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2020 PROGRESS

A supplement of the **Journal Review**



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Stevenson marks 50 years with ACE Hardware

Nick Wilson

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When Jack Stevenson was hired at age 16 by Marti and Dan Poole to work at their hardware store on the south side of Crawfordsville in 1970, he had no idea he would end up owning the business.

“I was the first employee they hired when they opened the store,” Jack said. “I was scraping mud off the cement floor.”

When Jack turned 18, the Pooles presented him with two options: He could attend college with tuition paid by the Pooles, or take a manager position within the store.

Jack considered the first option but had just lost his father at 18. His mother was working two jobs, compelling Jack to take the manager position and help the family.

And help the family he did.

Today, Jack and Pam employ their son Skylar Stevenson and are helped regularly by their adult children Dave and Stacey High, Jeremy and Starla Bradley and Josh and Stefanie Corbitt.

Focusing on family has propelled Poole’s Hardware into the future. The Stevensons became the “first” and “only” in many categories in Indiana: They were the first to partner with both True Value and ACE, taking the name of the latter in 2000.

The 1972 Southmont graduate and New Market native oversaw considerable expansion during his time as manager from 1970 to 1999, and purchased the business in 2000 from the Pooles.

Jack and Pam are members of New Market Baptist Church and give full credit to God for their successes.

“We all prayed about it ... it’s a God-given thing. It really is,” Jack said. “Sometimes that sounds cliché, but that’s really what I believe. God opens doors and makes things happen, and gave me the help to be here 50 years. Hopefully I’ll be here a while longer. I don’t want anybody thinking I’ll be gone tomorrow.”

And with the help of family, the small town hardware store has now joined one of the largest buying groups in the U.S.



“With that, that’s where a lot of our progress in the recent couple years has come from — launching our own marketing and our own website,” Skylar said. “There’s furniture, flooring ... that is a big deal.”

And the community has backed the addition of appliances at the location since in 2014 when they were added to the store, Skylar said.

Fortunately, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic could not bring down the hardware store despite struggles with deliveries and

providing an atmosphere to which customers were accustomed.

“We’re still thankful people prefer to shop local, and we’re thankful we’re able to work together with the big box stores,” Skylar said, noting the store works closely with neighboring Home Depot and Walmart.

As the Stevensons look to the future, they plan to continue providing their customers with every advantage possible, including technological advances while maintaining a positive, friendly attitude.

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Downtown restaurants respond to pandemic by putting others first

Nick Wilson

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Two of the many Crawfordsville businesses that rallied together in 2020 to maintain their downtown brick-and-mortars in the face of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic were Maxine's on Green and Francis & Mount.

With more than 30 million Americans applying for unemployment, the downtown eateries applied their full might to see to the needs of their employees while selling items outside their regular menus in efforts to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Hannah Thompson, owner of Maxine's on Green at 116 S. Green St., came to Indiana from North Carolina in 2015. Along with the support of family and friends, Thompson was able to open the Green Street restaurant by March 2016.

Thompson and others worked day in and day out to get the business rolling, which opened with just eight items on the menu.

"I walked in here in 2015 and my dad was like, 'This is where we're going to open a bakery.' And I was like, 'we're gonna do what,'" Thompson said, noting the building's poor condition. "There was so much crap hanging from the ceiling, and one spot had no floor. I was just like, 'OK. Cool.'"

After nearly a year of hard work, sweat and tears, the business opened in 2016 and quickly expanded its menu and dining space.

But when the coronavirus first arrived in the U.S. in February, things began to change for Thompson, her employees and her business.

"It's been insane, to say the least," Thompson said. "When it first started, I remember I had my last dinner here — I do



this dinner called the Baker's Table, where I get to showcase some of my upper-level food — and the following Monday I remember sitting in my office at my house and I have never had that much anxiety in my entire life."

Officials at every level of government began mandating shutdowns for nearly every place people gather. Unfortunately, residents also commonly gather at businesses, giving the economy a one-two punch, the likes of which had gone unseen since the Great Depression.

Bars, gyms and other places where people congregate were quickly shutdown — including restaurants.

"It was like the Twilight Zone. It was weird," Thompson said. "My fiance and I ... it was so nice to have someone through all of this. It was nice to have that support system, but trying to have that first pivot was crucial."

Maxine's immediately bolstered its to-go menu and began selling items commonly found at a grocery as store shelves became bare.

"It's been such a blur. Sometimes I can't even remember," Thompson said. "For the first two weeks, it was nuts. I could still get food from my providers, so I literally brought in like 400 pounds of chicken, and I had ground beef, eggs, milk ... I had toilet paper for days.

"All these people did preor-

ders and put all this stuff on my truck and I brought it in," she continued. "I could just see the gratefulness and the relief on my customers' faces that I had never seen before. It was a very strange feeling for me. It made me feel good."

Indiana had largely reopened by November, creating a sort of balance for the restaurant. The pseudo-normal has allowed Thompson to again begin thinking of the future.

"I'm a little nervous, so we're not going to make any sudden movements yet, but eventually I would like to expand within the building," she said. "There would (also) be a menu expansion."

At Francis & Mount, executive chef and owner Isaac Weliver also dedicated the full weight of his budding restaurant to his employees and the community.

The restaurant at the southwest corner of Market and Washington streets opened in 2019 and was just over a year old when the pandemic struck. The owner happened to be in the midst of rebranding efforts at the time.

"We rebuilt this beautiful, popular restaurant that actually did not slow down after the (2019) holiday season, which was incredible to me," Weliver said. "It's like, holy cow, we've really got it going on now with Crawfordsville. We've figured out what they like."

But by March, Weliver and

his employees had to adjust their momentum.

"I talked to the crew, and I'm like, 'There is a tidal wave coming. We don't know what it's going to bring,'" he said. "I really thought there was a chance of civil unrest, especially once we saw the supply chains starting to break down in the beginning when everything was still uncertain.

"So what I convinced my staff to do, is to try to serve this tidal wave."

Weliver and staff members began brainstorming and reaching out to other businesses that could continue operating during the pandemic and help him deliver meals to front-line workers.

That's when Feed the Fam came into play, alongside to-go and meat-delivery options.

Police, hospital workers and the like were all served complimentary meals from the restaurant.

"You don't really know where you're going to find the heroes, and it does take a certain kind of bravery to keep coming to your job when it has a high level of uncertainty," Weliver said.

Now that a degree of stability has been restored to the businesses downtown, like Thompson, Weliver is again able to look to the future.

"Really, when we want to look at how something is going to play out, it's a good idea to look to the past," Weliver said. "I'm trying to put my faith in history more than anything, so we're moving ahead with our plans."

For more information about the restaurants, visit www.maxinesongreen.com and www.francisandmount.com. Each can also be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/maxinesongreen and www.facebook.com/francisandmount.

