

GREATER FORT WAYNE  
Business Weekly

# FORTY UNDER

# 40<sup>TM</sup> 2022

SECTION A



**Purdue Fort Wayne**  
is honored by the many achievements and ongoing dedication from

**Sunila Chowdhry**  
*Director of Upward Bound*

and

**Krissy Creager**  
*Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management  
and the Student Experience*

We are proud to help welcome you into the  
**Forty Under 40**  
*Class of 2022.*

**PURDUE UNIVERSITY.**  
**FORT WAYNE**

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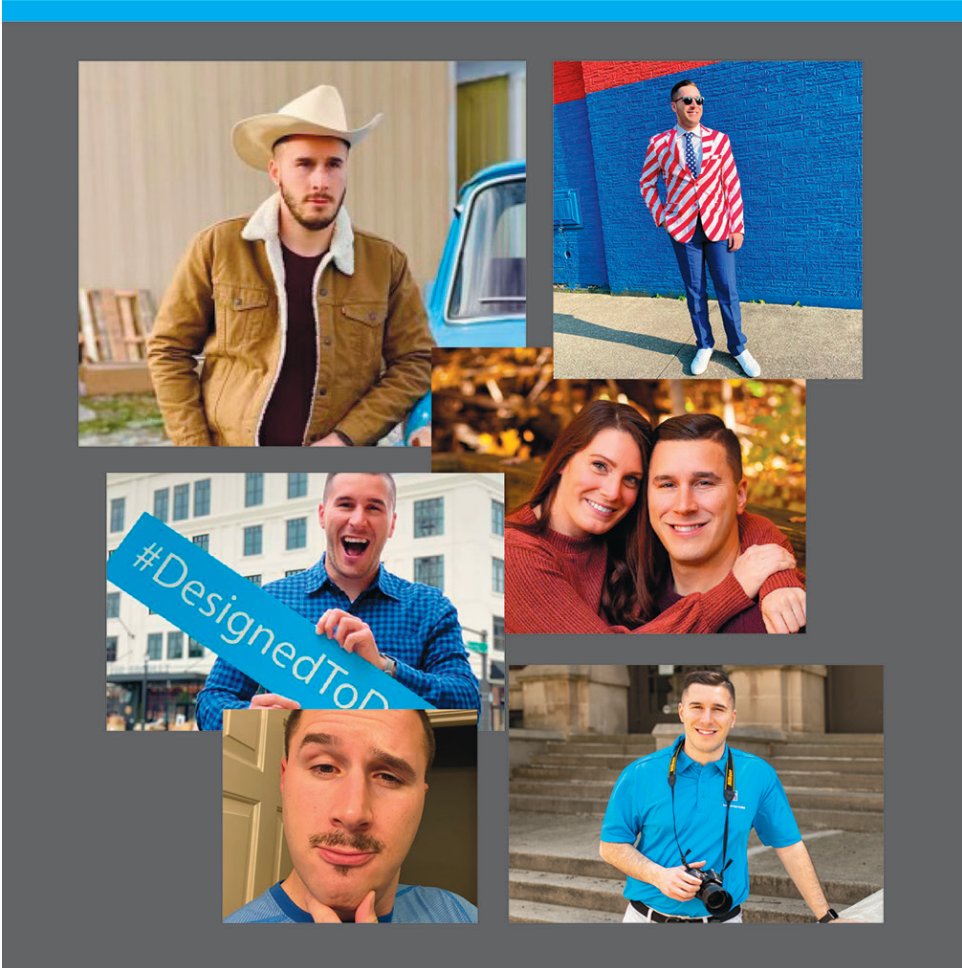
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**BRETT GAUGER**  
“MR. FORT WAYNE”  
ON HIS 40 UNDER 40  
ACHIEVEMENT.



CONGRATULATIONS  
DR. BONTRAGER  
*for being one of the 40 under 40  
award recipients*



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# Dr. Kalyssa Mae Bontrager, 29

**Employer:** LaGrange Family Dentistry  
**Education:** I graduated from high school at Leo Junior/Senior High in 2011. I received my Bachelor's of Science in Biology in 2015 from IPFW and finally, I graduated with my DDS in 2019 from IU School of Dentistry.  
**Community organizations:** Isaac Knapp Dental Society, Matthew 25 volunteer, Give Kids a Smile Day, Fairview Fellowship Youth Group  
**Hobbies:** My hobbies include playing pretend and doing crafts with my two sweet daughters, gardening and reading books. I also enjoy traveling and trying new restaurants with my husband.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I grew up in Leo and married my high school sweetheart. After graduating from dental school in Indy, we knew we wanted to move back to Northeast Indiana to be close to our friends and family.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** A person's oral health affects their whole life. If they have a confident smile, they are statistically more likely to get the job they want and have more life satisfaction. Toothaches can be excruciating and extremely life-disrupting. I love being able to give people a smile that they're proud of or help relieve patients' pain and give them back their ability to

eat whole-nutritious foods. Through my job I get to be a part of people's transformation everyday.  
**What does success mean to you?** My definition of success is walking with Jesus through the path He leads us on. Success is living out the abundant and joy-filled life that God wants for us.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** As a child, I wanted to be a doctor. I knew I wanted to combine my love for science and math with my desire to help people be their healthiest selves. Finding out that dentistry allowed me to do this while being in a private practice, small town setting where I could really get to know my patients drew me towards dentistry specifically.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from Bob Evans. I worked as a waitress there, and I loved the experience I gained serving people.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My husband, Matt, has always believed in me. He worked hard to support us through undergrad and dental school. He believed in me when I wanted to buy a dental practice and move to a new town. He has never doubted me.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?**



My biggest accomplishment has been becoming a business owner and becoming formally trained in placing implants. I took a year-long course after graduation that included very in-depth training.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake has been allowing the people-pleaser in me to lead me to neglect myself. I have

had to learn to put my oxygen mask on before I can assist others with theirs.  
**What are your current professional goals?** I am excited to be working towards bringing more doctors into my practice to increase access-to-care. Along with that, we are creating new job positions and boosting the local economy of our small town.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I have a continuous list of continuing education courses that I want to pursue. As soon as I finish one, I'm on to the next. I also stay connected with dentists in Indiana to collaborate and support each other.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I have to be willing to accept my limitations and set boundaries. I keep in mind that everything I say "yes" to is a "no" to something else.  
**What do you do to relax?** To relax, I like to take walks outside, get together with friends, and do art with my daughters.  
**What book do you recommend?** I recommend "Get Out of Your Head" and "Find Your People;" both are great books by Jennie Allen.  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** It's all going to work out. God does have a plan for you. Trust Him to take the next step and rest without knowing all of the details.

# Brett Donald Gauger, 29

**Employer:** Elevatus Architecture  
**Education:** Homestead High School (2011); Indiana University Fort Wayne (2015), Bachelors of Science in Public Affairs with a Health Services Administration concentration.  
**Community organizations:** Currently, I am actively involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters Northeast Indiana, Indiana Tech, Input Fort Wayne, Visit Fort Wayne, and Fort Wayne Air Show Inc. Over the years, I have engaged with local arts, education, and economic development agencies. Some of my past experiences have been with Community Harvest Food Bank, Fort4Fitness, Easter Seals ARC of Northeast Indiana, and Junior Achievement of Northern Indiana. I've been proud to partner with various businesses and organizations for purposes pertaining to raising awareness.  
**Hobbies:** My hobbies consist of spending time outdoors, getting a taste of the Fort Wayne food and brew scene, and just finding reasons to love my community more. Anything that brings joy can definitely be considered a hobby of mine.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I am in Northeast Indiana because I believe in the people who ambitiously help grow this region. Businesses, organizations, and initiatives thrive here in northeast Indiana. It's small enough to get involved and big enough to see the difference. That's what I love about Northeast Indiana. Side note: my whole education career was conducted within a 15-mile radius. I've been proud to invest my time and knowledge here in the region.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** Every single day is different. Architecture evolves around human behavior and throw marketing into that, you have so many

elements to communicate. On top of the growing environment, my profession consists of a lot of collaboration across numerous areas, so it's a blast to dig deep in the world of architecture. I absolutely love developing and implementing marketing and communications strategies that produce extraordinary results. With an industry background including public, private, and nonprofit entities, I've been fortunate to be on the forefront of some of the area's biggest chapters.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success is what you make of it. Whether it's perfecting a recipe you've been working on, volunteering at a local nonprofit, or seeing growth in your skill set, success can come by all shapes and sizes. It is practically limitless! Don't underestimate a successful point in your life. The smallest wins yield the biggest outcomes.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I feel like it always changed but the one thing that stayed constant was that I wanted to serve others.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck was from Casa! I was raised with the same food I worked around, which was pretty cool. While working at Casa, I was a busser. The job was very cross-functional at times.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My parents. They've motivated me to be the best version of myself. From the high and low times, they've been there for me and have provided sincere guidance. My career ambitions including my education endeavors never really lined up, but they always believed in me.  
**What has been your biggest**



**accomplishment thus far in your career?** I would have to say that my biggest accomplishment is doing this thing called life. It's a unique creature, if you think about it. Some days, it likes to give you the easy route and some days, the roads aren't always clear. I lean on my support system as the leveraging unit that helps push me forward. They've always been there for me and I will always be grateful for that. Accomplishing life is always a work in progress.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** How we respond to mistakes can really define us. My greatest mistake has to be being a perfectionist. I have learned time and time again, it is okay to make mistakes. You live and you learn.  
**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goals are to maintain an open mind and grow

into what suits my thoughts and interests best. Some action items would be: pursue what makes me grow, foster relationships that improve both end users, and bring awareness to the good in our world.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Connection. Maintaining relationships through connection and seeking out educational opportunities that suit your functions will expand your horizon. How you look at connectivity can really help pave your path.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I value time. It's essential to value time in life because there is only so much of it. Taking time for yourself is a critical component. How you look at time is up to you, but I believe it's vital to understand where you're spending it and how you believe it will leverage your future.  
**What do you do to relax?** I tend to try out a new activity or travel. Whether it's going a mile down the road or across state borders, I love getting out there to see the world. I am a firm believer that meditation can be seen as anything that soothes your soul. I consider meditation as a practice of concentration and living in the moment.  
**What book do you recommend?** There are so many books to choose from and it depends what genre you love best. If you're seeking a good professional development book, "Start With Why" by Simon Sinek is a stellar option.  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell my high school self that I am proud of them. I've tried my best and I have fallen at times. But, the only way you're going to define yourself is when you get back up and go at it.



# Laneisha R. Bennett, 39



**Employer:** Leaving Legacy Memorial  
**Education:** Northrop High School '00, A.S. Interactive Media, The International Academy of Design-Tampa  
**Community organizations:** Elevate City Church Dream Team, Junior Achievement  
**Hobbies:** Kayaking, reading and exercising  
**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** I am a generational resident. I currently have a teen son and there's no desire to relocate.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** The ability to offer a small piece of closure to grieving individuals. It's such an amazing feeling to turn tears of sorrow into tears of joy by sharing my talents and gifts.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success is creating a Legacy that my child, his children and their children can benefit from years to come.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** A club owner

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Chuck E. Cheese's — Cashier  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** Every family that has utilized the services of Leaving Legacy Memorial.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Taking the dive into helpful community resources such as The Launch Women Business Build Accelerator under The Women's Entrepreneurial Opportunity Center (WEOC) and Summit City Entrepreneur and Enterprise District (SEED).  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Fear — You never know if you can swim if you don't dive in, so jump from the deep end.  
**What are your current professional goals?** To be the #1 funeral program provider within the midwestern corridor.  
**How do you remain current/**

**relevant in your profession?** By continuing my education in the field through online resources, training w/ funeral and digital design experts.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** My planner is my best resource to keep me organized. I understand the importance of each area by staying spiritual grounded is my top priority. Tapping into my spirituality helps give me the wisdom that I need to prioritize all of those things including self-care.  
**What do you do to relax?** Exercise, read, pray and kayak.  
**What book do you recommend?** Summary of Grit: The Power and Passion of Perseverance by Angela Duckworth  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Learn/study everything and utilize it within any and/or every area of your life. It's okay not to be in the IN crowd. Stand out even if you have to stand alone.

# Scott Edward Campbell, 30

**Employer:** Ambassador Enterprises, LLC  
**Education:** University of Notre Dame Law School (2017) – J.D.; Wabash College (2014) – B.A., Economics, Classics; Bishop Dwenger High School (2010)  
**Community organizations:** YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne (Camp Potawotami).  
**Hobbies:** Rec hockey/sports; engaging with nature (hunting/fishing/hiking); traveling; reading.

**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** Family, opportunity, and the region's growth.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** Strategic problem-solving.  
**What does success mean to you?** Finding fulfillment personally and professionally; engaging in lifelong learning and sharing that wisdom and knowledge with others.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Professional

football player.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** I performed data entry tasks and file organization at my dad's business, Huff and Campbell Insurance Agency.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My fiancé, who unwaveringly loves and supports me in the life we are building together; my parents, who provided a solid foundation and always believed in me; Jeremy Gayed, who took a chance on me and pushes me every day to be a better strategic problem solver.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** The opportunity to have worked on or been a part of some of the transformational projects taking place in Northeast Indiana.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Sacrificing quality of work product to meet a deadline; manage time better and take pride in work that has your name on it.  
**What are your current professional goals?** Own part of a business.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Let quality work be my greatest marketing tool and network with like-minded people.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?**



The most challenging question; I try not to overextend myself – give full effort to a few things instead of half effort to a lot of things, and trust in God to show me the way.  
**What do you do to relax?** Dive into my hobbies.  
**What book do you recommend?** "Anatomy of Peace" (Arbringer Institute); "The Alchemist" (Paulo Coelho).  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Prioritize finding your identity and passions over external markers of success or potential.



Ambassador Enterprises extends its congratulations to  
**Scott Campbell**

Scott's recognition as a **Forty Under 40** honoree is well deserved. As Corporate Counsel for Ambassador Enterprises, his talent and humility make him an essential member of our team. More importantly, Scott's dedication to serving others and creating a positive impact make him a valuable part of our community.

Congratulations to Scott and to all of the 2022 recipients.



Partners for Legacy Impact



Congratulations to  
**Laneisha Bennett**



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# Jacob M. Butler, 38

**Employer:** Parkview Health  
**Education:** Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity ITT; Masters of Science in Cybersecurity WGU  
**Community organizations:** Fort Wayne Humane, Fort Wayne Pitbull Coalition, Indiana InfraGard Members Alliance, Indiana Executive Council on Cybersecurity, Galloping Grove Senior Horse Sanctuary and Community volunteer for the City of Auburn Parks and Rec.  
**Hobbies:** I love spending time with my family. We love to spend time outdoors hiking, horseback riding and star watching. I have just recently started a new hobby with my son where we are learning Shorin-ryu Shorinkan Karate. I also enjoy playing video games with my son.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I moved to the Fort Wayne area for college from Ohio after high school. I then met my wife, and we bought land north of Fort Wayne and built our dream home on our horse ranch. I love the lower Great Lakes area.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I hope to be the leader for others I needed as I grew in my roles in the past. I hope to inspire, educate and grow my teams. Creating solutions with my peers, leading my team and seeing the impacts of collaborations is the most rewarding to me. I still enjoy the challenge of technical aspects including; designing complex systems, procedures and processes that can be used through its lifetime. Additionally, I enjoy the challenge of identifying weaknesses and fixing them within the systems.  
**What does success mean to you?** Professional success to me is doing the right thing at the right time. No matter the situation, if it's the right thing, it's going to be successful. In my personal life, I believe success is building a life you don't want a vacation from.  
**As a child, what did you want to be**

**when you grew up?** As a child I loved to design landscapes and building structures. As I continued to grow up I found that computers came easy to me. From there I continued to design not landscapes, but large and complex networks.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first job was a farm hand with a local farmer in Ohio when I was 13 until I graduated high school. I performed various jobs from equipment maintenance, harvesting crops to watching over the animals. This was the definition of hard work, but I really enjoyed it. I learned so much, I still apply much of what I learned today with my own horses and ranch.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My wife Courtney, has been my biggest supporter. When I was faced with difficult situations she always had encouraging words to keep me pressing on. She reminds me to keep going, support others and keep on the sunny side. I have to give a shout out to my VP, Jeff Coulter as well. Without his daily support and recognition I would not be where I am today with Parkview.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest achievement has been my promotion into a leadership role with Parkview four years ago. I also created the team structure for Parkview's Information Security group three years prior to taking my leadership role. I am very proud that I, with my family, have fostered nine litters of puppies for Fort Wayne Humane and Fort Wayne Pit Bull Coalition over the last eight years. Some with the mothers, some without. We have helped save over 120 dogs and puppies.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Early on in my career, I was blindly following others, defaulting to



them for their opinions and solutions. From this mistake I learned that I have a voice as well as those people around me also have a voice. We all need to listen and speak up to be heard.  
**What are your current professional goals?** I want to maximize the efficiency of the two highly functional teams I lead. One team is working on automation, monitoring and mobile device use for the organization. My other team is focused on our data center operations. My teams are each incredible. They are highly committed, intelligent and I value them very much. An important goal is that I ensure I am leading them with respect and they feel valued each day. I am entering my Doctorate of IT in order to continue

growing in my career and have a goal to complete that in the next 24 months.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I commit to never stop learning from others, seeking information and furthering my education and certifications. I conduct research from reading RFC documents to testing in labs. I also work with security testing labs like Hack the Box or live systems at Hacker1. Also, working alongside other professionals through various boards and committees.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I love my daily work, so it is hard to walk away from tasks when the day is over. The horses, dogs, ducks and all of the fosters in my home usually give me reminders when it is time to put work down for the day. I look forward to spending time unwinding with my family out in nature. I do like to unplug when I can, but I can say I never truly put work down for the day-in the best kind of way I feel fulfilled being able to assist day or night with my teams and fellow managers. My employer encourages volunteerism for myself and the team, I get to apply my skills to help agencies such as Fort Wayne Humane whenever possible. The foster pups I take in are generally in my home office, so balance is easy there, they make the days go better.  
**What do you do to relax?** I love to hang out with my wife and son. Be it taking the horses out on a ride, or just sitting on the porch watching the sun set, I look forward to it. My favorite place to get away is the Straits of Mackinac and enjoy the outdoors with my family.  
**What book do you recommend?** "Start With Why," Simon Sinek  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Don't take yourself too seriously, make the mistakes and learn. I would also tell him to avoid the "pineapple" as a haircut.

