

W *Influential* OMEN 2023

KPC Media • Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly • Fort Wayne Newspapers



Tasha Eicher,
congratulations on being
named one of northeast
Indiana's most Influential
Women.

Your commitment to leading Parkview's northeast Indiana and Ohio operations and your dedication to community involvement by serving in local organizations makes a positive impact throughout the region. Congratulations, Tasha, on being named one of the top Influential Women in Northeast Indiana by Fort Wayne Newspapers and KPC Media — and thank you for remaining focused on moving us forward.



Tasha Eicher
Market President, Parkview Health
Northeast/Ohio

Tasha Eicher influencing the health care field

BY BEN WENGERD

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KENDALLVILLE —

Tasha Eicher has been a trailblazer for women in both the health care field and her community, and has been recognized as one of KPC's Influential Woman of the Year award winner.

Eicher is the market president for Parkview Northeast/Ohio. She's been with Parkview since 2019, when DeKalb Hospital joined the Parkview medical system. She continues to work at Parkview DeKalb Hospital to this day.

She got her start with a Community Health and Wellness Center in Bryan, Ohio. She worked there from 1998 to 2008, before relocating to Dupont Hospital in Fort Wayne. After a three-year stint, her mentor and boss would relocate to Nashville.

He offered her a promotion to a more senior position, and Eicher chose to relocate to Saint Thomas Health in Tennessee, as director of clinical operations. She worked there from 2011 to 2013, before she returned to Northeast Indiana and Lutheran Medical Group. She stayed at Lutheran from 2014 to 2015 before she took a position at DeKalb Hospital.

Eicher was promoted in 2018 to the role of CEO. She's the first woman to be named CEO in the history of the DeKalb Health system. She maintained this role, and oversaw the transition from indepen-

dence to working into the Parkview Health system.

After the acquisition by Parkview, Eicher continued to work as the chief officer of Parkview DeKalb until she was named to her current position of market president in 2023. She's only one of two female market presidents in Parkview Health's system, a system that is, reportedly, 81.5% female employed.

In her current position, she oversees all Parkview operations in DeKalb and Steuben counties. In addition, she oversees the Parkview operations in Ohio's Defiance, Williams, Paulding, Fulton and Van Wert Counties along the Indiana-Ohio border. This includes three new facilities Parkview has acquired in Ohio. Two hospitals, one in Bryan and one in Montpelier, and an outpatient center in Archbold.

Her path to her position was rather unorthodox.

According to reports, she began her career with a dream of becoming a nurse. After gaining experience with the hands-on clinical work, she realized that the path wasn't for her. She'd end up taking a different position at her clinic, instead working in the back with medical records.

She reports she didn't know what she wanted to do after that, seeing as her original plan had fallen through. Eicher would pivot directions and began to pursue a degree in business. Through her connections with the medical landscape, she reported she began learning

more and becoming more intrigued with the business side of health care systems.

Her combination of experience and intrigue led to her making a critical connection during her time at Dupont Hospital. Her then-boss and mentor relocated out of Dupont to Nashville. It's here that she stepped into her first senior role, all while pursuing her masters degree in business administration.

She finished her MBA during her time at Saint Thomas. According to reports, upon her return to Lutheran Medical and northeast Indiana in 2014, her combination of experience and expertise made her one of the most valuable women in the healthcare industry.

In addition to a master's degree, Eicher has obtained a bachelor's degree in business from Western Governors University, an associate's degree in business from Northwest State College and an associate's degree in health information management from Hutchinson Community College.

Eicher has since used her position of influence within the health care field, she reports only increasing her amount of community involvement.

She volunteers for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Indiana, where she serves as a lunch buddy. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is a non-profit organization focused on getting youth in contact with mentors with the goal of giving unguided



Tasha Eicher

and underprivileged youth with stable adult relationships.

She also serves on several boards in her community including a position with United Way of DeKalb County, the DeKalb County YMCA, Inspiration Ministries and the Hicksville School Foundation. All organizations aimed at the revitalization, progression and betterment of the DeKalb community.

Eicher has made it a point of hers to be a resource and support for her coworkers who are looking for ways to further their career and, reportedly, regularly checks in and offers guidance to those who seek it.

Alongside her duty as market president, she embraces her duty as mother. Tasha is married to Marlin, her husband of 21 years, and together they have two children. Macie, a sophomore in college, and Luke, a sophomore in high

school.

According to staff reports, Parkview is constructing a new facility in Auburn. The new building is being constructed on a 77-acre tract of land near the interchange of S.R. 8 and Interstate 69. Eicher's plate of responsibilities may continue to grow as Parkview announced the acquisition of an undisclosed number of Community Health and Wellness Centers on Oct. 1.

The expansion of Parkview's presence in the area may be just another stride for Eicher. From her unorthodox path, to her position as the first woman to captain the helm in DeKalb, to a position of chief ranking, which nationally is made up of approximately 80% men, and all the way to Parkview expansion in 2023, Eicher has been a trailblazer and helping her community along the way.

Deborah Garrison, Ph.D, helping university move forward

BY MARY ANNE GATES
For KPC Media

Deborah Garrison, inaugural vice chancellor and dean at Indiana University Fort Wayne, was appointed July 1, 2022. She was nominated for the dual position during a search for candidates.

"After the search firm contacted me, I researched Indiana University and Fort Wayne. I was intrigued and excited by the opportunities I saw...I could see how my health care background and my higher education experiences in public and private universities formed an effective foundation to lead," Garrison said.

She added, "The IU Fort Wayne Community Advisory Committee members I met had a strong vision for what IU Fort Wayne could become. These meetings started to reveal a future state that I felt confident would use my personal strengths...When I received a call inviting me to join IU, it took all of 30 seconds to say, 'yes', and I am so glad I did."

So far, one of the campus highlights for Garrison is the view right outside her office window.

"One of the most interesting things about the position is the presence of both PFW and IU on

the beautiful Fort Wayne campus. Our students can learn together, share residence halls, and have fun on the expansive Science Mall outside my window in Neff Hall, which gives me a great vantage point to see all the events held there," she said.

Besides being vice chancellor and dean at IU Fort Wayne, Garrison is a registered nurse. She is currently licensed to practice in Indiana and New York.

"Sometimes people ask if I regret leaving the clinical setting for academia, and my response has always

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Deborah
Garrison, Ph.D



INDIANA UNIVERSITY FORT WAYNE

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Hill enjoys mentoring people who are early in their careers

Please share with readers your definition of being influential.

Influencing comes in many forms. When I think about ways I personally influence people and events, it's most often through being a catalyst for communication and connection. There is power in collaboration and shared resources. So, whenever I can influence outcomes by spotting opportunities to bring people and organizations together, I'm all in.

How has someone been influential in your work, life, etc.?

My own kids have had a huge influence on who I am now. There's nothing more humbling, enlightening and rewarding than learning how to parent. My kids are now 19 and 21. I'm still learning. I held my mom's hands when she passed away at only 63 years old. Someone told me at that time "it's the last lesson she'll ever teach you." Her influence is stamped on me in so many ways. She always looked for the positive, she was energetic and disciplined. She always found ways to give of her time, talents and treasure to causes she believed in, and she cared deeply for her friends and family. In dying, she taught me how precious every moment is. She's been gone for nearly 20 years, and I still take nothing for

granted and maintain a clear understanding of what's truly important.

