

The Commercial Review

Portland, Indiana 47371

www.thecr.com

\$1

With open arms

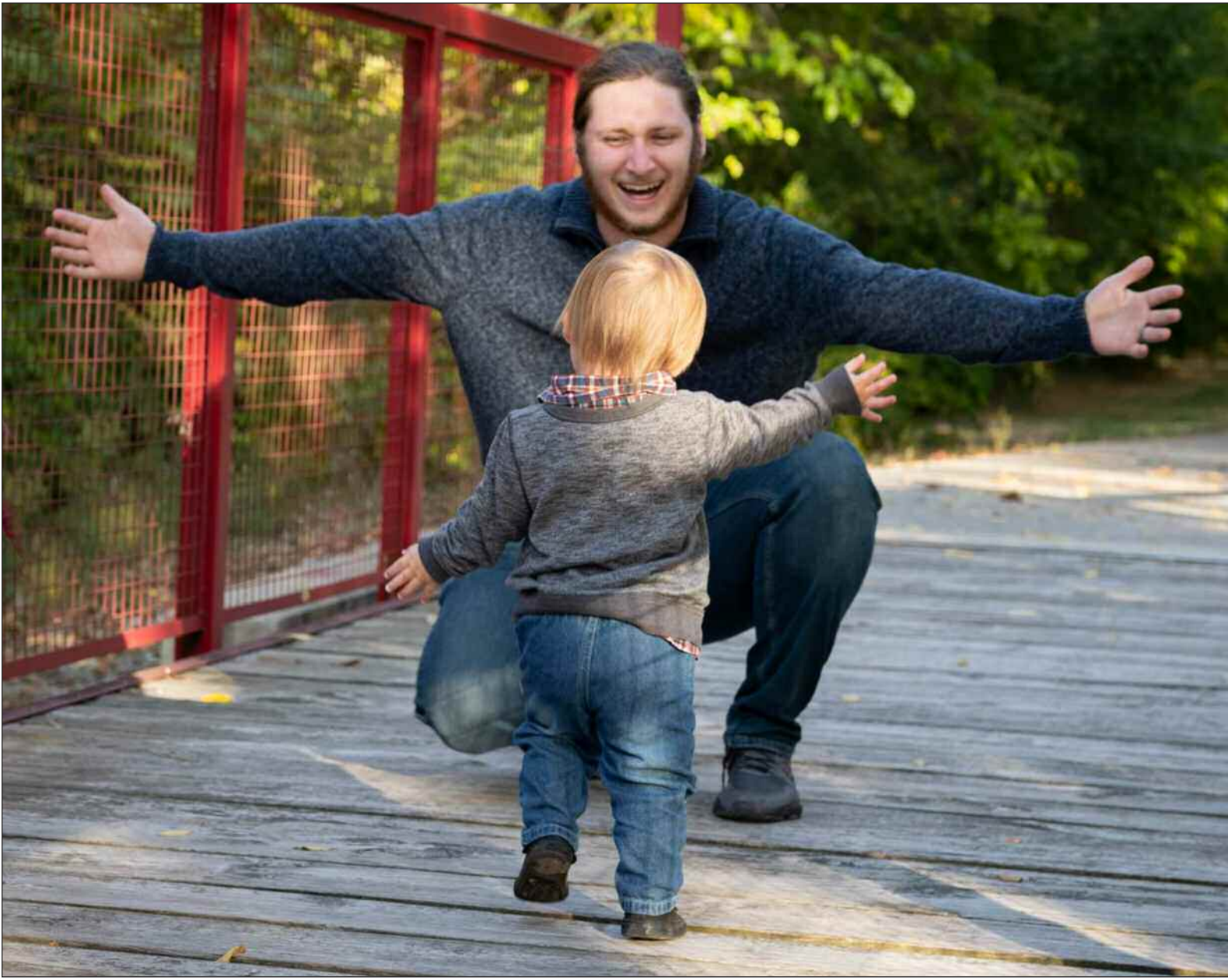


Photo provided

Braden DeShon holds his arms out as his young foster son runs toward him. Braden and his wife, Lilly (Rogers) DeShon, a Jay County native, surprised even themselves nearly two years ago when they agreed to become foster parents to infant twins. Now they're going through the steps of adopting the children.

Jay County native and her husband have gone down an unexpected road fostering infant twins

By BAILEY CLINE
The Commercial Review

Sometimes, life doesn't go as planned.

Jay County native Lilly (Rogers) DeShon and husband Braden DeShon didn't plan to take in two infants one month after becoming licensed foster parents.

They didn't plan to change occupations to make time for doctor's visits and child care.

Neither of them planned to keep the children for two years and ultimately adopt them.

But, sometimes, life is full of surprises.

Lilly and Braden DeShon have been fostering twins since they were 2 months old. Nearly two years later, they're now looking to adopt the children and detach from the foster care system.

The DeShons became licensed foster parents in December 2020. Taking a note from Lilly's family that has adopted or fostered children through the years, they wanted to help children in need.

"We both just felt like God was calling us to do something about it, and we were just in a good spot in our lives where we felt like that we could just open up our home to the children in need," Lilly said.

They had hoped to foster pre-teens, an age group that has the greatest need.

