

2022 Community Update: A Time to Shine

Tribune-Star

September 30, 2022

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

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TERRE HAUTE CONVENTION CENTER

Terre Haute Convention Center off to good start



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

When the community pulls together: Mayor Duke Bennett, center, thanks all of those who contributed to making the Terre Haute Convention Center a reality during the grand opening ceremony of the center on Saturday, April 9, on Wabash Avenue.

More downtown hotel rooms, Larry Bird Museum, still ahead

BY HOWARD GRENINGER
TRIBUNE-STAR

More than 6,500 people have visited the downtown Terre Haute Convention Center from its opening in April through the end of August.

While July was a slow month, which is typical for convention centers, August was "a good month," said Tennille Wanner, OVG 360's general manager of the Terre Haute Convention Center. OVG 360 is contracted to manage the facility for the Vigo County Capital Improvement Board.

"We did a lot of events in August, which is really great," she said, as the convention center staged 17 events.

Some events include two job fairs, an annual meeting for the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce that attracted 340 people and a Comedy for a Cause event to raise funds to build tiny homes for homeless veterans. The Terre Haute Realtors Association sold tickets for that event, which gave a lesson to the convention center on how to manage a larger than expected attendance.

"We didn't do the ticket sales or the registration, but we accommodated that [event] as best we could. We own 800 banquet chairs and we had 796 chairs in the room and had more folks out in the pre-function area, so it was a very successful event and obviously an event the community grabbed a hold of," Wanner said.

The center's "sweet spot" is attracting events with 300 to 400 people, Wanner said.

That allows the main ballrooms to be divided, part for a general session and part for meals, with other rooms available for breakout areas.

Through August, the convention center has hosted 63 events. Attendance was about 2,000 in August and the convention center has attracted more than 6,500 people since opening in April.

"I think it is good for a facility of this size. We are a smaller convention center," she said. The center also is new and getting started while COVID-19 is still around, and the economy has been turbulent.

"If you look at a 3-hour [driving] radius around the convention center, we hit nine pretty good-sized cities,

so that is a really realistic drive frame," Wanner said. However, the economy remains a concern as the industry may not be back to its full capacity until 2023, Wanner said.

"Prices for everything are going up, as is the amount of people are getting reimbursed for mileage and hotel rooms are up," Wanner said. "What I think we will start seeing is that employers will be less likely to send folks to conventions right now while it is getting more costly for them to do that.

"I sure hope that isn't the case, but I think that will affect our (convention center) industry moving forward," Wanner said.

Wanner said the convention center has business slated for 2023, but just a handful of events so far for 2024.

"What I am seeing is that folks are not really going to far outside of 12 months" for booking events, Wanner said. "That is fine for now, but what we want the larger pieces of business that books outside of 12 months. We are really looking for the pieces of business that are true multi-day conferences/conventions," she said.

"They will usually book outside of 12 months as they have to get their line up ready so when they have a conference they are announcing where their next conference is" to be held, Wanner said.

One good aspect for Terre Haute is the convention center is getting "a lot of day meetings, which is really great. It keeps our staff going and is filling the smaller meeting rooms which is what we are looking for and we are getting a lot of weekend and weekday banquets," Wanner said.

"I think since opening the gates, we have had a good amount of business that we have booked and hosted so far. What our sales team is also doing is reaching out to state associations, Midwest associations, 'societies of,' as those are the folks who travel around to different facilities and maybe go to a different city every year," she said.

"We want to get into those (meeting) rotations. There are also associations for government, such as the association of mayors or association of counties," Wanner said. "They typically travel all through Indiana



Submitted rendering

More hotels: The Wabash River Regional Development Authority has designed \$4.3 million of \$20 million it received in state READI (Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative) grants to help create a new downtown hotel complex. The grant would help construct a building housing Courtyard Inn and Residence Inn hotels and a parking garage. That project would be built on the site of the former administration office building of the Vigo County School Corporation at the intersection of Seventh Street and Wabash Avenue in downtown Terre Haute.

and usually are not be in the same place two years or three years in a row, so we want to be in that one every-three-year or one every-five-year rotation," she said.

Some of those association conventions "are too big for us, so it takes us working with (Indiana State University's) Hulman Center to try to overflow some of that business," Wanner said during a time frame that will work for both the convention center and the university.

As an example, Wanner said the convention center, while bidding on a convention for a trade show with more than 100 booths, had a group tour the convention center and Hulman Center. The group also looked at The Verve for a hospitality room.

"I think overall they were impressed with what downtown Terre Haute has to offer. We talked about museums and the space at the Ohio Building and at the (Terre Haute Historical Museum). We have so many great places that are all walkable that they realistically do an event here," Wanner said.

Such partnerships are important to attract visitors to the city, she said. "Another piece of that is the hotel nights. Right now we have a little over 200 walkable hotel rooms. For us to be really successful in getting that overnight business, we need more walkable hotel rooms or some type of shuttle system in the future," Wanner said.

"I think the new casino will play a big part in that. They will have rooms and I

would think they would have some transportation to get folks to and from, which would be a big draw for groups coming" for a convention, Wanner said.

DOWNTOWN HOTEL ROOMS

Terre Haute Mayor Duke Bennett, who is a member of the Vigo County Capital Improvement Board, said additional hotel rooms

downtown has been part of the convention center project.

Getting hotel rooms will require a private/public partnership, the mayor said. The Wabash River Regional Development Authority has designed \$4.3 million of \$20 million it received in state READI (Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative) grants to help create a new downtown hotel complex.

The grant would help construct a building housing Courtyard Inn and Residence Inn hotels and a parking garage. That project would be built on the site of the former administration office building of the Vigo County School Corporation at the intersection of Seventh Street and Wabash Avenue in downtown Terre Haute.

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Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Start of a new chapter: Mayor Duke Bennett cuts a ribbon during the grand opening ceremony for the Terre Haute Convention Center on Saturday, April 9 on Wabash Avenue. Looking on are Vigo County Commissioner Chris Switzer, Terre Haute developer Greg Gibson, Capital Improvement Board President John Marvel, Emily Crapo of Morris Trucking Corp, The Hometown Savings Bank Senior VP Teri Conley and David Patterson, executive director of the Terre Haute Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Center

Continued from C2

"The garage will be our portion of the project in order for [Dora Hotel Co. and Terre Haute businessman Greg Gibson] to invest" in the hotel project, Bennett said.

A new hotel project would cost more than \$50 million plus a new parking garage, costing \$8 million to \$14 million.

"We have to get them to make the commitment for the hotels, which I am hoping will be coming this year," Bennett said. "I would suspect that if we could get construction started no later than the spring of 2024, I would be very happy," the mayor said.

"I just think it will take a little time to put the financing in place for them and the design, and for us to get the parking garage design done and financed, it will probably take a good year to get that done," the mayor said.

"It will be driven by the private investment. If they can accelerate that schedule, then we can accelerate ours – but realistically to start to move formally, complete design and financing, it could start late next year, which would be great, but my guess is probably spring of 2024," Bennett said.

The mayor said the hotel project would require an agreement for a new parking garage to be built.

"My guess (is a new parking garage) will end up in the CIB's ownership. The Redevelopment Department may have to construct it first, as that is who owns the property," Bennett said. "We will be donating some of that property for the hotels. There is still some legal work to do and lay all that out. It (the garage) will end up probably being operated by the CIB as they are already operating the current parking garage for the convention center."