This could be a man or a woman: Who you see as a role model for influencing something for the positive?

There are influential people we can all name, there are "influencers" who give themselves the title and hope people will follow. But my role models are the ones who are influencing under the radar. They are finding ways to affect positive change through patience and persistence and without flash or high profiles. Here in Fort Wayne, many of our nonprofit leaders are influencers in that vein. They are putting their head down and getting the work done to protect and support our vulnerable populations, bring us a vibrant arts scene and build community.

Tell us about the work you have done. What drew you to that work?

Before I lived in Fort Wayne, I was the community development coordinator at Department of Metropolitan Development in Evansville. When I first moved to Fort Wayne, I worked at Vera Bradley where I eventually became the executive director of the Vera Bradley Foundation for Breast Cancer. At the end of

2014, I accepted my current role as Client & Community Relations Director at PNC Bank. I have also served on many nonprofit boards and economic development committees. I am drawn to serve people and improve outcomes for communities and I think my career trajectory tells that story. I'm fortunate at PNC that a part of my role is to recommend PNC Foundation grants for early childhood education, human services, and economic development.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

Answered below.



Catherine Hill

How do you believe you've been influential?

I really enjoy mentoring people that are not as far along in their careers. When someone who I encouraged

to stretch and grow gets a promotion or moves closer to their personal goals, I feel especially gratified. I love to spot talented people with drive and put some wind in their sails.

Celebrating the women who lead the way forward.

Congratulations, Catherine Hill, on being recognized for the contributions that benefit us every day. And for helping to inspire other women to achieve their very best.

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If it's about Fort Wayne, it likely involves Irene Walters

BY MARY ANNE GATES
For KPC Media

The ongoing growth and development of Fort Wayne can be attributed to many people that have spearheaded a myriad of projects that have gradually expanded an ever-flourishing Fort Wayne City landscape. However, it is also pretty safe to say that if it's about Fort Wayne, it is likely to have involved Irene Walters at some point. For nearly 50 years Walters has been a member of the driving force behind a lot of iconic Fort Wayne projects.

Besides years of involvement in a wide range of projects throughout the city Walters has kept in mind the purpose of life for herself.

"The purpose of life is to lead a life of purpose. It is very fulfilling and energizing to try to make life better for people who need help," Walters said.

Walters volunteer history with the City includes her current position as co-chairwoman for Clean Drains Fort Wayne.

Founder of Friends of the Rivers

Walters was a founder of Friends of the Rivers, a 501c3, project to enhance the value of the rivers and "get people on the rivers. Let them see Fort Wayne from a whole different perspective," she said.

Besides people enjoying the rivers, promoting economic development was important to the group.

"We raised over \$600,000 to build a replica of a canal boat that used to be on our rivers in the 1840s. We named it Sweet Breeze and gave it to the city in 2019 when Promenade Park opened," Walters said.

Adding, "That was a proud moment, I worked with a lot of other people on the River Advisory Committee to finally unveil Promenade Park, which is the jewel of our park system. It thrills me that it is open to people of all abilities," she said.

A volunteer for many projects

To say Walters is active in a variety of community organizations is an understatement. She lists more than a dozen organizations where she currently serves. These include Fort Wayne Redevelopment secretary, Friends of the River, United Way, Fort Wayne Urban League, Women United Steering Committee, Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne, Community Foundation—Grant Committee, Turnstone, Visit Fort Wayne, Riverfront Advisory Committee, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Super Shot Development Committee, Forest Park Boulevard Neighborhood Association, Parkview Community Health Investment Committee.

An award-winning volunteer

Besides being active with many Fort Wayne organizations, Walters has received numerous awards. In addition to the current Influential Women award, she received the Maclyn Parker Swaggar Award for community vision and leadership from Greater Fort Wayne, Inc earlier this year.

During her professional life she served as the executive director of, then IPFW, university relations, and communications from 1995—2014.

"One of the reasons I went to work at the University was because the stronger a University is the stronger the City is," Walters said.

However, building a strong University to create a strong city was just part of Walters' tenure at the University.

First, she had to bring the two entities together.

"The idea was to bring the university and the community closer together," she said, Adding, "It also was about building up the brand and breaking down the wall between the City and the University. I was in charge of events, communications, and the website.

(My job was) promoting the University and making sure it was a good citizen in the City and giving back to the community," Walters said.

Among the University projects Walters led include the Mastodons on Parade, celebrating the 40th anniversary of IPFW.

"The ongoing Omnibus Lecture series began when The English Bonner Mitchell Foundation gave IPFW \$50,000 to create a lecture series with speakers who could change your thinking or enlarge your thinking and open a world of ideas. I was charged with finding speakers that appealed to a diversity of thought," she said.

"Awareness, education, developing relationships of trust, and listening to people's concerns, are the building blocks of getting things done, and it takes time," she said.

In working with the city on other projects including applying to be an All-America City in 1997 and 1998. The application asked what the city's



Irene Walters

strategic plan was. According to Walters the city did not have one in 1997.

Fort Wayne was a finalist that year but did not win.

Creating a strategic plan for Fort Wayne became a priority. And the lessons learned during the previous year won Fort Wayne the All-America City award in 1998.

Francine's Friends

Other volunteer moments include the creation Francine's Friends Mobile Mammography Unit. When Francine Schubert died about 20 years ago her friends wanted a tangible way to remember her.

"Francine Schubert was one of my very best friends. She had an indomitable spirit. She had a lot of hope and a lot of humor. She passed away from breast cancer. A few of us wanted to make sure her legacy would live on. We initially raised money for a second-hand bus outfitted with equipment for a mammography," Walters said.

Walters no longer remembers how much the bus or the equipment cost at

that time.

Currently, Parkview Health operates Francine's Friends Mobile Mammography Unit and her friend's legacy lives on.

First Fort Wayne connections

Born in New York and raised in Chicago, Walters said living in Fort Wayne "was different." Irene and her husband, Bob, a Fort Wayne native, met at the University of Michigan. When it was time to think about marriage, Walters said, "Yes," with one condition, "We never live in Fort Wayne, because I am a big city girl."

"That was a very unfair judgement. I had never really gotten to know Fort Wayne. At that point in my life, it was, Fort Where?" she said.

As luck would have it, when Bob finished law school he was granted a prestigious federal clerkship in Fort Wayne.

"We came back here in the late '60s, and I fell in love with the city. I just found the community so

SEE WALTERS, Page A7

Sharon Miller strives to lead by example

Please share with readers your definition of being influential.

Being influential is having the ability to impact, inspire, and affect other's thoughts, actions, and decisions in a positive and meaningful way.

How someone has been influential in your work, life, etc.?

A handful of special people have strongly influenced my personal and professional life by genuinely caring, having compassion, and listening. I've been fortunate in my career to have great people around me, whether it was a manager that encouraged me through self-development opportunities, or a team member that listened and cared about my feelings, or an employee who offered to help me during a challenging situation, or a good friend that is always there.

This could be a man or a woman: Who you see as a role model for

influencing something for the positive?

My Strategic Coach, Steven Neuner, has been a great role model for me this past year. Steven is a caring and inspiring leader. I've learned so much from him, especially how to be a better person and improve as a business owner. His genuine demeanor and constant positivity are infectious and have greatly influenced my leadership style.

