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State Designates Wayne County Part of East Central Indiana 21st Century Talent Region

Wayne County, Indiana— Indiana Secretary of Career Connections and Talent Blair Milo virtually joined state and local officials on January 22, 2021 to announce the East Central Indiana (ECI) Region as Indiana’s tenth [21st Century Talent Region](#). A statewide designation awarded to Indiana communities, the ECI Region will focus on working collaboratively to attract, develop and connect talent. The Talent Region currently includes Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, Rush and Wayne Counties.

“Over [70 individuals across the East Central Indiana Region](#) have dedicated their focus to establishing East Central Indiana as a place where people want to live, work, play and stay,” said Secretary Milo. “Through the outstanding collaboration of these leaders and the [Forge Your Path](#) initiative, East Central Indiana is growing access to lifelong learning and opportunity for all current and future Hoosiers.”

The Office of Career Connections and Talent, with support from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and technical assistance from [CivicLab](#), launched the 21st Century Talent Region initiative to encourage local governments, businesses, educational institutions, nonprofits, and economic and workforce development partners to create and implement plans to increase educational attainment, raise household income and grow the population in a region. By taking a comprehensive systems approach, participating regions will identify strategic priorities and projects aimed at helping its communities create a better quality of place, develop and skill up its workforce, and connect talented Hoosiers with businesses seeking to fill high-demand, high-wage jobs.

“The common goal of the 21st Century Talent Region designation has catalyzed new relationships and collaborative planning across counties that are essential for East Central Indiana’s future,” said Tom Kinghorn, President and CEO of the George and Frances Ball Foundation. “Together, we have set our sights high, aiming to leverage our quality of place assets to boost current population trends by 11% by 2030, mobilize our learning system to increase postsecondary educational attainment of more than 9,000 Hoosiers by 2025, and build upon equitable economic opportunities to increase median household income and earnings by 7.5% by 2025.”

During the event, Secretary Milo and Indiana Destination Development Corporation Secretary and CEO Elaine Bedel presented Kinghorn, and Geoffrey S. Mearns, President of Ball State University, with the official 21st Century Talent Region designation.

“This new designation builds upon our University’s strategic efforts to serve the evolving needs of our adult learners, our communities, and our state in new and innovative ways,” said President Mearns. “We look forward to helping drive the success of our region’s efforts to enhance the impact of higher education and to bridge the critical gap between education and employment in East Central Indiana.”

“I applaud the East Central Indiana Region and their initiatives,” said Secretary Bedel. “Their collaborative mission supports the statewide mission of the IDDC, which is to promote, brand and tell Indiana's authentic story to attract and retain talent, students and business as well as visitors. The IDDC looks forward to supporting and amplifying the great work of the East Central Region.”

Spearheaded by the George and Frances Ball Foundation, with support from Ball State University’s Office of Community Engagement, key stakeholders from the seven counties worked together to identify four key priorities:

- Increasing integration of East Central Indiana’s Forge Your Path lifestyle marketing initiative across stakeholder marketing and talent attraction efforts by December 2021;
- Establishing regional coalitions to increase achievement in early childhood, K-8, high school, and adult/higher education by December 2021;
- Laying the groundwork for industry-specific networks to participate in regional implementation plans and develop talent pipelines in manufacturing, trades, education, healthcare, and technology by early 2022, and;
- Defining and prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all talent attraction, development, and connection efforts through and beyond 2022.

The East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative, a new backbone organization anchored by Ball State’s Office of Community Engagement, will oversee regional progress in these priority areas.

“This regional collaboration came about at the perfect time for us. Thanks to the efforts of Forward Wayne County (FWC), our county was already working on a plan for talent development,” said Valerie Shaffer, EDC of Wayne County President. “The 21st Century Talent Region created a process for us to follow and learn from our regional peers. I am proud of this collaboration and look forward to continuing to be engaged in regional efforts.”

“This process has been worked on locally through FWC’s Employability Coalition and we are happy to share in this designation,” said Acacia St. John, Program Manager. “The Coalition’s efforts align directly to the regional approach of increasing educational attainment, raising household income, reducing poverty, and growing the population.”

Forward Wayne County’s Employability Coalition includes members from Western Wayne Schools, Sugar Creek Foods, Reid Health, Purdue Extension, IU East, Ivy Tech, Belden, Wayne County Foundation, Wayne County Area Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County, Hill’s Pet Nutrition, Excel Center, Eastern Indiana Works, Eastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, and the Early Childhood Coalition.

Currently, 81 Indiana counties are actively engaged in regional planning through the 21st Century Talent Region initiative. The addition of [East Central Indiana](#) brings designations to 58 of Indiana's 92 counties, covering a population of nearly four million Hoosiers. Previously designated 21st Century Talent Regions can be located [here](#).

About Forward Wayne County

Forward Wayne County, an umbrella unit of the Wayne County Foundation, serves as a county-wide backbone organization to convened coalitions to foster a vibrant economy and promote prosperity in Wane County, Indiana.

About the Office of Career Connections and Talent

As part of his Next Level Indiana Agenda, Governor Eric J. Holcomb established the Secretary of Career Connections and Talent as a new cabinet-level position in state government to serve as Indiana’s chief talent and recruiting official. Secretary Blair Milo and the Office of Career Connections and Talent is dedicated to continuously assessing needs, identifying promising practices, connecting Hoosier workers to employment opportunities, and coordinating future priorities to improve the quality and quantity of Hoosier workers to ensure a skilled and talented workforce within the state of Indiana.

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