

By Rebecca Patrick

ABUZZ IN BLOOMINGTON

City Offers Unique Blend of Capabilities

It's known as the home of Indiana University basketball and the cycling film *Breaking Away*. But that only begins to scratch the surface of Bloomington.

If you look at just the last decade alone, the city has been on the cutting edge in several industries.

The life sciences sector – led by world-renowned device manufacturer Cook Medical Group – continues to thrive. An emergence in the high-tech arena is also paying dividends.

And the icing on the cake: Bloomington boasts quality of life

offerings second to none for its size.

The backdrop

The city has a winning formula for moving forward. Community leaders and residents routinely come together to tackle challenges and create new opportunities.

Local businessman Lee Marchant believes this sense of community spirit has been the most vital component to Bloomington's success.

"Over the years, we've had the ability to see what was good for the community and make it happen. I think that's one of the most magnificent things.



“So often in every area, in every profession, we’ve been able to bring in some of the best and brightest. You put these people together and the synergism just explodes in making this community what it is,” he raves.

Bloomington’s prosperity and popularity is also strongly rooted in its culture and attractions.

It’s something the city consciously uses to its advantage.

Mayor Mark Krusan: “Our economic development strategy is based on the notion that quality of life is synonymous with economic vitality, and trying to make this the kind of community in which people want to live, work, invest and to visit is exactly what’s driving our economy.”

Cultural availability

Bloomington’s hallmark is big-city entertainment with the comfort that comes from living in a close-knit community. It thrives in the form of theatre productions, outdoor events, concerts and much more.

The Lotus World Music and Arts Festival is a marquee event each fall.

“You can go and see bands from all over the world and experience the arts of a particular culture right up close,” enthuses Jean Kautt, a member of the City of Bloomington Arts Commission.

“There are so many wonderful things to do. There is never a boring moment. Every day there is something new and exciting to go out and take part in, to whatever extent you want to.

“This is a small town geographically so it’s easy to get to the things that there are to do. But it feels like a big city because of the variety and the amazing quality of the arts,” she remarks.

For example: IU’s School of Music has a production virtually every night.

“You would have to go to New York, to Julliard, to find a music program equal to what takes place here,” Marchant asserts.

Jennie Vaughn, chancellor for the Bloomington region of Ivy Tech Community College, is a West Coast transplant and feels right at home.

“I feel like I’m in a mini San Francisco. The entertainment. The

cuisine. All of it. I can go outside my door to IU or The Waldron (Arts Center) at Ivy Tech to see a play. I can go see great artwork. We have everything here.”

As Jeb Conrad, president and CEO of the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, puts it: “You don’t have to go to O’Charley’s every night – though there’s nothing wrong with O’Charley’s – but you have so many different (dining) choices.”

In downtown alone, there are 90 restaurants in a 15-minute walking radius.

Outdoor lovers are in luck too. Hoosier National Forest and Lake Monroe, which is Indiana’s largest inland lake, are popular attractions. A national gold medal winning parks department includes 26 park sites (on 2,354 acres) that are prime for exploring.

A recent addition is the B-Line Trail, a project that transformed an abandoned rail line into a multi-use path through the downtown core and connected it to another seven miles of trails throughout the city.

The annual Lotus World Music and Arts Festival features multiple musical performances each night at various venues across the city (*photo courtesy Visit Bloomington*).





Indiana University enhances Bloomington in a variety of ways – from academics to commercialization of technologies and skills to being a cultural center (bottom photo courtesy Visit Bloomington).

Joggers, bicyclists and families out for a walk are all likely to be spotted on the B-Line.

“It’s in the heart of our downtown and is now connecting neighborhoods and the entire community to downtown,” Kruzan shares.

Infrastructure improvement

A different kind of connection will be here before residents know it.

Bloomington is now on the cusp of being linked to a major roadway for the first time with the expansion of Interstate 69 from Evansville to Indianapolis. Over the next few years, the segments through Bloomington and up to Morgan County are expected to be completed.

While the project and the route through Bloomington have not been without controversy, the benefits it will bring are obvious.

“I-69 certainly elevates our ability to grow what we have and attract other businesses. Being connected to an interstate is one of the first questions site selectors ask. We will finally be able to answer that with a ‘yes,’ ” offers Lynn Coyne, president of the Bloomington Economic Development Corporation (BEDC).

“There are some who have wanted to be here that will be able to justify moving operations here now because of the interstate.”

Setting its sights

While existing companies in a variety of industries have thrived, Bloomington is poised to make technology its next growth industry. The objective: become the high-tech capital of Southern Indiana.

The work of the Bloomington Technology Partnership (BTP) is helping pave the way with a variety of endeavors.

“The technology sector is one person with a laptop to 50 to 60 employers all over downtown. They come together in the technology





Quality of life amenities abound in Bloomington. Residents can (clockwise) spend a day at Lake Monroe, take in a performance at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre, view an art exhibit or venture downtown for bike riding or dining (first and third photos courtesy Visit Bloomington).

partnership to help that sector drive forward and grow,” Coyne states.

