

# GOOD NEIGHBOR PLAN

## Communities Achieve More by Embracing Role

By Alyssa DelPrete



It is not uncommon for larger cities to sometimes dominate over their smaller neighbors. While almost always unintentional, the “big sibling” may garner most of the attention. The key for surrounding communities is how they adapt and forge a successful relationship.

“There’s benefit in influence and understanding to work together to solve problems,” asserts John Sampson, president of the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership. “We’ve found in our region that it’s even more important for us to leverage each other’s strengths. It’s important, particularly for a state like Indiana, to embrace a neighboring city or community.”

Ball State University’s Michael Hicks (see story on Page 16) adds, “You can put a pinpoint in the center of every major urban area of over 50,000 (population) in Indiana. Draw a circle with a 20-mile radius around it and 90% of Hoosiers live within 20 miles ... 95% of Hoosiers are within 30 miles of a downtown. It’s very unique geography that can accommodate a lot of urban-centered growth; it’s very different from elsewhere.”

Two such neighboring scenarios, among others, exist in different corners of the state.

### Northeast Collaboration: Huntington-Fort Wayne

Huntington has recognized the need to be a “team” player. It has been vital for the city to work with its surrounding communities, namely Fort Wayne, the regional centerpiece.

“Huntington has embraced its place in the global marketplace,” Sampson maintains. “For a small community, it’s difficult to have all the assets and resources for employers to compete on the global scale.”

Darlene Stanley, longtime Huntington County resident and president of Johnson Junction, utters a similar sentiment: “Economic development has become global and it’s not viable for each little community to compete. ... It’s more effective with people, resources and everything to take that regional approach.”

A perfect example occurred in 2010 when Onward Manufacturing Company, a Canadian manufacturer of outdoor grilling products, opened its first U.S. manufacturing center in Huntington. The day the production center opened, it was purchasing supplies from a company based in Fort Wayne.

“Supply chains and networks can exist anywhere,” Sampson contends. “If you can get raw resources to your door, it’s not necessary that you have them in your specific community.”

The road travels both ways (approximately 25 miles along U.S. 24) between the cities. Those living in Huntington can enjoy the lifestyle afforded by a smaller city but take advantage of opportunities in nearby Fort Wayne for entertainment, shopping or dining.

Although Allen County is the top county sending workers into and receiving workers from Huntington, the smaller county has a strong business base. According to 2012 data, roughly 80% of working

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### Southwest Success: Princeton-Evansville

Bill Poyner, recently retired president of Hansen Corporation in Princeton, has lived in Gibson County for more than 30 years and recognizes the appeal Princeton offers. “We consider ourselves more rural living here. We have friendly neighborhoods, good school systems and good sports programs.”

Poyner describes Princeton as having a “small town atmosphere,” one that is coupled with the opportunities in Evansville that add to quality of life.

Proximity to Evansville (28 miles south on U.S. 41) has proven advantageous for training and education purposes for Hansen Corporation, employing nearly 400 people. Continuous learning is important to the motor-building company, and it reimburses its employees for pursuing educational ventures.

“Most of our education is through schools located in Evansville,” Poyner explains.

He adds that some employees are involved in professional groups in Evansville. “Several of our inspectors go down to Evansville for quarterly meetings. We have also had people who have hooked up with Evansville technical groups.”

Todd Mosby, head of the Gibson County Economic Development Corporation, shares a similar pride in Princeton success while embracing Evansville. He points to the business strengths of Princeton as a manufacturing base. “Being home to Toyota, we draw a lot of people to our community to work every day. The majority of those are coming from the Evansville area.”

Vanderburgh is the top county sending workers to Gibson

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Huntington County residents were employed in their home county. “People are more independent about choosing where they want to live,” Sampson shares. “Your community has value to you and your family. In the northeast Indiana region, we don’t want communities to give up their identity and merge into an amorphous region. We want them to be competitive and take ownership of their community. . . . Just because you identify with a neighboring community doesn’t mean you give up what makes your hometown unique or special.”

