

# The SOUTH CENTRAL Business Connection

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Agresta, Storms & O'Leary PC welcomes new partner. Joseph Sullivan was welcomed as a Partner at the firm effective January 1, 2022. Sullivan, a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), has been an employee since January 2020.



"I am very excited for the partnership opportunity. I look forward to a bright future with and for ASO; our leadership is strong and committed to the firm, to the communities we work in and to the clients we serve. I have enjoyed and benefited from working with my co-workers and clients throughout the years and am thankful for the business relationships and friendships I have formed," stated Sullivan.

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**ON THE COVER**



Waynetta and Jason Lucas of Green Goddess Plant Bar. Photographed by Ali Kiel



# ON THE MOVE

■ First Financial Bank President and CEO **Archie Brown** has been appointed to the board of directors of the Cincinnati Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, one of 12 banks in the Federal Reserve system. It is a three-year appointment beginning on Jan. 1.

Brown has led First Financial since April 2018. He previously served as president, CEO and chairman of the board of MainSource Financial Group.

To learn more about First Financial, visit [bankatfirst.com](http://bankatfirst.com).



**STEPHEN STRINGER**

■ Blue & Co., LLC has announced recent promotions, including an employee from the Columbus office.

**Stephen "Steve" Stringer, CPA,** was appointed

to director effective Jan. 1. Stringer has 14 years experience in public accounting and focuses on tax planning and compliance for closely-held businesses in a

variety of industries. His primary responsibilities are managing the entire Blue client service team.

He graduated from Indiana Wesleyan University with a bachelor's degree in accounting and also holds a degree in health administration from Eastern Illinois University and a master's degree in health administration from Saint Louis University.

He is a member of the Indiana Certified Public Accountants Society and American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.



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## ON THE MOVE



TROY FORMAN

■ **Troy James Forman**, branch manager/financial adviser, Investment Management Consultant RJFS, 2635 Foxpointe Drive, Suite B, was recently named a member of the 2021 Raymond James Executive

II Council. This marks the sixth consecutive year that Forman has qualified for this recognition.

Forman, who joined Raymond James in 1999, has more than 24 years of experience in the financial services industry and wealth management.

■ Farm Credit Mid-America, an agricultural lending cooperative serving farmers, rural residents and agribusinesses throughout Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, including Bartholomew County, announces the appointment of **Dale Koester** to its board of directors.

The financial services cooperative mourned the loss of Board Member Kaye Hurst Whitehead earlier this year. The board selected Koester to fill the vacant seat for the remainder of the term.

Koester is the co-owner and operator of Koester Brothers Farms, Inc., a diversified dairy and grain operation in Wadesville that produces milks from 230 cows utilizing robotics. The operation also produces wheat, soybeans, and yellow corn and supplies straw to a local erosion control factory. His prior leadership experience includes serving on the American Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers and Ranchers National Committee, the Dairy Farmers of America's Young

Cooperators program Executive Committee, and the American Soybean Association's Young Leader Program. He was previously a member of Farm Credit Mid-America's advocate council.



DANIEL HEKMAN

■ **Dr. Daniel P. Hekman** has joined Franciscan Physician Network Franklin Township Family Medicine.

Offices are located at 8325 E. Southport Road, Indianapolis.

Hekman

completed a family medicine residency at Indiana University School of Medicine. He has a strong interest in treating dermatological conditions and performing skin procedures. He is board-certified in family medicine.

He received his undergraduate degree in biology at the University of Michigan. He earned a medical degree from Wayne State University School of Medicine with honors.

■ German American Bancorp, Inc. and its bank subsidiary, German American Bank, have announced the addition of **Ann M. Brown** to its corporate senior management team.

Brown has been promoted to senior vice president — director of human capital where she will oversee the departments of payroll and benefits, talent acquisition, and training and development. She has more than 27 years of banking industry experience. She is a graduate of the human resource management school program of the Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

She is SPHR certified, is a certified executive coach, published author, and an adjunct professor at Indiana aUniversity Southeast.

■ German American Bancorp Inc., and its bank subsidiary, German American Bank, have announced additions to the executive management team.

As announced and approved by the board of directors earlier in the year, **Mark A. Schroeder** will be assuming the newly created position of executive chairman, **D. Neil Dauby** will be assuming the position of president and chief executive officer, and **Bradley M. Rust** will transition to an expanded role of senior executive vice president and chief operating officer, while also continuing in his current chief financial officer role. Randy L. Braun will continue to serve as the company's executive vice president and chief banking officer, and Keith A. Leinenbach as the company's executive vice president and chief credit officer.

