

My View: Logistics opportunities exist for those who grab them

By: *Jeremy Woods, CCIM, SIOR*



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Too often, news that the Indianapolis area has landed a new distribution facility is met with shrugs and frowns. “Oh, great,” some people say, “another warehouse with low-paying jobs.”

It’s time to update that thinking, because today’s logistics industry is a high-tech world that offers plenty of opportunities for highly skilled people to design supply chains, manage the flow of freight and perform other highly compensated tasks.

That’s exactly why we might miss out on future logistics growth: We’re failing to deliver the well-educated workforce that industry requires.

Indiana’s status as a logistics powerhouse is old news, but it still is exciting to consider our status as the Crossroads of America.

Those infrastructure assets combine with our central location and a targeted logistics strategy for corporations to create the fifth busiest state for commercial freight traffic, with more than 724 million tons of freight traveling through the state each year. We’ve matched those assets with the private- and public-sector investments.

This bodes well for Indiana, especially when you consider that, according to Conexus Indiana, an initiative working to capitalize on emerging opportunities in advanced manufacturing, U.S. freight movement should double within the next 25 years.

Unfortunately, while Indiana is home to some of America’s most productive workers, its population is among the least educated. We rank 42nd in the nation in college-educated workers, and 31st in terms of workers with a high school diploma or greater.

Some of you might think, “How much education do you need to move boxes?” But, again, when we talk about logistics, we’re not just talking about the warehouse jobs many are quick to dismiss as “menial.” The 21st-century logistics industry offers high-tech, professional careers -- some with eyebrow-raising salaries. But getting into those careers requires education.

We’re risking a big part of our economic future because we have a largely undertrained and unprepared workforce.

Yet, we’ve created a great opportunity for ambitious men and women to pursue prosperity. It’s a matter of supply and demand: The marketplace is expecting a shortage in a key commodity -- qualified people; as a result, those who are willing to supply this commodity by entering the logistics industry stand to benefit.

The good news is that many of Indiana’s schools offer programs in advanced logistics. Area colleges and universities offer a range of programs, from two-year associate degrees to MBAs in supply chain management. Other schools provide enough classes to allow a student to specialize in those areas while pursuing a business degree.

In other words, resources are available, and the potential is there for Central Indiana to retain its position as a leading logistics hub. But it won’t happen unless Central Indiana leaders promote logistics as the rewarding career path it has become, encourage our best and brightest to pursue opportunities in this booming industry, and stop shrugging off the impact logistics can have on our workforce and our economy.

Woods is an executive vice president with Summit Realty Group.