## Congratulations, Jake!

Recipient of a Forty Under 40 award.



**Jake Butler**  
MSCSIA, CISSP, CEH, CHFI  
Information Systems Manager,  
Enterprise System Management &  
Datacenter Operations

Jake Butler has been chosen to receive one of Business Weekly's prestigious Forty Under 40 awards. Parkview Health is proud to have him on our team, where he brings his talents and ambition to his role as an Information Systems Manager. Congrats, Jake, on being selected for this honor!





# Brandon Deel, 38

**Employer:** Home Reserve, a furniture manufacturing company that offers renewable furniture to working-class families.

**Education:** What community organizations are you involved in? I lead a communications ministry and teach creative arts classes at Harvest Fellowship.

**Hobbies:** My most recent hobby is building model rockets with my kiddos.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I moved to Fort Wayne to escape a dark path I was on. I went back to school and at the same time, found refuge in a church where I was exposed to real, authentic Christians for the first time. These men and women propped me up with a kind of love that I had never experienced. They invested in me, influenced me as a leader, and helped to shape the way I view community. My roots have grown deep here, and I've been committed to investing back into this place and these people ever since.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy using the art and science of communication to influence, impact, and overall connect people together.

**What does success mean to you?** Success happens the moment you reach a place where you have just enough experience and resources to share with the people you find yourself surrounded by.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Motocross athlete or one of those guys that gets to operate a T-shirt launcher in a stadium.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My

first paycheck came from working at a feed mill in my small hometown of LaGrange, Indiana. I bagged and delivered truckloads of livestock feed to local farms.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** Terry Gust was the only teacher to see through my high school facade and told me I would be good at something — communication arts. Her voice rang through 6 years later when deciding a major. The late Allen Etter regularly inconvenienced himself to coach me through college. Chad Stuckey gave me my first big break in the advertising industry. Scott Anspach for his lessons of humility. Blaine and Blair Wieland's unique leadership style broke down my walls and empowered me to do neat things. Audrea Deel, because I don't think there's ever been a business decision made without her influence.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I've been lucky enough to play a small part in helping to grow Home Reserve from a \$4 million company to a projected \$30 million company by the end of 2022. Now having served over 200,000 families nationwide, I see Home Reserve as one of those companies that's helping to put Fort Wayne on the map. That growth has granted us more opportunities to give back to our people and communities in exciting ways.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** I once chose a job for all the wrong reasons — the job title and larger



salary was not worth it.

**What are your current professional goals?** To help make Home Reserve a household brand and one of the best places to work. Personally — to position myself to be more available for aiding in global missions work.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I position myself to be student of everything. My curiosity and compulsion to know more, drive me to absorb anything and everything around me — HBR podcasts, business masterclasses, business journals ... friends, colleagues,

coworkers, local professionals — there are so many talented professionals in Fort Wayne that inspire me, and they don't even know it.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** When I do get it right, it's usually because I've taken the time over the weekend to plan family time in advance. Call it being intentional or casting vision ... I'm more likely to act when I have a few ideas ready to implement. I try to utilize the in-between moments in the car lines. Rather than a few long vacations throughout the year, I'm trying to master more frequent 4-day vacations.

**What do you do to relax?** Hiking, biking, driving through the country, mowing lawn, spending down time with my wife and three kids.

**What book do you recommend?** "RARE Leadership," reminds us of the importance of remaining relational. "King Solomon's Keys To Success," points out that "a vision without goals is not a vision." "A More Beautiful Question": "The most successful people are expert questioners, comfortable in their own ignorance."

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** 1. Don't take yourself so seriously. 2. "Fake it until you make it" will only get you so far. You're eventually going to face the fact that you really don't know much, and that's OK — nobody does. Change the narrative to, "I don't know, but I'll find the answer." 3. Don't hesitate to ask the questions.

# Andrew Gritzmaker, 36

**Employer:** Habitat for Humanity of Greater Fort Wayne

**Education:** North Side High School Class of 2003; Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, Bachelor of Science in public affairs 2008 and a Master of Arts in public management 2010

**Community organizations:** Dupont Hospital Community Engagement Board

**Hobbies:** Endurance racing, reading, cooking

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** The region has incredible people, businesses, educational institutions and quality of life.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** Working with great employees, volunteers and donors who are focused on transformation every day.

**What does success mean to you?** It means that I have created the space and environment for those around me to succeed and grow personally and professionally.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Police officer

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Fort



Wayne's Famous Coney Island, waiter

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** Brian Bauer, Lorie Ailor and Sara Ley

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Being

a part of the current Habitat for Humanity of Greater Fort Wayne team, I have never been a part of a more dedicated, innovative and collaborative group of professionals. Together we have increased our housing production by 300% since 2019, eliminated \$2.6 million in debt, created a healthy vibrant culture and positioned ourselves to meet the increasing demand for affordable housing in the region.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Not exiting my first professional job opportunity sooner. I learned what type of leader I wanted to be, what type of leader I would never allow myself to be and the undeniable impact of culture.

**What are your current professional goals?** To work myself out of my job. I would love to see our housing production reach previously unimaginable heights and as a result require a new, better, more capable leader to move the needle once again. The housing need is great, and we must strive to meet the increasing demand.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** With a keen focus on

relationships, an uncompromising commitment to fulfilling promises and a tangible authenticity.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I don't. I truly strive to create a life where career, family and community service are not distinct from one another in any way. I seek to integrate all aspects of my life in a healthy way.

**What do you do to relax?** I love a good nap after an exhausting day or a hard workout when stressed and anxious.

**What book do you recommend?** "The Alchemist a Novel" by Paulo Coelho, "... whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it's because that desire originated in the soul of the universe. It's your mission on earth."

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Everything in life is a temporary assignment, so be a good steward of your relationships and your responsibilities during the short time they are in your care.

Congratulations,  
Brandon!

Recipient of a  
Forty Under  
40 Award.

We are so  
proud of you!!



Brandon Deel



Home Reserve  
Adaptable Furniture Co.



Congratulations to  
**AMY GRIFFITH**  
Executive Director,  
PARKVIEW FAMILY YMCA



Congratulations, Amy, for being honored  
in the 40 under 40 class of 2022!  
You make a positive impact and  
set an inspiring example to the community.  
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# Sunila Chowdhry, J.D., 35

**Employer:** I am the director of TRIO Upward Bound at Purdue University Fort Wayne (PFW).

**Education:** I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs from the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), formerly at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW). I also graduated with a Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) from Indiana University McKinney School of Law.

**Community organizations:** I am a part of Fort Wayne’s United Front; I engaged in conversations on race, equity, and inclusion in the City of Fort Wayne. I serve on the Advisory Board of Directors of the Mastodon Alumni Community. I am also a member of multiple committees on the PFW campus.

**Hobbies:** My hobbies include spending time with family. I enjoy watching and attending NBA games. I also like interior design, music, brunch, cars, and bike riding.

**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** Fort Wayne is a special place for my family because my parents immigrated here from Pakistan. My father first moved to Fort Wayne to attend college at Indiana Tech, and my mother moved here after they got married. My brothers and I were all born in Fort Wayne; we went to college here and choose to work here because we enjoy living in Fort Wayne. Fort Wayne is a place I’m proud to call my city, my home.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** The value of education was instilled in me at an early age by my parents. I enjoy working in a profession that allows me to help others find opportunities to further their education. I am passionate about advocating for students and helping them overcome barriers to achieve their academic goals.

I am a strong proponent of providing educational opportunities for students, which is why I enjoy working in roles that provide students the resources they need to go to college.

**What does success mean to you?** I believe the key to success is being able to move forward despite any setbacks and being adaptable along the way.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** When I was a kid, I used to draw house plans for fun, so I wanted to be an architect.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from the Office of Admissions at IPFW. I was a student admissions representative. I gave campus tours and enjoyed sharing all that campus and Fort Wayne had to offer.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My father, brothers, and late mother have been supportive of my career aspirations. My strongest support came from my mother who always encouraged me to further my education in hopes for me to have more opportunities in life and be independent.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I believe in using the skills and background you have to build a career that makes sense for you. My biggest accomplishment has been finding my way to a profession I am passionate about. I wanted to start in a position that would allow me to get exposure to multiple departments on a college campus and gain a better understanding of higher education. No matter what position I held, I took great pride in my work and welcomed the opportunity to learn and add to my skill set. My goal was to gain experience that would allow me to continue



to grow professionally. Within a few years after starting off as an admissions counselor, a position I also loved, I am now a director of Upward Bound, a program with a mission that deeply aligns with my passion of helping students get to college. It’s also a personal accomplishment to be a minority serving in a director role at PFW, and I hope I can inspire others in their career paths.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake thus far is not putting myself first but instead putting my schooling and work ahead of my personal life and

health. I learned that rest and taking time for myself are needed in order for me to recharge and be better in both my personal and professional life.

**What are your current professional goals?** My goal is to continue to develop professionally in a setting where I can help students reach their educational goals. I want to use creative ways to make improvements, find solutions, and make a positive difference.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I remain current by being a lifelong learner and growing professionally by acquiring new skills. I think it’s important to have versatile skills because it allows you to have a unique perspective and think outside the box. In order to remain relevant in my profession, we must put students first and do what’s best for students. Thus, it’s important to stay connected to students and get their feedback.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Generally, I have given priority to my professional life over my personal life, but I have learned that it’s essential for me to have a balance in order to be better all around. I am finding a better balance by allowing myself to pause and recharge. I want to make sure that I not only take time for myself but do things that bring me joy like spending time with family and helping others.

**What do you do to relax?** When it’s warm out, I relax by going on walks and bike rides. I also relax by driving while listening to my favorite music or by drinking a hot cup of tea while watching a favorite show.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Things won’t always go according to plan, but trust your journey and keep moving forward.

# Amy Griffith, 38

**Employer:** YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne (Parkview Family YMCA)

**Education:** I hold a Bachelors in Recreation Management with a Sport Management Concentration. I also hold a Master’s in Business Administration.

**Community organizations:** FW22 board member and volunteer (Nonprofit supporting veteran suicide, PTSD, & TBI). Indiana Tech Sport Management advisory board member.

**Hobbies:** I love watching my daughter play volleyball. Enjoy anything craft-related, creating, and making things.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised in Northeast Indiana and have never left. What I enjoy most about Fort Wayne is that you can experience a bit of city life, country life and everything in between.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I love that every day is never the same. You never know who you will meet or how you will impact someone’s day or life or the impact they will leave on yours. I love working for an organization whose purpose is to make our community better by providing equitable opportunities for people to meet their physical, mental, and social health needs.

**What does success mean to you?** Success to me means learning to be the best version of yourself, not only for yourself, but for your organization and others. My favorite quote to encompass this is: “Be better today than you were

yesterday and be better tomorrow than you were today” - Lorenzo Snow.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be a math teacher or accountant.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** There was a store in Glenbrook Square that was called Colorado (outdoorsy, hiking type style). I got a job there when I was 15 as a sales associate. Definitely a good experience as a teenager!

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I would say some of my biggest supporters in my career advancement were my previous supervisor and current COO, Patrick Kelly and my mentor/friend/coworker, Tabitha Ervin. These two individuals gave me a space to be authentic with them about my desires to grow and provided honest/helpful feedback that encouraged me to develop into the person I am today.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** As I was finishing my degree, my dream was to run a sport/community center. After growing in my organization, I am proud to say that I am now doing that. This was a huge accomplishment for me as it demonstrated positive growth in my leadership and that putting in hard work will get you where you want to go.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons**



**did you learn from it?** I would say my greatest mistake was not realizing the impact I had upon others sooner. Once I was able to become more self-aware, I was able to adjust my leadership and how I carried myself and interacted with others. I learned the importance of giving grace to others when needed and the impact my attitude/behavior had upon others. Making these changes has allowed me to be a better person in the way I interact with others.

**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goals include further researching the best methods in servant leadership and

coaching/leading my team in delivering a high level of service to others.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Attending workshops, reading leadership books, and connecting with others in my position, have really helped me to keep relevant in my work.

In 2018, I participated in the Foellinger Foundation’s Rising Leader program. Even though the program is over they continue to offer such great leadership development opportunities to individuals that were in the cohorts.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** For me it is work/life integration and the flexibility to adapt when/where around my family, career, and other responsibilities. Life is going to spill over into other areas, it’s all about prioritizing what/who needs your attention and distributing your time accordingly.

**What do you do to relax?** I love being outside in the sun or spending time with my family.

**What book do you recommend?** “What Got You Here Won’t Get You There” was a great book that really helped me shift my leadership mindset and the impact my behavior had upon others.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Enjoy the time you have been given and be PRESENT in EVERY moment.



# Darius D. Darling, 29

**Employer:** Brotherhood Mutual, HR Generalist

**Education:** Music Performance, 2010, Detroit Cass Technical High School; Business Administration, 2014, Indiana Tech; Master of Business Administration, 2017, Indiana Tech

**Community organizations:** YWCA NEI — Board Member, Fort Financial Credit Union — Associate Board Member, Indiana Tech Alumni Association Vice President, New Zion Tabernacle Church — Elder and Minister of Music, The Temple Church — Worship Leader.

**Hobbies:** Music (Gospel, R&B, jazz, classical — you know, the good stuff), sports (basketball, football, softball), and Broadway musicals (my favorites are Lion King and Hamilton).

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I arrived in NEI to attend Indiana Tech in 2010. After graduating, I thought I would return home to Detroit and start my life there. However, Fort Wayne grew on me and it became home. Fort Wayne became a place where I can grow professionally, socially and spiritually. I grew to be who I am here in Fort Wayne and I believe in investing in the place that invest into you.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy the opportunity to change lives and make memories. Every day, I have the privilege of working with managers to lighten the corporate load and with candidates to find meaningful work that they enjoy all to bring God glory through the work we do at Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company.

**What does success mean to you?** Success is the fulfillment of purpose. Success is when preparation and purpose collide. Success is when you put a smile on someone’s face just by doing what you love to do. Success is the product of divine destiny, timing, preparation and opportunity.

**As a child, what did you want to**

**be when you grew up?** When I was a child, I had two dreams. One of them was playing in the NBA. I realized this couldn’t happen in high school after being cut from the team twice. During that time, I began to have a thought of public service by being the Mayor of my hometown, Detroit, Michigan. Who knows, maybe that dream still lives and is just in a different city and state.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Unofficially, my first “paycheck” came when I was working for my grandfather’s landscaping company in Detroit. Officially, my first paycheck came from the Boys and Girls Club of Southeastern Michigan where I worked in the games’ room and gym on the east side of Detroit.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My biggest supporter in advancing my career was my mother, Valerie Messiah, who passed away in 2020 from COVID. She always pushed me to be the best version of me. She supported everything I did. She would travel to Fort Wayne from Detroit multiple times to support any event or activity I was doing. She would drag seemingly the whole city of Detroit with her to Fort Wayne to show what her “big guy” was doing in Fort Wayne.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I would say that my biggest accomplishment has been seeing the students who I mentored while serving at Indiana Tech graduate and become successful contributors to their respective communities. Knowing where some of them come from and how far they have journeyed to arrive where they are today is by far more rewarding than any of my personal professional accomplishments.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn**



**from it?** My greatest mistake was not knowing the value of authenticity in the workplace. Not knowing who I wanted to be was a nightmare and I never found myself in the right seat. Once I came to about who Darius was, I was able to grow and accomplish much more than I ever thought I would. Bringing me to the table daily was something I failed to do originally and subsequently struggled through. But I grew from it and became comfortable with who I am in God and the gifts God gave me and the rest flowed from that place. I have not looked back since.

**What are your current professional goals?** I am one who recognizes my success is not how far I climb, but how I make others around me feel while we collectively elevate. So professionally, I would say my goals are to make everyone around me better, be a voice for positive change and be known for being a values-driven, hardworking, dedicated team member who does what’s right.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** On the surface, being a member of NIHRA and SHRM allows me to stay relevant and current on the work I do every day. Deeper than that, having value added discussions with various individuals from different industries is highly important. I believe in diversifying your circle. Having people

in my life who come from diverse backgrounds helps to broaden my perspective. I value difference of opinion and fact-based debate. Engaging in intellectual discourse socially helps to inform the professional work as well.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Balancing can be tough. I find that I try and align myself with organizations whose causes I care about deeply. By doing that, it’s not hard to balance because the work I find fun and rewarding and do not find myself overcommitted and unproductive. I do try and find ways to unplug and refresh by relaxing with friends and traveling. Self-care is highly important and ultimately most-rewarding.

**What do you do to relax?** Video games and writing music is my way of relaxing. Enjoying a good musical or concert is always rewarding as well. Additionally, I wouldn’t be me if I didn’t mention prayer and meditation. I gain so much from being able to pray and have time alone with God.

**What book do you recommend?** A book I am reading right now is “The Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren. My church is doing a refresh Bible study on it. I would also recommend “Don’t Drop the Mic” by Bishop T. D. Jakes. Lastly, “Make My Hindsight Your 20/20: 52 Insights for Millennials Seeking Joy and Impact in a Work World Built by Boomers” by Derek Young is a great ready for the young professional.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell my high school self: “Do not get too down on yourself. Yes, you may look different. Yes, you may have different interests than what’s popular. And yes, you may even think that you’re overlooked. But don’t worry. You will find people who see you, accept you, value you and love you. But first and foremost, you must see you, accept you, value you and love you before anyone else will. Once you do that, the world will open for you. And those who overlooked you will have to read about your success in Business Weekly.”

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Brotherhood Mutual HR Generalist

His desire to cultivate success and greatness in others is just one of the qualities we love about him. He’s continually on the lookout to recruit talented people to our purpose-driven company. See why Brotherhood Mutual has been named one of Indiana’s *Best Places to Work* and learn how people, like Darius, are helping ministries thrive.