In addition to the current executive team, **Amy D. Jackson** will be promoted to executive vice president and chief administrative officer, and **Clay M. Barrett** will be promoted to executive vice president and chief digital and information officer.



JANE SEELIG

■ The American Association of Medical Assistants installed **Jane B. Seelig**, CMA-A (AAMA), Columbus, as a 2021-2023 AAMA Trustee at the 65th AAMA Annual Conference in Houston, Texas. In

this capacity, Seelig represents medical assistants and CMAs (AAMA)® across the nation.

Seelig retired from the Dermatology Center of Indiana after serving as a patient account representative for 15 years. During her career as a CMA-A (AAMA), she was employed in medical practices as a practice manager, patient account manager, patient account representative and medical practice consultant. She is the immediate past president of the Indiana Society of Medical Assistants and treasurer of the East Central District Chapter of Medical Assistants, and she recently served on the AAMA Membership Development Committee, Nominating Committee and Conference CE Sessions Task Force.

■ **Sherry Weir** has been appointed manager of infection prevention for Franciscan Health Central Indiana. In that role, she oversees all programs and protocols designed to protect the health of patients and staff at hospitals in Indianapolis, Mooresville and Carmel.

She most recently served as an infection preventionist for Fran-

ciscan and is a National Healthcare Safety Network expert, monitoring and tracking real-time communicable disease data to share with clinicians, hospital leadership and public health agencies. Prior to that, she was a manager of nursing resources, patient care coordinator and staff nurse.

A member of the hospital's infection prevention team since 1994, Weir has worked a variety of roles, such as conducting safety rounds with medical and support units. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, she has been responsible for daily data collection and maintaining departmental records. Further, she has been a key member of the COVID-19 Incident Command Center and has regularly updated employees on disease trends at virtual town hall meetings.

■ **E. Doug Poplin, MD, MPH**, has rejoined Franciscan Physician Network Columbus Primary and Specialty Care and is welcoming new patients. He recently completed a seven-month stint as medical director at Franciscan WorkingWell occupational services.

Board-certified in family medicine,



**E. DOUG POPLIN**

Poplin has served as a consulting occupational health physician for the federal government in Indianapolis and an industrial health services doctor for Toyota Motor Manufacturing in Georgetown, Ky.

He is a certified civil surgeon by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service and certified medical examiner for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Poplin received his undergraduate degrees in biochemistry and molecular biology at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, and earned his medical degree from the University of Kentucky College of Medicine, where he received academic honors.

He completed a family medicine residency at Franciscan Health and later earned a master's of public health in occupational medicine from the Medical College of Wisconsin.

— Staff Reports

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# AROUND THE WATER COOLER



TERRY AND CONSTANCE MARBACH

## Marbachs sponsor attorney for law center

BLOOMINGTON — Conservation Law Center is creating a new position, the Constance and Terry Marbach Conservation Attorney.

The couple have been conservation vanguards for decades, with a long history of funding the conservation of important natural areas for wildlife habitat, water quality and biological diversity in Indiana and across the U.S. This support has resulted in thousands of protected acres, including some of Indiana's most biologically important areas.

For more information, visit [conservationlawcenter.org](https://conservationlawcenter.org).

## VanNahmen named IUPUC Employee of the Quarter



MARSHA VANNAHMEN

Marsha VanNahmen has been named the Employee of the Quarter at IUPUC for quarter one. Since the beginning of 2016, IUPUC has recognized an employee every quarter for contributions made that go above and beyond regular work responsibilities.

Since joining IUPUC as the assistant director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2006, VanNahmen has strived to provide students the tools to succeed both in college and as they move forward into their careers. In her role, she continually works to bring relevant and meaningful training and workshop opportunities to both the IUPUC and Ivy Tech faculty and staff through her work with the Gateway Community of Practice, the Gateway Fellows, Growth Mindset programming, Civic Lab, National Equity Project, IUPUC Diversity Council as well as book reads and other programs.

As a member of the IUPUC committee for faculty development, VanNahmen participates in grant writing, most recently obtaining a second FACET Mini-Grant, as well as a Welcoming Grant to enhance IUPUC's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. She also serves on joint committees between IUPUC, Ivy Tech, and the Community Education Coalition in the planning and development of student resource guides, grant-writing, and space/center development in the Columbus Learning Center.

## Hard Truth Distilling earns whiskey honor

NASHVILLE — Hard Truth Distilling Co.'s first batch of Sweet Mash Rye Whiskey was recently named among Fred Minnick's Top 100 American Whiskeys of 2021 during his annual ranking event. The designation given to Hard Truth's Sweet Mash Rye Whiskey batch is unprecedented since it is their first batch to hit the market.