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Golf courses see spike in players

Journal Review

More golfers teed off at local golf courses this year as players looked for socially-distant ways to spend time outdoors.

“If we were shut down [at work], I’d definitely be out here more,” said Chad McKinney, who spent a humid August afternoon with friends on the green at the Crawfordsville Municipal Golf Course.

The Muni and other area courses saw a spike in tee

times at the same time some other recreational activities were shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The extra business reflected a national trend: In June alone, golfers played 7 to 8 million more rounds of golf compared to the same time last year, bringing in millions more in revenue for courses, according to Golf Datatech, which tracks industry statistics.

“[Players] are just looking for stuff to do to keep them

entertained and the golf course has been definitely one of those things that they’re doing,” said Trent Altieri, the muni’s general manager.

Revenue was up \$17,000 in July, and play remained strong into the fall.

Early in the pandemic, golfers from surrounding cities and states where courses had been shut down started booking tee times in Montgomery County. Course managers would also see younger players on the links.

“In terms of the pandemic, it was actually good for us,” said Nick Johnson, facilities and grounds director at Rocky Ridge Golf Club in Darlington.

The renewed interest in the game also fueled a nationwide surge in golf equipment sales. Retailers saw record transactions throughout the summer, according to Golf Datatech.

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Etter Ford reaches century mark

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Etter Ford, owned by Jeff and Sandy Etter and family, turned 100 years old in 2020.

A staple of the city of Crawfordsville, the family business has focused on good customer experiences while supporting the community.

And the community has returned the favor, particularly in 2020 when the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis first struck, shutting down small businesses and creating an uncertain future.

Jeff Etter's grandfather acquired the Ford dealership in New Market in 1920. The business has since become a family affair for the Etters with Jeff Etter's father and joining before he purchased the company from them in 1979.

Now, 41 years later, the Etters give all the credit to the community and overcoming car sales stereotypes with a friendly, supportive experience for their customers.

"It's something I grew up around and I just always felt like it's what I wanted to do; I hardly ever did

anything other than this," Jeff Etter said. "The industry's kind of got a reputation for people not wanting to go in. They don't like the experience. So trying to make the experience real pleasant and enjoyable it mostly what I like to see."

Jeff and Pam Etter's children, Lindsay and Kyler, also work for the Darlington Avenue business. Over the years, all members of the family have added to an extended network of customers and business partners, many of whom have become friends of the family.

"First impressions are real important. You want to make one but you really have to concentrate on maintaining a good experience and not getting complacent," Jeff Etter said. "We want people to be as excited (to be here) as they were when they came to buy their first car."

"The highlights are when somebody gets excited about upgrading their transportation and you feel like you've really helped them out," he added.

The Etters now look to be in business for another 100 years.

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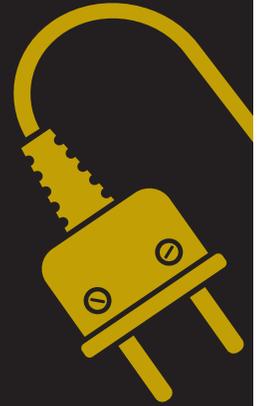
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Plans for Ben Hur Building unveiled

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Plans for the long-vacant Ben Hur Building were unveiled and construction is expected to begin by next year.

The downtown landmark will be transformed into a hotel and concierge apartments, with the ground floor anchored by a restaurant,

developer Jon Anderson announced in January.

Anderson, whose company has revitalized vacant historical sites in other Indiana communities, gained control of the building from the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners in 2018, ending a years-long search for a viable developer.

“I always say one of the biggest challenges with historic buildings is keeping it

standing long enough for the right person to come along because a lot of these buildings can be rehabbed, but a lot of these buildings get torn down because people get impatient and people don’t protect them,” Anderson said at Crawfordsville Main Street’s annual meeting in January.

Indianapolis-based General Hotels Corp. has been named manager of the hotel, which will feature original door

handles engraved with the Ben Hur initials — one of several historic features being preserved.

Anderson’s company is partnering with Wabash College and the Montgomery County Visitors and Convention Bureau on the hotel’s amenities.

Anderson was in talks with people interested in operating the restaurant.

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Park getting makeover thanks to anonymous donor

Nick Hedrick

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Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor working through the Montgomery County Community Foundation, the Kathleen J. Steele Park will get a complete makeover in the coming months.

The park in the 800 block of West Main Street is adjacent to the Montgomery County Youth Service Bureau and serves as a popular place for neighborhood residents and YSB patrons. It was renamed in 2014 to honor Steele's retirement as Crawfordsville Community School Corp. superintendent.

MCCF CEO Kelly Taylor informed the City of Crawfordsville that she had a donor interested in funding a number of improvements to the widely-used space. Taylor, the donor, and Crawfordsville Mayor Todd Barton had preliminary talks just before COVID-19 hit and began to lay the groundwork. HWC Engineering was hired to help move the project forward.

"Plans call for us to install all new playground equipment, a shade structure, decorative fencing and new landscaping," Crawfordsville Park and Recreation Director Fawn Johnson said. "Basically everything will be new and it will make the playground very inviting. It will transform this park into one of the nicest ones we have."

The renovated park will feature activities for all ages, including multiple play structures and greenspace. An existing basketball court will be moved and redesigned as well.

"It is always rewarding when donors approach the



Community Foundation with a vision and trust us to help make it a reality," Taylor said. "This is a wonderful opportunity that will not only benefit the neighborhood, but also the Youth Service Bureau and the many children and families that they serve. We are thankful for this gift and look forward to seeing the renovations begin soon."

The playground was part of Mills Elementary School that closed in 1995. The school district gave the playground to the city and the Montgomery County Youth Service Bureau

now occupies the building.

"The Kathy Steele Park has proven to be very popular and well-used by our community," Barton said. "This anonymous gift will allow us to greatly enhance the park to better serve the families of Crawfordsville. The planned upgrades are very robust and I know children and parents will be excited when they see the end product. We are very fortunate that the anonymous donor recognized the value of investing in local families and we are truly grateful for their partnership and generous contribution."

Taylor said preliminary renderings of the park were shared with Steele and Karen Branch, director of the Youth Service Bureau, and both have loved what they have seen. Steele wrote in a letter to the donor, "It is a stunning and delightful renovation of the park. Every time I think about this incredible gift, I have tears in my eyes."

The city hired Lafayette company Spencer Construction to design and build the improvements. Construction was expected to begin in the fall of 2020 and be completed by the summer of 2021.



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City crosses finish line on Stellar

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Etched into the bricks on the downtown trail, the words “Historic Downtown Crawfordsville” serve as a new gateway to the heart of the city.