The hotel project would add more than 200 additional hotel rooms to downtown, the mayor said. Add in the current 200 rooms, and it would mean more than 400 rooms within walking distance of the convention center, the mayor said.

"We thought we were going to have a third hotel at the state office building, but it was not financially feasible. It is better to build new than it is to remodel an old building like that," the mayor said. "What Tim Dora moved ahead with was the concept of two hotels side by side, which then meets the market demand need for this size of a convention center."

Terre Haute businessman Greg Gibson said the project remains in the planning stage.

"There are many factors to consider regarding the timing and viability of the hotel project downtown, including the economy itself," Gibson said of the proposed hotel project.

"Both material and labor costs have increased and supply of both can be a struggle. However, we do understand that to take advantage of the READI funds, we must use them by December of 2026. Obviously, we will be seriously evaluating market conditions and timing."

"Of course, we have always known that additional hotel space would be needed to maximize the success of the convention center, and it is still a priority," Gibson said. However, he added, "I really can't guarantee anything at this point, other than my interest in the project and developing downtown Terre Haute."

LARRY BIRD MUSEUM

An ongoing project that will likely have a more immediate impact on the convention center is The Larry Bird Museum, which is slated to open in 2025.

That opening has been pushed back to late summer or early fall, instead of early spring, said Jon Marvel, president of the CIB.

The main issue is obtaining all the required license agreements with the NBA.

"You have to get clearance from the NBA on so many things. There are a lot of things that went into this that we didn't realize would be so convoluted," Marvel said. "It has taken a little bit longer due to issues with the NBA and copyright laws. We are going through that process to obtain the copyrights."

Additionally, museum display cases have yet to be built, something that will also likely push the opening into late 2023, Marvel said.

Construction of the museum fell behind that of the convention center in general, but a build-out of the museum shell is underway, with that work slated for completion in October.

One construction delay was in shipping a ceiling grid system that is used to move movable vertical partitions or suspended items on display, Marvel said.

Barring any other unforeseen issues, the museum remains on target to open next year, Marvel said.

The Ohio-based museum planning firm Hilferty & Associates designed the museum exhibits, projected to cost \$897,709. Those are to include exhibits from Bird's childhood and high school at French Lick, his collegiate career at Indiana State University and his NBA career with the Boston Celtics.

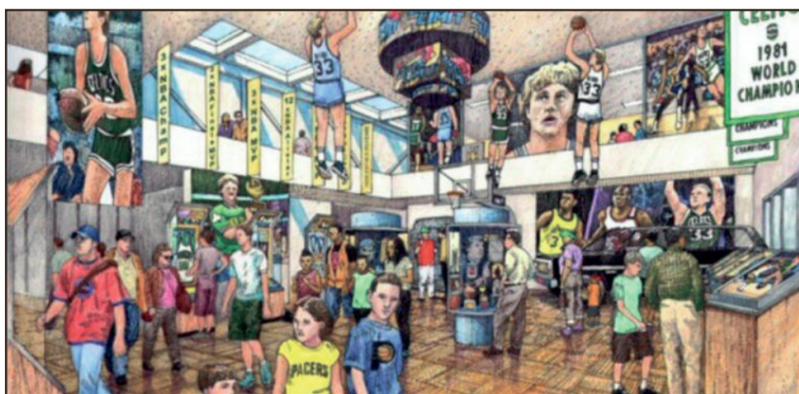
The NBA years will include his time as a three-point king and membership on the Dream Team, the 1992 Olympic squad.

Exhibits also will feature a Bird signature visitor experience; a Kodak Bird's Play showing his mastery of basketball; his post-playing career as coach of the Indiana Pacers and serving as president of operations; and the retirement of his jersey



Tribune-Star file/Austen Leake

Can't wait: Terre Haute Mayor Duke Bennett (left) and Gov. Eric Holcomb note the key attractions of the artist's rendering for the upcoming Larry Bird museum that will be located in the Terre Haute Convention Center in this October 2018 photo.



Submitted rendering

Bird nets: A submitted artist's rendering of the in-progress Larry Bird Museum in the new Terre Haute Convention Center.

No. 33 and his induction into the NBA Hall of Fame.

More than 70% of the 2,720 square-foot space for the museum has high ceilings allowing for vertical exhibition.

Wanner said when complete, the museum will be an attraction for the convention center.

"I think that is a selling feature," she said. "It will be free and open to the public with regular hours, but my hope is that when we have an evening reception, outside of those open to the public hours, we want to be able to utilize that space for receptions and let folks flow into that. It can definitely be a selling point – that when you do a reception here, you have access to the Larry Bird Museum," Wanner said.

"We would have something really unique to offer," she added.

The downtown convention center has been a project long time in the making.

It started in 2014. Under an original concept, the convention center was to be connected to a renovated Indiana State University Hulman Center. However, a funding gap stalled that project, with ISU deciding to move ahead separately to

renovate Hulman Center. The convention center

project then split from the university, and the Vigo

County Capital Improvement Board was formed.

A groundbreaking ceremony was staged in 2019, but it would be 229 days before construction began in late April 2020.

Total cost for the project is \$34.89 million, with actual construction cost at \$27.21 million.

Wabash Valley state legislators worked to get a 1% food and beverage tax approved by the Indiana General Assembly to support the project.

Reporter Howard Greninger can be reached 812-231-4204 or howard.greninger@tribstar.com. Follow on Twitter@TribStar-Howard.

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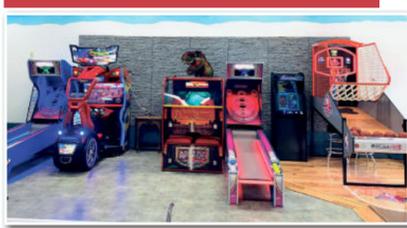


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Vigo County casino could be ready by December 2023



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Shovel-ready: Churchill Downs Inc. CEO William Carstanjen describes how happy the company is to be able to build a casino and resort in Terre Haute on June 21 during the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Queen of Terre Haute Casino Resort on Terre Haute's east side.

Churchill Downs Queen of Terre Haute Casino Resort coming to east side

By **HOWARD GRENINGER**
TRIBUNE-STAR

Bulldozers began moving dirt shortly after a June 21 groundbreaking to start construction of the Queen of Terre Haute Resort Casino on the city's east side.

Churchill Downs Inc.'s \$260 million project, up from an initial \$240 million, is to include a casino with 1,000 slot machines and 50 table games, as well as a 10-story hotel featuring 125 luxury guestrooms with a rooftop pool, as well as a TwinSpires Sportsbook and several food & beverage offerings.

The construction project encountered some initial issues, including the need to add rock to the building site, 50 acres of land off East Margaret Drive.

"We knew about the soil conditions before we purchased the land. Soil in that part of Terre Haute holds a lot of water and can turn quickly to mud," said Ryan Jordan, senior vice president of real estate development for Churchill Downs.

"The gravel around the site is to ensure that contractors have a solid surface to drive on as they build the casino and hotel," he said.

Additionally, a redesign of the project put the hotel construction back under the review of the Federal Aviation Administration for flight path hazards after the hotel's location was moved. As a solution, Churchill Downs planned to lower the height of the building from 150 feet to 141 feet and install aviation navigation warning lights on the building.

Jordan said supplies, as in many construction projects, bring challenges.

"Lead times for many items are still longer than we would like, but our current schedule has taken those things into account. We continue to adjust to market conditions and have a great gen-

eral contractor that helps work through these challenges," Jordan said.