"Never in my career has a new

whiskey producer come out with a first batch of a product and it tasted like this. The flavor is absolutely fantastic," said Minnick. "This is the best first batch of a new distillery I have ever tasted."

To identify the Top 100 American Whiskeys, Minnick conducted a thorough assessment of more than 700 whiskeys, all released in 2021, evaluating each by color, nose, palate, finish and uniqueness.

"We're on the forefront of a new era of whiskey-making as sweet mash pioneers here in the state of Indiana, and it is truly an honor to be included on a list with such legendary distillers, especially with our first batch," said Hard Truth Master Distiller Bryan Smith.

Made with the sweet mash method, with 100% fresh ingredients and aged in barrels for a minimum of two years, Hard Truth Sweet Mash Rye Whiskey, Batch 1, Mash Bill 01 is Hard Truth's debut sweet mash whiskey, released in November.

Headquartered in Nashville, Hard Truth Distilling Co. distills rums, vodkas, gins and whiskeys, distributed throughout Indiana and in parts of Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and Florida

Founded in 2015, it is one of three companies within the BWQOHT, Inc. umbrella — Quaff ON! Brewing Co. brews more than 40 craft beers, including well-known Busted Knuckle and Six Foot Blonde, and Big Woods Restaurant Group in central and southern Indiana.

For more, visit <https://hardtruthdistilling.com/spirit-finder/>.

## Koch honored by state prosecutor council



ERIC KOCH

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council recently recognized Sen. Eric Koch, R-Bedford, with a Legislative Excellence Award for 2021.

Koch was chosen for the award for his work on the council's priority legislation, House Enrolled Act 1082, the high tech crime units bill. The legislation creates a fund for establishing 10 high tech crimes units serving different geographic areas of Indiana. Police and prosecutors in the units will partner with university students to examine electronic devices and process them for evidence from GPS locations, texts, app usage, voicemails and phone calls.

Koch serves Senate District 44, which includes all or parts of Bartholomew, Brown, Jackson, Lawrence and Monroe counties.

## Zoning approved for dog grooming business

The Bartholomew County Board of Zoning Appeals gave conditional use approval for a request by David and Brenda Simmons to allow a dog grooming kennel in an Agriculture: Preferred zoning district. The property is 8111 E. County Road 450 North in Flatrock Township.

According to the Simmons' application, the second location of Tailwagger's Dog Grooming Salon will be located in the 450 North Brewing Co. original restaurant building. The company has opened its new location next door on the same property.

The salon will be owned and operated by Daron and Mandy Simmons, who will lease retail space for the endeavor.

## Faurecia receives 'platinum' award

Faurecia Columbus South Plant has received a Supplier Quality Excellence Award from Caterpillar.

Every year, construction equipment manufacturer Caterpillar recognizes a number of suppliers who meet or exceed standards in areas including product quality, delivery and program performance.

Caterpillar created the Supplier Quality Excellence Award to recognize suppliers who demonstrate a commitment to excellence and drive a "zero defects" culture within their organizations. Certification levels are awarded in bronze, silver, gold and platinum, with platinum being the top award.

Faurecia's Columbus South Plant received the highest level, platinum from Caterpillar.

For more on Faurecia, visit [faurecia.com](http://faurecia.com).

## Two Indiana-based aviation companies merge

Two Indiana-based aviation companies, Jet Access with service in Columbus, and Eagle Creek Aviation, have merged.

Jet Access took over operations at Indianapolis Regional Airport (formerly known as Mount Comfort Airport) in early 2021 and now oversees 10 fixed-base operators and runs 11 flight schools, including additional Indiana operations at Columbus Municipal Airport and Shelbyville Municipal Airport. Jet Access is known in the industry as one of the largest Part-135 Charter operators in the U.S., operating more than 40 executive jets nationwide from its Palm Beach, Florida operations base.

Eagle Creek Aviation has a nearly 40-year history in the Indianapolis area, providing aircraft maintenance, sales, FBO and charter services at Eagle Creek Airport in Indianapolis. It operates at Indianapolis Executive Airport and Frankfort/Clinton County Airport under First Wing Jet Center brand.

The new company will employ more than 380 people, including more than 110 pilots and 75 aircraft technicians, with the majority based in central Indiana, where the combined company will be headquartered.

Jet Access will be the 12th largest Part-135 private jet operator in the U.S. with more than 50 planes in the fleet.

— Staff Reports



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NATURALScape SERVICES INC.



# GROWING A FAMILY BUSINESS

Change of  
scenery helped  
landscape architect  
discover his passion

STORY BY BARNEY QUICK  
PHOTOS BY CARLA CLARK

**Mike Willey and  
his son Forrest  
stand outside  
NaturalScape  
Services Inc.**

It was the early 1980s when Mike Willey's grounds maintenance position with a large manufacturing company had been eliminated.

