

# The Chamber Scene

HUNTINGTON COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

40 E. Franklin Street • Huntington, Indiana 46750 • (260) 356-5300 • [www.huntington-chamber.com](http://www.huntington-chamber.com) • February 2024

## Chamber celebrating 100 years in 2024

The Huntington County Chamber of Commerce will celebrate 100 years of service to the community March 20, 2024. In honor of this milestone, Heritage Days 2024 will take place Wednesday, June 12 through Sunday, June 16, and focus on the contributions the Chamber has made to the community.

First organized as the Commercial Club July 2, 1902 by retail and industrial leaders of the city, according to the former Daily News Democrat, the Huntington County Chamber of Commerce of today is a direct link to those early forward thinkers. The first meeting took place at the Huntington Business university hall with approximately 50 of the “leading citizens” of Huntington joining together to form an organization whose purpose would be “to boom the city’s interests in every way possible.”

The decision to incorporate the Commercial Club of Huntington was made at a meeting held July 8, 1902 with yearly dues at \$2. Membership was open to businessmen and all who were interested in the welfare of the city. The articles of incorporation were approved at a meeting held July 10, 1902, and a committee of W.A. Jones, C.A. Tolan, James Canfield, Michael Moore and J.A. Kintz were appointed to canvas the city for members.

By July 24, 1902 officers were elected with the first president of the 15 member board being R.I. Hamilton; first vice president, Adam L. Beck; second vice president, B.F. Biliter; secretary, W.A. Jones; assistant secretary, W.W. Hawley and treasurer, Charles McGrew. The papers of incorporation contained the names of 82 members and by August of that year there were 106 members.

A new constitution was adopted and on November 7, 1911, the Commercial Club became the Huntington Commercial Association as published in the Morning Times of the next day. 400 Huntington men gathered at the Eagles’ and Phi Delta Kappa fraternity club rooms for a banquet to promote



the association which was to “deal with industrial affairs and promote any movement which has for its purpose the betterment of Huntington.”

The foundation of the Huntington Chamber of Commerce was laid on Monday, February 25, 1924 by a committee of 50 members of the Commercial Association. The group met at the K of C Hall. Letters of interest were mailed and a “big banquet” was planned for March 10 of that year. Jacob L. Brenn, acting secretary, stated in

the Huntington Press, that the organization would be formed under purely democratic provisions, that class or creed be discouraged under any and all circumstances and that all local business and professional men as well as employees of the local business and industrial enterprises were given every opportunity to affiliate.

Over 400 men and women attended the banquet on March 10, and The Huntington Press of Friday, March 14, 1924 reported that 472 members were enrolled in the new Huntington Chamber of Commerce when the membership drive closed on March 13. On March 20, 1924, the name of the Commercial Association was changed to the Chamber of Commerce of Huntington with Donald Purviance, president. On March 20, 1934 the Chamber of Commerce was incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of the State of Indiana. Its goal was to facilitate the work of improving the industrial and retail life of the city, stimulate transportation, commerce, agriculture and other varied pursuits.

(Story Continued on Page 2)



Shown above is a photo of Sunken Gardens taken around 1924. The Chamber of Commerce acquired the old stone quarry, transformed it into Sunken Gardens and then transferred the gardens to the City of Huntington.

# Chamber celebrating 100 years continued

(Story Continued from Page 1)

The first meetings of what became the Chamber took place in one of the buildings located near 15 West Market Street, in the “Lesh block.” In the 1930s and 1940s, the office was located in the Hotel LaFontaine. Later in the former UB Building on Franklin Street, the Community State Bank building, the corner of West Park Drive and Poplar Street, 12 West Market Street, 305 Warren Street and currently at 40 East Franklin Street in the restored UB Block since April 1, 2020.

One of the first Chamber efforts included Sunken Gardens. What was an old stone quarry was acquired by the Chamber of Commerce of Huntington and transformed into Sunken Gardens. The gardens were then transferred to the City of Huntington in 1924. The Chamber’s original newsletter was known as Huntington First, Bulletin of The Chamber of Commerce of Huntington.

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**During 1947 the Chamber organized the Community Chest of Huntington County, the forerunner of the United Way.**

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Following World War II, the Chamber served as an administrative office for veteran’s housing. During 1947 the Chamber organized the Community Chest of Huntington County, the forerunner of the United Way. It also organized the “Farmer’s Achievement Fish Fry” that brought some 1,600 businessmen and farmers together which supported the beginnings of 4-H.