Huntington is part of a collaboration gaining attention for its true regional approach. The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership has helped to facilitate collaboration among the 10 counties in the area, enabling community leaders to join forces on economic development for the region as a whole.

“When there’s vibrant economic development, it’s a benefit for every community,” Stanley acknowledges.

The goal, as in most areas, is to establish good paying jobs. To achieve this objective, a main focus of the partnership is to get 60% of the population to have some education beyond high school – a goal shared by the Indiana Chamber’s *Indiana Vision 2025* and other partners.

“When you create more jobs and higher paying jobs, people spend more and it goes back into the community,” Stanley says. “Many employers are seeking employees, but the people who need jobs don’t have the skills for the jobs available.”

### Business prospects

Stanley was born and raised in Huntington County. She is the third generation of her family to run Johnson Junction, a convenience

store chain currently operating five locations in Huntington, Decatur and Berne.

“I’m a really strong advocate of regional economic development,” expresses Stanley, who has taken part in both the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and the Regional Opportunities Council for several years. “It’s an advantage for my business if people can be mobile. They won’t be able to spend money at my business if they’re not employed.”

Johnson Junction employs residents who live out of the area, but the majority reside in Huntington. However, Stanley recognizes that the recreational opportunities available in Fort Wayne enhance the quality of life for those in her hometown.

In the summer, Johnson Junction takes its employees and their families to a TinCaps baseball game as an employee benefit. “It’s an opportunity to reward our people,” she shares, an opportunity available because of the proximity to Fort Wayne.

“We definitely get customers from Fort Wayne, especially those who commute to work in Huntington,” Stanley acknowledges. While she recognizes the advantages of Fort Wayne, Stanley also cites a notable attraction in Huntington.

“We have this wonderful new (downtown) Huntington theater,” she shares, referring to Different Stages Theater. “Two gentlemen have reopened and have totally made over an old theater. It is such a high-quality theater, and it’s an opportunity for residents to experience the arts.”

### University opportunities

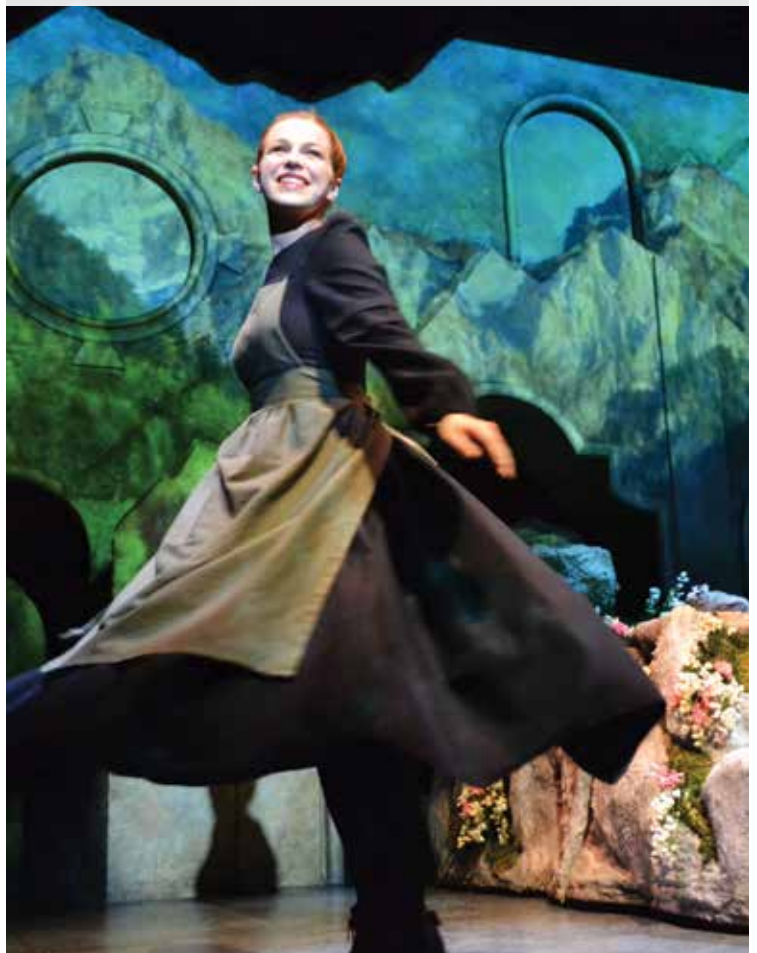
Partnerships have also been critical for higher education purposes. G. Blair Dowden, Ph.D., president of Huntington University



