

# DRIVING

2023 *home* 2033

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*A Narrative Plan to Drive  
Jasper and Newton Counties to Prosperity*





A photograph of a dirt road winding through a field towards a large, leafy tree under a clear sky. The road is light brown and textured with small stones and patches of grass. The tree is dark green and stands prominently in the middle ground. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

# *The Process*

## **FOUR NARRATIVES**

The broad themes that, together, tell the story of lived experience here in Jasper and Newton counties.

## **SIXTY STORYLINES**

The focal areas that, when addressed, will move our story in the right direction in the next decade.

## **FORTY-TWO PLOT POINTS**

The big ideas and innovations that help deliver movement in each of those key areas for our communities.



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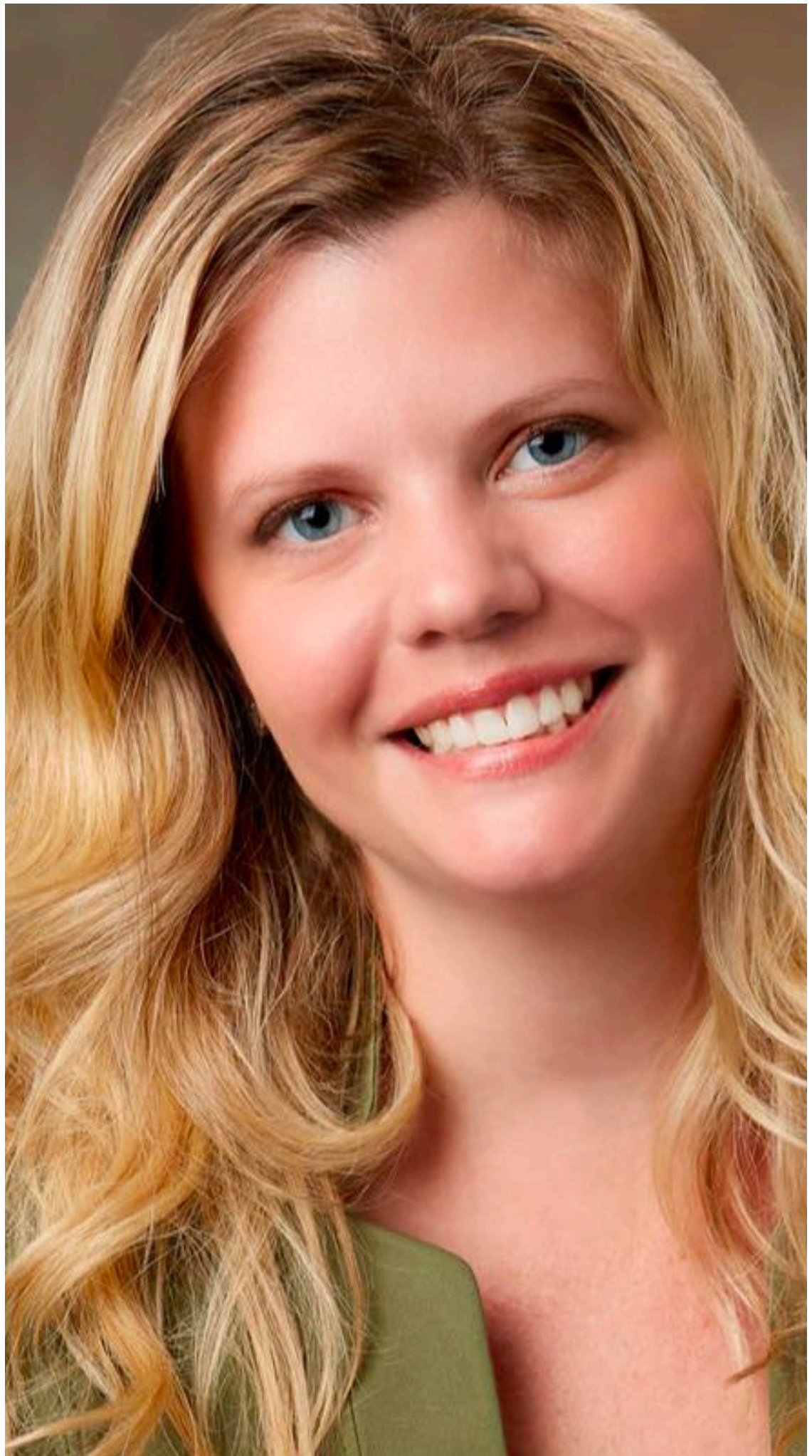
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*The Jasper Newton  
Foundation could not be  
more excited to see our  
communities coming  
together, growing,  
changing, adapting to  
what life dishes out, and  
connecting on what we  
see as our future.*

— BRIENNE HOOKER





## A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Home.

When we think about building community, too often we get caught up in the flashy trends of the exercise. We get caught chasing squirrels – adorning bridges, adding placards, emulating the actions of towns wholly unlike ours. We get caught up building a community and forget what it takes to build our community.

You see, home isn't the "Pure Jasper-Newton" billboard or the flashy Facebook advertisements framing up our great community to outsiders. Home doesn't require the pretense, the dog-and-pony show, the fake smiles, and Photoshopped images... Home is something deeper, richer, more interesting... more pure. Home is here. (I hope you are sitting there now, reading this.)

It is building that sense of pride that flows through everything we do together. It is reflected in the vibrancy of our community – through art, culture, food, and festival. It is attracting, employing, and retaining the human talent to do the work and the good businesses themselves to bring prosperity to our communities.

It is including all our neighbors in a quality place that helps us all build healthy, active, and fulfilled lives.

It is educating our children and becoming a great place to grow families with established roots that continue to thrive generations later.

Jasper and Newton Counties are perfectly planted in some of the best soil in the great state of Indiana. We are uniquely positioned, central to the American arterial system, with unmatched access to the largest population centers in middle America. With the whole world at our fingertips, we are rich in resources, full in heart, and safe and secure in our smallness.

For years, communities like ours were branded as Lilliputian by our metropolitan neighbors. But we've always known what they're learning now. Jasper and Newton counties provide the best foundation for crafting vibrant and prosperous

communities that provide a true quality life for growing the best kids, families, and neighbors... for building up a home. Doing so won't be for the weak of spirit. We've dreamt big for our shared home, and only we can bring that dream to reality. It'll take a concerted effort across all aspects of our shared lives. We must reach deep into our history and our culture. We must focus attention on the economic lifeblood of our communities. We must keep near to heart the lives we aim to collectively protect. And, among them, we must continue to support the young kids and young families who will be the next generation of leaders, workers, and builders of this place we affectionately call home. Not one of these areas can be left behind as we drive forward.

The Jasper Newton Foundation could not be more excited to see our communities coming together, growing, changing, adapting to what life dishes out, and connecting on what we see as our future. The last twelve months have been a true gift of insight from all of you.

I can feel it now. The engine is running, the cab is warm and cozy, a warm house and a warm meal are just a few minutes away. Let's climb in together, tug on the transmission lever, and drift away a bit into our shared vision for the future. Let's glance at the mirrors and imagine at one time all the sensory experiences that make this beautiful community home. And let's not take our eyes off the road ahead for long. It's time we tune the radio dial, roll down the windows, and take a drive home.



Brienne Hooker  
*Executive Director*



## FROM YOUR PARTNERS

Over the past year, we have come to know Jasper and Newton counties as treasures of the Midwest, hidden gems nestled in the heart of Americana. We've come to know yours as a second home—an extended family. More than that, though, we've come to know you all. Certainly not each and every one of you, but many. We've sat, broken bread, sipped coffee, and listened as you all described these counties. You've told us about the lived experience of rural Indiana—one we as fellow rural Hoosiers know well—and you've told us of the experience you want for your future.

In these past 12 months, we've put the microscope on that very chasm: the distance between where you are and where you want to be. We've studied it intently, looked at models of success elsewhere in the country, and carefully considered how to deliver new ideas that are the right fit for the unique DNA of your communities.

In that same time, we have, in equal measure, listened, and focused our microscope on those things that make your communities unique, interesting, and warm. It will undoubtedly be no surprise to you that they are many in number. Jasper and Newton counties are both individual and uniquely positioned for success for the coming generations. This plan is your shared vision of how to get there together.

It is easy for any consultant to do what is, by name, the same work we do: strategic planning. They sit back from afar; they study the numbers, the colorful line graphs, the Wikipedia entries, and the census data, then proclaim to know you... what ails you... and how to fix it. To the outsiders, it's easy to think one rural community is the same as the next and that a visit on Google Maps tells the story of your lives. We know differently. We grew up in rural Indiana. We're steeped in the lifestyle, the culture, and the challenges. Indeed, I recall many a weekend spent in Roselawn, tending to my grandfather's Christmas tree farm. Most importantly, we understand that each community is wholly unique.

If you've been bored enough to torture yourself with the reading of other strategic plans, you'll note quickly that this plan is different. It isn't ours. It isn't an outsider's vision of your future. It isn't full of trendy buzzwords, empty rhetoric, and purposefully vague promises of a generically better tomorrow. It has none of those things. You won't find little icons and confusing flowcharts talking about "pillars" of a plan for growth. You're our sort of people. You see through that in a heartbeat.

Instead, what we offer you is simple: a story.

The following narrative plan is your words, your ideas, your vision for the future, to build a more welcoming community; to highlight a unique culture; to deliver on the promises of education and health, and to build up into a sustainable economically-prosperous area. We've simply drawn the composite sketch of your vision, put words to it, and created a plan to bring it to life.

This process has delivered unique insight and an actionable plan for several others in the past. But, we have not yet seen a story as vibrant as this. We look forward to, together, breathing life into this story and highlighting the strengths of your communities.

Thank you for an opportunity to share with you in progress and build something extraordinary.



Marc Oestreich  
*Partner, Crane + Grey*





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Those who aren't from around here might not get this. The city folk certainly won't understand it. But, there's something about driving home, isn't there? Something about finishing an honest day's work and heading down the County Road or rural highway. Something about wrapping up supper with friends or family and setting out on a short drive home. Coming back from college to spend time with mom and dad. The sunset over the wheat fields. The combines or farm machines humming in the backdrop. The solitude. The community. The memories. It stirs up all of the good feelings. Driving home is an important piece of our story, strangely.

We need to deliver on that experience for generations to come. To push our story forward such that every drive home is a moment of reflection, warmth, and pride in the community.

Doing so means collective action; a community united around one story. This is your story.

Not the story of your past, but the one of your future. This is your vision for how Jasper and Newton counties will drive forward over the coming decade and deliver on the promises you've wanted your community to keep; the promises you've made to the next generation; the promises to both keep them alive the beauty and splendor of your rich histories

and drive it forward to meet the ever-changing demands of our future.

Contained in these pages aren't the results of countless hours of research and reporting, of learning about your counties. Instead, included in this volume are the resultant ideas of that analysis.

As you read through this plan, you'll notice something peculiar: no pillars, no strategic priorities, no verbose and confusing consultant-speak. We've replaced it all with your story. Indeed, the whole of this plan is broken into the component parts of story building because, well, that's what we're doing here, isn't it? We're together, driving home the story of our future so we can understand how to bring it to life. We're driving forward our home.

In the following pages, you'll be grounded in your past. We know certainly that no good story can be written without the backstory firmly in hand. During that history, you'll be introduced to four important narratives of our collective story. You'll begin to think through those four lenses: prosperity, culture, family, and wellness. They are the themes that help give structure to our future plans.

You'll meet five important characters. While their names and faces don't matter in the grand scheme of things, who they represent is of the highest significance. As you look at them, we ask that you project onto each the names and faces of your neighbors, your family, your church members, and your classmates. We ask that you further ambiguate and project onto these stories the faces of those you pass each night as you embark on your drive home. The faces you see for a momentary flash before they're gone. Each likely a neighbor in some form, living a full life unknown to you, equally responsible for driving our shared home forward.

Those characters are stand-ins for us all. You'll meet them today and be reintroduced to them at the end. You'll see their lives transformed and changed. You'll see their stories drastically impacted. You'll imagine their drives home, once clouded with anxiety, burdened with challenges; now freed up to focus on the simple pleasure of returning to a warm home.

In between those stories is nestled a plan of focus. Delivering a shared focus and priority, that plan (albeit simple and distilled) has the power to bridge the chasm of those stories. It has the power to change our stories. With our combined efforts, it has the power to drive home.



# *The History*

A time of exploration and discovery.





The story of Jasper and Newton counties is the story of America. From the days of the earliest Native American tribes to the railroad barons of the early 20th century, this region of Indiana has a proud history of self-reliance, hard work, and innovation. The settlers who developed the towns, farms, and landscapes that exist today were aware of the opportunities this unique region offered: rich soil, beautiful open prairies, vast rivers, and just a short trip away from the great lakes. Jasper and Newton are not as disconnected from other parts of the U.S. as are so many other rural communities today.

What makes this specific area so special? The first draw to the land that is now Jasper and Newton counties was the Kankakee River, named by the original inhabitants of the area: the Pottawatomie. The area was home to at least 4,000 Pottawatomie inhabitants that worked the land, growing crops such as corn and fishing the rivers.

After generations of Native American habitation, the Western world finally reached the area. The first to arrive was a French explorer and fur trader René-Robert Cavelier de La

Salle and his party, who landed in 1682. They were traveling south along the Kankakee River, attempting to uncover a water route to the Gulf of Mexico. While he may have missed that goal, his travels were not in vain as they established the Kankakee River as a perfect passage through the Midwest; a route that many would follow for years to come.

Today, the Kankakee River forms the northern boundary of Jasper County. However, in its earliest days, the river served as the spine of the great marsh, making it the richest wetlands region in North America. The Iroquois River is drained along the central and southern regions of the county, which in the early pioneering days, was locally known as the Bluestem Prairie due to its lush and tall grasses. Even back in the 1600s, Jasper and Newton counties' primary feature was their rich farmland, perfectly suited for a host of crops and beautiful plains that captivated all who traveled through. However, the marshlands were tough to inhabit. It would take a few hundred years before they dried enough to be ready to play host to newly developed communities.



## DID YOU KNOW?

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*Kentland is home to one  
of a handful of major  
meteor strikes.*

The Kentland crater is located a few miles east of Kentland, Indiana in Newton County. Nearly 8 miles in diameter, the crater dates as far back as the Paleozoic Era.







*When tillage begins, other arts follow.  
The farmers, therefore, are the founders  
of human civilization.*

DANIEL WEBSTER

### Expansion—Hard Work and Innovation Breed a New Community

Once settlers began to move in, the population and economic development erupted. Early on in the area's history, businessmen and farmers alike recognized the potential of the unique landscape in Jasper and Newton counties. Out-of-state investors purchased large tracts of land that were mostly uninhabited at the time. The settlers built farms and populated them with horses, cows, hogs, and other new livestock. However, the driving force of Jasper County's agricultural economy originated with crops like corn, soybeans, wheat, mint, potatoes, and onions. Production and distribution of these crops exploded with the introduction of rail and interstate commerce.

Once Indiana achieved statehood in 1816, it began a series of road projects that ultimately led to the state receiving its moniker of the Crossroads of America. The first rail line that crossed the Grand Prairie arrived in 1859. This line received heavy traffic as people were just starting to move out west in larger numbers. Many traveling through Indiana decided to lay down their roots and make it their home.

Small towns began to spring up along the rail line. The first depot was built at Carpenter's Creek crossing, which was later renamed the town of Remington. Thanks to the

Logansport and Peoria Railroad, Remington became a focal point for farmers and ranchers to ship cattle, sheep, hogs, and grains both east and north to Chicago.

In Jasper County, the primary entrepreneur responsible for bringing in railroads and ultimately economic growth was Benjamin F. Gifford, an Illinois native and Union Army Captain. After the war, he returned to the Great Lakes region to become a real estate investor and rail pioneer. In 1873 with his pockets heavy from successful Illinois land deals, Gifford organized the Havana, Rantoul, and Eastern Railroad, a 75-mile line from LeRoy, Illinois to West Lebanon, Indiana. After selling it in 1880, he turned to Jasper County, where he started buying up 33,000 acres of land along the Kankakee Valley. His rail line, completed in 1900, brought people to settlements along the river and allowed for the swift transport of goods among them.

At its height, Jasper County had five rail lines running through the area. By 1920, any resident could hop on a train in Jasper or Newton County and travel all across the continental United States. This travel infrastructure, accompanied by the abundance of fertile farmland, quickly brought economic prosperity to the area. The abundance of crops turned into a great deal of wealth for many of the early residents of Jasper and Newton counties. Trade with faraway lands also brought new products, knowledge, and innovation into the area, which launched it into another period of expansion and modernization.

At the turn of the century, the Great Depression and the growth of the trucking industry prompted a large decline in rail traffic. This was only further accelerated by the invention of the automobile in the early 20th century. In the 1960s, the creation of Interstate Highway 65 connected Jasper County to the rest of the state. The development of all of these roads and highways brought new people to the area who had not previously experienced it. They quickly fell in love with the lush countryside, crisp and clean air, and friendly people. This led to a boom in the agro-tourism industry and brought new forms of wealth to the area.

### Growth—Technology, Innovation, and Economic Opportunity

Advances in agritech allowed farmers to diversify their crops as well as opening up the possibility of mass production and transportation. Soon, both counties were populated by large ranches and mass agricultural enterprises.

One of the most pivotal moments in the community's agricultural history was the passage of the Land Ordinance Act of 1785. This act established the rectangular survey system of one-mile squares for land in the Northwest Territories. As a result, property disputes all but vanished, and land transfers became easier than ever. This was important because it allowed new settlers to purchase their share of land from offices throughout the state. Those who recognized the op-



portunity and the bounty the land could provide were finally given the means to stake their claim and begin production.

Another pivotal moment in the agricultural history of the area was the founding of Purdue University. A local, prominent university expanded learning opportunities for farmers or those who wanted to learn the trade to take advantage of the region's bounty.

By 1900, agriculture was the primary economic driver of the entire state of Indiana. Jasper County, in particular, was one of the most pivotal areas for farming due to its landscape and natural resources. However, Jasper and Newton counties were not one-trick ponies. They also began to expand and develop other industries besides agriculture at the turn of the century.

The innovations of the Industrial Revolution did not pass over Jasper and Newton counties. All along the numerous streams and rivers appeared water-powered mills that served the craft industries. Blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and coopers all migrated to the booming new countryside. As the railway system grew, transportation became easier than ever, which in turn drove up demand for mass-produced goods. To meet this demand, inventions like the internal combustion engine

and increasingly popular specialized factories appeared on the scene. With the rise in jobs and population, water power no longer sufficed. The area turned to coal, natural gas, and steam, which opened the area up to still more new workers. By the 1920s, manufacturing was just as large an industry as agriculture throughout the state of Indiana.

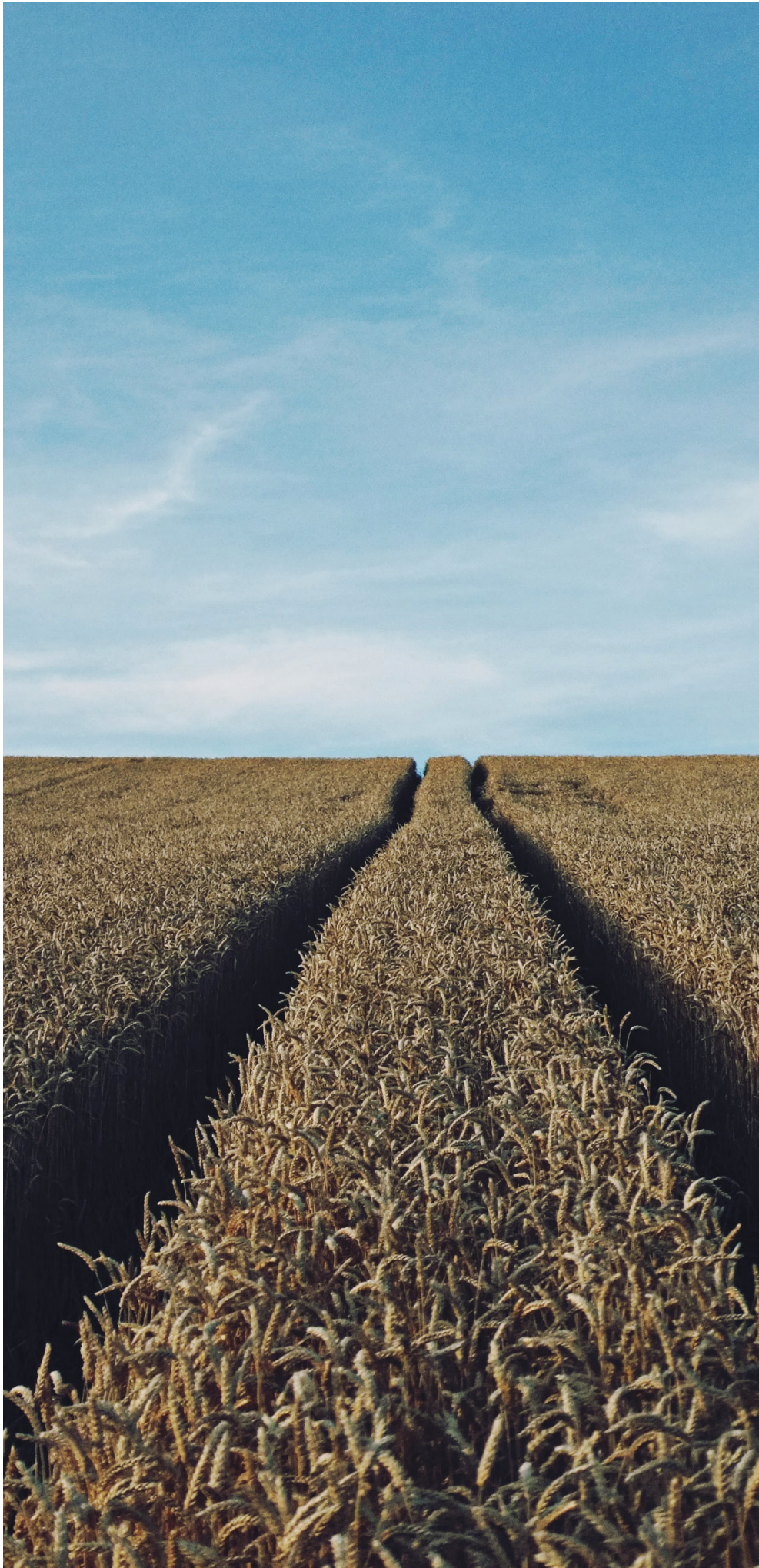
As a result of the mass influx of people into the area throughout the mid to late 1800s, the education system also thrived. Until 1850, only small private schools existed. But when demand exceeded what private schools could cope with, the state instituted a large public school system. This system provided standard pay for teachers, money for school libraries, and funds for construction. Schoolhouses appeared in the counties, most within only a few miles of each other. As time went on, the government looked for ways to bolster and consolidate these schools. Several larger school systems that spanned multiple cities were formed to keep up with demand and avoid spreading out funds.

### Today—Where We Are and Where We Could Be

This history of innovation, expansion, and economic development has set the scene for Jasper and Newton counties as they exist today...







#### DID YOU KNOW?

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*Roselawn is named  
after two guys, not a  
beautiful garden.*

Roselawn actually derives from Orlando Rose and Lon Craig who were prominent local businessmen during the inception of the town in 1882. The name officially changed from Roselon to Roselawn some 10 years later.

# *The Status Quo*

How we arrived at today.





After a long history of hard work, expansion, innovation, and excitement, life in Jasper and Newton counties (and the rest of rural America) began to slow down. As farms were passed from generation to generation, family businesses cemented themselves in both location and offerings, and innovators flocked to cities in search of new opportunities; growth came to a near standstill.

Tradition, while a major part of what makes up the personality of Jasper and Newton counties, has become the enemy of innovation. We've all heard the time-old phrases: "We've always done it this way" and "If it isn't broke, don't fix it." The reality is that these phrases are not as timeless as they might seem. It's a new mindset that has come along with a generation that is comfortable in complacency and often views change as an enemy.

This is by no means the historical mindset of the land that now makes up these two counties. We have a history of an entrepreneurial mindset; one that embraces challenge with warm arms and stands with grit in the face of adversity. One that never stops thinking, evolving, and finding new ways to

tackle problems. One that has the insatiable desire to do all we can to better our community—our family—in any way we can, be it economically, physically, emotionally, or culturally. The principled and steadfast entrepreneur is Jasper and Newton counties; we've just forgotten who we are.

### **Trends & Opportunity**

Unfortunately, modern trends are not on our side. New cities full of people and opportunities have sprung up across the country. Jasper and Newton counties specifically are wedged between Indianapolis and Chicago, two cities that offer promises of business opportunities, new people, and always something different to experience.

Businesses have taken advantage of these cities in the forms of mass out-migration and consolidation. They are moving out of rural communities and grouping together in faceless office buildings amidst a sea of concrete. Along with the relocation of business inevitably comes the relocation of people. They are flocking away from jobs in rural communities and in local businesses for more sustainable and less risky opportunities in the city.

This change in business and people is causing a shift in other areas like healthcare and education. In their pursuit to meet the needs of population centers, hospitals have elected to abolish the “neighborhood doctor” in favor of building mega care centers, and schools and universities are finding it increasingly difficult to attract students to rural campuses.

Despite how bleak the picture may seem, we are at an inflection point. People are quickly getting burnt out with the hustle of city life. Studies are coming out about the downsides of living in these population centers, and the negative impacts on both physical and mental health are beginning to take their toll. With respiratory systems suffering from smoggy air, backs hunched from living in front of the computer screen, and minds dulled from the monotony of office work, people are looking for an escape.

More and more people are seeking out what rural life has to give. They want simplicity. They want fresh air. They want to know their neighbors and be able to develop a sense of community and place that is more meaningful than living in a tiny bubble. People are quickly realizing that in the hustle to grow upwards and build these cities; we seem to have forgotten the sweetness of home and the peace that it can bring. People are ready to come home, lay down some roots, and start their families in a real community.