The Seymour man had been working at the company after graduating from Purdue University with a landscape architecture degree, and found himself in need of a new job.

"That company had to downsize and my position was one of the first they eliminated," he said.

Willey decided to give starting his own business a try until "something better came along."

That's how Willey's NaturalScape Services Inc. was born.

"I sometimes jokingly say, 'I guess nothing better ever came along,'" he said.

What could be better, considering the business has been serving commercial and residential clients in southern Indiana since 1984. The business is four miles southwest of Cortland in a part of the county known as Honeytown.

The company offers hardscapes, design work, lawn establishment and maintenance, landscape maintenance and a dozen or so other related services. Mike's son, Forrest, who has worked for the company full-time since 2009, also is a certified arborist who offers plant health care for the business.

"We're full service," Forrest said. "About the only things we don't do are large tree removal and trimming, and snow removal."



---

## NaturalScape Services Inc.

**PHONE:** 812-522-7332

**ADDRESS:** 1549 E. County  
Road 450N, Seymour

**WEBSITE:** [naturalscape  
services.com](http://naturalscape<br/>services.com)

The company also manages a nursery and greenhouse to help supply them for projects.

Mike said he was hesitant to start the business because he felt it was outside his comfort zone to have to regularly interact with customers and vendors.

But that's exactly what he has enjoyed most, particularly in the early days of the business.

"The thing that frightened me the most about doing business has been the biggest blessing," he reminisced.

When the company started, it was just Mike and one or two other part-time workers. It now employs four full-time workers and two to four

part-time seasonal workers to get them through the busiest times of the year.

Forrest, having grown up around the business, has a different set of memories, recalling the early mornings when he was as young as 8 or 9 helping in the nursery.

"My earliest memories were lining out thousands and thousands of tiny boxwoods, oaks, and various other trees and shrubs in our nursery," he said.

Mike said it helps he gets to work within his passion each day, which is the landscape design process. He said it is rewarding to create something new, and even more so when he gets to reimagine an area for someone.



“It’s wonderful to take a blank canvas and create something new, but I think it’s even more enjoyable to take an existing property and recreate something totally different,” he said.

That is found most notably in some of their larger commercial accounts at Schneck Medical Center and branches of Jackson County Bank.

But each project is treated with the idea of specialty service done correctly. Forrest said that commercial accounts tend to be more concerned with pricing while residential accounts are more inclined to be concerned with quality.

Since Forrest became a certified arborist in 2018, he has enjoyed the challenges of problem solving that the

work presents as there are so many variables to consider when diagnosing and treating plants.

“I love being a sort of arborological detective of sorts,” he said. “Modern effective management requires balancing plant health concerns with public perceptions, new pesticide chemistries, a changing climate, our ecosystem, myriad conditions under which a plant can grow, and even agricultural practices.”

Mike said that passion and interest in plant and tree treatments is an area he had interest in, but never had the time to pursue that work. He said he is glad Forrest has taken on that time of work to offer customers.

**Pictured clockwise from left: Landscaping work by NaturalScape Services Inc. // Crew members Jose Gomez and Robert Bowlen pose for a photograph with Mike Willey, and Forrest Willey on the bed of the Ford E450 at NaturalScape Services, Inc. // A completed landscaping project.**



**Landscaping projects by NaturalScape Services Inc.**

“Forrest has always had the ability to learn at an accelerated pace and has advanced the company in other disciplines quickly,” he said. “I’m excited to watch the company evolve towards his interests.”

There will come a time when Forrest takes on the role of running the company and will focus more towards the plant health care and maintenance.

“Dad hasn’t talked to me about any immediate plans to retire. In truth, I doubt he ever truly does,” he said.

One skill that is necessary for all small business owners to have can be found at NaturalScape after years of serving customers in southern Indiana, and it’s the principle of working honestly with customers and providing a high quality service at a fair price.

Of course the company has focused on getting projects done efficiently, but there’s also a service that not many can provide, and that is making sure customers are treated like family.

“We have found that we are sometimes playing the role of therapist more often while on a job since we may be the only people that a client could see for several days,” Forrest said.

It’s that type of work that has made NaturalScape a family success for so long.

“We have found that we are sometimes playing the role of therapist more often while on a job since we may be the only people that a client could see for several days.

— FORREST WILLEY



Mike Willey and his son Forrest stand outside NaturalScape Services Inc.