The Bloomington Code School, which opened in 2014, is a workforce development program by the BEDC and BTP that teaches people computer programming skills at no cost.

It’s funded by the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County.

“We surveyed local tech employers and asked which tech skills do you need the most right now, and so those are the classes we are teaching,” explains Katie Birge, director of BTP.

“We have code school every Monday through Thursday from 5:30-8:30 p.m., teaching people the skills.”

Employers participate in evaluating participants to make sure they are ready.

Additionally, all local residents have access to Treehouse, a self-guided online code learning platform through the Monroe County Public Library.

“Anyone in the county who wants to learn computer programming or computer design skills has this robust skill set at their fingertips for free,” Birge offers.

In its first two months, she reports 230

people signed up to use the online code learning program – and about 80 of those enrolled in the Bloomington Code School.

Weekly networking events, numerous technology gatherings and an annual three-day conference further emphasize the importance placed on the tech economy.

“There’s a very collaborative, very supportive culture here where everybody wants everybody to succeed,” Birge contends.

“I co-organize monthly start-up pitch nights. One of my favorite things about those is that I get to see the progress. We’ve been doing those for two years now. I see people who pitched an idea early on who now collaborate with people there.”

The city believes its crown jewel will be a 65-acre certified technology park that includes a 12-acre core property currently under development downtown.

“We developed a master plan for the properties and are in the process of implementing that master plan right now,” begins Danise Alano-Martin, the city’s director of economic and sustainable development.

“We’re also working on hopefully bringing

that property back into private sector hands and redeveloping it to become an addition to our tech sector for employment, as well as a real downtown mixed-use amenity.”

The center of the tech park is near city hall, in another part of the Showers Brothers’ former furniture complex, and is ready for occupancy.

This redevelopment project is the largest the city has ever undertaken.

Education matters

Another key factor driving technology and innovation has been the education and knowledge housed at both IU and Ivy Tech.

The IU School of Informatics and Computing – the first of its kind in the U.S. – is producing a steady flow of high-tech professionals. It’s also one of the fastest-growing schools at the university.

Commercializing the technologies developed at IU has been a continued priority.

“In just over the last 10 years, we’ve seen something like 500 patents come out of the work of all our faculty members – and many of those patents have led to either

technologies that have been licensed or the development of start-up companies,” describes IU President Michael McRobbie.

“Over about the same period, we’ve seen nearly 40 new companies get established that have grown out of IU-developed technologies and innovations.”

At Ivy Tech, the Gail and Bill Cook Center for Entrepreneurship connects entrepreneurs to mentors and instructors who can help them take their ideas to the next level.

“We can help them with an expansion, a start-up business or answer any related questions they may have. We also offer degrees in entrepreneurship and technical certificates,” Vaughn states.

Adds Bill Stephan, IU’s vice president for engagement: “This community is welcoming and accepting of entrepreneurs. I think we are having more and more students who, early on, want to get into the mix and have exposure to those kind of business activities.”

The Indiana Center for Life Sciences, which Ivy Tech manages, is a partnership with Monroe County government. It prepares students for a career in the life sciences and works with regional life sciences firms to fulfill education needs.

“People can get a new skill, get the training for technical certificates and associate’s degrees. They can then transfer to Indiana University to move on and get their bachelor’s and beyond,” Vaughn notes.

“We also help the partners in our service area. Any of the life sciences businesses can come and have training at our campus for free.”

Cook Group, for one, has seen the workforce benefits.

“We’ve partnered pretty closely with the chair of that department (at Ivy Tech) to help understand what we need for folks coming out of the program to become employees with us and also to help with training,” says Tedd Green, Cook Pharmica president.

“So it’s been a nice addition . . . we’ve probably hired at least 20 folks from that program over time.”

Adds Steve Ferguson, Cook Group chairman: “Ivy Tech has been a really good partner. If you are going to be in the life sciences arena, you need to have degrees and the regulatory training.”

Why Bloomington?

No matter the topic, there is passion and pride from Bloomington residents for their hometown.

“Bloomington represents the opportunity to achieve. In education, you have kindergarten through post Ph.D. in one place. If you have the desire to advance, there’s nothing to keep you from that,” Coyne declares.

“I came here as a young person from another big city where there were no opportunities and Bloomington is just full of them.”

For Birge, “The absolute best thing about Bloomington is the start-up culture. There are some of the geekiest, smartest people working on tech start-ups here. And every single one of them is creating a product that blows me away every time.”

Kautt enjoys the effect the infusion of youth and their energy has on the community.

“It stays young and exciting and new all the time because of the university and the young people who come here from every place to take part in Indiana University and Ivy Tech.” (Some 50% of Bloomington’s population is IU students.)

As McRobbie simply says, “I’ve never regretted for a nanosecond moving here. I love living in Bloomington. . . . It really is a wonderful environment in which to live.”

2014 Indiana Chamber Community of the Year

Congratulations Bloomington!

We’re proud to be growing with you.

As Hoosier Energy continues to grow, we are pleased to move forward with the city of Bloomington, relocating to a LEED-certified facility, implementing energy-saving and sustainable measures designed to manage future energy usage.

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