The Chamber Huntington County Industrial Show began in 1953 in the Community Gym of Central School. This eventually became the familiar Business EXPO in the 1990s that took place at the Huntington University fieldhouse.

Industrial development became the focus of the 1960s and the Huntington Industrial Park on the east side involved the Chamber. The Chamber secured funds for improvements to the Huntington Municipal Airport.

Heritage Days began in 1963 under the direction of a steering committee of the Chamber in conjunction with downtown

businesses. Heritage Days was first organized by the Huntington County Heritage Days Association, which had disbanded, and the Chamber learned that Heritage Days would not continue unless it assumed the leadership role.

The Chamber also aided in the development of Huntington Plaza which was dedicated May 1, 1963. The first store to open was Kroger’s on March 13 followed by Super X, April 1; Guarantee Auto, April 3; W.T. Grant, April 18 and Juergens Paint and Wallpaper also on April 18.

In 1965 two major projects began that also involved the Chamber. The Huntington Dam and Reservoir, now known as Roush Lake, and the four-lane U.S. 24 by-pass changed the direction of development in the County of Huntington forever.

The Chamber oversaw the Riverfork Development Co., Inc. in 1968. Approximately 250 acres of land were purchased at the intersection of Old Andrews Road and Indiana 9 and 37 for the beginnings of the original industrial park. The Chamber also began the Annual Parade of Homes and the first “Chief of the Flint Springs Tribe” was recognized in 1969.

The Chamber sponsored the dedication of the Huntington Lake (now Roush) and Dam in 1971, and Hunkler Products became the first resident in the Riverfork Industrial Park. Riverfork Development dissolved in 1979 and the Chamber helped to form Lime City Economic Development Corporation. The cooperative effort between public and private sectors worked, and by 1984 infrastructure in Riverfork was complete.

The 1990s saw a growing economy in Huntington that created new jobs, housing and commercial development. The Chamber’s Business/Education Collaborative realized that providing new training opportunities for the workforce was essential. This has led to an ongoing effort by the Chamber to encourage Life Long Learning, which spearheaded the formation of the Huntington County Community Learning Center opening on September 15, 2016 with an expansion completed September 2021.

The Chamber is a satellite office for the Northeast Indiana SCORE chapter. SCORE is a non-profit resource partner of the United States Small Business Administra-

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**In 1963, after the Huntington County Heritage Days Association disbanded, the Chamber learned that Heritage Days would not continue unless it assumed the leadership role.**

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tion. It is a resource for small businesses needing business advice and provides one-on-one mentoring in person and online. Business mentors for SCORE are volunteers who have expertise in a variety of industries to provide help to small business owners or those looking to start a business.

The Chamber also works to bring businesses and the community together through the Annual Dinner, Huntington County Coffee Connections, Entrepreneurial Leadership Council and entrepreneurial gatherings, Leaders EDGE, A B.I.G. Day Golf Outing and Chamber After Hours. It is also a part of Constitution Day each year, assists in organizing the Veterans Day Parade, was a part of the recent 175th anniversary celebration of the City of Huntington and helped to begin the development of the now complete Hoosier Heartland Corridor (900N).

The Veterans’ Memorial at Memorial Park was developed and funds were raised for construction of the monuments through Chamber efforts. Huntington’s Farmers Market was begun in 2013 and continues to be overseen each week by the Chamber. The Bicentennial celebration of the State of Indiana in 2016 in Huntington was organized by the Chamber. Christmas in the City and Music in the City are also coordinated by the Chamber.

The mission of the Chamber has continued through the years with the statement, “The mission of the Huntington County Chamber of Commerce is to support and promote a community atmosphere in which business prospers and the quality of life continually improves.” Steve Kimmel is the current executive director of the Chamber and Angie Garcia is the office administrator. For more information about Heritage Days 2024 contact the Huntington County Chamber of Commerce at (260) 356-5300 or email [skimmel@huntington-chamber.com](mailto:skimmel@huntington-chamber.com).





