

Search Our Site...

GO

THE REGION'S TOP LEADERS

Posted on December 27, 2011 by [NWIBQ.COM](http://www.nwibq.com)

Our annual reader nominations honoring business and community leaders.

Leadership is difficult to quantify. Either it exists in an organization or it doesn't. Successful companies and organizations have it, and in an economy that's been as difficult as this one has been for the past two years, good leadership has proven to be a valuable commodity for several Northwest Indiana businesses.

It has helped guide those companies through some choppy waters. It's a quality that has been recognized by readers of *Northwest Indiana Business Quarterly*. Business executives who have shown exceptional leadership have been chosen as our 2011 leading CEOs, CFOs and community leaders. Here are this year's top 11 CEOs, one chief financial officer and five community leaders who are making a difference in their company or their community. Congratulations!

CEOs

John Davies

Woodlands Communications

Valparaiso

John Davies has been a fixture in Northwest Indiana for decades. He's one of the biggest promoters of the region, first through the Hall of Fame and most recently through the Society of Innovators of Northwest Indiana. With both, he looks to find and promote the best in the region. With the Hall of Fame, the focus is on private citizens and the work they do to better the lives of others. Through the Society of Innovators (which he helped create), Davies has established a remarkable advisory board that goes into great detail looking for the inventors, entrepreneurs and ordinary people who have created growing businesses that employ people and bring cutting-edge ideas to the forefront. Davies serves on business, education and not-for-profit boards throughout the region. His goal is to show the rest of the world that Northwest Indiana is a force to be reckoned with.

Mike Falk

Falk PLI Engineering and Surveying

Portage

As the head of an established engineering firm, Mike Falk has led his company to new heights and industry recognition using the most innovative tools available, including laser scanning tracking devices. He also is engaged with various organizations to make Northwest Indiana a better place to live and work. Falk founded his company in 1995 with a philosophy to help clients realize gains in productivity and profitability. It's the same philosophy that prevails at the company today. Falk's company operates in a spirit of continuous improvement and seeks excellence in all that it does. As a result, Falk-PLI has become a nationally recognized engineering and surveying firm serving the industrial, commercial and residential sectors. By implementing cutting-edge technology backed by the extensive experience of its staff, the company helps clients increase productivity and improve processes. The goal, says Falk, is a value that translates to millions of dollars in savings per year for clients.

NEW ARTICLES

- [Nominations For Health Care Honors](#)
- [MERS Update from Community Hospital](#)
- [CENTURY 21 Alliance Group Recognizes Top Agents](#)
- [Groundbreaking Event of Surgical Pavilion](#)
- [Q&A With the Governor](#)

RECENT COMMENTS

- [Kristen Haffner](#) on [Here's What to Do](#)
- [Donna Yancey](#) on [ASI and IPAS Commission to Create Mobile App](#)
- [Tom Lounges](#) on [James Muhammad](#)
- [Jamie DeVriend](#) on [Results of 6th Annual Blood Drive Challenge](#)
- [Traveling Through the Pages | Northwest Indiana Business Quarterly Magazine | thomasarobb's Blog](#) on [Traveling Through the Pages](#)

ARCHIVES

Select Month

Stewart McMillan**Task Force Tips****NWIBQ** | Northwest Indiana Business Quarterly Magazine[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Contact](#) | [Terms](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Sitemap](#)

There is nothing that gives Stewart McMillan more pride than running the family business, Task Force Tips. From an idea outlined on a napkin by his firefighter father in 1971, the company has grown from an operation in the family basement to a 180,000-square-foot factory in Valparaiso supplying a variety of fire hose nozzles to customers around the world. McMillan took over the company in 1982 and since then has steadily grown the company to provide not only firefighting equipment but also fire hydrant valves, fittings, adaptors and other equipment involved in regulating water flow. McMillan treats employees as family, giving them gifts on their anniversary and sending birthday cards to their children with a \$1 inside for each year they're celebrating. He even has set up a program to help families plan their vacations.

Pete Novak**Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors****Merrillville**

Under Pete Novak's leadership, the Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors has continued to serve its Realtor members during the economic downturn. GNIAR was formed in 1995 through a merger of the Northwest Indiana, Duneland, South Lake County and Jasper-Newton Associations of Realtors. Novak has created partnerships with various organizations to keep his members informed while acting as the voice of the industry in Northwest Indiana. He sits on several boards and contributes time to many worthy causes. The mission of GNIAR is to help members be productive in their business so they can benefit the communities they serve. Novak makes sure GNIAR uses its mission to advocate a vision of the future that is in its members' and neighbors' best interests. It strives to maintain an influential presence within its professional, regional and economic community to become a recognized source of information for regional economics, community dynamics and real estate.