F.A. Wilhelm Construction Co. is the general contractor on the casino project.

The project's hotel is to be positioned so as to be seen from Interstate 70.

"The hotel is a concrete tower with post-tension slabs. The casino structure is steel construction," Jordan said.

A rough construction schedule, Jordan said, is to have foundation work continue through October, with the hotel and casino structures erected from October through March 2023. The exterior enclosures will be done January through

June 2023.

The interior work will be done from March 2023 through completion, currently slated for the end of December 2023.

The 400,000-square foot Queen of Terre Haute development on about 50 acres is the newest casino approved in Indiana, forecast to bring \$190 million in annual economic impact and create 500 jobs. The casino itself will be about 56,000-square feet.

GAMING IN INDIANA

In 2021, Indiana had 13 commercial and tribal casinos in the state, which accounted for 22,133 jobs, according to the American Gaming Association. The casinos had an economic impact of \$3.92 billion in the state in 2021.

Casinos in 2021 generated \$2.72 billion in gross gaming revenue, according to the association.

In 2022, the gaming industry broke revenue records nationally and Indiana casinos posted significant year over year increases, with casino and supplemental taxes for fiscal year 2022, which ended in June, according to the Indiana Gaming Commission's 2022 annual report.



Submitted rendering

Height an issue: Churchill Downs Inc. originally planned a 150-foot tall hotel at its Queen of Terre Haute Casino Resort site on Terre Haute's east side. Now, after the Federal Aviation Administration has initiated another review, CDI might consider reducing the height to 141 feet and attaching aerial navigation warning lights.

Gaming taxes totaled \$660 million, up 18% from \$560 million in fiscal year 2021, said Greg Small, executive director of the Indiana Gaming Commission, in the commission's 2022 annual report.

It's the first time Indiana collected more than \$600 million in total gaming taxes since it received \$602.4 million in 2017/2018.

Sports wagering taxes were up 38%, to \$51 million in 2022, up from \$23 million in 2021.

While the racinos and southern casinos experienced significant growth of about 13%, the northern Indiana market grew by 26%. The expansion of the northern market, which grew by \$236 million from \$900 million in fiscal year 2021 to \$1.1 billion in fiscal year 2022, was fueled primarily by the new Hard Rock Northern Indiana casino in Gary, Small said in the annual report.

Terre Haute is expected to increase that growth.

"The selection of Churchill Downs as the licensee for the Vigo County casino in December will bring a new gaming venue to the state," Small said in the report.

In the Gaming Commission's 2022 annual report,

Small said the strength of Indiana's gaming industry "was also shown in the deci-

sion of Caesars to invest a total of \$73.7 million for projects at the state's two

racinos in Shelbyville and Anderson.

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A new era begins: Churchill Downs Inc. CEO William Carstanjen, center in white shirt, breaks the ground with fellow casino staff, elected officials and construction management on June 21 at the site of the new Queen of Terre Haute Casino Resort on Terre Haute's east side.



Casino

Continued from C4

Horseshoe Indianapolis in Shelbyville completed its \$33.7 million expansion in early 2022. The project expanded the gaming floor by 25,000 square feet, increased gaming positions including a 20-table poker room and high limit area, added food and beverage amenities, and created approximately 100 new jobs," Small reported.

Additionally, a \$40 million expansion of Harrah's Hoosier Park in Anderson began in Spring 2022 with a scheduled July 2023 completion date, according to the annual report.

That project will add 30,000 square feet to Hoosier Park "and include additional gaming positions along with a high limit area, enhanced Caesars Rewards and promotional space, a new food outlet on the casino floor, and create 100 new jobs. Track side amenities and the sports book will also be refreshed," Small stated in the annual report.

A LONG TIME COMING

Following several failed attempts, the Hoosier state first legalized casino gambling in 1993, but as only riverboats - with five at Lake Michigan, five on the Ohio River and one on Patoka Lake. The Indiana General Assembly removed the riverboat restriction in 2015, allowing land-based gambling.

Terre Haute had been the last metropolitan area of the state without a casino.

In 2018, Terre Haute businessman Gregory Gibson co-founded Indianapolis-based Spectacle Entertainment with long-time Indiana gaming executive Rod Ratcliff. John Keeler became general counsel for Spectacle Entertainment. In November, 2018, Spectacle Entertainment purchased the Majestic Star Casino, a two-boat casino based in Gary.

In early 2019 Gov. Eric Holcomb signed House Enrolled Act 1015, an omnibus state gaming bill whose authors included Republi-

can state Sen. Jon Ford of Terre Haute. Among other things, it allowed one of the two Majestic Star gaming licenses to be moved from Gary to Vigo County.

In November 2019 Vigo County voters approved a casino referendum. The following month, Spectacle partnered with Hard Rock International for a new Vigo County casino and were the only applicants to seek the license.

However, before the Indiana Gaming Commission awarded the license, officials in the commission became aware of a federal investigation tied to Ratcliff's former gaming company, Centaur Gaming, with that investigation including allegations against Keeler. Federal authorities alleged gambling company money was illicitly funneled into the unsuccessful 2016 congressional campaign of Republican Brent Waltz.

For the purposes of establishing a Vigo County casino, Gibson then established a new company - Lucy Luck Gaming.

However, Lucy Luck lost the license for the Terre Haute casino in June 2021, after the Gaming Commission declared Lucy Luck ineligible for renewal of the owner's license. The commission said a qualified executive team had not been established and Lucy Luck's financing was incomplete.

In November 2021, the Gaming Commission selected Churchill Downs Inc. to receive the Vigo County casino license.

There was a legal challenge remaining, as Full House Resorts filed a lawsuit asking a judge to halt the process. It contended the Gaming Commission violated the state's open meetings law when it decided Churchill Downs would receive the license. However, Full House dropped the lawsuit in January 2022.

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Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Here's to the future: Terre Haute Mayor Duke Bennett shakes hands with Churchill Downs Inc. CEO William Carstanjen after they and others broke ground on Tuesday, June 21, at the site of the new Queen of Terre Haute Casino Resort. At center is state Sen. Jon Ford, R-Terre Haute, one of the authors of legislation that allowed a casino license for Vigo County.

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Vigo County sports tourism booming again

Cross country still king, but hardly the lone draw

By DAVID HUGHES
TRIBUNE-STAR

Terre Haute Convention and Visitors Bureau executive director David Patterson doesn't deny the scary arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted Vigo County sports tourism a lot in 2020 and a little in 2021.

But now, even though strains of the virus still exist, tourism is pretty much back to normal here, Patterson said.

In terms of live sporting events, cross country remains king when it comes to bringing large groups of out-of-towners to Vigo County, although the LaVern Gibson Championship Course hasn't hosted the NCAA Division I national championships since 2016. That was the last of the 12 times the nationals have taken place here – so far.

There is hope for the NCAA to award future D-I nationals bids to Terre Haute, but that can't happen until beyond 2025 because dates and sites elsewhere in the country have been announced for the next four years, including 2022.

But that doesn't mean the complex isn't drawing spectators and making money. Not at all.

This year, the Valley Cross Kick-off for high school runners opened the season there Aug. 13. Patterson said that meet drew 1,700 runners, by far the most it's ever attracted.

Another high school meet, the Hometown Savings Bank State Preview on Sept. 4, consisted of some of the top high school runners in the state.