# Budding Business





GREEN GODDESS

GREEN GODDESS  
PLANT BAR

GREEN GODDESS  
PLANT BAR



# Grow plant collections and friendly connections at Green Goddess Plant Bar

STORY BY BARNEY QUICK  
PHOTOS BY ALI KIEL

The business model for Green Goddess Plant Bar is rather different from that of a gardening center at a big-box store or a sprawling nursery. At Green Goddess, the emphasis is on fostering friendships based on a passion for exploring the world of visually striking and exotic plants.

Do you remember building terrariums in school? It was exciting to watch the plant life within the glass walls flourish. It gave one the sense of creating a little world suitable for beautiful living things.

Visitors to Green Goddess can sit at the bar and choose plants for a terrarium or a living wall, or just to take home to serve as stand-alone enhancements, while sipping a complimentary glass of wine or a craft beer.

Proprietor Waynetta Lucas stresses, though, that Green Goddess visits also appeal to kids.

"I thought it would be mostly adults, but I've been hosting lots of birthday parties," she says.

The establishment is located on Second Street, a little west of the State Street bridge over Hawcreek. It's a relatively small space. The bar is in

the front area. Adjacent to that is the room where most of the plants for selecting are displayed. There are two rooms set up for building terrariums.

Lucas opened Green Goddess in July. She'd previously been in the human resources field for a number of years.

"I'm basically a people pleaser," she explains, "and when COVID hit, it got really hard to be that, so I saw it as a time to switch career paths. I'd had flower gardens growing up and thought selling plants would be a good way for people to connect."

The staff consists of her husband Jason and daughter Lexi Garrity, as well as an East High School student who occasionally helps.

"Jason had no idea people liked plants so much," she says. "Now he's fallen in love with it, too. He gets off from his plant [as in industrial facility] manager job and comes over here and plays."

There are two basic types of terrariums. Open terrariums require more maintenance, particularly watering. Each plant needs a tablespoon of water every 7 to 10 days. Closed terrariums produce their own humidity.

"I tell customers to choose the type of terrarium they want based on whether it's going to hang or sit. Then they pick out their glass enclosure, container, soil and accessories, such as stones and shells."

Lucas has suppliers for plants and equipment in several states. She makes weekly trips to Chicago, and monthly trips to Cincinnati.

She notes that variegated strings (of hearts, pearls, turtles and dolphins) are big right now. Because the string-of-heart plants are hard to get from nurseries, she propagates them in her basement.

Green Goddess also carries tropical species and cacti, as well as succulents. Succulents are plants that have parts that have thickened to

*"I'm basically a people pleaser, and when COVID hit, it got really hard to be that, so I saw it as a time to switch career paths. I'd had flower gardens growing up and thought selling plants would be a good way for people to connect."*

*Waynetta Lucas,  
owner of Green Goddess Plant Bar*



**Green Goddess Plant Bar sells a variety of plant accessories and merchandise.**



Customers can create their own terrarium at Green Goddess Plant Bar.





**Green Goddess Plant Bar** sells a variety of house plants.



serve a water-storage function. Aloe plants are an example of succulents.

“When succulents get a lot of sun, they change color and flower,” she says.

Lucas also sells air plants, which are fascinating in that they are free-standing as opposed to being rooted in soil. One can just set them on a shelf.

“I’ve known people who have had air plants for years without fertilizing them,” says Lucas.

She’s willing to research any plants someone inquires about but that she doesn’t carry.

Along with birthday parties, she hosts bachelorette and wedding parties. She also makes deliveries to hospitals, nursing homes and the homes of people quarantining with COVID.

Repeat business is a major part of Green Goddess’s activity.

“I have about 15 to 20 ladies who

come in here three times a week,” says Lucas. “Some people from Indianapolis come down once a month.”

Her marketing strategy mainly consists of a website and social media presence. Her son has been helpful in optimizing Green Goddess’s online profile with his knowledge of the ways for the name to show up quickly in searches.

Lucas eventually wants to have a greenhouse and offer more rare tropical plants.

For now, she’s hosting a remarkable and growing number of people to a location that doesn’t exactly invite foot traffic. It’s a testimony to the concept she’s developed. A place where people can convene over a glass of wine and talk shop about plants and build terrariums has added a social-destination touch to the city’s south side. One might say Green Goddess is changing the landscape.

## Green Goddess Plant Bar

**PHONE:** 812-552-5142

**ADDRESS:** 951 Second St., Columbus

**WEBSITE:** greengoddessplantbar.com



Luke Otte and Bruce Otte, owners of Bruce Otte Painting, Inc. pose for a photograph.



# FROM BEES TO BRUSHES

## Local painting company is making some changes

STORY BY BARNEY QUICK  
PHOTOS BY CARLA CLARK

Early 2022 is a period of transition for Bruce Otte Painting. The company is moving into a new building, and there's been a change in management whereby Bruce's son Luke has become president and Bruce is now his employee.

