

Economic Development Insight

How Will Greene County Achieve Its Potential with Crane and the WestGate Tech Park?

In a county that has been hungry for jobs and economic expansion for decades, a fair question emerges: how will the people of Greene County realize the potential offered by the \$2 billion Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) and the WestGate @ Crane Technology Park?

As the *Indianapolis Business Journal* recently pointed out, with more than 100,000 sq. ft. of commercial buildings either occupied or under construction, the WestGate tech park is truly beginning to realize its economic potential for the region. With a new building set to break ground in the Greene County section of Indiana's only tri-county certified technology park, the WestGate vision will soon physically materialize here. Additional commercial defense prospects, particularly for the Greene County region with its federal HUBZone status, continue to demonstrate increasing interest in the park.

As our prospects for growth continue to expand, we need to consider one important fact. When the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) certified the WestGate tech park, it had one singular purpose in mind: the creation of high-impact, high-wage technology jobs. That's why IEDC invested \$1.3 million in the park.

This fact represented one of the key driving forces why IEDC incorporated the WestGate in three counties instead of one. One day in the coming years the huge payoff from NSWC-related technology transfer, commercial defense contracts and technical support services will fully materialize across the entire region, particularly once I-69 is completely open. While we work toward that time, our key focus today is and will remain on job creation and attraction. To achieve that, we must marshal and deploy our forces with care.

We have a good working example to follow. In the 1980s and 1990s, economic developers in Central Indiana fought like cats and dogs to attract new businesses to their specific county. This wasted and confused energy often repelled companies who were initially interested in relocating to Central Indiana. What people finally figured out in Indianapolis and the surrounding region was that they would be much better off if companies were attracted to the region, as opposed to a specific county. So they formed the Indy Partnership (today expanded to Bloomington and Monroe County) to better attract these companies.

Why did that make sense? Consider the fact that 52,000 people living in Hamilton County north of Indianapolis actually work in Marion County. This represents nearly a third of the entire working population in Hamilton County and thousands of the highest-paying jobs available in Indiana. Hamilton County – particularly the cities of Carmel and Fishers – reap incredible benefits from this Marion job-based workforce.

The same is true here in Greene County. According to a recent report by ESOP Partners, 46% of the income in Bloomfield comes directly or indirectly from NSWC Crane. Nearly half of all people who hold jobs there work every day in Martin County (or for an operation supporting work in Martin County), but they live in Greene County. Greene County's total employed workforce is about 14,000. Over 1,600 of those jobs (about 13% of the total Greene workforce)

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– among the highest paid in the region – are directly or indirectly associated with NSWC Crane. These Martin County-based jobs are critical to the Greene County economy.

The point? In reality, where the workers live is generally more important than where they physically work.

When it comes to growing the WestGate in its early years, we need to follow the example of the Indy Partnership in focusing on attracting defense companies to the region. Then it's up to us in Greene County to be so attractive that the employees of these companies will want to live here and raise their families.

Of course, there are numerous benefits to having commercial defense companies build facilities and locate their operations in the Greene County section of the WestGate, and we will always work for that. But we must never lose sight that the jobs associated with these new companies are the most important benefit. When we attract new WestGate people to live here (regardless of whether they work in buildings located in Martin or Daviess), they buy or rent homes, they buy groceries and supplies, they pay taxes – and the wages largely stay here.

We have much to offer in Greene County – let's tell that compelling story to everyone who thinks about moving to the region. Let's focus our energy on attracting high-impact jobs here and making Greene County the most attractive place to live, and achieve Crane and the WestGate's potential for Greene.

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