

Birch Bayh-Richard Lugar

GOVERNMENT LEADER OF THE YEAR

NOBLE ENDEAVORS

Jensen Leads With Boldness, Cooperation

By Matt Ottinger




NOBLESVILLE
INDIANA

"If I was mayor, things would be different" is likely a sentiment held by many ambitious youngsters at one time or another regarding their hometown. Very few go on to achieve it.

But Noblesville Mayor Chris Jensen, who was first elected in 2019, has distinguished himself through bold, collaborative leadership in governing his boyhood home – a growing city consistently recognized as one of America's Best Places to Live and one of the nation's safest communities.

For Jensen, his story began under challenging circumstances. His father, he shares, was killed in a car accident when he was just 15 months old. His mother Elaine, a teacher, strived to ensure Jensen and his two older brothers would not lack direction. He credits her for "running a tight ship."

"As a single mom, she kind of doubled down and decided that her life mission was to raise three acceptable human beings in today's society," Jensen reflects. "So, she worked two jobs to put all three of us through college."

He adds, "She is an incredible asset to my life and she's really still very involved with the nine grandkids that she has all still living in Hamilton County."

Campaign fever

As a young man, Jensen recalls gravitating toward theater, musicals and show choir, while his brothers were more into sports. But above all, he remembers a childhood that was very fulfilling – a notion that drives his affinity for Noblesville today.

"My elementary school, middle school and high school career were filled with friendships and extracurricular activities," Jensen remembers, noting his penchant for politics started early when he served as class president.

"I got to go between my junior and senior year to Washington, D.C. for a weeklong internship in (U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar's) office," he shares. "That was really where the 'Potomac fever' kind of bit me for the very first time."

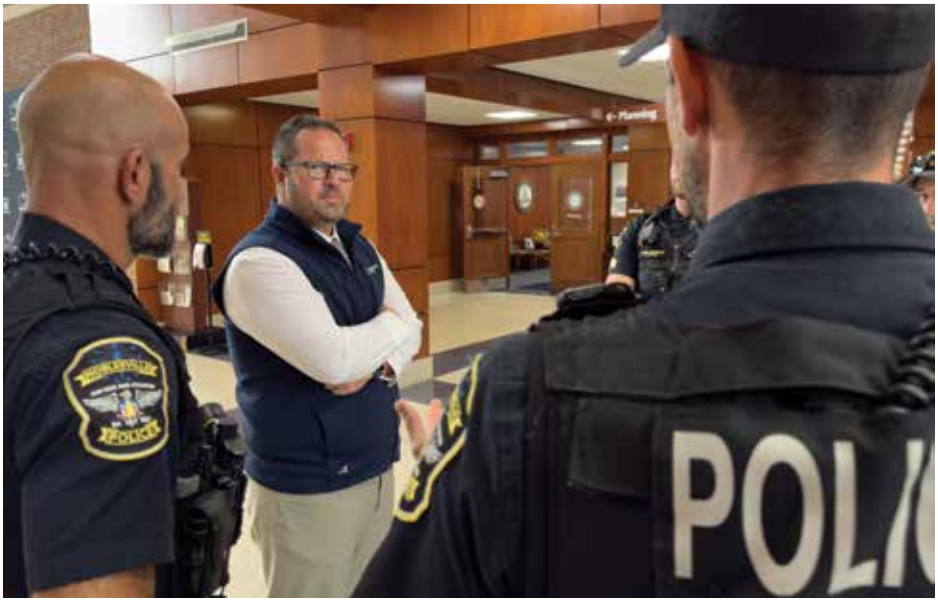
He then attended Butler University, where he would eventually once again assume the role of class president. That segued into more political activity that included driving Noblesville's State Sen. Luke Kenley around to Lincoln Day Dinners during the 2004 gubernatorial campaign.

Jensen had considered pursuing law school, but credits Kenley's bluntness for helping him pursue a more fruitful path.

"He looked at me and said, 'Yeah, I just don't think you'd be a very good lawyer,' " Jensen recounts with a chuckle. "And you know what, that probably stung a little bit at the time, but he was dead right."



