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EDITOR'S PICK

Celebrating Northwest Indiana women in leadership

Calvin Bellamy

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Cal Bellamy
Provided

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When my work career began nearly 60 years ago, almost all our local businesses and non-profits were under the leadership of men. Not that they did a bad job, but Northwest Indiana at that time had a rich vein of untapped talent: our women.

Fast forward to 2025 and now we have a great mixture of women and men in leadership roles. In fact, female leadership — public and private — has greatly enhanced our Region's progress.

Today many, probably most, of our non-profits are guided by female leaders. They are also leading the way on meeting the economic challenges and opportunities facing Northwest Indiana. Here's a partial sampling of what I mean.

Northwest Indiana Forum: For several years, the Forum has been ably led by Heather Ennis. Heather and her team promote economic development nationwide and administer the multi-million dollar READI grant process, among many other activities.

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Regional Development Authority: Led by Sherri Ziller, the RDA focuses on big infrastructure projects, like the expansion of the Gary airport and the South Shore commuter railroad (double tracking and West Lake Corridor).

Center for Workforce Innovation: Lisa Daugherty oversees a team of professionals working to prepare our local workforce and match workers and employees.

Small Business Development Center: Most new businesses start and stay small. These local businesses are very important to Northwest Indiana's economy. Lorri Feldt's agency provides invaluable advice and counselling to entrepreneurs as they start and grow. Since 1985, SBDC has provided financial, supply chain and management counseling and training to over 50,000 local small businesses.

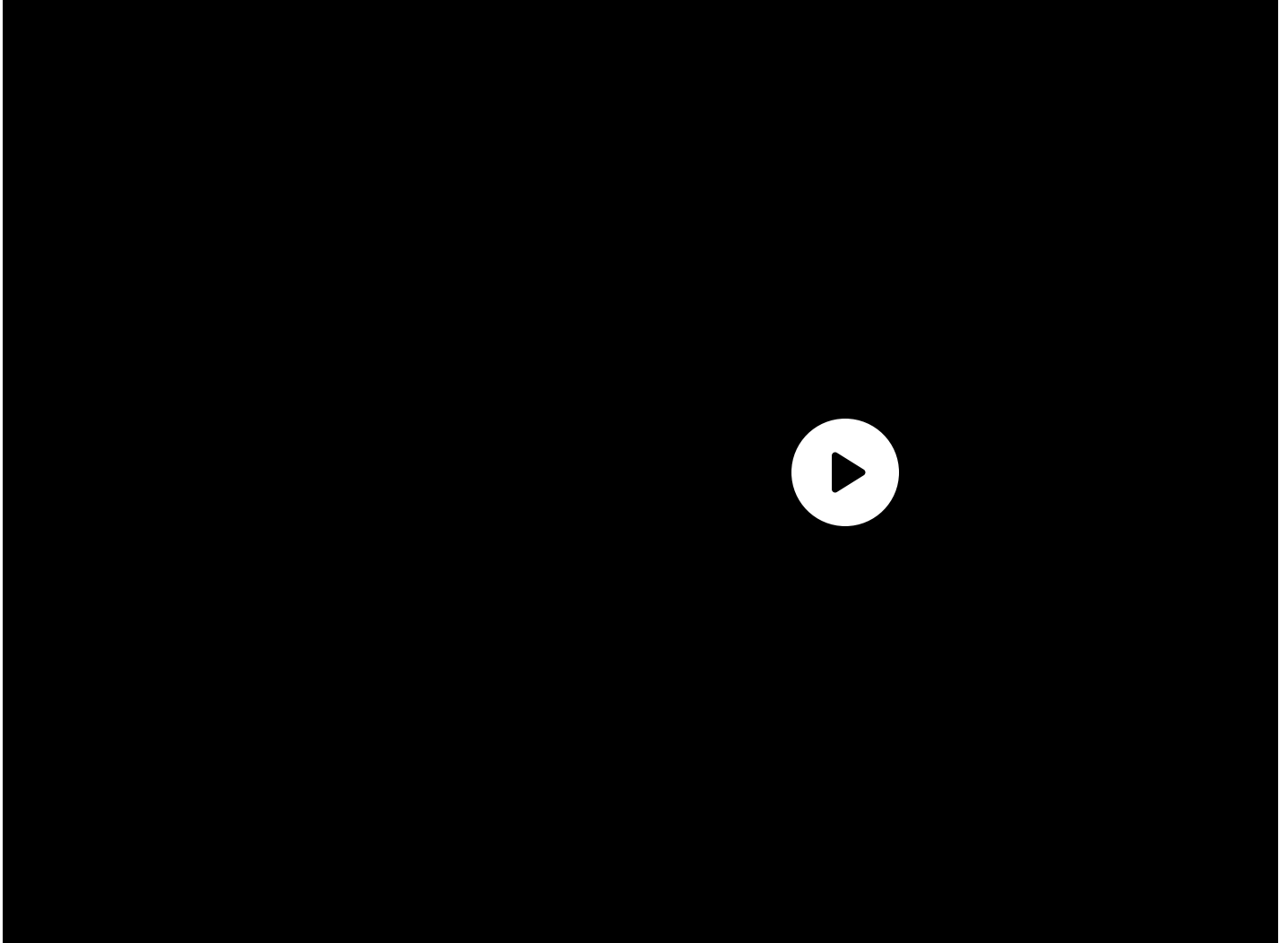
Regional Development Company: Not to be confused with the RDA referred to earlier, the RDC under the leadership of Erica Dombey administers a very important financing tool for small businesses, known as the 504 loan program. In partnership with local banks, RDC's 504 loans provide low down payment and beneficial borrowing arrangements.

Community Foundations Northwest Indiana is served by four community foundations — Legacy (Lake County), Crown Point Community Foundation, Porter County Community Foundation and Unity Foundation (LaPorte County). While each of these foundations focuses on its own service area, they work together on regional projects. Realizing the economic importance of tourism, these four foundations are currently directing their joint focus on furthering public access along the lakefront.

Three of these four foundations are led by women — Kelly Anoe, Mary Nielsen and Maggie Spartz. (Porter County's leader is Bill Higbie, but he doesn't seem to have any problem with being the only guy in the room.)

Shared Ethics Advisory Commission: Currently led by attorney Courtney Smith, this all-volunteer group exists to provide ethics training to public employees. Twenty-three Northwest Indiana communities have joined SEAC. Quality local government is also an important factor in economic development.

Northwest Indiana has an abundance of skill and creativity and now we are drawing on the full range of that talent — women and men. As a result, Northwest Indiana is growing, becoming ever more interesting and can look forward to even better days ahead.



Calvin Bellamy, a life-long resident of Northwest Indiana, has been active in community affairs for several decades. The opinions are the writer's.