

# AMERICA 250

## Hoosier Communities Celebrate Milestone

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

The Spirit of Vincennes Rendezvous (southern Indiana) in late May. The Kosciusko County Freedom Fest (northern Indiana) in early June. These are just two examples of the ways Indiana communities are honoring the nation's 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

"It's America's 250th (birthday)," enthuses Amy Howell, interim CEO with the Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC). "It's like the way we celebrated Indiana for its bicentennial (in 2017). It's an opportunity to share your pride and spotlight Indiana's contributions from the Revolutionary Era to today."

Fireworks, cuisine, parades, reenactments, exhibits, tours and more are underway throughout Indiana. Want to join the celebration? The IDDC's website ([www.visitindiana.in.gov](http://www.visitindiana.in.gov)) showcases a variety of events categorized by region.

"We're trying to combine all the information we can (from various sources) across the state into this one stop-shop website to be able to promote that," Howell explains. "Everybody's interests are different and every community is different, but (the goal is) to have a curated overview of the America 250 celebrations happening across Indiana."

Meanwhile, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites is taking part in more than 70 events across Indiana.

President and CEO Cathy Ferree asserts that America 250 presents a chance to uniquely tell Indiana's rich stories.

"It gives us an opportunity to remind people (of our historic gems)," she declares. "We took this as an opportunity to really highlight those Hoosiers that made a difference in the country – whether that was Mr. Lanier (James Franklin Doughty Lanier was a prominent banker and

railroad investor in the 1800s; his mansion stands in Madison's Historic District) or T.C. Steele (a renowned artist who resided in Nashville in the 1900s).

"(America 250) offers an opportunity for us to be invited to the table with a community event that we may not have been at before and make new connections and new programs."

### More than making memories

In addition to educating and entertaining residents and visitors, America 250 will generate a significant economic impact. Estimating the dollar amount in advance, however, is challenging.

"It will really be up to the counties (to track America 250 data). But a lot of the partners and visitor bureaus we work with, they're already tracking hotel bookings, restaurant reservations and retail. And we have a benchmark annually, so we can look at that," Howell reflects.

"A lot of people and communities and destinations, they're basically building America 250 itineraries. People are definitely wanting to celebrate. People want to immerse themselves in the celebration."

Ferree points out that the events create a positive ripple effect.

"We know that arts and culture obviously are a generator of placemaking," she notes. "(The festivities) are putting us in the forefront of people's minds. It's not just about the actual event, but also sort of the residual effect it has both with the visitors and the communities we work in.

"And many of these small towns have shops in them," she continues. "Metamora (in the southern part of the state) is a great example. They look for people to come into town and if they come to town to go to the (Grist Mill), they may also go have ice cream across the street or buy a cookie jar. So, any time we can invite additional people into the community as well through this type of program, it benefits the community at large."



Students at the Indiana State Museum explore artifacts from President Abraham Lincoln's legacy (left). Corydon Capitol State Historic Site, where Indiana's first state constitution was drafted in June 1816.

Howell seconds that: “I would say to destinations or attractions to basically make it easy for the visitor. Have some kind of event list or a presidential route package – include everything from bundling, lodging, tickets, dining or whatever so that it’s a one-stop-shop making it easier.”

### Meeting the moment

A recent study from Longwoods International, which specializes in destination marketing research, highlights the excitement building around America 250.

“The latest one showed that 37% of those surveyed want to attend specific America 250 events,” Howell reveals. “They want to visit historic sites and landmarks. Then, 35% want to visit museums and cultural attractions. And Indiana has all of that.”

Ferree remarks, “Everybody’s looking for how to really maximize, use it as a way to highlight things that they may do annually, new twist on it or something different that the 250th really allows us to draw attention to.”

“We get caught in our everyday lives and



Guests gather for an annual Juneteenth celebration.

it’s really a moment, particularly in the communities where our sites are and here at the museum to say to our visitors, ‘Yes, this is a great place and yes, we’ve all done

incredible things. (But) let’s talk about how we all continue to make our communities, our state and our country important and have an impact.’ ”

**RESOURCES:** Cathy Ferree, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, at [www.indianamuseum.org/americas-250th](http://www.indianamuseum.org/americas-250th) | Amy Howell, Indiana Destination Development Corporation, at [www.in.gov/iddc](http://www.in.gov/iddc)

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