The Reimagine Pleasant Street project is a multi-year initiative aimed at improving east-west connectivity and accessibility in Noblesville. Safety also remains a priority, as the city recently ranked as the 12th safest suburb in the U.S. by SmartAsset.



Jensen ultimately found himself working in Gov. Mitch Daniels' administration. Years later, he remains a "card-carrying member of the Mitch Daniels fan club."

"Something that's incredibly missing in politics today is the ability to disagree and not necessarily be disagreeable," Jensen asserts. "I just think the way that he governed was so focused on Hoosiers and what was important to them and how we put policies in place to move that ball forward for them. I think he was such a unique person that we'll never see again."

But it was Jensen's relationship with Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman that would be most formative, stemming from his time as her special assistant and director of intergovernmental affairs.

"I consider her as really a second mother to me; she will say I'm her second son," he remarks. "She's just an amazing human being.

"She was always underestimated – and she loved being underestimated – and she would usually win. And she always just had such a delicate way of being firm in how she felt but didn't make you feel offended."

Growing with the city

Jensen would eventually move on to a role in business development. Yet just over a decade ago, as Noblesville was transitioning from a third-class city to a second-class city (based on population increase), he was

recruited to run for city council. It sparked a resurgence of his passion for politics, and he felt like a younger voice on the council could help the city. He would go on to win a three-way race.

"City council is a great role. You get to be at the table and be a part of the discussion, but you don't get blamed for much, so it's kind of nice," he offers. "Mayor is completely opposite. You're at the table, but you also then get the table thrown at your face if something goes wrong, so I really enjoyed my time there and it gave me kind of a nice introduction to understand how the city works."

He reflects on being in office during the tragic 2018 shooting at Noblesville West Middle School.

"To be alongside (then-Mayor John Ditslear) in that conversation was a real eye-opening experience and really led to some positive changes in this community," Jensen notes.

Among such developments is a collective move to promote mental health.

"We really dove into the idea around mental health eight years ago, realizing that public safety and public health was incredibly important in our community," he imparts. "And we launched a whole series of programs like NOBLEAct, which is a proactive paramedicine program within our police and fire department that really helps target at-risk individuals in our community to get them the help that they need before they get into our legal system or our hospital system."

He continues, "If we can lift them up and get them partnered up with nonprofits or the faith-based community, we can help actually stem the tide there around some of the issues that they have."

The city also now features a program called Mental Health Monday, in which Jensen offers a monthly therapy session on Facebook Live tackling issues such as PTSD, suicide, cancer, food and housing insecurity, and more.

Business backer

Those changes in all aspects of life have contributed to a city growing at a staggering rate. As of 2026, Noblesville's population is over 77,300, up 10% from 2020. The pace of growth is evident with a recent addition of 800 new residential units in its downtown alone. It certainly poses a challenge in not just city planning but in managing the culture as well.

"It's just a constant balance between an old Noblesville mentality and a new Noblesville mentality," Jensen says of leading a community that includes generational families like his and an influx of transplants.

Part of that growth has come from an emphasis on the business community. For starters, helping existing local businesses succeed is a focus, even in times of distress.

"We were one of the first cities in the state of Indiana during (the COVID-19 pandemic) to launch a small business resiliency grant program," Jensen explains. "We knew during that very uncertain time of COVID, there were folks that were so focused on just getting through the day, getting through the week, (helping them to) meet payroll when there were mandatory shutdowns and whatnot."

He also notes that some funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) have been directed toward long-term investments.

"I knew that wasn't sustainable financially, so we decided to invest in infrastructure to our east – to put our ARPA dollars in the ground to open up new development for the community that would help our economy ultimately grow," Jensen shares. "That's why you're seeing the residential boom and the business boom on the east side of Noblesville because of the infrastructure we've invested in out there."

Going big

Economic development has also been a critical part of growth, adding $4.2 billion in private sector investment since 2020. Jensen's administration has been aggressive in attracting new employers, and he's even traveled to Japan to meet with Toyota Automated Logistics (TAL) and SMC Corporation.

TAL, formerly known as Bastian Solutions, is in the process of opening a 164-acre manufacturing and corporate campus in Noblesville to serve as a North American base.

"Mayor Chris Jensen has been a tremendous partner to Toyota Automated Logistics as we establish our new campus in Noblesville," praises TAL CEO and President Aaron Jones. "From the beginning, he has demonstrated a clear understanding of what businesses need to invest,



The Riverview Health Arena is a major feature of Innovation Mile, a new 600-acre business and technology hub to drive growth in Noblesville. The Indiana Pacers' G League basketball team, the Noblesville Boom, now call it home.

grow and create long-term opportunities in a community. His leadership, accessibility and collaborative approach helped reinforce our confidence that Noblesville is the right place for this important investment."

Jones adds, "Just as importantly, he has helped foster a community that combines a strong business environment with an outstanding quality of life, making Noblesville a place where companies and their people can build for the future. We appreciate Mayor Jensen's partnership and congratulate him on this well-deserved recognition."

Another example of growth is Innovation Mile – a recent project that exemplifies the city's progressive approach. Encompassing close to 600 acres near Interstate 69, it serves as a business and technology hub designed to drive investment and reinvestment in the area. Since 2025, the Noblesville Boom (formerly the Fort Wayne-based Mad Ants), the NBA G League affiliate of the Indiana Pacers, has played its home games at Riverview Health Arena at Innovation Mile.

Family man

Jensen and his wife, Julie, have four children, ranging in age from 5 to 15. When asked how he manages what sounds like an incredibly busy day-to-day schedule, Jensen credits his wife and a can-do attitude.

"I luckily have an incredible spouse and an incredible support system," he praises. "We kind of take it one day at a time. We very much have a linked calendar. My team here has my family calendar and probably knows way too much about my personal life … but I'm a pretty open book, probably too much sometimes."

He also notes his kids can often be found in his office when the day's itinerary allows.

"It's kind of a family affair, especially after hours, and that's how we have to make it work," Jensen relays. "My kids know the job that I have and they understand that and they come along with me to a lot of things."

His family currently attends White River Christian Church. He lauds the church not just for its spiritual support, but for its contributions to the community.

"We partner with them a lot through the flood relief; they've done a lot through the White River Food Pantry to help out the most vulnerable population in our community," he states. "I think that they do an incredible job, and we feel really at home."

Flood of support

The aforementioned flood put Noblesville in the spotlight in August as historic flooding inundated the area. Jensen shares it prompted a great deal of discussion between local mayors to determine how best to help their citizens. As we spoke in his office in early September for this interview, Jensen revealed he had just spoken with Carmel Mayor Sue Finkam that morning.



Helping residents recover from historic flooding is a recent project for Jensen, who frequently speaks with fellow mayors about best practices. He also remains in touch with Noblesville's citizens to keep a pulse on the city.



"We've talked about four times a day for the past three weeks as we go through this flood issue," he discloses. "She's working through the same things that we are working through on a different scale. She has a major infrastructure challenge, and we have more of a people challenge."

He adds that Hamilton County's mayors – a list that also includes Fishers Mayor Scott Fadness and Westfield Mayor Scott Willis – talk weekly.

"Mayor Jensen has shown time and again that he views Hamilton County's success as a team effort," notes Finkam, highlighting his open-door policy and ongoing dialogue with municipal leadership across the county. "He recognizes that our cities don't operate in silos. His willingness to share operational strategies, coordinate on regional challenges and proactively support neighboring administrations has set a collaborative standard for all of us in Hamilton County."

Leaders lead

Jensen is enthusiastic about what the city has achieved during his tenure and looks forward to engaging citizens even more.

"We've had incredible success the past seven years and we're not slowing down, so we're going to continue to focus on that," he says. "One of my personal goals too is to talk to folks around the state about what good leadership looks like. I think that's just a real passion project of mine."

Jensen remains mindful that he is simply a temporary occupant of the office. Yet he loves the job and intends to run for another term in just over a year.

"I'm going to go work my butt off to get rehired," he vows. ■