The John McNichols Invitational for college athletes invaded the popular course Sept. 17. As the weather gets cooler, the fall season includes the Vigo County middle school championships Sept. 28, the XC Town Twilight College Division meet Sept. 30, the Indiana middle school state championships on the morning of Oct. 1, the Nike XC



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Proud of this guy: Ezekiel Contreras of the Vigo County team is hugged by his family after he stepped off the awards podium during the Special Olympics Indiana Summer Games in June at the Gibson Track & Field Complex.



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

A Wolf in Rangers' clothing: Forest Park senior Spenser Wolf (224) leads the pack in the boys race during the IHSAA cross country state finals Oct. 30, 2021, at the LaVern Gibson Championship Course.

Town Twilight meet in the evening of Oct. 1, the IHSAA sectional Oct. 8, the Missouri Valley Conference championships (including ISU) Oct. 28, the huge IHSAA state finals Oct. 29 (for the 19th straight year here), the NCAA Division I Great Lakes Regional on Nov. 11 and the Nike Cross Regional Midwest Championships on Nov. 13.

Referring to Oct. 1 when runners from two separate meets will trample on the Gibson grass, Patterson emphasized: "That's the busiest day we'll have all year."

There's also a chance, although not official, that the Historically Black College and Universities will allow the Gibson course to be the site of its inaugural national cham-

pionships. But Patterson is awaiting confirmation for that, so don't mark it on your calendars yet.

Something to look forward to in the distant future are the NCAA Division III national championships, hosted by Rose-Hulman, on Nov. 23, 2024.

OTHER EVENTS, LOCATIONS

Some other events and locations mentioned by Patterson as being frequented by a substantial number of tourists:

- Terre Haute Torpedoes swimming meets at the Vigo County Aquatic Center. This year, the Conference Indiana high school meet (January) and IHSAA girls sectional (February) also took place at the Aquatic Center.

- Indiana USA Gymnastics compulsory state championships (March), hosted by Wabash Valley Gymnastics and Tumbling, kept the Strive 365 indoor sports complex crowded.

- Dog agility events at Strive 365.

- The annual Midwest Classic

tournament (April), sponsored by the Vigo County Youth Soccer Association, at the Springhill Soccer Complex.

- Various bicycle races – including the Gravel Race and the DINO Spring Tune Up (both in April), the Pump Track Series (May, June and July) and the Thompson Thrift Short Track Series (May, June and July) – kept Griffin Bike Park workers busy in southern Vigo County.

- Various automobile races at the Terre Haute Action Track and the Wabash Valley Dragway through the summer and fall.

- The Terre Haute Rex wood-bat baseball team for college players, which competes in the Prospect League, plays its home games at Indiana State University's Bob Warn Field at Sycamore Stadium.

- Special Olympics Indiana Summer Games (June) at ISU, with swimming at the Rose-Hulman Sports and Recreation Center. "[Participation] was down a little bit because of lingering concerns about COVID," Patterson said.

- The 45th Air Race Classic had 115 female pilots starting in Lakeland, Florida, and flying a course that concluded at Terre Haute Regional Airport, altogether roughly 2,550 statute miles. Nearly everyone involved attended a banquet at the then-new Convention Center and stayed that night in Terre Haute-area hotels. This event usually switches locations from year to year, giving competitors different parts of the country to see, but Patterson sees no reason why the ARC group wouldn't want to return to Terre Haute someday.

- The Wabash Valley Football Coaches Association's 18th annual All-Star Game (June) was played at Memorial Stadium. A banquet honoring the players and coaches – representing dozens of Indiana and Illinois high schools – took place at the Convention Center the night before the game.

- The annual RAIN (Ride Across INdiana) for long-distance cyclists started in Terre Haute and ended 159 miles later in Richmond (July). "They come the night before [the ride], spend the night here and all the restaurants and hotels are packed," Patterson said.

- The Valley Shootout youth basketball tournament (August) at the Wabash Valley Family Sports Center.

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Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

New location: Robert Crippin cleans the area in front of the store front that will become the entrance to Rural King on Sept. 20 next to Hobby Lobby in the former Kmart building at 4651 U.S. 41.

Rural King expansion among retail highlights

Indiana has its own strong points in the retail market

By HOWARD GRENINGER
TRIBUNE-STAR

With its mix of metro and rural economies, Terre Haute is a prime location for Rural King to expand.

New large retail businesses have been few in 2022 in Vigo County as retailers face uncertainty amid the economy and still feel effects from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rural King is currently building out a portion of the former Kmart building at 4651 U.S. 41, with another section to contain a relocated Hobby Lobby. The farm and hardware store is slated to open its second spot in the county in early fall of 2023, with at least 60 new jobs.

"The east-side store is very successful, and there is tremendous growth in the greater Terre Haute area, so there is a lot of opportunity," said Doug Overmyer, marketing manager for Rural King, based in Mattoon, Illinois.

"We are excited about what is going on in Terre Haute and Indiana," he said.

"The farm, home, ranch, hobby farmers, livestock and pets is really strong. Even with inflationary pressures we are seeing, those categories are recession proof, super-strong categories," Overmyer said. "People have to feed their animals, feed their pets, continue getting workwear, and Rural King wants to provide the lowest prices. We feel that everyone deserves what we are offering."

Terre Haute is unique, with higher education facilities – Indiana State University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and Ivy Tech Community College – but also a strong agricultural economy, Overmyer said. "Terre Haute is a hub, and people will drive 30 to 40 miles to get there," he said.

The new south-side store will also attract different consumers than the east-side store, such as from Sullivan County, Overmyer said, adding that moving into the former Kmart falls in line with what Rural King does for the majority of its stores.

"Rural King likes to use existing facilities for a couple of reasons. One, it cuts down on the cost to open a new store and, secondly, we find that it benefits the community by reducing blight [of empty buildings]," Overmyer



Submitted rendering

Signage: An image of the sign at the former Kmart building off U.S. 41 south of Terre Haute as submitted to Vigo County Area Planning Department.

said. "It is intentional. Instead of building some place new, typically we like going into places that have existing structure that we can rehab it and that building's goodwill in the community.

"People don't like seeing big empty retail spaces," Overmyer said. "Rural Kings tend to be unique, they all don't look the same and that is one of the reasons why because we go into existing facilities," he said with more than 85% put into existing buildings.

Rural King opened five new stores in 2022 and plans to open two in 2023, which includes Terre Haute. The second store in 2023 will open in Albertsville, Alabama. The company operates in 13 states – Illinois, Indiana, Alabama, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida.

"We will get back to our aggressive store growth, but we are like everyone else absorbing the economic pressures of inflation and navigating growth. We want responsible growth," Overmyer said.

"Inflation eats up cash, and we open stores with cash. Rural King is proud to be a debt-free company," Overmyer said. "One of the reasons we slowed our new store growth down is because it ate up a bunch of cash. You can't raise prices on people, so you have to navigate inflation responsibly.

"Customers expect low prices. If people are driving 30 miles, that is a lot of money, so we are passionate about our prices," he said.

'EATERTAINMENT' COMES TO TERRE HAUTE

In June, Terre Haute software developer and entrepreneur Zack Johnson began working to create a new "eatertainment" complex.

It's a three-phase project that started with the relocation of eBash, a video gaming center, into the Haute

City Center mall. That's a location Johnson already has a presence with Bank of Pinball, which he opened last year.

eBash is now open in a temporary spot near the front of the mall and has added evening hours on Friday and Saturday nights from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m.