But their first (and last) placement came in January 2021, when Lilly received a phone call from Indiana Department of Child Services.

See **Open** page 5A

Jay County native Lilly (Rogers) DeShon holds her foster daughter's hand. She and her husband, Braden, planned to become foster parents for pre-teens, an age group that is in the greatest need. But when Indiana Department of Child Services called looking for foster parents for infant twins, they quickly agreed to the placement.



Photo provided

Group pushes for use of exit forms

Committee would like to get info from departing employees

By BAILEY CLINE
The Commercial Review

County department heads may soon be required to complete exit forms following an employee's two-week notice.

Jay County Personnel Committee agreed to recommend adopting a resolution that would require department heads to complete exit forms and other personnel forms during a meeting Tuesday.

Jay County Council president Jeanne Houchins explained the county already has exit forms available to department heads but that they are not mandatory nor used often.

She sorted through a folder full of the forms and read them off, which included forms for disciplinary action, classification review, travel authorization, suspicious observation, and request for vacation, as well as other forms for reporting behavioral issues or substance use.

Houchins noted the county often hears its employees leave because of pay. She noted there are other reasons folks pursue jobs elsewhere.

Council finalized the 2023 budget in October. It includes raises across the board for county employees, some of which were made in an effort to bump wages for several positions behind the average pay in the surrounding areas.

Jay County Commissioner and personnel committee member Chad Aker added he believes it would be a good idea to encourage or require more folks to complete exit forms.

"I think it not only helps the departments, but it helps us also," he said. "So we see why we're losing people ... as far as what changes need to be made to retain our employees."

The personnel committee recommended creating a resolution to enforce usage of the forms.

See **Forms** page 2A

Baby box dedicated at fire department

By RAY COONEY
The Commercial Review

The sentiment was the same from all involved.

They all hope Portland Fire Department's newest feature never has to be used.

But they're glad it's there, just in case.

A blessing ceremony Tuesday dedicated Portland Fire Department's new Safe Haven Baby Box.

"I just hope we never use it," said Portland resident Tom Robbins, who sparked the push

to bring a baby box to Portland, following Tuesday's ceremony. "But if we do, (the baby is) going to be safe and it's going to be in the right place."

Robbins approached Portland Fire Chief Mike Weitzel early this year about the possibility of installing a baby box in Portland. At the time, he didn't know Weitzel and firefighter Travis Theurer had looked into the same idea a few years earlier.

They had backed off because of the expense.

"It was still on our list to-do but was just too expensive for what we had budgeted at the time," said Weitzel.

Robbins' support started the process of removing that obstacle.

"He offered a nice donation and said he would get the ball rolling on it," said Weitzel, who also received Portland City Council permission in April to apply for a grant for the project.

To facilitate the donation process, Weitzel directed Rob-

bins to The Portland Foundation. That opened another door.

Doug Inman, executive director of The Portland Foundation, connected Robbins and Weitzel with the IU Health Jay Foundation. The charitable arm of the hospital ended up funding the full cost of the purchase and installation of the Safe Haven Baby Box at a cost of about \$13,000 through funds donated by the Raymond and Thelma Milligan family.

Julie Teeter, who leads IU Health Jay's Healthy Beginnings

program, explained some of its education and outreach efforts that focus on keeping women out of situations in which they might feel as if they have no other choice but to give up their child.

"There are going to be times when preventative and proactive measures aren't enough for someone in crisis," added IU Health Jay chief operating officer Christina Schemenaur. "As a safeguard, the Jay County Safe Haven Baby Box will be a last line of defense."

See **Box** page 4A

Deaths

Lena Mcintire, 87, rural Ridgeville
Details on page 2.

Weather

Jay County had a high temperature of 56 degrees Tuesday. The low was 31.
Tonight's low will be 32. The Thanksgiving forecast calls for mostly sunny skies and a high of 60.
See page 2 for an extended outlook.

In review

There will be no newspaper Thursday to allow our staff to enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday with their families.
We will resume our regular publishing schedule Friday.

Coming up

Friday — Coverage of today's Jay County Commissioner's special meeting.

Saturday — Results from the JCHS girls basketball team's vs. Woodlan.



Forms ...

Continued from page 1A
Also Tuesday, committee members recommended council take no action on a request to adjust pay for truck drivers at Jay County Highway Department filling in for heavy equipment operators.

Houchins explained some truck drivers have had to fill in for heavy equipment operators recently. They have asked for additional compensation for the work, noting the pay difference for both positions.

Heavy equipment operators are paid 50 cents more per hour than truck drivers — their pay will also increase beginning in January, widening the gap to 75 cents per hour.

"I've thought about this, and thought about this, and it

No action recommended on request from highway department

would be a nightmare, I think, for everybody involved," Houchins said, referencing confusion it would bring with payroll.

Highway superintendent Eric Butcher explained the job shift happens frequently depending on the workload. If one heavy equipment operator is on vacation for a week during a busy time period, such as during chip and seal work, a

qualified employee may need to take over the position for the week.

"I see the point, but I also see the point where you're talking about if you're having your mechanic switch over to do the heavy equipment, is he going to take a pay cut to do that?" asked Aker.

Butcher said most of the time truck drivers fill in the position. He added that folks

have been compensated in the past for doing so.

