

With its global manufacturing headquarters in Winamac, BraunAbility is the global leader in life-changing mobility solutions.



The Montgomery Mercantile, where vendors can showcase and sell products, houses a café (Photo credit: James Korn).

“Anything from wheelchair accessible vehicles to wheelchair lifts and even seating solutions if you’re not in a wheelchair and would like a little extra help getting in and out of vehicles,” explains Megan Wegner, associate director of brand and communications. “Basically, any way we can help people with physical disabilities stay active in their communities through automotive mobility solutions.”

Established in 1972, BraunAbility employs approximately 1,200 globally. It operates a division in Europe and has its global headquarters in Carmel.

“Approximately 850 people work out of the Winamac location,” Wegner relates. “That location, as you can see by the numbers, represents about three quarters of our employee population – which is so neat in a town of about 2,000 people.”

In 2025, the company announced a \$3.8 million investment in Winamac for a new product line.

“The BraunAbility Ram ProMaster conversion is more of a public transit conversion featuring a lowered-floor and ramp for easier wheelchair access,” Wegner states. “Something your municipalities or small agencies would use. We built a facility just for manufacturing. It’s underway right now and they’re being produced.

“There’s been significant growth in this industry. We take a lot of pride in the heart and soul of that business being located right here in Pulaski County, and we’ll continue to grow and reinvest in the community.”

One cause BraunAbility prioritizes

supporting is early childhood learning and care.

“Our business community really stepped up and said, ‘Hey, childcare issues are impacting our workforce. We need some help figuring this out,’” declares Leeann Wright, executive director of the Community Foundation of Pulaski County. “The Community Foundation formed a coalition and through financial support from (a variety of) employers, we were able to attain a \$750,000 FSSA (Family and Social Services Administration) grant to work on this problem.

“We were able to open not one – but two – childcare centers to serve not only those (participating) employers, but the community at large, as well as developing a program called CoShare, which is a benefit that our local businesses can offer to their employees where they help with the cost of childcare because access and affordability is a huge thing for families,” Wright continues.

“We still have a lot of work to do in that space, but it’s something the community is invested in, not just our businesses, but our nonprofits and county government as well.”

Separately, local Main Street efforts are changing the face of downtowns – literally and figuratively.

The Uptown Project, for example, developed the Montgomery Mercantile in Francesville. The endeavor functions as a nonprofit in a renovated building in the city’s business district.

“It’s a space where local makers and crafters can display and sell their goods,” Wright shares. “There’s a little kitchen in the back where they sell some food. You can grab

a quick lunch if you're in the downtown area. They have a freezer section with 'take and bake'-type products. And they're currently selling things such as books by local authors."

Proudly, Wright reflects on what makes Pulaski County special: "Rural Indiana is a different pace of life than our urban counterparts. We're close knit. We know our neighbors. We care for our neighbors. We're creating a movement to show people how to love where you live – where not only do you care for your neighbors, but you take civic pride in your towns and your county as a whole."

## Wabash County

**Population:** Approximately 30,828

**County seat:** Wabash

**River:** Wabash

Giving back is woven into the culture in Wabash County.

"Our communities are very philanthropic," stresses Tenille Zartman, president and CEO of Grow Wabash County. "We volunteer. We donate. We join boards. That's just part of what we do. As we've tried to determine our identity and what sets us apart, we keep going back to that. You want to be a part of that kind of culture and feel like you're making a difference."

In late 2024, Wabash County was one of two in the state (Dearborn County the other) named a Stellar Pathways designee by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

"We were awarded \$7 million," Zartman notes. "Each of our communities has a project and what we rallied around was being a welcoming place for all ages and all abilities. Our projects were around extending our senior center and adding transitional housing that's affordable. There's several parks. There's going to be a new overnight respite care facility. We also supported free healthcare clinics with that grant program."

Leadership Development Wabash County (LDWC), an eight-month program for professionals of all ages, emphasizes community contribution.

"Like Tenille said, involvement is really big in Wabash County," asserts Chelsea Parson, project manager for development and marketing at Grow Wabash County which puts on the LDWC initiative. "It's not so much the question of, 'Are you involved?' It's, 'How are you involved?' We find that when people are connected in those ways, the retention's a lot stronger and you're more likely to stick

around. The leadership development program is a really big part of that."

Educating youth and adults through training and retraining helps the county thrive as well.

In 2025, Wabash County opened the Learn More adult training center on the site of the former Miller Furniture Store. Among offerings are high school equivalency instruction, college and career preparation, and vocational training and industry standard

County in 2025. In addition, Savannah, Georgia-based Innomed Design, LLC recently broke ground on a medical device research center in North Manchester.

Meanwhile, longtime employer Ford Meter Box is expanding.

"(The company) is adding on a \$300 million automated foundry to its Wabash site," Zartman notes. "They purchased additional acreage in the community and are building a second facility here."



Wabash High School students sharpen their presentation and soft skills with the Indiana Pathways to Careers and Postsecondary program.

certifications in areas such as industrial maintenance, advanced manufacturing, and certified clinical medical assistant.

Parson teaches a project-based learning class at Wabash High School.

"One of the main facets is having that industrial partner component to it. So, instead of them just doing a science project, we bring in someone from the community that basically answers the question of, 'When will we ever use this in the real world?'"

The class also covers soft skills (e.g., mock interviews, résumé creation and conversations centered on punctuality and introducing oneself).

"I think oftentimes in our technological world those don't come naturally to younger generations like it did our generations," Parson asserts.

Two plastics businesses – Winco Plastics and Springfield Plastics – set up shop in Wabash

She points to two Lilly Endowment-related grants as projects "on the horizon" that she's thrilled about.

"We were a recipient of the recently announced Lilly Blight and Remediation Program, so we qualified for a \$3.1 million grant for Riverfront Apartment Complex. There will be 100 riverfront apartments breaking ground next year, so that's really exciting."

Manchester University is a big part of all the activity too.

"They got the Lilly College and Community Collaboration grant (in 2024), so they're doing a lot of projects on campus and in downtown North Manchester," Zartman relays. "And North Manchester is working on Riverfront Park, which will be incredible. They're connecting the university to the downtown with streetscapes and bike lanes."

**RESOURCES:** Bill Cuppy, Logansport-Cass County Chamber of Commerce, at [www.logan-casschamber.com](http://www.logan-casschamber.com) | Michael Ladd, Fulton Economic Development Corp., at [www.fultondevelopment.org](http://www.fultondevelopment.org) | Jim Tidd, Miami County Economic Development Authority, at [miamicountyeda.com](http://miamicountyeda.com) | Leeann Wright, Community Foundation of Pulaski County, at [cfopc.org](http://cfopc.org) | Megan Wegner, BraunAbility, at [www.braunability.com](http://www.braunability.com) | Tenille Zartman and Chelsea Parson, Grow Wabash County at [www.growwabashcounty.com](http://www.growwabashcounty.com)