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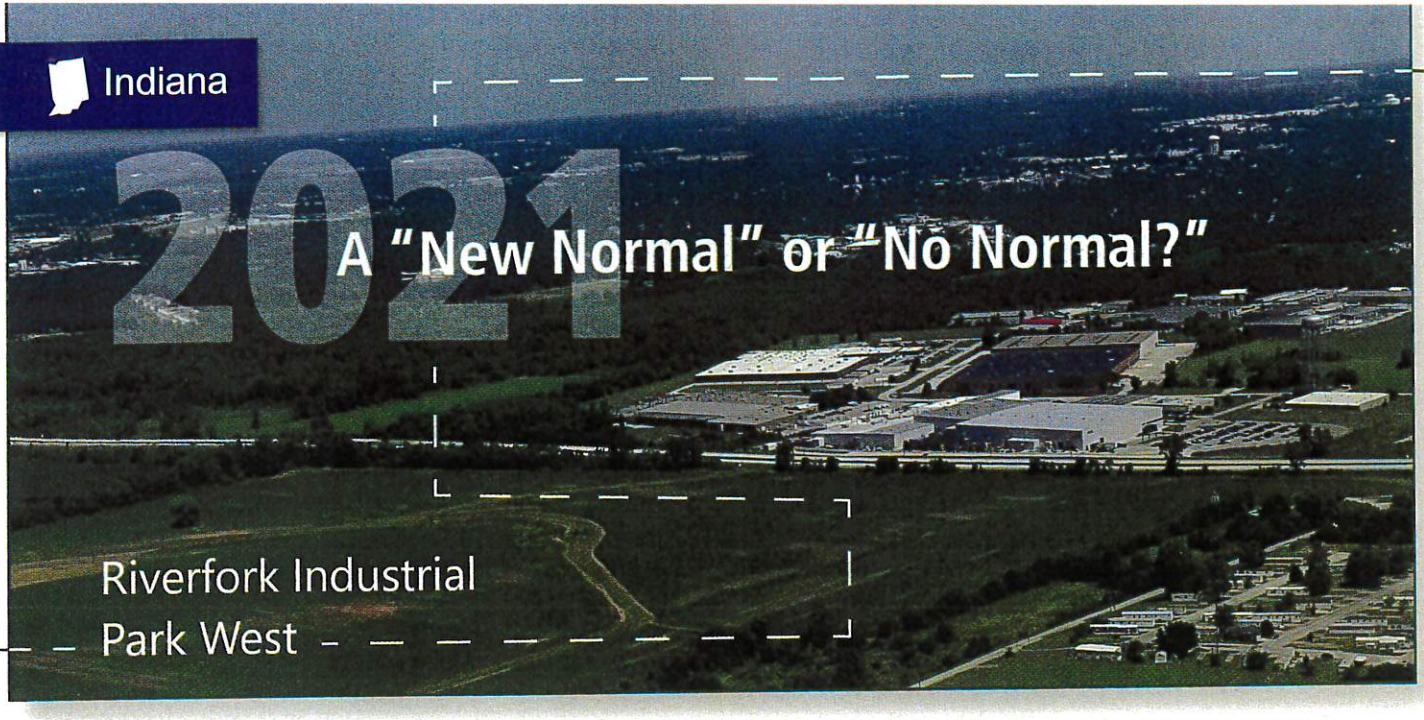


Did we see a "New Normal" in 2021 or simply the absence of any semblance of "Normal?" Or is uncertainty and change, in fact, what the "New Normal" really is? Regardless, 2021 was yet another successful year for the economic development team in Huntington County, Indiana, USA.

Approximately 36,000 people call Huntington County their home. Located in Northeast Indiana, near the regional urban center of Fort Wayne, this small County has a big story to tell with many chapters yet to be written. Huntington County has witnessed tremendous growth in its industrial sector over the past decade. Nearly one-half billion dollars have been invested through 157 industrial projects in this rural County.

Even with the uncertainty and instability of the pandemic, eight more projects, representing over $36.4 million in private investments were launched in 2021. Clearly, their local industrial base continues to be vibrant.

