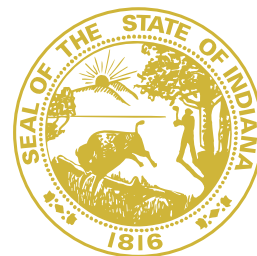


EAST CENTRAL INDIANA REGIONAL REPORT



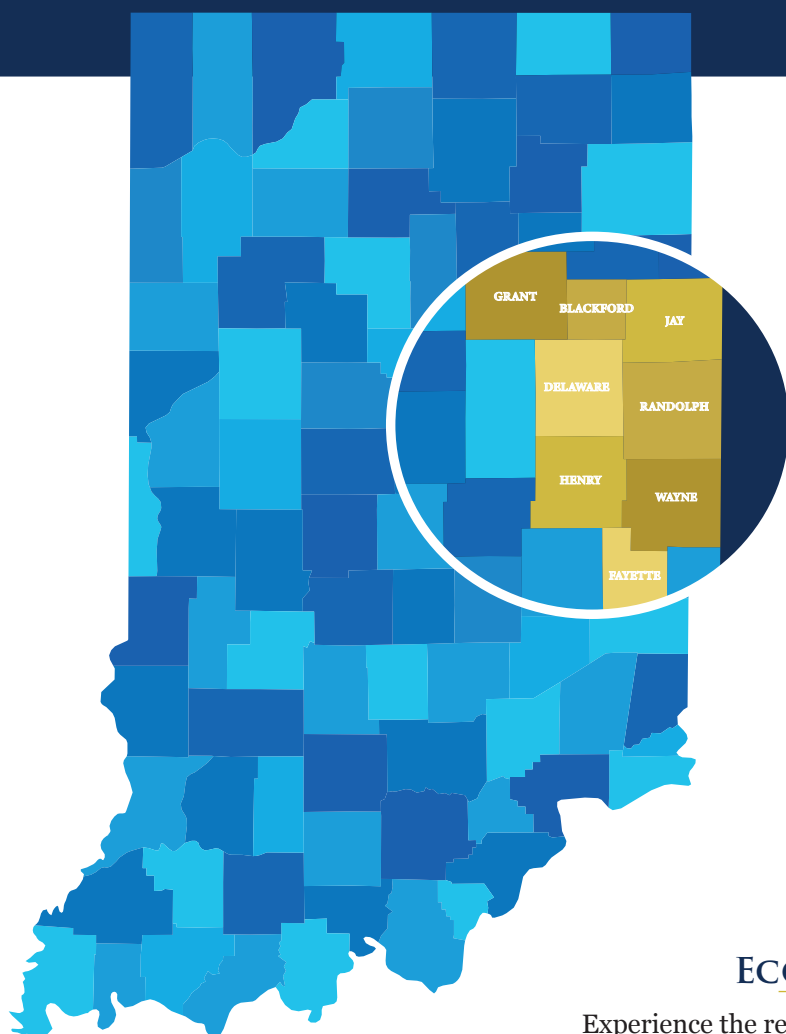
September 2026

“Indiana’s strength comes from its people – Hoosiers who work hard, solve problems and take pride in building something better for the next generation.

Across our state, we’re seeing what’s possible when business, higher education and community leaders come together to solve problems with a shared purpose. Those partnerships are driving growth, creating jobs and opening new doors for Hoosiers.

Here in East Central Indiana, that same spirit is building on a proud manufacturing legacy while creating new opportunities for the future. Companies like J.M. Hutton & Co., Weaver Popcorn and Richmond Beverage Solutions are investing in their operations and workforce, while Ball State, Ivy Tech and other regional institutions are preparing Hoosiers for careers in healthcare, advanced manufacturing and other high-demand fields. At the same time, communities are putting READI investments to work revitalizing downtowns and neighborhoods and creating places where people want to build their lives. Together, those strengths are helping East Central Indiana attract investment, develop talent and create more opportunities for Hoosiers.”

— Governor Mike Braun



REGIONAL IMPACT EAST CENTRAL INDIANA

IN THE LAST 6 YEARS...

- ♦ 47 businesses committed to locating or growing in East Central Indiana
- ♦ Almost \$2 billion in capital investment committed
- ♦ 3,515 new jobs committed with an average wage of \$26.50/hour
- ♦ More than \$209 million in new payroll committed

SCAN TO WATCH
EAST CENTRAL INDIANA
ECONOMIC HIGHLIGHT VIDEO

Experience the region momentum in this two-minute video.