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FORTY UNDER 40 AWARD RECIPIENT

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Music Instruments & Pro Audio







# Josh Gustin, 39

**Employer:** Sweetwater  
**Education:** Harlan Christian School (Harlan, IN), Class of 2000; Bachelor’s Degree in Information Systems from Purdue Fort Wayne, Class of 2005  
**Community organizations:** Weekly involved in leading music, teaching classes, and general activities at the Church of Christ at Harlan. In the recent past, I’ve done some volunteer work with Woodburn Christian Children’s Home and American Cancer Society/Relay For Life where I served on an event board as the online chairperson  
**Hobbies:** Playing guitar, roasting my own coffee (I’m a coffee snob!), traveling with my wife and kids (usually to Walt Disney World)  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** Allen County has always been my home. Born in Parkview Hospital, raised in “the country” east of Harlan (the family property bordered the state line with Ohio). My family is here; people that I love are here. Fort Wayne/NE Indiana is so amazing because of the people who make this area/community a great place to live, raise a family, and lead a meaningful life. Engrained in the fabric of our society, the idea of “Hoosier Hospitality” is alive and well here, and I couldn’t imagine a better place to lay down my roots than in this corner of Indiana.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** Every day, I solve problems for people. Ultimately, solving their problem leads to them having a better day and making their world a little bit better and brighter. Hopefully, they in turn pass that little nugget of happiness to someone else around them.  
**What does success mean to you?** I

value the quote “Success is when preparation meets opportunity.” Success is not about being fortunate in one moment, but putting in the effort time and time again, disciplining yourself over a lifetime, to make sure you are ready for any challenge life may throw your way.  
I measure my success in the number of smiles I see in other people. Whether it’s solving people’s problems or telling them a “dad” joke. If I can get someone to smile, then I feel I accomplished my goal.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Doctor or an astronaut  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from working in my dad and grandpa’s butcher shop when I was very young (probably around the age of 8 or 9). I worked for them after school was done for the day and in the summer until I was 18. Working in a small family business helps you learn a drive/work ethic, understand the inner workings of how a business ought to be run, and to be thankful for how “food is put on the table”. My dad and grandpa labored hard to make sure we had a great childhood and to make sure each customer interaction was amazing. Learning those at a young age certainly are valuable life lessons much later in life.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My wonderful wife, Lisa Gustin, of almost 18 years, has been my No. 1 supporter not only in my career, but in life. Not only does she put up with my shenanigans, she removes so many of obstacles in a day so I can work hard, whether in my career or for the local



church we attend. She is my rock and a fantastic mother to our children, and I love her very much!  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest accomplishment has been scaling a team of 4 or 5 web developers to a team of 50 while still maintaining that small team feel where everyone is close and cares for each other. If your team members love who they are working with, they will be more productive and be “all in” every day.  
My other biggest accomplishment was probably getting my boss, Mike Clem (chief digital officer of Sweetwater), to hire me in the first place. Since becoming

a part of the rocket ship he helped build, so many doors and opportunities have opened for me.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Failing to address problems early enough, particularly with people. If you let a problem fester, it only grows and becomes exponentially harder to solve. If you address it quickly, they are often more maintainable.  
**What are your current professional goals?** Keep growing; Keep learning.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Stay engaged in the details of the work. Even though someone advances in title, it can be easy to be “hands off” or make things “someone else’s problem.” I prefer to “get my hands dirty” and into the work, which helps me connect with my team and lead by example.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** For me, it’s about discipline and boundaries. Discipline yourself to make time for what’s most important in that moment, and then give your very best  
**What do you do to relax?** Make a cup of coffee/tea; Watch sports, particularly soccer; Travel with my family (we love to do day trips since there so many things within a day’s drive from Fort Wayne)  
**What book do you recommend?** The Bible  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Trust the process and be patient. As a young person, I would want opportunities in life to come faster, but as it turns out, opportunities will come exactly when they are supposed to.

# Réna Bea Bradley, 38

**Employer:** Bridge of Grace Compassionate Ministries Center and SEED  
**Education:** Detroit Country Day School and Howard University  
**Community organizations:** I am involved with Fort Wayne Public Arts Commission, Faces of the Fort Committee Chair, Public Art Masterplan Committee, Fort Wayne Airport Authority, Mount Vernon Park Neighborhood Association, Southeast Area Partnership and Input Fort Wayne Advisory Committee.  
**Hobbies:** Working out, drawing, painting, hosting “Food Thought” and learning French.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I came to Fort Wayne in the fall of 2015 to become the first full-time staff member of Bridge of Grace. I’ve stayed for the opportunity to do meaningful and impactful work.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** One of the biggest joys of neighborhood revitalization is having the opportunity to see the place and people of the Mount Vernon Park grow stronger, more skillful and more resilient day by day. It’s powerful to watch people reclaim what is theirs and realize their own power and potential to create and shape their future and present environment and circumstance.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success is growing daily, walking in faith, striving to create more just communities and having fun while experiencing joy.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be everything — a ballerina, cowgirl, artist, jeweler, green-energy focused non-profit CEO and president of the United States. Pursuing a career in architecture and community revitalization came crystalized my junior year in high school.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from my parents’ small business, Prescription Arts



Pharmacy in Detroit.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I was fortunate to grow up surrounded by a community of encouragers that included my parents, sisters, extended family, neighbors, teachers, and friends.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I’m proud to have raised millions of dollars to improve quality of life in Mount Vernon Park and to have helped design millions of square feet of new and renovated structures. But I’m most proud of the way my work has instilled confidence in members of the communities I serve.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far, and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistakes have been moments of inaction rather than those of action. Not pursuing an opportunity, relationship or position because I was afraid to ask or

experience fleeting moments of fear or discomfort.  
**What are your current professional goals?** To launch a multi-million-dollar company, dip my toe in politics and create more opportunities for residents of underserved communities to build wealth by leveraging the power of collective and cooperative economics.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** To stay current, I pay close attention to innovators in my field. To stay relevant, I listen closely to the concerns and desires of my neighbors and community members.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I schedule everything.  
**What do you do to relax?** When I need to recharge my batteries, I seek out

those experiences that slow my thought processes down a bit, typically spaces of prayer and those that evoke a creative response in me. Being in close proximity to nature, large bodies of water, and all manner of art help me to switch gears and unwind.  
**What book do you recommend?** “Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates.  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Choose her faith, happiness and self. Stress less, dance more, move in confidence and have fun along the way. Make daily efforts to overcome shyness in pursuit of your dreams and ask out the cute guy. Perfect opportunities are more likely to be created than waited out.



CONGRATULATIONS

RÉNA

&

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# Kibwe K. Cooper, 31

**Employer:** Kibwe Kreative Inc  
**Education:** Bachelor's Degree — University of Saint Francis  
**Community organizations:** Heartland Sings board member, PADAG  
**Hobbies:** Singing, acting, playing guitar, traveling, outdoor adventures  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I moved to Fort Wayne for college; since living in Northeast Indiana I've learned a great many things about community, networking and what it takes to create impact in the world. I'm in Northeast Indiana because it's given me opportunities to grow and stretch the limits of what I believed I was capable of doing. I may not always reside in Northeast Indiana but I'll never forget the lessons it taught me.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I have always loved audio, I grew up around music because both of my parents were musically gifted. I've always had an ear for people, and I'm a natural problem solver.  
My work on the EmpowerYou podcast gives me an opportunity to give back in a way that would have made a world of difference for me in my youth. I know now that if I had not experienced being without access, I wouldn't be as passionate about empowering youth and young professionals today. My profession as a podcaster, and business podcast producer allows me to create impact through my faith and values, problem solve on a high level, and pave the path for others to be empowered.  
Using my years of experience for the betterment of others. Doesn't get much better than that.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success for me means opening new doors and creating a path for others to pursue their purpose. I used to think success was only manifested by material things that you could see and acquire. I see now that success is never about what you can get, but is defined by what you're able to give. Your contributions to make your family, community, church and the world a better place are what makes you successful. I believe your willingness to sacrifice in the pursuit of character and a purpose that is greater than yourself is what makes you truly successful.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I think the first thing I wanted to be was a professional trumpet player. The thought of traveling the world playing music like the great musicians my father used to listen to on CD's and the radio really got me excited. I realized though that I would have to practice my trumpet more hours in the day than I had the ability to, given the fact that I started working at 14 years old, and didn't formally play in a band until college.  
I still love to perform, sing and play instruments, I've just taken a slightly different approach to my creative expression and world wide travel aspirations.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My

first job was at the Gary Public Library, I made \$6.55 an hour and my biweekly checks were about \$110. I was 14 years old at the time, and I was really proud of myself.  
Looking back, working as a page in the public library system opened my eyes to the world of city planning and how improper leadership in municipal agencies and services impacts the youth in those communities.  
I watched how the leadership in the library and in the city continued to prioritize their own personal interests and in a few short years, the library system, which was a safe space for at-risk youth in the communities, could no longer sustain itself and eventually close completely.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** This is a tough question. I've been very grateful to have family and friends who have given me encouraging words, and told me that they appreciate my work. I've been fortunate to create relationships with a few businesses here in town, as well as collaborate with organizations to create unique theatrical experiences that give voice to some underrepresented communities. My education at the University of Saint Francis, various volunteer opportunities with local non-profits, grants I've received from Community Foundation and Fortitude Fund, Podcast partnerships with Smile More Meal Prep, Come As You Are Community Church all helped me in their own way to get to where I am today.  
There was really no "big" supporter, as an entrepreneur you have to push past "no's" all the time, you really can't wait on others to see and value what you bring to the table.  
You have to create your own table, use all the rejection as confirmation that your next "yes" is around the corner.  
That being said, what you see in Kibwe Kreative Inc, and EmpowerYou Podcast is a culmination of faith, perseverance and determination. Sometimes Fort Wayne can be a difficult place to birth new ideas, and for me personally I've been able to climb over all the "no's" and string together a few "yesses" to keep the vision alive. God has truly blessed me with the stamina to carry these ideas and desires into fruition and it wouldn't be accurate if I said it any other way. I'm truly grateful for this recognition from Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly and I look forward to more connections, opportunities and the growth after receiving this prestigious award. I've been blessed to experience very low moments in my business while still exercising complete confidence and faith. That unseen faith and commitment has led me to this moment. I'm deeply grateful and I'm enjoying the ride.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I've been blessed to receive several awards over the course of my life and they each have had a tremendous impact on me given the different stages of my life when I received them.  
This first award that I received at 16 years old was the Indiana Young Leaders of the



Future Award. During that time I was really unsure about what my next step was after high school and it gave me courage to step out on faith and move to Fort Wayne two years later. After college I received a Telly award out of over 2,000 international submissions for original audio in an animation, which gave me tremendous confidence when building my business. And now at 31 years old, to receive the 40 under 40 award I'm just absolutely elated and encouraged to keep creating impact by building my business as a Podcaster and Business Podcast Producer & Coach.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistakes have always come from ignoring my intuition, from allowing fear or stress, or worry to paralyze my ability to make a decision. Life happens in small moments and each moment affects the next.  
My biggest mistake was not taking risks sooner. My biggest mistakes have always come from keeping poor boundaries around how I allow others to speak into my life. Sometimes the wrong advice can create setbacks that wouldn't normally happen had you not listened to someone with a smaller or different vision than yourself. And in other ways, the right encouragement and advice can completely change your life in ways you never would have imagined. That's why I'm so passionate about the EmpowerYou Podcast. I'm able to create a space where listeners can hear unbiased advice, personal experience and real life application that isn't fluffy and trendy. It's real world wisdom from incredible individuals who live what they preach. The best advice comes from those who have conquered their fears, who have suffered and succeeded and who understand that faith and perseverance are the gateways to greatness. My biggest mistake is not understanding this sooner.  
**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goals are to double down on my efforts. To interview more leaders, thinkers, experts and teachers. To serve my family, my community, and my Business Podcast clients on a high level. My professional goals are to:  
1. Surrender to the purpose God has put on my life.  
2. To present EmpowerYou Podcast to more young people through speaking engagements in person and virtually.  
3. To serve more businesses as a podcast

production coach in 2022 than in 2021.  
4. Create more access to mentorships through podcasting.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** For me relevance is a matter of perspective. I see the patterns in society and I create conversations and dialogue around those patterns. Society is longing for connection and for real advice, real mentorship that isn't attached to a gimmick. Authenticity will always be relevant and no matter the trend authenticity is ultimately what we crave as human beings. I created spaces where we can discuss social, economic, and cultural topics in safety and authenticity. There will always be an audience for that kind of intentional, courageous conversation.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I think "balance" looks different at different stages of your life. Sometimes "balance" only manifests by drinking enough water, or getting a 15 minute nap everyday. Other times it may mean setting aside time on your calendar every week for family time, phone calls, dinner dates etc. I'm not really looking to create "balance" in the traditional sense.  
I keep a strong morning routine and that allows me to function more clearly throughout the day. And because I wake between 4:30 and 5 a.m. each day, that means I have to limit my hours idly chatting or scrolling late at night. So you see for me I just design my life and my daily activities around the life I want to live.  
This creates intention, not necessarily balance. Balance for me probably looks extreme or very unbalanced to others. That's why it's important to know who you are, what you believe in and what you desire as an individual and build your life around that.  
**What do you do to relax?** Relaxing is difficult to me, we live in a society where nothing is ever enough and so we're constantly trying to satiate some desire or ego craving. Personally, I'm learning to meditate and pray more, work out 4-5 times a week, as well as take walks and listen to music and audio books. I love traveling and so my business coach insists that I take quarterly retreats. This doesn't mean I fly to Cancun every quarter but I take a minute to go to a hotel, go camping, and just give my mind a break, journal and map out the next quarter. This is as far as I've gotten in my relaxation practice.  
**What book do you recommend?** There are so many books I would recommend as a student of awareness, self development, and entrepreneurship but I'll stick with the following three to begin with. "The Power of Now" - Eckhart Tolle; "Battle Cry" — Jason Wilson (For men); "The Slight Edge" — Jeff Olson  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would say, keep taking things one step at a time. No one "knows" what's best for you, and you can only find out by taking the risk and knowing within yourself that whatever happens you're going to be OK.  
I would say "perfection" is a lie, and the best way to truly learn is to do things with authenticity, accepting that it will always be imperfect in some way, yet perfect because you gave your best in that moment. I would say "Kibwe, God has a massive plan for you, and it's OK if no one else understands it. Just keep going."



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# Kristina ‘Krissy’ Louise Creager, 37

**Employer:** Purdue University Fort Wayne  
**Education:** PhD in Global Leadership in Higher Education from Indiana Tech; Masters in Student Development Administration from Seattle University; Bachelors in Journalism from Northern Arizona University

**Community organizations:** My previous involvements include: Fort Wayne Youth Sport Club Board Vice President 2020-2021; Fort Wayne Youth Sport Club Board At-Large Member 2019-2020; NAIA/NCAA certified college soccer referee 2017-2019; IHSA certified high school soccer referee 2015-2019; US soccer certified regional referee 2013-2019. I am looking forward to resuming board work in NE Indiana later this year.

**Hobbies:** Anything involving sports, being outdoors, kayaking, home decorating/DIY, cooking, and traveling

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** Northeast Indiana is my chosen home! I was born and raised in Arizona and spent two years in Seattle, Washington, completing my master’s after finishing my bachelor’s degree. When I finished my masters, I wanted a position at a mid-sized university in a mid-sized, up-and-coming city, and basically pointed to a map and said Fort Wayne was it. I moved here in 2009 and said I would likely make this a three-year stop ... 12 years later, I cannot imagine ever living anywhere else. Northeast Indiana has given me a career that drives me every day, a fiancé who I cannot wait to marry this year, the best circle of friends and colleagues I could ever ask for, and so many incredible memories.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I get to change lives every day. To me, there is no greater honor than that. Challenging, supporting, and celebrating young people is not just a profession or career for me, it’s my calling. As vice chancellor, I have the immense privilege of being there to welcome a new student on their first day of college and then to also shake their hand as they walk across the

stage at graduation — in my humble opinion, it doesn’t get any better than that!

**What does success mean to you?** I used to think success meant becoming a vice chancellor of a university. When I got there, I realized that wasn’t necessarily it. One of the greatest things I have learned from Chancellor Elsenbaumer has become the cornerstone of how I would define success now. Success is when you look yourself in the mirror every night before you go to bed and you sleep well knowing you made the best decisions you could and gave the day everything you had.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I was going to replace Katie Couric on The TODAY Show after following in the footsteps of Mia Hamm as a professional soccer player. Both of those clearly worked out.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first “real” paycheck was from Golf ‘N’ Stuff in Tucson, Arizona. I was 15 and worked the snack bar and sold bumper boat, mini golf, race car, and laser tag tickets every weekend night and many weekday nights after school.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** It would be nearly impossible to pick just one, truthfully. I have been blessed with incredible mentors from California to Arizona, from Washington state to Louisiana, from Washington DC to Indiana. I cherish a group of colleagues who have become dear friends that push me to new heights every day. I am indebted to a family and a support system who stands beside me on the good days and bad. And I am inspired mostly by our students who breakthrough barriers every day to continue their quest to earn a college degree.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I could name tons of things I am proud of because I have an awesome team who works hard every single day. I would say the biggest



accomplishment is being a Vice Chancellor at 35. It’s much more “normal” to be in this position at 45 or 50 and I do not take that for granted or take it lightly. I wake up every day thankful and blessed by the confidence of an extraordinary supervisor and leadership team (and give myself a little pep talk). I use Glennon Doyle’s mantra “you can do hard things”.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake is trying to find the balance between transparency and over-sharing as a young leader with a primarily young team. It’s a difficult place to be when you have come up in an organization as peers of those who now report to you. I’ve learned (and am still learning) to pick and choose not what to share but how much and to evaluate all aspects of time, place and manner when doing so.

**What are your current professional goals?** I am happy and content where I am currently. Somedays I consider a university chancellor/president run in the future, other days I want to carry out all the work in my current role at PFW, and others I think about moving to a larger institution. For now, my goal is to continue to learn and grow in this position every day, to continue to publish and contribute to the overall field, and to be the best version of myself every day.

**How do you remain current/relevant in**

**your profession?** I am currently enrolled in a 10-month Enrollment Management Certificate program at University of Southern California, active in national organizations, and read the Chronicle of Higher Education every morning. Additionally, I stay in frequent touch with mentors across the field. Lastly, I co-authored a book and am finalizing co-authoring a chapter in “The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration” which is the most widely used book in masters and doctoral prep programs in the field.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I learned, after a lot of trial and error, how to say no. It is still hard for me not to be everywhere all of the time but it is necessary to maintain mental health and positive relationships. I also try to model/live by what I tell my team – we are only as good for others as we are for ourselves. If we are not full, healthy individuals, we cannot be there to offer full support, encouragement and love to our students, colleagues, friends, family, kids, etc.

**What do you do to relax?** I am most relaxed on or near the water. Sitting by the lake, being on a boat, taking a hot bubble bath, etc. is my go to. I also stay busy to relax as odd as that sounds. It is hard for me to sit on the couch and watch a movie or TV for hours. If I am making progress — cleaning the house, doing a project, etc., it is quite relaxing.