On the other hand, rural America often fails to live up to its promise. We have struggled to adapt at the same or even comparable rates as our urban counterparts in many important ways. Many of these failures are in critical areas of life and the barriers to ditching city life and moving to small towns are too high for many.

Rural communities such as Jasper and Newton counties are unable to keep up with the demands of a two-parent household that requires childcare. We cannot maintain and live up to the promise of giving our residents the accessible mental and physical healthcare they need. We cannot provide access to nutritious and varied food options. If we want to welcome these people in, as well as provide a better quality of life for our own families, we must adapt. We have to bolster the areas where we are lacking to meet the trends of modern times in order to build a community that can better serve each and every one of its residents.

### **Culture That Creates a Vibrant Community**

American culture has gone through several extreme transformations over the past century. We’ve experienced complete shifts in how people want to live their lives, how they engage with each other, and, ultimately, how they experience the idea of community. There are new standards that families have come to expect out of a hometown that did not exist before. While large cities have mostly been able to meet these needs, rural communities have fallen behind and failed to adapt. People today are more open to and crave new experiences.

Young people are constantly being flooded with pictures and videos of their peers out on adventures, trying new things, and experiencing life. They, in response, also want to have these experiences and be able to constantly try new things as they find themselves and figure out the type of life they want to create for themselves.

Additionally, they want to live in a town that is beautiful, filled with art, and well-maintained. In the age of Instagram realities and new and innovative aesthetics, people want to be inspired by the world around them. In large part, people have left the monotony of miles of corn and single-style homes in search of color, art, beautiful buildings, and decorated downtowns.

Unfortunately, these are all things that are almost exclusively offered outside of rural communities. The overwhelming mantra of rural America has been tradition: we have one way of doing things and have no interest in change. Rural families often work in the same business in the same spot for generations; people frequent the same diners week after week; and we shop at the same store that our parents or even grandparents did.

To better provide for our current residents and attract new ones, we have to meet them where they are. We need to focus on what we have to offer as a community through several different means. It is critical to open new restaurants, provide new experiences through agro-tourism, host meaningful events, and so much more. Now is the perfect time to attract new people to a thriving community.

### **Economic Factors Needed for Prosperity**

Throughout the past 20 years, the global economy has been experiencing exponential growth and, along with it, a series of innovations have cemented themselves as non-negotiable accessories to even the average working-class person. With the rise of the information age and a worldwide trend towards working remotely, a robust and reliable technology infrastructure is a prerequisite to economic and occupational growth in a community. Larger communities have been able to keep up with this demand with evolving methods such as the implementation of fiber-optic internet loops that increase speed and reliability and partnering with communications providers to deliver more reliable phone and wireless connections.

The tough reality is that Jasper and Newton counties have not kept up with the changes in technology. At present, there are several thousand people without any possible access to the internet speeds that have recently been deemed the new baseline of connectivity by government agencies. Even in areas that are more highly connected, speeds and connections are unreliable and can vary greatly. As drivers are traveling the countryside and commuting outside of the counties, they encounter several dead zones without connectivity. Without these things, we will continue to lose economic opportunities to better-connected communities.





#### DID YOU KNOW?

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*Jasper County is home  
to one of the nearly  
2,500 Carnegie libraries.*

Now home to the Prairie Arts Council, the neoclassical revival style building was the product of a 1903 grant, part of a larger program by industrialist Andrew Carnegie to build library buildings across the whole of the United States.

In addition to technological growth, there is also a large accessibility issue. The communities, as they stand today, lack the infrastructure necessary to attend to all aspects of the average person's lifestyle. Residents consistently have to drive 30 minutes to well over an hour in order to shop, buy food, get entertainment, or even work. People want to be able to minimize the amount of time spent traveling from one place to another and expect to be able to meet all of their basic needs within the confines of their community.

### Care to Lead a Quality Life

Even in categories as necessary as healthcare, recent trends have seemingly forgotten about rural America as a whole. Throughout the first centuries of this country, virtually every small town had a "neighborhood doctor" who would provide care to the community. Most people didn't have to travel as far as 10 minutes to receive everyday care. They were able to build a personal relationship with their healthcare provider.

Those days are unfortunately behind us. With the out-migration of folks from country life into large metropolitans, mega hospitals have sprung up. While their mission might be noble—to bring the most care to the most number of people—they have failed to take into account smaller communities like Jasper and Newton counties. The neighborhood doctors have made the career move to be in a larger hospital ecosystem where they can make more money while also networking with peers and leaders in their chosen field, leaving small towns without accessible care.

This is particularly a problem in Newton county, where the physician to resident ratio is well over 10,000:1. At the time of writing this, there is not even one mental healthcare provider in all of Newton County.

Some of these problems have been solved with the recent increase in available telehealth options. Many people can now have healthcare appointments via video call from the confines of their own home. However, this is not always a viable option due to the lack of network infrastructure and technology in the average household of Jasper and Newton counties.

As it stands, the area is a healthcare desert. Residents must drive several hours at times to receive quality care. In order to attract and retain quality individuals, mental and physical healthcare needs to be readily available and easily accessible. While that might seem difficult to do now, there are many steps we can take (detailed later in this plan) that will put us on the path to ensuring that every citizen of Jasper and Newton counties has the care they need.

### Infrastructure to Start a Family

Alongside tradition, family might be one of the most coveted and important values to rural America. Time and time again in pop culture, we see the classic trope of a large family, living together on a farm that they've passed down from generation to generation. Despite how important family is to us and our culture, though, we have ultimately failed to provide the necessary support to grow one in today's world.





The majority of the land that makes up Jasper and Newton counties has been classified as a “childcare desert” for its lack of access to daycare and early childhood education opportunities. The stark reality is that the life of a single-income household in Jasper-Newton is that of someone just scraping by, unable to work and take care of their child. Not because they don’t know how; they can’t.

Even when children are old enough to attend schools, the education options are limited. Many parents who elect to have their child attend a different school may have to drive over an hour one way to drop them off. Even then, the options for individualized education that meets the needs of the kids, as well as the needs of the current job market in the area, are limited. Students are not receiving the experience and education necessary to keep up in ever-changing fields such as agritech. The rest of the world is continuing to grow and we’re being left behind.

After high school, our kids aren’t staying here. They feel as though they have to move across the country to universities in order to gain the experience they need to be successful in life. After the closure of St. Joseph’s College, the closest options, Valparaiso and Purdue, are still far outside the borders of the counties. Even when students do choose the closest options, they don’t realize the opportunities that await them here and are electing to permanently leave the community.

However, it doesn’t have to be this way. We have to re-prioritize our value for families and provide them with the tools they need to live and thrive within Jasper and Newton counties. We must provide single-parent households with support and access to childcare. We must give our high school students unique and engaging learning opportunities that prepare them for careers in the area. We have to make sure that if they choose to pursue higher education, they also see the value of coming back to the community that helped make them who they are.

### Where We Go Next

While things may seem rough now, believe us when we say we are perfectly positioned to transition into a thriving community that people will not just enjoy being a part of; they’ll want to be a part of it. We talked before about the inflection point, how people have realized that city living isn’t all it was cracked up to be, and thousands, if not millions, are coming to realize the power of home and a sense of community that only rural communities like Jasper and Newton counties are uniquely positioned to provide.

We have to meet this inflection point with the same gusto and entrepreneurial spirit that the original inhabitants of Jasper and Newton counties employed to catapult this area into the land of opportunity and prosperity that it once was. We have to rise to the challenge, lean into the uncomfort-



able, embrace change, and do things we previously might not have thought possible.

We can build a community that has a culture as rich as its history, that’s open to opportunity, newness, and that provides residents with the taste for adventure that they so desire. We can build a community that offers the infrastructure needed for business not only to thrive but to prosper and surge ahead of the competition. We can build a community that serves a city on a hill when it comes to healthy living, where every single resident receives the care they need and gets the peace of mind that comes with it. We can build a community that is welcoming to new families and prepares our kids for the same challenges we faced as we made the transition into adult life. All of these things and more are possible for Jasper and Newton counties.

It won’t be easy. We’ve got a long road ahead of us. But we think it’s high time we start **driving home.**

# *The People*

Meet our characters. Imagine your own.



## *These five characters represent the current, combined stories of Jasper and Newton counties residents.*

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A community is nothing without its people. The people who live, work, and raise families here are what makes Jasper and Newton counties special. Many of the people who live in this area have been here for generations. They've inherited farms and small businesses and, due to their passion for the counties, have decided to continue on and start their own roots.

When developing a plan for a community, people are the most important factor to consider. What use is a new community center if no one wants to use it? Why hold a concert with no attendees? It is important to think about the people who live here and meet them where they are. We must provide value to the people of Jasper and Newton counties and consider their unique personalities, needs, and characteristics.

After meeting and speaking with hundreds of community members and personality types, we've condensed them down into five unique profiles. While these certainly won't cover every single person's unique characteristics, they do a pretty good job of capturing the stories of the majority of residents in Jasper and Newton counties. Looking at these profiles will help us better visualize not only where we are currently as a community but also what life could eventually look like here with a little bit of planning, hard work, and support.



**Maggie Sosa | Educator, 32**

Maggie lives with her husband Henry and their 4-year-old daughter Emma in Kentland. While Henry works part-time as a home appraiser, Maggie teaches Government and Econ at South Newton High School.

Despite their incomes, money is tight. Teacher pay at the high school is not enough to support all three, and Henry works when the housing market is hot, which is not always the case. He often has to travel long distances for jobs, which is getting more difficult when they don't have a sitter for Emma.

"The irony is that sometimes it costs to have me work," Henry says. So oftentimes, he stays at home caring for their daughter.

Maggie and Henry have ideas: She could go back to school and get her Master's, which would allow her to teach at a college level. Or he could enroll in business school and get certified for another job to make up what he isn't earning as an appraiser. But still, there are obstacles: Valparaiso University is the closest school, but it's expensive. They could commute to programs in Chicago, but there is the added time commitment, which makes that option impossible.

"For now, if we're going to stay in Kentland, that means enrolling in online courses," says Maggie. "That's not the best option, but it's the only one right now."

But those plans are in the future. Maggie and Henry first need to find a quality pre-K for Emma. There isn't one in the immediate area, so a commute out of town is likely in their future.

Overall, all of these factors play a role in Maggie's belief that her family will likely move closer to family in Detroit, Indianapolis, or Chicago, where greater access to jobs, education, and better pay is assured. Once the school year ends at South Newton, they start making plans and figuring which city is best provided what they are looking for.

"We hate to leave this area because there is so much to love about this community: the access to nature, our friends, and a home we have grown to love," says Maggie. "But we aren't making it, and I fear the coronavirus will only make things worse. Our future, unfortunately, is somewhere else."



**Sara Wilmsen | Waitress, 26**

To escape an abusive partner, Sara moved to Rensselaer from South Holland to raise her 10-year-old son Cale and 4-year-old daughter Sorrel. Even though her family is in a safer environment, they are struggling with a new challenge, namely how to survive financially on their own.

A high school graduate, Sara could only find work at the Royal Oak Family Restaurant, where she is making \$2.13, Indiana's minimum wage, plus tips. That puts her family below the federal poverty line for an annual household income of three in 2023: \$21,720. She qualifies for monthly Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which is essential to keeping her kids fed and housed at Meadowood Apartments, a low-income housing complex in town that accepts federal housing choice vouchers.

"Don't get me wrong, we like it here, and I'm grateful to have a job so fast," she says. "But it's just not enough."

Time and access prevent her from going back to school. St. Joseph's College recently shut its doors, and closer educational opportunities don't exist. Lack of pre-K is also a barrier to taking classes; she has no one to care for Sorrel during non-work hours. She'd like a higher-paying job doing clerical work—she can type and once worked as a secretary back in Illinois—but there aren't enough professional services companies in the area.

"Sometimes, I wonder why we moved here, but we had to get out of our old situation fast. When I got that job, it was like a way to plant some roots. But now that we're here, I'm finding it difficult to climb up any ladder," she says.

Sara has diabetes, and Cale suffers from ADHD; neither has seen a doctor or a therapist because of the cost. She takes both her kids to Bazz's Roller Rink for fun, but there's little else to do except going on bike rides and long walks. She worries about Cale getting involved with gangs or drugs when he becomes a teenager, simply because it'll provide a structure that she can't find for him in town.

"Maybe before then, we'll be someplace else," she says. "If a better job and more opportunities are someplace else, we'll go."



**Trevor Boyd | Farmer, Entrepreneur, 35**

Trevor grew up with farming in his blood. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were corn and soybean farmers in Parr, a town in Jasper County that dates back to 1895. He is committed to the land and to the heritage that it represents.

"I'm a proud Hoosier. I'm here to stay. My generation has fallen out of farming, but I see opportunities to help move it into the 21st century," he says.

Part of that future is agritech, the application of technology to improve all elements of the growing process. Considered an outgrowth of the startup culture, agritech uses applications designed specifically for the agriculture, horticulture, and aquaculture industries and uses them to improve productivity, yield, and ultimately profits. In other words, it's a world away from just getting up early and working in the fields.

The challenge Trevor faces is, unlike startups in big cities, he has no immediate access to capital. Many of the farming operations near him are shrinking or closing for good. He doesn't have a peer group of like-minded young farmers in the area who want to launch agritech businesses. There is no opportunity to network with potential investors. To do so requires day trips to Chicago and elsewhere, which lately has been impossible because of his duties to his farm and to his family of three children.

So how can he make the next step? "Right now, it's about waiting. I got my MBA online. Can I trust the internet to get the resources and information I need? Or will investors not take someone like me seriously unless they get to know me?" he asked.

What would help is having access to quality pre-kindergarten, but since there is none in the immediate area to care for his young ones, the time he'd like to devote to his startup is fading fast. "One of the big reasons startups in Jasper aren't a thing is because there's little or no support," he says. "We're behind the curve in so many ways."

Nevertheless, Trevor says he is committed to his dream. That could mean becoming the first agritech company in the county. It may take longer than he wants, but he hopes his example will inspire others to invest more in a community his family has worked in for more than a century.





### Karley Forrester | Psychologist, 29

Like many college graduates, Karley returned to her hometown after graduating from college. She needs to save money and look at what her future might hold. But unlike many of her peers, Karley would like to start her professional career in the town where she was born and raised: Morocco in unincorporated Newton County.

She admits that it will be tough. Karley graduated from Purdue University with a degree in psychology, and she'd like to launch a career as a therapist. Her dream is to own and manage her own clinic that offers mental health services to the county.

The obstacle she's facing is getting anything off the ground. "People here are not aware of what therapy can do for you like they are in the big cities or college towns," she says. "So not only would it be tough to get a job, but there's also the potential that you won't have any clients. People here just don't think wellness is a thing."

She is looking at jobs far outside Morocco, but the commutes would be long, plus there are the added costs of gas and car repair. She could practice telemedicine, but that would depend on strong internet bandwidth, which just isn't a reality in her hometown where internet access is sporadic.

What she likes about Morocco is the community: She and her college sweetheart Wes are intent on settling down there because of the connections they have there. If they get married, being close to family is important for support, especially if they have a child. But besides family get-togethers, she and her fiancé admit that the weekend commutes to Lafayette or Indianapolis to enjoy a nice dinner, attend a concert, or even play golf are getting pretty tiresome. They wish their hometown would be more welcoming to younger people who are in the prime of their lives.

"This area doesn't have to be one thing or another thing. It can be both," she says. "It can be a tight-knit community where people look out for one another and a safe place to grow up. It can also be a place where professional people can unwind and enjoy the finer things in life."



### Luis Delgado | Business Owner, 42

Luis is proud of Langly Works, a family-run glass manufacturing operation that goes back decades. He runs two warehouses and a small plant that produces custom glass for new homes and commercial buildings. Things were looking up when he took over the business in 2009 from his father. But a troubled economy and shortage of skilled labor are pain points that he can't seem to overcome.

"Our business is very specialized. It requires workers who have gone through at least 12 months of training in a trade school before they step foot on our floor. That's really tough to find these days," he says.

His original growth plan was to open up a second plant closer to Chicago. That's now stalled because orders are slowing, and the workforce he has is just enough to handle those. He dreams of the days when his father could take days off and spend time with his family with the security of knowing that the plant was running smoothly.

Those days are gone. A father of three, Luis wakes up with the sun and often doesn't return until the early evening. Because there is a lack of quality pre-kindergarten in the area, his wife stays home with their children, making him the sole provider.

He hoped his company could join other light manufacturing operations in the area to pool resources, but one by one, they are either closing or moving out of town. There just isn't the demand to improve the intermodal facilities in the area or get business-level internet to make connecting with clients easier.

Nevertheless, Luis is committed to making things work. He hopes the economy will improve, but beyond that, he's hoping for other businesses to discover the main advantage of the area: low overhead cost, primarily.

"We just need better workers. But how do we get them to move here? There should be some sort of long-term plan to build this place up as a manufacturing hub that's more cost-efficient than the bigger cities," he says.

# *Our Narrative Plan*

“There is no force more powerful than a community discovering what it cares about.”

—*Meg Wheatley*



## THE STORY OF US

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*The narrative planning process helps to deliver change through our most powerful community force: the story. A narrative plan is nothing more than the shared story we want to tell about our future.*

### The Process

After a year of getting to know these communities, a shared vision has emerged. Believe it or not, that shared story is the hard part. A beautiful and prosperous set of communities need only to realize that shared story. In order to do so, the story is deconstructed over the following pages in important ways.

### The Research

Before we dove into the planning process, we wanted to know everything there was to know about the people, the history, and the present-day of these communities. We conducted several forms of research, including focus groups, town halls, surveys, stakeholder interviews, and more. To get a baseline of comparison, we also looked at other communities such as neighboring Pulaski county and Ashland county in Ohio, who is a near demographic and economical match to Jasper county. You will see the results of this research, in context, throughout this document.

### Narratives

The largest building block of our story is something called the “narrative.” These narratives—four of them—are the lenses by which we view the story. They represent our roles as family members, workers, students, and individuals. At some point, all of us can break our lives—thereby our experience in our community—down into these four narratives. By propelling narratives forward, we see progress in the different areas of our lived experience.

### Storylines

Within any good page-turner are a handful of important storylines. Our story will be no different. Indeed, these storylines are the most important part of our shared future vision. They tell us about priority, about needed action, and about change-making possibilities. These storylines are the propulsion that determines the success or failure of the plan. These shorter arcs, when taken on as a whole, tell us the story of our community. But, when broken down, they have important stories of their own. In our plan, there are 15 storylines driving forward each of our 4 narratives.

### Plotpoints

In any great story, some event or idea jettisons a particular storyline forward. While storylines are the little arcs that move our broad narratives forward, plot points are the events that have an impact across those storylines. In this way, storylines tell us about needed change, and plot points are the instruments by which the changes are made. In our plan, plot points deliver radical change but aren’t exhaustive.

### Driving a Story of Success

There we have it. The elements of your shared story are simple. The narratives offer our lenses into the community. The storylines—our most important story building component—drive forward progress within each of those lenses. And, finally, the plot points are those large events, ideas, and actions that trigger major change in one or more storyline or narrative.

With these ingredients, we set out to deconstruct our shared vision for the future of Jasper and Newton counties, to build an actionable plan, and to deliver a new and better chapter in the story of our lives.



## NARRATIVE ONE

# Vibrant Community

*Our communities become enriched with culture, art, and dining creating a tight-knit and welcoming atmosphere.*

A vibrant community is one that people naturally gravitate towards and take pride in being a part of. People will never lack something to do. You can wake up early in the morning and head over to the local cycling studio to meet up with friends for a workout. On your lunch break, you network with other professionals in the cafeteria of their coworking space. When you want something to do, you can walk to thriving downtown areas. The sides of the buildings are painted with beautiful murals created by local artists. The downtown restaurants feature several unique cultures and styles, so there is something for everyone. The nearby parks are bustling. The playgrounds are packed with children, and there is a crowd gathered for the finals of a locals-only tennis tournament. In the distance, you can hear the outdoor amphitheater featuring a new local band. This type of community is not far out of reach for Jasper and Newton counties; and we can help you get there.

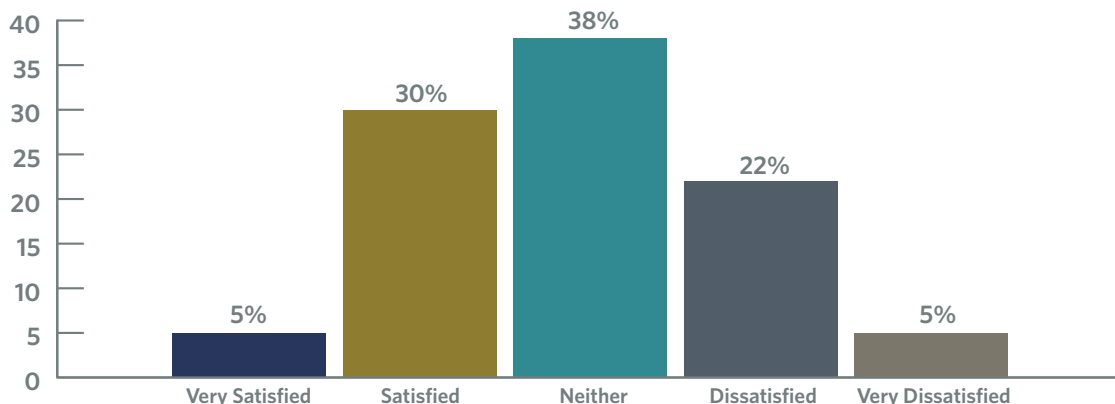
During our initial research survey, we asked citizens of Jasper and Newton counties, “How satisfied are you with your community’s culture and recreation?”. Results were pretty varied, however, 65% of respondents chose a response less than “Satisfied,” with only 5% of people responding “Very Satisfied.” See figure 1.1

On average, residents are not excited about living in Jasper and Newton counties. Throughout town halls and stakeholder interviews, we tried to figure out exactly what part of the culture residents felt was lacking. The most popular responses were that there need to be more community events and better-developed parks, and the least popular answer was to develop the nightlife of the area. Several people complained that if they wanted to go out to eat, go to events, or meet up with friends, they had to travel several miles outside of the county lines. While some recognize that there are, in fact, events and opportunities that are within the community, it appears that, for most people, a knowledge gap exists. Many residents here, who aren’t as involved, simply don’t know about the events or programs that are offered in the area and, if they did know, would be more than happy to participate. Without effective communication, attendance will be low, and the likelihood of partners wanting to host additional events will remain low as well.

Despite what we heard, we did not want to come to any conclusions solely on anecdotal evidence. However, when we looked into the data for several key performance indicators for the cultural health of a community, many of them supported people’s claims.

**FIGURE 1.1**

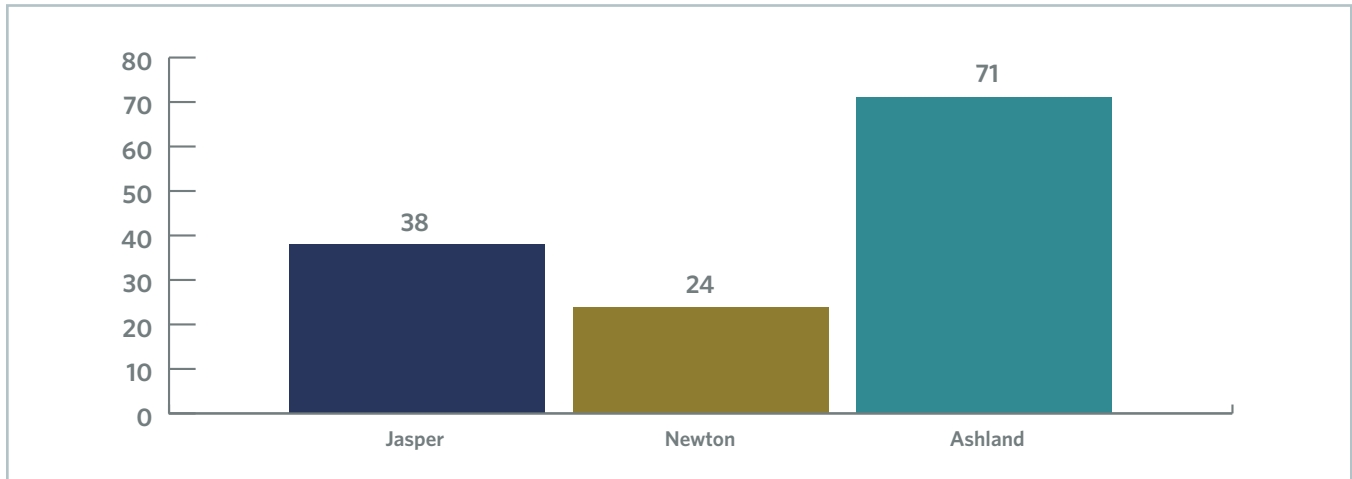
The chart below shows the distribution between the percentage of people who are satisfied with the current cultural and recreational offerings of Jasper and Newton counties. The simple majority of respondents fall in the “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” category.