"We are doing construction in the old Galloway photo space, that is where eBash will move [as a permanent location], so we had to add restrooms, a bunch of carpentry work, electrical and [computer] networks, plus we bought [in August] the board and card game store GAM3," Johnson said.

"That whole business model is going into that space, which we are hoping to have it open by October 1," Johnson said.

Once that is completed, then construction work will focus on a new restaurant space at the former Bagger Dave's location at the mall. Johnson said he hopes to have a liquor license for the restaurant – called Sandbox Social – and open that business in November or early December.

However, by late October, Johnson said he is planning to open a new business called Lumber Zacks.

"It will be our ax throwing spot in the former tuxedo shop," he said. "It will be real axes that you throw, but the axes are tracked digitally. So there will be a kiosk where you throw from, just like when you bowl, and it keeps score for you on the computer," Johnson said.

"So it is not like what people have seen in other cities where you just throw at a red and white circle wall and keep your own score. This is a digitally scored ax throwing," Johnson said.

Participants throw an ax against a wooden wall "and we project a video image on the wall and then we have sensors track the ax hitting the wall and scores for you on the system," Johnson said. "For example, there will be a tick-tack-toe game where you have to hit the squares and

the [tracking system] will register the squares where your ax hits when it is your turn to throw."

"Nationwide, there are a lot of ax throwing places, but ... I didn't want to do just a manual ax throwing experience, for us everything has to be based in and tying in with our software platform," Johnson said.

Johnson will have software that will integrate all of the businesses, including a

mobile app.

"I would like to get to the point where you score enough points in the ax throwing you earn \$10 in credits at the Bank of Pinball or score high enough in pinball that you earn a free drink in the restaurant," Johnson said. "That is our goal, but that will be six months to a year before all of that software integration is done."

"That's doesn't mean peo-

ple in the Wabash Valley can't come and hang out and have fun in the meantime. It just won't be completely automated yet," Johnson said.

OWNERSHIP CHANGES

In other areas, Terre Haute has seen some retail ownership changes in 2022, but with few changes in retail businesses.

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Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

A new home for eBash: The space which was once home to Galloway's will soon be the permanent home of eBash at Haute City Center mall which can be seen here on Sept. 20.

Retail

Continued from C7

In January, The Honey Creek Marketplace shopping center south of Terre Haute sold for \$22.3 million, according to Stan Johnson Company, an investment sales brokerage firm. The shopping center is anchored by Fresh Thyme Farmers Market and Academy Sports + Outdoors.

Maranatha Holdings LLC, based in Scottsdale, Arizona, bought the property from Vista Terre Haute Ltd., a Texas-based developer.

In April, The Meadows shopping center went under new ownership.

HJH Investments Inc., a commercial real estate syndication firm headquartered in Wichita, Kansas, purchased the shopping center as HJH Terre Haute Poplar LLC.

"The Meadows is a Terre Haute staple, and we intend to continue that legacy as the center evolves," Cory Harkleroad, CEO of HJH Investments, said in April. "We love to invest in projects with a turn-around story and communities in the Midwest with great core values like Terre Haute."

The Meadows is Terre Haute's first shopping center developed in the mid 1950s through Hulman & Co. In 2017, a group of five families formed Meadows Development of Terre Haute LLC and purchased the shopping center from Terre Haute Realty Corp., a subsidiary of Hulman & Co.

The family group included Polly Bryan, Ace Blind & Drapery; Steve Heck, Complete Outdoor; Linc Hobbs CPA, Hobbs & Co.; Ray Sumner, SMC Inc.; and Mark Zimmerly, Zimmerly Development, Inc. Four members of that group remain as partners in HJH Terre Haute Poplar LLC.

The Meadows had been anchored by Stein Mart, but that company closed in late October 2020, after filing Chapter 11 bankruptcy. That retail space in 2021 was split into two parts, with a new Ace Hardware store occupying one area and the remaining space converted into specialty store fronts.

Two new stores opened in February at The Meadows – Intimate Whispers and Campbell Creek Plain & Simple – located in renovated spaces along a newly opened corridor. Campbell Creek was previously located downtown at Fifth Street and Wabash Avenue.

NATIONAL AND INDIANA RETAIL

In mid August, the U.S. Census Bureau reported overall retail sales in July were unchanged from June but up 10.3% year over year from 2021. That compared with increases of 0.8% month over month and 8.5% year over year in June. On a three-month moving average, sales were up 9.2% year over year for 2021 to 2022.

Retail sales grew in July in part due to moderate improvements in ongoing inflation. Retailers will be closely monitoring inflation in the fourth quarter, the busiest and most profitable time of the year.

While retailers are seeing increases in sales compared to last year, it is a mixed bag on new



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Make a deposit: Software developer and entrepreneur Zack Johnson's business presence at Haute City Center is growing with the addition of eBash and the already established Bank of Pinball which can be seen here on Sept. 20.

store locations.

In the first half of 2022, U.S. retailers announced plans to open about 5,080 stores, similar to the first six months of last year, according to analytical work by The Daily on Retail, a financially focused industry research platform. Also, national retailers announced plans to close about 895 stores, down 63% from roughly 2,410 closing announcements during the same time last year.

In September 2022, New Jersey-based Bed Bath & Beyond said it is closing about 150 "lower producing" stores and will cut its workforce about 20% across its corporate and supply chain workforce. The company estimated the cuts would save \$250 million in the company's current fiscal year.

The company has been stymied in a prolonged sales slump, announcing it will revert to its original strategy of focusing on national brands, instead of pushing its own store labels.

Footwear retailer Foot Locker announced plans to close 190 of its 2,800-plus stores. Yet, the company also plans to open 100 new stores in 2022, so the net planned reduction is 90 stores, according to The Daily on Retail.

"Brick and mortar is not going away. We are in a bit of an odd period and there is a lot of uncertainty" as there has not been a clear, clean break with the COVID-19 pandemic, said John Talbott, director of the Center for Research and Education in Retailing at the Indiana University Kelley School of Business.

Companies will continue to open new stores, but will likely be



AP/file

Carts: Shopping carts are positioned outside an Amazon Fresh grocery store in Warrington, Pa., on Feb. 4.

smaller in scale as more firms gain on e-commerce and can reduce staffing needs, Talbott said.

"Uncertainty as politics comes back into play, Wall Street has suffered, there is a war in the Ukraine and there is inflation pressures. There is a lot going on in the economy," he said.

And the still persistent COVID-19 is impacting retailers, Talbott said, "but not so much on the consumer side as it did in 2021, but more on the ability of retailers to supply all of the things that their customers want. A number of companies that produce a lot goods that we consumer here in the United States are still under lock down procedures," as of mid September, especially those in China.

"That has had some negative effect on the supply chain around the world that I think still has left

quite a bit of uncertainty and inability to fill demand in odd places, just as we have all experienced over the past three years," he said.

Also, Talbott said consumers in 2022 are more challenged with inflation and a stock market not performing as well as in 2021. That impacts perception of wealth.

Talbott said specialty retailers, based on earnings reports, such as mall-based, smaller retailers like American Eagle reported lower sales than forecast, "whereas Walmart blew their earnings call out of the water, demonstrating the impact of inflation on consumer spending," Talbott said.

"The things that you have to have Walmart has, and people are going there to acquire those, but are not making choices around items that they can put off for a while in terms of something in

accessory apparel," he said. "There are mixed winners out there as far as who is doing well."