**What book do you recommend?** “Untamed” by Glennon Doyle

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Don’t be afraid to walk away from things, people, relationships, activities, etc. that are not healthy/serving you. That does not mean you quit. Life is too short to be unhappy and unfulfilled. At the same time, treasure and continue to pour into the relationships and things that bring fulfillment – those are the people and the experiences that you will cherish for the rest of your life.

Junior Achievement of Northern Indiana congratulates our volunteers on being honored as Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly’s Forty Under 40 Class of 2022!

JA volunteers have made a life-changing impact in our community by sharing their professional experience with students and helping them gain a better understanding of what it takes to succeed in the world of work.

We thank you for your time and commitment.





# Mylisa Keyondra Brownlee-Kelly, 32

**Employer:** CEO/founder of Bring Black Up (a Fort Wayne nonprofit corporation, 501©(3) status pending). I am a youth program developer and community event coordinator. I am a community social activist, singer/musician, and a hairstylist in Fort Wayne.

**Education:** I was a former high school student of South Side High School; I’ve completed work toward my bachelor degree in psychology.

**Community organizations:** Bring Black Up, which is my own nonprofit. I’m affiliated with most community organizations whose focus is to lift up and keep up the southeast side of Fort Wayne and it’s people. As well, I am affiliated with community organizations that are connected to our community’s youth. One of my personal favorites is the Boys and Girls Club of Fort Wayne. Boys and Girls Club CEO and Black Expo President Joe Jordan and Bring Black Up recently partnered in order to increase our ability to achieve our common aim. We are tremendously excited to see how large of an impact we can make in working for, and with, minority families while, at the same time, working on new and creative programs for our promising youth.

Other organizations that we’ve connected with recently have been Ometyio Rite with Dianne Rogers, The Arts leadership organized by Mr. Adrian Curry, and would like to give a special shout-out to the Fort Wayne Dance Collective. We’ve recently made a new connection with Allen County Council-woman Sheila Curry-Campbell who’s affiliated with many organizations in the community.

**Hobbies:** When I have time, I love to travel. I haven’t been able to travel lately due to the pandemic but I plan to take more trips and vacation time in the near future. When I’m home, I love to get in my artistic realm and create things. Singing and songwriting come naturally but sometimes I like to sketch portraits or find and practice new trendy hairstyles.

I love to write stories and would love to become an author and screenwriter. I also love to cook and find new recipes with my son. I plan to publish a recipe book and launch a sauce/seasoning brand one day in the future.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised in Fort Wayne.

I’ve faced many challenges here but have seen many challenges this city has faced overall through the years. There’s still room for improvements and I’d love to be able to be a part of the solution(s). I plan on moving to get more exposure for my work but not anytime soon.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy creating and being able to connect with people through the language of art and expression. I don’t think people fully understand the connection and capability of art as a language form.

History has told us that art has the potential of telling a story just by listening or visualizing something. You can change someone’s mood just off sound waves, movements and frequencies alone or by changing colors to express emotions.

I enjoy having the privilege to bring culture and diversity in the workplace. Having the privilege and position to represent positivity for all to create change in people’s lives is what motivates me.

**What does success mean to you?** Overcoming challenges. To be successful, life requires you to have a sense of humbleness and discipline.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** As a child I wanted to be a famous singer/musician.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My very first paycheck came from the Three Rivers Jenbe Ensemble. I was a founding member of a group of youth Percussionists ages 7-17. I remember I was so excited because we had the opportunity to get paid for the first time at one of our gigs. I was about 15 or 16 years old.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** The city of Fort Wayne has been doing a great job so far in supporting my vision, mission and career. One I’ll always mention is Ketu Oladuwa. He’s been a great mentor and father figure in my life for quite some time.

Two people I’d like to give recognition to outside of my “artsy” self are Audrey Davis of Faith in Indiana and Reppard Hourne, president of the East Wayne Street Center. These two people haven’t known me as long but have had a major influence on business, philanthropy and



charity work in my life.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** One of my biggest accomplishments in my career thus far is this opportunity and experience to be nominated for the Forty under 40 award of Class 2022. The recognition itself for the work I’m currently doing in the community, have done and working hard to do is a blessing. I’m truly honored.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistake so far has been doubting myself, which can lead to procrastination. Anytime I don’t believe in myself I seem to fail!

Another mistake I’m learning is that It’s OK to say, NO! Sometimes I try really hard to make everyone around me happy so I’ll put too much on my plate that I can handle. In return, when situations don’t work out, I’m the only one suffering and the only one dedicated to get the task done.

Another mistake I’ve made in my career has been trying to control what happens around me. When work gets hard and throws you lemons, you really have to take those lemons, learn how to make lemonade, smile and keep moving. Being a leader in the community is all about problem-solving. Learning to solve the problems is challenging but it’s worth it.

**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goal is to travel more doing charity and mission work, in hopes of creating more business opportunities and finding resources for BringBlackUp and its mission. Our biggest goal is to find more funding to help support our mission, board members and volunteers.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I stay consistent in

my creativeness. I show support, love and gratitude to others while creating a space for them to be heard and not ignored. I pay it forward and try to give people respect and the same or more opportunities that we’re given to me.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I’m always working, so my service and career are a part of my life. I get my son involved with my work as much as I can so he can learn, have social skills and have experience being my business partner. I only service hair clients every other week and on the weekends only! I take off work every Sunday unless I’m working on a project or event.

We also try to limit phone calls during the weekend so we can enjoy time with each other or when he’s not busy playing sports or with friends. Community service is every day and anytime I can reach out to help someone else. I’m teaching my son the gift of giving as well.

**What do you do to relax?** Spending quality time with myself always helps. Something I call my “self-care” day would consist of listening to some smooth jazz or R&B and having a glass of wine. Water meditation or a quick trip to the spa for a massage, wax or mani and pedi always works for me. If I need to relax in a hurry, dimming the lights, lighting a candle or adding a little aromatherapy in complete silence works magically.

**What book do you recommend?** I recommend “The Secret” by Rhonda Byrne. A book about the laws of attraction and how thoughts can directly change a person’s life. I’d also recommend any books on how to be an inclusive leader in the community.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I’d tell myself that it’s OK to be yourself; It’s OK to express yourself! Make mistakes and keep growing. Don’t give up or change yourself because you feel you’re not worthy. You’re more than qualified and good enough to do whatever you set your mind to.

Find your niche, find what makes you happy and stick to it. It’s OK to dream but not for too long ... you only dream while you’re sleeping so make sure you wake up and find your vision cause time is ticking! A dream is nothing without a vision: a vision is nothing without activation!

# Daylana Daisy Saunders, 36

**Employer:** Ichor Strategies

**Education:** Masters of Education in Educational Leadership

**Community organizations:** Change-Makers Fort Wayne, NAACP Fort Wayne, Women United For Progress Allen County

**Hobbies:** My hobbies include singing with family, reading new books, staying informed and vacation planning

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I am here because my loved ones are here. I am here because I’ve grown to love people that live here. This is my home.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy engaging with my community, learning more about the amazingly intricate and interesting people that makeup this community; the culture, the diversity and the talent is RICH!

**What does success mean to you?** Success to me equals happiness. I feel Success, not as a destination but as a process, when I am using my time, talent and treasure effectively.

**As a child, what did you want to be**

**when you grew up?** As a child I wanted to be a singer and a teacher.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Gallery 37 my freshman year of high school. I was a peer tutor.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My mother is and was my biggest supporter.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My greatest accomplishment has been the work I’ve done with ChangeMakers Fort Wayne that spanned from helping a judge be seated as the 1st African American in Allen County to empowering single parents with the knowledge needed to advocate for their school-age children when facing expulsion.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake has been taking time for granted. I lived many years to work and focus on my career while ignoring my personal life. I have since learned to live in the present and not

for the future. I’ve learned to harness the beauty of NOW.

**What are your current professional goals?** I currently endeavor to expand the reach of ChangeMakers Fort Wayne and our ability to empower and equip our community with the resources that are necessary to live healthy and happy.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I remain current and relevant by continuously seeking knowledge and building a diverse network.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I’m not sure that I’ve been able to find balance but I am sure to prioritize self-care and vacations.

**What do you do to relax?** I get massages, adjustments by my chiropractor and sleep.

**What book do you recommend?** “Organizing for Social Change 4th Edition’ by Kimberley Bobo

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell myself to change my major and to start a business.





# Nicholas ‘Nick’ Donald Heiny, 39

**Employer:** Metal Technologies of Indiana LLC (MTI) as vice president and general counsel

**Education:** J.D. – IU McKinney School of Law; BS – Finance – Kelley School of Business, IU Bloomington; HS Diploma & International Baccalaureate Diploma – South Side High School (Fort Wayne)

**Community organizations:** Science Central Finance Committee; Boy Scouts of America – Pack 3300; former Aboite Township volunteer firefighter

**Hobbies:** Amateur endurance auto road racing at tracks near and far, including taking podiums at Charlotte Motor Speedway, Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Mid-Ohio, Barber Motorsports Park, and Gingerman Raceway. Reading to gain new perspectives and ideas. fitness, travel

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** Northeast Indiana is home. After spending eight years in other Midwestern cities, including starting a family in Indianapolis, my wife and I returned to Fort Wayne. We’re proud to raise our children in Fort Wayne and take advantage of all Northeast Indiana offers.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I greatly enjoy helping a family-owned business thrive in a competitive market. Businesses face an array of legal issues — ranging from ADA to OSHA to energy policy — as well as complex commercial matters. Untangling issues so the business can make informed decisions constantly provides a challenge.

**What does success mean to you?** Success means a strong home, close

friends, and making positive contributions at work to help others reach their goals.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I thought I wanted to be a physician and held that belief until freshman year of college. The dream ended after the first day of organic chemistry.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** I started mowing lawns and doing yard work for people around Foster Park in high school, then worked at Kroger on State Boulevard prior to college.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** Jeff Turner, my predecessor at Metal Technologies and current confidant. Going from a legal department with dozens of highly skilled attorneys at Zimmer Biomet to being the only lawyer in a different industry required me to quickly learn how to apply things I’ve only read about in textbooks. Jeff’s advice and guidance helped me get up to speed and serves as a sounding board for difficult issues. Similarly, Stacy Cook at Barnes & Thornburg greatly helped me as a new lawyer learn the skills necessary to succeed, from writing to advising clients in tough situations.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Being selected to serve as MTI’s General Counsel.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Taking the mental load of various work problems



home. It’s a constant battle to leave problems at the office, and there will always be times I’m up at night worrying about possible issues or risks. When I let those issues stay at the forefront when I’m with my amazing spouse or kids, however, it’s not fair to them. It’s a constant battle, but I think I’ve made some progress.

**What are your current professional goals?** To keep learning, growing, and developing as an effective General Counsel at MTI, as well as get more involved in community organizations.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I remain

current through continually reading and absorbing new information. The world remains constantly in flux. Fortunately, the internet provides almost limitless opportunities to learn from great minds with an array of opinions and ideas as well as a limitless list of great book recommendations.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** There is no way I’d be able to balance everything without my amazing wife, Malak. She bonds our family together and is our rock while making it look like a breeze. It can be difficult managing competing priorities and sometimes it isn’t possible to do it all. Sometimes it is also necessary to decline to take on new volunteer activities, particularly with young kids.

**What do you do to relax?** Head to a race track with great friends to compete in endurance auto racing. I’ve met wonderful people from an array of backgrounds who share a common interest in cars, and it’s taught me a lot about effective teamwork, handling unexpected problems, and ignoring distractions to stay focused on the long term goal.

**What book do you recommend?** “Man’s Search for Meaning” by Viktor Frankl.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** To badly quote Viktor Frankl, I’d remind young me that challenges — often from events we have no control over — always will be there. Responding to those challenges, not fighting them, is where we learn and grow.

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# Lee Hoffmeier, 39

**Employer:** Fort Wayne Industrial Revolution, L3Harris Technologies and Indiana Air National Guard

**Education:** Norwell High School, Purdue University Fort Wayne, Community College of The Air Force

**Community organizations:** I am a member of the National Guard Association of Indiana and the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States.

**Hobbies:** Family time, creating custom woodworking pieces, working out and traveling.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I love Northeast Indiana. I was born and raised in the Bluffton. I chose to stay in Fort Wayne and attend IPFW to stay close to the Indiana Air National Guard and work for my dad who owned a construction company. We have a bit of everything in my opinion, and the area continues to grow and improve.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** What I enjoy most about what I do is working very closely with my clients to create one-of-a-kind, custom piece for their businesses and homes. Not all pieces are alike, so the attention to detail is important. I also get to know my clients throughout the process.

**What does success mean to you?** Success comes in many forms. For me, its happiness, providing for my family

and how quickly my small business has grown.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** A pilot, my dad, mom, grandfather and uncle all flew. It's still on the bucket list of things I've like to accomplish.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Hoffmeier Builders, working for my dad as a laborer.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My family and friends have always supported me and have also helped me along the way to not only become a better craftsman but a better person along the way.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I feel like I've made a lot of accomplishments throughout my career, most recently my small business was awarded Fort Wayne Newspapers Best of 2021 in three categories, up from one category from the year before.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far, and what lessons did you learn from it?** I have made a lot of mistakes along the way. What I've learned most about those mistakes is to own it, improve from it and make it something that you won't fault upon again. Everyone makes mistakes along the way; it is how we learn. And learning from it is how we



improve our skills.

**What are your current professional goals?** To continue my education, to develop myself to fit the ongoing needs of the industry. Improve and sharpen my skills. Learn new things that I'm uncomfortable with. Build a network in

this community

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Social media has kept me relevant, and I am constantly moving forward to improve that aspect of my small business. I am currently working with Cyclone Social here in Fort Wayne to transition my website and social media to be more e-commerce and engaging for those who are viewing. I also work to improve my skills through trying new things. I spend a lot of time researching new ideas/concepts and then practicing them on my own.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I've dedicated Tuesdays and Fridays to family time, which means after my full-time job I do not work on any of my additional projects. On Tuesdays we always go out for tacos as a family, and we really enjoy that. Planning is most important for me.

**What do you do to relax?** Spending time with my family is what I do enjoy most. Aside from that, I do enjoy the very rare and occasional naps that come up from time to time.

**What book do you recommend?** "Good Clean Fun" by Nick Offerman

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Be patient and make the most of your time. Learn a new skill. Believe in yourself.

# Paris McFarthing, 37

**Employer:** Hop River Brewing Company and Phil's Hobby Shop

**Education:** Bishop Luers High School 2003; IU 2009

**Community organizations:** I am a board member of Visit Fort Wayne and Believe In A Dream.

**Hobbies:** High-performance cars and race cars, craft beer, and remote-control aircraft

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised in Fort Wayne. I graduated college from IPFW. After graduating I was planning to move to Chicago. Before that happened I had a chance to buy a local business. I have owned that business for over 10 years and then started Hop River Brewing Company six years ago.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** Both of the businesses I own are people-centric. I am recharged by the people I interact with every day. Each of these allow me to create positive experiences in people's

lives. This can be as simple as introducing someone to craft beer or welcoming them for a celebration.

**What does success mean to you?** This question has always had an evolving answer for me. When I first started in business it was centered on what was in it for me. Now I am more focused on my impact and what I put out in the world. My first measure is the example and impact I have on my family. Second, it is the impact I make on the people I interact with. I always try to positively influence someone's day. Small moments make big change.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I didn't have a clear path. I was always into mechanical things. I started in college for engineering, but it was not a fit.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from working as a summer janitor at my old middle school. I worked there in high school prepping the

school for the next school year.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I had lots of supporters. The most impactful one was my grandmother. She has always had a focus and drive to make sure myself and my brother had a great education. That was her mission as it was not an opportunity she was afforded. Her drive to give us more gave me the tools to be where I am today.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest accomplishment was opening Hop River Brewing Company. Creating a new business from a concept was a great experience. I was also and continues to be one of my biggest source of learning.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistakes was waiting for things to come to me. It is easy to assume if you do all the work and planning things will come. Through my experience the final ingredient is my on drive to make them happen. The only person that can limit my success is me.

**What are your current professional goals?** My current focus is on growth and scale in my businesses. The thing that excites me about being is business is evolution and new opportunities. I am constantly working to envision what future success looks like. By doing that it helps me start both connected and excited about what can be.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** To stay relevant I am constantly reading, learning, and networking. These things help me push my own boundaries. As I grow as a leader and professional new opportunities are



presented.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I do my best to be focused with my time. It is always a challenge, but I work to make sure all the correct buckets are full.

**What do you do to relax?** As a family we spend time at the lake. This is our time to disconnect and enjoy each other. Personally, I enjoy cars. This is something I shared with my late father and is a way for me to stay connected to him.

**What book do you recommend?** There are so many great options. One I am reading right now is "The Lean Startup" by Eric Ries.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell myself that no one will push you until you push yourself.

Congratulations,  
**Lee Hoffmeier**

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# Caitlin Krouse, 35

**Employer:** I am the graduate nursing program director at the University of Saint Francis.

**Education:** I went to Bishop Luers High School. I obtained my bachelor's degree (BSN) from Saint Mary's College, my master's degree (MSN) from University of Indianapolis, and my doctorate degree (DNP) from Purdue University.

**Community organizations:** I volunteer weekly at Matthew 25 Health & Care as a nurse practitioner for uninsured patients who live in poverty. I serve on the board of directors for Alliance Health Centers, a Federally Qualified Health Center for underserved patients. I am the health policy director for the Coalition of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses of Indiana advocating for increased access to high-quality, cost-effective health care. I am a founding member of the Indiana Coalition for Patient-Centered Care, an interprofessional coalition working to ensure a patient-centered health care system. I am the vice president of the Historic Harrison Hill Neighborhood Association on the south side of Fort Wayne.

**Hobbies:** I have two little kids, Emmett (2) and Cecilia (4), who keep me very busy. Therefore, my hobbies have become playing with dinosaurs, dressing up in princess attire, and dancing to Disney soundtracks.

**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** My husband Alex and I both grew up in Fort Wayne and, while we moved away for our college education and early careers, we always intended to come back here where our families are rooted. Our parents, siblings, and extended family are scattered throughout the '07 within blocks

of our home, which is exactly the life we wanted for our children.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** As a nurse practitioner, I have worked with the most incredible patients who often have very difficult lives. It did not take me long to discover that our health care system was broken, especially for these vulnerable populations. My passion quickly focused on increasing access to high-quality health care for the underserved. I am proud to be able to work toward this each day, provide care to those in need, and share this passion with nurse practitioner students.

