



**“GPS 2 Success”**  
**Working to Connect People to Jobs, and Jobs to People**



(Pictured Left to Right)

**Cheryl Shepherd, Sponsored by Bowen Center**  
**Kristin Whitacre, Sponsored by SYM Financial Advisors**  
**Nicole Sherrill, Sponsored by Zimmer, Inc.**  
**Tom Till, Sponsored by Ivy Tech Community College**  
**Jennifer Stouder, Sponsored by DePuy Synthes**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Warsaw, Indiana and Kosciusko County are blessed with beautiful lakes, great schools and an employer base that is the envy of communities throughout the Midwest. The Orthopedic industry was born in Warsaw in 1895 and the city is world renowned as the “Orthopedic Capital of the World®.” An aging population supports enormous growth in joint replacement, with the current United States replacement rate topping 1 million hips and knees annually. This number is expected to exceed 4 million by 2030 (OrthoWorx, CDC).

Orthopedic manufacturing is big business, and the manufacturers in Kosciusko County employ roughly 6,800 workers, which equates to about 1 in 4 jobs. Every 10 jobs in the orthopedic industry help support an additional 9 jobs elsewhere in the County. Orthopedic employees make an average of \$10,000 more annually than the state and national averages. These companies bring in over \$11 billion dollars in revenue which contributes to an extremely positive financial impact on the State of Indiana (OrthoWorx).

Kosciusko County’s employment base goes far beyond its medical device companies, as it is also known for a thriving and diverse agricultural industry, among others. Companies such as CTB, Inc., Creighton Bros./Crystal Lake, Maple Leaf Farms, Louis Dreyfus and Tom Farms are just a few agricultural companies that are headquartered in the county. Many of these companies have a large international footprint with offices and staff around the world. Healthcare is also a primary employer, with Parkview Hospital building a new facility in 2015. Kosciusko County has one of the world’s largest publishers of

periodicals and catalogues with RR Donnelley, a company who employs over 900 people in its Warsaw facility.

Indiana's December 2014 unemployment rate weighed in at 5.8 percent, while unemployment in Kosciusko County was a full percentage point lower at 4.8 percent. For the last 10 years the County has employed a workforce of around 40,000 people, with a 2007 pre-recession high of 40,500. As of December 2014 this workforce grew to a new high of 42,255 employees (Robertson). With so many things going well, it is difficult to recognize a potential issue that could limit growth for new and existing companies in Kosciusko County.

### **PROBLEM**

Kosciusko County companies are having a difficult time finding employees to fill existing, as well as new positions created by attrition and growth. This makes it difficult for existing companies to expand. This also limits the ability for economic development to attract new businesses to the area.

Our KLA team joined together to collectively address this issue. The team includes Cheryl Shepherd, Employment and Compensation Specialist at Grace College; Nicole Sherrill, Senior Specialist for Surgeon Communications at Zimmer; Jennifer Stouder, Analyst and Web-Based Training at DePuy Synthes; Tom Till, Director of Advanced Manufacturing at Ivy Tech Community College and Kristin Whitacre, Financial Advisor at SYM Financial Advisors.

Our backgrounds vary greatly, but we have all joined together with a passion to see our children and grandchildren experience the same, great, job opportunities we have come to enjoy in Kosciusko County. How do we best address a problem that has been described nationally as 'people without jobs' and 'jobs without people'? Our team discussed the idea of holding a county-wide career fair. To investigate this problem and potential solutions, we decided to reach out to highly respected individuals in Kosciusko County with different backgrounds and unique perspectives.

Our initial visit was with the Honorable Dr. Joseph Thallemer, Mayor, City of Warsaw. We shared our idea about holding a career fair, and he confirmed that this was something that local employers needed in order to fill open positions. Dr. Thallemer supported our idea to visit other interested stakeholders. Next, we met with Brad Bishop, Executive Director, OrthoWorx. Mr. Bishop was also supportive of our idea for a career fair and recommended we include the agricultural base in our planning. We then met with George Robertson, President, Kosciusko County Economic Development Corporation (KEDCo). Mr. Robertson provided a wealth of data, including the following items:

- A 5 percent unemployment rate is considered full employment and most people who want to work are employed.
- The United States has the highest percentage of high school graduates going on to college, but it also has the highest college dropout rate.
- 45 percent of all people in the United States who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in the last 5 years are working in positions that only require a high school diploma.

Our final meeting was with Mark Dobson, President and CEO of the Kosciusko County Chamber of Commerce (Chamber). We learned that the Chamber and WorkOne held an event in 2014 at Warsaw Community High School (WCHS) that focused on connecting WCHS students with local employers. Mr. Dobson informed us that the Chamber's Workforce/Education Committee was interested in holding an expanded career fair that included juniors and seniors from multiple high schools in and around Kosciusko County.