STORIES FROM AROUND THE REGION

NEW OWNER OF **J.M. HUTTON & CO.** INVESTING \$6.2 MILLION IN RICHMOND MANUFACTURER

- ◇ First major investment in Hutton by new owner National Stamping & Fabrication
- ◇ 37 new high-wage jobs by the end of 2029, facilitating the addition of a new truck-cab production line
- ◇ Further strengthens Richmond's role as a center for advanced manufacturing

"J.M. Hutton has built an outstanding reputation for quality, precision and customer service," said **Rick Grise**, President and CEO of J.M. Hutton & Company. "As the new ownership team, we are committed to building on that legacy by investing in our people, expanding our capabilities and creating new opportunities for growth. Richmond offers the skilled workforce, business climate and community partnerships that make it the right place to invest for the future."

WEAVER POPCORN INVESTING MORE THAN \$22 MILLION IN VAN BUREN CAMPUS

- ◇ Incorporating state-of-the-art packaging and food-processing technology
- ◇ 45 new high-tech positions
- ◇ Building on \$16 million in upgrades over the last two years

"As the gold standard in the snacking industry, we are thrilled to further invest right here in Indiana, where we have the opportunity to grow for the next generation of success," said **Tim Ingle**, COO of Weaver Popcorn Manufacturing.

RICHMOND BEVERAGE SOLUTIONS IN MIDST OF \$45 MILLION EXPANSION

- ◇ Expansion will add between 65 and 80 jobs by end of 2027
- ◇ Subsidiary of Dairy Farmers of America modernizing existing Richmond plant
- ◇ Maker of extended shelf-life dairy and non-dairy beverages and shake mixes

"We're appreciative of the opportunity to partner with Dairy Farmers of America," said Economic Development Corp. of Wayne County President **Valerie Shaffer**. "The facility has a long history in Richmond, and now a bright future as well. Their expansion further enhances our county's growing food and beverage manufacturing industry."

EAST CENTRAL INDIANA LEANS INTO ITS REPUTATION AS A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR HEALTHCARE EDUCATION

A WELL-TRAINED HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE IS IN HIGH DEMAND. Training that workforce happens to be one of East Central Indiana's many strengths. From top-ranked high schools and career technical education programs to Ball State University, Ivy Tech, Earlham College, the IU School of Medicine's Muncie campus, and Indiana Wesleyan and Taylor universities, the region is focused on becoming Indiana's "eds and meds" region.

The region's educational institutions, along with Reid, Marion General and IU Health Ball Memorial hospitals, are known for their excellence in preparing doctors, nurses and healthcare workers, all of which are in short supply across the country.

The region's institutions of higher ed also make up one of the state's most reputable pipelines of K-12 teachers, advanced manufacturing and skilled trade employees.

GRANTS BOOST REGION

\$50 MILLION IN READI GRANTS FUND DOWNTOWNS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

DOWNTOWN RENEWAL, ARTS AND CULTURE DESTINATIONS AND NEIGHBORHOOD

REVITALIZATION, are positioning the region for population growth and talent attraction thanks to \$50 million in funding from the state's Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative, also known as READI. READI grants have leveraged millions more to improve quality of place across the region. Among the projects underway or in the planning stages:

- **Gas City Performing Arts Center.** This 1,830-seat music venue opened in 2024, bringing a top-notch performing arts center to Grant County. Funded in part with a \$2.75 million READI grant, the \$19.2 million venue is designed to host national and regional artists and to serve as the main venue for the local school district's fine arts programming.
- **Downtown Renewal Creative Corridor and Connections.** With support from a \$4 million READI grant, this \$29.48 million project spearheaded by The Community Foundation of Muncie and Delaware County will activate a defined Creative Corridor in downtown Muncie anchored by Cornerstone Center for the Arts, Muncie Civic Theatre, MadJax Maker Force and the Carnegie Branch of the Muncie Public Library.
- **The McKinley-Whitely Live Learn Neighborhood.** This \$40 million project, supported by a \$2.6 million READI grant, is a partnership between the City of Muncie and the YMCA that aims to rebuild an entire Muncie neighborhood through numerous projects that will result in intersection and street enhancements, pedestrian amenities and a new YMCA.
- **Richmond Rising.** This \$33.6 million project involves replacing a long-vacant department store with a mixed-use development, including 150 apartments, 4,000 square feet of commercial space and a pocket park. The City of Richmond, City of Richmond Redevelopment Commission and developer Flaherty and Collins are partners in the project.
- **Henry County YMCA.** This almost \$2 million project, made possible by a combination of public, READI and private funding, involves expansion and renovation of the existing YMCA in New Castle to accommodate an enhanced before- and after-school program that supports working parents.
- **Canal Street Lofts.** This partnership between the Town of Yorktown and The Ridge Group will enhance Yorktown's urban fabric by creating 76 market-rate apartments and a 3,500-square-foot commercial space, creating a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use community between Yorktown's Civic Green and South Walnut Street.
- **Wayne County Blight Elimination Projects.** Richmond's historic Starr District, Vaile neighborhood and downtown are among the areas to be transformed by this program that involves multiple partners focused on elimination of blight, restoration of historic homes and construction of new housing units.
- **The Newberry Daniels Project.** Equipped with \$3.1 million in READI funds, this project aims to revitalize Hartford City's historic downtown by turning the 120-year-old Newberry Building into a multi-functional space.
- **River Rock Lofts.** The River Rock Lofts are part of a comprehensive urban revitalization initiative spearheaded by the City of Marion. The larger project is meant to transform a key area of the city into a vibrant, mixed-use community with residential, commercial and recreational spaces.