The new building expands the company's physical space by a half, from the 2,000 square feet it has had at the Cherry Street location where it's been since 2008 to 3,000 at the new site on Lewis Place, just off US 31 a little south of Taylorsville. There will be more warehouse space, as well as a far more favorable parking situation for employees.

The transition has been nine years in the making. Luke had concluded his active duty stint with the Air Force (he's still in the Air Guard) and came on board to run a painting crew. He then went into sales for the business full time. He enjoyed learning more about the various facets of management, but he had plenty on his plate, as his family grew to three children (now four).

But now the moment has arrived.

"Most people won't notice the transition," says Luke. "The company name will stay the same. Our staff will stay the same."

Painting was a secondary professional activity to bee-keeping early in Bruce's working life. He had painted his parents' house at age sixteen, which led to painting those of his aunt and his grandparents. He earned an associates'



**Luke Otte, owner of Bruce Otte Painting Inc., helps paint the edges of a pergola. Photo by Garrett C. Photography**

degree in commercial beekeeping, which led to a career that took him to Scotland, New Zealand, Texas and California. He moved the base of his beekeeping operation from Columbus to south of San Antonio, where he stayed the first six months of the year.

“I was painting to support the business,” he says. “I’d come back to Columbus for that in the summer, fall and early winter.”

Several factors led to his move into painting full time: marriage, kids and the northward migration of African killer bees from Mexico.

“I decided it was too risky.”

So he made the switch in 1989 and incorporated a few years later. He operated out of his house for a while, and then a rental property of his that had a storefront on the side. The company occupied the Cherry Street location in 2008.

The goal is to have the move to the Lewis Place location completed by the end of February. Factors such as COVID-related supply chain issues affecting many businesses may modify that.

The company culture at Bruce Otte Painting emphasizes a team attitude.

“We look for people who enjoy painting and can get along with others,” says Bruce. “Years ago, an older gentleman approached me at a job fair wearing a suit and tie. He was retired from a sales job with a large corporation. He wanted to paint. He wanted to see tangible results of a day’s effort after years of moving papers from one side of his desk to another. He was with me for ten years, from age 60 to 70. I still

see him around town. He's now in his 90s."

The company has generally regarded its market to be Bartholomew and Brown Counties, but that will likely expand with the move.

"Our rule of thumb has been a 45-mile radius from the office," says Luke. "Now we'll be positioned by the interstate and will probably seek work in Franklin and Greenwood."

The staff at Bruce Otte Painting is a creative bunch. Five employees are guitarists. Bruce is not surprised.

"There's an art aspect to our product," he says. "There's a lot of consulting with the customer about color, sheen levels and how our contribution is going to fit into the overall look of the property."

Bruce notes some changes in

the industry that he's seen over the course of his career. Latex paints have largely taken the place of oil-based paints, which leads to a far more pleasant work experience for crews. Rollers, which "everyone pooh-poohed at first," have become prevalent.

The company has continued to offer an expanding array of services, such as pressure washing, wallpaper stripping, cabinet repolishing and drywall repair.

Even though their time is increasingly consumed by cost estimating, job scheduling, record keeping, payroll, sales and other management activities, the Ottes are still painters at heart.

"My dad and I still love the physical act of painting," says Luke. "There's just not a lot of time for it these days."

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## Bruce Otte Painting Inc.

**PHONE:** 812-342-0735

**ADDRESS:** 2221 N. Cherry St., Columbus

**WEBSITE:** [bruceottepainting.com](http://bruceottepainting.com)



Dan Stone, right, and Eric Hahn, left, work at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.



# What every small business owner should know today

STORY & PHOTO BY STATEPOINT

Given how much has changed about the way people do business over the last few years, experts say it may be time for entrepreneurs to rethink how they store and protect company data, and collaborate with their teams.

According to Brian Mallari, a marketing director in Western Digital's hard drive business unit, a shared storage or network attached storage (NAS) solution can help, and here's why:

**Cost:** As every owner of a small- or mid-sized business (SMB) knows, cutting costs without cutting corners is key to protecting the bottom line. While cloud storage fees can incur ongoing costs, adopting a NAS solution is a great way to pay once while keeping sensitive data local to the office or home.

**Capacity:** Before selecting a storage solution, consider your needs. From wedding photographers to graphic designers, many businesses need a storage solution that can grow over time. Popular

NAS storage drives for small and medium businesses, such as the WD Red family of products from Western Digital, range in capacity from 1 terabyte (TB) to 18TBs, making them a good solution for those who work with large amounts of data.