In Indiana, in terms for an area for retail logistics, the Hoosier state "is a real player," Talbott said. "The Indianapolis area has become a leader in supporting e-commerce picking warehouses."

Order picking is the process of selecting a specific amount of inventory from a fulfillment center, then preparing it to fulfill an order that is placed by an individual end customer.

Talbott said several companies have large distribution warehouses in the state, such as Amazon or global fashion retailer SHEIN, which in March announced it is opening a distribution center in Whitestown with 850 new jobs by the end of this year. That company was founded in 2012 and employs nearly 10,000 people worldwide and sells to more than 150 countries.

"We will not have consumer consumption like Los Angeles, New York or Miami, as we have a much smaller number of malls, probably in Indiana than the city of Dallas," Talbott said of Indiana. The Hoosier state does not have the population base and has a lower per capita income to compete in consumer consumption, "but in retail logistics we are a player."

"People are making investments in warehouse facilities" in Indiana "in a big way," Talbott said. "They are good jobs with good pay and benefits."

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Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Welcome: Ryan Orman, right on lift, helps attach the new "Welcome to Historic 12 Points" sign to posts on Lafayette Avenue during the installation of the sign on Jan. 17.

12 Points beautified and booming

Neighborhood brims with enthusiasm, promise

By DAVID KRONKE
TRIBUNE-STAR

The past year in 12 Points has been the very definition of progress. The once-blighted neighborhood has grown in recent years as business after business opens, and its beautification has preceded

apace. "The major thing that people talked about was the iron archway," said Jennifer Mullen, president of 12 Points Revitalization Initiative, referring to the decorative sign that greets visitors as it spans Lafayette Ave. Erection of the archway was funded by a grant through Patronicity. "Tiffany and Mark Baker (who have supported numerous 12 Points projects) were the project managers of that. We're gonna use the rest of the funds to put up lights along Lafayette."

Also contributing to the neighborhood's beautification is the proliferation of murals on buildings' exterior walls. "Luckily, we have artists who are more than willing to put their time and vision into 12 Points," Mullen said.

"There's been some amazing advancements in the 12 Points neighborhood just within the last year of having so many local businesses open: Illumination Wellness, Ferm Fresh, Planty Lane, and the 12 Points Creators Market to name a few," added Brenna Deal, coordinator of 12 Points Creators Market, which operates every Thursday evening.

Grant money also paid for the pavilion in front of Illumination Wellness. Community members are invited to book it – the Creators Market transpires there, and people can play music or engage in other activities there.

Apartments above the stores Son Spice, Ferm Fresh and Local Vinyl are now available. Terre Foods is still planning on locating in 12



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

More art for us: Luke Davies gets a closer look at his mother's new mural on the back of Building Eight Twelve on Thursday, July 29, 2021, in the 12 Points neighborhood.

Points. A cheesecake shop and a bookstore and tap room are expected to open before the end of the year.

That bookstore isn't the only literary venture coming to 12 Points: "The other big thing that happened this year is the library made its announcement of coming into the area," Mullen said. It will open within the next year in a former funeral home on Lafayette.

Two new covered bus stops will be arriving soon, one to be placed on 13th Street, where the city repaved a sidewalk. "That sidewalk hadn't seen the light of day in a decade," said Mullen, who hopes more sidewalks are on the way.

Mullen also touted Local Vinyl's Rosebox Music Festival, now in its second year, and its fourth annual car show, which has been relocated to Collett Park because of the influx of cars has expanded the event.

Also in the past year, RJL Solutions began staging community forums to get

feedback for a five-year plan for the area. The Revitalization Initiative will be working with City Council members to rezone the area for commercial developers.

The proliferation of small businesses in 12 Points has not created a competitive market but just the opposite – the stores in the neighborhood are supportive of one another.

"The thing that's unique about Terre Haute is that the small business owners help one another – they sell each other's products. It's really cool," said Mullen.

"There has been so much collaborative efforts to support the neighborhood and especially to entrepreneurs," agreed Deal. "A big reason for that is because when we support our local entrepreneurs we are supporting our community."

"Everybody roots for everybody and I always say that Terre Haute's a town with such a big heart," Mullen added. "If somebody needs help, there's always somebody who's gonna help

them. That would be hard to find in a bigger town."

Mullen marveled that as 12 Points has grown, so has the number of people offering to contribute to its expansion.

"It's not even pulling teeth to get people to help – they'll just email, 'How can I help?'" she said.

But she credits members of the Revitalization Initiative with its germ of an idea that got the ball rolling.

"Our board, those core people have been in it since the beginning," Mullen said. "They're doers and they're dreamers. It's easy to be optimistic now – it wasn't at first, people would come in and say, 'That's never gonna work.' But if you get the



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Sing: All American Chess Club bassist Martin Ladd performs with his bandmates Marc Bland, background on drums, and guitarist Brandon Rupska during the group's set at the Rosebox Arts & Music Festival on July 11 behind the PARQ Building in 12 Points.

doers and the dreamers and the believers, it kind of takes off."

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Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Great things are growing in 12 Points: Planty Lane owner Stephanie Lane Rohrkaste sets up a table in her shop on July 1 in 12 Points.

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READI grants aim to spur public, private investment

\$500 million state program uses federal COVID-19 relief funds

By **HOWARD GRENINGER**
TRIBUNE-STAR

The new Sullivan City Pool is the first completed project through the Wabash River Regional Development Authority's distribution of \$20 million in Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) grants.

The project received \$1 million in READI funds, which is matched on a 2-to-1 basis with the city of Sullivan, as the city contributed \$2 million of the project through various fundraisers.

The READI program is part of a \$500 million state program that uses federal COVID-19 relief funds and is overseen by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, which gives financial approval for each project.

The Wabash Valley RDA, which covers Vigo, Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion and Knox counties, was awarded \$20 million in December 2021.

Requirements of the READI grant money is based on a matching ratio, with government projects requiring a 2-to-1 funding match of the local government dollars to READI dollars; non-profit agencies with a 3-to-1 match of nonprofit-generated funds to READI funds; and private projects requiring a 4-to-1 match of private money to READI money.

The program's goal is that each project collectively works to advance the region's quality of life and talent attraction and retention efforts.

"Our region is blessed to have various projects at different stages. Some projects were already near completion and needed that chunk of READI funding to reach completion," said Greg Goode, president of the Wabash River RDA.

"Other projects are in their early stages and READI dollars are going to help jump start the process. Each project is unique, and the RDA has been in close communication with each project," Goode said.

"Currently, the RDA is in the process of working through the contributions to the Mill, the Wilma and Liston Buell Community Center in Clay City, and anticipates working on two or three more initiatives moving into October," he said. "In addition, the Vigo County Capital Improvement Board recently announced they will be moving forward with the feasibility study for the Sports Complex and Water Facility and recently Rea Park announced that they are getting closer to their fundraising goal," Goode said.

The RDA anticipates multiple projects going through the IEDC approval process at the same time over the next two to three years. Goode said, "however, recognizing there are potential opportunities to advocate for more READI dollars in the future, the RDA expects working with all stakeholders closely to finalize READI Round 1 projects as soon as possible," he said.

"Our goal is to complete as many projects as possible by fourth quarter 2022, but we anticipate many of the larger initiatives will begin coming to fruition at the beginning of 2023," Goode said.