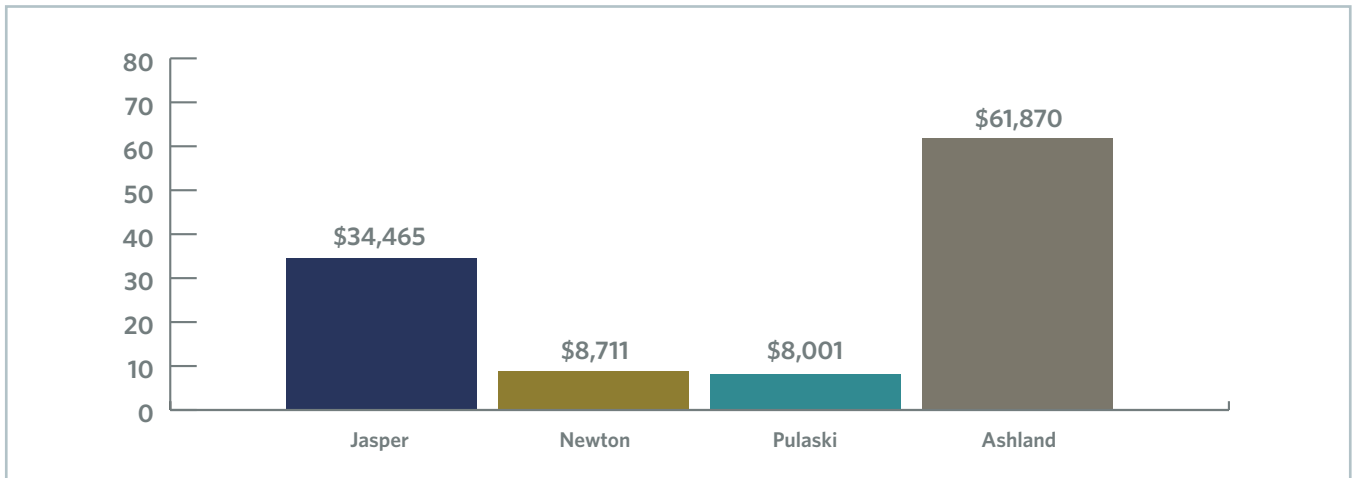
**FIGURE 1.2**

This chart shows the current number of restaurants in Jasper, Newton, and similar county Ashland located in Ohio. We have far fewer offerings than other Midwest communities of similar size and demographic makeup.



**FIGURE 1.3**

This chart depicts the food service sales per capita in each county. While on par with neighboring Pulaski County, we are still far behind other peer communities in the Midwest.



To start, we looked at the number of restaurants in the area in order to quantify the diversity of food options available. Jasper County currently has only 38 restaurants. Most similar counties that we compared it to had well over 70. Newton came in at even fewer with just 24. The diversity of restaurant options is one of the first things that many people consider when evaluating a community. Going out to eat is the primary form of entertainment and social interaction for many people. Even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are still ordering carryout from their favorite places and are flocking en masse to those that are open at smaller capacities. *See figure 1.2*

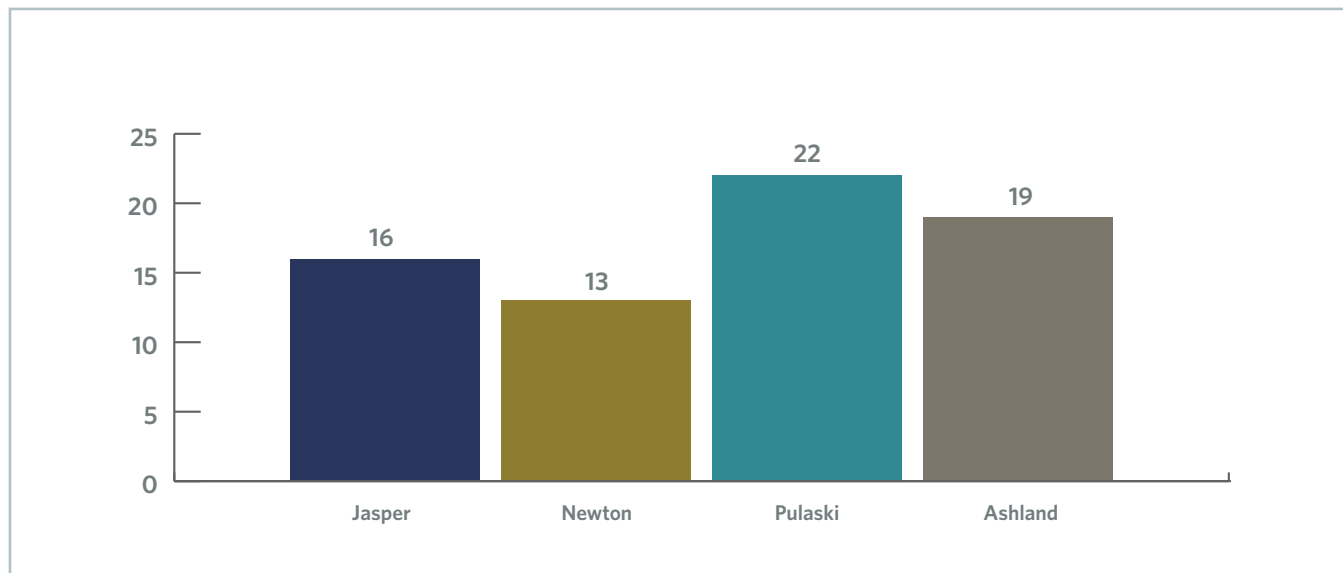
Relating to the number of restaurants, we also wanted to compare the amount of restaurant service sales to other counties. This shows not only how much food is available, but also how much people are going out and purchasing. These numbers are significantly lower than we would want them to be. Jasper County is about 55% of similar Ashland county in Ohio, and Newton is sitting at about 14% of the

sales. Neighbor Pulaski is also not performing well in this area showing that either many are choosing not to eat out, or they feel as though they have to drive multiple counties/ towns over to find restaurants they want to eat at. *See figure 1.3*

Another telling figure that is used when measuring the vibrancy of a community is the number of social associations per 10,000 members of the population. For this statistic, a social association is defined as any organization requiring membership to join. Jasper and Newton counties had 16 and 13, respectively. These numbers are well below other averages of similar counties and significantly below neighboring Pulaski County at 22 associations per 10,000 residents. Organizations such as these help people develop a sense of community and belonging. They also have the added benefit of typically taking a vested interest in the community and will offer to regularly host events and turn out to larger community projects and fundraisers in greater numbers. *See figure 1.4 on the following page.*

**FIGURE 1.4**

This is the number of social associations requiring membership in each county. While somewhat consistent with neighboring and similar counties, we still fall somewhat behind in numbers.



A vibrant community will not only attract new members, but it will also help retain those who grew up here. Later we will go into more detail, but we have come to realize there is a large outbound net migration issue. Kids are growing up, going to college, and not returning to their home communities. They feel as if there is not enough here for them. If there are more opportunities for entertainment, educational programs, and clubs/organizations, many could be incentivized to come back after college and establish roots for their families.

Additionally, we want to make sure that there is always something to do for the residents who live here. They should have plenty of access to trails and gyms where they can lead active lifestyles. There should be plenty of options when it comes to looking for a place to eat. Events should serve a purpose and be planned with the target audience in mind, so they provide meaningful and memorable experiences.

Up next are the 15 storylines that capture the Vibrant Community narrative. These throughlines are the categories that we will use to develop our actionable plan going forward to create a more vibrant and engaging community.



*“The ache for home lives in all of us.”*

— MAYA ANGELOU





## DID YOU KNOW?

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*Mark L. De Motte  
founded the Valparaiso  
University School of Law*

After returning home from heroic service in the Union Army, our town's namesake went on to found and become the first dean of Valparaiso University's School of Law.



# The Vibrant Community Storylines

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## VC.1 Establish Third Places

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Establish and support gathering places that can adequately serve as a “third place” to residents in all communities.

The Brookings Institution lovingly refers to third places as the “living rooms of our communities.” These places offer space to gather, chat, share, and commune and can take a number of forms from coffee shops to cafes to recreation centers. Importantly, though, third places are considered the building blocks of great communities. They bring us together, create parity, and democratize the lived experience in ways that few other institutions can do.

In both Jasper and Newton counties, third places are hard to come by and aren’t diverse or dispersed enough to serve our many small communities. Third places of the past have given way to automation and e-commerce, and adequate replacements haven’t grown to fill the niche. More functional zoning, incentivizing, and better community communications will help us promote third places. As we drive forward our home, we must certainly give it an adequate living room.

## VC.2 Diverse Dining Options

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Attract and retain a diverse and high-quality range of dining options.

Nothing is more central to the creation of a vibrant downtown space than adequate dining and restaurant options. Regardless of community size, shared dining experiences play an important role in building a tighter-knit community, offering a more experiential visit for outsiders and tourists, and creating a cultural center for residents to share experience and trade stories.

At present, both Jasper and Newton counties rank among the bottom 5% of counties in Indiana in terms of restaurant density and lower still in cuisine diversity.

A better future for our communities means attracting, building, and retaining more diverse dining options to support a vibrant community. For this reason, it ranks second in our priorities.

## VC.3 Events Communication

---

Ensure that all local events and activities are communicated in an effective and easy-to-access way.

As technology has taken over, our front porch communities have disappeared and, with them, has gone our ability to communicate amongst our residents. In years past, a tighter social fabric allowed news and events to travel through an informal network with relative ease. Today, that fabric is weakened and stretched; messages get lost and fall away.

Are people more distant? Do they want to be more insular and shut off? The answer is a simple and resounding, “No.” It is incumbent, then, on us to evolve our social fabric to meet their needs. We must develop communication tools and products and leverage the ones we already know are popular to ensure that our methods of communication meet the market demand.

With an improved communications effort, we’ll quickly see our social fabric tighten, our events become more popularized, and a push for more vibrant activities to follow.



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**Living rooms of our community.**

The third place can be a home for the community of a whole



#### **VC.4 Active Lifestyle Opportunity**

Increase the opportunity to engage in individual physical activity and group sports.

Our population suffers from health ailments, obesity, and physical and mental distress. We must generate and highlight opportunities to live a healthy and active lifestyle.

#### **VC.5 Develop Trails and Greenways**

Develop a purposeful set of trails and greenways to connect into surrounding trail systems.

Perhaps our most valuable asset is our beautiful land. We must create opportunities for its exploration, connecting ourselves to trails and greenways from neighbors.

#### **VC.6 Establish Purposeful Festivals**

Establish and support annual festivals unique to each town.

Though it may sound simple, these festivals are indicators of success in our towns and give our communities an opportunity to showcase our assets and wares to one another.

#### **VC.7 Active Lifestyle Technology**

Leverage tools to connect and register active residents and youth with local activities.

In order to deliver on the promise of an active lifestyle, we must find a technological solution that connects our community members to potential activities.

#### **VC.8 Healthy Lifestyle Education**

Develop a community-wide program to encourage healthy lifestyle choices for all ages.

Both mental and physical health are lacking in our education system. As a community, we must meet the challenge by delivering a better education on these topics.

#### **VC.9 Access to Events**

Improve access to local events and activities.

We must create more accessible and consumer-driven events in each of our communities.

#### **VC.10 Access to Clubs**

Improve the amount of and access to community clubs, groups, and meetups.

Community clubs and organizations give our population an outlet for civic-minded energy.

#### **VC.11 Improve Communication with Technology**

Leverage technology and tech literacy to significantly improve communications inside and among towns.

Many of our community challenges can be filed away under “communication problems.” We need to develop a system by which we can better and more efficiently communicate.

#### **VC.12 Diverse Grocery Options**

Develop, incentivize, and maintain adequate diverse grocery options.

Many of our communities are becoming fresh food deserts, with nary a grocery store in range. We need to ensure that we have access to fresh and nutritional foods.

#### **VC.13 Leverage Data for Planning**

Track and assess participation in cultural offerings and use of public facilities for better planning.

We can’t fly blind. We must implement a tool for robust data collection so that we can make informed and efficient decisions about asset planning and building.

#### **VC.14 Cultural Tourism Marketing**

Improve awareness of cultural and community offerings outside of our communities.

Independently, our offerings can’t drive tourism, but taken on a whole, they build a rural lifestyle tourism that sells.

#### **VC.15 Support Local Art**

Create and adequately support an emerging local arts scene at and between communities.

It’s time we highlight our strength in this arena and build community around our passion for arts.

*“Community leadership is the courage, creativity, and capacity to inspire participation, development, and sustainability for strong communities.”*

## NARRATIVE TWO

# Prosperous Community

*Our communities build the capacity to attract, employ, and retain sources of and employers of talent.*

A prosperous community is one in which all its residents have equal opportunity, and incentive, to thrive professionally. In a prosperous community, small businesses are abundant. People both from the area and from afar recognize the counties as a perfect place to set up shop. There are incentives available to help get businesses off the ground. The technology infrastructure is ideal for working either in an office or remotely from home. Innovation thrives. There is a large network of creative and talented professionals to share ideas with, and local entrepreneurial competitions and incentives help them bring those ideas to life. A community this economically abundant is bound to grow as it attracts more professional and driven individuals.

Economic factors are obviously extremely important to a community's development. In order for people to migrate to a community and lay down roots, there has to be ample opportunity to have a good job, make enough money, and be able to grow and develop professionally.

Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is that Jasper and Newton counties are not quite there yet. Our survey revealed that 72% of people were less than "Satisfied" with

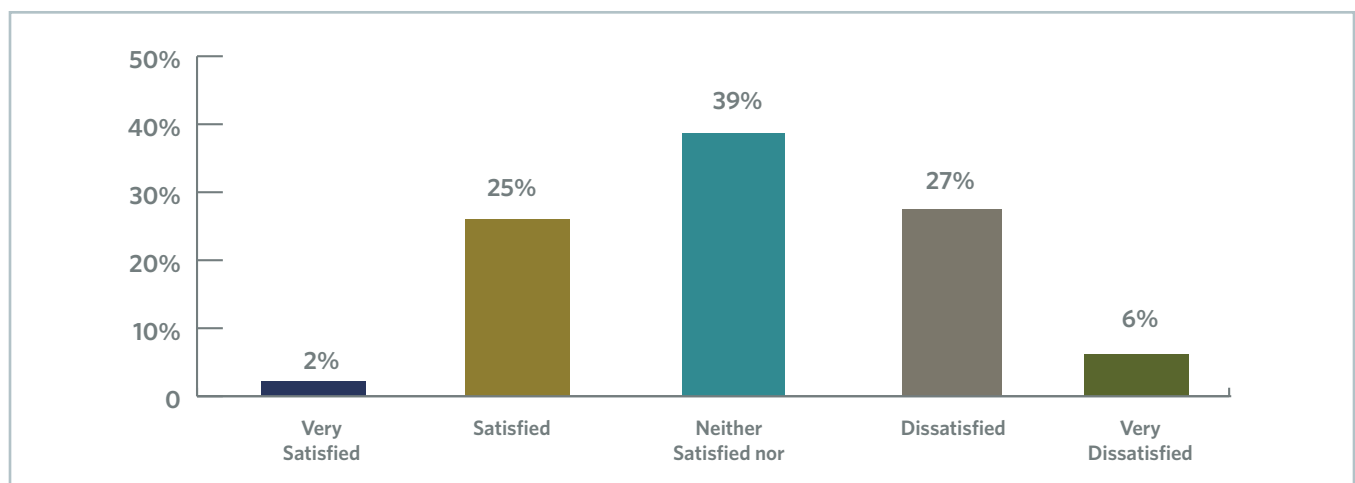
the community's economy, 25% of respondents said they were "Satisfied"; and only 2% of respondents claimed that they were "Very Satisfied." As a follow-up question, we asked which areas in economic development needed leadership attention and people equally expressed a need for the ability to attract business, access to career training/ services, competitive wages, and diversity of employment opportunities. [See figure 2.1](#)

While there are certainly many talented people living and working in Jasper and Newton counties, it is clear that there is an issue with retaining residents and incentivizing people to move into the counties to work. We heard time and time again in our initial research that kids were growing up, going to college, and not coming back. We dug a little deeper and found some hard statistics to support this claim. Jasper County currently ranks 72nd in the state (out of 92) for the net migration rate. Net migration is a figure that compares the number of people moving out of an area with those coming in. People are looking for better opportunities for work outside the county, and we are losing talented individuals.

[See figure 2.2](#)

**FIGURE 2.1**

This chart shows the distribution between the percentage of people who are satisfied or dissatisfied with the economy of the community. The majority of respondents fell into less than satisfied categories with only 2% being "very satisfied."





In our initial interviews with the team and other stakeholders, we also heard a lot about the availability of housing in the area or, more specifically, the lack thereof. We wanted to dig more into the numbers, so we researched statistics showing the availability of housing in each of the counties and some similar ones as well. At the end of 2019, there were just about 1,400 houses vacant and available across Jasper and Newton counties. Our data shows that there are vacancies and houses for sale; however, many of these are decentral-ized or too far from work, food, and schools. [See figure 2.3](#)

All of these things can change and improve drastically with a bit of planning and community follow-through. A prosperous community is one where businesses can thrive. Existing businesses continue to perform well and grow, and new businesses are attracted to the area due to the thriving environment and culture that welcome entrepreneurship

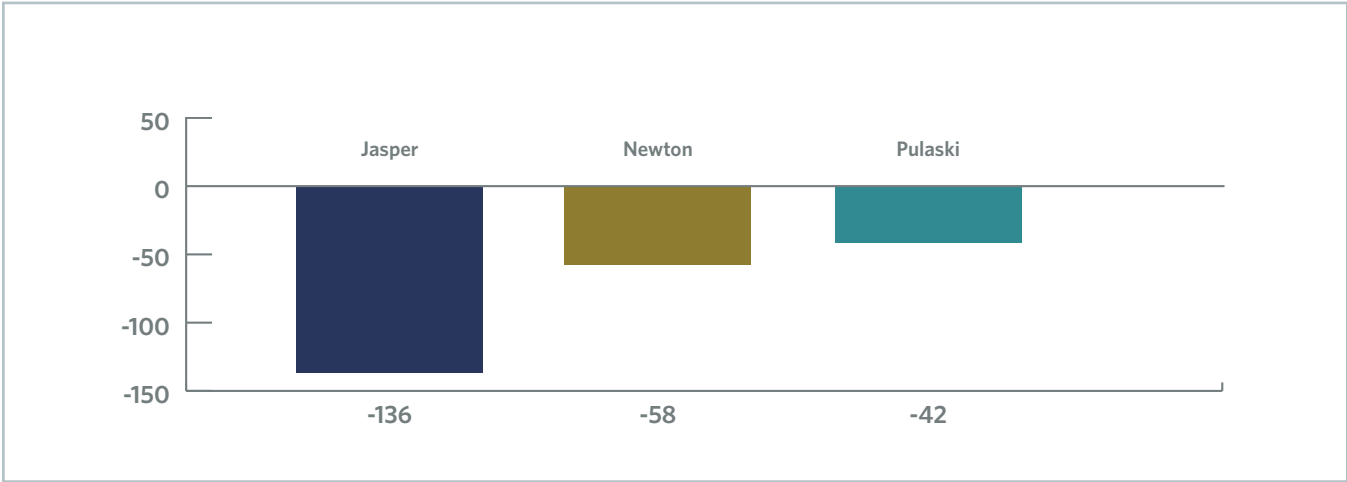
and innovation. In a prosperous community, we also see stu-dents graduating ready to enter the local workforce, armed with the skills necessary to continue on local businesses and innovate to move them forward.

With the addition of new education models and partner-ships with institutions, we will be able to position ourselves as an agritech hub where innovation thrives. This will bring new technology businesses to the area and will greatly improve local farms as they become testing grounds for advances in the field.

Next up are the 15 storylines that we identified for the Prosperous Community narrative and will use to develop our Plot Points and path forward.

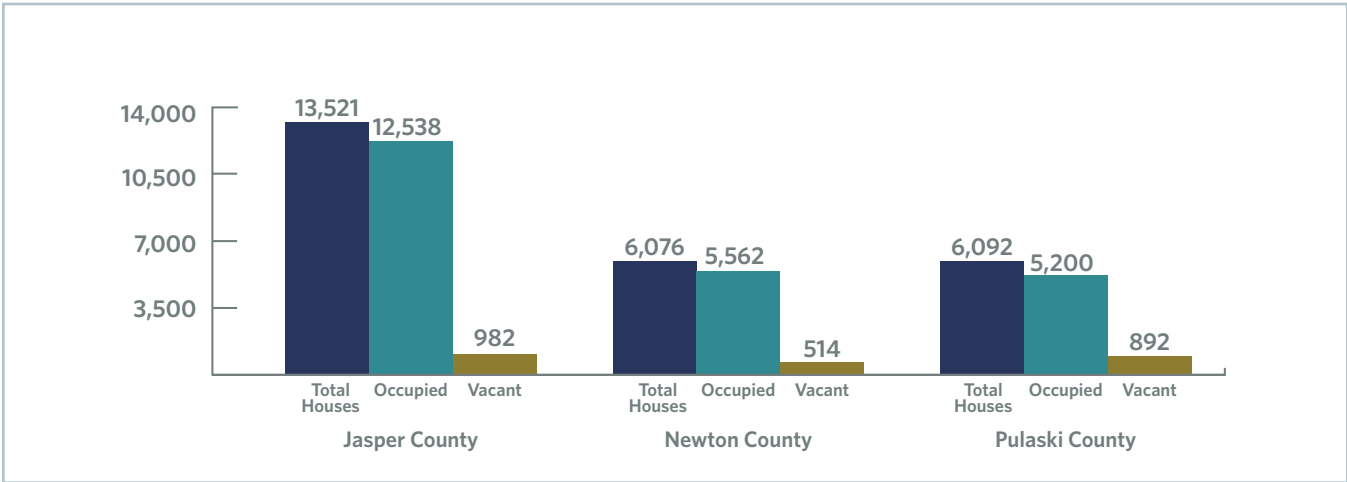
**FIGURE 2.2**

This chart shows the net migration of each of the counties. Net migration is a figure calculated by the number of people coming into an area compared to the number who are leaving. Jasper and Newton counties have some of the lowest net migration rates in the state.



**FIGURE 2.3**

This shows the number of homes along with how many are vacant vs. occupied. While a majority are occupied, there is an overwhelming amount of vacant homes and properties throughout the area.



# Prosperous Community Storylines

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## PC.1 Business Resources

---

New business startups and small agri-businesses are supported by resources.

In an effort to build a prosperous community, we must evolve to meet the changing needs of our local current and prospective businesses. While the future of our counties is likely to be steeped in agriculture and manufacturing, we must compete for and win the next generation of technology in those fields.

Our communities must build an infrastructure that can support our businesses. This infrastructure includes scalable internet technology to ensure that our businesses can compete in the global economy of instant and microtransactions. The infrastructure must also include localized business services beyond just internet access. We must plan our business environment to accommodate the shipping, supplying, and recruitment needs of small businesses and startups. Even more importantly, we must ensure that we provide resources to those entrepreneurs willing to take a risk on our community.

## PC.2 Vocational Training

---

Students are offered more pathways to trade and vocational training.

In order to build up a talent pool and help our young residents self-actualize, we must build diverse and robust pathways that bridge the chasm between local education and local employment opportunities. While we don't intend for every kid in our community to stay and set up their life right here, we want to ensure that they have the opportunity to do just that if they wish to.

We must create programs both inside and outside of the public education system to help students and residents skill up to meet the requirements of local jobs.

Our local employers should be partners in an effort to ensure that job demands are being met, and a healthy and well-trained set of recruits is being groomed to take over the next generation of high-skilled labor in our communities.

## PC.3 Agri-Tourism and Fair Oaks

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A series of agri-tourism experiences are built around Fair Oaks traffic.

Fair Oaks Farms have proven to be a flagship in an ever-expanding trend to build agri-tourism experiences. There is no question that, as lives get busier and more challenging in cities, people are becoming more disconnected and more enthralled with the agrarian lifestyle. Our hearty and heart-filling way of life has gone from passe to popular, and we know the secret: we're doing it just a bit better.

We want to ensure that Fair Oaks is built up and surrounded by a host of tourism experiences that complement and continue the stay of someone spending time here. The agrarian lifestyle expands well beyond the dairy farm, and we've certainly got plenty more to show them about our beautiful home.

We'll develop a plan to create complementary experiences that pull visitors into our towns for a short stay, and convert them for a lifetime.



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### Focus on our strengths

Agriculture is what makes us who we are. An investment in the agriculture industry is an investment in the people of our community.



#### **PC.4 Agri-Tech Positioning**

Communities are positioned to bolster a burgeoning agritech industry.

Without a commitment to technology, we cannot compete in the global agricultural landscape. With resources like Purdue and Fair Oaks, we are primed to be the epicenter for major agricultural technology progress.

#### **PC.5 Leverage Geography**

Businesses leverage proximity to major metros and thoroughfares.

We are positioned between two major hubs of commerce along a superhighway in the crossroads of America. It's time we leverage our geographic position to find success.

#### **PC.6 Technology to Sustain Business**

The community's technology infrastructure can sustain a modern business.

We must invest in a technology infrastructure that provides our businesses with the internet and technology demanded of them in the modern economy.

#### **PC.7 Support for Telecommuters**

The communities support more major metro commuters and telecommuters.

The telecommuting lifestyle should be a focus for our future. With advances in tech, we can draw a new population.

#### **PC.8 Incentivize Business Relocation**

Tax policy and incentives have been evolved to meet the demands of relocating businesses.

We must draw in new businesses as we dedicate ourselves to their support.

#### **PC.9 Encourage Ag-Investment**

Natural resources have been leveraged to create an environment friendly to ag-investment.

Let's take advantage of our primary resources.

#### **PC.10 Local Talent in Agriculture**

Leverage local talent to focus on innovation in the agricultural economy.

With support in education, we can drive change from within.

#### **PC.11 Access to Quality Pre-K**

More parents have access to quality, affordable childcare.

#### **PC.12 Adult Skill-Up Pathways**

Adults have pathways for skilling up and advancing their careers.

Our community members deserve access to relevant continuing education opportunities.

#### **PC.13 Access to Quality Healthcare**

Residents have access to quality, affordable healthcare options.

In order to ensure a prosperous community, we must commit to a healthy one.

#### **PC.14 Youth Community Commitment**

Younger generations feel a sense of commitment to community and career.

#### **PC.15 Government Access and Transparency**

Local government provides open access and is held accountable to community metrics.

*“There are many roads to prosperity, but one must be taken. Inaction leads nowhere.”*

— ROBERT ZOELICK

## NARRATIVE THREE

# Quality Life

*Our communities become a place to live a healthy, active, and fulfilled life for people of all ages and backgrounds.*

When we say “quality life,” we are primarily referring to citizens’ ability to maintain a positive, mentally and physically healthy lifestyle within the infrastructure offered by Jasper and Newton counties. Residents should be easily able (and encouraged) to lead active lifestyles. When looking for a workout, there is a wide selection of gyms or cycling studios. Conversely, if they want to get outside, there is a robust system of trails that go through the local parks where people go for a run or bike ride. To fuel this activity, restaurants in the area should offer healthy, locally sourced, organic foods. Children, from a young age, should learn how to lead healthy lifestyles through education and after-school programs aimed at getting people active.

