

By Charlee Beasor

# RESURRECTING DOWNTOWN EVANSVILLE

## New Medical Campus Headlining Renaissance



A rendering of the Multi-Institutional Academic Health Science Education and Research Campus.

Charles Dickens employs the theme of resurrection in *A Tale of Two Cities*. He uses the phrase “recalled to life” in reference to a character that was long-thought dead, but was secretly imprisoned in the Bastille for almost 20 years.

Kelley Coures, executive director of the Evansville Department of Metropolitan Development, recalls this line when he contemplates the amount of new construction taking place in Indiana’s third largest city.

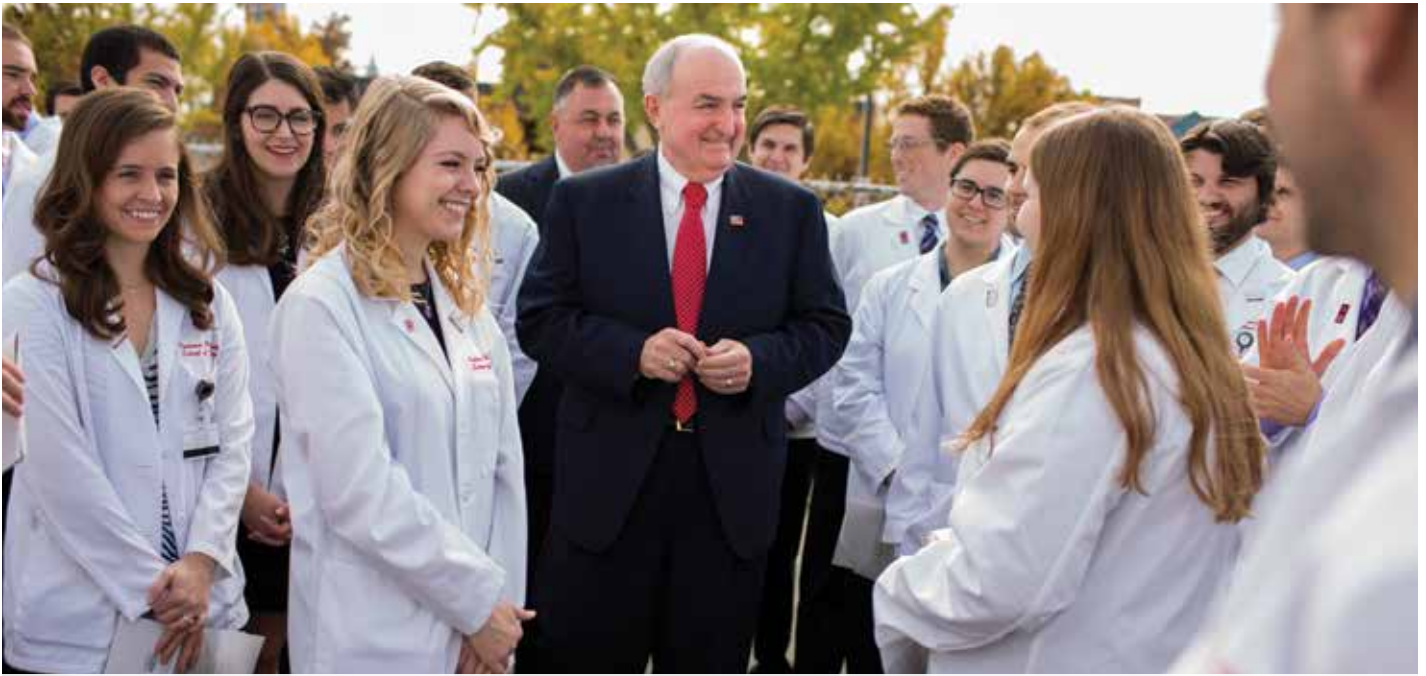
“When I was a kid, my stepfather’s office was downtown. When I was eight or nine years old, I watched them tear everything down, from Fourth Street to the river. It’s taken all these years. And I’ve had

this small part to play in watching it come back to life,” he reminisces.

“It’s like the first chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities* – it’s been ‘recalled to life.’ That’s happening to downtown. It’s being recalled to life.”

Most point to the sleepy river town’s renaissance beginning in 2011 with the opening of the Ford Center, an indoor arena that seats up to 11,000.

Fast forward to today: A new convention hotel is under



Indiana University President Michael A. McRobbie gathers with students for a groundbreaking ceremony in October 2015. Medical students will be taking advantage of the new campus, beginning in 2018 (*IU School of Medicine photo*).

construction, along with a 550-space parking garage. Updates are being made to the Old National Events Plaza convention center. A combined sewer overflow project is underway, as well as a streetscape project with a new bicycle path, brick pavers, vintage-style lighting and green space, according to Coures.