"Some of the multi-faceted and collaborative projects such as the Early Childhood Education Center, the Equine Event Center, Rose Ventures, and the Downtown Hotel project will likely begin in 2023-24 but not be finalized until 2024 and beyond," he said. "However, we have a great amount of confidence that every project in READI Round 1 will come to fruition by 2026."

Goode said the "IEDC continues to be a valued partner and although they are having to develop changes along the way to meet ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) standards, we have found that they are working through the process in a timely manner.

For example, once we have all the information and approval for submission, it's intended to take two to four weeks to process the payment," he said.

"The process included a multi-phased approach of processing the data and utilizing an online portal system so that there is a shared tracking system for all information. The RDA must remain somewhat fluid in submitting the projects through the (IEDC) portal as the projects are ready because they are all on their own timeline. Recognizing that, it's hard to say today exactly where these projects will fall over the next three to four years."

All projects have until the end of 2024 to have money committed, with all READI funds to be spent by the end of 2026.

WABASH VALLEY RDA PROJECTS

The projects for the Wabash Valley RDA are:

■ **Billie Creek Village** — \$250,000, requiring a 3-to-1 match, to rehabilitate a historic town in Parke County. The goal is for Billie Creek Village to return to a tourist destination combining its historical buildings and covered bridges with shopping, food and family fun.

■ **City of Sullivan Central Plaza** — \$1.5 million, requiring a 2-to-1 match. The grant is for the city's Central Plaza Pavilion to provide outdoor entertainment and outdoor community events. An aquatic feature will be an integral aspect of Central Plaza.

■ **City of Sullivan Housing Project** — \$800,000, requiring a 2-to-1 match. The city, in this project, seeks to develop 40 new homes - town homes, duplexes, and single-family homes - in the \$180,000 to \$250,000 price range to attract population growth.

■ **City of Terre Haute Rea Park** — \$50,000, requiring a 2-to-1 match. It is part of an effort to restore the park's historic clubhouse into an all-inclusive activity/social center, including tennis courts, pickle ball facilities, a golf academy, a running/walking trail around the park, and a park space for picnickers with playground equipment and a health and wellness facility.

■ **Clinton Water Feature** — \$250,000, requiring a 2-to-1 match. The city of Clinton, to improve quality of life, seeks to create an interactive water feature located in Riverside Park.

■ **Courtyard + Residence Inn and Parking Garage** — \$4.3 million, requiring a 4-to-1 match. The two hotels and parking garage are slated to assist the viability of the new downtown Terre Haute Convention Center, enabling the center to have 400 "walkable" hotel rooms. The project is aimed at increasing tourism in West Central Indiana.

■ **Design and Innovation Studio (Vincennes University)** — \$100,000, requiring a 2-to-1 match. The IN-MaC Design and Innovation Studio (DIS) will develop and provide industry-education activities and curriculum for users to cultivate the next generation of high-tech thinkers and doers.

■ **Diversity and Career Center/School of Health Sciences** — \$1 million, requiring a 2-to-1 match. Funds aimed at the workforce will allow Ivy Tech Community College's new Diversity & Career Center to provide initiatives that support future health-care professionals for employers in the Wabash Valley.

■ **Early Learning Center at Indiana State University** — \$1 million, requiring a 2-to-1 match. In partnership with the Vigo County School Corp., the renovation of the Chestnut Building will allow ISU to increase capacity for early childhood education, creating a co-design model that positions West Central Indiana as leaders in early childhood education.

■ **Homes for the Future Pilot Program** — \$1.8 million, requiring a 4-to-1 match. Essentially a pilot program for home-builders enticing them to build homes in West Central Indiana. After an request for proposals grant cycle, chosen homebuilders could request up to 10% of the building cost. This program emphasizes a focus on home-builders building homes at market rate, allowing homebuyers to seek successful funding at appraised value.

■ **Rose-Hulman Ventures Movement** — \$1.5 million, requiring a 3-to-1 match. The funds target a relocation of Rose-Hulman Ventures to Rose-Hulman's main campus and prepare for the future development of the Research and Development Farm. Ventures is currently located 6 miles from the main campus on a 100-acre campus on the south-



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Rea Park Clubhouse: A READI grant of \$50,000 was awarded to the city of Terre Haute for clubhouse improvements at the Rea Park golf course seen here on Thursday, June 23.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Ready because of READI: The new Sullivan City Pool is the first completed project through the Wabash River Regional Development Authority's distribution of \$20 million in Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) grants. The pool is seen here after its dedication ceremony on Aug. 31.

east side of Terre Haute. Through this project, Rose-Hulman will construct a new campus for Ventures at the corner of Indiana 46 and Indiana 42 and will design a space that can be utilized to its full capacity.

■ **Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College Equine Event Center** — \$1.5 million, requiring a 3-to-1 match. This phased project will allow equine enthusiasts from across the Midwest and beyond to participate in events in West Central Indiana. Celebrating SMWC's role in the equine industry both academically and programmatically offers them a unique perspective and opportunity to engage tourists interested in this industry.

■ **Sports Complex and East Side Aquatic Center** — \$50,000, requiring a 2-to-1 match. A feasibility study to determine the impact that a sports complex and aquatic center will have on the region, developing a scope of the project and furthering previously identified action items in regards to the development of a Terre Haute Multi-Sports Complex and Waterpark.

■ **Sullivan Hotel Project** — \$1,000,000, requiring at 4-to-1 match. The hotel project is targeted for the city's downtown, adjacent to the new Sullivan Civic Center.

■ **Swope Art Museum** — \$150,000, requiring a 3-to-1 match. The renovated space will serve as a flexible space for art classes for all ages for gatherings, fundraisers, and workshops and funds will create ADA-accessibility to the museum.

■ **Terre Haute Children's Museum Outdoor Space** — \$50,000, requiring a 3-to-1 match. The funds will cover a feasibility study to determine the scope of a play area for kids complete with climbing walls and other playground equipment as well as permanent seating where families can sit and enjoy the outdoors. On a grander scale, this outdoor space could potentially result in guests visiting other downtown businesses, like restaurants and shopping.

■ **The Mill** — \$200,000, requiring a 4-to-1 match. The plan is for a state-of-the-art performance structure that would allow for the largest national touring acts to perform. A design iconic in nature while still matching the aesthetic of the venue property and its historic past. This structure and design would allow for in-house sound and production that could lead to lower ticket costs for guests, bringing in a bigger crowd. Ultimately, however, these funds will be used to create ADA accessibility for the new complex.

■ **The William Henry Harrison Presidential Mansion** — \$2 million, requiring a 3-to-1 match. The \$10 million William Henry Harrison Presidential Mansion and Visitors Center project is a significant investment in the preservation of Indiana's history. The new 15,000 square foot Harrison Presidential Visitors Center will welcome visitors to explore the history of the local surroundings and gain an understanding of the

model of collaboration and placemaking that engages the community, links to economic development and other river-related improvement projects, inspires new ideas, and offers a comprehensive vision for an important and historical downtown area.

■ **Wilma and Liston Buell Community Center** — \$220,000, requiring a 3-to-1 match. Recreation, Education, Information and Nutrition. These four ideologies are what REIN Coalition aims to provide West Central Indiana. Since 2009, REIN has strived to create a new and unique community center to create a space capable for a variety of services including meeting space, housing a large food pantry, events like graduation parties, birthday parties, wedding receptions, and much more.