We all agree that focusing on providing access to quality healthcare and providing opportunities to live healthy

lifestyles is a necessary service that a community should offer to its residents. Health is one of the most important areas of focus to consider when talking about the quality of life in an area. However, in most community plans, it tends to be forgotten or not thoroughly considered. Health goals can all too easily make their way to the backburner.

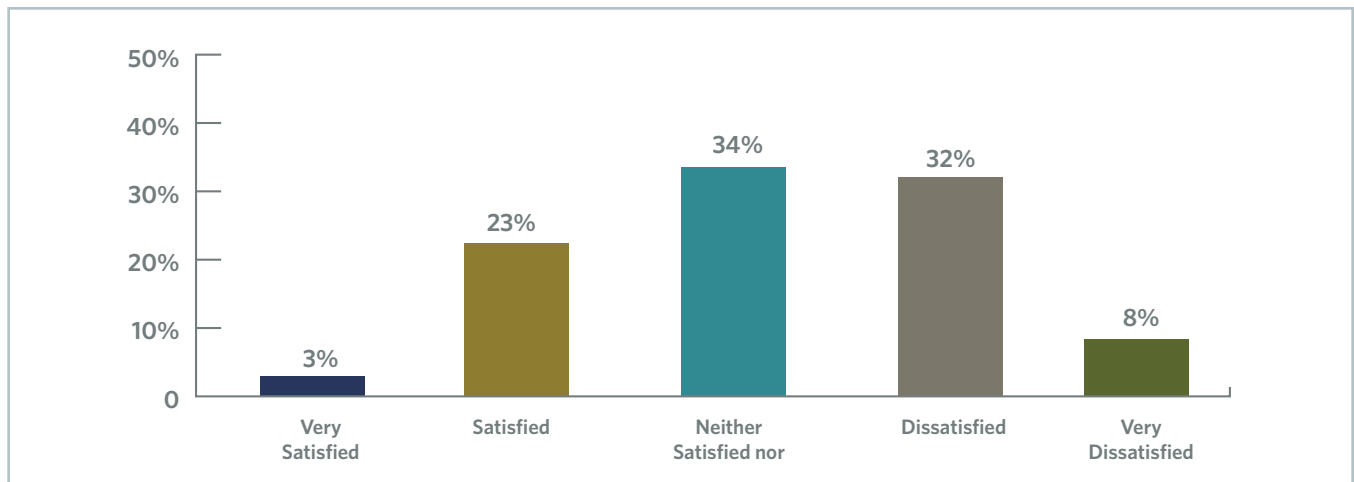
When we surveyed citizens of Jasper and Newton counties, one question was, “How satisfied are you with the community’s healthcare infrastructure?”. A substantial 72% of respondents answered below the “Satisfied” category. 23% claimed they were “Satisfied” with the healthcare infrastructure, and only 3% claimed to be “Very Satisfied.” It is important that people can trust in their community’s health and wellness programs and facilities, so they can feel safe and healthy in that community. *See figure 3.1*





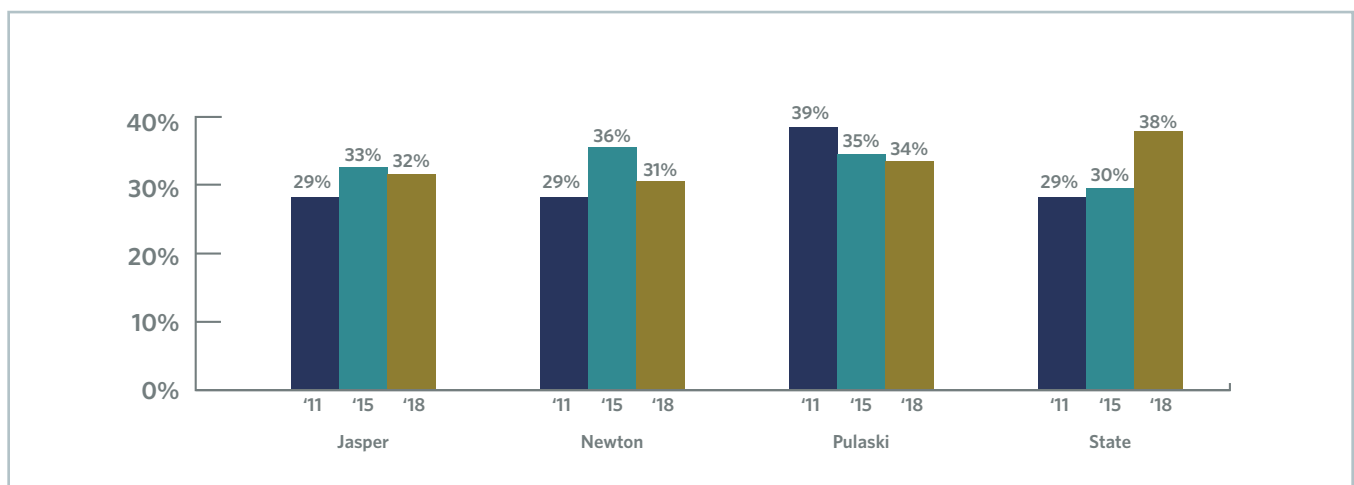
**FIGURE 3.1**

This chart shows the distribution among the percentages of people who are satisfied or dissatisfied with the healthcare offerings.



**FIGURE 3.2**

These are the obesity rates for Jasper, Newton, and Pulaski counties as well as the state averages over the past 9 years.



To feel the pulse on the health of Jasper and Newton counties, we researched several statistics such as obesity and diabetes rates, the percentage of people with health insurance, and how accessible care is. We then compared these statistics to similar counties, state and national averages, and historical data to get a better total picture of where Jasper and Newton counties are ranked amongst peers.

The first concrete stat we wanted to look into was the obesity rate. In city-, county-, state-, and nationwide measurement, the obesity rate is typically used as a metric for poor diet and limited physical health activity and opportunities. Obesity can also increase the risks of several other health conditions. While Jasper and Newton counties are currently sitting around 32% (which is in line with state averages),

there is still plenty of room for improvement. We see Jasper and Newton counties as an exemplary community that should perform well in this statistic and others. [See figure 3.2](#)

Another KPI for measuring the health of a community is the diabetes rate. This measurement is used when analyzing a community as an indicator of access to and consumption of healthy food along with physical activity. Jasper and Newton counties both have a diabetes rate of 12%, which is 1% higher than the state average and 2.6% higher than the national average.

A newer statistic that has been measured is the physical inactivity rate. [See figure 3.3 on the following page.](#)

Physical inactivity is the percentage of adults in a community over age 20 that report they have no physical activity on an average day. This can be used in communities to measure how active their citizens are but also of the extent to which a community provides quality opportunities to be active. Jasper and Newton counties are both hovering around 30%. This statistic is particularly concerning because not only is it higher than the state average rate, but it also grew from 2015-2019 while it continues to fall at the state and the national level. *See figure 3.4*

With increased risks for health comes an increased need for access to health professionals. A common statistic to show the ease of access is the physician to patient ratio. Jasper County is near the state average at 1,500:1; however, Newton County has one of the lowest ratios in the state at 14,000:1 (shown in green on the chart). This is a need that came up in several conversations with residents as we conducted our initial research. People feel as though there is not enough diversity in healthcare as well as access to healthcare without having to drive long distances. *See figure 3.5*

While these factors are currently not where we would like them to be, they can be easily improved through implementing meaningful changes, increasing education, and bringing in more affordable and accessible care.

Residents of Jasper and Newton counties should have the opportunity to live their best quality of life within the infrastructure of the area and without having to drive great distances or forfeit time to receive care. They should have access to affordable, convenient healthcare that covers every potential problem they may have. There should also be programs in place to make sure that everyone is educated and knows how to live a healthy and active lifestyle and why it is so important. All these elements are necessary to preserve the long-term health of a community and to attract new members who want to be taken care of and be able to lead happy and healthy lives.

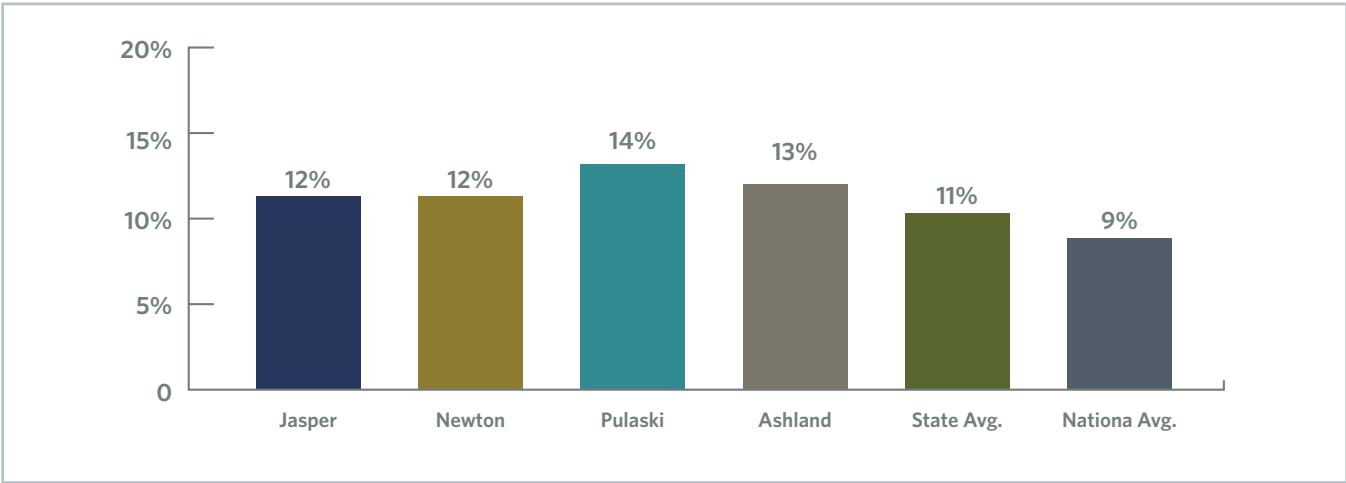
Up next, the 15 storylines that fall under the Quality Life narrative.





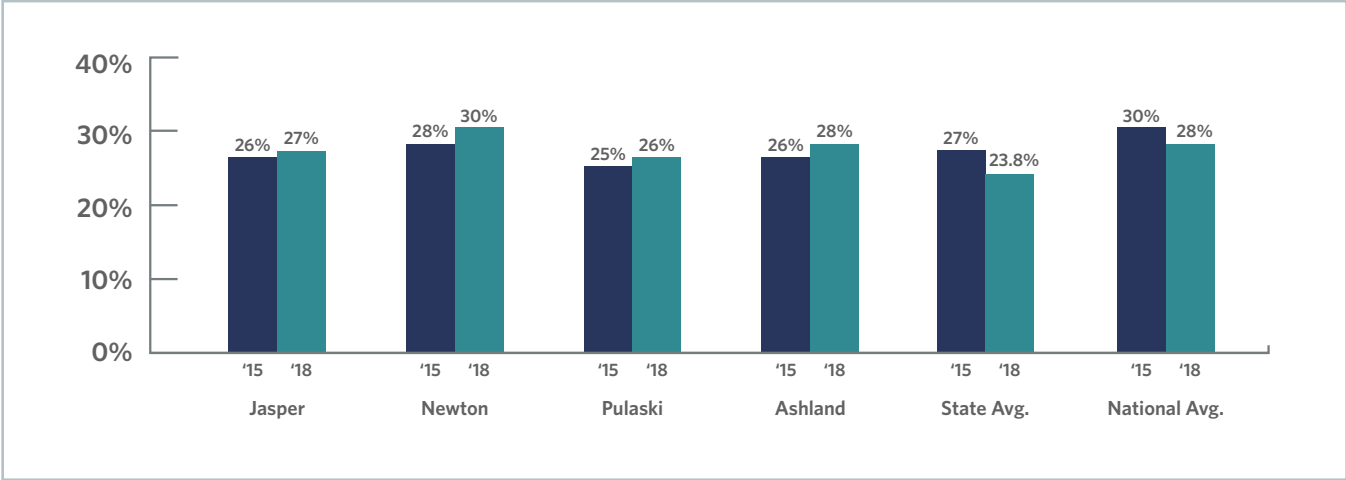
**FIGURE 3.3**

This shows the rate of diabetes in our counties compared to neighboring communities and the state and national averages.



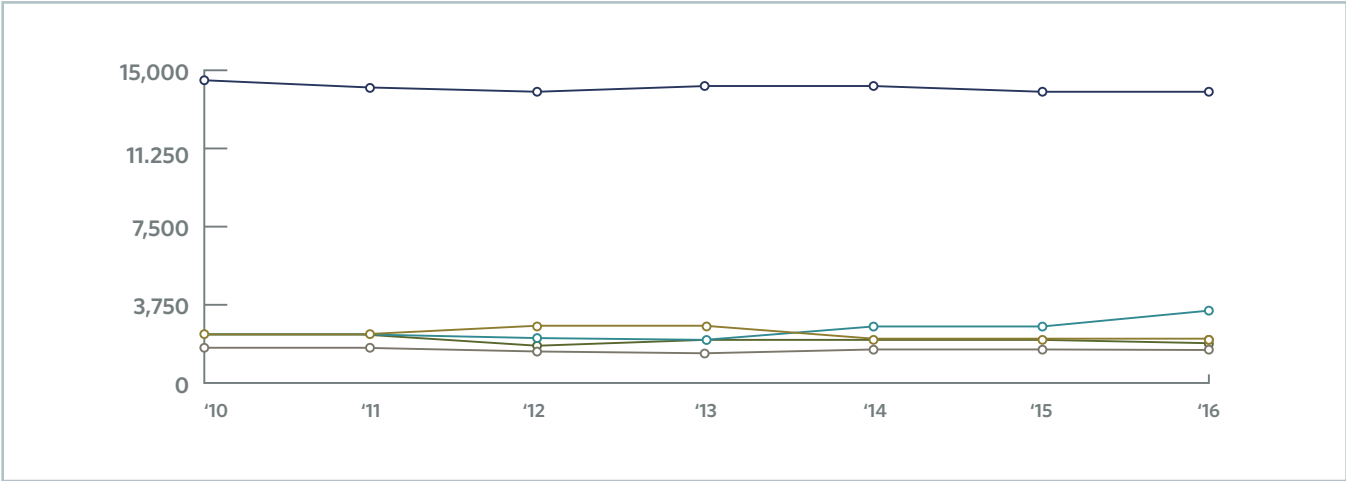
**FIGURE 3.4**

The physical inactivity rate is the percentage of adults in a community over the age of 20 that have no physical activity in an average day. This rate has been increasing over the past few years.



**FIGURE 3.5**

This graph shows the physician to patient ratio for Jasper and Newton counties as well as the state average. The top line is Newton County with a ratio of over 14,000:1. The other counties represented are Jasper, Pulaski, and Ashland.



# Quality Life Storylines

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## QL.1 Mental Health Education and Opportunity

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Increase understanding of mental wellness and the opportunity to engage in therapeutic activity.

Mental healthcare is one of the most challenging parts of any modern community. It escapes the auspices of many modern healthcare infrastructures, but it remains crucially important (indeed, often an indicator of whole health) to the health of a community writ large.

One of the most telling indicators of mental health in a community is its access to education regarding mental health. Our community must commit to this sort of educational effort in order to ensure the long term well-being of our people.

At the same time, with better-educated people, we must ensure that access to mental healthcare is open to any and all citizens of both Jasper and Newton Counties.

## QL.2 Mental Health Infrastructure

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Build an infrastructure to give residents timely access to care for acute, chronic, and mild mental health issues.

At present, mental healthcare resources are scarce at best, totally absent at worst. Jasper and Newton counties need a commitment to improved infrastructure in mental healthcare to ensure that citizens have access to quality care options at rates they can afford.

Our citizens generally lack any knowledge about how and where to seek help for mental ailments, both chronic and acute. It's no wonder why: there simply aren't (in many cases) any quality options available. We must commit to bringing in a more diverse network of mental healthcare resources that includes everything from a fully committed and smart community mental health center, to better school-based resources, to a more fecund network of localized private practices in the field of mental health.

But our commitment must also extend beyond traditional means and ensure that our communities have access to great talent via telemedicine.

## QL.3 Access to Urgent Care

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Ensure urgent care facilities are available within 30-minutes of every resident.

Modern medicine can largely be handled with a firm commitment to improved technology and mental health resources. But, one gaping hole remains in the infrastructure of Jasper and Newton county: urgent care facilities. These facilities bridge the gaps in an improved healthcare infrastructure by providing emergency medical care ranging from obstetrics to trauma wounds to overdoses.

We must be steadfast in our commitment to recruiting a hospital network to locate their urgent care facilities to multiple communities in our counties. This may likely involve multiple medical networks from various locations but will ensure that local citizens never have to travel further than 30 minutes by car to receive needed emergency medical treatment when it's most needed.



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### There's no place like home

We will provide our community members with the means to lead a healthy, happy, and quality life.

#### QL.4 Healthcare via Technology

Leverage technology and tech literacy to significantly broaden access to primary mental and physical healthcare.

Telemedicine can and will provide improved access to healthcare services badly needed by our communities.

#### QL.5 Nutrition Education and Access

Drastically improve education about and access to affordable, nutritious eating options.

We must improve how our communities eat, how they find and purchase their food, and how they learn about nutrition.

#### QL.6 Healthcare Transportation

Ensure that residents are given adequate options for transportation to and from health and health-related activities.

We must ensure that everyone can make their way to physical doctor offices when needed.

#### QL.7 Active Lifestyle Education

Increase understanding of physical health and the opportunity to engage in physical activity.

Our residents should be committed to an active lifestyle.

#### QL.8 Substance Abuse Care

Ensure access to quality, affordable, and effective care for those suffering from substance use disorders.

Our residents should be given rehabilitative and educational care regarding substance use disorders.

#### QL.9 Pre- and Post-Natal Care

Ensure that expecting mothers receive appropriate education about and access to pre- and postnatal nutrition and care.

#### QL.10 Purpose for Seniors

Give seniors and retired adults a sense of purpose and community.

For instance, we can help pair active adults with local organizations and the like.

#### QL.11 Active Lifestyle Infrastructure

Improve communication about and access to healthy activities for all ages.

Communication is key to ensuring participation in group activities in any community.

#### QL.12 Active Lifestyle Technology

Develop a community-wide program to encourage healthy lifestyle choices for all ages.

Leveraging technology, we can make an impact on communication gaps in and around maintaining an active life.

#### QL.13 Substance Abuse Prevention

Develop educational programming to help quell the problem of substance abuse.

A commitment to real-world and relatable education is important in helping to fight substance abuse.

#### QL.14 Year-Round Fitness Centers

Improve access to and use of year-round fitness and activity centers.

We'll commit to creating year-round centers for our citizens to be active and commit to health.

#### QL.15 Chronic Disease Management

Provide access to tools and education about chronic disease management for adults with chronic health conditions.

*“The power of a community to create health is far greater than any physician, clinic, or hospital.”*

— MARK HYMAN



## NARRATIVE FOUR

# Kids and Families

*Our communities become great places to build a family, raise and educate our children, and establish roots.*

Jasper and Newton counties could be the perfect option when young professionals are looking for a place to lay down roots and start a family. There is plenty of support for new parents with a robust and accessible childcare system that has spots available for every single kid. We see a community where education thrives. Parents have their choice of 4-star public schools that, due to the rapid growth of the community, have attracted several talented teachers from across the nation. They also have some non-traditional options. Parents could perhaps send their kids to a potential microschool that is funded through a new initiative at Purdue, teaches the principles of agritech innovation, and then sets students up to start their own businesses. Jasper and Newton counties are primed and ready for innovation and to become an exemplary educational community.

To attract and retain talented individuals, the community must first be an inviting place to raise or start a family. People who are looking for an area to relocate to want to know first and foremost that their children will be taken care of and have opportunities to thrive. The most important set of performance indicators of how family-friendly a community is primarily based on education. Parents will inevitably be more attracted to a community that has a thriving education

system, plenty of opportunities for early childcare, and a robust offering of after-school activities and programs. Conversely, it could be off-putting if the education systems are seen as lacking in an area, especially when the closest other options are a long drive away.

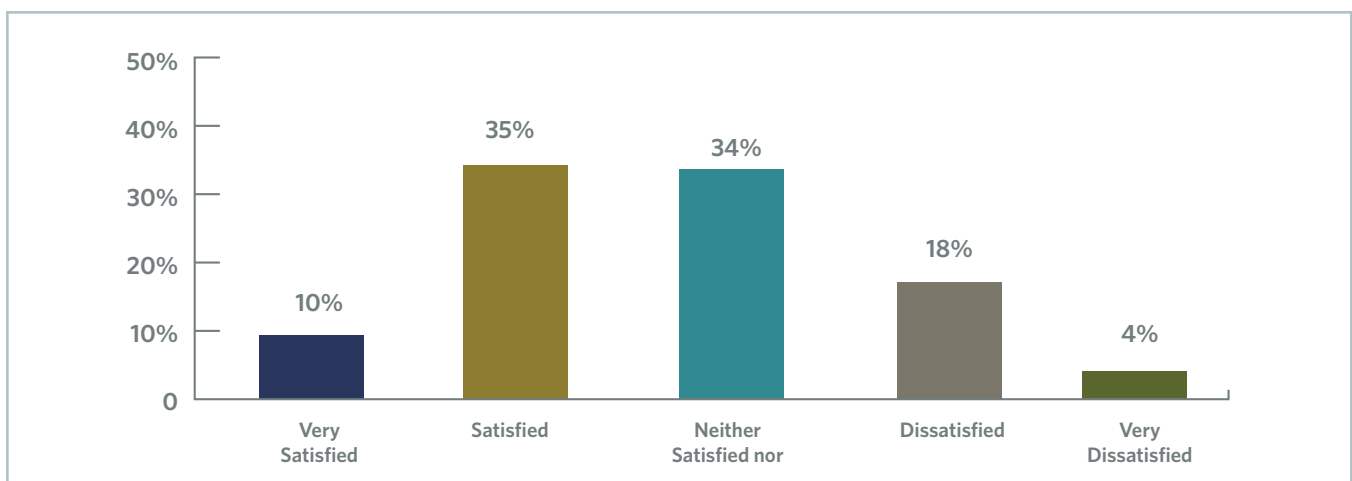
To start off our research into education in Jasper and Newton counties, we surveyed the greater population of the area to see how it was perceived amongst residents. In response to our survey, 56% reported being “Not Satisfied or Dissatisfied,” “Dissatisfied,” or “Very Dissatisfied” with the community’s educational structure. Additionally, when asked to rank the topics from most important to least important that need to be most addressed in this region; education was the highest-ranked category with 30% of respondents placing it at #1. *See figure 4.1*

While some of these perceptions can be adjusted through positive communications and messaging, others are ultimately rooted in reality and need to be addressed. To identify problem areas, we started by looking at some key performance indicators for early childhood care and education.

To get a picture of the quality and success rates of secondary education, we started with high school graduation rates.

**FIGURE 4.1**

This chart shows the distribution among the percentages of people who are satisfied or dissatisfied with the education system in Jasper and Newton counties.



Whenever someone wants to look into the education system of an area, usually the first stat they gravitate towards is the graduation rate. While this can be somewhat telling of how successful a high school is, it definitely does not provide the full picture. In the case of Jasper County, the graduation rate was on par with nearby and similar counties and significantly above the state and national average. For Newton County, it was lagging slightly behind back in 2011 but has since caught up and is in line with the mean. [See figure 4.2](#)

The first stat that we looked at was the number of pre-K slots available per 100 children. The ages of 0 to 5 (right before kindergarten) are extremely important in a child’s life. The amount of pre-K slots available per 100 children is extremely low compared to state and national averages, as well as neighboring counties. To put it in perspective, according to the most recent census information in Jasper County, there were roughly 1,913 kids under the age of 5 and only

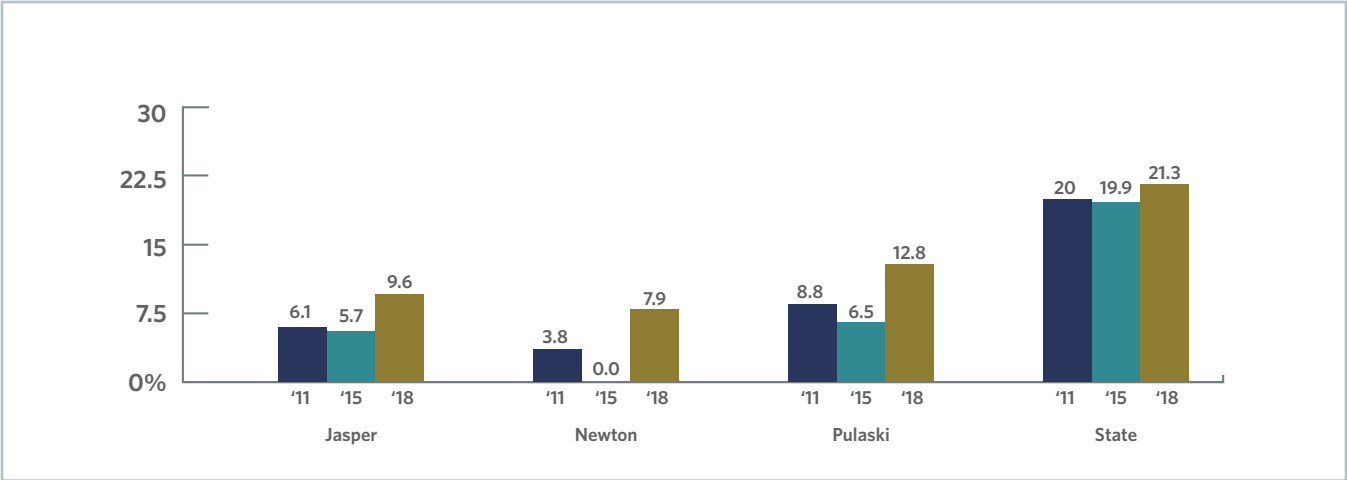
180 available pre-K slots for them to fill. In Newton County, there were 755 kids for only 60 available slots.