ENTREPRENEUR SUCCESS STORIES

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION

SMALL BUSINESSES MAKE UP THE HEART OF THE INDIANA ECONOMY and employ more than 1.2 million Hoosiers. The state, including the Indiana Small Business Development Center, supported more than 10,000 entrepreneurs and small businesses in 2025, an effort that helped launch more than 450 businesses statewide. The East Central Small Business Development Center has assisted 644 entrepreneurs and small businesses in the last 18 months, helping launch 46 businesses and supporting almost 2,000 jobs. These are some of the region's recent SBDC success stories:

- ♦ **Elkins Mowing & Landscaping (Blackford County):** Owner Austin Elkins, who got his start as an entrepreneur mowing lawns with his grandfather at just 4 years old, officially went into business in 2020 while Austin was serving in the National Guard. His unit was asked to handle snow and ice removal for an armory, and the following spring the armory asked him to bid on mowing. The resulting business, winner of Indiana Small Business Development Center's 2026 "Veteran-Owned Business of the Year" award, provides mowing, trimming, pruning, snow removal and leaf cleanup for numerous business, residential and military customers.
- ♦ **Hometown Coffee (Randolph County):** Mariel and Jaime Tapia moved from Indianapolis to Union City to expand their first business, a custom cake company, from their home to a brick-and-mortar business. Through their church community in Union City, they became acquainted with Union City Mayor Chad Spence, who knew that the current owners of HomeTown Coffee were trying to find a buyer. He played matchmaker, and the rest is history. It was a win-win-win for the Tapias, the community, and the sellers, who wanted to leave their café in capable hands.
- ♦ **Pivot Manufacturing (Delaware County):** Susan Carlock's family owned an automotive manufacturing company that pivoted to making face shields during the COVID-19 pandemic. She was the point person in making that happen, which gave her the idea of starting her own company to work with entrepreneurs who have great ideas but no manufacturing experience. She founded the company in Yorktown in 2020 and has been advising entrepreneurs ever since. In the five years since she launched Pivot, Carlock has worked on projects across a range of industries, from medical devices to automotive accessories.
- ♦ **Wholeheart Communications (Henry County):** This New Castle business founded by Christy Ragle offers a wide range of consultative services—from marketing strategy, social media management and content creation to short-form videos and public relations. The company serves small businesses and non-profits that might not have the resources to hire a big advertising agency. "Every business is different, so there's no one-size-fits-all plan," Ragle said. "However, things we learn from one client can often be tailored to benefit other clients in completely different industries."

A BOOST FOR CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

East Central Indiana is home to two initiatives meant to develop and support childcare services that allow talented Hoosiers to support their families.

Partially supported by READI funds, the Training, Resource and Advocacy Connector, known as TRAC, works with Ball State University and other organizations to offer training and other support for Early Care and Learning Professionals in the region. And in Muncie, Muncie BY5 offers two nine-week cohorts that offer training and individual coaching to ministries and small businesses that offer childcare services.

HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE REGION



[Grant County Economic Growth Council to focus on support for entrepreneurs](#) (July 23, 2026)

[First Merchants renews community investment commitment with four-year, \\$2 billion deal](#) (June 26, 2026)

[Ball Brothers Foundation awards \\$1.8 million to East Central Indiana outdoor initiatives](#) (June 17, 2026)

[Shareholders approve First Bank Richmond, Farmers Bank merger](#) (May 28, 2026)

[Downtown Richmond building eyed for renovation as part of effort to transform downtown](#) (March 16, 2026)

[Red-Tail Land Conservancy buys 32-acre Wayne County property](#) (June 12, 2026)

[National packaging company to open facility in Delaware County](#) (April 17, 2026)