Tell us about the work you have done. What drew you to that work?

As a kid, I loved playing "office." So, it's fitting that I'm now a business owner!

I started my career in financial services as an administrative assistant. Then I moved into customer service, followed by project management and process improvement. These roles led me to start Bulldog Consulting Services from my dining room table in 2007. I've always been interested in business, marketing, sales, and management. The

consulting space allowed me to help other businesses thrive in these areas.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

As one of the Largest Women Owned Companies in the Greater Fort Wayne area for the past eight years, I'm impacting the community not only by offering employment opportunities, but also by being proof that hard work and grit lead to endless opportunities. I'm fortunate to have been part of speaking engagements and panel discussions about project management and business management. I sponsor and mentor another woman-owned business through the Greater Fort Wayne Bridge Program. It's a blast helping my mentee grow professionally and offer office space for her to conduct training. It's inspiring that my team has also embodied a passion for



Sharon Miller

impacting the community. The Bulldogs are active through local volunteerism and support of efforts like food drives and Christmas family sponsorships. It's important that we, as leaders, keep looking for ways to help others and build up the people and places around us!

How do you believe you've been

influential?

I strive to lead by example and inspire others to reach their full potential by having strong ethics and working hard. I am genuine, determined, and trustworthy. These traits, plus focusing on always doing the right thing, have helped me influence my kids, my employees, my mentees, and hopefully others I've worked with!

W *Influential* **WOMEN** 2023

WALTERS

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welcoming.

"Living in Boston, I thought it was going to be a cultural wasteland. It was so not. It was flourishing with the Philharmonic, the (Fort Wayne) Museum of Art, all the lectures, the concerts. There was an abundance. We came back here, and we never left. We love it," she said. Her newfound love for Fort Wayne gradually turned into a lifetime of volunteering for a variety of causes.

"The thing that stands out about Fort Wayne is the collaboration. It's not about egos and who gets the credit.

It's about getting it done and doing the right thing. That's what makes me love Fort Wayne so much, Walter said.

Lori Gagen leads Noble County's economic development efforts

BY MATT GETTS

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ALBION — She had a good role model.

And now Lori Gagen is one.

Gagen was selected one of KPC Media's Influential Women by our publication Business Weekly.

Lori was the executive director of Black Pine Animal Sanctuary for nearly 11 years. She began marketing for Be Noble Inc., Noble County's Economic Development Corp., in 2019 and has since moved up to become operations director.

She also owns her own marketing business, Catchy Creations.

Gagen has been instrumental in creating Noblepalooza, a free community expo that showcases organizations

and entrepreneurs from across Noble County. She also is the lead coordinator of Noble County's first leadership program, Engage Noble Leadership Academy. The first cohort is set to begin in late September. Lori volunteers her time on the Albion STAR Team, the Albion RDC, and wherever else her input is needed.

In July, the Albion Rotary Club honored Gagen as its Citizen of the Year for her personal investment in everything Albion and everything Noble County.

Being named an Influential Woman might be extra icing on the cake.

"I am honored to have been nominated, and surprised to have been selected. Learning that I have had an influence on others is humbling and has

lifted me. I am grateful."

Gagen was inspired by her parents growing up.

"My mother was a master of words and very smart," Gagen said. "She was strong in her convictions. Mom made it fun to learn and she was a great teacher."

"I used to watch my father do office work on Saturdays, and occasionally would tag along with him to his workplace. I can never remember wanting to do anything except work in an office like my Dad. My Dad had a real adventurous spirit, too, which I share. My brothers also grew up with very strong work ethics, which influenced me as well. They were good role models."

With a private business, her work with the EDC and her countless volunteer



Lori Gagen

activities, one might wonder how she does it all.

"I think I can take on multiple roles because I am good at organizing, staying 'in my lane,' and have time to give," Gagen said. "I tend not to take on responsibilities that are not a good fit for my skills or talents. I used to feel like I should say yes to every opportunity, but have learned a few things. First, there is only so much time in a day and a good pattern of sleep is maybe the most important thing I can do for myself. Second, if I lack the skills needed, the opportunity becomes a burden and stresser. Stress leads to burnout, and if I am burned out, I am no longer efficient or effective at anything. My mantra at this stage of life is that if something doesn't bring me joy and is not required to pay the bills, I'm 'out.' Life is too short not to be joyful and feel good."

Her level of success in various undertakings has been influenced greatly by habits she picked up early. "I would like to believe that honesty and high expectations have influenced

outcomes," she said.

"Growing up, I had many teachers and mentors who reinforced my desire to work efficiently and accurately. I was encouraged to learn in areas that require great attention to detail, including math and language. I enjoy puzzles and structures and learning how things work. I am unafraid of conflict. Conflict is inevitable, and learning how to focus on the facts and objectives, instead of individuals and failures, has been important to me."

"A former colleague of mine saw in me this quote 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing,' by Edmund Burke. I feel like they nailed it! If I have a pet peeve, it is silence in the face of destruction, corruption, incompetence and other unrighteousness."

What message would she give to young women or high school girls?

"My advice is to learn to ask people how they see you," she said. "Learn from others what the reality is and what they expect of you."

Focus your efforts on doing

SEE GAGEN, Page A9



Come visit Noble County



Congratulations
Lori
Gagen!



A&J Optical Boutique's Amber Tinsley showing dreams come true

Tell us your definition of being influential.

Someone with a story that tells how they grew and worked hard to get where they are today. Someone who shows hope and is who hopeful. Someone with goals who works hard to complete each goal to get where they are going. Someone who believes in God.

Tell us how someone has been influential in your work, life, etc.

Here lately I would have to say (personal trainer) Sabrina Miles of The Waist Game. Sabrina is a walking affirmation! She is one of the most positive people that has been placed in my life. I met Sabrina in the (beginning) stages of my journey with A&J Optical Boutique. When I told her my plan she loved and wanted to talk about it and encourage me every step of the way. At The Waist Game with Sabrina, I was able to work out being around positive people and listening to Sabrina motivate me daily all at the same time. I can't seem to find the time to get back in the gym, but that never stops Sabrina whenever I see her, she has advice and encouragement just because she has jems

that she wants to share, and I am grateful for it all.

Any man/or a woman – could be anyone in the world – who you see as a role model for influencing something for the positive?

Michelle Obama

Tell us about the work you have done

I have been in the optical field for the last decade, I started as counter sales moved my way up to management and then HR support. Now that I look back on things I once started in management and began to order frames and lenses and setting up accounts and things, I started thinking that I could do this myself. I created a 3-phase business plan to open my own optical boutique. Phase 1 being the storefront and being able to offer frames and lenses, while I was setting up vision insurance. Phase 2 was to buy the exam lane to offer eye exams to my patients. Phase 3 was to get (a lens) edger to be able to offer some same-day services for glasses. I have completed all 3 phases, I opened the doors Sept. 3, 2023, which was Phase 1.

Phase 2 was completed in January of 2022, followed by Phase 3 that was completed September of 2023. Along the way I have created a discount plan for a few small businesses to offer their employees for their optical needs. While being the first Black woman-owned optical store in Fort Wayne.

What drew you to that work?