Shown in the photo above is Kristina Smekens, co-owner of Smekens Education in Warren. Brady Smekens, Smekens Education Solutions, and Krystal Fornal, owner, Son-Rise Bakery will be the featured speakers at the February 26 'Meet & Greet' at The Exchange, 201 N. Wayne Street in Warren.

## 'Meet & Greet' at The Exchange

The Entrepreneurial Leadership Council, a committee of the Huntington County Chamber of Commerce, will hold its third entrepreneurial 'Meet & Greet' on Monday, February 26, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at The Exchange, 201 N. Wayne Street, Warren.

The gathering will feature guest speakers Brady Smekens, co-owner of Smekens Education Solutions, and Krystal Fornal, owner of Son-Rise Bakery.

Brady and Kristina Smekens are the entrepreneurs behind Smekens Education Solutions, a consulting firm that serves schools and districts throughout the United States. Smekens Education provides in-person and virtual professional development training to help K-12 teachers improve instruction and achievement in reading and writing. Headquartered in downtown Warren, Smekens Education has five full-time literacy consultants who are located throughout Indiana along with a staff of nine others, most of whom work out of the Warren office.

Krysta Fornal grew up in Warren, went to college in Indianapolis and returned to Warren in 2014 with her husband and first child. Shortly after the birth of their second child, she made the decision to purchase a bakery on November 1, 2016 and started to make Son-Rise Bakery her own. Many changes have been made over the seven years since then to engage customers and support the Warren community.

If you are an entrepreneur, aspiring entrepreneur, own your own business, thinking about starting a business or simply interested in learning more about growing entrepreneurial wealth in Huntington County, this gathering is for you. If you would like to attend this get-together reply to [skimmel@huntington-chamber.com](mailto:skimmel@huntington-chamber.com). There is no cost to attend, but you must RSVP as the Chamber needs to know how many will be attending. Food will be catered by Son-Rise Bakery and the Wagon Wheel.

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## Coffee Connections still popular among members

The Huntington County Coffee Connections, a gathering for members and non-members, is a popular place to get to know others working in and around the county. The coffee, conversations and connections are free and the coffee is sponsored by Huntington University.



Huntington County Coffee Connections meets on the first Wednesday of each month at the Habecker Dining Commons on the campus of Huntington University at 8 a.m. Each person is given around 60 seconds to introduce themselves, and tell a little about themselves or their place of business. Afterwards those attending can visit with others in the room and get to know each other more intimately by sharing business cards.

The Chamber has helped launch a business from this gathering, assist a couple of individuals find new positions in the community and connect business owners and managers with others in the community. This is a great way to promote and grow your business.

Please be sure to mark your calendars for the first Wednesday of each month, and join the Chamber for our Huntington County Coffee Connections and watch your business grow. The event is free to anyone wanting to attend and RSVPs are not required.

## Obituaries can be viewed from Chamber website

The Huntington County Chamber of Commerce has recently linked its website to all member funeral homes in the county. By clicking the 'In Memory' logo on the front page of the Chamber website you will be able to read all obituaries from all local member funeral homes.



This is a new service provided free by the Chamber to our member funeral homes, and a service to those interested in staying informed of obituaries in the area.

Keep up with all of the obituaries and local business news by bookmarking the Chamber's website at [www.huntingtonchamber.com](http://www.huntingtonchamber.com).



Shown in the photo above are Chris Storie, left, co-founder of Novae, and Manish Bhandari, new CEO of the corporation. Bhandari assumed his role on Tuesday, January 16.

## Novae names Manish Bhandari as new CEO

Markle-based Novae announced Tuesday, January 16 that Manish Bhandari has taken over as CEO, succeeding co-founder Chris Storie, who will remain involved with the company on its board of directors.

Bhandari most recently served as CEO of Current, a lighting solutions manufacturer headquartered in Greenville, South Carolina. He also held multiple leadership roles with New Jersey-based Emerson Electric.

Storie and co-founder Steve Bermes will continue to serve as executive vice chairs of the Novae board.

"Steve and I have dedicated our professional lives to Novae, and we are confident that under Manish's leadership the company will achieve new milestones," Storie said in a news release. "His vast experience and leadership skills are exactly what Novae needs as it enters this new chapter. I am excited to support Manish and the team in my new role."

Novae was founded in 1995 and manufactures a variety of trailer products including cargo and car haulers, equipment trailers, dump trailers and tilt trailers through brands such as Sure-Trac Trailers, ITI Cargo and LOOK Trailers, the latter of which was acquired in 2022.