County auditor Emily Franks noted she had OK'd the department to do so previously when a position was open during the interim between former highway superintendent Donnie Corn and Butcher.

The personnel committee recommended to not adjust the pay.

Also Tuesday, the personnel committee recommended creating a new job description for a maintenance position at Jay County Country Living. They suggested combining the job's duties with housekeeping work.

In other business, personnel committee:

- Talked about reclassifying

jobs, with Houchins asking Franks to add a proposal from consulting firm Waggoner, Irwin, Scheele and Associates to Jay County Council's next meeting agenda

- OK'd paying Jay County Health Department environmentalist and administrator Heath Butz, who now serves as site facility operator (water tester) at Jay County Country Living, biweekly for the job. The health department budgeted \$5,000 for the position annually.

- Noted it was Champ's last personnel committee meeting. Champ, who was defeated by Randy May in the November election for a seat on Jay County Council, has served in county government for 12 years.

CR almanac

Thursday 11/24	Friday 11/25	Saturday 11/26	Sunday 11/27	Monday 11/28
60/42	50/35	53/40	47/30	45/33
Thanksgiving Day will be met with mostly sunny skies and temperatures warming to a high of 60.	Showers are expected shortly after midnight with a chance of precipitation continuing until early afternoon.	There is a 30% chance of showers with a high of 50.	Skies will be mostly cloudy and there is a chance of showers before 1 p.m.	The high temperature will be in the mid 40s under mostly sunny skies.

Lotteries

Powerball Estimated jackpot: \$30 million	Quick Draw: 1-2-10-12-14-15-16-19-20-25-26-29-33-36-42-46-49-60-69-71 Cash 5: 3-6-15-16-43 Estimated jackpot: \$258,000
Mega Millions 13-23-24-25-43 Mega Ball: 2 Megaplier: 3 Estimated jackpot: \$284 million	Ohio Midday Pick 3: 4-7-4 Pick 4: 1-6-4-0 Pick 5: 6-8-0-5-1 Evening Pick 3: 4-0-9 Pick 4: 0-1-8-9 Pick 5: 0-4-3-7-9 Rolling Cash: 2-7-26-36-39 Estimated jackpot: \$561,000
Hoosier Midday Daily Three: 3-2-8 Daily Four: 0-0-5-0 Quick Draw: 1-4-5-9-12-23-25-27-30-44-46-47-50-52-58-60-67-72-73-77 Evening Daily Three: 8-2-9 Daily Four: 7-2-5-6	

Markets

Cooper Farms Fort Recovery Corn.....6.75 Dec. corn.....6.76 Wheat6.37	Wheat 7.46 Dec. wheat.....7.46
POET Biorefining Portland Corn.....6.78 Dec. corn.....6.78 Jan. corn.....6.68	Central States Montpelier Corn.....6.48 Late Nov. corn6.52 Beans14.12 Late Nov. beans.....14.14 Wheat7.91
The Andersons Richland Township Corn6.58 Dec. corn6.63 Beans14.17 Dec. beans14.17	Heartland St. Anthony Corn.....6.43 Dec. corn.....6.43 Beans13.87 Dec. beans13.92 Wheat7.22

Today in history

In 1407, agents of John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy, assassinated Louis I, duc d'Orleans, during a power struggle over control of French King Charles VI.
In 1972, the Pennville High School boys basketball team scored a 79-70 victory over Redkey in the Dunkirk gym. It was the first win of the season for the Bulldogs, who had opened 0-4.
In 1992, Miley Cyrus was born Destiny Hope Cyrus in Franklin, Tennessee. She starred in

the TV show "Hannah Montana" and has had hit songs including "We Can't Stop," "Wrecking Ball" and "Party in the U.S.A."
In 2021, Indiana Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch announced that Jay County would be among the first three communities to participate in the Hoosier Enduring Legacy Program (HELP) administered by the state's Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

—The CR

Citizen's calendar

Today
2 p.m. — Jay County Commissioners, commissioners' room, courthouse, 120 N. Court St., Portland.
5 p.m. — Dunkirk Park Board, city building, 131 S. Main St.
Monday
9 a.m. — Jay County Commissioners, commissioners' room, courthouse, 120 N. Court St., Portland.
3:30 p.m. — Jay County Solid Waste Management District, 5948 W. Indiana 67, Portland.
6 p.m. — Portland and Jay County economic development income tax advisory committees joint meeting, Community Resource Center, 118 S. Meridian St., Portland.
6 p.m. — Dunkirk Board of Works, city building, 131 S. Main St.
7 p.m. — Dunkirk City Council, city building, 131 S. Main St.

Obituaries

Lena McIntire

Sept. 19, 1935-Nov. 21 2022
Lena L. McIntire, age 87, of rural Ridgeville, passed away on Monday, Nov. 21, 2022, at her residence.

She was born in Moreland, Kentucky on Sept. 19, 1935, the daughter of Edward and Florence (DeWitt) Little. She was married on Dec. 26, 1953, to Gilbert "Gib" McIntire and he passed away on July 18, 1998.



McIntire

Lena was a homemaker and had worked at Kerr Glass for 17 years.

She was an avid quilter and crocheter and enjoyed doing crafts.