The completion of phase one of the trail marks the finish of the Stellar Communities projects, a five-year long process to revitalize Crawfordsville and spur business and residential growth.

“I think it’s had a very positive impact on how people feel about their hometown,” Dale Petrie, director of operations for the City of Crawfordsville who oversaw the Stellar portfolio, said.

“You know, when they see all the development that’s gone on ... with parks and trails and improvements, they feel better about their community. Businesses then look at that and say, ‘Hey this is a community that’s growing and stable. And so businesses want to be here.’”

Along with the trail, the state-led initiative led to more than \$7.3 million worth of enhancements, including Pike Place, Fusion 54, Dr. Philip Q. Michal Trailhead Park and the rehabilitation of owner-occupied homes in Historic Whitlock and other neighborhoods.

More than half the money came from state grants along with support from local donors including the Montgomery County Community Foundation, which heavily backed Pike Place.

Much of the rest of the funding came from tax increment financing — or TIF — dollars, meaning property taxes were not imposed for the project. The city did not finance the projects.

“I know there’s some rumors floating around if you look at Facebook that there’s like a balloon payment that’s



coming up or whatever, that the city’s going to have to pay back all this money, and that’s not true,” Petrie said.

“All the projects have been paid for as we progressed.” More funding is needed for the second phase of the trail extending the path to the downtown business district. The city was mapping out a feasible route before applying for a grant from the Indiana Department of Transportation.

The final phase of the project connecting the route to the Sugar Creek Trail still depends on CSX Transportation’s plans for the railroad tracks on Franklin Street.

“That project could come before the downtown loop if that becomes available, or we finally say, ‘That track’s never going to become available. Let’s find another route to get through town so we can connect to Sugar Creek Trail,’” Petrie said.

Revitalizing the Ben Hur Building was also part of the Stellar application, but the project isn’t being funded through the program.

The Stellar program works with Indiana communities to strategize investment, promote local and regional partnerships and address challenges facing rural communities. It opens the door to grants and other government funding for projects.

Since the program launched in 2011, 17 communities have received the designation. Crawfordsville was the sec-

ond city in west central Indiana to be selected following Greencastle, one of the first Stellar communities.

As then-Crawfordsville Fire Chief Todd Barton campaigned for mayor the next year, he said residents complained to him that the city didn’t put itself in the running.

“Not that we didn’t win — we just didn’t even apply. We didn’t try, and people were very unhappy about that,” Barton. “So, when I was running for mayor, I promised all those people that if I’m elected, we will apply for Stellar and we will apply every year until we either are successful or they politely tell us to go away.”

Crawfordsville was a finalist during Barton’s first year in office and continued applying for the award. When the city was selected in 2015, a corner of downtown that had been leveled nearly a decade earlier by a fire remained a grassy lot.

A half-mile away, more empty pavement stood where flames destroyed the former Crawford Food Stores building in 2008.

City leaders envisioned transforming the downtown space into a park and using the other vacant lot to build a center for the community’s business and tourism organizations that included co-working facilities for young professionals. (The former Crawford site eventually became the trailhead

park and the PNC Building became Fusion 54.)

Officials also wanted to revitalize the homes surrounding the long-vacant Culver Union Hospital.

“What we said was this in and of itself wasn’t going to change the community but it would certainly be the stimulus for further change, and that’s exactly what we’ve seen happen,” Barton said.

After becoming the new home for the local farmers’ market, Pike Place soon began hosting summer concerts by Crawfordsville Main Street, Hoosier Heartland State Bank and Crawfordsville Rotary and other festivals and gatherings. The trailhead park, named in memory of a well-known veterinarian and mayor, provides green space in the near-downtown neighborhood.

In the Historic Whitlock neighborhood, crews renovated three owner-occupied homes with money from Indiana Housing & Community Development. The remaining funding was used to fix up 20 other houses in the city.

“As we’re going through the national crisis right now [with] everyone being affected, I see that visionary package of projects as being so providential to better frame the city of Crawfordsville for resiliency and recovery,” said Sue Lucas, program manager of Crawfordsville Main Street.

She called the recent growth of downtown the “Stellar stimulus effect.”

“The projects that the City of Crawfordsville under Mayor Barton’s leadership have built here speak of permanence. That’s an attraction for anybody looking to invest, especially now.”

To Barton, the projects lay the foundation for the city’s future growth.

“It’s a starting point, and we have to capitalize on it.”



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Plans unveiled for courthouse annex

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Standing in front of rows of large leather-bound books in the Montgomery County Courthouse on a winter day, deputy auditor Rhonda Herron pulled out a tome of real estate transfers.

“There’s a lot of history in these books,” Herron said. The paper records may

tell the history of Montgomery County, but offices are running out of room to store them. Certain records must be permanently kept under state law and many documents have been digitized, but older files are being stored in the courthouse basement.

The lack of space in county offices helped revive talks for a courthouse annex, which

will be housed in the former Williamsburg Health Care building.

Offices on the first floor of the courthouse and in the South Boulevard building are moving into the annex, where county government meetings will also be held.

Courtrooms will remain at the courthouse, and the sheriff’s office and highway department are staying put.

“Even though we won’t be under one roof, I think it’ll be the closest we’ll be able to get for the size of the county we are and everything we have going on,” Board of Commissioners President Jim Fulwider said in April.

The county entered into a public-private partnership with Envoy Construction Services for the approximately \$5 million project.

\$100,000 grant created 80 new childcare seats in county

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The Montgomery County Community Foundation was announced as a winner of the Child Care Deserts Competition in January. The grant competition focused on increasing access to high-quality childcare for children ages six weeks to six years.

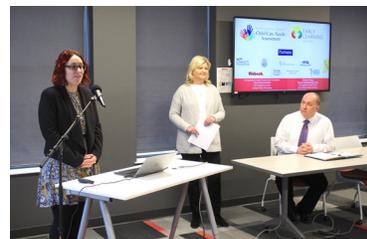
More than four of every 10 children in Indiana live in a childcare desert — a neighborhood, town or part of a city where there is no more than one childcare seat for every three children.

“As a parent, I know childcare is a struggle,” MCCF Executive Director Kelly Taylor said. “For working parents, it’s very important to be able to go to work and know your child is being well-cared for in a safe, nurturing and quality environment.”

The Child Care Deserts Competition, hosted by Early Learning Indiana with support from a 2014 grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., awarded \$1 million to 13 organizations in 2020 for their submitted ideas to create new childcare seats. The MCCF received \$100,000 from Early Learning Indiana in the Child Care Desert Competition.

The news was shared Jan. 23 at a meeting of the Montgomery County Workforce Development Roundtable — a group organized by Crawfordsville Mayor Todd Barton to address workforce related issues.