I had a friend that was in the optical field for years. One day she said that they were short-staffed and needed help, and it was good pay. I started part time and, before you knew, I liked my job; I liked helping people pick out frames and educating them on the things that would help them see to the best of their ability with their new pair of glasses. Glasses are a need; I like being that person that helps them make a statement while they are seeing day to day.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

When it comes to my involvement with the community, I think of Metro Youth Sports. Metro Youth



Amber Tinsley

Sports is a football and cheer league in the inner-city of Fort Wayne. They have served children from ages 7-12 for the last 50 years. I have been a coach and mentor since 2009. I started as the head cheer coach of the Raiders team, and now I am the cheer commissioner of the league. My goal as a cheer coach is to have all the girls ready for the next level of cheerleading, social skills, and a safe place. I love being involved with taking the girls to different parades to walk in the Circle city Classic and 3 Rivers. Some girls have never left the city, and some have never been downtown to the 3Rivers parade.

When I am in the community doing vendor

events, I like to educate my community about the importance of the health of the eye and diabetes and why yearly eye exams are very important. We are high on the charts for being diabetic. Vision loss is a side-effect if not treated, or poorly treated diabetic.

How do you believe you've been influential?

I hope that I am an influence on all young Black women in Fort Wayne. Dreams do come true, we can do more, we can own more. To all my Metro cheerleaders I hope I influence you to reach for the stars and everything you want in life.

GAGEN

FROM PAGE A8

the things that make you proud and earn the respect of others who can help you achieve your goals. Females, in particular, place so much pressure on themselves to look a certain way when, in

reality, the rest of the world really doesn't care that much how you look.

"It matters more to learn how to ask good questions, how to be a good listener, to be honest, kind and trustworthy. Developing good communication skills and integrity will take you far."

Congratulations!

Chamber leader Jennifer Esterline brings fresh ideas to Whitley

BY SHERYL PRENTICE

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COLUMBIA CITY — Jennifer Esterline leads the Whitley County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center, advocating for infrastructure investment and rehabilitation of historic buildings as homes for new businesses. However, the executive director is also an entrepreneur.

She and her husband, Jason Esterline, opened E Brewing Company, in July as the first farmhouse brewery in Indiana and the

first functioning brewery in Whitley County since Prohibition. The destination farm in South Whitley has sustainable agriculture, interactive brewery, tap room, beer garden and lodging for guests, offering a large selection of micro beers and a boutique of farm to fork foods.

Esterline is a native of northern California. She pursued an education in agriculture and culinary arts at Montana State University in St. Helena and took a path in teaching agricul-

ture and culinary arts. She combined her passions in 2011, developing a farm to fork nonprofit organization that helped to boost the heirloom food movement and tourism.

Esterline also created agricultural educational programs for adults and youth with developmental disabilities, ensuring high quality vendored day programs for the state of California.

Esterline has a calling to

SEE **ESTERLINE**, Page A17



Jennifer
Esterline

Congratulations to Jennifer Esterline a 2023 Winner of Influential Women.



Jennifer is the Executive Director of the Whitley County Chamber.

Jennifer brings more than 24 years experience in business development, town revitalization and agri-tourism.

Jennifer loves her family and small businesses. Being a philanthropist and an advocate for children and adults with disabilities are also things Jennifer holds very dear to her heart.

You will find Jennifer participating in town meetings, talking one on one with business owners, listening to what the community needs and representing all businesses in Whitley County. As Jennifer expressed, "you will see great things happen in small towns again."



128 W. Van Buren Street • Columbia City, IN 45725
(260) 248-8131 • whitleychamber.org

Mission 25 CEO Shawn Ellis works to build relationships in community, state

Please share with readers your definition of being influential.

My definition of being influential is to step outside of self and selfish desires in order to create impact all around me; an impact that will engage others into the work, the people, and/or the purpose.

How someone has been influential in your work, life, etc.?

If someone took time out of their busy work day or life and paused to spend time with me, they were influential. If someone took time to share their ideas, thoughts, dreams or emotions with me, they were influential. The person who took their time to explain something to me or to teach me something new, they were influential. The person who paused to pray with me and for me influenced me greatly. The person who made it through the toughest times of their life and found hope through it all, has influenced me. The person who can find the good in every situation or person has been influential. At the end of the day, there truly isn't a day that goes by that I do not interact with someone who has influenced my life. People of influence are EVERYWHERE!

This could be a man or a woman: Who you see as a role model for influencing something for the

positive?

Andy More, owner of More Farm Stores is someone I have observed for a very long time. As a businessman, a Christian, a faithful husband and father, a friend to many, colleagues of others, and a board member for different organizations, he seems to always be influencing something for the positive.

His wheels seem to always be turning with who should work with who in order to accomplish "XYZ". Andy is a connector. He connects people to solve problems. He connects people to create solutions. He connects people to impact change. He has a

knack for connecting people together for the greater good. Whether through his own circle of influence, his employees, his church family, or organizations he is connected with, he knows which person to call to answer his questions and/or to connect a person with a problem to be solved. I can't begin to imagine how big his contact list truly is.

Every time Andy's number shows up on my phone, I always know, it's going to be a phone call about helping someone, connecting with someone, thinking about a way to address something, and/or it's a phone call of encouragement and empowerment. I am honored and privileged



Shawn Ellis

to serve with Andy, AND excited to solve problems and create solutions for people from hard places whenever he calls.

SEE ELLIS, Page A16



THE
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
OF WHITLEY
COUNTY

celebrates
Shawn Ellis,
CEO of Mission 25



2023 Recipient of the
Community Foundation's
Altruism in Action Award

Our community
is kinder, safer and
stronger thanks to
Shawn's dedication.

Malak Heiny finds public service is her passion

Tell us your definition of being influential.

My definition of being influential is someone who leads by example that can motivate others to do their best and be accountable for mistakes. It is someone who knows that the road to success is challenging, that has ups and downs and isn't afraid to admit they are wrong and to learn from mistakes going forward. Being influential means leading with conviction, strength and humility.

Tell us how someone has been influential in your work, life, etc.

I have had many mentors along the way in my life that have led me to where I am today. The first mentors I had were my parents. They (are immigrants) who came to this country with nothing and worked their way from nothing to raising their family with all the opportunities they never had. They taught themselves the language, the culture and made sure their kids would be well-adjusted kids in a world they were unfamiliar with. They owned their own business and I watched them work tirelessly to provide for their family. This is the work ethic that I inherited and used throughout my entire life. They showed me that the only way to success in this world required discipline and self-reliance.

In my professional life, my biggest mentor was my first boss, Judge Patricia

Riley. She is a judge on the Indiana Court of Appeals. She pushed me to think critically and to analyze the facts and law to achieve a fair outcome. She encouraged me when I doubted my abilities by trusting me with difficult cases.

And/or a woman – could be anyone in the world – who you see as a role model for influencing something for the positive?

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg is one of the greatest jurist in our history. She is a role model for all young women lawyers for demonstrating that conviction and hard work can change the world. She was known for her ability to “disagree agreeably.” Oftentimes in my profession, people believe that opposing counsel must use legal force to achieve their objective. Justice Ginsberg had the ability to engage opposing views without being threatening and was still able to achieve her goal.