■ **West Central Indiana Business Hub** — \$500,000, requiring a 3-to-1 match. In 2020, the West Central Indiana Business Hub was created as a comprehensive business resource for all business-related development in the West Central Indiana region. The idea is to create a one-stop-shop for business.

■ **West Terre Haute Clinic**

and Pharmacy — \$100,000, requiring a 3-to-1 match. This new clinic in West Terre Haute opened in May and was dedicated in June. The Valley Professionals Community Health Center will improve access to comprehensive quality health care and enhance the overall well-being of the communities served. Most importantly, it's meant to advance, in a positive way, the health metrics of West Central Indiana, offering a new destination for those seeking health care.

■ **Administration** — \$530,000 of READI grant fund used for administration by Wabash River RDA. As the projects within this READI application move forward, the Wabash River RDA is partnering with various organizations to manage the grant administration responsibilities, serve as fiscal agent, and provide legal services. These entities report directly to the Wabash River RDA and will enable the RDA to be competitive for future grant opportunities representing West Central Indiana.

To track and follow progress and updates on the projects, visit www.wabashriverda.com or find the agency on Facebook.

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Pet food maker looking to grow in Vigo County



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Line lead: Jesse Stephens, saturn petfood packaging line lead, keeps an eye on a conveyor belt during production at the plant in Vigo County Industrial Park II south of Terre Haute on Aug. 29.

Saturn, opened in 2021, may invest millions more, add 50 jobs

By HOWARD GRENINGER
TRIBUNE-STAR

As a machine fills aluminum cups with pet food, Oliver Schmitt walks along a grated floor designed to prevent slips.

"We make sure we have always the same [amount of filling inside] each food cup, he said, watching the production at saturn petcare Inc's facility, located in the Vigo County Industrial Park II south of Terre Haute.

The company is a subsidiary of the Heristo Group, headquartered in Bremen, Germany. The facility in Bremen is the largest private-label, wet pet food maker in Europe. Private label means the company packages pet food under the label of store own brands.

The Vigo County plant is the Heristo Group's first U.S. facility and started production in April 2021.

The facility is already ahead of its projected job

creation with 205 employees this year. The company originally had expected to have 200 workers by 2024.

Future investments of up to \$50 million are planned to expand the saturn petcare facility, which would add 50 more jobs. The target is to have equipment installed and into production by 2024.

"We are investigating doubling our capacity, with new equipment to be installed by 2024," said Andy Volkl, chief operations officer at the Vigo County facility. "The [new] equipment alone would be roughly \$30 million. Additionally, we are investigating an on-site warehouse," Volkl said.

"The pet food industry is vibrant. It is growing," Volkl said.

The global pet food market size was valued at \$110.53 billion in 2021, according to Fortune Business Insights. The market is

anticipated to rise from \$115.50 billion this year to \$163.70 billion by 2029.

"I think as a company, we are happy" with the set up and location in Vigo County, Volkl said. "We are excited for future growth and are very thankful for the community. People here work together and care about each other, versus whose title is what, so there is team work."

Schmitt is a continuous improvement leader and trainer, who came to Terre Haute from Germany initially to bring his experience for two years.

"I look over processes and how we can improve," Schmitt said. "I like it here and I have decided to stay here in the United States because of the work environment here. You work with people who are like family members," Schmitt said. "It is fantastic to see how we can be involved."

The facility's process starts with delivery of frozen meats ranging from beef lungs to chicken livers, spleen and breasts, to turkey

liver and breast, to salmon and lamb. The meat is then ground up, warmed and mixed with ingredients – called the sauce or gravy – and the placed into aluminum cups.

The cups are then cooked and sterilized in large pressure cooker-type ovens that use steam to cook the meat. The cups are then packed in cartons.

The packages are then placed into "incubation," a warmer room used to ensure

all package seals work properly and do not leak. The cups are later sorted by flavor variety before they are shipped to the customer.

"We do checks on the raw material and we check the batches once all the ingredi-



BOYCE

ents have been mixed together," said Katie Boyce, a quality associate. "We have certain specifications that have to be met. We also test the seals on the cups once they have been filled."

Also, Boyce helps to monitor critical control points throughout the plant to ensure product quality.

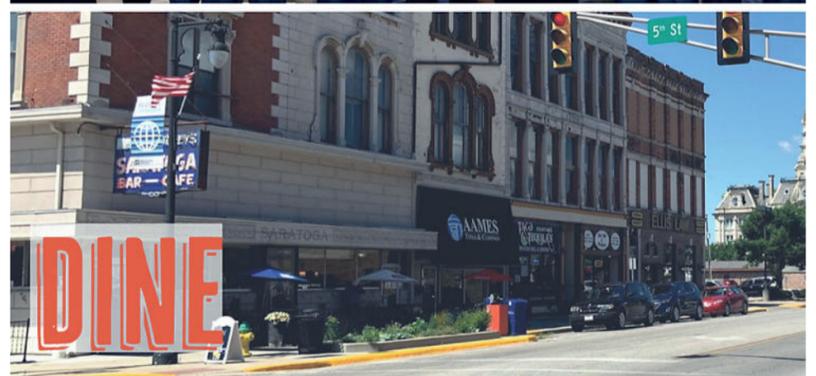
"If something is not working properly, the food can't be sold," she said.

Turn to SATURN, C12



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

How its done at saturn: saturn petfood employee Oliver Schmitt explains the pet food manufacturing process during a tour of the Terre Haute plant in Vigo County Industrial Park II on Aug. 29.



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Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Variety of products: A saturn petfood employee packs a box at the Terre Haute plant on Aug. 29.

saturn

Continued from C11

Packaging labels and date codes are also checked "to make sure everything is good before we let it go," Boyce said.

Boyce, whose father is Keith Ruble, former superintendent of the Vigo County Parks and Recreation Department, decided to join Saturn Petcare after returning to Terre Haute. She initially worked at another company, "but I have an animal science background (attending Purdue University) so when this opportunity opened, I wanted to come here. This was interesting to me," she said of the position.

Deb Chandler, works as a warehouse associate.

As delivery trucks arrive, warehouse associates unload everything from labels, ship-

ping boxes to containers of frozen meat, which are stored in a large freezer section, she said.

"We also load outgoing trucks that are going to customers," Chandler said. Warehousing also maintains a large storage space lined with several rows, each having four levels of pallets of pet food that are ready for shipment.

"I spend 27 years at a retail warehouse distribution. I moved to Terre Haute and thought (saturn petcare) was something new and different. I thought it would be interesting to get in on a company that was new to the area," Chandler said.

The company also attracted Volk, who previously worked at another Vigo



CHANDLER

County company.

"After 20 years in automotive, I decided maybe I wanted to do something different," Volk said of assuming the chief operations officer role at saturn petcare Inc. in December, 2021.

And Volk has adapted well into his new role. The quick growth saturn petcare has experienced has sparked the need for an expansion to be able to serve additional customers, Volk said. The company is unique in that it can produce an individual product, creating a blend of wet pet food for each client.

"It is exciting," Volk said of the Vigo County facility's growth.

For more information, visit saturnpetcare.us.

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Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Ready to ship: The warehouse at saturn petfood in Vigo County Industrial Park II is seen here on Aug. 29.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Automated packing: saturn petfood employee Jose Santiago loads cardboard trays into the tray packing machine at the plant on Aug. 29.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

From Terre Haute to the world: saturn petfood employees prepare boxes for shipping during production at the plant on Aug. 29.

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