“This group has done some phenomenal work coming together to create locally-driven solutions,” Mayor Todd Barton said. “The lack



of childcare, basically, was keeping people out of the workforce. It was causing disruption in the workforce when people were actually employed.

“We were able to bring in some really good partners to help us really dig in and understand this and start to create a strategic plan to move forward,” he continued. “At the same time, this issue was really rising to surface around the state, and we found ourselves in a situation where we were really ahead of the curve.”

Childcare rose to the top of the Workforce Development Roundtable’s concerns in 2019. A task force was then formed with representatives from local government, non-profits, industry and schools. Data from the Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee showed that Montgomery County ranked in the 10-low-

est counties for childcare seats and that only 2 percent of Montgomery County children under the age of five were enrolled in high-quality programs.

“Early Learning Indiana is committed to supporting innovative models for creating capacity locally,” Early Learning Indiana Director of Capacity Building Natalie Brake said. “So engaging with the local stateholders to look at those models that are promising across the nation, and then deciding which ones will work for their communities ... is what the MCCF did in their application, and that’s what we’ve invested in for them to create here.”

Before launching any new initiatives related to childcare, the needs of the community had to be studied. MCCF and the City of Crawfordsville collaborated with local employers to hire

a consultant to complete a community needs assessment related to childcare in the county, as well as develop a strategic plan to respond to the need.

Using the findings from the needs assessment, the task force drove a proposal for the Child Care Deserts Competition. The plan includes partnerships with Rainbows and Rhymes Preschool at First United Methodist Church and Hand-In-Hand at First Christian Church. The grant funds will be used to add 56 full daycare preschool seats at Rainbows and Rhymes and 24 full daycare infant and toddler seats at Hand-In-Hand. Both programs will be focused on delivering high-quality care.

“I’m excited not only in my work at the MCCF, but also as a parent, that we’re going to be offering additional seats to address this in the community,” Taylor said in January. “I know we have more work to do; this is just the beginning. But our task force has put together a five-year strategic plan to address this.”

Funds will also be used to start a Montgomery County Early Childhood Coalition to improve childcare quality through provider and public education. Hoosier Heartland State Bank, Pace Dairy, Nucor Steel, Wabash College, Wesley Thrift Shop, CEL&P, the City of Crawfordsville and the MCCF also partnered to provide additional funding support for the coalition.

“This is just the beginning of some good things we’re going to see for parents, for providers and most of all our children,” Taylor said.



AWL maintains 'no kill' designation during pandemic

Nick Hedrick

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Administrators and staff at the Animal Welfare League of Montgomery County worked through the coronavirus pandemic to make sure every healthy, domesticated animal that came through their doors found a home.

"By the time I started, it was about 60/40 ... but last year we hit 90% saved," medical coordinator Nickee Sillery said in July. "I am so excited, when I pulled the numbers for this year, that we are at 93% now. That is huge, and it qualifies us as a 'no kill' shelter."

The facility offers lower euthanasia rates when compared to most clinics, she added, noting the percentage could be even higher as many bring their aged or sick animals to the shelter to be put

down out of necessity.

"Low-income families in our community can use us as a resource, so those numbers are included when we talk about euthanasia," Sillery said. "A little old lady who has an 18-year-old chihuahua and she can't spend \$200 to have it put to sleep at the vet — that's a service we offer."

A no-kill shelter does not mean that animals are never euthanized at the facility. Instead, it follows the guidelines that "no healthy animal or adoptable pet is ever euthanized."

With quarantine measures implemented by Gov. Eric Holcomb earlier this year in efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19, this designation has been more difficult to retain than in previous years.

"After a few weeks of being shut down, we had to deal with no adoptions," Sillery said. "We started opening up

a little bit, here and there, by appointment only. The shelter is usually open every afternoon to the public, but having a bunch of people there walking dogs — not a good idea."

The shelter was able to stay open thanks to small business loans made available by federally-insured lenders. Through this funding, the shelter was able to avoid layoffs and reduced hours.

"There's nearly 300 animals in our care, so that was very important to us that we were able to do our jobs," Sillery said. "Trying to do what we need to do, with less people, is just impossible."

Students of Purdue University's College of Veterinary Medicine have also made a big impact on the shelter's ability to function as normal.

"It has been incredible; we've had a number of veterinary students — who are now not in classes, they're just sit-

ting around — foster animals for us," Sillery said.

This made all the difference for one "hard-to-adopt" dog which recently came to the shelter. A pitbull mix, the canine was heartworm-positive and had a number of mammary tumors, and likely would not survive its health battles if not for the foster care of Purdue students.

"Just yesterday, she needed to have emergency surgery," Sillery said. "She's being fostered by Purdue students, and they were able to use their resources and our resources ... and the dog is having surgery as we speak and is expected to make a full recovery. That's not something that would happen, that chain of events, had a Purdue veterinary student not been the one who was fostering her. That was really neat for us to see — those kinds of connections happening."

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Schools ramp up food services in response to pandemic

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The rise of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Indiana also forced a rise in food donations throughout Montgomery County in 2020.

Schools scaled up food delivery, restaurants continued to-go options while forming delivery programs of their own, and food banks proved vital during a time when more than 30 million Americans lost their jobs.

When the pandemic forced schools to shut their doors in the spring, it was unclear if they would continue providing meals for students and their families.

Each Montgomery County district — North Montgomery, Crawfordsville and Southmont — continued to provide meals each week with bus drivers and food service personnel volunteering their time for the cause.

One of those districts was

recognized by the Indiana Department of Education in August for its efforts, which resulted in tens of thousands of meals delivered in four months.

“When schools were closed in March we quickly recognized that many of our children no longer had access to the nutrition they rely on each day,” Southmont Superintendent Dr. Shawn Greiner said. “(We) delivered nearly 100,000 meals this spring through our Mobile Meals Service to our students and their families.”

Though some districts in Indiana were forced to lay off, furlough or terminate employees, Southmont maintained its staff members, including food service staff, bus drivers, teachers, instructional aides, assistants, administrators and board members — all of whom helped with the program, Greiner said.

“Our food service staff prepared and packaged

meals, and many of our bus drivers stepped up to drive twice-weekly delivery routes,” he said. “This truly was a labor of love, and an effort made by many on the Southmont Schools team.”

Without the help of a grant from the Montgomery County Community Foundation and the hard work of so many district staff, he added, a service on this scale would not have been possible.

“Public schools provide so many important supports for students, and meal service often times tops the list,” Greiner said. “We have been honored to have been recognized by both Gov. Eric Holcomb and the DOE for our Mobile Meals Service.”

Crawfordsville and North Montgomery community schools also continued food delivery programs as usual despite the risk. They saw the need for students to receive the prepackaged items because many depend

on multiple meals a day from the school, superintendents Dr. Colleen Moran (North Montgomery) and Dr. Scott Bowling (Crawfordsville) said.