But the *pièce de résistance* might be the one that is least visible, as it is in the early days of construction: the Multi-Institutional Academic Health Science Education and Research Campus.

It will house the Indiana University School of Medicine-Evansville (IUSM-E). Academic institutions that will operate programs there include the Indiana University School of Dentistry, Ivy Tech Community College, the University of Southern Indiana and the University of Evansville.

The campus will hold training and education for physicians, dentists, nurses, health science researchers and more. It will feature a 25,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art simulation center, and the first building will open to students in 2018.

### **Born of a critical need**

The concept for the medical campus began in 2011, when IUSM-E made a proposal to the Evansville Regional Business Committee and outlined an impending shortage of physicians, physicians' assistants and nurse practitioners, along with an increase in aging demographics.

Two million dollars was set aside in the 2013 state budget to go toward design planning. In late 2015, the State Budget Committee gave final approval to release \$25.5 million in funding. The city of Evansville also created a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) to provide another \$30 million toward the project.

Taking up 149,000 square feet and encompassing six city blocks, this is not a small project for a downtown. Along with the myriad other initiatives happening within the area, Coures expects there will be over \$300 million in construction taking place between now and 2018.

"It's huge. And I hate to say that word. But it is. Building the Ford Center was step No. 1. It's an incomplete picture without a convention hotel to join it and the convention center, which is across

the street. These are all the pieces of the engine together," he offers.

Following an October 2015 groundbreaking, the former D-Patrick car dealership that sat on the site of the new campus was demolished in May. The streetscape project is out to bid until August, Coures notes.

Under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's mandates for correction of the combined sewer overflow problem, there are incentives for the medical campus and other projects to be "green."

"Below ground, there will be large-scale stormwater retention tanks. In addition to being beautiful, (the campus) is also green," he explains.

There are two senior living high-rise buildings in the same area as the construction, so the goal is to maintain access for those residents throughout the projects.

A spokesperson for the construction company, Skanska HealthRealty, said the firm was unable to speak publicly about the medical campus project until all contracts have been signed.

Even so, Coures notes that there are already plenty of signs of progress.

"There are several hundred people working on the hotel and the sewer (project). People from Vectren. There are people working every day in that area. It's pretty populous with hard hats. There are the biggest cranes I've ever seen — as long as a football field — moving steel beams over the hotel lot. It's huge," he adds.

### **A new 'front door' to downtown**

There is also an ongoing blight removal project in Evansville. Blaine Oliver, assistant director for the Evansville Area Plan Commission, explains that removing blighted homes in surrounding neighborhoods will free up space for subsequent residential development.

"We're hoping to get redevelopment of those vacant sites with new homes and a mix of housing types actually, and that would provide some additional residential options for (medical campus) staff and visitors," he says. "It's going to have a big impact on the city."

Jan Meeks, owner and principal broker for Summit Real Estate, points to that residential need, which will eventually demand



additional commercial development.

“I think there are a lot of people putting a lot of faith and hope in the fact that (the campus) will spur development and I believe it will,” she asserts. “I think it will take some time to see how the medical campus changes the landscape and how it grows the residential side of downtown. Those people will need services downtown.”

Summit Real Estate was not involved in the real estate transaction for the medical campus. The company sells retail and office properties and has been in business for 20 years.

Meeks points to restaurants and small boutique retail as one of the expected results of the medical campus and surrounding development.

“Downtown really is just getting a lot of attention right now. It’s in the news all the time and it is all very exciting, and I think some people are trying to capitalize on it now,” she offers. “There are several properties on the walkway that are available for sale or lease, and we’ll have to wait and see if that helps move that.”



Leaders from Indiana University and the city of Evansville, along with other partners on the project, turned the first shovels of dirt (IU School of Medicine photo).

Either way, she says, building the new school will only help to beautify the city’s downtown.

“No offense to the car dealership that the medical school is replacing. But it’s going to be a much more attractive building to downtown. It’s going to add ambiance and

green space that wasn’t here before. It’s going to be more contemporary,” she states.

“And I think being as close as it is to the Ford Center and brand new hotel, it’s going to create a new ‘front door’ for us. It’s not at the front door of entering downtown, but it will help spur (that entry point).”

**RESOURCES:** Kelley Coures, Evansville Department of Metropolitan Development, at [www.evansvillegov.org](http://www.evansvillegov.org) | Jan Meeks, Summit Real Estate, at [www.summitrealestate.us](http://www.summitrealestate.us) | Blaine Oliver, Evansville Area Plan Commission, at [www.evansvilleapc.com](http://www.evansvilleapc.com)



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