These are the most formative years of development, and it’s paramount that they are cared for and given ample opportunities to grow both cognitively and socially. A thriving community needs to have the infrastructure in place for parents to send their children to get a quality early-childhood education. As we looked at the data, we noticed that throughout the past 10 years, the number of slots available in Jasper and Newton counties has been significantly below both the state and county averages. [See figure 4.3](#)

We also looked into the percentage of residents of the counties that completed high school and college. While high school graduation rates were pretty on par with peer communities and the rest of the nation, the percentage of residents with a college degree was not. In Jasper County,

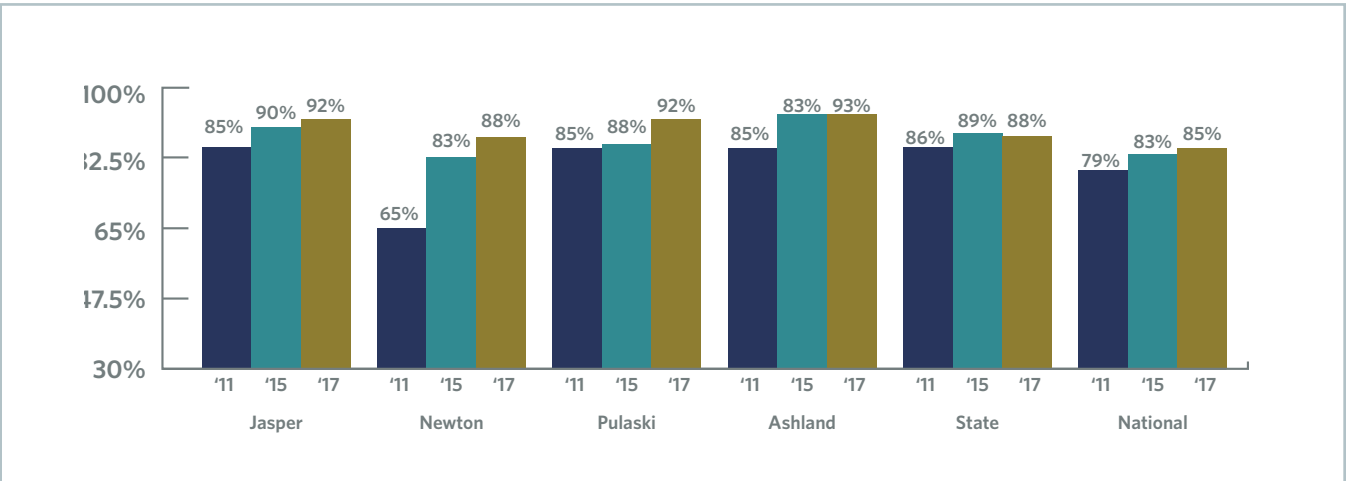
**FIGURE 4.2**

This shows the number of pre-K or childcare slots available per 100 children over the past 9 years.



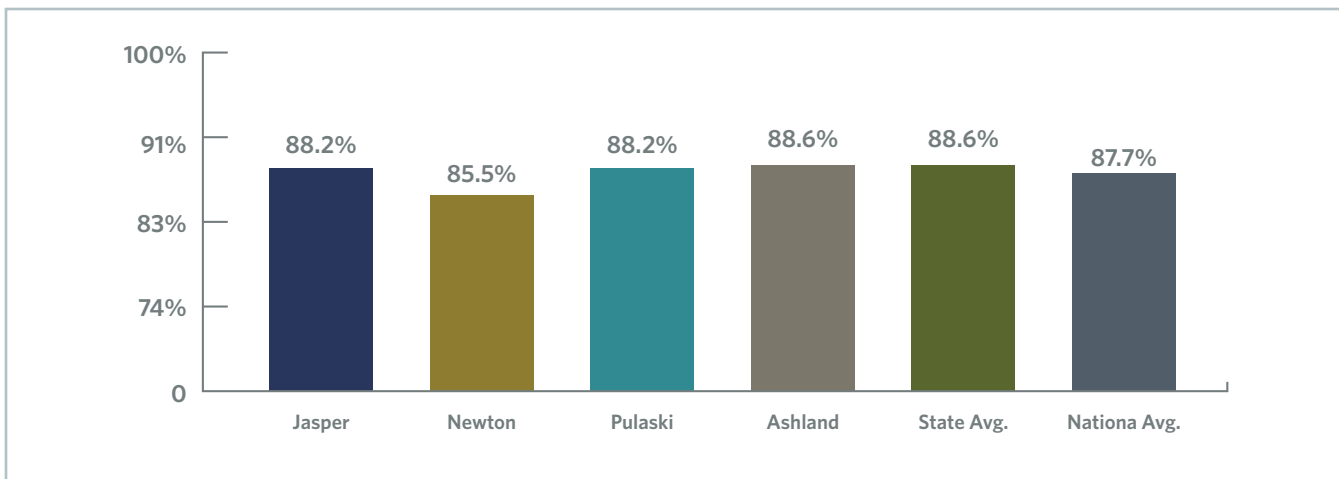
**FIGURE 4.3**

These are the high school graduation rates by county and compared to the state and national averages.



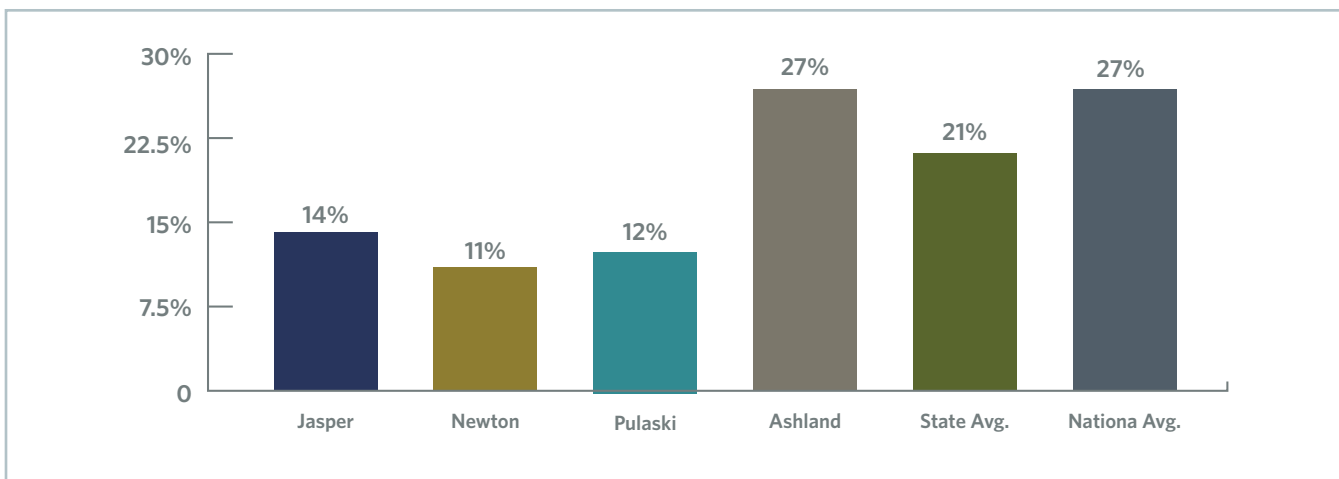
**FIGURE 4.4**

This graph shows the percentage of residents in the county who have completed a high school level education.



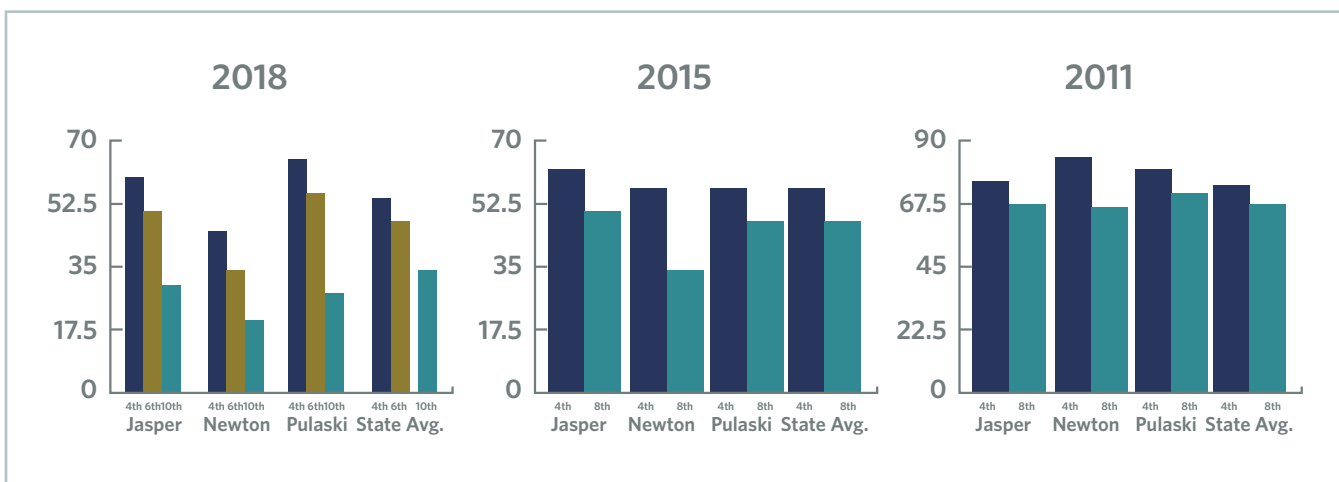
**FIGURE 4.5**

This shows the percentage of residents who have received at least a Bachelor's degree or higher.



**FIGURE 4.6**

These are the combined math and reading ISTEP scores for the 4th, 8th, and 10th grades by county for the past 9 years.





the percentage of residents with a college degree is only 14%, which is slightly higher than in Newton County at 11%. Peer communities we looked at were closer to 27%, which is also on par with the national average. The numbers tell a story of people graduating from high school, performing well, going off to college, but then not returning to the communities they were raised in. Retaining these individuals and incentivizing them to come back is a vital step towards improving the community. *See figure 4.4*

To see how our students were performing, we looked at ISTEP scores throughout the past 10 years. We wanted to get a picture of how we matched up with nearby counties as well as the state average. The ISTEP test is given in the 4th and 8th grades, and for 2018 there is data for the 10th grade (sophomore year) as well. We also wanted to compare several years to see if scores were improving, decreasing, or remaining the same.

The good news is that scores have been fairly consistent with both peer counties and the state averages over the past 10 years. The main area we would like to see improvement in, however, is 10th grade. In 2018 the 10th-grade pass rate was about 4% lower in Jasper and 13% lower in Newton than

the state average. We will continue to monitor those scores as we begin to implement some of the education-related goals that will be detailed later in this plan.

*See figures 4.5 and 4.6*

While many performance indicators falling under the Kids and Families narrative are where we want them to be (graduation rates, test scores, etc.), there are certainly areas for improvement such as early childhood education, programs for young children, and more incentives for college graduates to return to the area. We will get into these goals and what types of impact they will make in our Plot Points section.

Attracting new families (and providing for those currently living here) is a necessary prerequisite to growth. The way to do that is to make Jasper and Newton counties an inviting place to live with the infrastructure for parents to ensure the success of their children. This starts with providing quality pre-K and extends up to an innovative and effective high school experience primed to place students in local careers.

Let's look at the 15 storylines that shape the Kids and Families narrative.



# Kids and Families Storylines

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## KF.1 Early Education Access

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More children have access to quality, affordable early childhood education.

In order for our community to prosper and our people to thrive, we must lay out an infrastructure that ensures that such thriving can happen and dismantles those systemic obstacles in our path. No obstacle is greater than that of early education, which predicts success in the long term for both the student and the parent.

With quality early childhood education in place, our kids can see educational parity, our schools can reduce the burden placed on them by early achievement gaps, and our families can thrive economically by finding adequate solutions to allow for a dual-income household. Creating access to early education is akin to creating access to long term wealth, academic achievement, and an improved community economic system.

## KF.2 Improve Technology Infrastructure

---

Enhance the community's technology infrastructure.

Rural life is not without its challenges. None is more acute today than a technological infrastructure that lags well behind that of our more population-dense neighbors and peers. Our counties rank among the lowest 10% in all of Indiana for connectivity, and that number only worsens when connectivity is measured by a more realistic internet bandwidth requirement.

Improving this infrastructure is definitely not an easy task, but it isn't the same challenge it was just a few years ago. As technology advances, we see that wireless connectivity can and will compete with wired, and our need for investment in infrastructure is significantly declining as technology improves.

With the technological infrastructure in place, we resolve many challenges beset upon our community, ranging from healthcare to mental health to education to joblessness. Just a handful of improvements can resolve a host of problems.

## KF.3 Sense of Connection

---

Residents feel connected to their town and to one another.

As our community has evolved over time, so too the way we create community. Local church events and front-porch conversations aren't gone, but they don't drive our community as much as they did in the past. Participation in civic groups and organizations is lower than it has been historically. It's time we reinvest our community in our community.

We'll focus on building on-ramps to community participation, encouraging civic-mindedness, and making more transparent and regular communications about the goings-on here in Jasper and Newton counties.

With a real focus on communication and coordination, we will tighten the knit of the fabric of these communities and rebuild a sense of home.



---

### An infrastructure of community

Answering just a few challenges like technology, communication, and education will dramatically impact family life in Jasper and Newton counties.

#### *KF.4 Active Lifestyle Education*

Residents have an increased understanding of physical health and the opportunity to engage in physical activity.

Ensure that all community members have equal access to programs and activities for active living.

#### *KF.5 Healthcare Options*

Residents have access to quality, affordable healthcare options.

We must create a diverse set of healthcare options available to all residents in our communities.

#### *KF.6 Diverse Educational Pathways*

Create a landscape of diverse educational pathways for students.

We need to partner with curricula providers to create educational pathways for kids of all interests and abilities.

#### *KF.7 Community Centers*

Residents have a gathering and recreation facility for community needs and after-school activities.

We'll build a series of facilities for our active families.

#### *KF.8 Mental Health Education and Opportunity*

Residents have an increased understanding of mental wellness and the opportunity to engage in therapeutic activity.

We invest in mental health education in and outside of local schools and educational organizations.

#### *KF.9 Quality Education*

Students have access to higher quality education.

We commit ourselves to improving the diversity and quality of our educational programs.

#### *KF.10 Educate for Jobs*

Student education is aligned with the needs of the local employment market.

We need to band together with local businesses and nonprofits to offer a bridge from education to local job markets.

#### *KF.11 Develop Culture*

Residents enjoy a rich landscape of cultural events and experiences.

We must work with local communities to develop events based around vibrant local cultures.

#### *KF.12 Diverse Food & Grocery*

Residents have diverse food and grocery options available.

Dollar stores cannot provide everything. We must commit to a diverse offering of groceries and food.

#### *KF.13 Diverse Educational Program*

Area students have access to broad and diverse educational curricula.

We need to partner with providers to diversify educational programs.

#### *KF.14 Non-Traditional Support*

Non-traditional families have the support needed to be successful in the community.

#### *KF.15 Single-Parent Support*

Single-parent families have the support needed to be successful in the community.

*“Education is an ornament in prosperity and refuge in adversity.”*

— ARISTOTLE



# *The Plot Points*

The tangible action items, rooted in research, that bring the plan to life.



We started out with the big picture when we discussed the key narratives that any community should consider when planning for growth. We then narrowed our focus slightly and broke those narratives down into storylines that are unique to Jasper and Newton counties and the problems they are facing today. However, now is the time to get granular and take all of that research, testing, and thinking to put together a tangible and actionable path forward.

These are what we call the plot points. We’ve come up with 42 points that will put Jasper and Newton counties on the path to becoming a vibrant and prosperous community that is primed and ready for families to live the quality life they desire.

The plot points vary greatly in terms of size of the project, timeline, funding, etc. To help keep this organized and consider the investment, each point will be accompanied by a table that breaks down four characteristics: opportunity, timeline, impact, and cost.

Opportunity refers to whether this point is meant to improve the quality of the community, attract new members, or lead the way for communities everywhere and become a city on a hill. Timeline is broken down into three buckets of 1-2 years, 3-6 years, and 7+ years. This covers your short, medium, or long term goals. The impact can either be direct or indirect. A direct impact is something that creates a clear

and measurable change in the lives of people in the community. An indirect impact, on the other hand, is something that could potentially affect other goals or make it easier for people to improve their quality of life themselves. Lastly, with all goals, you must consider the cost. For the purposes of this project, we simply broke it down into high-, medium-, and low-cost options.

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low

Without further ado, it’s time for the part you have all been waiting for; let’s dive into some actionable steps to move Jasper and Newton counties forward!

# *A Solution for Early Childhood Education*

Storylines Affected: KF.1, KF.9, KF.13, KF.15, QL.9, PL.1

## THE DESCRIPTION

To meet the demand for early childhood education in Jasper County, we propose developing a non-profit education center. This center, which we propose to call “Appleseed Childhood Education”, will provide high-quality care and education for children 5 years of age and younger, increasing access to education for all.

In order to meet this need, we’ve identified the initial early partners who are willing to assist our organization: Right Steps CDC, Goodland Early Learning Center, Growing Patch Learning Center, Franciscan Health. Additionally, we’ve identified a handful of organizations and political bodies to assist with funding. These are: Jasper Newton Foundation, City of Rensselaer, Jasper County, Corporations.

## HOW WE’LL MEASURE IMPACT

Our annual assessments will be focused on the number of slots utilized per age group each year. We also expect to see a Child Care and Development Fund reimbursement rate increase year over year.

## THE OUTCOMES

Through the development of Appleseed Childhood Education, and with the support of our partners and funders, we will be able to provide access to quality, affordable childhood education for those aged 5 and younger. We’ll also be able to meet a vital need in our community for single-parent family support by providing childcare, more single-parents will be able to be gainfully employed.

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*“Education is not  
preparation for life;  
education is life itself.”*

— JOHN DEWEY



<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3–6 Years	1–2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Education



Children

# *Staddon Field Foundation Park Upgrades*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.4, VC.9, QL.7, QL.10, QL.11, PC.5,  
KF.3, KF.4, KF.7, KF.11

## THE DESCRIPTION

Staddon Field has been a pillar of the parks in Rensselaer. Many children and families have known it as a centerpiece of some of their defining years. But with time, it's become necessary to upgrade Staddon to meet the needs of all populations and to maintain its role in the lives of our community.

To that end, we propose the following upgrades and enhancements to Staddon Field:

- New playing surface
- New foul poles
- Convert existing announcer stands into concessions
- Upgrade current restrooms
- Create an ADA-accessible restroom & seating area

To achieve this, we'll be partnering with a handful of organizations including RBI, City of Rensselaer, and the Rensselaer Parks Department. We hope to secure funding through Jasper Newton Foundation, City of Rensselaer, RBI, IHCD Patronicity, and Rensselaer Parks Department.

## HOW WE'LL MEASURE IMPACT

To measure the effectiveness of this investment, we expect increased year-on-year games to increase, concession sales to rise, and a greater satisfaction with the community's recreational offerings.

## THE OUTCOMES

With the upgrades and enhancements in place, we expect to see an increased attendance from senior citizens and mobility challenged individuals. As RBI is able to generate more revenue from concessions, we expect to see a lower participation cost for the community to engage in activities. We also expect to see more events held at the park, resulting from both the enhancements and lower cost. Lastly, we look to the future wherein a Foundation Park is developed as a "third place" for gatherings and community events.

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*"Take care of things, and they  
will take care of you."*

— SHUNRYU SUZUKI

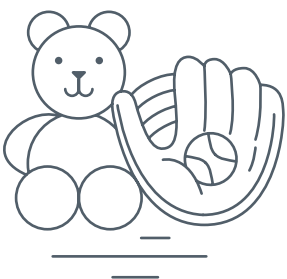
<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3–6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Infrastructure



Children



# *Food Pantry Meat Supplement*

Storylines Affected: KF.12, PC.10, QL.5

## THE DESCRIPTION

At the foundation of the needs that we have, physiological needs are the most crucial. And yet, we've seen an increase in our communities of families lacking access to basic supplementation that is so important for developing and sustaining healthy individuals. As inflation has further increased food costs for the average home, access is only becoming a greater issue. It is for this reason that we propose LEAP - Local Food Meets Local Needs.

Working with Jasper Newton Foundation, NCEDC, and local producers, LEAP will ensure the needs of the most in need in our communities are met. Funding will come from Jasper Newton Foundation, LEAP, and other local producers.

## HOW WE'LL MEASURE IMPACT

Our assessment of impact will be the pounds of meat donated and the number of food pantries and families that are served by the partnership.

## THE OUTCOMES

With the partnership achieving its goals to feed the most in need in our communities, we expect to see improved access to nutritious protein options, improved diversity in food options available to the community, and would like to see expanded opportunities for local agriculture resource partnerships.

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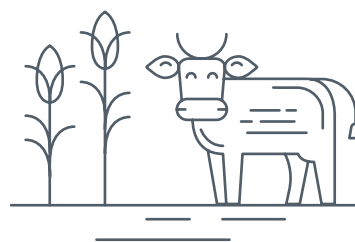
*“Good food is the foundation  
of genuine happiness.”*

— AUGUSTE ESCOFFIER

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Agriculture

# *Increase Mental Health Resources in Schools*

Storylines Affected: QL.1, QL.7, QL.13, and QL.15

## **THE DESCRIPTION**

Mental Health is one of the most challenging parts of any modern community. It escapes the auspices of many health-care infrastructures, but it remains crucially important to the health of the community at large. One of the most telling indicators of mental health in a community is its access to education regarding mental health.

A local Youth Mental Health Summit survey revealed that youth cited barriers to asking for help as being fear of using school counselors because of difficulty of scheduling or being taken seriously, embarrassment, lack of parental help, and lack of resources. To help address these barriers, we hired Jaff Yalden, a professional speaker who addressed three area high schools, teachers, and parents and provided everyday guidance and coping skills. Resources to seek help were gathered from all three schools and have been housed on the Jasper Newton Foundation webpage.

## **HOW WE'LL MEASURE IMPACT**

-Feedback from school counselors

-Tracking on JNF resource page (via analytics)

## **THE OUTCOMES**

Over 2,000 students and staff will receive professional mental health education with increased awareness of coping skills and community resources.

---

*We need to ensure that our kids have access to preventative mental healthcare.*



Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

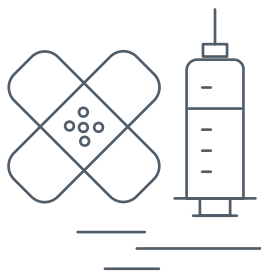
Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Health



Children



Education

# *Bring Together Central Indiana*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.2, VC.7, PC.3, PC.4, PC.10, PC.14, PC.15, QL.5, and KF.12

## THE DESCRIPTION

Identify and develop partnership that could support the long-term sustainability and growth of businesses and the regional economy through an enhanced focus on agricultural development. Self-selected regions will analyze data in an effort to discover their major agricultural assets and work to attract value-added agriculture – agribusiness and food processing facilities and their connected supply chains – that fit with the Region’s capacity, vision, and needs.

## HOW WE’LL MEASURE IMPACT

- Increase the number of local growers
- Increased access to local food.
- Increased growth of related business.

## THE OUTCOMES

- Strengthening regional food systems.
- Grow and connect the regional food supply chain.
- Developing an agricultural workforce.
- Streamline regulation around zoning and permitting

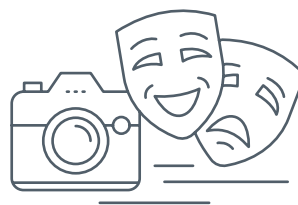
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*Partner with surrounding rural communities to develop a collective.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Culture



# *Create a Community Podcast*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.9, VC.11, VC.14, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

We will create and produce a podcast for residents of Jasper and Newton counties. Each episode will be professionally produced for quality and will be made available on several platforms including standard channels for podcasts.

The original hosts of the podcast will be Brienne Hooker (President of the Jasper Newton Foundation) and Stephen Eastridge (Director of Economic Development for Jasper County). Throughout the year, they will have segments discussing what's going on in Jasper and Newton counties, will have guests from the area talking about different events or news, projects announcements and conversations about rural issues. The name of the podcast is Roots and Graffiti.

## HOW WE'LL MEASURE IMPACT

- Number of downloads
- Social media buzz

## THE OUTCOMES

To see communities engage in conversations about local topics and to change the narrative around rural communities for the positive.

---

*Create a voice for the  
community to bring  
everyone together.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Communication



Culture

# Morocco Coworking Space

Storylines Affected: VC.1, PC.1, PC.7, PC.8, KF.2, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

Coworking spaces are becoming more and more popular in big cities. However, they still have a place in rural communities. A coworking space is essentially an office that can be leased out by individuals or small teams to have a place to work. In Morocco, we propose all-inclusive, affordable, modern shared co-working space. This space will have six private furnished offices, 24/7 key card building access, high-speed fiber internet, secure WiFi, a modern break room and restrooms. A shared professional conference room and 2 60" smart TV's will be additional amenities for the employers using the space.

## HOW WE'LL MEASURE IMPACT

- The number of start-up businesses that seek store front locations in Newton County.
- The area organizations utilizing conference room for meetings throughout the year.
- A waiting list for private office space rental

## THE OUTCOMES

The coworking space will serve as a professional working and meeting space for those starting a business, working from home, or that need additional private space.

It will also assist companies wishing to establish a footprint in Newton county with office space and mailing address.