**What does success mean to you?** Success, to me, is meaningful contribution to one's community that seeks to leave the world a better place for others.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** As a kid, I wanted to be a marine biologist. I absolutely love animals, especially ocean life, but I quickly discovered there wasn't a market for this in the Midwest.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** I worked at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo throughout high school. I'd love to say that I was responsible for training the sea lions, but I spent my days selling tickets, mowing the lawn, cleaning trash bins, and washing strollers.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I am beyond fortunate to have a lot of supporters, including family and close friends. However, my partner in life is my husband, and I doubt I could accomplish much in this world without him.



**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest accomplishment has been diving into the world of health policy. I never imagined I'd spend my days meeting with legislators, testifying at the Statehouse, and advocating for legislative change, but these tasks now consume much of my time. As such, I was recognized with awards from the Indiana State Nurses Association and the American Association of Nurse Practitioners.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** I've always been someone who speaks up for what I believe to be right. However, I continue to learn better ways to do this so the message is effectively heard.

**What are your current professional**

**goals?** I want to achieve Full Practice Authority in Indiana for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses. This legislative change is a known way to improve health outcomes, increase access to care, and decrease healthcare costs, especially in rural and underserved populations. Additionally, I hope to become dually certified as a Family and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner and learn more Spanish to provide bilingual healthcare services.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Being a professor requires me to stay up to date on evidence-based practice, which helps me provide quality care to patients based upon current guidelines. Professional presentations and an upcoming publication have been other great ways to challenge myself.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Most days, life is more of a juggling act than a balance. I find lazy weekends spent with my family to be the most rejuvenating time.

**What do you do to relax?** I love to watch HGTV and implement these DIY renovations on my 1918 home.

**What book do you recommend?** The Pulitzer Prize-winning history book titled "The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry" by Paul Starr gave me a great perspective on our health care system.


**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** My husband and I are high school sweethearts, so I'd tell my younger self, "You've got a keeper!"



The University of Saint Francis is proud to see USF Graduate Nursing Program Director Caitlin Krouse, DNP, FNP-BC, RN, honored as one of Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly's Forty Under 40 recipients.



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# Autumn Rose Law, 36

**Employer:** Ziffles Zip n Go, One Love Food Truck, Catering Fort Wayne, Baby Got S'Mac, One Love Organic Bar, Prime Teams, INC., Law Logistics, Intuitive Healing.

**Education:** Some college but no degree.

**What community organizations re you involved in?** MISFITS (Homeless Ministry), PRIME TEAMS INC. (nonprofit youth organization specializing in at-risk youth.) Allen County Jail (volunteer chaplain), Parkview Behavioral Health (mentor), Allen County Juvenile Center (mentor)

**Hobbies:** Traveling and eating

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born here, and my family is here.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I love that every day is completely different and unpredictable. I also love that I have such close interaction with people from all walks of life. Everyone I meet ends up being a friend no matter their circumstance.

**What does success mean to you?** Being free — mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Having the understanding that I get to create my own reality and that I have the ability to change ANYTHING in my life that I want to change at any given moment.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Plastic surgeon

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** From my dad. I started working at 9 years old with my dad. Saturdays I worked the carryout window and Sundays after church I would count the Cherry Master money. I LOVED counting the cash and working with him because I learned how to do everything he was doing.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My husband. He drove me to Arkansas to get my first food truck and he has built me five more food trucks since. He's always pushing us to keep growing.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Just being able to help others. I always try to be of service to those around me.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Not getting my (expletive) together sooner.

**What are your current professional goals?** Creating more passive income.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Traveling. I get so many ideas and learn so much from observing the world around me.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** It's all one and interconnected so I have never felt I had to balance it. It just flows because it's all part of who I am.

**What do you do to relax?** Go to my favorite place, the beach!! It's there I really connect with my highest self.

**What book do you recommend?** "The Secret" by Rhonda Byrne

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** College is a waste of time and money.



# Josh Miller, 31

**Employer:** Global project manager – product lifecycle management at Zimmer Biomet

**Education:** Beech Grove High School (Indianapolis); Bachelor of Science, Indiana University Kelley School of Business; double major – HR Management & Business Management; Masters of Business Administration (MBA); Indiana University (IPFW) Doerner School of Business; Project Management Institute; Project Management Professional (PMP)

**Community organizations:** Healthier Moms & Babies; Board Secretary from 2019-2020 & Vice Chair of Board of Directors in 2021; Board Member, Governance & Marketing Committee Member. I was a Fighting for Firsts Champion in 2021 and joined other leaders in Fort Wayne in raising nearly \$30,000 in October for Healthier Moms & Babies and the families that they serve. I also served as a team leader for the Diaper Dash and joined over 200 people to raise money for supplies for the families Healthier Moms & Babies serves. Warsaw Community Church: I serve on the worship team as a drummer along with my wife, Allisia, who serves as one of the worship leaders. Zimmer Biomet Employee Resource Groups (ERG); African and Black Leaders for Excellence (ABLE); Community Engagement Committee Member; Zimmer Biomet Young Professional Network (YPN); Project Management Institute (PMI) Global & PMI North East Indiana Chapter; Young Adult Professionals – Kosciusko Chamber

**Hobbies:** I enjoy spending time with

my family (My wife, two sons & soon-to-be baby girl). We love to walk and ride the trails at Winona Lake or around Warsaw. We enjoy boating on Winona Lake, or spending time at the beach and parks with our sons. I also enjoy playing golf, drums, coaching and refurbishing furniture or working on DIY projects.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I'm a transplant to the area from Indianapolis, but it has truly become home, and we love Northeast Indiana. My wife and I moved to Fort Wayne in 2013 for my job at Do it Best Corp. We then moved to Warsaw in 2019 for my job with Zimmer Biomet and to be closer to family as my wife is originally from the Warsaw area.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** As a global project manager in our Reconstruction (Hips, Knees & Bone Cement) Business Unit, I get the opportunity to work with so many different areas of the business. I am also blessed to partner with some amazingly talented and passionate colleagues across the world and our many divisions. I have had the opportunity to partner with coworkers from five different continents and dozens of countries in my role based out of Warsaw. In the end, we are all working to "Alleviate pain and improve the quality of life for people around the world." To me, that is an absolute dream that I get to have a global impact on people's lives from Northeast Indiana.

**What does success mean to you?** Success for me is being the best husband, father and person that I can be at home, so that my wife and children have the ability



to grow and develop to be their best selves. I've always believed that if you don't have success in your personal life, it is very difficult to have success in your professional life. Outside of my family, success is always bettering myself and helping those around me achieve their goals as well. I always try to live by my favorite quote by Les Brown – "Help others achieve their dreams, and you will achieve yours."

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** When I was younger, I always wanted to play basketball when I grew up. But as I grew up, I got to learn more about what my dad did in the health care industry at Eli Lilly & Co. and knew that eventually I wanted to get involved in the Med Tech or Pharmaceutical industry.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Nussli Group, I was an assistant foreman for a construction crew that traveled the US building bleachers for major events like Nascar, X-Games, LPGA & PGA the summer before college.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** While I have been blessed with some amazing leaders who have challenged me and pushed me to be my best, no one has sacrificed more or invested more into my success than my wife. Through years of traveling, or spending late evenings working or studying during my MBA or PMP, she has always been the one to keep pushing me to better myself. I would not be where I am without her support and dedication to our family over the years. Professionally, Scott Sproul at Do it Best Corp. helped me grow exponentially in the few years I was on his team. He gave me the opportunity to take on new challenges and helped me grow as a leader, project manager and person.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I believe that earning my MBA and PMP were two of my biggest personal accomplishments that have helped propel my career forward. In terms of my biggest

accomplishment in my career, my team at Zimmer Biomet completed one of the biggest product lifecycle projects in our company's history at the end of 2021. This project has helped streamline our decision making and continued to improve our global portfolio.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Not saying "No" earlier on in my career as I wanted to take every opportunity to grow personally and professionally. This quickly led to burnout and has been something I have tried to consistently implement into my life in order to balance professional, personal and philanthropic obligations.

**What are your current professional goals?** My goals are to continue to learn and grow as a project manager and leader in Zimmer Biomet as well as in the community. My plan is to develop into a senior leadership position where I can continue to make an impact and help others grow in their careers as well.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** One of the best ways I have done this is continuing my education through training courses, academia or certifications. I am always willing to ask questions, learn from my mistakes and I never stop being curious. I also make it a focus to set goals and have accountability in my life to make sure I achieve them or understand why if I don't. I believe that having a strong support system and group of mentors is another key way to stay current.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Being intentional with my time and learning to say no. If there is something I'm asked to do that I'm not passionate about or it isn't my area of expertise, I have slowly and painfully learned to say "no" where I can. I have always naturally been a helper and I want to help people, but it's ok to simply say "no". Staying organized, communication and time management are also several key areas that I have to focus on to balance my career, family and community involvement.

**What do you do to relax?** I enjoy camping, boating, spending time at the beach, sitting by the fire or spending time in nature with my family.

**What book do you recommend?** "Everyone Communicates, Few Connect" by John C. Maxwell

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Your life is going to take a lot of sacrifice and unexpected turns to get where you want to go, but it'll all be worth it. Slow down every once in a while, and just enjoy the ride and cherish the moments along the way.

*Congratulations Autumn Law*

...on being named a Forty Under 40 award recipient.



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- Owner of Law Logistics Transport
- Owner of Manifesting Abundance Intuitive Healing



Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly

FOR 40 UNDER





# Jennifer Norris-Hale, 39

**Employer:** Mission: Motherhood  
**Education:** Carroll High School graduate of 2001 and Indiana University — Bloomington Class of 2005. I received my Bachelors in Apparel Merchandising and minored in Business.  
**Community organizations:** Mission: Motherhood is centered on collaboration within the community, so I am grateful for the opportunity to be in active partnership with Connect Allen County, Community Harvest Food Bank, Associated Churches, Bridge of Grace, as well as forming other connections in the future. Personally, I have been involved in Junior Achievement as a classroom presenter and have been a Big Sister since about 2018. I am also a graduate of Leadership Fort Wayne (Class of 2018).  
**Hobbies:** Listening to late 90s/early 00s emo/punk music, watching horrible reality TV, exploring new restaurants with my husband and playing games with my kids. Eventually I would like to get back to reading a lot and writing, but that's not in my current season of life at the moment!  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised in Fort Wayne and decided after college that I wanted to pursue my career in NYC. I loved the excitement of the city when I was single, but once I started a family, my experience was very different. I realized that to raise my children, I needed the comforts of the Midwest more than I thought that I would. Since moving back home, it has been refreshing to get back to my roots and grow my family here.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I've been fortunate to have extensive experience in the corporate world and enjoy bringing that to the nonprofit arena. Consistently what I enjoy is always learning something new. My career background is in operations and I love it because you can learn all

about how an organization works and then find ways to streamline processes and communication.  
**What does success mean to you?** "To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded" — Ralph Waldo Emerson. This quote pretty much sums it all. I believe that I became so burnt out in the corporate world, I really needed an outlet to actively give back in a big way.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I really wanted to be an archeologist because I loved history and wanted to travel all over the world.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came when I was around 14/15 and I worked at the Pine Valley Country Club bussing tables.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I've been fortunate to have met so many supporters along the way. There was always one person who just took a chance on me and I'm grateful for those individuals. Whether it was on the East Coast or coming back home though, my biggest supporters (and most concerned) were always my parents. I would say that in my current career, my husband has been the biggest support because he sees my vision and the need in our community.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Oddly enough, realizing when it was time to make a change. When I first started I was determined to make my way in NYC and for a long time I enjoyed what I did, loved the opportunities to travel and was really proud of all of the effort I was putting into building a career. Eventually though after becoming a mom, the idea of who I wanted to be, who I had to be and who I was, became extremely conflicted. I think realizing that I needed to change gears and put the focus on prioritizing



my own health was an accomplishment in itself because it was a very tough realization. From there, I was able to develop my career and new path in a way that I never would have thought possible.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistake has been just getting in my own way and thinking I have to do it all. It really takes a village, to be a parent, to raise a child, to build a business. Leaning into those who are willing to offer help/support is imperative because those people do exist! Asking for help is never, ever a sign of weakness and neither is making space for others to shine and lead the way.  
**What are your current professional goals?** Continue to advocate for mothers and families in our community, state and country. I am currently running a diaper bank initiative that I hope can eventually

be sustainable and a staple in communities for years to come.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I love connecting with people one-on-one and developing those relationships. I am never opposed to reaching out to someone who inspires me or that I think might be able to offer more to move a conversation forward. I stay relevant by staying connected and valuing people's time, expertise and bringing them to the table.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I have yet to master that because I am often driven by whatever motivates me that day. From my experiences over the past few years, I have become a deeply faithful person and I try to stay intentional about where I spend my time and energy and worry less about the small stuff.  
**What do you do to relax?** I don't take myself too seriously and I take naps. As a mom of four boys and at almost 40, I love a good nap when I can get one.  
**What book do you recommend?** "When I Ran Away" by Ilona Bannister. It is a deeply moving book about a mother experiencing postpartum depression. I wish more people would take the opportunity to read it to really understand the stress of modern motherhood. And for any mother who has experienced it,  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** First of all, you are beautiful, so please own it and stop comparing yourself to others. Your value is not in what others think about you, but in what you think about you so stay true to discovering yourself. And finally, you're much, much stronger than you think you are and once you realize that, the opportunities will be endless, but...remember, you can always come back home.

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2022

## Congratulations to the Class of 2022!

- Aaron Robles, Founders Spark
  - Alan Scherer, Sold by the Gold at North Eastern Group Realty
  - Amy Griffith, Parkview Family YMCA
  - Andrew Gritzmaker, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Fort Wayne
  - Anna Baer, City of Fort Wayne Public Works
  - Autumn Law, Ziffle's Zip n Go / One Love Food Truck / One Love Organic Bar / Catering Fort Wayne / Baby Got S'Mac / Prime
  - Teams Inc. / Intuitive Healer
  - Brandon Deel, Home Reserve
  - Brett Gauger, Elevatus Architecture
  - Caitlin Krouse, University of Saint Francis
  - Chris Polhamus, JH Specialty Inc.
  - Darius D. Darling, Brotherhood Mutual
  - Daylana Daisy Saunders, ChangeMakers Fort Wayne
  - Dr. Kaley Bontrager, LaGrange Family Dentistry
  - Emily Stuck, Visit Fort Wayne
  - Jacob M Butler, Parkview Health
  - Jennifer Norris-Hale, Mission: Motherhood
  - John Nichter, Three Rivers Festival, Ft. Wayne Police, Upside Event Management
  - Josh Gustin, Sweetwater
  - Josh Miller, Zimmer Biomet
- Josh Pulfer, 3 Rivers Federal Credit Union
  - Justin Hayes, Lake City Bank
  - Kibwe K Cooper, EmpowerYou Podcast - Kibwe Kreative INC
  - Kourtney Teegardin, The Hagerman Group
  - Krissy Creager, Purdue University Fort Wayne
  - Laneisha R. Bennett, Leaving Legacy Memorial
  - Lee Hoffmeier, Fort Wayne Industrial Revolution
  - Melissa Singh, Amani Family Services
  - Mylisa Kelly, Bring Black Up
  - Nicholas D. Heiny, Metal Technologies
  - Nick Podlaski, Podlaski LLP - Attorneys
  - Paris McFarthing, Hop River Brewing Company
  - Raven Morton, American Red Cross
  - Rachel Steinhofer, Barrett McNagny LLP
  - Rena Showen, Turnstone Center
  - Réna Bea Bradley, Bridge of Grace Compassionate Ministries Center
  - Rochele Watson, Fort Wayne Pet Food Pantry
  - Scott Campbell, Ambassador Enterprises
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# Rachel Katherine Steinhofer, 38

**Employer:** Barrett McNagny LLP  
**Education:** Cathedral High School – Indianapolis; DePauw University – Greencastle  
**Community organizations:** Board member for Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo; secretary for Mental Health American of Northeast Indiana; past board member of McMillen Health (2015-2021), serving as president (2018-2019, 2019-2020) and secretary (2020-2021); member of Our Lady of Good Hope Church  
**Hobbies:** Going to new restaurants, baking, attending my children’s activities, volunteering at school  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I moved to Fort Wayne in June 2012 for my husband’s job.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy the fact that every day is a different with new challenges and new lessons. Not one day is the same.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success means providing high-quality services to my clients.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** A nurse or a doctor because my mom is a nurse, and my dad

is a doctor.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** I was a cashier at a small family-owned grocery store in Carmel.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** If I had to narrow it to just one person, it would be my husband, Jonathan. He is my biggest supporter, cheerleader, and advocate. And we could not be a two-working-parent household without the support of grandparents. Although they live in Indianapolis, my parents offer encouragement and support from afar, and my mom drives up to watch the kids when I can’t find anyone else to watch the kiddos. My in-laws drop everything to help me with the kids so I can tend to work.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Honestly, it’s navigating being a working mom while providing high-quality services to my clients on an ongoing basis.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** I can’t think of one “greatest



mistake” in my career, but I can think of a lot of little ones. I’m my biggest critic so I analyze everything I’ve done after I do it. For example, I’ll immediately ask myself what question(s) I missed after

I’ve completed a deposition. But that is why the call it the “practice of law” — because you are always learning as you go.  
**What are your current professional goals?** I want to strengthen my client relationships and continue to grow my client base while still being active with my children and in volunteer opportunities.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Since I concentrate in labor and employment, I stay up to date with ongoing developments in my practice area. I regularly present at conferences and conduct HR training for clients.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Every day is different, but my husband and children always come first, and the rest falls into place.  
**What do you do to relax?** I try to relax by watching light-hearted movies or TV shows.  
**What book do you recommend?** “To Kill a Mockingbird”  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Don’t be afraid to have a voice and speak up, including advocating for yourself.