Huntington University’s doctorate program in occupational therapy is housed at Parkview Hospital’s Randallia campus in Fort Wayne.



*The Sound of Music* is performed at Different Stages Theater in Huntington.





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– Darlene Stanley

from 1991-2013, worked closely with institutions in Fort Wayne to enhance student experiences. “Probably more in the last 10 years, we created a lot of partnerships with Fort Wayne,” he offers.

Fort Wayne provides students with internship possibilities as well as extra class options. In

addition, a major affiliation has developed with a leading regional health care facility.

“Over a period of three or four years, we worked on establishing a partnership with Parkview Health to start an occupational therapy and doctoral program,” Dowden explains, mentioning the relationship as an

important achievement for the college.

“Another significant partnership in the last five years has been our efforts to diversify our campus,” Dowden adds. “We began that effort with connections with some of the African American churches in Fort Wayne.”

Fort Wayne’s location has also proven advantageous for recruiting purposes. “It helps us say, ‘Hey, Huntington is a smaller town, but we have Fort Wayne close,’ ” Dowden says. “Students are constantly going to Fort Wayne to take advantage of opportunities.”

Additionally, a large number of students and some faculty members are from Fort Wayne, and Dowden notes that the university obtains adjunct faculty from Fort Wayne institutions.

Dowden attributes many of the college’s successful partnerships and programs with Fort Wayne to his involvement in the regional partnership, which he participated in during his last several years at the university.

Teamwork is the key to success. “If communities are willing to work together regardless of size,” Sampson explains, “each can be bigger and leverage each other’s strengths to work together and better each other.”

**RESOURCES:** John Sampson, Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, at [www.neindiana.com](http://www.neindiana.com) | Darlene Stanley, Johnson Junction, at [www.johnsonjunction.com](http://www.johnsonjunction.com) | G. Blair Dowden, Huntington University, at [www.huntington.edu](http://www.huntington.edu)

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## Southwest Success

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County. In 2012, nearly 30% of Gibson's out-of-county workers were from Vanderburgh.

Mosby continues, "We have the opportunity to capture people if we do the right things by putting amenities in place for an individual to move closer."

Some of these attractions to draw visitors and potential residents are under construction. The city has recently undergone a revitalization as the result of the Stellar Communities program it was selected for in 2012 (see story on Page 74).