**A shifting workplace:** With hybrid and remote workplaces becoming the norm for businesses of all sizes, this has added new challenges for business owners and their staff wishing to easily collaborate, edit files, and work with shared files and databases. With a NAS storage system, all users' PCs and laptops can be assigned permission to access the storage solution, giving them the ability to load files and data wirelessly or via connected ports. What's more, such a system can help protect your team's work and data against loss from a network outage or potential cyberattacks, as remote/home data can be backed up to the storage device itself at the office. Because NAS solutions

use several hard drives, they can provide protection of data via redundancy, also referred to as RAID. In other words, should one drive fail, the data lives on.

**Getting set up:** Getting set up with a SMB NAS storage system is easy. The solutions are available at consumer electronics stores and online, and you can choose from a NAS system that includes from two to 24 slots or "bays" for hard drives to make sure all your data is covered. Most NAS solutions, especially two- and four-bay solutions, can simply plug into an internet router via Ethernet.

To learn more about NAS-ready data storage options, visit [west-erndigital.com](http://west-erndigital.com).

"In today's world, small- and mid-sized businesses need both reliable, affordable data storage solutions, as well as tools that allow for collaboration among workers near and far," says Mallari. "Rethinking how data is stored can help entrepreneurs achieve both these goals."

Have you invested blood, sweat and every penny in your business but are now looking to diversify?

The thought can be both exciting and frightening at the same time!



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Zach Greiner, CFP®  
Assoc. Director of Client Service  
zach@kirrmар.com

Matt Kirr  
Director of Client Service  
matt@kirrmар.com

Maggie Kamman, CFP®  
Assoc. Director of Client Service  
maggie@kirrmар.com

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# RETHINKING RESHORING

## Supply-chain snafus renew interest in reviving US manufacturing

STORY BY ANDREW MAYKUTH  
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER (TNS)

Michael Araten knows a thing or two about bringing manufacturing back to the United States. Araten and his company, the Rodon Group, got many accolades and a visit from President Barack Obama a few years ago after shifting assembly of its K'nex brand of plastic construction toys from China to Rodon's plant in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

As global supply chains melted down recently in the pandemic, Araten ratcheted up his evangelism for repatriating production to America, a process known as reshoring. He and Rodon are encouraging other U.S. manufacturers to evaluate the true costs for producing overseas — including soaring costs and shipping delays — and to bring back some manufacturing to American companies like Rodon, which employs 128 people who make precision plastic parts.

“All of a sudden, the stuff you thought you were saving on overseas, you're not saving,” said Araten, who is chief executive of Sterling Drive Ventures, the family firm that owns Rodon Group. “I saw this happen in the Great Recession: There's a shock to the economic system that causes people to really look at their total cost of ownership.”



Reshoring efforts have received renewed interest during the pandemic, spurred by frustration with supply shortages and price increases. On Friday, Intel announced plans to build “the largest silicon manufacturing location on the planet” near Columbus, Ohio, a \$20 billion investment to address the global undersupply of computer chips whose production is dominated by Asia.

Some advocates say domestic manufacturing is at a turning point, after years of contraction. The pandemic has stirred a close scrutiny of weaknesses in supply chains and raised the possibility of reshoring as a potential solution. But changing course after five decades of offshoring primarily to Asia will not happen quickly, experts say. Rein-

forced U.S. industries will likely require more automation and create fewer direct jobs than the uncompetitive factories that shut down in recent decades.

The decision to bring back manufacturing is not casual, and requires thinking through every step of procurement, production, and packaging, said Araten. Global supply chains that have evolved in recent decades to produce a stunning banquet of affordable merchandise are immensely complex, and not easily dismantled and rebuilt.

#### **INVESTMENT IN AUTOMATION**

To compete with low labor-cost manufacturers overseas, Rodon invested heavily in automation and robotics. Much of Araten’s workforce is concentrated in high-skill

jobs, such as fabrication and maintenance of the sophisticated stainless steel molds used to make plastic parts, and the supervision of the robotic injection-molding presses. Rodon has about 250,000 square feet of manufacturing, office, and warehouse space at two locations in Hatfield.

In a typical production run, Tammy Shiber, 59, a quality inspector who last week marked her 34th anniversary at Rodon, oversees a fleet of automated machines making fine mesh discs that serve as filters in the bottom of single-serving coffee pods. A robotic arm withdraws a sheet of discs from the hot mold, passing them through an automated visual inspection to ensure the perforations are open, separates the discs from their plastic trees (the leftover plastic runners are recycled), and then circles back to collect a new batch of discs. Over and over again, 32 presses produce 8 million discs a day.