# Melissa Lynn Singh, 30

**Employer:** Amani Family Services  
**Education:** High School — Huntington North High School. Undergrad — Huntington University, B.A. in History and Political Science. Graduate — Currently enrolled through IUPUI in the Master of Social Work program in Fort Wayne. I will be graduating with my MSW in May 2022.  
**Community organizations:** Currently, I am involved in Made Strong Ministries (board president), Anti-Trafficking Network of Northeast Indiana (Victim Services co-chair), and Children’s Health Collaborative Advisory Board.  
**Hobbies:** I love hiking, playing volleyball, reading, photography, and exploring new places. I am always my happiest when I am exploring outdoors!  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised in northeast Indiana, so this is home to me. This area will always be home and I hope to continue to make an impact in my community to allow others to feel this is their home too, which is what led me to working with the immigrant and refugee population locally.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** At Amani Family Services we work with families from all over the world who now call Fort Wayne their home. I love learning about and celebrating other cultures, all while helping families to reach their goals who may be struggling. I not only enjoy walking alongside our clients in their journey, but also our staff as they continue to grow professionally in the mental health field.  
**What does success mean to you?** At the end of the day, I want to know that I tried and gave everything my best.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be a history teacher.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from my first job at Zahm’s Greenhouses in Huntington.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I have had so many supporters throughout my career that it is incredibly difficult to name just one person. Professionally, many people have believed in me throughout my life to provide me opportunities to continue to grow and move into various leadership positions. In my personal life, my parents and husband are my largest cheerleaders. They have been with me every step of the way and have supported me throughout my entire journey.  
**What has been your biggest**



**accomplishment thus far in your career?** Moving into the Associate Family Justice Director position at Amani has been my largest accomplishment and soon graduating with my MSW will also be a large accomplishment. I see every accomplishment as important since they all continue to lead me in a direction where I am able to grow and use my passions to help others.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** I am unsure of a specific mistake, but I have learned that mistakes are always made when you do not follow your passion and what makes you happy. While things may not always feel like they will work out, as long as you follow your passion, everything finds a way. Mistakes are also great learning points!  
**What are your current professional goals?** I would love to do additional work in the policy realm to make big picture changes in the areas of immigration and public health. While I have enjoyed working with families and influencing change at an agency level, community level changes are needed to truly impact many of the hardship’s community members experience daily.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** The mental health, policy, and advocacy field is always changing, and new information is constantly coming out. To stay current, I always make a point to take time to attend trainings, as well as network with others in my field.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I work efficiently and set great boundaries. There is no way I could be successful in my

career if I did not take time to step away to also be with my family and pursue my hobbies. My family and hobbies are what refuel me to be in the right headspace to be innovative in the workspace.  
**What do you do to relax?** Hiking and being out in nature are what relaxes me.  
**What book do you recommend?** I read A LOT, so it is difficult to think of

just one book!  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell myself to always follow my passions and not focus on what others think. I feel many of us make decisions based on what others will think of us, but if we follow our passion and interest, we will never be wrong.

Barrett McNagny  
congratulates  
**Rachel Steinhofer**  
on being named to  
*Greater Fort Wayne  
Business Weekly’s  
Forty Under 40 Class of 2022.*



Rachel Steinhofer is a partner with Barrett McNagny where she assists clients in the areas of labor relations and employment law.  
  
Congratulations to Rachel and to all of the 2022 *Forty Under 40* recipients!



# Zachary M. Lightner, 37

**Employer:** Lightner Law Firm, P.C.  
**Education:** Homestead High School, Purdue University, IU Robert H. McKinney  
**Community organizations:** I am involved in Auburn Main Street, United Way of DeKalb County, YMCA of DeKalb County, the Community Foundation of DeKalb County and the DeKalb County GOP.  
**Hobbies:** Spending time with family and friends. Hunting and fishing, and trap and skeet shooting, hiking.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** It is home. Family and friends brought me here, but it's been an amazing place to raise a family, start a business, and give back to my community.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I have the opportunity to work with people as they navigate problems or complexities in life and help them to find solutions.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success is synonymous with happiness

and giving back. That doesn't mean I think I'll ever quit pushing or working but I try to see success through the eyes of my family/children. I'd rather have a good life and great relationship with my kids and wife than feel that my success is based on a dollar figure. But I also see success as a means to support others and give back as I'm able.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** A lawyer.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Clounie Landscaping. I worked as a landscaper.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My wife, Kristin, has been a tireless supporter of me; that has allowed me to build my firm and participate in multiple boards, committees, etc.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** To be able to start a firm in the midst of all the unknowns happening in 2020



and not just get by, but thrive with the support of loyal clients and community members is something I'm immensely proud of.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far, and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistake was not

trusting my gut (and my wife) to go out on my own earlier.  
**What are your current professional goals?** To support my current clients while growing my firm and increasing my skills and knowledge.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I study, attend seminars, and, most importantly, network with other attorneys who can mentor me and keep me on the straight and narrow.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** With the help of my incredible wife. I truly couldn't do a fraction of what I do without her support and willingness to pick up my slack.  
**What do you do to relax?** Read, exercise, wine.  
**What book do you recommend?** "Atlas Shrugged."  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Trust your gut, work hard, and build your network.

# Aaron Robles, 30

**Employer:** Founder/CEO — Founders Spark (Professional services for entrepreneurs/networking events/training, etc); founder/CEO — Hyprnova (Design and marketing agency); co-founder/CEO — Lizcano Properties (corporate leases)  
**Education:** High School grad/some college  
**Community organizations:** St. Joseph Missions — board member  
**Hobbies:** Cycling, music festivals,

volleyball  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** My family immigrated to the US when I was a baby and after four years in Texas we moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Fort Wayne has been my home ever since and I've committed myself to growing it into the place I want it to be for me and everyone else in this community.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I do a variety of

things, from being a graphic designer, to interviewing people for my show Heart of the Hustle, hosting networking events, coaching entrepreneurs, etc. The common thread is that I help people get closer to where they want to be in life, specifically through business and entrepreneurship. I love helping empower people to create the life they want and gain freedom and generational wealth on their own terms to live a better life.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success to me means living life in a way that's meaningful for yourself. Creating a life that makes you happy and fulfills you.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** As a child I wanted to be an artist. I always loved drawing and being creative. I'm fortunate to be able to do that in a variety of ways now as an adult.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first job was as a balloon artist for Sweetcakes Entertainment. I could make a ton of different amazing balloon animals and did a ton of parties when I was a teenager.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My biggest supporters have been my parents, who always encouraged me to do what I wanted to do without question. Aside from them, Ms. Karen Gillie taught me how to be a designer at Anthis Career Center and provided me with many opportunities that I would not have known about otherwise.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** So far my biggest accomplishment has been working with YLNI to create the Ignite Institute, where I taught a cohort of 12 students how to be entrepreneurs. As someone who was helped a lot as a teenager (especially as an undocumented immigrant), it's been my honor to provide that training and education to the next generation of entrepreneurs.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistake has been to doubt myself and care about what others think. That kind of mentality can set you back and close doors before you've ever had a chance to open them. It's so important to be your own biggest fan and do the things that you want to do.  
**What are your current professional goals?** Currently, I'm looking to expand Hyprnova significantly by the end of the year. I also want to bring back my Origins events through Founders Spark as we get a better handle on the pandemic in order to help entrepreneurs connect and feel



supported again.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Having conversations and involvement with the community. Actively working in the industry and staying in constant communication with others in the industry helps me stay sharp, up-to-date, and see the changes in my profession.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** "Balance" is a tricky thing that needs to be constantly looked at. It changes from month-to-month and even day-to-day. The key for me is to know my own limitations and put myself in a position where I can perform to the best of my ability. Sometimes seasons in my life require me to work more and others to be at home more, regardless constant communication with my loved ones helps me know where my attention needs to be.  
**What do you do to relax?** As a very social and outgoing person, I tend to relax most around people. Whether it's with my girlfriend at home or out with friends, whenever I'm around people my batteries tend to be recharged.  
**What book do you recommend?** "Essentialism" by Greg McKeown is by far one of my favorite books. As someone who does a lot and loves entertaining new ideas, this book speaks about how to focus on the right thing and do that exceptionally well rather than doing many things at a mediocre level.  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell myself to stop doubting myself as much and go for it. There is more regret in what you don't do than what you do and that life is a book and we should make it a good book to read.

Congratulations,  
**Zachary Lightner!!**

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# Anna Baer, 39

**Employer:** City of Fort Wayne, Division of Public Works, Traffic Engineering – project coordinator

**Education:** Bachelor of Science, Construction Engineering Technology – Purdue Fort Wayne, Associate of Science, Architectural Engineering Technology – Purdue Fort Wayne with a Theater Minor and an Honors Program Pin

**Community organizations:** Three Rivers Festival – City Appointed Board Member & International Village Committee Chair, Society of Women Indiana Northeast Indiana – Outreach Committee member and past President, Open Streets – Logistics Committee member & Volunteer Committee member, Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana – Membership Committee member, Future City Competition – Indiana Regional Committee member, Volunteer with Allen County Public Library and FIRST Lego League Indiana State Championships

**Hobbies:** Crafting — specifically making jewelry and handmade gifts, Playing Board Games – currently my favorite is Wingspan, Biking when the weather is nice – recreationally on the trails and commuting downtown

**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** I moved to Fort Wayne to go to college and after graduation I looked at job opportunities in cities across the country and realized that I had everything I needed in Fort Wayne. After having lived in a variety of places, ranging from an unincorporated small town to the third largest city in the country, I knew that I wanted access to arts, events, trails, restaurants, shopping, etc without the sprawl, commute and costs of a very large city.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I love the creative problem solving of engineering and being able to do that for the City of Fort Wayne means that I get solve problems that help my community, neighbors and friends. Being able to work with neighborhood

associations and local organizations makes what I do very fulfilling and I can see the impact that my work has on people.

**What does success mean to you?** Success is continuing to grow; learning and trying new things. Success isn’t about a specific accomplishment but about overcoming obstacles.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be a veterinarian because I love animals, but at some point, I realized it wasn’t just playing with animals all day and the animals might be sick. I am currently content to simply share my house with two cats and dog.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from Goshen Public Library. I started by shelving books but ended up working multiple jobs there over the course of six years. Then when I moved to Fort Wayne, I worked at the Allen County Public Library for almost four years. My first job turned into an almost 10-year career and I still volunteer at the library.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** For the last five years, Kyle Winling has been giving me projects that slowly increase in complexity both at work and through connections with other community organizations. He is an amazing cheerleader, having words of encouragement when projects get difficult and congratulations for completing large projects. He is always open to hearing my out-of-the-box ideas and checks in to see if there are any new projects or opportunities that I’m interested in participating in.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Creating the Painted Pavement Art Program and Community Led Traffic Calming Demonstration Program were brand new programs for the City of Fort Wayne and these are not common programs for a city to have. It has been amazing to work with



community groups to help them improve their neighborhood. I have even shared information about the programs to a few people across the country that are interested in these new programs we are offering in Fort Wayne.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** For years, I underestimated myself and avoided extracurricular projects that I wasn’t sure that I would be competent in. Luckily, I have had many amazing people in my life over the years to help nudge me past my initial apprehension enough times that I have been able to get a better understanding of what my strengths are and how to ask for help so I can now more confidently tackle new types of projects.

**What are your current professional goals?** I am looking forward to the opportunity to work on more projects with neighborhood associations with the Community Led Traffic Calming Demonstration Program that I put together. Being able to

work with citizens to design projects helps me learn what is important to the community and gives me a chance to work on new types of projects that expand my thinking and knowledge. I am also hoping to present at a conference next year about the neighborhood traffic calming projects that we have been doing in Fort Wayne.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I attend webinars and conferences from a variety of different organizations to get different views on topics. I am a member of professional organizations and advocacy organizations. I also get a daily roundup of links to news articles related to my work, I rarely read the articles but it helps to keep tabs on trending topics and different things that other communities are doing.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Being honest with myself and others about what my expected involvement is for different projects allows me to help prioritize my different commitments. I also schedule time for entertainment and physical activity to make sure that they also get priority and I’m not just hoping to find time for them.

**What do you do to relax?** I have been doing yoga for 15 years and although I’m not always consistent with my practice, I always end up going back to it. I am always in the middle of a book (or two) and enjoy attending book clubs to discuss what I am reading. I also enjoy a nice leisurely walk with my dog, especially in the woods.

**What book do you recommend?** “The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse” by Charlie Mackesy

It is a simple but beautiful book about kindness, courage and self-acceptance.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Keep following your interests, not any specific goal because the path isn’t linear but perseverance and random unrelated skills can lead to some amazingly unexpected places.

# John Nichter, 38

**Employer:** City of Fort Wayne Police Department — detective sergeant; Upside Event Management — owner

**Education:** Master of Science in Management & Leadership- Western Governors University; Bachelor of Science in Business Administration- Indiana University-Fort Wayne; Associate of Applied Science in Paramedic Science — Ivy Tech State College-Fort Wayne. North Side High School Fort Wayne.

**Community organizations:** Three Rivers Festival — board president second term and volunteer for 20 years; Northeast Indiana Critical Incident Stress Management Team — member/peer; Pinestone Community Association-Treasurer; Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana-Member.

**Hobbies:** My fiancé says I need to get a hobby, because I don’t have one. I like stay busy and work on my volunteer activities or my business. However, I have recently discovered the TV show “Survivor” and have been binge-watching them. Maybe I will make my hobby to get physically ready to apply as a cast member.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** Born and raised in Fort Wayne. Looked at moving to a larger city in the past, but once you start comparing cost of living and other factors you quickly realize how great Fort Wayne really is. When it comes to public safety, northeast Indiana is very supportive of its first responders. I talk to officers from around the country and a common theme is that their community and government leader don’t support them. I set up a ride-along for an officer on a department serving a population of almost a million people in Texas. After the shift this officer said he was amazed at how our officers seemed to enjoy their job and to work for our agency. The Fort Wayne area is a great place to work

and live!

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** That I am not tied to a desk, that I can go out in the community and make a difference. Even simple things like walking around Jefferson Pointe and waving at kids in uniform is breaking barriers. Working in public safety is not all fun; people don’t call 911 because they are having a good day. But, it brings joy when you can help someone in their time of crisis.

**What does success mean to you?** Doing things that you want to do, not letting possible failure be a deterrent. Did you do something or challenging, that either went the way you had planned or if not, you learned from the experience. Even if something didn’t happen the way you wanted now, it made you stronger and you learned from it.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Something in public safety, either a firefighter or police officer. I always wanted to help others, which there are so many ways to do that, but I was drawn to the high stress environment. During my middle and high school years my long-term plan after public safety was to run for president of the United States.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** I was hired by Park Center at age 16 as a file clerk. I would file medical documents for the Child & Adult and Addictions Services.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My parents, in that they engrained on us kids to always work hard at whatever you do in life. My fiancé, Aspen, for understanding the long nights working extra or studying will pay off one day.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** I have



had several proud moments in my career as a police officer, but I would say being promoted to sergeant with little over eight years on the force when at the time the average was 14 years. I would also have to say performing CPR/AED on a person during the Three Rivers Festival and then meeting him several months later fully recovered.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** When I commit to a project I go 110% into the task, and I expect everyone else to do the same. If they don’t I tend to take over the project myself and run with it. I have learned that just because someone doesn’t go all in right away doesn’t mean they are not committed to the task. Slowing down and allowing others to do their parts allow for better collaboration that reflects diversity and different thinking. There can be

several different ways towards achieving the goal; you just have to be willing to see it.

**What are your current professional goals?** To advance within the police department ranks to eventually the chief level. To grow and expand my personal business with new clients needing off-duty police, fire, and first aid services.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Be willing to learn new things and never stop growing. In public safety we are always learning new and advanced ways to do our job, we must move with that flow. We must also be willing to listen to the other side; we all have a story to tell. In my business, Upside Event Management, we currently are a staffing agency. Keeping an eye to the future with education, like CPR classes, and safety consulting.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** My fiancé would say I don’t, but it has gotten better over time. In the past I would put my work over my family and personal needs. If something or someone needed help it was/is hard to say no. I would say I am more conscious of how I spread my time among the things in my life now.

**What do you do to relax?** When I can, sleep. I am a social person so I like to be around people or doing something. I am more relaxed in a room full of my friends talking, than sitting in a quiet room by myself watching TV or something.

**What book do you recommend?** “The Leadership Challenge” by James Kouzes and Barry Posner.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** You’re doing the right thing; keep doing what you feel is the right path. Hard work and determination does pay off.



# Chris Polhamus, 33

**Employer:** JH Specialty, Inc.  
**Education:** Butler University – Bachelor Degree  
**Community organizations:** Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana – vice president

**Hobbies:** I am a husband and father of three (ages 5, 3 and 8 months old) and enjoy spending time with my family, making memories and trying to keep up with them. We enjoy our time at the lake doing all of the water activities. We also have a passion for all sports and if we aren't competing or coaching, we are fans and rooting on the Butler Bulldogs, Ohio State Buckeyes, Cleveland Browns, and Cleveland Guardians. I also find camaraderie in and enjoy hunting, fishing, hiking, and all of the other outdoor activities.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I grew up here in Fort Wayne and was given a wonderful childhood filled with many experiences, coaches and mentors along the way. When I was lucky enough to come back to Fort Wayne after college and get hired at JH Specialty, I felt a responsibility and honor to be able to give back to the community and coach/mentor in the same ways that I had been.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** Every day is something new. I get to work with CEOs, CFOs, COOs and other management to identify opportunities for growth as well as overcoming business issues with digital solutions. In the same day, I could be working with small local restaurants to Fortune 500 companies. At the same time, in an ever-changing industry, there is always something new to learn and different tactics to implement. It keeps me on my toes and allows me to help those around me.

**What does success mean to you?** Success is making those around you better. Whether it be the relationships that you have or the job that you're doing, it is finding opportunity to grow and perfect the task at hand and find a new one to set as a goal. It's lifting those up around you to be the best versions of themselves and to achieve as a team, community or company.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Growing up, I wanted to be everything. It changed so often and new ideas and professions were constantly catching my eye. From being the sports star to an orthopedic surgeon to acting my way through my favorite movies, I always was changing my dream job and somehow combining them into one Jack-of-all-trades profession.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first real paycheck was from working on the landscaping crew for Plant Center.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** I am so lucky to have so many people along the way that helped and guided me. Each has played such a significant role to get me to where I am today. First and foremost — my parents and wife that constantly supported and challenged me to be the best version of myself and never settle for mediocrity. Patrick Florea that paved the path and showed me the way while constantly challenging me to think from a different perspective. Allowing me to vent during the challenging times but also celebrate after overcoming them. John Henry III for giving me the opportunity at JH and showing me by example what it means to lead with empathy and not only live by but work and conduct business by the Golden Rule. Each



and every co-worker at JH Specialty — For every challenge or opportunity, they have had my back and have worked beside me as a team while also being some of my biggest cheerleaders.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Biggest accomplishment in life has been my three kids — Charlie, Joe and Brielle. Biggest accomplishment in my career has been the role that I have played in the growth of JH Specialty. Being able to make an impact in the lives of those around me and play my role starting from an intern to where I am today and achieve the growth that JH has seen and the opportunity from that growth that JH has given to others.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistakes have been the actions that I didn't take. There is that saying, "You always miss 100% of the shots that you don't take." And, my biggest mistakes were those that I didn't have the confidence to make. Opportunity comes to those that face and overcome adversity, not

those that shy away from it.  
**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goals are the same that I have always had: To make those around me better; To serve my clients with empathy in helping them achieve their goals; To continue to serve my role at JH and take part in the massive growth in JH's future.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Collaboration — It is tough to read every article, to keep up to date with every bit of technology that has an update or a new version rollout, and to know every bit of new technology out there in an ever changing environment. But, in an industry like Digital Marketing, you need to know the latest and greatest. So, we work together as a team and discuss trends we have seen, recent articles, techniques, etc. We collaborate to come up with the best solution.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** It is a juggling act trying to keep all of the balls in the air and in control. Sometimes you feel like you are juggling balloons and sometimes you are juggling bowling balls. The trick is knowing and understanding when you need to focus on the bowling ball while the balloon floats there for a little while. And, having a partner to help pass the balls back and forth when needed.