All county schools ceased in-person instruction in March when the pandemic began to take its toll. In lieu of meeting in person, secondary-level students were placed on a hybrid schedule of attendance in which they would come to school every other day while utilizing remote learning technology on their days “off.”

“We are delivering approximately 12-130 meals to hybrid students each day,” Crawfordsville Assistant Superintendent Dr. Rex Ryker said in September.

North Montgomery introduced a grab-and-go program through which students and their families could pick up a week’s worth of prepackaged meals at their respective schools.



Feller takes on new title at Wabash: president

Nick Hedrick

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Dr. Scott Feller had a plan. After a few more years as dean of Wabash College, he would go back to teaching chemistry on the leafy campus that had introduced the Oregon native to the Hoosier State.

But after Wabash President Dr. Greg Hess announced he would step down in July 2020, Feller was named to the top job, the first faculty member in more than half a century to lead the college.

“I came to see that it was a challenge that I wanted to take on,” Feller said via Zoom from his office a few weeks before the end of the fall semester. “Obviously, I don’t think I realized the level of challenge that the first six months was going to provide. That part was completely unexpected.”

Unable to take Wabash’s message on the road due to the pandemic, Feller met virtually with alumni and supporters and oversaw the day-to-day response to the coronavirus as the college reopened for in-person classes

in the fall.

A 40-person team of Wabash men was formed to ensure students were monitoring their symptoms and following safety protocols in campus housing. The group also delivers meals to students being quarantined or kept in isolation.

Coronavirus shifted Feller’s long-range plans for the college. The economic fallout from the pandemic, he said, will challenge administrators to find a way to attract students from modest backgrounds. Most students at Wabash receive financial aid.

The application fee was waived, and prospective students were not required to submit standardized test scores for the upcoming enrollment cycle.

“We’re just trying to react in the moment so that the pandemic is not something that turns any young man away from a path towards college,” Feller said.

Wabash also provided emergency financial aid grants to current students through CARES Act funding and donors.

The transition to the president’s office began just



days before the pandemic hit the state. Hess, who now leads a global network of study abroad and internship programs, saw Feller as a key partner in the college’s efforts.

“He has set a thoughtful tone, brought a sharp analytical approach to every challenge we have wrestled with, and he has been a great listener to all members of our community,” Hess said in a statement earlier this year.

Feller said the changing-of-the-guard was made easier by his knowledge of the campus. The last faculty member to be named president, Byron Trippet, took office in 1956.

“At the end of the day, Wabash College is built on relationships and the relationships didn’t change that day even if the business card did,” he said.

Feller came to Wabash in 1998 after teaching at the University of California at Davis and Whitman College in Washington State. He taught chemistry for six years before moving to the dean’s office.

He became president as construction continued on the college’s new \$13 million football stadium, which was expected to begin holding small events in the fall of 2020. The football season had been shelved due to the pandemic.

Away from campus, Feller takes refuge on the Montgomery County sheep farm he owns with his wife, Wendy. He worked a shift behind the counter at Four Seasons Local Market, which sells the farm’s products.

“That was fun to get to see some people that I hadn’t seen for a while,” Feller said.

Athens gallery shows pandemic support with sidewalk art, celebrates 10 years

Nick Wilson

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Artists and board members from Athens Arts Gallery, and citizens around Montgomery County, showed support for one another during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic with sidewalk art.

Through a number of donations and volunteer efforts, Athens Arts Gallery Director Diana McCormick said she was able to put sidewalk chalk in the hands of students and parents alike who signed up for Chalk the Walk on May 18.

Social distancing and other safety guidelines were observed when delivering the chalk. School meal delivery programs also took part, delivering bags of sidewalk chalk and special “thank you” notes in each of their deliveries.

“I talked with the artists about how to let the community know that the gallery is still here, that the member artists are still creating and that community is important,” McCormick said, citing a June 4 reopening of the downtown art center. “Through brainstorming we thought we would do a ‘chalk’ — and let’s do it throughout the county.”

Several locations in downtown Crawfordsville and around the county saw sidewalks steadily covered with works of art. Some in the city included sidewalks at the gallery, Pike Place, Canine Plaza and the Montgomery County Community Foundation.

By using the hashtags #athensarts, #altogethernow and #uniquelymoco, participants posted their creations online and connected them to the gallery.

Arts quest leads to cultural spots

A trail of clues led families to Montgomery County



cultural destinations Aug. 22 during Athens Arts Gallery’s Art Quest.

The event, part of the celebration of the gallery’s 10th anniversary, aimed to draw people to the collection of artwork by local and regional artists while promoting other family-friendly attractions.

Ten places were selected for the scavenger hunt, which ran from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. All of the sites were within walking distance and were stroller and wheelchair friendly.

“Some are historical sites, so having people seeing those that maybe don’t come downtown or take their families to family-friendly places in the community, we thought was important,” gallery director Diana McCormick said.

The hunt began at the gallery, 113 N. Washington St. Prizes were available at each of the 10 sites, and all those participating received gifts.

Social distancing was encouraged and people at the sites were wearing masks.

The event benefited the gallery’s programming budget, including activities for preschoolers and senior citizens and the summer children’s

camp.

Art gallery celebrates 10 years

As a way of celebrating a decade in downtown Crawfordsville, and to provide opportunities for customers to meet their favorite artists, the Athens Arts Gallery held a COVID-19-conscious open house Oct. 4.

Seven of the Gallery’s artists and several board members were present for the open house that afternoon, which saw dozens of visitors throughout a staggered day to promote social distancing and allow for proper sanitation.

“We had to cancel our 10-year gala celebration because of (COVID-19),” Gallery Director Diane McCormick said. “To still thank the community for supporting us for 10 years, and to celebrate our decade, we decided to do it open house style. It’s also our major fundraiser.”

Tickets, as well as a “10-by-10” raffle, formed the central fundraising effort for gallery members.

A silent auction was also featured.

Gallery member artists, such as Kenya Ferrand-Ott and Ellie Dieckmeyer, were on hand to meet with customers



and demonstrate their media.

Ferrand-Ott could be found painting a manticore, a mythical Greek creature with the head of a man, the body of a lion and the tail of a scorpion. The inspiration for the idea came from an area taxidermist in her hometown of Greencastle, who had a stuffed lion in his shop for decades, she said.

Dieckmeyer demonstrated her use of alcohol inks for abstract pieces. The medium utilizes glossy yupo paper, which allows for colors to run rather than soak into canvas.

Due to the large size of the gallery’s interior, board members have approved a temporary closing in January to sanitize and adjust the layout to be more visitor friendly during the pandemic.

When it reopens in February 2021, Dieckmeyer said the goal is to start up classes again.