---

*A rural coworking space  
will help us compete and  
stay relevant.*



Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Infrastructure



Small Business

# *Develop a Centralized and Branded Event Management Platform*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.9, VC.11, PC.15, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

We propose the creation of a one-stop-shop for everything Jasper and Newton counties. The easiest way for this to come to life would be in the form of a landing page. Residents could log on to find any information they need about Jasper and Newton counties. The site would feature a robust events page that details everything going on in the area, from events at local restaurants to concerts or conventions. Advertisements on the site would also highlight these local events and tailor them to each individual user's interests. An updated daily local news column would entice people to come back to check in every once in a while to see what is going on. There could also be special offers available at local restaurants or businesses. This site would serve as the link to everything happening within the community.

One good example of this in practice that we have spent a lot of time researching is "What's New Laporte." It is a landing page and branded marketing campaign created by Laporte County that serves as the "community homepage." On this site, you can read everything from police/fire updates to weather to community events to local sports and government news. While the website itself is templated and simple in design, it has a branded look that feels unique to Laporte. It also features some creative and fun sections like "Our Heritage," where they take a look at Laporte County headlines in the past on whichever day you log on to the site. To drive further engagement, they have links on every single article allowing you to share them out on your social media channels and leave any comments you may have. We could easily create a similar model that is unique to Jasper and Newton counties.

## THE RATIONALE

We heard time and time again throughout our interviews, surveys, and in our leadership retreat that there is a communication gap. No matter how much time goes into planning, prepping, and marketing an event, people still seem to say, "We didn't know it was happening or else we would have come." It is clear that something needs to be done to improve, centralize, and standardize event communication, and this is a method we have seen have a great deal of success in similar communities.

## THE OUTCOMES

To measure the success of this goal, we will look at KPIs, such as event attendance, event frequency, and analytics on the site. We can track how many people are visiting the landing page each day, engaging with each section of it, and then track those engagements to actual attendance at local events.

---

*"Community events create strong communities, and a strong community is a healthy one."*

— SANDY SMITH

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3–6 Years	1–2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Technology



Communication



## Create a Volunteer Portal

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.3, VC.5, VC.11, VC.13, PC.14, KF.3, and KF.7

### THE DESCRIPTION

*"The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention." — Oscar Wilde*

Volunteerism is a great way to improve and build a community. When people are getting out and doing good things like cleaning up trash or helping kids learn and grow, the quality of life of a community will obviously improve! However, there is also a great indirect impact in that volunteering with others helps build community, strengthen bonds, and instill a sense of place and purpose in residents.

We will start by planning more community days throughout the year, aimed at mobilizing volunteers to get out and do work in the community. These days can be centered on picking up trash, helping local businesses with odd tasks, or hosting events to get kids outside and active.

On top of the community days, integrated through the landing page discussed in PP01, we will create a portal for volunteering. Residents will be able to access this portal to connect to and register for local volunteer opportunities. There will also be a "game" component. Residents will be able to earn points for showing up to different events and volunteering their time and will be able to use those points for rewards such as coupons at local businesses. There is also the opportunity to recognize those who put in the most volunteer hours each month or year.

### THE RATIONALE

There is a lot of work to be done throughout Jasper and Newton counties. It would be beneficial to have a group of volunteers ready to take action and ownership of beautifying and improving their community. This will also help people find their sense of community and could even serve as a mobile third place for many people.

### THE OUTCOMES

The success of this initiative can be measured by the number of volunteer hours completed over a specific time period, the number of volunteers coming to events, and the number of projects that are completed for local businesses or public areas.

---

*"Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can change the world."*

— HOWARD ZINN



# *Develop a Social Media Presence*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.9, VC.10, VC.13, VC.15, PC.1, and PC.14

## THE DESCRIPTION

Social media is no longer the future of communication... it is the present. Over 2/3rds of the entire United States population has a Facebook account, and most people spend more than 2 hours on social media every day! In order to improve communication and keep people informed, we have to meet them where they are at.

We will create a social media strategy for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Each property will have branded profile pictures and header images, as well as professionally written descriptions that capture the personality of Jasper and Newton counties and describe the purpose of the page. The strategy will also include guidelines for keeping a regular posting cadence, as well as descriptions of what posts belong on the page and which ones do not, in order to keep consistent and clear messaging.

For the first few months, in order to generate traction and engagement, we will schedule out several posts to be shared on people's timelines so that more people can realize that these pages now exist and will ultimately want to follow. We will also partner with local restaurants and businesses to run promotions via social media and have them share out our content on their channels.

## THE RATIONALE

As mentioned, there is a communication gap. We have to find new ways to effectively communicate what is going on in Jasper and Newton counties. Social media is an easy, inexpensive, and (most importantly) effective way to create that communication.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure the success of this plot point by looking at several social media analytics. The most obvious is the follower count. Success would be getting the majority (over 50%) of adult residents following the social properties. On a smaller scale, we will also look at engagement rates on individual posts to see how many people are not only reading but also taking the time to interact with our content.

---

*Evolving communication to meet our community where they already are.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Technology



Communication



## *Build a Branded Periodical*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.15, and PC.1

### THE DESCRIPTION

There are many stories in Jasper and Newton counties that go untold! Stories of entrepreneurship, hard work, local pride, and more that deserve to spend some time in the spotlight. To bring these stories to life and highlight local heroes, we will develop a monthly publication, both in print and online.

Each issue of this publication will focus on a person or family in Jasper and Newton counties who is doing something remarkable. This could be in business, through volunteer efforts, innovation, awards they won, or more. We will talk about their accolades, but also get to know them as a person.

By spreading the word about how many talented, successful, and interesting people there are in this community, we will have a heightened sense of pride or even maybe want to work to do something remarkable to be featured. Those who are showcased in the publication will also gain an increased sense of community pride and feel appreciated, welcomed, and at home.

To promote this, we will make sure that it ties into the Facebook news API so that any Jasper and Newton counties resident who goes to look at the news on Facebook will see the article. We will also have an opt-in print version that people can have mailed to their homes.

### THE RATIONALE

Everybody needs to feel a sense of community and of place. Being separated by large swaths of land makes it difficult to remember that there are other people living and working in Jasper and Newton counties the same as them. Putting a face and story to these people will help generate a sense of place and pride in the community.

### THE OUTCOMES

The impact for this point is slightly harder to measure, but we will track viewership on the publication and gauge interest by the number of people nominated for a featured spot. We can also track conversations on social media as it is shared out to people's timelines.

---

*Developing a lifestyle  
around rural Indiana that  
is truly aspirational.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



**Community**



**Technology**



**Communication**

# *Implement an Opt-In Text Alert System*

Storylines Affected: VC.3 and VC.11

## THE DESCRIPTION

Recent research has shown that 90% of text messages are read within 5 seconds of being received. Everyone constantly has their phone on them all day; we're typically ready to respond immediately to notifications. We will use a text alert system in order to bolster even further the communications infrastructure of Jasper and Newton counties.

Text alerts will work on an opt-in system. Residents will have the choice of whether to receive messages and can opt out at any time. We recommend having different categories of alerts, such as severe weather, events, and local deals.

Severe weather is pretty self-explanatory; people would receive an alert on their phone if severe thunderstorms or tornadoes are coming to the area. Event updates would be last minute. We would push out a notification on the day of a big event in order to catch a few people at the last minute who don't have plans. For deals, we would partner with local businesses to highlight specials or promotions.

## THE RATIONALE

As we've said before, communication is key. Text message alerts would be another tool to bolster communication and make sure that all residents of Jasper and Newton counties know what's going on.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success in this initiative will be measured in a few ways. The most simple measure would be tracking the number of people who opt into the text program. For engagement purposes, however, we also want to track how many people who receive event texts are then going on to attend the events.



---

*Delivering communication  
in a timely and useful way  
brings us together.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Technology



Communication



# Build Third Places

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.9, VC.10, KF.3, and KF.7

## THE DESCRIPTION

The concept of a third place was born out of a book written in 1991 by esteemed sociologist Ray Oldenburg. He argues that these places are essential for the health and vitality of a community and serve an essential role in a resident's ability to find a sense of place.

In his description of a third place, he claims they have to meet every one of his 8 standards:

- **Neutral Ground.** People are free to come and go as they please. There are no time requirements or invitations needed. Much of our lives in first places and second places are structured, but not so in Third Places.
- **Act as a Leveler.** People from all walks of life gather in Third Places. There are no social or economic status barriers.
- **Conversation is the Main Activity.** The talk is lively, stimulating, colorful, and engaging.
- **Assessable and Accommodating.** They tend to be conveniently located, often within walking distance of one's home.
- **There are Regulars.** It is easy to recognize that many patrons are regulars at the establishment. But unlike other places, newcomers are welcomed into the group.
- **Low Profile.** As a physical structure, they are typically plain and unimpressive in appearance.
- **Mood is Playful.** With food, drink, games, and conversation present, the mood is light and playful. The mood encourages people to stay longer and to come back repeatedly.
- **A Home Away From Home.** At their core, they are places where people feel at home. They feel like they belong there, and typically have a sense of ownership.

While a lot of locations and businesses in Jasper and Newton counties might check one (or most) of these boxes, there are not a lot that check all eight. People need gathering places where they can go, connect with people, learn from others, and develop socially, emotionally, and professionally. These places need to be constructed, developed, and promoted intentionally in order to effectively provide the value they are intended to.

Third places will also help connect community members who otherwise might not regularly interact. Specifically, they can provide the perfect opportunity for aging members of the community to network with young people, share their stories, and explain why they are so passionate about living here. It's essential for young people to connect with the history of the community and the folks who made Jasper and Newton counties what they are today.

## THE RATIONALE

Third places are necessary for a community. They provide people with a sense of belonging and the opportunity to meet new members of the community and branch outside of their comfort zone. Residents who feel as though they have a third place that they can belong in will inevitably become more involved in their community and will be less likely to look for options to move away.

## THE OUTCOMES

The most obvious way to measure the success of this plot point is whether or not we reach our goal of one third place per city in the county. Other metrics that we would like to track, however, are attendance, how often people are visiting, and if there are repeat visitors (regulars). To measure the sense of community and belonging, we can look at the net migration rate to determine if fewer people are moving away.

---

*Building up community means building up places to commune.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Infrastructure



Small Business

# *Form a Committee to Foster New Third Places*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.9, VC.10, KF.3, and KF.7

## THE DESCRIPTION

Establishing a new third place for every city is a tall order. We will need to form a new committee to help achieve this. The committee will be composed of local business and government leaders throughout both of the counties.

The primary goal of the committee will be to bring guidance to third places to help them get off the ground and continue to grow. They will provide resources and advice to business owners and work with other committees and organizations to promote the third places throughout the broader Jasper-Newton community.

They will also work to secure and manage funds to set up new third places. The funds will primarily be created from grant opportunities and will give money to startups or individuals with the intention of building a third place and committing to strive towards the guidelines set forth by Oldenburg.

## THE RATIONALE

Creating an effective and intentional third place is hard work. It requires a significant investment as well as the assistance of dedicated professionals committed to helping them reach the goals. Having a committee devoted to creating and growing these third places will ensure that they are supported and primed to thrive.

## THE OUTCOMES

The success of this committee will be measured by the number of third places established. We will also use several strategies to measure the effectiveness of the committee's spending.

---

*Creating new hotspots requires planning and preparation.*

**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

**Cost**

High

Medium

Low



**Government**



**Infrastructure**



**Small Business**



# *Bring Local Government Meetings Online*

Storylines Affected: VC.11, PC.15, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

A lot of people expressed a desire for more transparency from their local government. An easy way to do this would be to broadcast local meetings online. At the end of meetings, there could even be a live Q&A feature where residents could write in their questions or concerns to be addressed.

This will live on the landing page that we proposed in the first plot point. At the time of meetings, residents would simply click to join the meeting and could watch a live feed and engage through the chat.

## THE RATIONALE

There is a perceived lack of transparency in local government. A lot of that comes from a lack of accessibility. Making it easier for people to attend government meetings will encourage people to become more engaged and feel as though they are part of the community.

## THE OUTCOMES

To track this, we will measure attendance and engagement at each meeting.



---

*Creating transparency and interactivity in government will encourage our people to buy in.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Technology



Communication

# *Bring in Fiber-Optic Internet Infrastructure*

Storylines Affected: VC.11, PC.1, and PC.6

## THE DESCRIPTION

Innovations around fiber-optic internet infrastructures are making it easier and easier for rural communities to get connected. One of the biggest problems we heard when conducting research was that the internet was slow or not existent in some more remote areas. Fiber-optic cable can help fix both of these problems.

There are several grants available through organizations like the UDSA who just launched a \$550 million funding campaign in January 2020. We will build out a committee who job it will be to find these funding opportunities and oversee the installation and implementation of the system.

## THE RATIONALE

The internet is severely lacking throughout the rural parts of the counties. Most areas have no connection, and those that do have slow and unstable access. Providing a solid internet infrastructure is necessary to attract and retain businesses and remote workers.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success will be measured by the ability to install a fiber-optic system and by measuring average internet speeds after the implementation.

---

*Fiber-optic-backed connectivity is a baseline for modern business technology.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Infrastructure



Technology



# *Offer Phone + Internet Incentives for Telecommuters*

Storylines Affected: PC.1, PC.7, and KF.2

## THE DESCRIPTION

There is an issue with people commuting out of Jasper and Newton counties for work; we need to retain talented individuals. One strategy for retention is to provide incentives for people to live in the county and work out of their homes. We will do this by offering a discounted rate on their phone and internet bill if at least one person is working out of the home.

## THE RATIONALE

We want people to consider Jasper and Newton counties a potential home when looking to relocate. More and more people are in jobs that allow them to work remotely; providing small incentives could encourage more people to want to work in our community.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success will be measured by tracking the number of people working from home in Jasper and Newton counties.

---

*We should embrace the  
work-from-home lifestyle and  
incentivize those doing it.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Technology



Infrastructure



Small Business

# *Build a Coworking Space*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, PC.1, PC.7, PC.8, KF.2, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

Coworking spaces are becoming more and more popular in big cities. However, they still have a place in rural communities. A coworking space is essentially an office that can be leased out by individuals or small teams to have a place to work. They typically also provide added benefits such as a fitness studio, cafe, or even laundry facilities.

With the increase of people that have been forced to work remotely as a result of COVID-19, people are getting tired of being at home. Now is the perfect time to create a coworking space to cater to those who are ready to get out of the house and start separating their work life from their home life. We would center this in the counties (most likely in Rensselaer) so that it is accessible to everyone.

## THE RATIONALE

Building a coworking space would provide value to two groups of people. First, it would provide a more welcoming environment for telecommuters. They would be able to get out of their house and network with other community members. Second, it could provide infrastructure and a welcoming environment for small teams looking to start a new business.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success would be measured by the number of people using the coworking space as well as the revenue generated from



---

*A rural coworking space  
will help us compete and*

**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

**Cost**

High

Medium

Low



Infrastructure



Small Business



# *Create an Agritech Innovation Incubator Program*

Storylines Affected: PC.1, PC.2, PC.4, PC.6, PC.9, and PC.10

## THE DESCRIPTION

We will create a program to help foster and create agritech innovation and bring talented individuals to the community. This will take the form of a fellowship program lasting two years, as we know that most graduates relocate permanently to the city or community they spend more than one year in post-graduation.

Borrowing from South Bend's successful enFocus program, we will arrange it so that these fellows split their time between their own projects and the projects identified and scoped from a governing board or at the request of local farms and businesses. Building on the enFocus model, our institute will function more like a think tank and consultancy than a rentable set of young professionals. We'll work in teams, leveraging diverse backgrounds, educational experiences, and diverse human experiences to solve problems more effectively.

The think tank will be tasked with projects ranging from the improvement of government efficiencies (applying disruptive technology to improve civil society) to designing uses for public lands (developing cost-effective ways to leverage our resources), to reviving the rural family farm (consulting on how to maximize yield and profit), to bolstering local businesses (applying modern business practices and mental models to ensure sustainable downtowns).

The fellows will have the unique opportunity to get high-level and high-impact experience with projects directly out of the gate. They'll learn from one another as well as from structured Continuing Education (CE) opportunities and speaking circuits. These fellows will graduate our program with immediate job prospects, incredible experience under their belts, and an appreciation for rural living and community.

## THE RATIONALE

Agriculture is the primary economic driver of Jasper and Newton counties. The best option for bringing in new innovation, wealth, and economic development is through the already booming agritech industry. This program would attract talented individuals and encourage them to set up roots and build their innovative startups within the community.

## THE OUTCOMES

This is a very long-term goal; however, the outcomes would be measured by the community's ability to attract several new agritech startups to the area.

---

*Leveraging local resources, we will develop a truly unique agritech program.*

**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

**Cost**

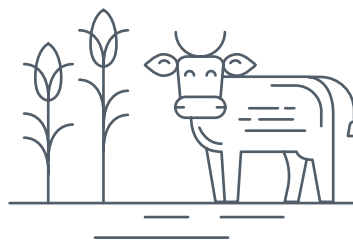
High

Medium

Low



**Infrastructure**



**Agriculture**



**Education**

# *Build an Agritech + STEM Charter School*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.10, PC.2, PC.4, PC.5, PC.9, PC.10, PC.14  
KF.1, KF.6, KF.9, and KF.10

## THE DESCRIPTION

We will build a new agritech + STEM-focused charter school. We heard in our initial research that many people feel like kids in the area aren't being prepared for the jobs that are available in the county. Most feel as though they are going to school just to be prepared to go off to college and find jobs far away and outside of the community.

With partnerships with Fair Oaks and Purdue, we can create a new school that is focused on preparing students for what's new in agritech and encourage them to become involved in the booming agriculture industry of central Indiana.

This school would still offer all of the traditional subjects, but it would also have programs geared towards food science, technology, and engineering. Classes would be hands-on and involve getting real-world field experience on local farms or traveling to the labs at Purdue.

## THE RATIONALE

Students are going off to college and not coming back. Many (if not most) are not continuing on to careers in agriculture. Providing a top-tier education infrastructure inside of the community and then offering postgraduate programs and startup incentives will result in retaining talented individuals to live and work in Jasper and Newton counties.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success will be measured in many ways. We'll look at the school's ability to get off the ground, registration rates, and its ability to attract top professionals to teach classes. We'll also continue to closely monitor the net migration rate (specifically for young people) and will look at the number of new startups that are run by Jasper-Newton natives.

---

*Delivering education that's specific to the needs and jobs of our community.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Infrastructure



Agriculture



Education



# *Bring an Entrepreneurship Program to Local High Schools*

Storylines Affected: PC.2, KF.3, KF.6, KF.9, KF.10, and KF.13

## THE DESCRIPTION

Apart from technical skills, there are soft skills and business knowledge that are required to start a business. We will bring an entrepreneurship program to each of the local high schools. There are plenty of partners that can help with administration and curricula. One that we have worked with in the past is Youth Entrepreneurs. They help train educators to administer their semester-long experiential-learning based entrepreneurship course. Students get the opportunity to learn skills that will help them in the real world and even get the chance to create and operate their own small business.

## THE RATIONALE

Entrepreneurial education is necessary to help prepare our students to be ready to start their own agritech business or operate their own farms post-graduation.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will track how many students enter and complete the program. We will also look at how many graduates of the program start businesses and how many stay in Jasper and Newton counties.



---

*Building entrepreneurs from the ground up will revitalize our community.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Children



Education

# *Partner with Unions for Trade-Based Summer Camps*

Storylines Affected: PC.2, PC.12, PC.14, KF.6, KF.9, and KF.10

## THE DESCRIPTION

As mentioned in PP13, we heard many people complaining that students aren't being prepared for the jobs available. In order to provide more vocational training and income opportunities for young people, we will partner with local unions, businesses, and farmers to host a 1-2 week summer program. At this program, students will have their choice of whichever industry they want to learn more about. They will then learn from and shadow professionals in each field and also take part in larger group sessions that teach them about life skills and work.

## THE RATIONALE

There is a lack of vocational training in the area. Students are forced to look outside of the county in order to get the education they need and are then finding jobs in those areas. Providing a training structure within the community will help develop and retain talented individuals.

## THE OUTCOMES

To measure the success of this initiative, we will track the number of program members who go on to work in local businesses or start their own.

---

*Delivering on the promise of a quality education means skilling up our people.*

**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

**Cost**

High

Medium

Low



**Children**



**Education**

# *Increase Mental Health Resources in Schools*

Storylines Affected: QL.1, QL.2, and QL.4

## THE DESCRIPTION

We have heard a lot about the lack of mental healthcare options available throughout Jasper and Newton counties. Currently, Newton does not have any mental healthcare facilities, and the ones that are located in Jasper have 6+ month-long waiting lists. This is particularly a problem for teens and young adults who are unable to receive the support they need.

To mitigate this issue, we will train school nurses and administrators on how to treat the unique mental health needs of rural teens. We will also train them to recognize the warning signs of more dangerous mental health disorders and will provide them with the resources they need to get support for these individuals.

These individuals will help serve as a support system for teens, so they do not feel alone or have no one to turn to. This will not replace the need for qualified mental health professionals or a mental health facility, but it will provide an extra, easily accessible layer of support for many.

## THE RATIONALE

There is currently a lack of mental health resources available in the community. Many teens and young adults with mental health issues are going untreated and don't know where to go for support.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will continue to track how many people are trained and certified, as well as the number of students seeking support.



---

*We need to ensure that our kids have access to preventative mental healthcare.*



Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

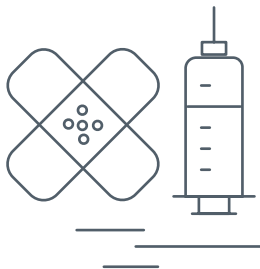
Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Health



Children



Education

# *Bring a Mental Health Facility to Newton County*

Storylines Affected: QL.2, QL.8, and QL.13

## THE DESCRIPTION

As mentioned already, there is a serious lack of mental health support for Jasper and Newton counties. Specifically, Newton County does not currently have a mental healthcare facility. We will partner with a local mental healthcare provider to bring at least one facility into Newton County. We want to also ensure that they're staffed with the capacity to take care of the mental health needs of the area.

## THE RATIONALE

There needs to be at least one mental healthcare provider in Newton County.

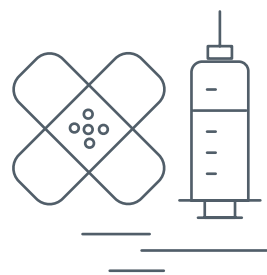
## THE OUTCOMES

Initial success would be opening a mental health facility. After opening, we will want to track the number of appointments and wait times to determine if the single facility is enough to meet the needs of the area.

---

*Bring a provider of mental health services to a people without any access.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Health



Infrastructure

## *Develop a School Program around Rural Mental Health*

Storylines Affected: QL.1, QL.2, and KF.5

### THE DESCRIPTION

While individual and personalized care is important, it is perhaps equally important to increase education and awareness around mental health. Mental health conditions impact 1 out of every 5 adults in the United States. Many continue on undiagnosed and untreated. These mental health conditions can be harmful, and it is important that people know when and how to reach out for help.

We will develop a school program that is geared specifically towards rural teens. We want to make sure that the information is relevant and reaches our students where they are, so it is more likely to make an impression and convince them to take action. We will most likely partner with a national mental health organization to send in a specialist to administer the program.

### THE RATIONALE

Many mental health conditions are going untreated due to a lack of education and awareness. Destigmatizing mental health conditions for rural teens is the first step to getting them to reach out for help and support.

### THE OUTCOMES

We will track the impact of the program by following the number of teens who reach out for help or to ask questions.

---

*We need to increase  
mental health outcomes  
via educational programs  
in our schools.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

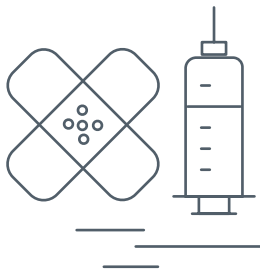
Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Health



Children



Education



# *Build a System of Telehealth Kiosks*

Storylines Affected: QL.1, QL.2, QL.4, and KF.8

## THE DESCRIPTION

Another way to bolster the healthcare infrastructure is by implementing a system of telehealth kiosks. These kiosks will look something like phone booths. People will be able to enter, close the door, and find themselves in a private and soundproof enclosure. They will then be prompted with a few questions on the screen to get them in contact with the right healthcare provider. After the short questionnaire, they will be connected with a doctor or nurse practitioner who can answer any questions or help them schedule an appointment with a local office.

These will be placed in the hearts of downtown areas to make them widely accessible and they will be free to use for the public. They will be funded and operated in partnership with larger healthcare providers such as Franciscan or Valley Oaks.

## THE RATIONALE

There is a lack of accessibility around healthcare. Not only are people unable to find the care they need, but they also don't know how. A system like this can make it easier for people to find the care they need.

## THE OUTCOMES

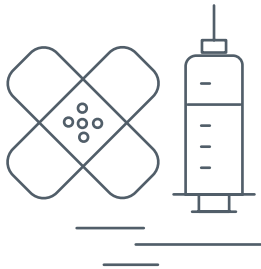
Success will be measured by looking at the usage rates of the kiosks. Indirectly, we will also be closely monitoring rates of various health issues and numbers of residents who have begun to seek treatment.



---

*Ensure access to quality care through communal telemedicine services.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Health



Infrastructure



Technology

# *Offer Better Telehealth Options*

Storylines Affected: QL.1, QL.2, QL.4, and KF.8

## THE DESCRIPTION

Along with the kiosks, we will work with providers such as Franciscan and Valley Oaks to provide more easily accessible telehealth options. When people were discussing lack of care, we frequently heard that they had to drive 30 minutes or even an hour for regular appointments or mental health treatment. COVID-19 has shown us that a large number of appointments can be done remotely via the phone or video call.

We will work with these large providers not only to ensure that people can get telehealth appointments but also that they know how to. Through an educational marketing campaign on social media, our new landing page, as well as print resources, we will let people know what forms of telehealth are available and how to access them.