Sarah Oudman**Treasure Homes****DeMotte**

Sarah Oudman has invested a lot of energy, time and money in educating the public about green building principles. She has been involved in some of the most comprehensive residential green building projects in Northwest Indiana, and in the process has won awards for her work. She's an example of what a small business can do when reaching outside its comfort zone. The key, says Oudman, is education because consumers won't buy what they don't know or value. By becoming a Certified Green Professional, Oudman is able to explain energy efficiency and answer questions about green design—both indoors and out. She explains that what looks like an average house on the outside is really special on the inside because of its insulation and energy saving features. And while Oudman firmly believes in her message, she says it wouldn't be possible to deliver it without a dedicated team effort at Treasure Homes.

John T. Phair**Holladay Properties****South Bend**

John Phair acquired controlling interest of Holladay Properties in 1999 and today is managing partner of 75 commercial partnerships. His administrative assistant describes him as "one of the finest bosses I have ever worked for and with." More than a dozen of his partnerships are joint ventures with firms such as the Purdue Research Foundation, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross and Delaware Investors. Holladay Properties is among the five largest asset management firms of medical office space in the country. Since 1988, Phair has led development of \$50 million in construction annually, including three of the four largest mixed-use projects in Indiana. Phair joined Holladay in 1978 after seven years in mortgage banking in Denver and South Bend. Today he's on the board of 1st Source Bank and an investor in several small businesses. Phair has been involved with the Boys & Girls Club of St. Joseph County, Family & Children's Center, WNIT Public Television, the South Bend Civic Theatre, the Alliance of Indiana (IU Kelly School of Business), Project Future and the Villages of Indiana.

Thomas F. Prisby**Citizens Financial Bank*****Munster***

Thomas Prisby has been a part of Citizens Financial Bank since 1982. From executive vice president, he climbed the bank's corporate ladder and in 1996 was named chairman of the board. In that time he has overseen the bank's conversion from a mutual thrift company to a publicly traded NASDAQ corporation. In addition, Prisby is chairman of the Citizens Savings Foundation, a \$3 million asset organization set up in 1998 to support housing, education and community initiatives. It mirrors Prisby's belief that the bank should be involved in the fabric of the community. Prisby has been known to help those less fortunate and has assisted schools, churches and after-school programs in need of financial support. Not only that, he has gotten personally involved with organizations, visiting Restoration Ministries, Campagna Academy, Tri-City Mental Health and a long list of other organizations.

Julie Rizzo**U.S. Greenworks*****St. John***

Julie Rizzo's vision is to educate the world about the benefits of recycling granite. By recycling granite remnants, her company eliminates millions of pounds of waste from landfills, saves energy, creates jobs, adds value and makes the world a better, greener place. Her nominator said Rizzo sees what others have not seen in thousands of years—value in scrap granite. That scrap comes from the remnants of thousands of granite countertop fabricators around the country. She founded the methods, machinery and market to recycle scrap granite, and started her granite recycling business in 2007. Rizzo followed that with creation of the RecycledGranite.com in 2008. Today, she has licensed Recycled Granite Centers across the country. In a short period of time, she has been featured on television, in magazines and newspapers, on the radio and on the Internet.

Rick Rondinelli**In Touch Pharmaceuticals*****Valparaiso***

In Touch Pharmaceuticals opened in 2004 with five employees and today has grown to more than 100 employees. The company provides patient medication management to hospitals, senior care facilities, prisons and other institutions. The growth has happened because of the leadership of owner Rick Rondinelli. He is a leader in the industry in innovation and customer service. Rondinelli believes in giving back to the community and contributes his own time, money and energy to several not-for-profit organizations. His personal philosophy is that those who have much should give back much. His nominator said Rondinelli's passion for his customers, his employees and the company will move In Touch Pharmaceuticals to greater growth in the future.

Desila Rosetti**Organizational Development Solutions Inc.*****Westville***

Organizational Development Solutions was described by nominators "as a great resource to Northwest Indiana." Desila Rosetti and her team offer services every organization needs, from high-level strategic planning and 360-degree feedback to employee handbooks and front-line customer-service training. She is a leader in many organizations from national boards such as the National Association for Healthcare Quality to her local commitment to the Society of Human Resource Managers and the Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce. Her team members provide high-quality work and the turnaround on projects has won them great praise. They dedicate themselves to the region through their project work and volunteerism.

Laura Smith-Wynn**Indiana Parenting Institute*****Merrillville***

The nominator for Laura Smith-Wynn said it was nice to see someone realize her passion and share it with the community. Smith-Wynn is founder and executive director of Indiana Parenting

Institute and has a passion for youth. She wants to see kids grow and excel so they can take their communities successfully into the 21st century and beyond. Having healthy and happy children requires parenting that knows how to cultivate such a result, just like a farmer knows how to cultivate his crop for a successful harvest. Smith-Wynn's vision calls for helping children by helping parents. She creates a vision for the entire family and then plots a course to get them there. Since bringing her training methods to Northwest Indiana in 2007, the Indiana Parenting Institute has helped more than 2,000 parents improve their relationship with their children and achieve goals they previously hadn't dreamed of.