Each distinguished interviewee agreed that our area employers are having difficulty filling open positions, which has limited our companies' ability to expand their current footprint. If employers are unable to find qualified applicants locally they may look to expand elsewhere. One example was discovered during our visit to Precision Medical Technologies (PMT) on our KLA introductory bus tour last fall. PMT manufactures products for the local orthopedic Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). PMT could not find enough qualified people in our area, so they put help wanted

advertisements in multiple cities' newspapers and expanded where they had the greatest response, which was Rome City, IN.

The problem affects existing businesses that lose employees through attrition. Several of the County's larger companies own existing manufacturing facilities in other parts of the world, so this increases the likelihood that products could be shifted to locations outside the United States if necessary. This problem also affects new employers looking to create or expand their business in Kosciusko County. If there is not an appropriate workforce, they will relocate to a community that has one. In Kosciusko County, some of the reasons behind the lack of a qualified workforce include a mismatch of required skills and education, aging workforce and lack of awareness of job opportunities in our area.

There are several disconnects between an applicant's skill set/education and current open positions. In some situations candidates are underqualified, while in others they are overqualified. Many of today's workers have heard stories about factories that provided atrocious working conditions. As a result, vocational education has been deemphasized or eliminated from the majority of our Country's high school programs. For the last several decades parents and high schools have been informing their students that in order to be successful they are required to attend a 4 year college and earn a Bachelor's degree, so students flocked to colleges in droves. The downside is that many students have earned degrees in programs that do not match employer demands, so they are forced to take positions outside of their desired field. Another issue is students are not well informed of what type of education/skills are needed for the careers they want to pursue before making a career choice. Additionally, 2014 graduates left college with an average of \$33,000 in debt. This is very unfortunate because many open positions require highly skilled employees with technical training that includes competencies in

computers, robotics and automation and much of this training can be acquired at two year community colleges at a fraction of the cost (Sheehy).

Another contributor to the people deficit is the huge population of baby boomers who are eligible for retirement. The 2008 recession wiped away billions of dollars in retirement savings which forced many of the baby boomers to continue working. The economy is rebounding and projections indicate that the baby boomer workforce has begun to retire at an increased pace. Many feel that accelerated retirements will continue and nothing is likely to stop it (Casselmann).

Lack of awareness of job opportunities in our area is another source for positions not getting filled. Currently, there are not suitable forums for local companies and job seekers to share information with each other. Smaller companies in Kosciusko County do not have large budgets for recruiting. Often times they rely on word-of-mouth to fill open positions. Alternatively, bigger companies have larger budgets, but do not have many options to recruit locally. These companies post positions online, but there is not a local venue to recruit on a larger scale. Many are forced to go outside of Kosciusko County to recruit and attend career fairs in surrounding counties and large cities that have better organized and more reputable career fairs. While we cannot fix job skills and education discrepancies, or the aging workforce issues over the short term, we can work to connect people to jobs, and jobs to people.

### **Solution**

Our team identified an opportunity to create an effective annual career fair that connects our local diverse job market with prospective employees; including students, the unemployed and the underemployed.

Our KLA team met with the Chamber's Education/Workforce Committee on January 9, 2015. This committee includes representatives from the County's high schools and local companies. They gave us the opportunity to solicit feedback from a wide cross-section of educators and employers, and design

an event to benefit all students. Approximately 2,500 high school juniors and seniors are expected to attend the event during the day, and our collective teams have determined that along with an expanded career fair, it would be necessary to hold the event in a much larger venue that was neutral to all schools. We also concluded we could enhance the Chamber-sponsored career fair by assisting with the planning and execution, adding a segment to focus on the general public and incorporating an innovative technology component to streamline the event.

Planning began by developing a list of potential exhibitors. Chamber representative, Renea Saylor, provided a list of 48 companies, educational institutions and government agencies that participated in past events. Tom Till and Cheryl Shepherd identified additional contacts which added 46 more potential exhibitors, and WorkOne's Richard Petre added an additional 15. We made direct contact with each potential exhibitor on the list to verify the appropriate contact person and determine the exhibitor's interest in participating in the event. The final list had over 100 invitees. We also created and designed the invitation, agenda, registration form, welcome packet and survey for the exhibitors.