Surviving are three sons, Eric McIntire of Ridgeville, Clint McIntire of Ridgeville and Nathan McIntire (wife: Dyanna) of Montpelier; one daughter, Vickie Manship of Salem, Indiana; two brothers, Bill Wiley of Seaman, Ohio, and Ernest DeWitt of Muncie; two sisters, Doris Bailey of Seaman, Ohio, and Beverly Jackson of Muncie; 50 grand, great-grand and great-great-grandchildren with three more on the way.

She was preceded in death by a son, Jeff McIntire; and she was the oldest living on both sides of her family.

Funeral services will be Saturday, Nov. 26, 2022, at

noon in the Baird-Freeman Funeral Home with Pastor Randy Smith presiding. Burial will follow in the Bluff Point Cemetery. Visitation will be Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon.

Condolences may be expressed at bairdfreeman.com.

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The Commercial Review publishes death notices for those with a connection to our coverage area free of charge. They include the name, city of residence, birth/death date and time/date/location of services.

There is a charge for obituaries, which are accepted only from funeral homes or mortuary services.

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SERVICES

Today
McCollum, Janet: 1 p.m., Downing & Glancy Funeral Home, 100 Washington St., Geneva.

Saturday
McIntire, Lena: noon, Baird-Freeman Funeral Home, 221 N. Meridian St., Portland.

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Premature births are on the rise in Indiana

By WHITNEY DOWNARD

Indiana Capital Chronicle
indianacapitalchronicle.com

Another report, this time focused on premature births, concludes that the United States — and Indiana in particular — is one of the most dangerous developed nations in which to give birth.

The March of Dimes report concludes that

10.5% of all births in 2021 were premature, a number that predates the reversal of nationwide abortion protections and includes stark racial disparities. Indiana fared slightly worse, with a preterm birth rate of 10.9% or roughly 8,458 children — up from 10.4% in 2020.

“This year’s report sheds new light on the

devastating consequences of the pandemic for moms and babies in our country,” said Stacey D. Stewart, the president and CEO of March of Dimes, in a release. “While fewer babies are dying, more of them are being born too sick and too soon which can lead to lifelong problems... it’s clear that we’re at a critical moment in our country and that’s

why we’re urging policy-makers to act now to advance legislation that will measurably improve the health of moms and babies.”

Stewart said pregnant parents with COVID-19 had a 40% higher risk of premature births but the report also identified inadequate prenatal care and other pre-existing maternal health condi-

tions as contributing factors.

The costs

A 2020 Indiana Department of Health report on the emotional, health and economic costs of perinatal care for infants shortly after birth, said the financial costs for premature births in Indiana are estimated to be between \$655-678 million annually.

Costs to parents average \$64,713, compared to \$15,047 for an uncomplicated birth.

“Preterm and low birth-weight are associated with long-term disabilities like cerebral palsy, autism, mental retardation, vision and hearing impairments and other developmental disabilities,” the report said.

See **Premature** page 7A

Box ...

Continued from page 1A

Each box must have an accompanying alarm system. It was initially thought that the box would be able to tie into the fire department’s existing system. When that turned out not to be the case, Robbins donated to install the alarm system and provided additional funding for annual expenses.

Portland’s new box is the 126th distributed by Safe Haven, a not-for-profit organization that focuses on building awareness of Indiana’s safe haven law. It is the 91st in the state.

For Safe Haven founder and CEO Monica Kelsey, the mission is personal. She was abandoned by her mother at a small Ohio hospital just two hours after being born from a pregnancy from the rape of a 17-year-old girl.

“I stand on the front lines of this movement as one of these kids that wasn’t safely, lovingly surrendered in a Safe Haven Baby Box like we’re getting today,” said Kelsey during Tuesday’s ceremony.

She started Safe Haven after learning of her own birth story and seeing a baby box in operation at a church in Cape Town, South Africa.

Indiana has had a safe haven law since 2000. It states, in part, that an emergency medical service provider shall take custody of a child who is (or appears to be) less than 30 days of age if the parent voluntarily leaves a child with the provider and does not express an intent to return for the child.

Seven babies have been surren-



The Commercial Review/Ray Cooney

Portland Fire Department’s new Safe Haven Baby Box was dedicated in a ceremony Tuesday morning. Pictured above is the view of the box from inside the fire department. It is located in the middle of the four overhead doors at the facility, 1616 N. Franklin St.

dered in baby boxes in Indiana so far this year.

When the money was raised for the Portland baby box, it took six to eight weeks to produce and then was installed by HandiCraft

of Portland. That was followed by a week of testing and a week of training.

After Tuesday’s ceremony — it included a blessing from Fr. Peter Logsdon of Immaculate Concep-

tion Catholic Church — the box is fully operational.

“We never want it used, but you’re thankful it’s here if it does,” said Kelsey.

“Hopefully the box never gets

used,” Weitzel echoed moments later.

The box — it is located in the center of the four overhead doors at the fire station, 1616 N. Franklin St. — is equipped with a mattress pad, blanket and hat. Anyone who feels they can no longer take care of their infant can surrender their child anonymously using the box.

“Once they put the baby in the box, it’s in a controlled environment,” said Weitzel. “And we have the alarm system so there’ll be someone tending to the baby, the goal is, under two minutes.”