## THE RATIONALE

Not only is healthcare physically inaccessible, people don't know how to reach out for help. Through offering more opportunities for telehealth and teaching how to access them, more people will be able to get the treatment they need.

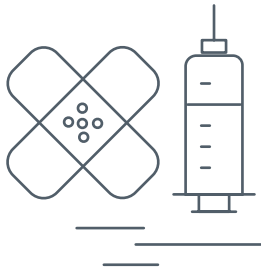
## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure the increase in the number of people taking advantage of telehealth service offerings.

---

*Build education and services around telehealth for rural communities.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Health



Infrastructure



Technology

# *Provide Transportation to Healthcare*

Storylines Affected: QL.3, QL.6, and QL.15

## THE DESCRIPTION

While we are working on bringing healthcare to people virtually and through the phone, we also want to think about how we can help people physically get to care. Many of those that need care are unable to get to it due to long distances, not having a car, not being able to drive, or not having anyone to take them.

During our research, we heard a lot about the aging population that is unable to travel far distances and don't have access to alternate transportation methods. This issue, on top of the fact that this population on average needs additional care, leaves many residents stranded without the treatment they need and the means to receive it.

We will work to remedy this issue by providing a ride-share style transportation system to healthcare facilities. This transportation method would not replace ambulances in emergency situations. However, residents would be able to pre-arrange rides to their appointments. This would be free and available to those who are qualified and paid for in partnership with healthcare providers and through grants.

## THE RATIONALE

Many people lack the physical ability to get the care they need. When telehealth is not an option, there has to be another option to get care.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will continue to monitor the number of people using the ride-share in order to determine capacity or if we need to add additional drives/vehicles.

---

*Create a more robust system of transportation to service physical and mental health.*



Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

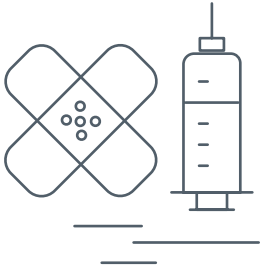
Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Health



Transportation

# *Build at Least 1 Year-Round Fitness Center per City*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.4, VC.7, QL.7, QL.11, QL.12, QL.14, and KF.4

## THE DESCRIPTION

Throughout our research and during our retreat with community leaders, we heard a need for accessible fitness facilities. Apart from in those in the bigger cities, there are not many gyms or fitness centers available. The ones that are available are primarily locally owned and not open all day or 7 days a week.

We will bring at least one year-round (preferably 24/7) fitness center to every city in Jasper and Newton counties. These gyms will feature state-of-the-art equipment and personal training services will be available. We also want these gyms to serve as community meeting spaces. Group fitness classes and events are great ways to build community while also promoting healthy and active lifestyles.

## THE RATIONALE

There is a lack of accessible fitness opportunities throughout the community. Many people have to travel to get to a gym or elect not to go at all. Having accessible gyms and fitness classes is a prerequisite for building a physically healthy community.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will track gym and class attendance, membership rates, and revenues to determine the success in each individual community.



---

*Develop an establishment that promotes and delivers an active lifestyle.*

**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

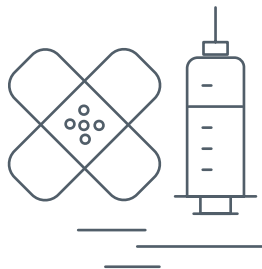
Direct

**Cost**

High

Medium

Low



**Health**



**Infrastructure**

# *Create Community-Wide Fitness Challenges*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.4, VC.9, QL.7, and QL.11

## THE DESCRIPTION

Who doesn't love a little competition? Along with the construction and opening of fitness centers in each county, we want to encourage people to get out and take advantage of them. We will host a monthly challenge among the cities in Jasper and Newton counties. The categories could be miles run on the treadmill, time spent at the gym, times people went to the gym, etc. The reward for these larger city-wide challenges would be bragging rights and feature all of their stats on our community landing page.

We also want to have some individual challenges with rewards attached. These could be similar categories as above, such as most miles run etc. We would have rewards attached to this that could be gift cards to local businesses or even discounts on gym memberships.

## THE RATIONALE

There is an issue with physical inactivity in Jasper and Newton counties. Over 30% of the population has no physical activity on an average day. Competition is a good way to motivate people to get out and get active.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure the usage rates of all the gyms as well as future physical inactivity and obesity rates.

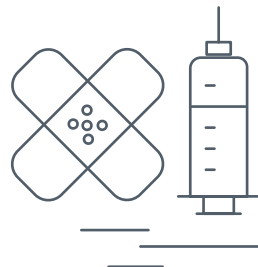
---

*Embrace competition to improve physical health outcomes.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Health



## *Host at Least 3 Active Lifestyle Events per Year*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.4, VC.9, QL.7, and QL.11

### THE DESCRIPTION

We've all seen pictures of thousands of people lined up and excited to go for larger city marathons. We want to bring some of that excitement to Jasper and Newton counties. We have a goal of hosting at least 3 road races per county a year. These races could vary in length from just 5k run/walk all the way up to a marathon. These races could be planned in partnership with local community organizations as well and work as fundraising initiatives.

### THE RATIONALE

There is a lack of physical activity and opportunities to get out and get moving. Racing is a good way to bring people together as a community and get healthy at the same time.

### THE OUTCOMES

We will keep track of how many races we are hosting as well as attendance rates.

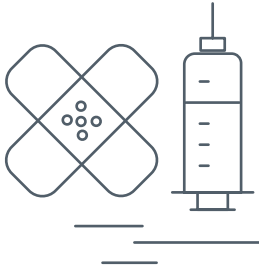
---

*We are committed to promoting an active lifestyle in our communities.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Health

# *Take the Erie Lackawanna Trail from Crown Point through Pulaski*

Storylines Affected: VC.4, VC.5, and QL.11

## THE DESCRIPTION

The Erie Lackawanna Trail is an expansive path that runs all the way from Hammond to Crown Point. The trail connects two train stations and was originally a route to Chicago back in the early 1800s. Today it is a paved and frequently traveled biking/running trail that takes you through the lush countryside and has been beautifully maintained by volunteers.

We will work with local governments of the cities that own portions of the trail to continue it on. Ideally, the trail would stretch all the way through both Jasper and Newton counties into Pulaski County. This would have a great deal of impact on and benefits for the community. Having the infrastructure of a trail such as this one encourages people to get outside and get active; whether that be riding bikes, going for a run, or even taking a family walk. In relation to previous plot points, trails such as the Erie Lackawanna are perfect locations to host running or even biking races. The easiest way to get people active is to make physical activity easy, accessible, and enjoyable!

## THE RATIONALE

There is currently a lack of trail systems that would promote running, biking, or other healthy physical activities. Bringing this trail through the area would help promote active lifestyles and would have several indirect impacts on the health of the community.

## THE OUTCOMES

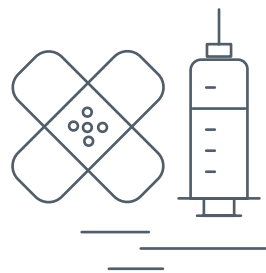
Success would be measured by our ability to bring the trail through Pulaski County. After construction, we will continue to monitor usage rates, how it is being used, and how many volunteers/man-hours are necessary to keep it clean and safe.



---

*Build a connective trail to  
tap into resources already  
present around us.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Health



Infrastructure



Transportation

# *Identify and Enact a Technology Solution for an Active Lifestyle*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.4, VC.9, QL.7, and QL.11

## THE DESCRIPTION

There are two main barriers that prohibit people from developing healthy lifestyle habits. The first barrier is that exercise by oneself is not the most fun. Most people don't have the motivation to go out for a run every day alone without anyone there to push or motivate them. The second barrier is monotony. Running, biking, or using an elliptical machine every day can quickly become stale.

The answer to both of these barriers is simple: get people involved in local sports leagues! Most people enjoy sports and competition and, were it provided, they would like to take part in a soccer, tennis, or softball league. However, managing these leagues can be difficult and requires a lot of time.

To address this issue, some members of our team at Crane + Grey have worked on developing an app called Playon. This platform allows anyone to easily put together a sports league, manage schedules, keep track of stats, and more.

Jasper and Newton counties could be a perfect pilot community for Playon, and it could help organize people to get them outside and active.

## THE RATIONALE

Infrastructure for physical activity is lacking. Additionally, people are looking for things to do and need new forms of entertainment. Playon would address both of these issues by bringing people together to have fun, compete, and get in shape.

## THE OUTCOMES

We would measure the success of this goal by how many people are downloading and using the app, as well as monitoring how many leagues get off the ground and start hosting games.

---

*Leverage tech to bring our community closer to options for active living.*



Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

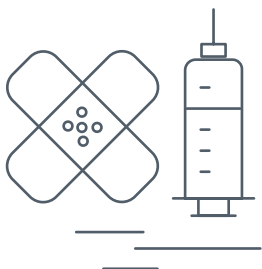
Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Health



Technology

# *Bring a Pre-K Center to Fair Oaks*

Storylines Affected: PC.3, PC.5, PC.11, PC.14, KF.1, KF.6, KF.9, and KF.10

## THE DESCRIPTION

We will bring a pre-K center to Fair Oaks Farms. There is a lack of quality pre-K available in Jasper and Newton counties. This is a way to greatly increase the number of spots and provide these children with a quality education.

Partnering with Fair Oaks will help generate the funding necessary to pay several pre-K professionals where we could have class sizes no greater than 20 children. Additionally, by hosting this program at Fair Oaks, we can provide a unique, experiential learning environment centered around agriculture. Children could get hands-on experience with crops and livestock and would be better prepared for future careers in the field.

The location is also a great asset. Many residents who commute out of the area drive past Fair Oaks every day on their way out of town. This would make it very easy and convenient for parents to drop off their kids on the way to work.



## THE RATIONALE

We often heard about the lack of quality pre-K education available throughout Jasper and Newton counties. The ages of 0-5 (right before kindergarten) are extremely important in a child's life. These are the most formative years of development, and it's paramount that they are cared for and given ample opportunities to grow both cognitively and socially. We looked into the numbers, and for 2018 in Jasper County, there were only 9.6 pre-K slots per 100 children available, and in Newton there was only 7.9. There are currently available spots for less than 1 out of every 10 kids in the area. This is significantly behind state and national averages.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success would initially be measured by our ability to open a school. We would then want to track the number of students enrolling in the program to see if we need to scale up. We should see this have a direct impact on the number of pre-K slots available per 100 kids.

---

*Develop early education  
around our favorite  
destination.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Children



Education



Agriculture

# *Build a Landing Page to Help Find Quality Pre-K*

Storylines Affected: KF.1 and KF.2

## THE DESCRIPTION

One of the biggest reasons why people can't find quality pre-K is that they don't know where to look! To remedy this situation, we will create a landing page that helps people find quality pre-K providers that are conveniently located close to either their home or their work. When you enter your address, you will see a list of quality providers in the area. When you want to look into one, simply click it, and you will have details like class size, tuition costs, teacher bios, and more.

We see this as being a resource for all of central Indiana. In conjunction with the previous plot point, it would be a way to promote the new pre-K center at Fair Oaks and potentially bring more families into the community.

## THE RATIONALE

Quality pre-K is hard to find. Many people don't know where to look or how to know if the ones they find are even good for their kids. This site will fix that problem. Additionally, connecting residents to a quality pre-K center can take a lot of stress off their shoulders, and they will feel as though they don't have to move to a big city to find care.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will track analytics on the site to see how many people are visiting. We'll also look at placement rates in local pre-K centers from people who used the site.

---

*Help our communities easily find and register for pre-K in these counties.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Technology



Children



Education



# *Provide At-Home Pre-K Resources*

Storylines Affected: KF.1, KF.2, KF.9, KF.13, KF.14, and KF.15

## THE DESCRIPTION

Another solution to the lack of pre-K centers would be to support those who decide to teach their kids at home. If COVID-19 has shown us anything, it is that learning does not have to be confined to the traditional schoolhouse. Learning can take place anywhere and in several different ways.

We will partner with local libraries, schools, and pre-K centers to provide at-home learning resources for parents who want to teach their kids at home. These resources could be supplies for activities, articles, lesson plans, and more to help them on their journey. We would also like to create a webpage that would be consistently updated with new resources geared towards giving parents advice on how to educate rural children at home.

## THE RATIONALE

Dropping kids off at preschool is not the only option. Many parents (especially after the 2020 school shutdowns) are deciding to learn at home. By supporting these parents, we can ensure that they have the resources necessary to give their kids a quality education and set them up for success.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will look at the need for these resources as well as how many parents are taking advantage of them. We will also continue to track test scores of elementary-age students to make sure that they are performing well and adjusting to at-home learning.

---

*Help improve early education by teaching the teachers.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Government



Children



Education

# *Apply for a Grant to Bring a YMCA to the Community*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.7, VC.9, VC.10, PC.2, PC.12, PC.14, QL.5, QL.7, QL.10, QL.12, QL.14, KF.4, and KF.7

## THE DESCRIPTION

This plot point is fairly self-explanatory: we will bring a YMCA to the Jasper-Newton area. A YMCA provides several benefits to a community and is way more than just a gym. Most YMCAs serve as community centers and a third place for many. With pools, basketball courts, gyms, and more, they are an ideal place for many people to meet up with friends and spend time outside of work or school.

They also host several events that are open to community members. These include but are definitely not limited to cycling classes, workout classes, open swims, crafts, health-related courses such as CPR, and more.

The YMCA defines itself as “the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening the community by connecting all people to their potential, purpose, and each other. Working locally, we focus on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities.” This is exactly the type of organization that Jasper and Newton counties need to help bring people together and elevate their community.

The main blocker to this goal would be funding. However, there are several grant opportunities available to help bring organizations such as the YMCA to rural areas, and there is even a provision in the Affordable Care Act that requires hospitals to grant a portion of their profits to community development.

## THE RATIONALE

Jasper and Newton counties need third places, opportunities for healthy lifestyles, events, and community builders. The YMCA checks all of these boxes and would be a great addition to the community.

## THE OUTCOMES

The first step in achieving this goal would be to secure the funding and construct a YMCA. After building, we will monitor usage rates, what percentage of the population become members, how many classes are offered, how many are attending, and more to make sure that the community is getting the most out of this opportunity.

---

*Bring a home for active living to each county through grants.*

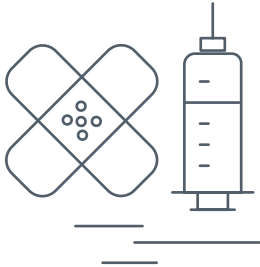
<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Infrastructure



Health

# *Revitalize Firehouses for New Businesses*

Storylines Affected: VC.1, VC.2, PC.1, PC.6, KF.3, KF.7, and KF.12

## THE DESCRIPTION

Several people in our initial interview mentioned that there are several old firehouses—beautiful buildings—that are sitting empty, vacant, and abandoned. We see this as a missed opportunity. We will, through the guidance of a committee, provide funding for small business owners who have an idea on how to convert these firehouses into a business.

The committee will hear several ideas and review applications, and then the winner will be granted a portion of the funds needed to convert these spaces into what they had imagined. There will be some guidelines in order to ensure that these spaces are updated effectively and so that they are able to preserve some of the history behind the buildings.

This would be a great way to revitalize portions of the community, bring in new businesses, and beautify some areas by updating older buildings. This could even play into the plot point of developing third places if one were made into a community center or some other form of gathering place.



## THE RATIONALE

These abandoned buildings are an opportunity for growth. With the existing infrastructure, not as much cost would be required in order to update and rebuild. This would also promote local entrepreneurship and would get members of the community excited to see what is built.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will want to track these new businesses as they get started and measure the ROI of our investment by how many people are taking advantage of and frequenting these new spaces.

---

*Leverage our beautiful old buildings by repurposing them.*



<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Government



Infrastructure



Small Business

# *Create a Brand of Community Pride*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.6, VC.9, VC.14, VC.15, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

While some residents certainly feel a lot of pride for and have found a home in Jasper and Newton counties, it seems as though many (particularly young people) do not see the value in their community. This is why many tend to grow up, go to college, and not return to the area, instead flocking to larger cities.

Pride is a necessary prerequisite for developing a sense of place. This sense of place is what leads to an active, engaged, and productive community member. To help instill this pride and sense of place in people, we propose launching a campaign that is centered on Jasper and Newton counties and that highlights all of the amazing things that are happening here.

This campaign would feature a new brand that can live on the landing page, our publications, newspapers, and will appear at events. The brand will have a grand launch party that will bring together hundreds (if not thousands) of members of the community to celebrate what makes Jasper and Newton counties unique. The festival could also turn into a yearly event centered on Jasper and Newton pride. The campaign could also feature a quarterly publication or even a poster series that highlights some of the amazing people of the community or the awesome things they're doing. We want to make sure that this campaign is always in front of people and in the forefront of their minds to remind them that they are part of a greater whole; a community of people that cares and that they should be proud to be a part of.

## THE RATIONALE

A sense of place is necessary for someone to feel welcome and want to be a part of the community. This doesn't come easy or even naturally for many. We must work to let people know about all that Jasper and Newton counties really are and why they should be proud to be a part of it.

## THE OUTCOMES

Initially, we will want to test a few versions of the brand in smaller focus groups in order to make sure that we have something that will resonate with the majority of people in the area. After extensive testing and launch, we will measure attendance at brand-related events, viewership on brand publications, and more. We will also be looking for indirect impacts such as attendance and participation at other community events.

---

*Develop a specific brand around a specific sort of rural community.*

**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

**Cost**

High

Medium

Low



**Community**



**Communication**



**Culture**

# *Bring Together Central Indiana*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.6, VC.9, VC.14, VC.15, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

I'm sure you've all heard about "The Region" and our affectionate nickname: the Region Rats. Coming from someone who lives in The Region, it's a real thing, and the people here definitely have pride in being from the area.

We want to create a similar brand in central Indiana. Something that ties together all of the rural farming communities and gives them a sense of pride in saying that they belong here. This brand would most likely be based around agriculture, agritech, innovation, and hard work.

The brand would extend beyond Jasper and Newton counties to the neighboring agricultural areas as well. This would be a perfect way to bring everyone together to celebrate the unique history and culture of the area. This is an opportunity for Jasper and Newton counties to lead the way and be an example community not only for Indiana but for all of the rural midwest.

As with the previous plot point, this brand would come with events, merchandise, publications, and more to help bring it into the forefront of people's minds and create a cultural shift.

## THE RATIONALE

The problems around belonging and community pride are not unique to only Jasper and Newton counties; they persist throughout central Indiana into several rural communities. We could position ourselves as a leader in central Indiana and bring these communities together.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will test the impact of this brand throughout all of central Indiana and will share data with neighboring counties to determine its effectiveness and make sure that we are moving in the right direction.

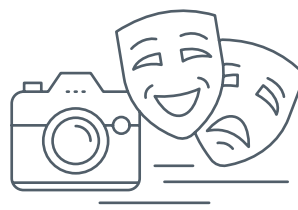
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*Partner with surrounding rural communities to develop a collective.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Community



Culture

# Create a Branded Wayfinding Program

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.11, VC.14, PC.1, and PC.5

## THE DESCRIPTION

With communities being rather separated and far apart, central Indiana can be a difficult place to navigate. Signs are sometimes miles apart, and you never know what you'll find if you pull over at a random exit. Most people don't even realize that they are driving through a thriving community that might be the home of their new favorite pitstop or local restaurant.

We will attempt to remedy this by creating a branded wayfinding program. We want to put up signs all throughout the highways and country roads that feature our brand and let people know where they are driving through and what we're all about. These signs will also serve to direct people to local businesses, hotspots, or sightseeing areas. They will be placed strategically to target through-traffic that is on their way to either Chicago or Indianapolis.

## THE RATIONALE

Jasper and Newton counties are hidden off the side of these major thoroughfares. We will use this branded signage program as an opportunity to drive more traffic off the highways and into our communities. These branded signs will be effective not only because of their directionality but we will also make sure they are branded and designed out to portray Jasper and Newton counties as thriving areas that people will *want* to stop by.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure how many more people are visiting local restaurants and businesses as a result of this new branded wayfinding program. We will also want to make sure that we research the locations of these signs to make sure that we are hitting the most high-traffic areas.



---

*Use our brand to create a universal wayfinding system in rural Indiana.*



<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Infrastructure



Culture

# *Implement a Grocery Basket Delivery Co-Op*

Storylines Affected: VC.8, VC.12, PC.1, PC.10, and QL.5

## THE DESCRIPTION

Lack of access to quality groceries and food was something we heard a lot about in our initial research. We will remedy this by tapping into local farmers and crafters to build a local-sourced, weekly food basket delivery packed with healthy options. Delivery of these baskets will be managed through an online subscription tool. This tool could be plugged into the landing page that we discussed earlier. People could select a pre-built basket or customize their own.

We would also want to use this grocery basket delivery system to help bring fresh food to those who lack the means to go get it themselves. We will work to identify older members of the community who struggle to get out of their house or travel longer distances and will work with them to deliver convenient and affordable healthy food options.

An added benefit of this grocery delivery system is that people are receiving healthy, locally sourced, food. Improving the quality of the food in people's fridges will help with promoting and sustaining healthy diets and will create a healthier community.

The actual delivery of the products could also help create additional income for several residents. This would be similar to an Uber Eats or DoorDash, but would be managed through the community government and would enlist the help of drivers each week to deliver these baskets. The profits would also be shared with the farmers, who could sell off some of their additional crops.

## THE RATIONALE

There is not only just a lack of food in the area; there is a lack of access to *healthy* food. By partnering with local farms and farmers, we can make fresh, organic, locally-sourced produce easily accessible and affordable for all Jasper-Newton residents.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure the ROI on this project by tracking how many people are ordering the basket and how much profit is generated for the farms and for the delivery drivers. There will also be a series of indirect impacts to the health of community members, as healthy diets become more affordable and accessible.

---

*Support local farms and deliver nutritious food to people in need.*

<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



## *Form a Committee of Business and Education Leaders*

Storylines Affected: PC.2, PC.4, PC.10, PC.14, KF.1, KF.6, KF.9, KF.10, KF.11, and KF.13

### THE DESCRIPTION

As mentioned before, there is a lack of coordination with what is being taught in school and the occupational needs of the community as a whole. To address this, we will bring together an organization of local community leaders in business and education to form a committee.

This committee will coordinate the expertise and knowledge of local business leaders alongside the support of educators and administrators to develop initiatives for students, families, and community members at large. They will develop events, workshops, curricula, and pathways to ensure that students are prepared for the unique positions in the area.

The community as a whole will elect 5 leaders of business + the superintendent of schools to serve on the committee as volunteers. They will convene monthly to ideate and track programs.

### THE RATIONALE

There is a need for qualified and educated individuals to fill the unique positions in Jasper and Newton counties. This committee will ensure that they are getting the education they need and will ideate creative vocational opportunities for students.

### THE OUTCOMES

We will track the committee and their success by the programs they are able to implement and the number of qualified individuals graduating from local high schools and moving into jobs in the area.

---

*Develop a body that builds diverse educational pathways for our kids.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Government



Small Business

# *Partner with Ivy Tech to Bring in a New Campus*

Storylines Affected: KF.6, KF.9, and KF.10

## THE DESCRIPTION

With the closing of St. Joseph's College, there is a lack of nearby higher education opportunities. The closest options are Valparaiso University or Purdue, which are both outside of the counties and well beyond commuting distance. To fill the void for now until St. Joseph's is potentially able to reopen, we will bring a new Ivy Tech campus to the area.

This would give high school graduates the opportunity to seek out a college education while still living and working in Jasper and Newton counties. They will also be more likely to stay in the area and find a career after graduating. This will bring a new generation of college-educated and qualified individuals to live and work in the area.

## THE RATIONALE

The statistics show that Jasper and Newton counties have significantly fewer college-educated individuals than many of their peer counties. This is undoubtedly due to the lack of a higher education institution within the county borders. Bringing in a school that is accessible to many will make it easy for students to get a college education and then continue on to work in the area.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will continue to track the number of students that graduate from local high schools and go on to attend classes at our local Ivy Tech. We will also want to track them through their time there to measure graduation rates and look at how many students went from local high schools, through Ivy Tech, and then found careers in local businesses.

---

*Bring back higher education  
to our communities using a  
great state resource.*



Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Government



Education

# *Partner with a Healthcare Provider for an Urgent Care Center*

Storylines Affected: QL.3, QL.4, QL.15, and KF.5

## THE DESCRIPTION

In many larger communities, urgent care facilities are popping up and quickly becoming the healthcare treatment option of choice for many people. These urgent care facilities allow people to walk in without an appointment and see a doctor or nurse practitioner. These facilities can diagnose and prescribe treatment and will refer you to a specialist or other care provider if necessary.

Our research shows that, especially throughout Newton County, healthcare is rather inaccessible. By implementing an urgent care center, getting treatment would be cheaper, faster, and more available due to more convenient hours of operation.

## THE RATIONALE

There is a lack of healthcare options in Jasper and Newton counties. An urgent care center would make healthcare easy and accessible for everyone and would lead to an overall healthier community.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will use this urgent care center in order to track several data points related to the health of the community. We will be able to track rates of illnesses as well as how many people are seeking care. Depending on the numbers, we can decide to open more of these centers.

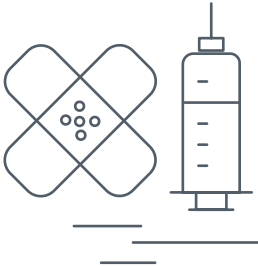
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*Bring needed emergency and acute care to our communities.*

Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Infrastructure



Health

# *Develop a Funding Plan to Supplement Educator Compensation*

Storylines Affected: KF.6, KF.9, KF.11, and KF.13

## THE DESCRIPTION

When discussing problems in the current education systems in Jasper and Newton counties, many brought up that it is hard to attract and retain talented and innovative educators. We will institute a funding plan that will help attract teachers and reward them for going the extra mile to educate our students.