Tell us about the work you have done

After I graduated law school, I was a clerk on the Indiana Court of Appeal for Judge Patricia Riley. During that time, I drafted legal opinions on various aspects of the law, including criminal and civil law. Because the Court of Appeals was likely the last stop for most litigants, as only a small

fraction of cases ever move beyond the this stage of the process, I took great pride, thoughtfulness and care when drafting these legal opinions. I knew that the person filing the appeal deserved the attentiveness to the case and this was likely their last chance at an appeal. I treated each case with respect and diligence.

After my husband and I decided to move back to Fort Wayne, our hometown, I was hired at the city of Fort Wayne as an associate city attorney. In that role, I provided legal advice to all City departments on legal matters, including employment law, contract law, and guidance interpreting federal, state and local law. I also prosecuted ordinance violations and represented the City in all small claims matters.

In 2022, I was promoted by Mayor Tom Henry as City Attorney. In this role, I manage the legal affairs of the City under the Mayor's direction, acting as the city's chief legal counsel. Among a few of my job duties, I supervise the Law Department, Risk Management, Human Resources, and Internal Audit. I evaluate and make determinations on tort claims and police professional liability claims. I also represent the city in disciplinary hearings involving suspension, demotion or termination of city employees.

What drew you to that work?

Public service has always been a passion. After I graduated from Indiana University as an undergrad-



Malak Heiny

uate, I was a Governor's Fellow under Governor Mitch Daniels. In that role, I rotated through 3 state agencies and learned the intricacies of state government. During that Fellowship, I knew that I wanted to stay in the public sector after graduating law school. In my current role, I have the ability to touch the lives of all the citizens of Fort Wayne. For example, I have worked on land acquisitions that led to the construction of walking trails in the City. I assisted the Fire Department in the construction of a new fire station. There is no greater joy than to make an impact on the community I live in.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

Below is a list of the organization I have assisted in my community:

Amani Family Services – Board Vice Chair (01/2018

– Present)

Allen County Bar Association – Board Member (01/2019 –Present)

Cancer Services of Northeast Indiana – Spring Fundraiser Walk Committee (01/2020 – Present)

2018 Welcoming Fort Wayne Diversity Awards – Event Co-Chair (09/2018)

Pathways to Law – Mentor (2020-Present)

Fort Wayne Equality Alliance – Board Member (2020-Present)

These organizations work toward making our community a better place to live in.

How do you believe you've been influential?

I don't know if I have been influential in anyone's life, but I do my best to mentor younger women to help them realize they can achieve anything they put their mind to. The one thing I tell them is this – anything worth achieving in life is hard, but worth it in the end.

Zoda (Rainie) Miller offers guidance, equips others with crucial skills

Tell us your definition of being influential.

I define “influential” as someone who effectively shapes lives of others through positive contributions that enhance their overall quality of life.

Tell us how someone has been influential in your work, life, etc.

My manager, Jess Hopkins, has had a significant influence on my professional journey over several years. Out mutual support, characterized by empathetic and constructive advice, has allowed us to obtain valuable insights from each other's experiences, strengths, and opportunities.

Tell us who you see as a role model for influencing something for the positive?

Malala Yousafzai

Tell us about the work you have done.

My history of volunteerism is:

- Served as a Girl Scout troop leader for a duration of 4 years.
- Volunteered as a receptionist for Christian Community Health Care

and later taking on role as a board treasurer.

- Grabill Chamber of Commerce board treasurer and Membership coordinator.

- Contributing my time to the annual Amish auction in Grabill, which benefits Amish families with special-needs children.

- Involvement as a collection counter for church.

- Extraordinary Minister for Catholic Mass.

- Sub-committee member for finance/budget for School Board.

- Multiple years of volunteering at the Fun Fest Church fair.

- Acting girls sports representative for my children's elementary school.

- Harvest Food Bank volunteer for the past four years for the Turkey Rally.

- Multiple volunteer engagements with Habitat for Humanity.

- Regularly dedicating my time to organizations such as A Mother's Hope and the Fort Wayne Rescue Mission.

- Candy striper as a teenager at Goshen Hospital.

- Junior Achievement – One time only

What drew you to that work?

I have a passion

for giving back to the community and making a positive impact.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

As a Girl Scout troop leader, my mission was to mentor girls, instilling in them the values of confidence, courage, and character, ultimately motivating them to contribute to the betterment of our world. Additionally, at the Rescue Mission and A Mother's Hope, I actively assisted homeless individuals, both men and women, in acquiring vital life skills to facilitate their successful reintegration into society.

How do you believe you've been influential?

1. Community Impact: Through work as a Girl Scout troop leader, I hope that I've positively influenced young girls by instilling essential values and qualities, such as confidence, courage, and character, which will shape their future contributions to society.

2. Empowerment: My efforts at the Rescue Mission and A Mother's



Zoda (Rainie) Miller

Hope have empowered homeless individuals by equipping them with crucial life skills, offering them the opportunity to regain independence and stability in their lives.

3. Social Contribution: Volunteering at various events and organizations, including the Amish auction, church fairs, and Habitat for Humanity, has contributed significantly to community cohesion and welfare.

How do you believe you have been influential?

Overall, I hope that my volunteer service has made a meaningful and lasting impact on individuals and communities, reflecting my dedication to making a positive difference in the lives of others.



Attentive Bankers Helping You

Congratulations to Zoda “Rainie” Miller for being among the top 12 Influential Women in Fort Wayne.

Zoda supports the community in a “helping you prosper” way.



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Congratulations Jama Smith

from all of us at
Smith Law Group
and Littlejohn Auctions!
We are so proud of you and all
of your accomplishments!



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Auctions

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Phone: 260-925-2796
www.LittlejohnAuctions.com

Jama Smith seeks to bring varied voices to the table

Please share with readers your definition of being influential.

The most influential individuals that I know tend to make an impact with their time, with their generous spirit, and by uplifting others to also contribute in ways that are meaningful to them. Influential people change hearts and minds. For good or bad. I prefer when the influence is for good.

How has someone been influential in your work, life, etc.?

In the last few years, I have really surrounded myself with a lot of women who challenge me. My friends are always ready to work on necessary community projects and ask for support. My friends

ask challenging questions when they think I should think about something in a new way. And my friends welcome those same questions for the same reasons. It's amazing how much we can learn from humbly re-thinking things. So, I have been greatly influenced by a group of normal women just trying every day to be their best.

This could be a man or a woman: Who you see as a role model for influencing something for the positive?

My oldest brother is actually a fantastic role model in the Auburn community for leading by positive example. He is non-stop! And always very

SEE SMITH, Page A16



Jama Smith

Congratulations Jama from all of us at Carbaugh Jewelers!

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Congratulations Jama!

We love all the energy and creativity you put into everything you do!

We appreciate all that you do for our organizations and our community!



SMITH

FROM PAGE A15

positive.

Tell us about the work you have done. What drew you to that work?

Professionally, I'm an auctioneer. I come from an auctioneer family. I love the marketing aspect of the business as well as the fundraising event aspect of our business. In fact, it was fundraising event consultation that actually brought me into the family business.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

Both as a professional and a volunteer, I am drawn to events and the power they have as fundraisers and as vehicles of comfortable communication. Gathering people together for whatever reason makes great things happen. I love to help facilitate that.

How do you believe you've been influential?