Last February Novae broke ground on a \$35 million, 150,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Markle, its third in the town and seventh in Indiana. The company said the project would add up to 36 jobs by the end of this year.

Novae operates more than 20 manufacturing facilities nationwide and employs 500 people in Indiana, including about 225 in Markle.

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## Mayor to give “State of the City” on February 15

The Chamber of Commerce will host a “State of the City” for 2024 event on Thursday, February 15 with Mayor Richard Strick. The event will take place at the Pathfinder Arts & Entrepreneurial Center, 32 E. Franklin Street, at 3 p.m.



Mayor Strick plans to talk to the group about accomplishments during 2023 and plans for 2024. This will all be followed by a question-and-answer session.

If you would like to attend this event, please reply to [skimmel@huntington-chamber.com](mailto:skimmel@huntington-chamber.com) or call the office at (260) 356-5300. There is no cost to attend but we would like to know how many will attend.



## Chamber scholarship, deadline April 5

The Huntington County Chamber of Commerce is proud to provide a \$1,000 scholarship to high school seniors wishing to further their education. To apply for this scholarship, the student must be pursuing an education in a skilled trade certification or two-year program.



Applicant must be a high school senior planning to graduate in the current school year and who will be continuing their education at an institution with a skilled trade certification or two-year program.

The following steps in the application packet must be completed in order to apply for the scholarship: Complete the application and submit prior to the deadline of Friday, April 5, 2024. You can receive an application by emailing [agarcia@huntington-chamber.com](mailto:agarcia@huntington-chamber.com)



The LaFontaine Arts Council has partnered with the City of Huntington in their effort to procure new upcycled benches for the community. Additionally, to donating towards the cost of the benches, the Arts Council is looking for local artists to submit their mural proposals for consideration.

## LaFontaine Arts Council looking for artists

The LaFontaine Arts Council (LAC) has partnered with the City of Huntington in their effort to procure new upcycled benches for the community. The LAC, in addition to donating towards the cost of the benches, will sponsor and oversee the implementation of murals for eight of the new city bench structures to be installed downtown and in city parks.

These benches, made by a midwestern company called Canvas, have been constructed from recycled wind turbine blades and are a durable and sustainable alternative to the worn-down benches they will replace. Some of the benches offer features like lighting and shade and shelter from the elements.

The LAC is looking for artists to submit their mural proposals for consideration. Each artist chosen will receive a stipend of between \$500 and \$1,000, at the discretion of the LAC. Paint will be supplied to the winning muralists. Painting of the murals will commence in the Spring of 2024, weather permitting.

Artists are welcome to submit multiple designs. Design submissions are due by March 25, 2024 and can be submitted via the LAC website. The LAC will choose the winners on March 27. Announcements will be made on the LAC Facebook page and all participants will receive notification via email.

The LAC provides rules and guidelines with canvas dimensions on the online submission form.

The LaFontaine Arts Council has been providing Arts in Education programming to the Huntington County Schools for over 30 years. Currently the council is funding programs including the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Young Artist Awards, along with grant and scholarship programs.

The LAC board of directors meets every fourth Tuesday at 6 p.m. and board meetings are open to the public. For more information, reach out to [lafontaineartscouncil@gmail.com](mailto:lafontaineartscouncil@gmail.com) or visit their website at [lafontaineartscouncil.org](http://lafontaineartscouncil.org).



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## Bereavement groups offer help coping with grief

When a loved one passes away, grief can be bewildering and isolating. While each person ex-



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periences grief in their own way, getting support to help you understand your grief and find companionship with others dealing with similar struggles can be important in helping you navigate your feelings and move forward.

Parkview Hospice counselors facilitate bereavement support groups across the area. Any community member who has experienced the loss of a loved one, recently or longer ago, and is seeking a compassionate, supportive environment in which to heal is welcome to attend.

The groups focus on concepts in the book, "Understanding Your Grief," by noted author, educator and grief counselor Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. Wolfelt's exploration of grief, self-compassion and practical steps toward healing has been a helpful guide for thousands of people nationwide. Wolfelt is founder and director of the Center for Loss & Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Support group members will receive a free copy of the book, which they will read and discuss during the meetings as they explore the normal emotional responses to illness and death and ways to cope.