Several Gallery members, such as Board President Linda Brady, said they were toughing out the worst of the pandemic.

“We’re all being as good as we know how to be,” she said.

For more information, visit the Gallery at 113 N. Washington St., call 765-362-7455 or find them online at www.athensartsgallery.com.

Nonprofits, small businesses receive financial lifelines

Nick Hedrick

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The coronavirus had yet to begin spreading in the Crawfordsville area when the Montgomery County Free Clinic started handing out thermometers to patients.

As cases of COVID-19 appeared, the clinic saw the need to equip more patients to check their temperatures.

“When this became more prominent and one of the early symptoms was fever — often times without the cough — I thought, you know, how are people going to know that they have a fever if they don’t have a thermometer,” said Kay Nannet, a nurse practi-

tioner and executive director of the clinic.

The clinic was among local nonprofit organizations to receive funding through the Montgomery County Community Foundation’s COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Fund, one of the programs created to help frontline agencies respond to the pandemic.

As public health officials raced to limit the spread of the virus, the foundation distributed more than \$216,000 to food, childcare, human services and health agencies.

“We’re hearing about [organizations’ needs] so we want to be there to help,” MCCF chief executive officer Kelly Taylor said in March.

The Montgomery County United Fund also mobilized to help nonprofits weather the economic uncertainty of the pandemic.

MCUF received a \$250,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. that was split among 10 organizations to cover operations, equipment, programs and equipment.

“We’re just glad to be able to add this to the pot of money that’s available to our county,” MCUF executive director Heather Shirk said.

Local for-profit businesses could take advantage of a short-term loan program launched by the City of Crawfordsville.

The city awarded more

than \$250,000 to over 40 retailers, restaurants and other businesses this spring. The interest-free one-year loans were aimed at covering payroll, rent and other essential operating expenses.

“Our small business owners have done an amazing job of adapting in these unprecedented times and I am very confident they will be even stronger in the end, if we can just help them get through the immediate challenges,” Mayor Todd Barton said as the program launched.

“I appreciate that these businesses have been here for our community and it’s now time for the city to be there for them.”



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Food banks staying busy during pandemic

Nick Hedrick

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A few minutes before the FISH Food Pantry opens under a gray sky, three cars have lined up waiting for boxes of food.

Inside the building on the grounds of St. Bernard Catholic Church on this day, manager Carol Spencer has been at work for hours loading up the boxes, which are harder to come by since clients had to stop using their own containers to limit the spread of COVID-19.

When it's time to start handing out the food, Spencer reaches into a freezer for a package of chicken breasts, handing it to a volunteer who sends it out the door as two other workers rush to pack more food.

The scene is playing out across the nation as more and more people left without a job or taking home smaller paychecks due to the coronavirus pandemic turn to food pantries for help feeding their families.

Due to the effects of the pandemic, more than 54 million people may experience food insecurity this year, including a potential 18 million children, according to Feeding America, a non-profit hunger relief organization. That's on top of the 35 million people in the U.S. who struggled with hunger in 2019, based on federal statistics.

From March through June, Feeding America said food pantries distributed nearly 2 billion meals nationwide.

Local pantries said they were well stocked heading into the anticipated rush. A Wabash College fraternity donated its leftover food to FISH after the cam-

pus closed for the rest of the semester. Pace Dairy gave nearly 2,000 pounds of cheese to Grace & Mercy Ministries.

On a rainy day early in the pandemic at Grace & Mercy, a stream of cars pulled up to a side door as volunteers loaded up boxes of food into trunks and backseats.

Less than an hour after the doors opened, more than 30 people had showed up.

"I think we're going to see an uptick of people coming," said volunteer Dick Young, standing in a storage room lined with freezers.

The pantry, which distributes food twice a week, has served up to 1,000 families since the beginning of the year, including 150-250 new families.

"We're still seeing an increase of new people I've never seen before," said Carla Neese, who's volunteered with the pantry for 11 years.

"So the need's still there," fellow volunteer Mecca Menges added.

The initial rush of clients at FISH slowed after stimulus checks were sent out in April, but demand has since gone back up for food. The pantry, which is open four days a week, served 773 clients in September.

While the community has generously donated food throughout the year, the pantry lost seven workers who couldn't travel because of the virus.

"We don't have that many [volunteers] but they're very loyal," Spencer said.

For client Tammie Ricketts, the pandemic hasn't been the only hardship this year. Her husband recently died, and she started visiting the pantry to cut down on grocery bills.

"It's been very tight,"



Ricketts said as she waited in the car with a neighbor.

Families were also showing up to Food Finders Food Bank's mobile pantry, which has stopped at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds and New Market Elementary School. The truck provides enough food to serve 140 families, according to the organization.

MEALS ON WHEELS

Schools were closed. Churches were empty. Even the public library was closed. But every weekday a cadre of dedicated volunteers came together (socially distanced) to prepare, package and deliver hot meals for 55 members of the community.

Meals on Wheels volunteers delivered a hot meal about noon time and, for some, a sack meal for later.

The meals were prepared at Franciscan Health Crawfordsville under the direction of dietitian Carla Strong. Volunteers labeled and packed the meals.

At about 11 a.m., drivers



and a helper arrived at the hospital to pick up meals that were delivered on five routes within the city. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, volunteers made face-to-face contact with each client.

Beginning March 16, by order of Health Officer Dr. Scott Douglas of the Montgomery County Health Department, drivers left the meals on the doorstep, knocked on the door or rang the bell, and walked away to avoid contact with the homebound, thus keeping both drivers and clients safe.



Civic organizations see milestone anniversaries in 2020

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Crawfordsville Rotary Club Founded in February of 1920, the Crawfordsville Rotary Club celebrated its centennial anniversary in 2020.

Rotary International is renowned for its efforts across the globe in the 20th century and into the 21st. From its beginnings installing public restrooms in Chicago to nearly eradicating polio worldwide, the club has made many contributions to the communities far and wide.

Aiming to duplicate those efforts on a local level, Crawfordsville Rotarians put the children of Montgomery County first, Hess said.

The club meets every Wednesday at the Crawfordsville Country Club. Once each month, two students from North Montgomery, two from Crawfordsville and two from Southmont sit in as student Rotarians.

“We have the Leadership

Academy for adults, but there is also a Student Leadership Academy out at Camp Rotary every summer for eighth graders in our county ... to learn team building,” Rotary International District 6560 Assistant Governor Jennifer Stanfield said. “We also send students to RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Academy) in Lafayette and to HOBY (Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership) in Indianapolis.”

For more details on the upcoming events in honor of Rotary’s 100th anniversary, visit its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/crawfordsville.rotary or call the Crawfordsville Chamber of Commerce at 765-364-7870 for additional contact information.