I hope that I've been influential on the boards that I serve by bringing as many varied voices to the table as possible. The best ideas happen when we encourage and are open to many perspectives. That's not always the easy path. As I've gotten older, I find that I stand up and stand firm in advocating for new and varied voices at the table.

ELLIS

FROM PAGE A11

Tell us about the work you have done. What drew you to that work?

Being a child from hard places, I was determined at a very young age that I would break generational curses. I was the first person on both sides of my family to graduate high school. The first to go to college. However, my "Life Work" began the day I married my husband.

For the past 23 years, I have served in the nonprofit sector within Whitley County. Selfishly, I started out working a couple nights a week at a local homeless shelter when I was 5 months pregnant with my second child. However, I quickly fell in love with the human services field and pursued a degree in Human Services. I worked for Interfaith Mission, Inc. from 2000-2007 as a case manager and administrative assistant. I gained so many skills and a passion for people from hard places and I knew I would carry them with me moving forward.

I served in the role as executive director for BABE of Whitley County, Inc. from 2007-2016. During my tenure with BABE, I worked with a board of directors to turn the organization around in order for it to continue to serve the community. As we reimagined how BABE was serving the community and the potential to serve more and be more, the organization grew fairly rapidly. We moved to two different locations during my nine years of leadership and with each move, we grew into

even larger locations and serving more families and children. Furthermore, we were recognized as Business of The Month and Jewel of The Community under my leadership.

I went back to Interfaith Mission, Inc. as the executive director (later named CEO) in 2016-current. Since coming back to Interfaith Mission, Inc. I have led the way with our board of directors and staff team to take an organization from nearly closing its doors and having only three part-time employees to: engaging community partners into the work of Interfaith Mission, to rebranding in 2018 (becoming Mission 25), to launching three additional programs between 2020-2023, to hiring more staff with additional skill sets and credentials (from three part-time employees to eight full-time and six part-time employees, as well as a contracted therapist), to becoming a certified recovery residence, and increasing awareness of the organization and most importantly who we serve throughout all the programs.

Over the last 23 years, I have worked to build relationships throughout the community and the State of Indiana. Whether through collaboration, serving on other boards, committees, a task force of various forms, and/or partnerships, I have served in positions to advocate for those who may not have a voice yet, who have not exercised their voice and/or who have felt powerless to use their voice. I have served, currently serving and will continue to serve the underserved, the powerless, the less fortunate, the hopeless, the hurting,

the victims, the addicted, the poor, the unhoused, and the lost.

I went to college to be a missionary; a missionary in Ethiopia. However, my college advisor knew after meeting me for five minutes that I wouldn't be going to Ethiopia. I wasn't meant to be a missionary in a third world country, I was meant to be a missionary in my own backyard. I am called to serve my community, to be all in, to create impact, to have influence where and when needed — to step out of self and to step up for others.

How has your involvement benefited your community (this could be your workplace or geographical area)?

Throughout my 23 years of serving my community, I have served on the board of directors for United Way of Whitley County, Leadership Whitley County, Parkview Whitley Hospital, New Hope Wesleyan Church, and Indiana United Ways.

I had the privilege to work with many different board members, staff members, collaborative partners and funding partners to turn around two nonprofits in the county from nearly closing their doors, to becoming organizations creating impact and serving people well.

I applied for a Community Coordination grant, which paved the way for Whitley County to have a Suicide and Overdose Fatality Review team. I was invited to speak at the 2023 National Forum for Overdose and Fatality Review in Washington DC

back in January.

Our community now has the first certified recovery residence and the only Recovery Engagement Center in the county.

One of our mobile home parks now has feet on the ground and providing an after-school program and access to resources and services to the families and children who live in that community.

How do you believe you've been influential?

I believe my greatest responsibility and influence started with my children. My husband and I instilled a strong work ethic in their lives, as well as leading by example of how to be led, to be taught and to lead when necessary.

I tend to be a very determined individual who will stand in the gap whenever needed and will work to help others understand why they too should stand in the gap. Communicating the stories of the hard stuff, the true stuff, the good stuff and everything in between so that others are empowered to do more is one of my favorite things about life. Whether on paper, on social media, in presentations, with groups, during board meetings or anywhere else, if I have an opportunity to speak up for someone or something, I will take the opportunity.

My heart's desire is to serve people whenever and wherever I can. Whether in easy situations or complicated situations or with people who are doing OK in life vs people from hard places, I simply desire to serve them.

Congratulations,

ESTERLINE: Esterline is advocate for small towns

FROM PAGE A10

development of small businesses and cities, and started her first business in 1998. She married Jason Esterline, then moved to South Whitley in 2018 with her daughter, Katie. The couple established

Esterline Farms to meet the need for innovative farm living and hospitality, welcoming visitors from all over.

As the executive director of the Whitley County Chamber, Esterline brings new perspective and a fresh approach to

small business. She advocates for preserving the history and culture of the community for residents, and at the same time bring innovative opportunities to the next generation. She balances growth through downtown revitalization, and welcomes new business,

thriving entrepreneurship and the shop-local movement.

"I find small communities are under-utilized and certain growth strategies can help achieve goals for development while maintain their distinctive small-town character," she said.

GARRISON

FROM PAGE A4

been that I could take care of patients one at a time myself, but the students I have taught across the years have cared for exponentially more than I ever could have," she said.

Meeting the IU Fort Wayne community

Upon her arrival, Garrison made becoming well-acquainted with the University a top priority.

"Because IU Fort Wayne had been so newly created, it was important to learn about IU Fort Wayne through the lens of our multiple stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, partner organizations, community leaders, and neighbors," she said. Adding, "We launched our listening tour, IU Fort Wayne Forward."

Over 260 people through focus groups, personal interviews, and an online survey open to the public let university leadership know what their concerns were. The full report is available on our website, she said.

According to Garrison, top priorities include:

- branding and signage
- student scholarships
- learning spaces
- adding graduate and undergraduate programs
- adding clinical placements/internships/field study
- improving technology (such as simulation, virtual reality)
- community service, and research opportunities.

Growing the IU Fort Wayne Community

Fortunately, there are plans already laid out that are designed to meet the needs of stakeholders. Student enrollment is on the rise. Graduate programs offer expanded opportunities. And more students are choosing to stay in the area to meet their career goals.

"The Indiana University 2030 Strategic Plan was launched in the fall of 2022, aligns well with our IU Fort Wayne Forward input. Each campus of IU has a strategic plan that focuses on: Student success, Research and innovation, and Service to our state and beyond," Garrison said.

Additionally, a plan expected to be fully unveiled in 2024 is expected to address campus concerns.

"The Vision 2024 plan focused on the realignment of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis to occur July 1, 2024, has provisions for campus branding, designated sections of the campus for IU Fort Wayne's future expansion, and opportunities for additional academic programs to meet the needs of our region's workforce," she said.

Student enrollment

"Our undergraduate student enrollment has grown from 434 when we started in 2018 to 965 in fall 2023. We have a goal to double our enrollment by 2030. To do this, we will expand our programs where capacity exists and add programs in areas of need in our region. Along with this growth will come requirements for physical space, faculty, staff, and fiscal resources commensurate

with expansion," Garrison said.