A firefighter then retrieves the infant from the box, provides immediate medical care and transports it to the nearest appropriate hospital, which contacts Indiana Department of Child Services. The child is then placed in the foster-to-adopt program.

All babies who have been surrendered in Safe Haven boxes in Indiana have been adopted except one, whose parent came forward for reunification with the child.

Before Tuesday, the nearest locations to safely surrender an infant via a Safe Haven box were Muncie, Bluffton, Decatur, New Castle and Van Wert, Ohio.

There wasn’t any particular incident that led Robbins to push to have Portland’s name added to the list of Safe Haven sites. He just wanted to do something that could have an impact.

“I was coming up with some ideas on how to help the community and this just popped in my head,” said Robbins. “I may have heard it somewhere or something like that. And I thought, ‘Well, I can start that.’”

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Open ...

Continued from page 1A
"They told me they needed a home for two kids. They gave me very little details," she recalled, noting she was originally told the twins were 13 months old. Within five minutes, she called Braden, and they decided to accept the placement.

When they got to the hospital, the DeShons learned the children, a boy and girl, were only 2 months old.

The DeShons have no biological children. The twins became their first experience as parents with infants.

"We just suddenly had a baby," Lilly explained, pointing out they were only able to bring one child home with them for the first few weeks. "We didn't know a thing about her, other than she's now in our care. And so, our first night, we actually had my child development textbooks out in the living room ... It was a big shock."

Lilly called Kevin Duecker, the children's pastor at Pierce Church in Upland, when she found out they would be taking in the two infants.

"I just didn't know what to do," she recalled. "We had one crib, one car seat, one of everything."

Church members donated an extra crib, toys, diapers, clothing and other infant necessities, as well as meals for them. Family members offered their help with navigating how to be first-time parents.

"The support system we had during that first few months (was) what we needed to get ready for this whole journey," said Braden.

Amid the dirty diapers and sleepless nights, the DeShons also had to navigate extra health concerns for the boy.

"At one point, we were having either therapy or doctor's appointments every day for like a month or two, so we didn't have any more time that we could devote to opening our home to more kids," said Lilly.

It soon became a problem with Braden's work schedule.

Braden, who earned his bachelor's degree in education from Ball State University, previously taught at Muncie Southside Middle School and Elwood Haynes Elementary School in Kokomo.

He left his teaching position in order to make time for the twins' health and foster care requirements. Braden took a youth and children's ministry position in Columbia City before shifting to a job at Hobby Lobby in Marion.

Lilly was finishing up her undergraduate studies at Ball State University when she and Braden took in the twins. She graduated in summer 2021, obtaining her bachelor's degree in general studies with minors in psychology of human development and sociology.

Going straight into graduate school in January 2022 wasn't her original plan. She envisioned joining the workforce

'We just suddenly had a baby. We didn't know a thing about her, other than she's now in our care. And so, our first night, we actually had my child development textbooks out in the living room ... It was a big shock.'

—Lilly DeShon

after getting her degree and saving up money before going back to school.

"But then our kids came, and I realized that it was not going to be practical or even possible for me to be able to work full-time, and my husband to be able to work full-time, and meet their needs," she said.

So, she adapted. She's currently attending graduate school at her alma mater and working on her master's degree in educational psychology. She expects to finish her master's next summer and transfer into the doctorate program of educational psychology in the spring.

"(Lilly) pushes herself to new limits every day and is an amazing mother for the twins," Braden said. "Not only is she being a stay at home mom, (but) through the afternoons and nights when I'm home from work or when they're asleep, she's grinding away on her (school) work."

Her goal after graduating is to become a college professor and conduct research to help marginalized communities have a better public education experience.

Lilly currently works in a graduate assistantship position in the educational psychology department at Ball State University, and she also volunteers with the children's and youth ministries at her church.

"I don't like free time," she said, laughing. The DeShons' commitment to their foster children hasn't gone unnoticed.

See Open page 7A

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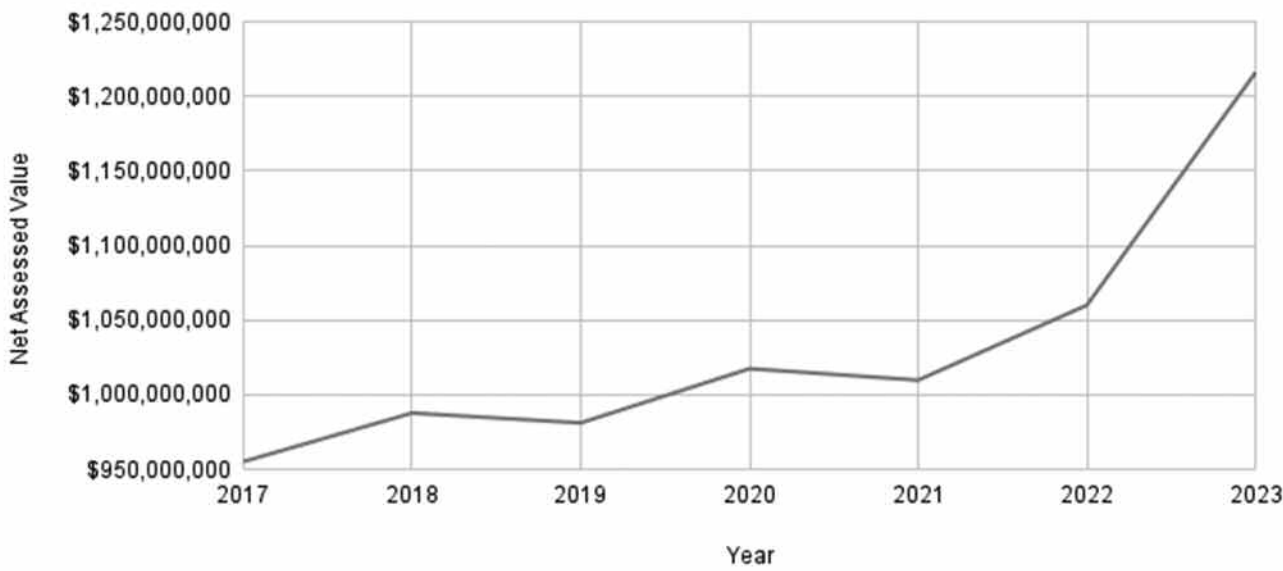