It’s fitting in the pandemic that much of Rodon’s new business is in the medical field. One company hired Rodon to provide plastic parts for its COVID-19 test kits, a business that has accelerated with the surge of the omicron variant. Rodon also recently developed special plastic handles for cartons that can withstand the supercool freezers that store some vaccines.

After Araten heard about a shortage of medical swabs needed for COVID tests — there are few sizable domestic producers, and hospitals depend on imports — Rodon developed a flexible nasal swab from medical-grade plastic in consultation with Fox Chase Cancer Center. It’s now making a million of them a week. It wants to expand production, but new equipment is back-ordered — waiting for imported parts stalled in the supply chain.

Most of the plastic pieces Rodon manufactures perform vital support functions, such as the threaded seals on food and beverage containers, or components for windows



and doors. Toys make up less than 10% of its business —the K'nex line for which the company is known was sold off in 2018, though Rodon still produces them under contract.

Rodon's supporting role as a supplier for products made by other manufacturers means there is a limit to how much influence its efforts can have on complex global supply chains. "We're not the general contractor for the world," said Araten.

#### **'CONTROL OVER OUR DESTINY'**

Attention to reshoring is not new — America has been losing factories and jobs to low-cost countries since the 1970s, and offshoring periodically becomes a hot political topic, especially during economic downturns.

Reading Truck, a Berks County, Pennsylvania manufacturer that builds distinctive tool-box service bodies that are fitted to truck chassis, wanted to reclaim manufacturing it had outsourced to China about a decade ago amid concerns about the quality of the steel and aluminum fabrication done by overseas suppliers. It brought the manufacturing work to its plants in Pennsylvania and Oklahoma, and has no regrets.

"Having the manufacturing done locally here in Reading and in Claremore, Oklahoma, gives us a greater control over our own destiny,

especially in the fragile ever-changing environment that we're currently operating," said Balint Peto, the vice president of procurement at Reading Truck. The company has 1,200 employees at 22 locations, but more than half are in Reading.

Peto said the "Made in America" distinction is important to its customers, the field mechanics and tradespeople who use Reading trucks as mobile workshops. But Reading Truck's fortunes are still tied to global supply chains. Its sales depend upon the availability of truck chassis, mostly from American manufacturers like Ford and General Motors, whose production is hindered because of limited supplies of critical imported components such as computer chips.

"The lack of chassis availability is impacting our end users," Peto said.

The higher cost of American labor and complying with stricter U.S. environmental and workplace rules can make American products less competitive in the market. Americans have enjoyed access to more affordable manufactured goods at lower prices than were available to previous generations, thanks partly to low-cost overseas goods. But offshoring has led to the loss of American jobs and income and disruptions of local economies.

Despite reports by advocates about

a resurgence in reshoring, skeptics say the nation's trade deficit set a record last year amid soaring demand for imported goods. The annual reshoring index, compiled by the international consulting firm Kearney to track whether manufacturing jobs are coming back to America from 14 low-cost Asian nations, found that factory work soared in Asia in 2020 to nearly its highest point since 2008.

"Our latest findings show that the U.S. has not reclaimed manufacturing jobs in any material way," Kearney reported last year.

#### **A POLITICAL DIMENSION**

There is sometimes a vast difference between the announced claims from business executives about reshoring and what is actually taking place on the ground, said Morris Cohen, a professor emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. Cohen specializes in manufacturing and logistics and says he has been "working on global supply chain strategy long before supply chains became cool."

Companies often announce reshoring initiatives to great fanfare because they want to be seen as good corporate citizens, Cohen said, citing Apple's 2019 announcement that it was moving manufacturing of its high-end Mac Pro laptop from China to Texas.

"Well, if you look at the data, the vast majority of what they continue to produce was being produced in China," he said. "There's a political dimension to this you can't ignore."

Cohen coauthored research in 2015 and 2016 that showed that much manufacturing touted as "reshored" was actually new investment from foreign companies seeking access to American markets and innovation. The research found that global supply-chain movements were crisscrossing more than ever, and even within the same company, one department might be outsourcing while another is reshoring. The bottom line is that there was not a significant net improvement to U.S. manufacturing.



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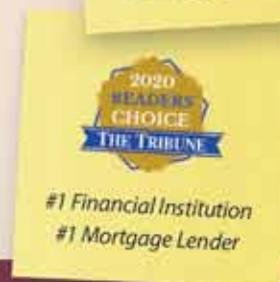
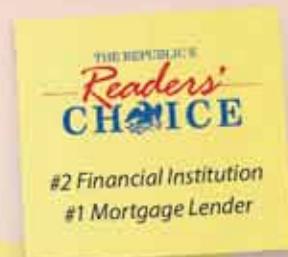
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