This funding plan will be merit-based to an extent. Educators will be rewarded for innovating in the classroom and providing additional value to their students. This could be creating an experiential learning environment, taking students to get hands-on learning at local farms or businesses, creating and leading after-school programs, or more. Funds will be available to help teachers create these opportunities, purchase classroom supplies, pay for field trips, and more. There will also be stipends or rewards available for teachers that are creating a meaningful difference in their students' education experience.

In addition to making funds available, we are sure that the other community improvements detailed in previous sections will go a long way to attracting young and talented educators to our schools. They will be more willing and likely to move to a community that has been making strides to improve the quality of its resident's lives.

## THE RATIONALE

There seems to be an inability to attract new educators and retain talented individuals. Financial incentives would be the easiest way to remedy this issue. Additionally, providing the funding necessary to fuel their ideas and unique education experiences, as well as providing them the freedom to be creative in their classroom will make them more likely to stay in their roles for extended periods of time.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure the success of this initiative by the amount of new educators we are able to attract to our schools as well and improvements in test scores, engagement, graduation rates, and college placements.

---

*Improve teacher quality and subject-area diversity with compensation and skilling up.*

Opportunity

Improve

Attract

Lead

Timeline

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

Impact

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

Cost

High

Medium

Low



Government



Education

# *Create a Community Podcast*

Storylines Affected: VC.3, VC.9, VC.11, VC.14, and KF.3

## THE DESCRIPTION

We will create and produce a podcast for residents of Jasper and Newton counties. This podcast will be recorded for both video and audio playback. Each episode will be professionally produced for quality and will be made available on several platforms including YouTube, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, etc.

The original hosts of the podcast will be Brienne Hooker (President of the Jasper Newton Foundation) and Stephen Eastridge (Director of Economic Development for Jasper County). Each week, they will have segments discussing what's going on in Jasper and Newton counties, will have guests from the area talking about different events or news, and will bring in a few other fun segments to keep the podcast lively and engaging.

## THE RATIONALE

This plot point plays into the prevailing issue of communication. Podcasts are becoming more and more popular, and this is an effective method of promoting events, keeping residents up to date with what is happening, and encouraging engagement in the community.

## THE OUTCOMES

We will measure how many people are listening to the podcast as well as how long they're listening for and if they are engaging with the content. We'll also track revenue generated from sponsorships and advertisements.

---

*Create a voice for the community to bring everyone together.*



<b>Opportunity</b>	Improve	Attract	Lead
<b>Timeline</b>	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
<b>Impact</b>	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
<b>Cost</b>	High	Medium	Low



Community



Communication



Culture

# *Purchase Unsold Homes for Use as Childcare Facilities*

Storylines Affected: PC.1, KF.1, KF.6, KF.9, KF.13, KF.14, and KF.15

## THE DESCRIPTION

In previous sections, we discussed the fact that there are several hundred empty homes throughout Jasper and Newton counties. The vast majority of these homes have been vacant for many years and can be purchased at a significantly lower cost.

One way to solve two problems with a single plot point would be to purchase and renovate these homes to be used as childcare facilities. Most houses already provide much of the infrastructure that you want in a childcare facility such as living spaces, kitchens, and outdoor yards for recreation. It would take minimal investment on the community's part to get these buildings ready for operation as a daycare or pre-K center.

We will find people in the community who would be willing to take courses to become certified to operate a childcare facility and then allow them to use the space for minimal to no cost. We would set a starting goal of creating at least one of these spaces for every town in both Jasper and Newton counties.



## THE RATIONALE

There are two prevailing issues that we discussed in the Kids and Families narrative: the abundance of available housing, and the lack of childcare accessibility. This goal would solve both of those problems for minimal cost and time invested.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success would be measured by the number of childcare facilities opened in each town in Jasper and Newton counties and how many children are able to attend these centers.

---

*Provide people with the resources they need to bring affordable childcare to our families.*



**Opportunity**

Improve

Attract

Lead

**Timeline**

7+ Years

3-6 Years

1-2 Years

**Impact**

Unknown

Indirect

Direct

**Cost**

High

Medium

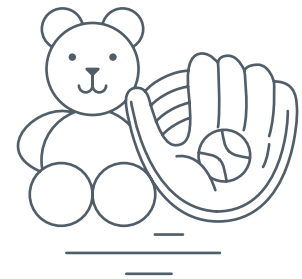
Low



**Government**



**Infrastructure**



**Children**

# *Use Opportunity Zones to build a Pre-K Center*

Storylines Affected: PC.1, KF.1, KF.6, KF.9, KF.13, KF.14, and KF.15

## THE DESCRIPTION

An Opportunity Zone is a designation and investment program created by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, allowing for certain investments in lower-income areas to have tax advantages in the form of decreases in the capital gains tax. A large part of southern Newton County has been designated as an Opportunity Zone.

This area also happens to be severely underserved and classified as a “child-care desert” in a study done by Early Learning Indiana. By taking advantage of this tax break, we can construct and operate a new pre-K center for significantly less cost than it would take in other areas. There are many grants and funds that are also available specifically for Opportunity Zone investments that we can leverage to make this happen.

## THE RATIONALE

Newton County is already underserved when it comes to childcare, and the need for a pre-K center is high. We will take advantage of this tax incentive to provide this service at a lower cost.

## THE OUTCOMES

Success will be measured by our ability to gain the funds necessary and construct and launch the pre-K center. We will then want to measure if this center is meeting the needs of the area.

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*Take advantage of tax  
incentives to assist in  
building childcare centers.*

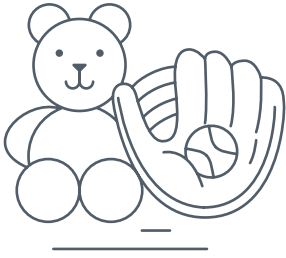
Opportunity	Improve	Attract	Lead
Timeline	7+ Years	3-6 Years	1-2 Years
Impact	Unknown	Indirect	Direct
Cost	High	Medium	Low



Government



Infrastructure



Children

# *Outcome Stories*

A picture of the future.





Remember the five profiles that we talked about earlier? If you need a refresher, go ahead and skip back to read through them again. This time, we're going to take those same five stories, but offer a hypothetical different world. Our 5 people haven't aged, and they still have the same

backstories as before. This time though, we're going to examine how their lives would be different if Jasper and Newton counties were successful in carrying out the big ideas we've outlined during this 5-year evolutionary journey.



# Maggie Sosa

EDUCATOR, 32



A day in the life of Maggie Sosa has changed drastically from before. Her community has developed all the support she needs to be successful and feel integrated into a place that she can call home for a lifetime.

Maggie wakes up each new day as the sun peeks through the fertile woods of her spacious yard, a luxury she never thought she'd have in her life. She bursts into action, like any mother quickly learns to do, and is off and running on a new day. This day is a lot different from those spent in the old Kentland; she's lucky to have been the beneficiary of a decade of committed work by her community.

Eliza, her 4-year-old daughter, is rambunctious as ever, but she doesn't awaken before Maggie. These moments are always precious silent time for Maggie, who starts her day with a long and relaxing shower before it's truly go-time. Today will be a soccer day in the Sosa household.

Maggie found two new soccer programs that ensure that Eliza is committed to an active lifestyle all year round. Using a tech platform, finding the activities was a breeze; she even enrolled Eliza in dance classes that have been a new favorite in the Sosa house. Many evenings are spent YouTubing and recreating the latest dance crazes, both girls zooming through the internet with ease.

As if she is set to an invisible alarm, Eliza rises from her sleep and stumbles into the bathroom to knock on the shower door. "It's game day, Mommy," Eliza proclaims excitedly with that raspy just-woke-up voice. "Can I wear my orange jersey to school?" Game days have become something of a ritual for Eliza, who likely is motivated partially by the promise of ice cream after the game at Kentland's new soda shop.

Maggie and Eliza are off to Growing Kids, a new pre-K school system that has a location just 15 minutes down the road from their house. The 4-star school has Eliza already exceeding kindergarten readiness and moving into 1st-grade level work. Today, Maggie is a bit anxious, dropping off Eliza. She knows that after drop-off, it's time for a crucial appointment with the local OB. Maggie is hoping to add a 3rd to the family but needs help with fertility treatments. It weighs on her heavily, but she's grateful to have a great doctor so close.

After the appointment, it's time for Maggie to get to work educating and molding the minds of the future. She's had the distinct pleasure of working on a new program at her high school, focusing on vocational pathways and soft skills needed to compete in the local job market. Her program has been a great success story in the community. In fact, over 90% of her graduates find jobs in the local community within a year of graduation. And those higher-paying, higher-skilled jobs are helping to push upwards a budding local economy replete with new manufacturing centers and

innovative new startups. One of those startups was even piloted and launched by a graduate of Maggie's first class. It's a special point of pride for her as she pushes hard to make this program fulfill the promise she made as an educator.

The new vocational program comes with a little pay bump, which means Maggie can finally afford graduate school and can stop entertaining offers from competing communities nearby.

After work and a rousing soccer match, Maggie picks up Eliza, and they head home to make dinner before ice cream. They get quality time each night cooking a dinner from their delivered fresh-produce boxes. The boxes come from local farms and even have great recipes to try with all the seasonal herbs, proteins, and veggies. The dishes don't always turn out great, but the two of them always have fun building something together.

A trip to get ice cream is followed by a twice-weekly walk on the newly minted nature trails. The system is expansive and ever-growing, it seems, so Maggie and Eliza can try new paths and see new things fairly regularly. It's a great time to disconnect from the internet and TV and get a bit of exercise for both of them. Best yet, after a brisk walk and a soccer match, the ice cream barely keeps Eliza awake long enough to make it to her bed before collapsing.

But Maggie's day isn't yet done. She logs into her blazing wireless internet and jumps on Ivy Tech's website. She's taking classes to move up to administration where she hopes to take the great successes of her vocational program, built in partnership with the local community mental health center, and implement them more widely across the school system. Her extra pay as the coach of debate and mock trial all help supplement a modestly priced graduate degree.

Maggie's life in our future Jasper and Newton community doesn't look wildly different than today, but it's significantly easier, more supported, and more likely to keep her here.

---

*I finally feel like I found a place to call home, to enjoy a rich life, and to raise a family that will give back to this great community.*

— MAGGIE SOSA



# Sara Wilmsen

WAITRESS, 26





Sara Wilmsen and her family have seen a drastic change in their way of living from the community of a decade ago to the community of now. Let's examine what a day in the life of Sara and her family looks like today and bask in the great work we have accomplished in the past 10 years.

Sara wakes up today like any other day, a bit groggy from a late shift at work. The mutterings and giggles of children in the room next to hers bring a pang of great satisfaction to her heart as a smile curls subtly outside of her lips.

Sara is thankful that last night's late shift no longer has her counting tips and hoping to make rent. She has largely given up her role at the restaurant as a late-night bartender in lieu of her life's true passion: helping those in need.

Indeed, today Sara spends her time tending to a different type of patron altogether. After enrolling in a program at her local Saint Joseph's College, Sara has worked her butt off to become a licensed professional nurse. The program was flexible around her schedule and scaled to meet her financial means. She's thankful to have had the opportunity to learn so much in such a flexible setting.

As she sits up in bed, like most of us, Sara unlocks and checks her phone. Unlike most of us, Sara is getting paid to do it. She took a few online courses in social media marketing and his transition into the role of social media coordinator for the restaurant at which she wanted a bar. 36 new follows on Facebook. Not a bad haul for a couple of beautiful pictures of the new menu items. Her boss is thrilled that the weekday average spend has increased by over 15%.

Begrudgingly, Sara drags herself from bed and knows she has limited time to get Sorrel to her great new preschool program. Kale is already up and showered, ready to hop on the bus and off to school. Both kids are committed to a number of after-school programs that they found using the community's events and organizations management platforms. Both are regularly active in team sports, signing up using the active community lifestyle system.

With the kids after school, Sara returns home jumps on the lightning-fast Internet. She isn't content to stay with a bachelor's degree, as she continues to pursue the next level of nursing excellence. She dedicates just a couple hours each day to studying and moving through the courses, and in just a few short years will have earned her nurse practitioners status. She's already quite proud of herself, hey single

*My town has supported me to grow as a person, as the leader of my family, and as a member of my community.*

— SARA WILMSEN

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mother making it on her own, but she will be elated when her graduation date comes. For now, it's off to work at the retirement home where she has made lifetime new friends and continues to offer excellence help to those less able.

At school, Kale has had great success academically, especially in robotics and stem. He just has a knack for the mechanical. But, he continues to work diligently and the soft skills needed to excel in any career. He is signed up in a mentorship program through the robotics lab, where he will take an elementary school student under his wing and help them find the same success that he has.

After school today, both kids will head to 4H, where they take an active role in an agrarian lifestyle. The program has done an enormous amount for both of them in their short lives. After school today, importantly, this rich landscape of after-school activities has afforded Sarah the ability to pursue a more flexible work schedule. Her kids' activities don't finish up until around 6:45, giving her ample time to finish her workday, grab the kids, and head home for a family dinner.

Ten years of focus on the challenges to the single-parent family have been enormously helpful. Sara's family simply couldn't have existed without enormous strain and struggle before commitment to this plan. Now, her family prospers in a vibrant community, made possible by her participation actively in it.

# Trevor Boyd

ENTREPRENEUR, 35





Like any self-respecting multi-generational farmer, when the sun first peeks over the corn stalks, he has been awake for some time. Trevor Boyd has built a little, rural empire in the past few years, but something about his Midwest sensibility means that he can't let other people do a job that he could just as well do himself. That is why, on most mornings like this, you'll find Trevor covered in grease working on the combine head, trucking a load up north to the elevator, or driving to the co-op to pick up another trailer of anhydrous ammonia.

As he clocks his third hour of work for the day, his three kids start the slow movements of before-school mornings. His youngest, James, three, is the first up and certainly most excited to greet the day. James is likely excited because he knows what his day will look like. Pastor Drayton is leading his preschool class alongside his normal teacher, Miss Maria. Much of today's class will be spent outside, having fun on the new playground, and learning by experiencing nature. James' preschool is housed in his local church, where all of the teachers are trained in the Montessori method and have built the school model from some of the more interesting school charters in America. The little rural school has just 40 students, but it's been featured in *EdWeek*, winning an award for curriculum innovation. It's a bright spot for rural Parr, and something folks here really hang their hat on.

Eva is the next to wake, a little bit less eager to get started, but excited nonetheless. Eva, 7, is a second-grader at the local Lincoln Elementary School. While she likes school, she's most excited about dance class, which is set to take her from just after school through to dinner time. Her dance course is a new addition to the community, housed in the local recreation center just down the road in Rensselaer. The center was built recently as part of a program designed to encourage healthier lifestyles in the area. It's hard to imagine that, just a few years ago, Parr and neighboring Rensselaer had almost no group recreation activities. Eva certainly couldn't imagine life without dance.

Mary, nine, is predictably the last to rise. While her father took her on many an early morning combine ride as a toddler, the farming schedule never seemed to take with Mia. And she'll need those extra few winks of sleep. Today is a long one for young Mia; she will split her time between three of her great passions. At the ripe age of nine, she has already developed a keen interest in both sports and science. Today, her robotics club meets to compare final notes before

the big competition this Saturday. While many chose to build battle bots, Mia focused her attention on creating something of greater value. Her robotic lathe is capable of turning crayons into sculpture and pencils into miniature furniture. She hopes to build the larger version, driven by a computer, by the time she hits middle school. But, Mia's first passion is gymnastics, where she grew an intense love for the sport in her preschool tumbling course. Thanks to an up-and-coming, vibrant sports community nearby, she gets elite training in gymnastics three times a week at the recreation center.

As the school day winds down and the kids gear up for their after-school activities, Trevor and his wife Jamie overlap for a quick chat and to steal a kiss in the high school hallway like old times. Trevor is on his way to volunteer, like he does twice weekly, at an agricultural program of his own making at the school. Jamie wraps up a meeting with the PTA, wrangles up the kids, and dispenses them at the rec center for the next few hours. She has a brief respite, and it's plenty of time to catch up with her local book club.

Trevor's agricultural program has made some great strides in the past few years. Just like his startup business, the program focuses on hydroponics and the science of growing indoors. His training in biochemistry makes him something of a dual-threat in the world of farming, and it's made him a lot of riches in the world of entrepreneurship. With the support of a local agritech incubator and a partnership with Purdue University, he grew his small idea into a living, breathing company. His hometown is growing rapidly, and he's had a lot to do with it. That hydroponics business went from side hustle to a thriving business in just a few years. And, of the 20 new families relocating to Parr, 12 of them have done so to work alongside Trevor. Parr might be looking to incorporate soon at this pace.

And with those new families, has come an influx of culture wouldn't have otherwise been possible. One of those new cultural events has been circled on the Boyd's calendar for months. It's the annual farm-to-fork community dinner. Held on the neighboring farm, 100 community members are slated to come together, break bread, share stories, and enjoy each other's company over some of the finest fresh Midwestern food our fertile soil has to offer.

As evening rolls around, bellies are full as their hearts. The Boyd family has a lot to be thankful for: a thriving business, a great school system, each other. As they drive home from another busy day, their eyes gaze into the horizon. Something just feels right about this place, doesn't it? They can't exactly put their finger on the feeling. As the kids move up in the years, as the yields come and go, as Trevor's business grows, they'll get closer to defining exactly what this feeling means.

It's the feeling of family and the feeling of the simple pleasures of being together... It's driving home.

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*My roots here are deep, but  
I'm finally feeling like my  
kids will feel the same.*

— TREVOR BOYD

# Karley Forrester

PSYCHOLOGIST, 21





Karley starts the day a bit differently from the people in our other stories. No children crying in the background or early-morning careers to attend to. At her heart, Karley is still a bit of a college kid, so morning rituals aren't coming as easy as they are for others. The idea that most of Morocco is awake before the first crow of the rooster is something that Karley can't quite wrap her head around. The idea that there's literally a rooster crowing isn't even the craziest part for her.

But, Karley is learning from her fiancé, Wes, the positive impact of an early start to the day. She's taken up running recently and found that the new rails-to-trails installation is the perfect spot (just 10 minutes from her house) to get in an inspirational morning jog. Today, Karley is setting out to hit her first 10-mile run. She's deep into a training program that should culminate in her first-ever marathon, an inaugural event held just north of her in DeMotte. The route will take her and the pack along the Kankakee, along a newly paved trail connecting Lake County's system to Pulaski's new riverfront passage.

On her way from the run to the office, Karley has a moment free to dial up Wes and see how his day is starting. The two are set to get married in just a few months, and they're excited to tie the knot at a beautiful venue built from the old firehouse.

Karley's practice opens up at 10 am and her schedule is booked full on this beautiful day. She unlocks the door and hops in the work shower in time to enjoy a fresh coffee before her first appointment. As part of an initiative between Jasper and Newton counties, Karley was able to apply for a small business grant and get the funds needed to back her dream.

Karley agreed to take on a broad caseload of mental health clients in the area to fill a big gap in the healthcare infrastructure. She's thankful that a progressive program like this actively recruited folks with her level of talent to make this community her home. Without the help, she isn't sure she could have stayed here. After just a few years, she wonders how the community could have functioned without her practice. She's been able to have an impact quickly and make her mark on the world where it's needed most.

Karley and her business partner quickly saw a need for better mental health education, especially around the topic of substance abuse. Together, with some creative funding and philanthropic community leaders, they have built a community-wide, immersive mental health education program. Rather than simply adding a few worksheets or videos to health class, Karley built this curriculum to lay over entire modules in the school system, working closely with local educators and ensuring that the activities would have an impact on young mental health challenges.

She's graduating her first class through the program this year. Local kids have now been immersed in her social and emotional learning activities over four separate units. She can already start to see the difference just in how the community thinks about mental health and the stigma around it.

Karley's youthful energy is nothing compared to her business partner, Trish, whose plans already extend beyond the practice or the school program. Trish, a classmate of Karley's at Purdue, paid her way through college by working in the restaurants on campus. She worked her way up through the ranks, eventually even landing a role as a sous chef at the steakhouse in the Memorial Union. She's bringing that talent to the community to accompany her practice.

The downstairs of their practice has been vacant for some time and, with some help from the economic development folks, Trish and Karley were able to get some grants to bring a whole new idea to life. "Harvest" will be a fresh kitchen, serving only local ingredients on their menu (a partnership with local providers and farms). The two of them put in a few hours each night painting, decorating, and cleaning to get things ready. As soon as Karley returns from her honeymoon, it's grand opening time.

Karley wraps up her final session—she takes a few later in the evening—to see Wes popping in the door. The two are off to a taste-test at a new local bakery started by one of Wes' old high school friends. They're hoping to land on a final choice for their wedding night. Either way, a few extra carbs after an honest day's work won't hurt anyone. In fact, these two deserve it.

As Karley drives home, she thinks of what could have been had she made the easier choice. Had she fled home like so many of her peers, she would never have had the opportunities she's had at such an early age. In the past 10 years, she's seen her community resolve and recommit itself to those things she is most passionate about. She's excited to call herself a small town gal. More excited still to raise a small-town family with the love of her life. She lets her mind blur a bit as she logs the feeling into memory. This is home.

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*I can't believe I'm a small-town girl. It's not the path I would have ever guessed, but this place makes me feel more home than I ever have.*

— KARLEY FORRESTER

# Luis Delgado

BUSINESS OWNER, 42





Luis rolls out of bed to the sound of an unnerving alarm, one his wife has, after five years, learned to ignore. The sound resembled something you'd hear in a dystopian movie signifying an impending nuclear attack, but it was the only thing that seemed to get Luis out of bed and on his feet when he wanted to. It's 4:45 am, and Luis is ready to greet the day with just a select few—mostly farmers getting an early start in the fields and hunters hoping to nab that big buck.

Luis has made it a point to be the first one in the building, something in which he takes great pride but, if he wants to spend an hour working at one of his properties, it means adjusting to a pretty rough schedule.

Luis owns four downtown properties that he and his wife renovate, rent, and eventually plan to sell. He likes to think he's giving back to the community and his retirement at the same time. His wife, Molly, really enjoys working with her hands and flexing her interior design muscles. His kids even chip in on the weekends and nights. Luis and Molly now think it's important to instill a work ethic at an early age.

It's probably that same work ethic that Luis's father taught him that has helped him to build one of the most successful manufacturing companies in rural Indiana. But, a few other factors are at play as well.

Luis will be the first to tell you that it is thanks in no small part to the work of his local community in creating a vibrant hometown that he was able to recruit great talent from as far away as Indianapolis and Lafayette.

He is, of course, most proud of his recruiting efforts right here in DeMotte. He has been instrumental in building, alongside the local community foundation, a talent pipeline to feed his business for decades to come.

In fact, Luis has to make a stop during his lunch hour today at the local high school where he has helped implement a vocational entrepreneurship program. Just 5 years in the making, the program has already graduated four employees at his business.

As Luis oversees the production lines and cracks wise with a few of his longer-standing employees, back home, Molly is hard at work. Their two boys are incredibly active in youth sports. Molly is dropping Connor at football practice this morning and then zooming over to the YMCA soccer league for Jake.

*My community has built up a pipeline of talent that is happy to call this town home and it's made all the difference in my life.*

— LUIS DELGADO

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Connor's football practice meets at a newly installed multi-sports venue. It was made possible by some smart planning based on great data generated through an active lifestyle app. Jake's league, like many of her sons' leagues, meets at the new recreation center where the boys have annual memberships, get free daycare, and make diligent use of the great amenities.

After a long but rewarding day, The Delgado's are sure to meet back home in time for a family meal. Sure, they might not cook everything themselves, but we're happy to share the trimmings of a takeout dining experience with some great stories and great company.

Afterward, to round the day out, the family takes a group walk through the new biking and nature trails. The boys end up racing each other along the path, which gives Molly and Luis a little bit of alone time to decompress after the day. The boys don't realize it now, but these shared sunset walks will stick with them forever and remind them, each time they reflect on them, of what it means to be home.

A decade of very focused effort on community-building, with an emphasis on creating a thriving economy, has built a home for Luis and the Delgado's that they just didn't know was possible. Now, as he drives home from a long shift at the plant, a football game, or a walk in the park with his family, Luis finds himself lost in the beauty of things.

He can't quite put his finger on what the feeling is, but we know. It's driving home.



# *Closing Thoughts*

Let's put our power to work for this community.



We began this journey together in one of the more peaceful practices of our all-too-stimulated lives: the drive home. As we imagine that drive today, for many of us, it conjures up the coziest and most warm and comforting thoughts.

That last glint of sunlight warms the tips of siloes protruding from our fertile home. Farmland is cut by treelines and irrigation, landmarks only those of us lucky enough to call this place home could know to use as waypoints—a silent, peaceful calm washes over the most anxious among us. We can't help but give ourselves to something bigger in those moments, to lose ourselves in the breadth and beauty of it all.

It's a passive act: that drive. It acts on us far more than we do on it. It restores and rejuvenates us. It prepares us for home. Now it's time that we prepare our home for it. For the future of those drives and those lucky enough to call these communities home. With our shared narrative in hand, we can turn driving home into an active process. We can put our hands on the shared wheel, our feet on the accelerator, and drive our home forward. We pass by those communities too stubborn to push boundaries and navigate

the hazards of those who might wish to meet this progress with challenge. Our trip, together, is one of shared responsibility and work. But, for us, that isn't anything new. It's programmed into our Midwestern value system. It's built into our DNA.

Outsiders are unlikely to get it. We're a special breed in two important and dichotomous ways. First, we are born and bred as rugged individualists. We take care of our own and ask for little to nothing in return. It's honorable. Second, we're raised to treat our neighbors as we would ourselves want to be treated.

These communities are sacred lands and our people are uniquely industrious. Those qualities aren't born in the way we do things or what we've done, but rather in how we go about the doing. We're entrepreneurial in spirit and powerful in community. And when we harness that power—when we discover what we truly care about—we can be changemakers. Together, let's drive that change; let's drive our community forward.

Let's drive home.



# DRIVING *home*