



Chesterton High School



Downtown

A Smart, Patient Approach to Growth

If ever there was a word that described the town of Chesterton, it would be patient. The 12,556-person community nestled just south of Lake Michigan in Porter County has been patiently waiting for a variety of developments to sprout and flourish the landscape in a way not seen in the Duneland town for years. This sensible approach to economic development and residential growth, town leaders believe, will create an economic stability that will ensure the community's livelihood for generations to come.

Community leaders recognized 15 years ago that steel, while a critical component of northwest Indiana's economy, could not be depended on for the town's future growth. At the same time, town leadership did not want to turn Ind. 49, the town's main north/south artery, simply into a retail corridor. Doing so would have projected the wrong, long-term plan for the town that does not want an economy that's entirely retail-based or pigeonholed as a bedroom community. As a result, town officials have rejected some proposals over the years that would have meant retail construction and job creation, but the instantaneous economic gratification would not have satisfied the long-term needs of the town.

"Chesterton set the bar higher," said

Thomas Godfrey, Vice President of Lake Erie Land Company. "They didn't go the easy route. It's a different approach from 'what am I going to eat tomorrow to what kind of community will my grandchildren will be living in.'"

That long-term approach to community planning is embraced by both Chesterton's public and private sectors. Working in conjunction with the business community, Chesterton Town Council has undertaken aggressive efforts – in terms of zoning and land use planning – to accommodate new growth. Sewer and water utilities are in place to handle the increased business development. The town's comprehensive plan was updated in 2004 and will be updated again this year.

"We are preparing ourselves for the next wave of development and we will probably be the community most prepared in Indiana to accommodate new development," said Chesterton Town Council Vice President Jeff Trout. "It's almost like it is halftime and when the gun goes off we'll be ready to go into the second half as much as any other community."

For Chesterton, the second half of the game involves the attraction of medical facilities. The town's top economic development priority is to become a regional medical hub.

The medical profession offers high wages and Chesterton has undeveloped land to accommodate new construction. Additionally, Chesterton is ideally situated in between some of the Midwest's most traveled roadways – I-94 and Indiana Toll Road to the north and U.S. 30 to the south.

"The medical industry is where jobs come from and where there's real economic stability," Trout said.

The makings of a medical cornerstone are already in place. The Sisters of Saint Francis Health Services operates the Duneland Health and Wellness Institute and the Lakeshore Bone and Joint Institute, a dialysis center and surgery center is located in the Coffee Creek Center.

By bringing more medical jobs to Chesterton, town officials believe this will form the economic infrastructure for sustainable commerce for years to come. They would prefer for these higher paying jobs to lead to further commercial growth rather than opening the door to retail creation without the people in place to frequent the stores. Development of medical facilities will trigger commercial development opportunities, including hotels, high-end restaurants and residential growth.

"Live, work and play in the same community – that's what we want. If we can bring



Coffee Creek Center

high paying jobs people will stay here and it will create a strong community,” Trout said.

Chesterton may be better suited than any other community in the state to land medical-related industry. Porter County is the only county in Indiana with only one hospital – Porter Hospital is located several miles south in Valparaiso. Therefore, Chesterton’s absence of a hospital makes it fertile ground for area hospitals interested in expanding to the community. Community Health Services plans to break ground this year on a \$275 million hospital just south of Chesterton town limits. The Sisters of Saint Francis Health Services plans to build a \$20 million emergency care facility at Indian Boundary Road and Roberts Road that will open in mid 2010.

More medical facility growth can be accommodated in Coffee Creek Center. The development is among the most unique developments in the country because of its innovative approach to sustainable design and ecological-based land planning. It’s a nearly 700-acre development that combines residential, commercial and recreational elements in one harmonious environment. Coffee Creek Center is an example of the smart, sustainable growth that leaders want all over Chesterton. There’s also the exclusive Sand Creek, a country club community that features one of the finest golfing facilities in the Midwest.

Drawing people to live in Chesterton has not been a daunting task; the quality of life in the town is among the best in northern Indiana.

The variety of residential developments, both middle and upper-class, achieve a balance in meeting the needs of homeowners.

A hugely attractive feature about Chesterton is its proximity to the Indiana Dune State Park and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Porter County is Indiana’s only county in which there is both a national and state park. Quick access to one of the world’s largest fresh body lakes and

the accompanying recreational opportunities is an appealing feature for individuals and businesses. On the education front, the Duneland School Corporation, made up of more than 5,000 students across nine schools, possesses a highly regarded reputation for academic excellence and quality instruction. Annually, Chesterton High School’s graduation rate is around 90 percent. Close to 75 percent of those who graduate from Chesterton High School every year goes on to attend a two- or four-year college. In addition, the music, athletic and

speech and debate programs are celebrated for their state and national success.

“Education has always been a top priority in the Duneland community,” said Dr. Dirk Baer, Superintendent of Schools. We’re a big part of the quality of life in Chesterton and we’re a big factor in bringing people to the community.”

A new energy in downtown is bringing more people to the community. New business investment, the development of the diverse open air European Market and community activities such as the free movie/live music night in Thomas Centennial Park are revitalizing the town’s center. More efforts are underway to recruit specialty shops and restaurants that will spark a livelier downtown.

As the economy begins to rebound, Chesterton will be at the forefront in leading economic development in the medical sector.

A thoughtfully articulated vision for its future, Chesterton blends a rich education focus, vast recreational opportunities and a revitalized downtown to make for one of the outstanding communities in northern Indiana. ♦



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