CFO

Robert Lowry

Peoples Bank/NorthWest Indiana Bancorp

Munster

Robert Lowry has been a part of Peoples Bank for 24 years, starting as a staff accountant and rising to chief financial officer. Most recently, he was named executive vice president. His financial knowledge and leadership have made a significant impact in the performance of Northwest Indiana Bancorp and Peoples Bank. For the past six years, it has been named by US Banker magazine as one of the Top 200 Community Banks in America. During his financial leadership, the bank has not received any criticism from its independent auditors or the Securities and Exchange Commission. His nominator explained that Lowry is not only focused on doing things right, he's focused on doing the right thing. He is described as unassuming but forceful in crafting a course of action to improve the bank's performance. Away from the bank, Lowry is involved with the Northwest Indiana Food Bank as well as baseball and swimming with his children.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Heather Ennis, executive director

Duneland Chamber of Commerce

Chesterton

Heather Ennis is credited with turning around a struggling chamber of commerce. She is praised for her leadership and enthusiasm in working with both her office staff and the board of directors. Most importantly, Ennis has reached out to the community to work with residents to give the Duneland Chamber of Commerce a higher profile. One of her nominators said she is an invaluable resource for the community and "gives hope and encouragement to all the business owners during these difficult times by creating economic development opportunities for all to partake in."

Andrew Fox, president

Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad

Michigan City

Although new to Northwest Indiana, Andrew Fox is building on the legacy of the South Shore Railroad name by creating partnerships to bring jobs to the region. Fox is a native of California and began his railroading career with Southern Pacific. Most recently he joined Anacostia & Pacific, a holding company of several short line systems around the country, including the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad, the freight line that crosses Northwest Indiana. The freight line has 60 employees, 523 freight cars and 10 2,000-horsepower locomotives. As Fox has built his customer base along the 127-mile line to 35 clients, he has been involved in a project to develop the Kingsbury Industrial Plant south of LaPorte into a hub for handling produce. Fruits and vegetables are to be hauled to KIP by the CSX line and stored in a massive refrigeration warehouse to be built there. SouthShore Freight would then move the produce to Chicago, where it would connect with other national haulers.

Noel Reitmeister, financial advisor

Wells Fargo Advisors

Merrillville

Noel Reitmeister is a teacher. He has been with Wells Fargo for 43 years as a financial planner, but what he really does is teach people how to manage their finances and build for their future.

He teaches at Purdue University and Indiana University and also delivers his message on radio and television as The Money Doctor. A nominator spoke highly of Reitmeister's desire to help others by being a mentor. He and his wife (a doctor) are active with several charities in the region; they will celebrate their 50th anniversary this year. Reitmeister is known for his integrity and for his involvement in the community, particularly the arts, environment and animal anti-cruelty organizations.

Sharon Sporman, Director of Wellness Centers

Omni 41 Health & Fitness Connection/Duneland Health & Wellness Institute

Schererville

Sharon Sporman has been a leader in wellness in Northwest Indiana for 30 years. She began as an aerobics instructor at Omni 41 in the early 1980s. Today, she remains active in teaching, coaching and mentoring as well as being involved in community programs throughout the region. Sporman is involved with the Lake Central Wellness Committee, Safety Village, Wellness Council of Indiana and Relay for Life. Recently, she was promoted to regional director of Wellness Centers in the Franciscan Alliance Northern Region, overseeing Omni 41 in Schererville and Duneland in Chesterton.

May and Willie Thomas

New Life Christian Center

Gary

May and Willie Thomas are described as unsung heroes for the work they do in the community. Before opening New Life Christian Center, they worked in the steel mill. Since founding New Life Christian Center, they have rehabilitated an entire city block in Gary near 35th and Martin Luther King Boulevard. They financed improvements on most of the homes and continue to pick up trash and keep the area clean. They rehabilitated the former Chase Bank building at 4040 Broadway, which has been the home of the New Life Christian Center for 11 years. They saw a need and financed a free community seminar for residents, bringing in speakers from the Indiana Attorney General's office, Internal Revenue Service and attorneys to help the neighborhood learn how to manage their debt. For residents who didn't have transportation to work, May and Willie Thomas have provided cars, and they have provided shelter for families who didn't have a roof over their head. They have stepped forward to make their community a better place.

This entry was posted in [Business](#), [Leader & CEO Profiles](#), [Regional News](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

Previous Post: [2 St. Mary's students receive fellowships](#)

Next Post: [IU Health opens VNA office in Hamlet](#)



LEAVE A REPLY

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment