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Trends in Industry in Allen County

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Introduction

It was the Fall of 1982, and I was entering my Freshmen year in college. I had grown up in Fort Wayne, and the community was plodding through an economic malaise reflective of national conditions in which the dominance of the United States in the world economy was being challenged, most notably, in the automotive industry.

I remember my high school soccer coach's insect-looking car, about half the size of any car I had ever been a passenger in or driven, with a funny rounded "hatchback" trunk. The curiosity was a 1970-something, first generation Honda Civic. He was the father of a growing young family, and I surmised it was all he could afford. Later, I came to realize he was an early adopter of less expensive and, frankly, better quality Japanese-made automobiles. Over my lifetime of car ownership, I have owned more Hondas than any other car brand, and at my peak of car ownership (with three driving-age sons) had four black Hondas in the driveway at one time.

In 1982, my best friend from high school was joining me at the same college, and we looked forward to college life with excitement. But for him, particularly, there was concern about the cost of attending college. His father was a supervisor at the International Harvester assembly plant in Fort Wayne. At its peak, the plant employed 10,600 workers. But a national strike of Harvester began in November 1979 and ended 172 days later in April 1980. It had seriously hobbled the company. Production of the four-wheel drive Scout vehicle at the plant was terminated in October 1980. By March 1982, the company was struggling to avoid bankruptcy. Harvester announced that, without financial incentives from state and local governments, either the 60-year-old Fort Wayne plant or the 17-year-old Springfield, Ohio plant would be closed. My friend's family knew his dad's job hung in the balance. When Fort Wayne's final bid of \$41 million was rejected in favor of Springfield's \$28 million package, and the Fort Wayne plant closed in 1983,¹ my friend's father's job was eliminated. I remember the sadness when he told us in the middle of the semester of that Freshman year that he would be withdrawing from school and heading home.

That experience and similar losses multiplied by the thousands of Harvester families, and the collective trauma of the Harvester experience on the psyche of Fort Wayne, has had a profound impact on Allen County industry. "The City that Saved Itself" from the historic flood in the Spring of 1982 was struggling to save its local economy. GM's August 1984 announcement to build a new truck plant in Allen County with employment of about 3,000 was a psychological shot in the arm. But the era of a handful of major manufacturing employers powering the local economy was over.

This paper will look back briefly on the history of industry in Fort Wayne, move forward to the present, and then discuss where opportunities lie for economic growth in our community. I'll refer to "Fort Wayne" frequently, not intending to slight the rest of Allen County. But please allow my reference to mean the "county" from the standpoint of the "Fort Wayne area." At the outset, I must admit that the topic of identifying "trends" in industry in Allen County is daunting. I am grateful for the resources and input of Rachel Blakeman of the Purdue University Fort Wayne Community Research Institute, and Greater Fort Wayne and the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership. I can only cover the topic lightly in this context, but these organizations are tremendous assets in helping the community build a stronger economy, and I commend them to those of you who want to dig further into the subject.

History of Industry in Allen County

Fort Wayne, by its location at the confluence of rivers, was an early site of commerce, transportation and manufacturing. River transportation yielded to the Wabash & Erie Canal, which rather quickly succumbed to competition from the railroads. The New York, Chicago and Lake Erie Railway purchased the canal right-of-way through downtown Fort Wayne and was able to lay track straight through the heart of the city without razing a single building. This was part of the celebrated "Nickel Plate Road".² John F. Bonsib's excellent Quest Club paper on the influence of railroads on Fort Wayne observed that at one time in the mid-1800s Fort Wayne challenged Indianapolis and Chicago for predominance as the rail gateway to the west, ultimately losing out to Chicago.³ Nevertheless, in the early



1880s, the Pennsylvania Railroad chose Fort Wayne as its sole location for the construction of rail cars because of its central geography and access to lumber from Michigan. The Pennsylvania Railroad Shops grew to employ 3,950 workers by 1913.⁴

Bonsib observed that the railroad shops spawned other businesses such as the Jenny Electric Company (later to become General Electric), which built lights for rail engines and cars, Bass Foundry for rail wheels, frames and other locomotive parts, and safety valve manufacturer, Kunkle Valve. The skills learned in the rail shops made Fort Wayne a tool and die center and also made possible the pump manufacturing businesses of S.F. Bowser, Tokheim, and Wayne Pump. He argued that the good transportation system from the many rail lines and workers with mechanical skills were material to International Harvester's decision to locate in Fort Wayne in the early 1920s.⁵

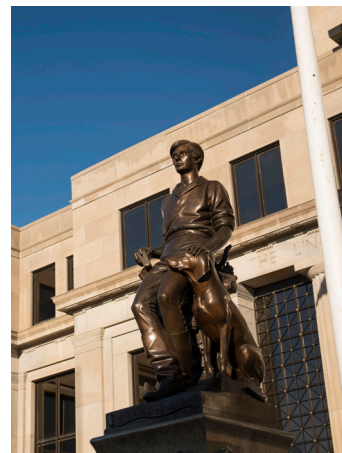
Arthur C. Richard's Quest Club paper discussed Fort Wayne's 20th century industrialists and their businesses.⁶ In addition to some mentioned in Bonsib's paper, Richard profiled Wayne Knitting Mills, founded by Theodore Thieme, as a major employer, manufacturing fine hosiery, until it was sold to Munsingwear in the 1920s. The large brick industrial buildings just behind Paula's Restaurant north of West Main Street -- now home to Ward Corporation -- are the former home of the mills.

Richard also recounts the genesis of the magnet wire industry, starting with Dudlo Manufacturing, founded in 1911 by enamel wire inventor George Jacobs, a former chemist at General Electric. In ten years, Dudlo became recognized as the world's greatest complex for wire drawing and wire enameling, providing insulated wire to the booming automobile industry. For most of the 20th century, Fort Wayne was the world's leading magnet wire producer, including such companies as Essex, Rea Magnet Wire, and Phelps Dodge, which succeeded to Dudlo's business.

The magnet wire business thrived as a supplier to the electric motors industry which in Fort Wayne was led by General Electric. Before International Harvester began building trucks in Fort Wayne, General Electric and its predecessor entities had been operating in the community for more than three decades. At its peak in the late 1940s, GE employed roughly 40% of the city's workforce.⁷ Last year, GE's history and legacy in Fort Wayne was featured in a PBS Fort Wayne documentary called "Electric Legacy: The Story of General Electric," which I would highly recommend if you have not seen it. It's a wonderfully told tracing of the people, places, and events around the company's origins in Fort Wayne, its heyday during World War II and the post-war economic boom, and its steady decline in jobs and ultimate closure in 2015, made poignant by the stories of former GE employees.

The word “Industry” conjures images of manufacturing. But, of course, there is also a long history in Fort Wayne of education, health care, and services that have employed many more Allen County residents. I will touch on those further in discussing current and future trends.

But let me mention the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company (now part of the Lincoln Financial Group), founded in Fort Wayne in 1905, and the first and only company in the world that is allowed to use Abraham Lincoln’s name and image, having received permission from Robert Todd Lincoln, the President’s last surviving son. Lincoln Life was a leading white-collar alternative to the dominant Fort Wayne manufacturing enterprises of the 20th century. In 1955, Lincoln Life employed approximately 1,300 men and women in Fort Wayne and was the ninth largest life insurance company in the country.⁸ It continued to grow and diversify into a comprehensive financial services company. While the headquarters moved in 1999 to the Philadelphia area along with various business units, Lincoln Life continues to be one of the largest private employers in Fort Wayne.



With that look back in time, how has Fort Wayne moved forward from the days when International Harvester, GE, Lincoln Life, and others provided such a large percentage of the jobs for so many area families?

Current Industry in Allen County

The hard lesson of a community being too reliant on a few large employers has motivated government, business, and community leaders to focus for many years since Harvester’s closing on diversifying our economy. In his 2011 Quest Paper on “100 years of the Fort Wayne Economy,” fellow Quester Mac Parker described Fort Wayne’s economy as moving through four “Acts.” Act 1 was the canal period, Act 2, the railroad period, and Act 3, the manufacturing period. Act 4 is “the knowledge-based economy,” which calls to mind high tech centers like Silicon Valley and Research Triangle in North Carolina, but also -- closer to home-Indianapolis, which has diversified into biosciences, pharmaceuticals, and as a sports and convention center. It’s a tall order for Allen County to move completely from its manufacturing base to a knowledge-based economy. But the Fort Wayne area has taken steps to lessen its dependence on manufacturing and grow in other areas, such as health care and education services, along with other service-related jobs. And, to a certain extent, “advanced manufacturing” -- requiring unique engineering and technology application -- is a combination of both.⁹ It seems fair to say that Allen County is somewhere in the Act 3.5 stage.

And, more generally, anyone who has lived in the Fort Wayne area from the difficult post-Harvester years to the present must admit we are in a much better place. Community leaders and promoters have been championing building a “nationally



recognized economy.” The bold 2015 “Road to One Million” vision of the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership -- a vision to grow the region’s population from 789,015 residents in 2015 to one million by 2031 -- earned northeast Indiana \$42 million in Regional Cities grant money from the state. That award has been leveraged into more than \$258 million “quality of life” projects designed to retain and attract a younger and more educated workforce.¹⁰

The latest and most dramatic signal of the success of the community’s efforts came in early January of this year with the closing on funding for the \$280 million Electric Works redevelopment of the former General Electric west campus. The significance of this accomplishment cannot be overstated. As ambitious as the Road to One Million was, it could only identify the redevelopment of the GE campus as a “vision project,” rather than a “near-term” or even “long-term” project. But with completion of the redevelopment targeted for mid-to-late 2022, it will have been accomplished in seven years. A central piece of the redevelopment is retaining

the corporate headquarters of Do it Best Corporation in Allen County, with the likelihood of further job growth at its new location.

Manufacturing continues to be a significant part of our local economy. According to Rachel Blakeman of the Community Research Institute, while total employment has decreased from 37,400 jobs in 1990 to 30,000 in 2019, manufacturing GDP has never been higher, meaning we are seeing much higher productivity per employee.¹¹ Vehicle manufacturing continues to be a significant sector, led by General Motors truck assembly plant, employing 4,200, BFGoodrich tire plant in Woodburn, employing 1,640, Dana light axle plant, employing over 800, and Brunswick Corporation's pontoon boat plant, employing over 400.



However, the sector that has seen the most dramatic increase has been in healthcare and education, including hospitals and ancillary health services. From 1990 to 2019, that sector has seen an increase of nearly 21,000 jobs, to a total of more than 38,000 in Allen County.¹² That represents more than 20% of all of the employed persons in the county. Parkview Health System is the largest employer in the Fort Wayne area with a head count of 7,858. Lutheran Health Network follows as the second-largest employer at 4,768. Most indicative of this growth is the massive \$550 million Parkview Regional Medical Center opened in 2012. Lutheran is also constructing a new smaller downtown hospital to replace the adjacent existing St. Joseph Hospital, at an investment of around \$100 million, which is planned to open in early 2022.

Another newer sector, logistics and e-commerce, has also seen significant growth. Employment leaders in this sector include Sweetwater Sound, which reported adding more than 400 new jobs in the past year, increasing its workforce to nearly 2,000 and having annual sales of more than \$1 billion in 2020.¹³ Sweetwater was fortunate to have completed and fully stocked its new 480,000-square-foot distribution center in February 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, and was able to remain open as an “essential business” throughout. Customer demand soared as professional musicians, schools and churches beefed up their investments in recording and communication equipment during the pandemic.¹⁴

Do it Best and Sirva (a global relocation and moving services provider), each employing between 400 and 500 in the county, are also considered part of this sector. Adding to this sector is the announcement in the Fall of 2020 of Amazon's plans to construct a new \$60 million, nearly 630,000-square-foot distribution facility near the Fort Wayne International Airport.¹⁵ Greater Fort Wayne reports Amazon will have a total investment of \$89 million and add 1,320 new jobs.¹⁶

The financial activities sector, which would include banking and insurance, has lost about 18% of its jobs from 1990 to 2019, to a total of about 10,700. One factor contributing to that decline could be the move of Lincoln Life's headquarters and related corporate divisions out of Fort Wayne in 1999, although it continues to be one of the county's largest employers at 1,954 jobs. In addition, Medical Protective (founded in Fort Wayne, but now owned by Berkshire Hathaway) employs nearly 400, and Ash Brokerage and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company each employ over 500. The brick-and-mortar presence of these last two insurance businesses has grown dramatically in recent years. In 2016, the impressive Ash Skyline Plaza opened in the heart of Fort Wayne, including Indiana's largest rooftop green space at approximately one acre.¹⁷

Brotherhood, a leading insurer of churches and related ministries across the nation, will in the second quarter of 2021 be completing its third major expansion in the last decade or so, including 88,000 square feet of office, meeting and auditorium space at its campus near the Coldwater Road / I-69 interchange. The expansion will create enough additional space to

increase the local workforce by 300 in the next few years.¹⁸ On a personal note, my father, Paul, retired as President of Brotherhood in the mid-1990s, having devoted 30 years with the company and leading its growth and transition from its small one-story office on Vance Avenue to the company's current campus location.

A number of community, regional, and national banks have a presence in the Fort Wayne area, including Lake City Bank, First Merchants Bank, and Old National Bank. Most of them have offices in the downtown area in prominent locations. Late last month, Star Financial Bank, the only community bank with its headquarters in Fort Wayne, announced plans to open a new headquarters in the "Ashberry Project" at the corner of Main Street and Maiden Lane in downtown. The project includes a 7-story, 50,000-square-foot tower along Main Street that will house Star's offices, and a 3-story, 30,000-square-foot mixed use building along Berry Street, which will be joined together by a 387-space public parking garage. The \$43 million development will be the new home to over 220 Star employees.¹⁹

Military and defense-related employers still continue to have a significant presence in the Fort Wayne area. The largest of these includes BAE Systems, employing 833, and L3 Harris Technologies, Raytheon, and General Dynamics, employing approximately 1,400 among them. The Indiana Air National Guard 122nd Fighter Wing also employs an additional 650 people.

Apart from the increasing diversity of employment in Allen County, we are fortunate to have many of the large leading employers headquartered here. Certainly, Parkview Health, by its sheer size is the dominant example. I've mentioned already Sweetwater Sound, Brotherhood Mutual, Ash Brokerage, Med Pro, Do it Best, and Star Financial Bank.

Another is Vera Bradley, founded in Fort Wayne in 1982 by Barbara Baekgaard and Pat Miller, which is known world-wide for its signature colorful quilted handbags, luggage, and accessories. For many years, my wife, Beth, sported a stylish Vera diaper bag and duffel stuffed with toys, books, and blankets for our baby boys. Vera Bradley employees 600, and its headquarters -- emblazoned with the company name -- greets travelers heading north on I-69 into the Fort Wayne area.



A few other examples are Franklin Electric, Fort Wayne Metals, and Steel Dynamics. Best known for manufacturing submersible pumps, Franklin Electric in 2013 opened its new world headquarters and engineering center near Fort Wayne International Airport. The company was founded by two Fort Wayne businessmen in 1944 in Bluffton, Indiana. The company took its name in honor of Benjamin Franklin, considered by the company founders

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as the country's first electrical engineer. Its first product was a backpack generator to power radio equipment for U.S. military in World War II.

Incorporated in 1970, Fort Wayne Metals Research Products Corp. has become a world-class leader in the manufacturing of medical wire. The company has grown a campus of buildings near the Fort Wayne International Airport and employs over 1,000 people.

Started in 1993, Steel Dynamics was the idea of small group of former Nucor steel managers who decided to strike out on their own to create a steel company, designed to use electric arc furnaces to melt recycled steel to create new steel products. In 2007, SDI acquired another local company, OmniSource Corporation, to integrate OmniSource's scrap metals business into its steelmaking supply chain. SDI's corporate headquarters are located in the former Midwestern United Life Insurance Company building on West Jefferson.

My firm has had the privilege of representing SDI since its earliest days. I was an associate in the law firm in the early 1990s when it was mentioned that one of our senior lawyers was advising a client on a "Project X" new business venture that was being kept very confidential. A package of very important documents related to the venture's financing needed to be

signed by our client and delivered to New York all in the same day. Complicating matters was that our client's location was temporary office space on the north side of Indianapolis. My job was to drive the package to Indianapolis, get our client's signature, seal up the package, drive to the Indianapolis airport and deliver the package to the airline ticket counter where it would be loaded on a plane bound for New York that afternoon. Law school had not prepared me for this! But I carefully drove the package, met our client, obtained the signatures, and successfully delivered the package to the airline. The package made it to New York later that day, and the rest is history.

Today, SDI employs nearly 900 in Allen County and is one of the country's largest domestic steel producers. It had \$9.6 billion in net sales in 2020. Not only is SDI a successful steel company, Fortune Magazine recently named SDI one of the 2021 World's Most Admired Companies and No. 1 with the metals industry. Certainly a point of pride for all of us that a Fort Wayne company is acknowledged worldwide for doing business the right way.²⁰

There are many other examples of admired and well-run Allen County businesses, and this is only the most recent and notable. But recognition like that raises the visibility of the Fort Wayne area to the world in a positive way and can only help with talent attraction.

So what are the trends in Allen County industry? What economic opportunities are on the horizon for our community? Let's first look at some of the challenges.



Future Opportunities for Industry in Allen County

The primary challenge is workforce development. Related to this is the need for educational opportunities that provide the skilled workforce this community needs now to grow economically. In the area of health care, the University of Saint Francis, Huntington University, Manchester University, and Trine University have all expanded their health sciences programs, including graduate programs to meet the demand for more skilled health care workers. Physician assistant, occupational therapy, physical therapy, pharmacy, and nurse anesthesia are some examples.

Recently, former State Senate President Pro Tem David Long wrote an opinion piece in the *Journal Gazette* on behalf of Purdue University Fort Wayne in support of a relatively modest \$2 million state annual appropriation for three years in support of specific academic programs in (1) materials, biomaterials, and bioengineering; (2) data science, applied statistics, and computer information systems; and (3) strategic and risk management, financial services, and financial information services. Employers in Allen County and northeast Indiana need workers educated in these backgrounds for the 21st century job opportunities they have. Our economic growth will stall without them. As former Senator Long puts it, "Homegrown talent is the key to a strong and thriving northeast Indiana economy. Invest in it, and the future is bright. Clearly a failure to do so now cannot be an option."²¹

Other efforts to reverse the brain drain include the Greater Fort Wayne Fellows program launched in 2015, which matches college students with Allen County employers for 12-week project-based paid summer internships. Although interrupted by the pandemic, early results of the program showed it was working. While only about 25 percent of Fellows participants are from Allen County, roughly 50 percent of the program alumni are now living and working here.²²

Another significant challenge is the lag in personal income levels in Allen County. In 2019, the per capita personal income ("PCPI") was \$47,602. PCPI includes wages, retirement income, government assistance, and investment income, so it is a

more complete measure of how much money is flowing through the consumer economy. This compares to \$48,678 (97.8%) in Indiana and \$56,490 (84.3%) in the United States. In addition, while PCPI has been growing in Allen County, up about 11.9% from 2015 to 2019, that growth has trailed Indiana's (14.1%) and the nation's (15.2%) average growth over the same period. These statistics have motivated the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership to set a goal of raising the region's PCPI to 90% of the national PCPI by the year 2030. Raising to 90% as opposed to 100% or more is part a reflection of the lower cost of living in the region as compared to the rest of the country and part realism. President and CEO of the Partnership, John Sampson reminded that there has been growth, which means increased prosperity in the region over time, but acknowledged we need to redouble efforts to narrow the growth gap and continue "to focus on attracting and retaining companies offering high-wage, high-skilled jobs".²³

The county's population grew by 4,137 in 2019, making Allen County the third-fastest-growing metro area in the Great Lakes region.

The pandemic has also brought into clear focus the need for reliable and affordable high-speed broadband. It has accelerated online behavior into the major medium for conducting business, and delivering products, information resources, and educational services. The "Road to One Million" identified regional broadband as a vision project that requires focus. Broadband access is a baseline for quality of life. The State of Indiana has established an Indiana Broadband Office and designated \$100 million in grant money to expand broadband access to unserved and underserved areas in the state.²⁴ While this grant funding isn't necessarily targeted to beef up broadband access in urban areas like Fort Wayne, it does indicate its importance to every Hoosier. As it becomes apparent that more jobs in the global economy can be done remotely, better broadband could make the county more attractive to those who are not geographically bound and can pick where they live to do their work.

Without question, the racial injustice protests of 2020 have shown that our community has a ways to go on racial equity. It has become more clear that an important ingredient for a thriving productive community requires diversity and inclusion. We need to be striving for the inclusion and advancement of all portions of our community. To that end, Fort Wayne United has introduced the United Front Initiative. Since its launch in September 2020, 150 businesses/organizations and over 5,500 individuals have joined the comprehensive cultural competency program that fosters racial equity, healing, and unity.²⁵

Here are some positive trends. From 1990 to 2016, Allen County has lost about 21,000 more residents who have moved away than have moved in. But for the years 2017 to 2019, the trend has reversed by net in-migration of 2,257 people, with 1,492 of those residents coming in 2019. In addition, the county's population grew by 4,137 in 2019, making Allen County the third-fastest-growing metro area in the Great Lakes region.²⁶ People are taking notice and are voting with their feet. We are headed in the right direction!

Like Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership on the regional level, Greater Fort Wayne has done an outstanding job of championing, promoting, and facilitating the growth of industry in Fort Wayne and Allen County.

I have to compliment the world-class production value of GFW's marketing and informational pieces. And they know how to throw great annual meetings to celebrate the community's successes. The October 2020 annual meeting was fittingly attendance-limited, but appropriately "rah-rah" at the Fort Wayne Aero Center -- with airplane hangar doors open on a brisk autumn evening. GFW effectively and compellingly tells the story of our community -- what makes us unique and attractive for business, and, more broadly, for making a life here. The pitch is as much about our "quality of place" as it is about X number of jobs and Y dollars of investment by these Z companies.

Speaking of quality of place, let's talk about Parkview Field, Promenade Park Riverfront Fort Wayne, The Landing, The Bradley Hotel, and the Arts Campus Fort Wayne. As a community,



we've got a lot to work with. Despite the pandemic, we have kept the success going. The Electric Works project is just the latest in a growing list of investments being made in our economy. I've mentioned some others earlier in this paper.

When it comes to promoting industry, Greater Fort Wayne has specifically targeted the following: specialty insurance, medical devices and technology, vehicles, design and craftsmanship, food and beverage, advanced materials, logistics and e-commerce, and military and defense.²⁷ In each of these industries, there is significant history of innovation, productivity, and competitive advantage. Existing companies in these targeted areas have successfully adapted and grown in a changing national and global economy. At the base of their success is a quality workforce.



Many of these targets, as I've mentioned earlier in my paper, have one or more companies headquartered in Fort Wayne. That means the CEOs are here in Allen County. These business leaders tend to be invested not only in the success of their company, but also in the community as a whole. They care about the "quality of place" because they live here too, they have children in the schools, and they want to be a part of making where they live better for their families.

The answer to how to grow industry in Allen County is more complicated than, "If you build it, they will come." But having a fourth consecutive year of more than \$1 billion in building permits issued by Allen County means companies are putting money where they believe there will be a return on investment. New construction and redevelopment improves our community's physical appearance and shows the rest of the state and the country that we are growing and we believe in our future.

Apropos of my topic, the January 2021 issue of *Fort Wayne Monthly* magazine contains a series of articles written by a variety of "innovative thought leaders" on different aspects of the "future" of Fort Wayne.²⁸ Many pose questions or project aspirations of what the future should be for our community.

One contributor, former Fort Wayne Mayor Graham Richard, asks "How do we leverage the central location, and almost disaster-free location of Northeast Indiana for attracting national and regional logistics, distribution and transportation companies?"



Jamie Elder, Principal at Forty53 Advisors, writes similarly that being a four-hour drive from a quarter of the nation's population is an inherent advantage over other comparable cities.

Ellen Cutter, Vice President with Greater Fort Wayne, observes that community and economic development should benefit everyone, and economic development is about providing opportunities for each and every person to build wealth for themselves and their families.

John Sampson counsels against fearing that the increase in population envisioned in the Road to One Million will change our historic values and instead to see our values as what attracts people to our region.

Dave Arnold, Managing Director at Great Lakes Capital, advises that, in the process of investing public resources, we should not try to do every project, but stay true to our current strategy of being targeted in our choices.

Brenda Gerber Vincent, also a Vice President with Greater Fort Wayne, reminds us that we have the potential to attract people from all over the world while retaining our best and brightest in Fort Wayne, but only if we purposefully value the thoughts, ideas, and perspective of all.

Mike McGlothlin, Executive Vice President at Ash Brokerage, notes the opportunity to increase our presence in education with several area universities, to grow the intellectual capabilities here for the financial services industry, and to encourage critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity in developing tools that will help consumers make better choices about their financial future.

TK Herman, President of Aptera, believes that cities like ours are becoming more attractive for their standard of living, including a low cost of living, fast internet, and a family-friendly culture. He's happy to see another software company, Rural Sourcing, opening a regional office in downtown, and finds it remarkable that a city our size has two 100+ person custom software development companies. He sees it as putting Fort Wayne on the map as a hub for technology talent.

Karl Lapan, President of the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center, remarks that the Fort Wayne area has significant strategic advantages for today's innovative companies with its best-in-class manufacturing, centralized location, transportation network, dynamic entrepreneurial support system, excellent business climate, and access to talent.

Ryan Twiss, Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership's Vice President of Talent Initiatives, focuses his comments on the Partnership's goal of 60% of the workforce achieving credential attainment and the need to emphasize support for our advanced industries which offer higher-quality and higher-paying jobs, perhaps at the expense of industries with high numbers of lower-quality jobs.

Andrew Hoffman, Executive Director of Neighborlink, and Kate Virag, Vice President of Marketing at Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, emphasize the need for positive communication. They say that when we speak positively and proudly about our community, others do the same.

These are just a few samples from some of the authors of this wide-ranging article, and I would recommend it to all of you.

Conclusion

So to conclude, Allen County has a storied history of enterprise, invention, and innovation. I have only been able to touch on some of the more prominent industries and companies in our history. There are many more successful companies, small and large, that demonstrate further that we are makers and doers, and we value community and family. We have an impulse to want better for ourselves and for the next generation. As we have traveled through, and begin to emerge from, the COVID-19 pandemic, we can be grateful that as awful as it has been for so many, Fort Wayne industry has shown resiliency. That's a reflection of the basic positive spirit of this community that has threaded through the toughest of economic times, like the 1983 Harvester closing.

The collective, sustained public and private efforts to maximize our strengths, confront our weaknesses, and cast vision for a better tomorrow are encouraging. The positive momentum we have experienced has been slowed in the past year, but the current is still moving forward and will pick up the pace this year. The future of industry in Allen County is brighter than it has ever been in my lifetime. We've come long way since 1983.

I am more hopeful than ever that the trends will lead to greater retention and attraction of younger and higher-skilled workers and increasing prosperity for all.



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