**What do you do to relax?** I am a movie junkie — Being able to sit back and enjoy a new story or experience and immerse yourself into the story.

**What book do you recommend?** "Don't Put Me In, Coach" — it takes the angle of a walk-on college basketball player and the inside look of a D1 top program.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Enjoy the Process — Don't be in a rush to get to the end point of succeeding, but enjoy the process that gets you there.

The Three Rivers Festival Congratulates  
**Anna Baer and John Nichter**  
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# Nicholas A. Podlaski, 33

**Employer:** Podlaski LLP and Allen County Government, Public Defender’s Office

**Education:** Homestead High School, University of Notre Dame, B.A. Political Science, Michigan State University College of Law, J.D.

**Community organizations:** I am involved in Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana, Cathedral of Immaculate Conception, Notre Dame Club of Fort Wayne and Allen County Bar Association.

**Hobbies:** Work, spending time with my family, watching the New York Mets and Notre Dame sports, smoking cigars and tasting Irish whiskey, making music, and reading.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** My family and opportunity. After graduating law school and moving back to Fort Wayne, I met my wife, a Fort Wayne native, and started our family here. Aside from family being here, northeast Indiana is a great place to do business and grow businesses.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I get to interface with many different types of people and learn about their lives, trades and businesses. No two days of work are the same. I enjoy using my knowledge and skills to help people.

**What does success mean to you?** Success to me is performing my work at a high level, putting out a superior legal product, getting great results for clients, all the while being able to maintain a work-life balance.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Initially, a herpetologist, the study of reptiles and amphibians. But my interests shifted to multi-jurisdictional, federal district court commercial litigation in the third grade when my father started to read John Grisham novels to me out loud.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** I have always had a strong entrepreneurial spirit. I started a lawn care business in high school when I lived in Georgia prior to moving to Fort Wayne.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My wife has been, and continues to be an immense support for the long hours, that come with assisting in running a few businesses and everything it takes to work in and out of the office to grow those endeavors and advance in same. My business partner and father has been a great source of guidance, advice and encouragement.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?**



Forming and growing our own law firm into a very quickly expanding and scaling business into multiple states, as well as various promotions within the Public Defender Office and obtaining a very rare not guilty verdict on a murder case this past January.

**What has been your greatest mistake**

**thus far, and what lessons did you learn from it?** Not betting on and trusting myself more often and early enough. I suppose the lessons learned are to be brave and take risks. Nothing can substitute for experience.

**What are your current professional goals?** To continue grow and develop our firm and practice and continue to work hard and get good results for clients, both private and publicly appointed.

**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Participating in bar events, publishing articles and maintaining collegiality.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** It’s a constant juggling act that is held together with support on the home front and drive for success.

**What do you do to relax?** Work, spending time with my family, watching the New York Mets and Notre Dame sports, smoking cigars and tasting Irish whiskey, making music, and reading.

**What book do you recommend?** “Sirens of Titan” by Kurt Vonnegut.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Invest in crypto currency and be brave, take risks, and nothing can substitute for experience.

# Alan Christopher Scherer, 39

**Employer:** Sold by the Gold at the North Eastern Realty Group

**Education:** Leo High School, 2000; IPFW, 2000-01; Western Michigan University, 2001-03

**Community organizations:** Leadership Fort Wayne, Greater Fort Wayne Onboard Fort Wayne

**Hobbies:** All things cars. I love driving them, looking at them, just being around my fellow car enthusiasts. Also a lifelong IndyCar and Formula One fanatic. I also love to support the Mad Ants and READ.

**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I moved to Fort Wayne when I was 14. My dad took a position here so we followed from Northwest Ohio. After going away for school and stints in Tampa and Chicago, coming home to be near family was where my heart was.

**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** It seems cliché, but helping someone navigate possibly the biggest purchase of their life is something I really enjoy. Every client is a different situation so it’s a process that allows me to build some really great relationships throughout the ups and downs of looking for a home, selling or building, then the actual process of being under contract. It’s all about relationships, and I love that.

**What does success mean to you?** Success for me is about being the best version of myself that I can be. It’s about always improving. Some days the needle moves quite a bit. Others maybe not as much. Just trying to be 1% better every day and representing my name, my family and friends the best that I can.

**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** For as long as I can remember I just wanted to be a business

owner like my dad. That or an IndyCar driver, but I think that ship sailed.

**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** First real paycheck was from my dad, putting together spine anatomical models in his warehouse.

**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** There are some many people who have poured into my life over the years. My mom and dad have always been incredibly supportive. I have a small, but tight, circle of friends who have been rocks. Businesswise, my dad, Eric Fortmeyer of Circle Logistics, and Beth Goldsmith have been the biggest impact makes.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Consistency. More than one good year, here or there, I’ve always made consistency my goal. Thus far, I’m proud of what I’ve been able to consistently while always pushing myself.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far, and what lessons did you learn from it?** Saying yes too frequently. Several times I’m a people pleaser and tend to think I can do it all. It’s created serious burnout in the past. I’ve learned that in some cases it’s far better for myself and the other party to politely decline when things don’t align with goals, passions, or personal health. I’ve learned the value of my mental and physical health.

**What are your current professional goals?** Consistently setting and reaching my personal goals while while passing on all the lessons I’ve been fortunate enough to learn to the next generation, and watching them hit their goals and grow.



**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I’m always challenging myself to learn. Studying our market, refining processes, negotiation, service, marketing and learning what makes people tick. So many areas to try

to improve on. Being involved in the community and really doubling down on deeper relationships with the people I can serve and work alongside.

**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I’m sure I’m not great at times, but making sure I have time for my mental and physical health is a huge part of making the rest work.

**What do you do to relax?** Driving (always at the speed limit), whether on a weekend with buddies or at a track. Reading and working out, and spending time with friends and family.

**What book do you recommend?** “Four Thousand Weeks,” by Oliver Burkeman, “Soundtracks” by Jon Acuff, “Atomic Habits,” by James Clear, “The Icarus Deception” by Seth Godin, anything by Malcolm Gladwell or Robert Greene. “The 4-Hour Work Week” by Tim Ferris, “Ego is the Enemy” by Ryan Holiday, “The New Gold Standard” by Joseph Michelli.

**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Set big scary roles. Never stop improving. Listen more. Be kind. Know your worth, then add tax.

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# Justin Hayes, 31

**Employer:** Lake City Bank  
**Education:** Huntington North High School graduating class of 2009; Indiana University-Fort Wayne, graduating class of 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Finance with a Bank Management Certificate.  
**Community organizations:** President of the Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana; president of the Northern Indiana Chapter of Risk Management Association; Greater Fort Wayne Inc (board member); NEIRP Regional Opportunities Council (member; ex-officio); Junior Achievement of Northern Indiana (volunteer)  
**Hobbies:** Spending time with friends and family, staying active, traveling, and watching sports.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised in northeast Indiana and growing up I thought there was no way I would stay around this “boring place.” I joined the military my junior year of high school and thought for sure that would be my free ticket to not only college but also out of NEI. I was completely wrong! I fell in love with my high school sweetheart and quickly realized how much I missed home while I was away. I decided to attend IPFW and get involved with the community as much as possible. The more and more I got involved, the more and more I enjoyed being here because I felt like I could truly make a difference within the community. There aren’t many places where you can have the opportunities to make a significant impact within your community at a “young” age and in NEI you can!  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** As I mentioned before, I enjoy making a difference and

as a business banker I can do just that. I can make a difference within my community by helping create more jobs and by simply helping a business owner or entrepreneur’s dreams become a reality. I also enjoy the opportunity my profession gives me to be involved within my community in ways that I am truly passionate about.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success is a relative concept to me and is always moving as I continue to grow. Each person has a different definition of success because it is something that should be defined by you, not other people. For me it is trying to make a positive impact in whatever I am doing. I feel that if I am doing that then there will be sense of accomplishment and continued progression personally and professionally. As long as that continues, I think that the success will continue to follow.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be in the military or a firefighter.... One of those was fulfilled, and I am running out of time for the other.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from being a dishwasher at The Country Post, a restaurant in Huntington.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** Outside my profession, my biggest supporters have been my wife and close friends, who I consider family. Everyone should have an inner circle and for me these people have made me who I am today. Inside my profession, I have had a lot of great mentors to say the least. However, my first manager, Linda Henschen, was the one who encouraged



me to grow as a leader and get involved within my community. She has had a lasting impact throughout my career in many ways.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Within my workplace, I would say that my biggest accomplishment has been my ability to continue to grow and lead through a variety of ways. Outside my workplace, I would say that becoming President of YLNI has been an honor because of the passion I have for our community and our emerging leaders. Having the opportunity to lead an organization of likeminded individuals to be a valued voice within our community is so fulfilling.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn**

**from it?** Mistaking motion for progress. Being so task-oriented, this is something that I continue to struggle with. I have realized that motion does not always equal action, so it is important to define what being productive means to me.  
**What are your current professional goals?** To continue to grow as an effective leader within my profession and my community.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I realize that I am not going to know the answer to everything, but I would like to at least know where I can find it. I try to stay involved with professional groups and utilize the peer networking to stay in the know of what’s going on in my industry. Finding a few mentors has been very beneficial to me, both personally and professionally.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Continual reevaluation — I try my best to focus on things that I am passionate about and if I find myself in a situation that I don’t feel this way, I reassess. My focus and passions may change over time so ensuring that I am staying conscious of that is very important.  
**What do you do to relax?** Exercise is typically my bridge to relaxation because it helps me decompress from what all might be going on.  
**What book do you recommend?** Tie between “Atomic Habits” by James Clear and “Extreme Ownership” by Jocko Willink  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Learn to lead yourself before trying to lead others and failure is a part of success so don’t be afraid of it.

# Stephanie Taylor, 37

**Employer:** Taylormade Agency  
**Education:** 2001 High School- Douglas MacArthur High School in Decatur, IL; 2004 Michiana College- Associate of Science Medical Assistant; 2006 Trine University- Bachelors of Science Criminal Justice; 2008 Trine University- Masters of Science Criminal Justice: Public Administration  
**Community organizations:** YLNI, Brightpoint, Fort Wayne Children’s Choir, WEOC Advisory Council, Young Professionals  
**Hobbies:** Resting, skating, watching documentaries  
**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** I moved here in 2001 when my mother was stationed here by the Army. After residing here for seven years, I relocated to Indianapolis for three years and had a calling on my life to return to Fort Wayne to

implement programs and resources and to impact the community here. My children were also born in Fort Wayne, and I’m currently raising them here. It’s important my children are acclimated to the community and have access to opportunity.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy the freedom that comes along with being an entrepreneur. Being free mentally allows me to be my most creative self and to put positive and productive energy into helping my clients.  
**What does success mean to you?** To me, success is subjective. Success means that I have accomplished a goal that I set for myself. Success means empowerment to keep going for the things my heart desires.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** As a child I wanted



many small-business owners in a formal setting. In 2018 that prayer was answered.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake would be staying in places and around people past the expiration date. What I learned from this is that we hold ourselves back when we make this mistake and that comfort and fear can cripple our growth.  
**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goals is to continue to grow my business and expand access to my services. My goal is also to keep an open mind of learning as much as I can to get better every day.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I remain current in my profession by continually studying the market and trends. I also take advantage of educational and networking opportunities that align with my vision.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I am a strong believer that balance is nearly impossible. I believe in prioritizing the different key areas in one’s life. I believe that I have to take care of myself first in order to be there for my family, and to be there for the community; my family has to be taken care of. Order is very important when managing life.  
**What do you do to relax?** Sometimes I sleep, other times I’m binge-watching TV or simply nothing.  
**What book do you recommend?** I would recommend “Boundaries: When To Say Yes, How To Say No to Take Control of Your Life” by Henry Cloud and John Townsend; “Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul” by Stasi and John Eldridge  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell my high school self to stick to your plan, ask more questions and find a mentor.

*Congratulations to Stephanie Taylor!*

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Forty Under 40 Winner



# Rena Elizabeth Shown, 35

**Employer:** Turnstone Center for Children and Adults with Disabilities  
**Education:** Ohio County High School- Hartford, Kentucky; Eastern Kentucky University – Richmond, Kentucky — Bachelor of Arts, Political Science; Indiana University Lilly School of Philanthropy — Bloomington, Indiana – Certificate in Fundraising Management (CFRM) & Crisis Response Fundraising; Foellinger Foundation, Rising Leaders, Leadership Lab; Tufts University The Fletcher School – Medford, Massachusetts – Graduate Candidate, Global Business Administration  
**Community organizations:** Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana – chair, Get on Board Committee; Fort Wayne Civic Theatre – board member; Rotary Club of Fort Wayne – member  
**Hobbies:** Paddle boarding, riding my scooter in downtown Fort Wayne, visiting local restaurants and breweries, and walking my greyhound, Victra Au Barka.  
**Why are you in northeast Indiana?** I moved to Northeast Indiana 10 years ago after teaching English as a second language in Busan, South Korea. My partner is from Fort Wayne and when the fire department announced they would be hiring a fire academy class, we decided to leave Korea and pursue his dream of becoming a firefighter. I did not have much of a plan when we arrived state-side, but I was quickly welcomed in the nonprofit community with my first position at United Way of Allen County as a donor relations manager.  
**What is it about your profession that**

**you enjoy and why?** The people. Fort Wayne is a very generous community filled with people who just want to do good! My job is to help connect people who have the ability and resources to address systemic community problems and give them the opportunity to be a part of the solution.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success to me means that everyone around me has what they need to effectively and efficiently do their jobs to the best of their ability and can execute the plan.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** Professional NBA basketball player — I seriously thought I would be the first female basketball player in the NBA. I was so glad when the WNBA started in 1996 when I was in 7th grade.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from Ohio County Family Wellness Center. I was a lifeguard.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My greatest supporter professionally has been Mike Mushett, current CEO of Turnstone Center.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest accomplishment thus far is building a dynamic team of development professionals at Turnstone Center for Children and Adults. I work with an incredible team who are passionate about helping others by creating opportunities for community members to give back in



support of our mission. My success is a result of their hard work and dedication; I could not do it without them.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake was leaving the nonprofit industry in pursuit of a different career path. Instead of learning how to work through the “burnout” and further develop my leadership skills, I decided to leave the industry. Only a short six months later, I was back at it and provided the opportunity to participate in the Foellinger Foundation Rising Leaders program. It was a game-changer for me at the time and has helped me be a

better leader for my team and peer to my colleagues.  
**What are your current professional goals?** To finish my Global Business Administration degree at Tufts University, The Fletcher School.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Development is constantly changing and evolving as the needs of organizations change and evolve. To stay current, I read online articles, participate in webinars and talk to colleagues. To stay fresh on Leadership Development best practices, I participate in the Foellinger Foundations, Leadership Lab – Alumni Program.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** My life is enjoyable because I’m able to bring all of these important aspects of life together. To me, that is the balance. My life is a reflection of what makes me happy, which happens to be my career, family and community service.  
**What do you do to relax?** To relax I play pinball at Hop River Brewing Company. Best beer in town and nothing is better than getting that high score or for me personally, beating my partner when we play against each other. It is rare, but a good day when it happens!  
**What book do you recommend?** “Loonshots: How to Nurture Crazy Ideas That Win Wars, Cure Disease, and Transform Industries.”  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Have more fun!

# Rochele Watson, 38

**Employer:** Humane Fort Wayne is my full-time employer, and I have been the volunteer executive director at Fort Wayne Pet Food Pantry for 2.5 years.  
**Education:** I graduated from North Side High School, and then began schooling at IPFW and Ivy Tech for nursing and hospice care. I had to drop out after I sustained a brain injury.  
**Community organizations:** I was on the ground floor of Fort Wayne Derby Girls, I created Fort Wayne Bombshells Burlesque with two fellow North Side graduates, and I’m on the board of Art Fort Wayne — heART of the City, which provides low-cost opportunities and resources for up and coming artists.  
**Hobbies:** I create content with Fort Wayne Bombshells, and relax with my cats at home.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born and raised here, and lived on the East Coast for a year, before returning to Fort Wayne; there’s something magical here, and I love our community.



**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I absolutely love that Fort Wayne is so progressive in providing social services for animals and their owners. I take a lot of pride in working with organizations and forming relationships to help preserve the human/pet bond.  
**What does success mean to you?** I never think about this enough to really give it any thought. The world is hurting right now, and sometimes success just looks like survival. Maybe in 20 years I could say that I didn’t waste my time here and made the community a little more kind for our neighbors.  
**As a child, what did you want to**

**be when you grew up?** I absolutely wanted to be a veterinarian. I took a few detours, but I was able to finally marry a little medical and a little animal care and compassion together through my work at Humane Fort Wayne.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from Dairy Queen in the spring of 1998 and I never nailed the signature loop on the cone.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** Melissa Osborn and Jeff Brachmann, long-time friends and mentors have shared a mountain of information and passion with me in animal social services

and behavior training. They pushed me to keep going with certifications, training and are a testament to teamwork in action.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest accomplishment at this point is thinking about all of the pets that have stayed in their homes because I was able to connect them with resources and showed a little compassion and understanding with their owners. Empathy builds bridges to common goals.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My biggest mistake was letting other people’s fears become my fears. You can always try again, but not doing something because it failed for someone else is harmful to progress for everyone.  
**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goal is to get more folks engaged in animal welfare, show them that there is a place for them,

and that their passion can change so many lives, both human and animal.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I absorb as many webinars and continuing education opportunities as I can. Someone in this field always has some new perspective or idea that might be incredibly helpful to our community, and I want to learn it all.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Gosh, I don’t. It’s my biggest flaw.  
**What do you do to relax?** I drink coffee. It’s warm and it keeps my bones comfortable.  
**What book do you recommend?** “A Framework for Understanding Poverty,” by Ruby K. Payne  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Be patient, it takes 10 years to prepare for the next 10 years, and don’t smoke cigarettes, ya big dummy.



