

Local Identity in a Regional World

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This week begins the first of ten Briefly Speaking articles over the next three months that will focus on the 10 topics that have come up in conversations during the first six months of 2019.

This week will focus on the increasing reality that our region of Indiana formally known as the South Bend-Elkhart Region and formerly known and still referenced by us locals as Michiana, is becoming a more formidable and recognizable economic, cultural, and legislative collective in our state and country.

I have stated this in previous Briefly Speaking articles but it bears repeating to highlight the wisdom of those that made the decision to build the infrastructure that created our North Central Indiana Beltway that connects Middlebury, Bristol, Elkhart, Mishawaka and South Bend through the U.S. 20 Bypass and its connection to the 80/90 Toll Road. They didn't stop there and realized connecting Cass County, Michigan to Southern Elkhart County by way of CR 17/M217. On the western edge US 31 connects Berrien County, Michigan to Marshall County, IN through St. Joe County, IN.

The strength of the South Bend-Elkhart Region lies in its population density and collective voting block influence. However, like so many other topics we should not mistake the region as homogeneous population with a singular political and economic outlook. Therein exists the challenge and potential of our region. Bringing together communities that see the world through different lenses is no easy task. However, with examples such as the Regional Cities Initiative we have seen the power, influence, and impact that happens when our region works together.

As each of our towns, cities, and counties work to economically diversify, the region gives us a view of what that can be. Within the South Bend-Elkhart Region we already have companies in manufacturing, technology, financial services, health care and agriculture that cross city, county, and state lines to employ and serve people throughout our communities.

There are two very important keys to building a solid foundation in the continued strengthening of our region. The first is the realization that the strength of our region is founded upon the strength of our local towns and cities. When we utilize the collective knowledge of the region to support and serve the cities and towns the buy-in to our regional efforts will continually grow. Second is communication. It is imperative that the leaders of the South Bend-Elkhart Region, and I will humbly include myself in that group, make sure that the purpose and messaging of building a strong region is clear throughout the Michiana area.

I have notes to write another 300 words but I am going to end with this: Let's all focus on strengthening where we are so as the web of our region grows each strand will support the weight of our collective influence.

As always, have a productive and positive week and we hope you take some time to enjoy the July 4th holiday.