Securing the venue and managing the logistics were also major components of the planning. Since the Chamber holds several annual events at the Manahan Orthopaedic Capital Center (MOCC), our KLA team was successful in securing the venue for the career fair. We then met with the MOCC representatives and toured the facility to help in developing our vision for the event. In conjunction with the Chamber, Nicole Sherrill was responsible for identifying and executing various logistics of the event, while working closely alongside all members of the team to strive for a flawless execution. A few of the logistics included coordinating the various attending schools, organizing the itinerary, scheduling food & beverage for exhibitors, and recruiting volunteers to assist with on-site help. Collaboratively, Mr. Till and Ms. Whitacre worked to compile the outline, draft and final paper and PowerPoint presentation.

The final planning element included marketing and advertisement. Jennifer Stouder, along with Alyssa Lowe from the Chamber, led the campaign to promote the event to the public. Our team developed the name of our event, “GPS 2 Success”, as well as the logo and tag line, “Working to Connect People to Jobs, and Jobs to People”. Promotional flyers for the schools and public were created and utilized, as well as other advertising mediums like Facebook, Ink Free News, radio and television. The Chamber also posted the event to their calendar and issued a press release on their website. Finally, Diane Quance, WCHS Director of Guidance, invited our team to participate in a short web video to provide students with information on the event, as well as tips for a successful career fair experience. This video was made available to each student planning to attend the event.

Based on our personal experiences, conversations with the local leaders and companies, we felt strongly about integrating the general public into the latter half of the “GPS 2 Success” event. Our goal was to connect people with job opportunities, and invite the students and their parents back to the event. This provides the exhibitors the opportunity to connect with students and educate them on what is needed to become employed with their company. It also connects the exhibitors with qualified job seekers to fill their current open positions and network for future opportunities. A wildly successful 2015 event will be the catalyst to the Chamber continuing the event in 2016.

The final step to enhance the event was to incorporate it with a mobile application (app) that attendees, exhibitors and sponsors could use with their smartphones and computers. The benefits include:

- Increase attendee engagement by communicating with the students BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the event.
- Update schedule/last minute changes with ease.
- Drive potential revenue by offering sections for businesses to advertise if they cannot attend.
- Save money and the environment by going ‘Green’.
- Provide an app that is ‘native’ to the user’s smartphones.
- Position our event and organization as forward-thinking.



- Customize our event by adding logos and other branding, maps, exhibitor lists, Twitter and more.

Ms. Stouder was responsible for selecting and building the app, sponsored by DePuy Synthes. She confirmed that Guidebook was one that worked well with mobile devices regardless of internet or cell connectivity. Guidebook also allows users to interact and create customized content; such as to-do lists, notes and attendee networking. In the end, we wanted to be innovative and appeal to our students and exhibitors in how we interact and engage with them.

### **Conclusion**

Some indirect benefits of “GPS 2 Success” include the Chamber’s use of Guidebook for future career fairs and other community events such as Taste and Trade, the Annual Chamber Membership Banquet and Young Entrepreneur Academy. This event also promotes and educates students and job seekers with essential skills for finding a job, including tips on how to dress, prepare an elevator speech and draft a resume. It also provides an inexpensive way for companies to advertise their business and job openings using ‘green’ technology.

“GPS 2 Success” will allow students and parents to have a greater awareness of what is needed to be successful when entering the workforce or determining their future paths. It will potentially enlighten students to fully understand that there are many opportunities for them to thrive in this community and be reminded to “*Come Home to Kosciusko*” at some point in their lives. This event will connect local companies with unemployed and underemployed people who are looking for job opportunities. It also has the potential to bring people from outside our community as they find opportunities at “GPS 2 Success”.

In order to keep the momentum of “GPS 2 Success” alive, it is important to have community involvement and sponsorship. If our team wins the Northerner Award, the funds would be appropriated to the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce to ensure sustainability of “GPS 2 Success”.

### Suggestions/Recommendations for Future Career Fairs

Based on our evaluation of “GPS 2 Success” we suggest the following:

1. Purchase Guidebook on an annual basis.
2. Work to attract quality exhibitors, students and applicants by focusing on the following:
  - a. Review and revise the list of exhibitors so that it includes as many potential relevant contacts as possible.
  - b. Contact all potential exhibitors at least two months in advance to gauge interest in participating in the event.
  - c. Work with local schools to incorporate customized information into their school’s portion of Guidebook.
  - d. Schedule the event so it does not conflict with similar events. “GPS 2 Success” was scheduled to fit around multiple high school’s spring break vacations and state-mandated testing. Our April 14, 2015 date was in direct conflict with the Northeast Indiana Career Enrichment (NICE) Career Fair that was held at IPFW in Fort Wayne on the same day.
  - e. Consider moving this event to the fall timeframe to avoid potential conflicts mentioned above.
3. Send out invitations earlier to allow companies more time to commit.
4. Budget early for large scale advertising to include surrounding counties. This will positively impact participation on both exhibitors and attendees.

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