American Legion - Women’s Auxiliary

When the American Legion gathered for its first national convention in 1919, the formation of a women’s auxiliary was on the agenda.

By the next year, more than

100,000 women had organized to advocate for veterans like Kathy Billingsly’s grandfather and other troops that had just returned from the First World War.

The family’s tradition of military service continued in the second. Billingsly’s father joined his 10 brothers to wear the nation’s uniform, earning a Purple Heart and other medals of valor for his bravery in Germany and France. Years later, he complained to his daughter that her biscuits tasted like the ones he ate overseas.

“Daddy didn’t like to talk about the service at all,” said Billingsly, second vice president of Byron Cox American Legion Auxiliary Unit 72, which is celebrating the national organization’s 100th anniversary this year.

Perhaps best known for selling red poppies in memory of fallen soldiers for Memorial Day, the American Legion Auxiliary raises millions of dollars annually for youth

activities, scholarships and community programs. More than 8,000 local units serve alongside Legion posts.

Crawfordsville’s unit, which marks its own centennial in 2026, supports veterans programs by selling 50/50 tickets and holding raffles. The unit has 580 members.

“They’re all family,” said Carol Roberts, who serves as the group’s treasurer.

Spreading out in a meeting room one afternoon last week at the post, members recalled the last major event before the coronavirus shut down the Legion: A countdown event where hundreds of tickets were sold as a fundraiser. The auxiliary hopes it can run a belated poppy sale later this year.

The group led a round of applause for longtime auxiliary president Rosemary Hutchison, who said “just serving the veterans” has driven her passion. Under her direction, the unit prepares meals for Bingo nights and lunches at the



posts and supports programs headed by post commander Rodney Strong.

The auxiliary also sponsors residents of the Indiana Veterans Home who receive gifts on their birthdays and for Christmas. Residents have also played Bingo at the post.

Like other service organizations, the auxiliary is looking for new members. Last year, the national organization allowed male spouses of U.S. veterans and service members to join. Children and teenagers can also join as junior members.

Sherri Rice, whose grandparents were active in the Legion, recently signed on to the unit. After donating items to a recent fundraiser, she said she was ready to serve in other ways.

The auxiliary meets at 7 p.m. on the fourth Monday of the month except in July or December. Dues are \$25 for senior members and \$7 for juniors ages 0-18.

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Local volunteers dedicated to fostering children's futures are celebrating three decades of serving the youth of Montgomery County in 2020.

The statewide and local branches of Indiana's Court Appointed Special Advocates program (CASA) served more than 25,000 children in

2019. Hoosier volunteers of the program, nearly 4,500 in all, provide courts with relevant information concerning abused and neglected children.

"I am incredibly proud to have worked with hundreds of selfless and caring individuals who have spent countless hours making sure abused and neglected children were getting their needs met and into their forever homes," Montgomery County CASA Director Jane Christopherson said.

The 30th anniversary of the local branch coincides with the state's program as they were both launched in 1990. Christopherson and six other area volunteers traveled to the Statehouse in Indianapolis on March 4 to thank legislators for their help.

"We went to the Statehouse to thank Sen. Phil Boots and Rep. Tim Brown for their ongoing support," she said. "CASA Day is held annually to thank the legislature for supporting CASA with a generous amount of funding. That funding is absolutely necessary to recruit, train and supervise volunteers who advocate for our most vulnerable children."

Montgomery County had a total of 59 volunteers in 2019. Together with just six staff members, they served nearly 300 area children.

Speakers for the event in Indianapolis included Indiana Supreme Court Justice Loretta Rush and CASA Director Leslie Dunn. A special guest, 23-year-old Youth Advocate De'Coriyanna Garrett, also spoke about how the role has impacted her life.

More information about CASA, including how to become a local volunteer, can be found by visiting the Montgomery County Youth Service Bureau website www.mmysb.org, or by contacting Kate Doty at 765-362-0694, ext 106 or kate@mcysb.org.



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Signs show support for local police

Journal Review

Watching the recent unrest following police shootings of Black people across the country, Bonnie Mills wanted to show her support for those who wear a badge.

“Every time there’s an issue or somebody needs help, you call the police and they always respond. And you know, now that people are saying ‘Defund the police’ or even ‘Disband the police’ or something, I just want to ask them, ‘Who are you going to call?’” said Mills, who felt the entire law enforcement community was unfairly being blamed for the shootings.

Mills worked with local company Follow Me Graphix on yard signs designed with the badges for the Crawfordsville Police Department and Montgomery County Sher-

iff’s Office that were quickly spoken for.

At the courthouse, where Mills handed out signs at the offices, she received support from Heather Laffoon and Mindy Byers, who ordered another batch to tremendous response from callers and Facebook friends. The group also sold signs at Kroger and the Waynetown Homecoming Fish Fry.

Mills said she’s reached out to people from surrounding counties in hopes of spreading the message.

“At this point, we don’t have plans to order any more [signs],” she said, “but I believe that if somebody wanted to do that, there’s still a large interest and if a person got some and set up at Kroger or some other place ... where a lot of people

go by, that they could sell a lot more.”

Crawfordsville Police Chief Mike Norman said the community has long been “noticeably supportive” of the department.

“The officers in Crawfordsville have made comments about how often they get a wave from citizens or a positive comment that has been said as they walk by,” Norman said. “Those small gestures are huge to officers, because you don’t know what kind of call, case or scene that the officer just left.”

Norman thanked the group for their efforts to visibly show support.

“We as a department are making strides working with folks in the community to progress in many areas, but we have a lot of work to do,”



he added. “Crawfordsville Police Department is always open to suggestions or ideas. We just have to keep working at it together.”

Sheriff Ryan Needham said his department was thankful for the support.

“You can’t drive from Crawfordsville to the end of the county line without seeing a Support Your Local Law Enforcement [sign],” Needham said. “It’s a little thing, you know, it’s a \$5 sign, but that means a lot to the guys when they drive by and see that.”

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Quilters, companies answer the call for PPE

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With their sewing skills already bringing comfort to families through service projects, local quilters answered front-line workers' calls for more face masks during the fight against COVID-19.

As people began collecting masks for workers in long-term care facilities, local quilt guilds mobilized their members to help sew, turning out thousands of masks that have been rushed to essential workers across the country.

"As a quilter and a sewer, we always have fabric. We don't always have everything we need, but we do have fabric," said Linda Haltom, who gave masks to a local long-term care facility and a pharmacy and is filling another box for New York City, where an associate's grandson is a registered nurse at a hospital.

Amid a shortage of masks and other personal protective equipment, health care facilities, pharmacies and state health departments turned to hobbyists, businesses and corporations to donate supplies. For health care workers, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said homemade masks can be used ideally when paired with a face shield.