Past participants in Understanding Your Grief meetings have had these and similar comments on their experience:

"It helped me share with my family and friends what I was going through. It helped with my deep depression. I didn't feel alone in my grief."

"It gave me a safe place to express my thoughts, anxieties and feelings."

"I am so glad I made the decision to attend. It gave me tools – the book and my leaders – to help me work through my feelings. It was nice to be with others who knew exactly what you were feeling."

I truly enjoyed that connection. They were very kind and thoughtful. They listened with no judgments."

Bereavement support groups are available in Allen and Huntington counties on an ongoing basis.

The Allen County group meets 5:30 to 7 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month in the PACH Conference Room at Parkview Randallia Hospital, 2200 Randallia Drive, Fort Wayne. Participants should use ground floor entrance 2 to access the PACH room.

The Huntington County group meets 5:30 to 7 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month in the Parkview Home Health office at 2806 Theater Avenue, Suite A, Huntington.

For more information about the Allen or Huntington County groups or other bereavement support, call (260) 373-9800 or toll free (800) 363-9977.



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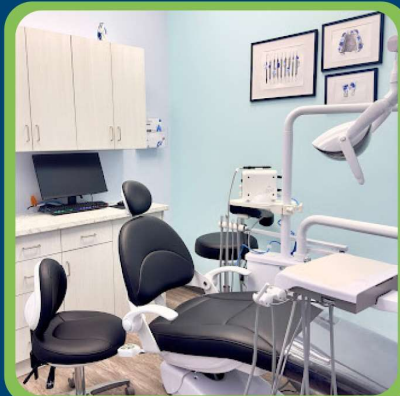


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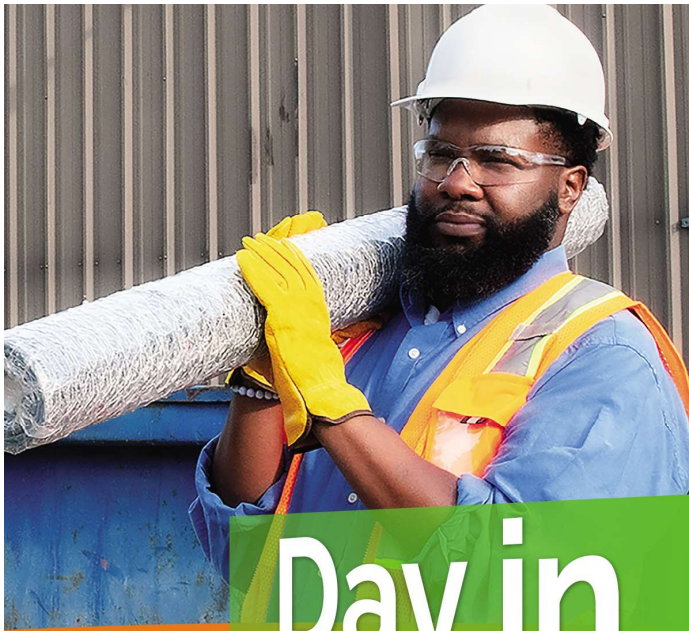
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# Day in, Day out.

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40 E. Franklin St., Suite 121  
Huntington, IN 46750



# Mark Your Calendars

## **Free Lunch**

Saturday, February 3, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Trinity United Methodist Church, 530 Guilford Street

## **HC Coffee Connections**

Wednesday, February 7, 8 to 9:30 a.m.  
Habecker Dining Commons, Huntington University

## **Entrepreneurial 'Meet & Greet'**

Monday, February 26, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.  
The Exchange, 201 N. Wayne Street, Warren

## **Taste of Warren**

Saturday, March 2, 7 to 9 p.m.  
Dogwood Glen Golf Course, 753 E 900 S, Warren

## **Chamber Annual Dinner**

Tuesday, March 19, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.  
PAL Club, 2099 Riverside Drive, Huntington

## **For A Complete Calendar of Events**

Visit our website at [www.huntington-chamber.com](http://www.huntington-chamber.com)

### **Lime City Title Services, LLC**

327 N. Jefferson St.  
Huntington, IN 46750



Phone: 260-356-2988  
Fax: 260-356-5201  
[jbnewitz@limecitytitle.com](mailto:jbnewitz@limecitytitle.com)  
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