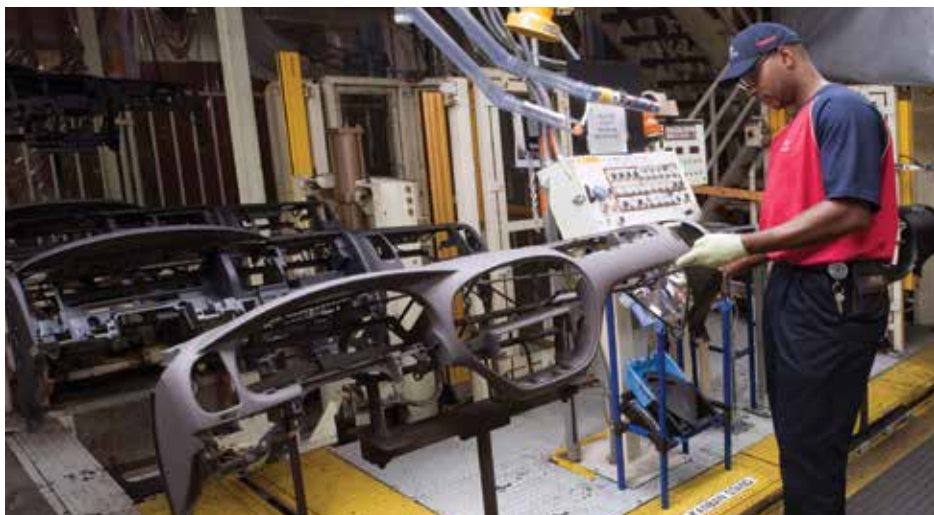
Mosby also gives credit to Princeton's leadership. "Mayor Robert Hurst has done an excellent job to put together the right team to develop Princeton correctly," he shares. "Communities like ours have to get good at the small things. You fix the small things that will give individuals the quality of life that they're looking for for their family. The big things we'll travel to."

### Regional effort

While trumpeting Princeton's individual achievements, Poyner notes a spirit of regionalism and its positive impact. "(In Southwest Indiana) our communities work together very freely and all have a working relationship with each other. This is a major contributor to the growth of Gibson County and Southwest Indiana in general."

Transportation is a fixture for Princeton. "Princeton's original growth was around the railroad system," Poyner explains. "We have nearly 100 trains that go through Princeton every day."

Princeton has north/south and east/west



Toyota provides a critical link between its Princeton home and nearby Evansville.

tracks for its rail systems. Other transportation routes include Indiana 41, Interstate 64 and now I-69. The Ohio River in Evansville provides water routes.

Kelly Dillon, manager of external affairs for Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Indiana, contends, "In Gibson County we can enjoy access to good transportation such as railroads and access to highways while avoiding aggravating congestion in a more urban area."

Toyota has 81 Indiana supplier facilities. A large percentage of Toyota vehicles are transported by rail. Various supplies are shipped by truck.

Dillon, who lived in Gibson County for nearly 20 years before recently moving to Vanderburgh County, has been active in both communities. She has been involved with Princeton groups including the local chamber of commerce and the Princeton mayor's

Umbrella Committee.

"Many of our government agencies and economic development organizations have regional impact and play a role in making the entire region a great place to live, work and enjoy a good quality of life," she asserts.

Proximity to Evansville has been beneficial to Toyota. "Evansville has several offerings that an employer of our size needs," Dillon acknowledges. "For example, Evansville and the tri-state have a strong workforce from which to hire. We recently hired an additional 240 team members, so a strong workforce is important as we continue to grow. The city also has the region's largest airport. We also use other Evansville venues for meetings, hotels accommodations, attractions and dining options."

Poyner indicates that the Gibson General Hospital in Princeton is another key metric for Princeton's growth. Having a good local hospital is important for residents. It is also an example of collaboration, since Gibson General is supported by Deaconess, one of the major health facilities in Evansville.

Mosby also refers to Gibson Station, the largest power plant in the Duke Energy portfolio. "It's attracting a lot of individuals to come here to work, as well as attracting other businesses who want to be suppliers to those businesses."

Mosby is a major advocate of all the efforts Princeton has recently made to improve the city, but he recognizes the importance of nearby communities working together.

"We revel in the success of other communities in our region," he states. "We realize that with successes by others, we'll see some benefit from that too."

Bill Poyner (left) enjoys the "small town atmosphere" of Princeton as well as the nearby amenities of Evansville.



**RESOURCES:** Todd Mosby, Gibson County Economic Development Corporation, at [www.southwestindiana.org/gibson\\_county\\_edc](http://www.southwestindiana.org/gibson_county_edc) | Kelly Dillon, Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Indiana, at [www.toyota.com](http://www.toyota.com) | Bill Poyner, Hansen Corporation, at [www.hansen-motor.com](http://www.hansen-motor.com)