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Jay County Net Assessed Value vs. Year



Going up

Jay County matches statewide trend of increasing assessed value by double digits

By STEVE GARBACZ

Special to The Commercial Review

Property owners may experience a little sticker shock next year when they get their annual tax bills, as assessed values in Jay County are set to spike by double digits next year.

Most of the state has been seeing huge jumps in values as sale prices on homes and land have continued to spiral upward and Jay County is no exception.

You've been hearing about 8 to 9% inflation for consumer goods?

Well, we're talking a nearly 15% year-over-year jump in total property values for Jay County.

It's a definite break from recent history of small ups and downs in values across the county and one that could lead to some property

owners seeing bigger numbers on their annual tax bills.

Assessed values, the taxable value of your property, are set to shoot up by double digits in Jay County as well as many other counties across Indiana. Driven by Indiana's market-value assessing, rapidly spiraling home prices and land sales have pumped up the values statewide well beyond what would be considered normal by historical measures.

Values spike

Indiana has certified its 2023 assessed values, figures which are the first step needed for crunching out tax rates and tax bills for next year.

Based on those numbers, Jay County is looking at a 14.71%

increase in assessed values county-wide in 2023 as compared to 2022.

The total net assessed value for Jay County is set to rise just shy of \$1.22 billion overall, a sharp jump from \$1.06 billion the year prior.

It's a major outlier. Looking back through 2017, the first year available via the Indiana Gateway government information portal, Jay County had been seeing much smaller ups and downs in its annual AV.

Total valuation was up 3.4% in 2018, down less than 1% in 2019, up 3.7% in 2020 — topping \$1 billion in total property values for the first time — before dipping less than 1% again in 2021.

The county saw a larger-than-usual 4.97% jump from 2021 to 2022, but now looks to triple that heading into 2023.

See Up page 8A

The Pregnancy Care Center of Jay County, a Christian, pro-life ministry is seeking an Executive Director.

Strong communication, leadership, and people skills is a must. Candidate should be comfortable working with women regarding reproductive issues, also dealing with crisis and personal situations that may include domestic violence. Duties include managing volunteer and paid staff, overseeing budget, fund raising and public relations. It is preferred that candidates should possess 3-year management/supervisory experience.

The Pregnancy Care Center is a 501 (c)3non-profit. Application packets are available for pick up Monday - Friday between the hours of 1-5pm. Applications and Resume should be returned by December 12th. Stop by the Pregnancy Care Center of Jay County located in downtown Portland Indiana at 216 South Meridian Street.

Questions - phone 260-726-8636

With Our Gratitude At Thanksgiving

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Jay rate is 2.8%

By RAY COONEY

The Commercial Review

The unemployment rate went up last month.

It still remains below 3%.

According to estimates released Monday by Indiana Department of Workforce Development, Jay County recorded an unemployment rate of 2.8% in October.

The rate was up 0.7 percentage points from September. (It was up the same amount from the same month last year, as the October 2021 rate came in at a historic low of 2.1%.)

Jay County was tied for the 34th-highest unemployment rate in Indiana along with Brown, Fulton, Monroe, Parke,

Switzerland, Tippecanoe and Vanderburgh counties. It was tied for 38th-highest last month after coming in tied for 35th-lowest of the state's 92 counties in August.

The local unemployment rate has been 3% or lower for more than a year. The last time it was above 4% was July 2020, coming off of the unemployment spike resulting

from coronavirus pandemic shutdowns.

Jay County's rate came in matching that of the state at 2.8%.

Ohio, Gibson and Boone counties posted the lowest unemployment rates in the state at 2.1%. Adams County was tied for fourth-lowest at 2.2%.

Howard County had the highest unemployment rate in Indiana for the third month in a row at 4.8%. Fayette (4.2%) and Lake (4.1%) were the only other counties to come in higher than 4%.

Area rates are as follows:

Adams County: 2.2%, up 0.6 percentage points, tie-fourth lowest

Blackford County: 3.1%, up 0.6 percentage points, tie-16th highest

Delaware County: 3.2%, up 0.3 percentage point, tie-10th highest

Jay County: 2.8%, up 0.7 percentage points, tie-34th highest

Randolph County: 2.7%, up 0.7 percentage points, tie-45th lowest

Wells County: 2.3%, up 0.5 percentage points, tie-eighth lowest

County has been below 3% for more than a year

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Thanksgiving Greetings

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Premature ...