Graduate programs

"There are two graduate programs on the IU Fort Wayne campus, including the IU Master of Social Work degree with 68 students and the IU School of Medicine with 85 students. Our social work graduates are in great demand in our region in a variety of settings. Our medical students can complete all four years of medical school in Fort Wayne, and they can continue in graduate medical education residencies," she said.

More graduates remain in Northeast Indiana

"We are delighted that 78% of our graduates choose to remain in Fort Wayne and Northeast Indiana upon graduation. This is vitally important as we consider the needs of the healthcare workforce to care for our growing population in the region," Garrison said.

Engaging the larger Fort Wayne community with IU Fort Wayne

Garrison is building connections to the larger Fort Wayne community that are in turn building connections for IU Fort Wayne students.

"I find that everywhere I turn there is someone else who can connect me, and through me, IU Fort Wayne, to another opportunity in the community," she said.

"As an example, I was invited for a tour of Super Shot by two powerhouse women who are on the

board there, and now we have connected several of our programs including nursing and health, and human sciences, to Super Shot that give our students experience," Garrison said.

Community memberships

Garrison is active in Fort Wayne area organizations.

"I am energized by our visionary membership in Greater Fort Wayne, Inc. Likewise, I appreciate the higher education group that meets as a part of the Northeast Indiana Partnership. It is phenomenal to sit with leaders from other higher education institutions to discuss ways to support the growth and workforce in the region," Garrison said.

Other civic organizations Garrison is involved in include: the Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club of Fort Wayne, and Quest Club.

The visual and performing arts, church activities, and Big Brothers Big Sisters also rank high with Garrison.

"We have enjoyed the Fort Wayne Ballet, Fort Wayne Civic Theatre, and Fort Wayne Philharmonic. We have found a tremendous church home and are engaged there," Garrison said. Adding, "Another special organization is Big Brothers Big Sisters, and I have a strong, intelligent, and inspiring little sister who enjoys plays, musicals, and ballet, and ice cream."

Introduction to health care

Garrison's introduction to nursing came naturally when she decided to earn

money for college. In a small Texas town with limited employment opportunities there were only two choices. "Raised by my grandmother and, with limited resources, I set a goal to earn money for college. In my small west Texas hometown of around 3,000 people ... the Dairy Queen and the nursing home were the primary sources of employment for teens. I chose the nursing home and loved caring for the residents. It was my first introduction to healthcare, and I was intrigued by the medications used to treat illness and the importance of relationships to health and well-being," she said.

Garrison earned a BS degree, and an MS degree from Texas Woman's University (TWU). Later, Garrison also earned her Ph.D. from TWU.

"One of my nurse mentors and her young family drove me to college – and we are friends to this day," Garrison said.

Upon receiving her Ph.D., she joined the faculty at her alma mater.

"I joined the faculty on the 20th anniversary of going there for freshman year. It seemed surreal," she said.

Settling into Fort Wayne

"I absolutely love Fort Wayne. It is an amazing city. My husband and I agree that it is our favorite of all the places we have lived, which have been quite a few cities in six states. ... There is a spirit of coming together to be a force for good that we find incredibly special. It is a beautiful area, and we love the energy and revitalization

Why business plans matter

BY METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

Businesses cater to consumers' every whim. As the world has learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses play vital roles in daily life, and many effectively cater to their clients even when their facilities are closed to the public.

Business owners recognize that the road to building successful businesses begins long before that first dollar is earned. Devising a strong business plan is one of the first steps toward building a successful business.

According to the Small Business Administration, effective business plans can guide entrepreneurs through each stage of starting and ultimately managing a business plan. Business plans serve as roadmaps that business owners can continue to look to as they build their businesses. Business plans also serve as invaluable resources once businesses get off the ground and owners' focus shifts from establishing the business to growing the business.

The SBA notes that

there's no right or wrong way to write a business plan, though most will fall into one of two categories: traditional plans or lean startup plans. When writing traditional business plans, entrepreneurs should keep in mind that prospective investors, whether that's lending institutions like banks or venture capital firms, will want to see detailed plans that include a mission statement, information about the product or service being offered and the people involved

in the business, including executives in the leadership team. A market analysis, a marketing strategy, a funding request, and financial projections are some additional components to include in a traditional business plan.

Lean startup plans are less detailed than traditional business plans. The SBA notes that these plans are generally best for entrepreneurs who want to explain or start their business quickly or those who plan to regularly change and refine their business plans.

While they need not be as detailed as traditional plans, effective lean startup plans may draw investor interest, so entrepreneurs should be prepared to offer more detailed information about the business on request. That means it's helpful for entrepreneurs planning to write lean startup plans to also begin working on traditional business plans so they're prepared if prospective investors request more detailed information about the business and its products.

October events for small-business owners

FROM STAFF REPORTS

WEOC Women's Business Center, 3201 Stellhorn Road, Fort Wayne, invites small-business owners to a number of events in October.

Register at www.eventbrite.com.

What: Business @ Bedtime: a no make-up meetup

When: 8:30 p.m. Oct. 23

Where: Online (see Zoom link provided after you register)

Who should attend: Open to anyone (business owners, entrepreneurs, employees, non-business owners, spouses/ supporters of business owners)

Price: \$0 (must provide contact information at registration)

WEOC established Business @ Bedtime networking to complement client acquisition work.

What to expect:

- Conversation with up to 10 people to:

- Create strong professional ties
- Gain access to opportunities
- Utilize a safe space to exchange new ideas
- Gain knowledge
- Polish your communication and social skills
- Solidify potential business collaborations/referrals

What: 2nd Annual Artisans & Innovators Market

When: 10 a.m. Oct. 29

Where: 1030 Swinney Ave., Building No. 19, Fort Wayne

Organized by the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center (NIIC), hosted by Electric Works, and supported by the Allen County Public Library (ACPL).

This event offers an opportunity to showcase and sell products. It's timed right for early holiday shoppers!

Two other events at Electric Works that day promise a great customer

turnout:

Trunk or Treat from 2-6 p.m. — Families from the community will gather for a night of fun, creativity, and, of course, treats. The event will be held during Electric Works' Trunk or Treat event, which welcomed over 600 enthusiastic visitors last year.

Shop Local Food Vendor Market from 10 a.m.–5 p.m. — Dynamo Alley will come alive with delectable delights where guests can savor a wide array of culinary delights from local food vendors who will tantalize their taste buds.

This year's event also features an Entrepreneur Resource Fair during setup Oct. 28.

What: Managing Multiple Priorities

Michelle Gladieux provides practical techniques to manage your multiple priorities.

When: 9-11 a.m. Nov. 9

Where: Electric Works, Forum, Building No. 19, 1690 Broadway, Fort Wayne.

Cost: \$10

Small Business owners must act as Project Lead, Sales, Finance, Human Resources, Customer Service, I.T., Marketing, Manager, and so much more as you manage your personal life. Determining priorities can be difficult to say the least. Michelle Gladieux, small-business owner, speaker, and author, will provide techniques to help us manage our multiple priorities.

What to expect:

The first 30 guests will receive Gladieux's new book, "Communicate With Courage."

She will share how she grew from a solopreneur to leading a team and the techniques she encourages us to repeat to ensure we find success with managing multiple priorities.