Rena Shown  
CHIEF OF DEVELOPMENT  
& STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

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Turnstone congratulates our very own 40 under 40 honoree, Rena Shown. The dynamic energy you bring to the Fort Wayne community and Turnstone family do not go unnoticed. Thank you for sharing your time and talents to create possibilities for people of all abilities.





# Josh Pulfer, 37

**Employer:** 3Rivers Federal Credit Union  
**Education:** Bachelor's-Organizational Leadership & Supervision, Purdue University West Lafayette  
**Community organizations:** 122nd Fighter Wing, Big Brothers Big Sisters-Real Men Read, Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana, Greater Fort Wayne Inc.-Leadership Fort Wayne  
**Hobbies:** Family time with my wife and two little girls, biking, hiking  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I am originally from Northeast Indiana and returned after college. We decided to stay in the area due to the growth that is happening. Also, geographically we are close to family and many other regional

cities and activities.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I love coaching and developing other professionals. My organization emphasizes this and supports me in living this out every day. The best part of my role is leaning into others in support, who then impact our membership and community.  
**What does success mean to you?** Understanding your values and how you can take steps to grow incrementally. It is about focusing on daily practices and habits on a consistent basis, even when it is easier to accomplish them only on occasion.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I saw myself in a

public service, specifically as a firefighter.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** Visentin USA, where I took part in a high school work program. My specific role was in a warehouse, where I pulled items for shipments, reviewed inventory, and conducted quality assurance inspections.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My wife has been my biggest supporter and cheerleader. She understands my career passions and is always the first to encourage and support me.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Seeing others grow into their potential in their careers. Helping others understand their strengths and where they add value in the organization. I have felt the most accomplished when a team member was chosen to lead her very first team.

**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Assuming the team understood their goals and objectives. I learned through feedback that there was opportunity for greater clarity. That taught me to have a greater understanding of each team member's role in that objective, and also the need for consistent and clearer messaging of those expectations.  
**What are your current professional goals?** Focusing on building into the individuals and teams that I have the pleasure to lead. My hope is to work with more leaders in the future and grow into a role that likely does not exist today.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Owning my development is key and I feel that this mindset is one that will need to be ongoing every single day into the future. Specifically, this has been done through reading of books/articles, listening to Podcasts, participating in leadership curriculum



programs in the community, and mentorship. I also feel that a primary component to this is following up and sharing what I learn with others to pay it forward.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** Clearly defining how I intend to spend time in each area. Setting boundaries is also key so that I can be intentional with each. Knowing that each area is complementary and helps me become better overall, and recognizing that connectedness.  
**What do you do to relax?** Spending time with my family, spending time outside, or being active at the gym.  
**What book do you recommend?** "Atomic Habits"  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** You are more concerned with yourself than others are. Enjoy the chapter you are in and don't spend so much time thinking about what's next.

Emily Stuck

From the staff and board at Visit Fort Wayne

Josh Pulfer

AVP of Branches

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Congrats, Rochele!

Forty Under 40 Class of 2022

We're proud to have you on our lifesaving team!



# Raven Symone Morton, 31

**Employer:** American Red Cross — Northeast Chapter program manager  
**Education:** Graduate of Harding High School; IU Bloomington B.S. in Human Development and Family Studies; Indiana Tech — M.S. in Organizational leadership; Purdue Fort Wayne — MSed in Clinical Mental Health Counseling  
**Community organizations:** Young Professionals of Fort Wayne — professional development chair; PFW Chi Eta — professional development chair; Girls Rock Rock  
**Hobbies:** Taking long road trips, shopping, outdoor adventures and supporting my family and friends.  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I was born in raised Northeast Indiana (southeast Fort Wayne) and I have always felt as if I could not be released from my hometown until I left my imprint.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I enjoy being able to help people in the midst of their crisis. Being able to be hope for someone in the times that hope is lost is everything to me.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success to me a balance of having self-love meanwhile sharing your time talents and treasures to the best of your ability to everyone who is in your reach.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** As a child I wanted to be a pediatrician when I grew

up. Chemistry lecture at IU deferred that dream.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from my grandmother, as I help her do custodial work at local banks on the southeast side of Fort Wayne.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My biggest support has been my family and friends through my career advancement. Whether it was an encouraging word or the by product of watching them walk their own career journey, I have carried a piece of them all to get where I am today.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** My biggest accomplishment thus far in my career has been making it to my senior year in the Master of Education program at PFW for Mental Health Counseling. It has been the most revealing yet rewarding accomplishment of my life thus far. Not only have I gained a tool to benefit my community, but I have gained a tool that has been to the betterment of me.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** My greatest mistake thus far has been my lack of boundaries, from that I have learned that no one can receive my help if I do not first help myself.



**What are your current professional goals?** My current professional goals are to get licensed as a mental health counselor in at least two states, and to deploy as a mental health counselor outside of the United States. Another goal of mine is to be able to work for FEMA.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** I remain current in my profession by constantly

looking up trainings and gleaning knowledge from peers within the crisis management and mental health field. I also believe in the divine dance of teaching and being taught, so another component to staying current is learning from the individuals in which I serve.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** This is something I am still learning how to do. I do my best to prioritize life, family and community service in order to have energy for my career. I am also known for always having a to-do-list and this helps tremendously with balance for me.  
**What do you do to relax?** In order to relax I like to watch things that make me laugh, such as “The Bernie Mac Show.”  
**What book do you recommend?** I would recommend the book “Letter to My Daughter” by Maya Angelou.  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** I would tell my high school self to use her voice, in spite of how confrontational it maybe. I would tell her to remember that confrontation is neither good or bad but merely uncomfortable and that is OK, as addressing this discomfort now will make a beautiful tool for older you.

# Emily Nicole Stuck, 34

**Employer:** Visit Fort Wayne  
**Education:** College – Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs – Indiana University  
**Community organizations:** Northeast Indiana Hospitality Association  
**Hobbies:** Spending time with my family — Husband, Son (5 yrs old), Daughter (2.5 yrs old). Being at the lake — it is my happy place. Enjoying Fort Wayne’s restaurants, attractions, and everything in between — I love our community. Watching TV — give me a good reality show!  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** I grew up in Fort Wayne and had big plans to leave the area after college. However, things change and the older I became the more I saw what made Northeast Indiana so great. I could see Fort Wayne growing and being a place, I wanted to stay and honestly, I could not picture myself living and working anywhere else. Not only that — with my job I get to share with visitors and residents daily all the reasons why Fort Wayne/Allen County is so special.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I am not sure I could fit in to just a few sentences all the reasons why I love my profession. Visit Fort Wayne’s mission is to promote the community as an exceptional destination and advocates for the growth and development of its visitor industry. This means I get to work with Allen County’s 300+ tourism partners from producing our Visitors Guide to planning and organizing Savor Fort Wayne — Fort Wayne’s Annual Restaurant Week to managing a Visitors Center that welcomes 5,500+ visitors and residents each year.  
I am in a career where every day is different, making it fun and exciting. I work with people and organizations in making Fort Wayne/Allen County a better place to visit, live, work and play. I value all the tourism partners in our community and am so fortunate I can work with them.  
**What does success mean to you?** This is a great question. Success for me has changed throughout my career. At one point if you would have asked me what that meant I might have said — a great

title. Asked me again later it might have been my salary or if I had my own office.  
Being where I am today — success to me is a combination of things. I cannot tell you how fulfilling it is to love where you work. Sure, I still have stresses and hard times but loving where you work and who you work with is an almost daily reward. Also — I have to say that being able to be a director of a department and oversee employees has made me feel very successful. I want my staff to look up to me and see me as a leader. I value their hard work and enjoy seeing how their successes only elevate mine. I am thankful for that opportunity to lead and work with them.  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I always thought I would be a veterinarian – I was even accepted to Purdue University’s Veterinary Program, but life had other plans. I still love animals and we have an adorable American Bulldog – Leo.  
**Where did your first paycheck come from and what was your job then?** My first paycheck came from Pizza Hut- I was a server.  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My mom has always been my biggest cheerleader — she is professional and has one heck of an amazing work ethic. Also, my husband — he is amazing at supporting my career — may it be after work events or early mornings and changing his schedule. Lastly — I have been at Visit Fort Wayne for 11 years — our past President/CEO Dan O’Connell continually saw potential in me and promoted me within the organization several times. He always trusted me and continued to give me more and more responsibility. All these people have brought me to where I am today in my career.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** Sometimes it can be hard to do things outside your comfort zone so there have been times in my career where I did not necessarily use certain social gatherings to introduce myself. Advice is always try and meet one new person — it can



lead to a great connection.  
Also — always come prepared and take more than you think you will need for meetings. There have been times I did not have what I need, and I hated how I felt and so I do all I can to avoid those circumstances.  
**What are your current professional goals?** I will always strive to have Visit Fort Wayne be an organization that our community knows and values. I want our residents to see the value of tourism, how Visit Fort Wayne brings in visitors and letting us be that resource/tool for all there is to see and do in Fort Wayne/Allen County.  
I want to see Savor Fort Wayne continue to expand and grow — and be something our restaurant community participates in, and diners enjoy.  
Grow and cultivate my partnerships with our tourism partners in Allen County and Northeast Indiana. The people and organizations are who make our community special, and I want to know as many as I can and be a resource/partner alongside them.  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** Education is so important! I attend 2-3 professional development conferences a year that are focused on tourism. I also subscribe to a lot of different professional development newsletters and meet with a lot of partners

to know what is important to them.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life, and community service?** I think balance is almost impossible — it is more like you give some to one area and then give to another- like a flow. My family will always be my first and foremost priority — so there are times I will miss functions after 5 p.m. because I want/need to get home for my children. At this stage in my life with my children young I really do not do a lot of community service outside my work hours unless it is something that can involve them. However, I know that when they are older that will change, and it is nothing to feel guilty about! We are all doing the best we can with the limited hours in the day. I strive to work hard and give my family time. You must do what is best for you and be sure you are not doing too much in one area.  
**What do you do to relax?** Honestly — what gives me a lot of relaxation is just an hour or so at night watching TV and snacking on something great. Between work and being a parent, it is nice to have that time at the end of the day where you can relax and watch TV — a show that is maybe not from Disney.  
**What book do you recommend?** I love reading! I do not do it as often as I used to, but I really enjoy self-help books. I think it can be great to be reminded what drives or motivates you and how you can be your best. Also — communicating with others — READ up on this! You will work with all types of personalities in your career, so this is something that is always helpful.  
One example: “Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour and How to Effectively Communicate with Each in Business (and in Life)” by Thomas Erikson  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** To stay positive and know there is a path — even if it is hard to see right now. There is a lot of negativity in the world and we can only control how we react and behave. That times will be hard, and life is unfair, but a positive outlook is contagious and to not step believing great things are ahead.



# Kourtney Kara Teegardin, 39

**Employer:** The Hagerman Group  
**Education:** South Side High School, Fort Wayne – 2001. Bachelor of Arts in Journalism with a second concentration in English – Indiana University-Bloomington, 2005  
**Community organizations:** Cancer Services of Northeast Indiana – board member; chair of Lapper fundraising walk (six years on the committee). Community Transportation Network (CTN) – board intern. Make-A-Wish of Northeast Indiana – Council member. Middle Waves Music Festival – sponsorship committee member (past board member; four years involved). Amani Family Services – fund development committee member. Leadership Fort Wayne 2021 program graduate  
**Hobbies:** I like to play board and card games with friends. I know how to knit, but don’t practice nearly enough to be considered good. I enjoy home projects. Do these things count as hobbies? Ha!  
**Why are you in Northeast Indiana?** Fort Wayne is my hometown. After college graduation, several of my friends moved to Indianapolis and Chicago. At that time, my older sister had two children growing up in Fort Wayne. I didn’t want to be anywhere they weren’t, so I moved home. Later, she had two more children. I am so thankful I chose to build my adult life in Fort Wayne because it meant I got to be an active part of their lives.  
**What is it about your profession that you enjoy and why?** I have always loved editing and perfecting things. And marketing is that. It’s my job to take an idea, or a product, or a team and present it in a way that’s desirable and easy to understand. I like being behind the scenes to help highlight the thing I want the audience to focus on. Creating a polished final “product” makes me feel good about my work.  
**What does success mean to you?** Success to me means being able to afford Starbucks every morning without checking my account balance. Once achieved, I’ll be able to sing, “Hey Look Ma, I Made It!”  
**As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be a teacher. I would buy workbooks and used textbooks at neighborhood garage sales, set up a small chalkboard in the garage, and ask (OK, maybe force; I was bossy) neighborhood kids to be my students and listen to my lessons. I loved it. But I fell in love with journalism in high school, and that changed my focus.  
**Where did your first paycheck come**

**from and what was your job then?** My first job was at Scott’s grocery store at Georgetown Square when I was 15. I worked there for maybe six months. I remember when I quit. My friends wanted to hang out on MLK Jr. Day. I was scheduled to work. You can imagine how that went at 15. Sorry, Scott’s grocery, for my choices in early 1998!  
**Who was your biggest supporter who helped you advance in your career?** My first salaried position was in 2014, nine years after college graduation. My friend Katy Silliman took a chance and hired me as a grant writer. I had no background in nonprofit development, but I could write. She taught me the ins and outs of grant writing, which led to grants and marketing, which led to solely marketing, where I am today. Her faith in me — to be able to learn something new using transferable skills — took me from an hourly job that wasn’t challenging me in the least to where I am today.  
Another big supporter of mine is Beth Goldsmith. Beth is my surrogate aunt. She tells me she is proud of me, lifts me when I’m down, and encourages me to do more and be better. Her support is important to me because she is truly a model of success. Not only is she an amazing realtor (I used her myself, so I can attest to this!), but she is such a community champion and stellar volunteer. I look to her for advice, criticism, and praise.  
**What has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?** Easily, my biggest undertaking was a complete rebrand for Rothberg Law Firm, my previous employer. I was a marketing team of one. I worked with Reusser, who are an amazing team. We started the process in February 2020... so things were delayed a few times, to say the least. Originally, the plan was three months, start to finish. But then the scope changed. Plus, pandemic. It launched in February 2021. I am really proud of that project, and know that Rothberg is set up for success for years with their branding.  
**What has been your greatest mistake thus far and what lessons did you learn from it?** I make mistakes often, both in actions and words. The takeaway from those collective mistakes both personally and professionally is accountability. The older I get, the easier that’s become. But owning my mistakes to the people I’ve wronged or correcting the thing I messed up can be hard, depending on the gravity of the mistake. Holding myself



accountable and clearly communicating how I will fix a mistake is both necessary and humbling.  
**What are your current professional goals?** I’ve been with Hagerman nearly six months, but had a few years in the A/E/C industry in a past position. (Side note: I missed this industry, and am thrilled to be back!) My current goal is to learn this industry inside and out. When I start dreaming about construction, I’ll know I’m ready for another goal, which will likely be learning more about Google Analytics and SEO, which leads me to...  
**How do you remain current/relevant in your profession?** This is a funny question because only in the last two years have I felt like my knowledge of the marketing industry is a bit outdated. Google Analytics and SEO make me feel old. I’m technically a Geriatric Millennial, or a Xennial. When I finished college in 2005, Google was just becoming a common search engine. It was definitely not a verb like it is now. SEO wasn’t taught in journalism school. I learned how to build a basic website, but my focus in college was writing and editing. My lack of knowledge on Google Analytics and SEO put me at a disadvantage with recent college graduates. But I’m learning.  
I stay current by looking at design trends, maintaining my love for AP Style and monitoring its annual changes, expanding my proficiency in Adobe programs, and regular communication

with other friends in marketing.  
**How do you balance your career, family, life and community service?** I have a standing date with my sister’s family every Tuesday for dinner. We’ve done this for 6 or 7 years, and I prioritize it. I rarely miss a school function for my nieces and nephews, and am an active aunt. Beyond that, I am single and childless, and have time to volunteer. I’ve made sure I give back to the community through board and committee participation and monetary donation when possible.  
Further, Hagerman encourages every employee to take on community service and volunteerism in some way — regularly, or just once a year. We can do this on company time. That’s something that drew me to this company. They’re helping to literally build our community, and ensuring that employees give back to it through time, talent, and treasure. I serve on a handful of boards and committees. Being encouraged to participate and being given work time to do so is a blessing.  
I’ve learned to block out time on my calendar to do nothing, which is important. During the pandemic, it was a difficult adjustment to go from having commitments most evenings after work to nothing. Blank calendar. I learned to enjoy my free time a lot more, which taught me to be more selective with what I give my time to, and how often.  
**What do you do to relax?** I find cleaning to be therapeutic. I love a good nap. In the warmer months, I spend a lot of time on my patio in my hammock. I love a mug of hot chocolate with a good blanket and a cat on my lap.  
**What book do you recommend?** I don’t know how to approach this other than honestly — I stopped reading about a decade ago. I don’t have the attention span for it anymore. I’ve listened to a handful of books on Audible in recent years, but I can’t remember the last time I read and finished a book. Of my quasi-recent audio book listens, I was inspired by Jonathan Van Ness’ “Over The Top.” I recommend that book with a side of Kleenex.  
**Based on what you know now, what would you tell your high school self?** Oh, girl. I would tell her to be patient. Life is a slow burn; enjoy it. I’d remind her not everyone is going to like you, and that’s OK. You can’t please them all. And I’d ask her to continue wearing her retainers into adulthood. Oops.

Get your tickets to the Forty Under 40 award ceremony and banquet at [kpceventbuzz.com/forty-under-40](https://kpceventbuzz.com/forty-under-40)

Congratulations Kourtney!

**FORTY UNDER 40 2022 WINNER**

Kourtney Teegardin  
Marketing Coordinator

Congratulations, Raven!

**FORTY UNDER 40 2022 WINNER**

The American Red Cross is proud of you for this recognition and all you do for your community. Your contribution to bring care and comfort to Fort Wayne residents is exceptional, and we are glad to serve alongside you! Thank you for your commitment to making a lasting impact in your community for years to come!