Continued from page 4A
“(Low birthweight) infants tend to have lower educational attainment, poorer self-reported health status, and reduced employment and earnings as adults relative to their normal weight counterparts.” Innovations in healthcare mean that a premature birth doesn’t mean the child will die but the impacts of that poor health outcome can follow children as they grow into adults. The U.S. infant mortality rate is 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to Indiana’s 6.6 deaths per 1,000 live births. But the preterm birth rate among Black women is 42% higher than among all other women in Indiana, according to the March of Dimes. For women of Asian/ Pacific Islander descent, 8.7% of live births are born premature, followed by 9.9% for white women and 10.1% for Hispanic women.

But 14.1% of births for Black women are preterm. Jarnell Craig, the interim executive director of the Minority Health Coalition of Marion County, is part of a group of organizations that seeks to spread information about services for mothers in Indianapolis. Efforts include safe sleep classes, parenting classes and even lists Black physicians in zipcodes with high mortality rates. But Craig said funding or staffing isn’t the limiting factor for their influence, but rather getting parent buy-in. “We believe that really it is a lack of understanding,” Craig said. “You can only provide them what they’re ready to receive so it just depends on their attitudes. Are they hearing us and what we’re saying to them?” Still, Craig believed that there’s been an upward tick in

interest, especially with the expansion of classes on Saturdays. **Prenatal care** One reason why new parents might not be getting the appropriate prenatal healthcare during their pregnancies: there simply isn’t any in their area. Another 2022 report, also from the March of Dimes, found that 6.9 million women were affected by and almost 500,000 births occurred in these “maternity care deserts” with no or low access — a 2% increase from the 2020 report. “Access to quality maternity care is a critical component of maternal health and positive birth outcomes, especially in the face of a lingering pandemic,” said Stewart and Dr. Zsakeba Henderson, the interim chief medical and health officer for March of Dimes, in the report. “In maternity care deserts there

is a higher risk for poor maternal and infant health outcomes.” On average, an estimated two women die every day due to pregnancy or childbirth complications and two babies die every hour, the report said. Though the report doesn’t include a state-by-state breakdown, a graphic reports that roughly half of Indiana’s 92 counties have full access to maternity healthcare. Nationwide, Black women and Native American women had far less access to quality care. One in five Black women and one in four Native American women didn’t receive adequate prenatal care, compared to just one in ten for white women. In Indiana, the maternal mortality ratio is 93% higher for Black women compared to white women. Typically, educated women are less likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth but a Black woman who graduates col-

lege is still at a higher risk than a white woman who didn’t finish high school. The Indiana Maternal Mortality Review Committee report from earlier this year said 92 Hoosier women died in 2020, and that 73 of those deaths were considered preventable. Just half of those women who died in 2020 access prenatal care during their first trimester while another 15.2% received no prenatal care at all. Compared to the state’s live births, 69.3% of mothers accessed care, leading the committee to conclude that inadequate prenatal care could be a contributing factor to maternal mortality in Indiana. But those appointments serve another equally important purpose of assessing the health of the expected child, whether screening for health conditions or analyzing third trimester movement. See **Premature** page 8A

Open ...

Continued from page 5A
Despite not knowing what the twins’ future held, Duecker noted, the DeShons have showered them with nothing but love. “I’ve always been amazed at their expression of love they have for the kids,” said Duecker. “It’s kind of a challenge when you’re in that spot, you don’t know the timeline, level of commitment you’re getting yourself into.” He noted the many doctor visits, procedures and therapy appointments they have handled. It’s tough work, he said. “They’re doing it all around the clock, and they continue to do it to this day,” he said. “That’s an expression of love that’s more impactful than any sermon.” Nearly two years after taking in the twins, the DeShons now plan to adopt them. Their hopes are the adoption will be finalized at the beginning of next year.

Fostering the children, she said, wasn’t the hard part. Adhering to and observing the effects of foster care laws proved to be the largest challenge. Lilly referenced the many children in the foster care system in Indiana. According to Indiana Department of Child Services’ website, there were more than 12,300 children in need of services in October. “There’s laws regarding foster kids that make it really easy for kids to like just slip through the cracks and end up in the foster care system for years,” Lilly said. “No child should have to be in the system for years.” Currently, the DeShons’ foster son still requires weekly healthcare attention. As the foster care process winds down, though, they’re looking forward to giving the twins the best lives they can. “We’ve always raised them like they were our own,” said Lilly. “We didn’t go into fostering with the intent to just somewhat take care of a child. We’re both very much all or nothing people, and so we’ve just loved them unconditionally from the beginning, having no idea where the case is going to go.” Braden is considering getting back into teaching, Lilly pointed out. Perhaps the couple may also pursue giving birth to more children along the way, Braden noted. They’re planning to close their license once the adoption is finalized. “This is more than both of us ever bargained for, and we want the two kids to be able to have, to start settling into as normal of a life as possible, and to just kind of get away from all the trauma that has happened for all of us,” said Lilly. “We just need time to just start growing as a family and just healing as a family.”

