

Compendium:

NORTHEAST
INDIANA
WORKS



Board Newsletter, December 2020 (LaGrange County Edition)

Dear Board Members:

Kathleen Randolph, CEO of Northeast Indiana Works and a longtime leader in regional workforce development, is retiring, effective December 31.

Edmond O'Neal, current president of Northeast Indiana Works, will assume the role of president and CEO of the organization.

Randolph and husband **Dr. Geoff Randolph**, who retired October 2 from his position as chief medical officer for IU Health, are transitioning to the role of doting grandparents.

CEO Randolph
Retires; O'Neal
Assumes Reins

"I have served on the workforce board for 20 years," said **Keith E. Davis**, president of wealth management for STAR Financial. "Our most successful chapters have been written during Kathleen's tenure. Through recessions, changes in governmental agencies and shifting technology, Kathleen's dedication and clear-eyed leadership has delivered for the businesses and workers of northeast Indiana. She has been the go-to authority for economic development leaders in the region and for state lawmakers and local elected officials."

Randolph has spent 18 years in regional workforce development leadership. Her work at the nonprofit Northeast Indiana Works (previously known as the Northeast Indiana Regional Workforce Investment Board) has included overseeing the region's 11 WorkOne Northeast career centers.

"It has been my honor and passion to be part of a collaborative spirit in northeast Indiana that has led to an alignment between workforce and economic development," Randolph said. "That kind of partnership, as well as partnerships with numerous entities throughout the region, has fostered a deep commitment to developing, attracting and retaining talent."

"The challenges we face in northeast Indiana in ensuring a strong, skilled workforce – and in turn a robust regional economy – are no different from what other areas of the country face," she said. "But it is my belief that because of our region's dedication to working together, we are better positioned than most to meet those challenges."

WorkOne Transitions to Service Virtually and by Phone: Due to an increase in COVID-19 cases, Northeast Indiana Works transitioned indefinitely December 14 to serving customers at all 11 WorkOne Northeast career centers virtually and by phone.

The one exception: Appointment-only center access is available for the phone/computer systems in Fort Wayne, Auburn and Marion that provide direct connection to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development in Indianapolis for people who need assistance with unemployment eligibility matters.

People interested in other WorkOne Northeast services are being asked to call center phone numbers.

"This has obviously been a challenging time; we've had quite a few service adjustments throughout 2020," said O'Neal. "But we feel the latest move is in the best safety interests of our staff and customers. We remain committed to providing the best customer assistance possible under the circumstances."

Agriculture Awareness Initiative Launched: Northeast Indiana Works recently launched a social media awareness initiative designed to encourage middle and high school students to explore the many career options in agriculture.

The initiative includes a page of information on the Northeast Indiana Works website (www.neinworks.org/ag/) and links to other helpful, interactive sites, as well as four short videos that have been posted on Facebook and Instagram. The videos target students 13- to 18-years-old. Thus far, the four videos have reached 15,890 people and resulted in 350 clicks to the website ag page.

The initiative, which generally focuses on higher-wage, higher-skilled positions, stems from two studies commissioned by Northeast Indiana Works that looked at the overall strength of the region's agriculture industry and the educational programming that supports the industry.

The studies determined that northeast Indiana has strong food processing and durable-goods manufacturing components and that there is a need for a bolder, more consistent network of educational offerings. One of the studies recommended creating more awareness of agriculture-related careers.

"Agriculture here and elsewhere involves many skills that at first blush may go unrecognized," said **Rick Farrant**, director of communications for Northeast Indiana Works. "Sustaining a robust agriculture industry requires the talents of plant, animal and soil scientists, biochemists, environmental engineers, hydrologists, veterinarians, finance, business and data specialists, genetic researchers, and precision agriculture technicians."

WorkOne Center Gets American Legion National Honor: The WorkOne Northeast career center in DeKalb County received the American Legion National Outstanding Employment Service Local Office of the Year Award in recognition of efforts to help Indiana veterans find jobs and ensure their economic well-being.

The award was presented October 9 at the WorkOne Northeast center in Auburn. The honor is one of only six employer-focused awards given each year by the nation's largest veterans service organization. The American Legion has nearly two million members and more than 12,000 posts across the country.

Legion National Commander **James W. (Bill) Oxford**, who presented the award in Auburn, said the award recognizes the WorkOne Northeast center's efforts in assisting veterans in securing meaningful employment and making the transition from active duty to civilian employment easier.

"WorkOne," he said, "helps veterans identify and highlight the job skills – like discipline, organization, commitment, and trainable – that civilian employers are looking for and able to identify with. Hiring a vet is good business."

WorkOne Northeast's centers, overseen by Northeast Indiana Works, literally put veterans first. Veterans are first in line for services, and they are given access to job information listed on indianacareerconnect.com 24 hours before jobs are posted for the general public.

Veterans also benefit from career planning guidance.

"I am extraordinarily proud of our team," said WorkOne Northeast DeKalb Center Manager **Nancy Magginnis**. "This national honor is a testament to the hard work our staff puts in every day to better the lives of veterans."

Unemployment Rate Steady: Northeast Indiana’s unemployment rate remained unchanged in November, but several plant closings and spikes in COVID-19 cases suggest the economic recovery is still tenuous.

The non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Economic Growth Region 3 in November was 4.4 percent. That compared with Indiana’s rate of 4.9 percent and a national rate of 6.4 percent. LaGrange County had an unemployment rate of 3.5 percent.

Among the recent company closings: AAM/Metaldyne in Fremont, affecting 62 workers; Vibracoustic in Ligonier (84 workers), and the SMI Division of DCX-CHOL Enterprises in Fort Wayne (52 workers).

While the unemployment numbers are relatively good, an underlying and concerning trend is that people are continuing to leave the labor force.

Northeast Indiana Works Gets Lilly Grant: Northeast Indiana Works received a \$184,000 grant through the Youth Program Resilience Fund of Lilly Endowment Inc.

Northeast Indiana Works will use the grant for a variety of pandemic-related costs, including technology, site modifications, personal protective equipment and general operations.

“We are most appreciative for this grant from the Lilly Endowment,” said O’Neal. “As our region, along with the nation, continues to face challenges brought by the pandemic, the money will help us ensure the safety of our staff and those utilizing the workforce system’s services.”

The grant to Northeast Indiana Works is one of 297 that Lilly Endowment made through the Youth Program Resilience Fund to help youth-serving organizations across Indiana adapt their work to challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

More Than 2,000 People Get Training: One hundred and eighteen employers took advantage of the expanded free Employer Training Grant in northeast Indiana in 2020, leading to short-term, largely certification-based training for 2,065 workers valued at \$7,425,676.

The vast majority of employers were in the manufacturing industry.

The expanded Workforce Training Grant has also generated interest, leading to at least 140 individuals in northeast Indiana pursuing various certifications, including CDL-A, phlebotomy technician and certified nursing aide.

A report recently released by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education indicated state residents earning certificates has increased dramatically in the last decade and that the growth coincides with campaigns to promote short-term credentials.

Brushing Up on the Economy: O’Neal and Chief Financial Officer **Lori Rice** attended economic forums hosted by STAR Financial and PNC Bank. O’Neal was also the subject of a podcast presented by Fort Wayne Mayor **Tom Henry**.

(The next board meeting will be virtual from 9 to 10:30 a.m. January 8, 2021)