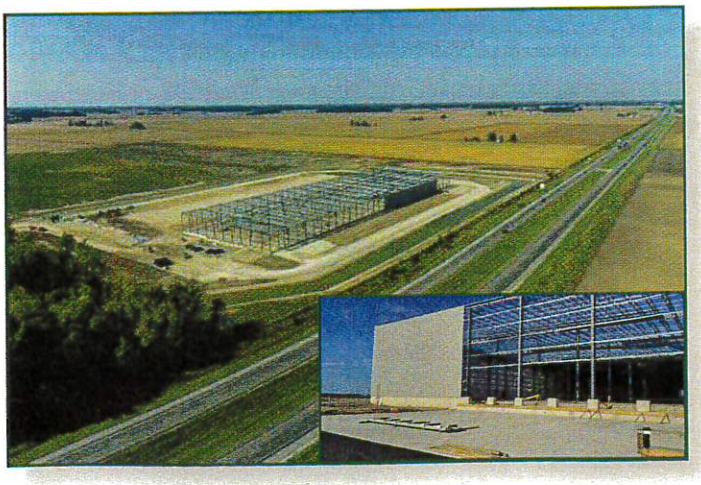
"Economic Development is a team sport and we have an excellent team," said Mark Wickersham, Executive Director of the Huntington County Economic Development Corporation. "Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb and his team at the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, provide excellent leadership to the effort in Indiana. We couldn't experience project wins without the collaborative spirit they have brought to the table," Wickersham added.

Wickersham identified two significant differences about their approach. "First, the team in Indiana and Huntington County, recognizes and appreciates that prospective investors aren't simply managing risk, they're truly looking for a 'friends and family plan' as it relates to their development needs. Prospects are experiencing the same uncertainty and instability in the marketplace as everyone else. They're looking for a home. They're looking for a secure place to make a profit," Wickersham said. He continued, "There's real estate available all over the world. Every economic development agency talks about their logistical advantages and so forth, but investors with projects need the confidence to know a region is on their side."

The second distinction builds on that theme, collaboration. Collaboration produces value. "In a world of supply chain disruptions and uncertainty, knowing you have friends means a lot. It can be the difference between success and failure," he said.

It's also clear, the team in Huntington County, Indiana continues staying focused on its core mission – industrial development, facilitating new capital investments, the retention and creation of jobs, which ultimately impact the local tax base and improve our quality of life.

Significant preparations were made for the development of the new Riverfork West Industrial Park in Huntington. The 172-acre site adjoins a Norfolk-Southern Railway Class 1 rail line. Interstate



highway sites along I-69 have been purchased by private investors at the Markle Industrial Park and an investment group constructed a 200,000-square-foot spec building at Exit 286.