Sponsor: SBA & NIIC

5 advantages local business have over the competition

BY METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

Small businesses on Main Street and big-box chains have been competing for consumers' attention for decades. Historians say that big box stores were born in the early 1960s when Wal-Mart, Target and Kmart entered the retail landscape. It's been more than 60 years since these chains arrived and they certainly have garnered their share of devotees. Big-box businesses have size, inventory and

often price on their side. However, when consumers look beyond those factors, it's easy to see all of the benefits small businesses offer that behemoths cannot.

1. Passionate owners and operators

Walk into a big-box store or other business and you may find a handful of dedicated employees, but not quite at the level of small businesses. Small-business owners prioritize

the customer experience because they know they need to work hard to retain customers. This translates into knowing the products well, and sharing as much knowledge as possible with customers. Big-box businesses vulnerable to heavy staff turnover often do not have a vested interest in the brand.

2. Work the local niche

What makes big-box retailers so familiar to shoppers is one can

stop in a store in the middle of Nebraska and likely find the same items as a store in Hawaii, with only a few subtle differences between the locations. Big-box companies work with the same suppliers and ship the same products all over the world. Customers seeking personalized items and services for their particular regions are better off utilizing local small businesses that can bring in

SEE ADVANTAGES, Page A19

Notable Hispanic leaders, executives and entrepreneurs

BY METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

Hispanic and Latino individuals comprise one of the largest demographics in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that, as of 2020, there were more than 60 million people identifying as Hispanic or Latino living in the country.

With such a high percentage of individuals belonging to the Hispanic and Latino community, it should come as no surprise just how influential the group can be. In addition to achievements in sports, music, film, medicine, and more, Hispanics and Latinos have made great strides in the business sector. In fact, many notable people are executives

in major corporations or are innovating by coming up with new products and business concepts. Consider these influential Hispanic business professionals.

- **Lymaris Albors:** Albors is the CEO of the Acacia Network, a nonprofit housing, health and social services company. Under Albors' leadership, the company opened the Santaella Gardens development in the Bronx, helping low-income individuals.

- **Anthony Jimenez Jr.:** Jimenez, Jr. is the founder, chairman and CEO of MicroTech, one of the largest Hispanic-owned IT Integrators in the United States. Under Jimenez Jr.'s leader-

ship, the company has grown from a small, home-based startup to a half billion-dollar company.

- **Betro Perez:** Anyone who has taken a Zumba Fitness class at a local gym can thank Perez. As an aerobics instructor in Colombia, Perez once forgot his usual exercise routine, so he improvised by adding dance moves to the program. That on-the-fly thinking helped shape a fitness empire that now spans the globe.

- **Marilu Galvez:** Galvez is the first Latina to fill the role of president and general manager of the WABC-TV network in New York. Through her position, Galvez has worked to increase the

Hispanic American community's visibility by leading broadcast productions of live events and ensuring representation through content creation.

- **Jose Perez:** As the president and CEO of Hispanics in Energy, Perez leads a nonprofit that strives to increase Hispanic inclusion in America's energy industry. He is both a leader and an advocate.

- **Maria Contreras-Sweet:** In addition to being administrator of the Small Business Administration, Contreras-Sweet is founder of ProAmerica, California's first Latino-formed commercial bank in more than 35 years. She also founded Contre-

ras-Sweet Enterprises, a marketing and research firm.

- **Jordi Munoz:** Munoz is the founder of 3D Robotics, a company that has generated millions in revenue. The company started by chance when Munoz hacked the sensors on the controller of his Nintendo Wii and wrote code to use it to control a drone he built at home.

- **Jeanette Prenger:** Prenger is the founder, CEO and president of ECCO Select, a leading provider of technology services and consulting for government agencies and Fortune 1000 companies. ECCO Select has consistently been listed as one of the top 500 Hispanic businesses in the United States.

Congress, nonprofit working to put suffrage monument on National Mall

BY SAMANTHA DIETEL

Indiana Capital Chronicle

As Congress considers a bill to place a women's suffrage monument on the National Mall, a nonprofit is working to raise the estimated \$50 million needed to build it.

The Women's Suffrage National Monument Foundation, the nonprofit backing the effort, launched a donation campaign in September in an effort to raise funds for a memorial honoring women's rights activists. It's still collecting donations to meet the cost of erecting the monument to the 19th and 20th century activists fighting for women's right to vote and other rights.

The U.S. House Natural Resources Committee unanimously passed a bill in July that would allow the

monument to be constructed on the National Mall, but provides no federal funding.

The bill's next step would be a vote on the House floor. Members return next week after a summer recess, but have several other must-pass items, including government funding bills and a defense policy bill.

The Senate has not taken action on a companion measure.

While Congress must authorize monuments on the mall, many are funded at least in part with private donations.

"How amazing if American women united behind this," Kimberly Wallner, the foundation's deputy director, wrote in an email. "To give \$10 each to the first national monument in D.C. to honor women's history and we could start designing and building this

in time to break ground by America's 250th anniversary of our democracy."

The process

Wallner said she estimates a budget of \$50 million for the construction of the monument, but the ultimate cost will depend on the site location and size. Wallner said it is likely that the group would receive about an acre for the monument.

If the bill does pass, the foundation would have to work through about a yearlong process with the National Park Service to select a specific site on the National Mall, Wallner said.

The bill has received bipartisan support in Congress. Colorado Democrat Joe Neguse sponsored the House bill, with a group of 32 members of both parties

signing on as co-sponsors. U.S. Sens. Tammy Baldwin, a Wisconsin Democrat, and Marsha Blackburn, a Tennessee Republican, reintroduced the Senate counterpart in March.

"The National Mall is home to memorials for those who fought for our freedom, Presidents who defined our country, and the seat of our government, and it is only fitting that it also houses the Women's Suffrage National Monument," Baldwin said in a March news release. "Wisconsin has played a crucial role in the fight for women's rights and I am proud to continue this long and proud tradition."

Blackburn, in the same news release, said that as Tennessee's first female U.S. senator, she was pleased to join Baldwin in this effort to

honor women suffragists "who pioneered the way for future generations."

U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, a Colorado Democrat, has also spoken out in support. Bennet had helped to lead the previous 2020 legislation that authorized the monument's construction.

"American history has always been a struggle between the promise of equality and the reality of inequality, and this bipartisan legislation commemorates our long and enduring journey toward securing equality for all," Bennet said in a March news release. "For centuries, we have witnessed historic calls for progress on the National Mall, and this monument to women's suffrage deserves this most dignified location for its home."

ADVANTAGES

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regional vendors more readily.

3. Better shopping experience

Big-box stores draw customers during peak times when they're home from

school or off from work. That often translates to long lines both at checkout and at customer service or return counters. By contrast, there may be no apparent rhyme or reason to when shoppers visit small businesses, meaning there likely will not be crowds. It's much more pleasant to browse wares without having to contend

with shopping cart traffic and people blocking aisles.

4. Advanced technology

Big box companies have invested millions of dollars into their point-of-service systems and other technologies, which means it can be a very slow transition to new

options as times change. Small businesses generally can shift to newer, better technology more readily because they do not have to do so on the same scale as their larger competitors.

5. General agility

Changing technology on a dime is not the only ways small businesses

excel. They can experiment in other ways, such as a home contractor offering a special price deal for a certain period of time, or a clothing store experimenting with new in-store decor. Big chains cannot pivot that quickly, and any changes must be approved by corporate and implemented across all centers.

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