A few months into caring for the twins, the DeShons had been warned if they weren’t willing to agree, if necessary, to become a pre-adoptive home — it means a family would adopt a child pending legal work — the twins would be placed elsewhere. Braden explained this is a common practice in situations like theirs, with a goal to avoid moving children from foster home to foster home. Lilly and Braden have spent the past two years loving the twins and wishing situations with their biological family would improve. “It’s been a very heart-breaking process,” Lilly said. “We agreed that we would gladly just break our hearts and sacrifice our hearts to protect whatever kids came into our care, no matter what that looks like. And this looked very different than what we initially planned.”



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Up ...

Continued from page 6A
Under normal historical conditions, Indiana county assessed values typically change around 1-3% per year.
The spike isn't just a Jay County fluke, either. Adams County's total assessed value is jumping 12.94% year-over-year in 2023, Blackford County's total is up 13.28% and Randolph County is seeing a similar 13.58% jump.

Jay County		
Year	Net Assessed Value	% Change
2017	\$955,317,373	
2018	\$987,871,327	3.41%
2019	\$981,288,301	-0.67%
2020	\$1,017,602,946	3.70%
2021	\$1,009,936,869	-0.75%
2022	\$1,060,176,425	4.97%
2023	\$1,216,135,948	14.71%

Source: Indiana Gateway

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What's driving increases?
Simple — rapidly rising sale prices.
Indiana uses market-based assessment, meaning the value the county assigns your property is supposed to reflect its value if you were to put the property up for sale. Therefore, if your house is assessed at \$200,000, you should be able to sell it for \$200,000.

But in recent years the real estate market has been so hot — overheated by high demand but a short supply of available inventory — that sales prices have shot up. In recent years, it's not been uncommon for sellers to receive multiple offers within 24 hours of listing and then accept one that is \$10,000 or \$20,000 or more over the asking price.

When a house sells at a price over its assessed value, that obviously leads to a change in that property's value for the next year. But the effect isn't isolated,

Assessors also do "trending," meaning that when multiple properties in a neighborhood sell, if they're all notably out of line with the current neighborhood values, the assessor's office will adjust the values of all of the nearby properties.

That's the main driving force behind huge countywide jumps being seen all over the state. High sales increase values and trending spreads those higher values over a wider area.

Assessors are required by the state to do that trending, so they

can't simply ignore the value gap between new sales and those existing, unsold properties.

Is this good or bad?
It's a win for local governments, who get a bigger tax base to draw taxes from and can do so while seeing tax rates fall. Since rates are figured by taking the tax levy (the amount local governments need to raise in taxes to fund service) and dividing by the total assessed value, when that denominator grows quickly, it helps push down the resulting tax rates.

For individual property owners, the impact is more mixed and can vary parcel by parcel.

Decreased tax rates caused by rising property values don't necessarily translate into lower tax bills for individual owners. If the value of your property increased by a larger percentage than your tax rate decreased, your tax bill will actually end up being higher than the year before.

The state limits how much local governments can grow their annual levy — it's 4% for 2023 — so odds are many people are going to see the value of their property rise more than they'll see their tax rate decrease. Translation: More money

due to the county treasurer in May and November.

Not sustainable
Don't expect double-digit jumps to stick around for years to come and the trend may already be starting to revert.

The Fed has been hiking prime interest rates in an effort to tamp down inflation, which has led to increased interest rates on mortgages that most buyers need to purchase a home. That mechanism has already started to slow the real estate market by making borrowing more expensive and therefore cooling a national housing exchange that has been far overheated by high demand and short supply.

If prices stop spiraling upward, that will cause assessed value growth to level off. And if that market cooling starts to actually drive prices down off their historic highs, counties could potentially see their total AV start to drop, possibly sharply, fueled by the same mechanism of neighborhood trending that has caused values to inflate so quickly.

If counties enter a situation where values start falling, it's much more likely going to result in tax rate increases across the county.

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Happy Holidays from The Jay County Sheriff's Office.



Premature ...

Continued from page 7A
Proposed solutions
A program to partially alleviate that disparity in healthcare access — My Healthy Baby, which finds community partners for pregnant women — expanded to its 82nd county last month in Porter County. In 2022, it was launched in 35 counties, including Porter.
The March of Dimes report applauded Indiana for expanding Medicaid to 12 months postpartum for mothers and having committees to study maternal and infant health. But dinged the state for not

allowing Medicaid to reimburse 90% or more for services rendered by certified nurse midwives.
While the state report analyzing the economic costs of premature births considered several health interventions for mothers, including prescribing the hormone progesterone to expectant mothers, which it says could reduce preterm births by 20-40%. Additional suggestions include establishing group prenatal care organizations, utilizing home visiting programs, reducing teen pregnancy, expanding telemedicine and investing

in smoking cessation programs.
"... the costs of perinatal morbidity are staggering — both financial costs to the state of Indiana and the human, social and emotional costs to its Hoosiers," the state's report concludes. "Investments in Indiana-specific research and programs to reduce perinatal morbidity will pay dividends far beyond the costs."
Indiana Capital Chronicle is an independent, non-profit news organization. Its website is indianacapitalchronicle.com.

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