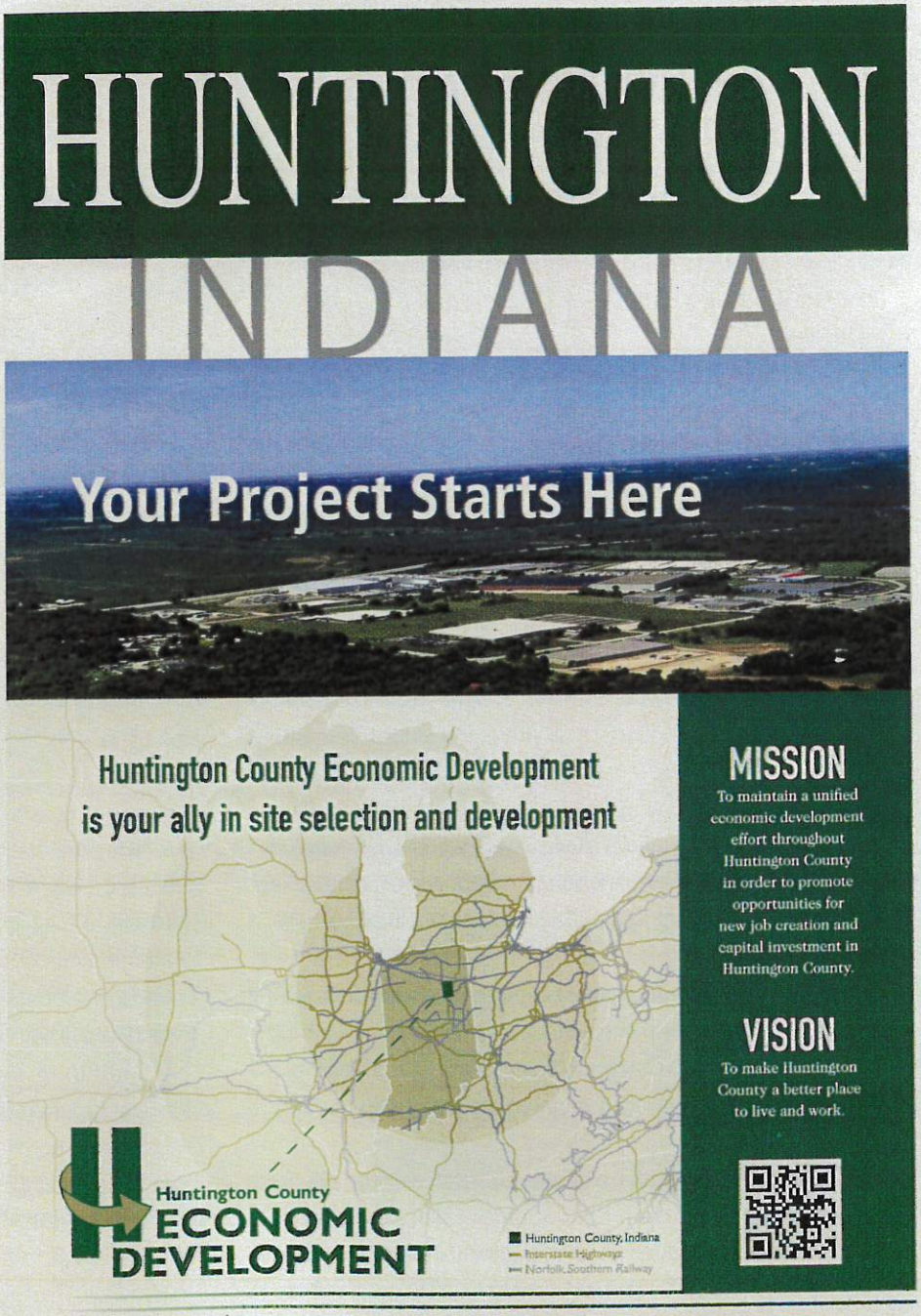
Not long ago no one would have guessed it could be possible to experience full employment and nearly full occupancy in the real estate market, particularly during a pandemic. Wickersham reflected, "I recently saw an advertisement on our local PBS television station which included a quote from President Ronald Reagan, 'We take for granted things which previous generations would have found extraordinary...' We don't want to take anything for granted about our local economy."

Key industries in Huntington County include Teijin Automotive Technologies, manufacturer of the external body panels for the mid-engine Chevy Corvette; Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems, maker of braking systems and transmission safety technologies which improve highway safety for commercial trucks; and Ecolab with major manufacturing and distribution facilities in Huntington County, meeting the global demand for hand sanitizers and other cleaning agents so critical to the global effort to fight the pandemic.

There also are firms in the orthopedic device industry, food production industry, agriculture and ag bio-science and logistics operating in Huntington County. The County also boasts an excellent municipal airport with an adjoining housing development known as "Aero-Landings" creating an opportunity for aviation hangars to be built on adjoining private property with secure access to the airport itself.

Other Community assets include Huntington University and Parkview-Huntington Hospital. Both institutions are nationally recognized for their excellence. Outdoor recreational and trail experiences add to the quality of life in Huntington County.

Maybe the "New Normal" in Huntington County, Indiana isn't new after all. It's the idea of staying focused on core business responsibilities and delivering results. It's comforting for any investor or decision maker to know there is a winning team available to help, whether there's a new normal, no semblance of normalcy, or a world bullishly presenting new opportunities for success.



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