Haltom, a member of the Sugar Creek Quilters, made the first batch for her daughter's Ohio veterinary clinic, which was still seeing animals early on in the crisis. Requests soon began coming in through Facebook and Haltom sent masks to a long-term care facility and the Walmart pharmacy.

"I watched a couple of videos on the use of non-woven materials in the center to make it pretty close to an N-95 mask and I happened to have a couple yards of that so the first masks I made for family and my daughter's colleagues included that non-woven fabric,"

Haltom said.

Three layers of cotton are sewn into the masks for added protection.

The ramped up production of personal protective equipment has led to a shortage of elastic. Orders placed on Amazon a month ago aren't expected to arrive until the end of May. In the meantime, quilters have turned to shoelaces or cut up headbands or T-shirts to create the mask bands.

"We got resourceful," said Laura Harris, who is part of both Sugar Creek Quilters and the American Sewing Guild.

When a local long-term care facility reached out for masks, Harris sent out a mass email asking members to start sewing.

About 16 members made more than 1,300 masks for the Franciscan Health hospice and Wellbrooke of Crawfordsville.

When health experts urged Americans to wear masks in public, Sugar Creek Quilters member Amy Sanders began taking custom orders.

"I didn't think I'd have more than 30 or 40 people and I had 171 orders that first day from Facebook, and it just ballooned," said Sanders, who had already donated masks to friends.

Sanders sewed more than 500 masks in three weeks until she ran out of elastic. She had a supply of elastic and fabric from her late mother Delores Epperson's sewing store.

"It's like a part of her is still living on," Sanders said.

Another group called MoCo Makers with Heart also mobilized for the effort. The group made and delivered fabric face masks to area nurses, retail employees and factory workers who are on the job during the stay at home order. More than 400 masks have been delivered and orders are coming in from other states. Nurses have also asked for gowns.

"We didn't think it was going to snowball the way that it has," said Bunny Sutton, who



owns the online craft store Bramble Avenue and began coordinating the effort.

The group includes Sutton and her friends Deana Stewart, owner and operator of Reliable Cleaning, and Mary Everett, who began meeting at the Linden-Carnegie Public Library during recent wildfires in Australia.

When a friend with a relative who works at Riley Hospital for Children at Indiana University Health reached out in need of masks, Sutton, who doesn't sew, recruited friends with sewing machines to start making the gear. About 30 volunteers sewed the washable masks using a pattern approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The group donated masks to Franciscan personnel in Crawfordsville and Lafayette and nurses at children's hospitals in Indianapolis. Masks were also shipped to Florida and Ohio and orders were received from Illinois. Standing orders were in place at a half-dozen area hospitals and an emergency response team from Clinton County.

Area factories joined the fight by changing production to meet the demand for personal protective equipment.

Designers and engineers at plastics manufacturer Crawford Industries rushed to draw up face shields and formed a concept for ear saver mask holders designed to make masks more comfortable. The shipping process was changed to send the equipment out in

a couple of days instead of weeks.

"We have to keep up with the demand. We've got to get these shields back out there for those that are needing them," said business development manager Shawna McGrath.

The company extruded its own plastic for the face shields and distributing straps for customers making their own equipment. All of Crawford's 120-130 employees were involved at some stage of the production.

"Our product is now worldwide. It's going all over," McGrath said.

In Whitestown, Austin Hildebrandt, an account executive for packaging company Stephen Gould Corp., contacted a high school friend who works for the City of Crawfordsville about the city's need for protective equipment.

Hildebrandt was put in touch with Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency Director Shari Harrington, who placed an order for face shields. The company donated the equipment to Montgomery County.

The company's 150 Whites-town employees were retrained to produce the shields, which have been shipped to at least 11 states.

"We recognized we were in a unique position to quickly start manufacturing a critical PPE product from the materials we already work with that could be fabricated on the equipment we already have," Hildebrandt said in an email.

MCHD leads response to coronavirus

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Three weeks before the coronavirus reached Montgomery County in late March 2020, a “decision team” of local officials convened to begin drawing a battle plan against the fast-spreading disease.

“I remember after we went through the plan, we left that meeting and we had our first case for the state of Indiana and so things started rapidly moving from then on,” said Amber Reed, administrator for the Montgomery County Health Department.

“The timing couldn’t have been more right in terms of ... sitting down and going through the plan and getting all the team players on board.”

Officials say the cooperation between local agencies allowed the county to respond quickly to the pandemic.

Days after the first local cases were confirmed, a unique partnership was formed to test residents for COVID-19, the illness caused by coronavirus. The health department worked with the Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency, Franciscan Health Crawfordsville and the Franciscan Physicians Network to open a drive-thru testing site.

Like other public health agencies across the country, the virus changed the daily routine for Reed’s staff. Employees shifted to their roles on the department’s preparedness team as residents were warned to be prepared.

“The fact that a virus that had erupted in China in December was already spread completely around the world by March — that was jaw-droppingly surprising how fast this infection transmitted itself to every corner of the globe, including Montgomery County, Indiana.

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We’ve just not seen anything like that,” county health officer Dr. Scott Douglas said.

Douglas worked with the hospital to keep the testing site stocked, received updates from the public health nurse on local cases and advised local businesses and Wabash College on the virus. He also signed off on COVID-19 tests for patients who didn’t have a doctor.

“Having someone like that in your corner every day has been really what’s pushed us all through, I think,” Reed said.

Douglas credited Reed for the county’s response.

“I really think that almost all of it lands in Amber’s wheelhouse,” he said. “It’s really that this would not have gone nearly as well as it has in Montgomery County without Amber. She’s a great communicator.”

Beyond COVID-19, Reed said the existing relationships between local agencies and surrounding counties would help bolster the response to the next health emergency.

“I don’t know what it’s



going to be and I’m not in any hurry for it to get here, but I do feel confident that we’ll be able to work in very much the same manner,” she said.

The county received state funding to expand community testing and worked with local schools to provide the tests. As of October 2020, there were no reports of the virus being transmitted in the schools, but officials said the testing was key to ensuring who does and does not have the virus.

“It’s not mandatory testing,

it’s just about accessibility,” Reed said.

County health departments are involved in the state’s plan to roll out a vaccine. The first round was expected to go to hospitals followed by health departments, pharmacies and doctor’s offices.

Health workers will be first in line for the vaccine. The state identified more than 1,100 licensed health care personnel in Montgomery County.

INSPIRED BY LOOKING FORWARD

As we adapt to what life looks like now, we recognize there are still concerns. Over the last few months we have faced adversity, battled this historic virus, all the while remaining vigilant and focused on the health and safety of those we are privileged to serve. At Franciscan Health we look to a better tomorrow and are all in – all the time – on safely caring for you and your family.

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