

OFFICE OF COMMERGE

NEWS RELEASE



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Governor Braun Champions Small Business Week in Indiana

Indiana celebrates impact of entrepreneurs and small businesses, awards eight Hoosier companies with Small Business of the Year recognition

INDIANAPOLIS (May 5, 2026) – Indiana Governor Mike Braun celebrated the pioneering spirit of Hoosier entrepreneurs and small businesses and their many contributions to the state, issuing a [proclamation](#) declaring May 4-8, 2026, Small Business Week in Indiana.

“Indiana’s communities and economy are propelled by small business innovation and Main Street entrepreneurship, with small businesses accounting for approximately 99.4% of all Hoosier employers,” said Gov. Braun. “As a fellow entrepreneur, I understand the passion and grit needed to succeed. I commend our 2026 Small Business of the Year award winners and our entire network of founders and small businesses statewide that create meaningful, quality jobs for Hoosiers.”

Indiana is home to nearly 600,000 small businesses (<500 employees) that employ more than 1.2 million Hoosiers. The state ranks in the top five nationally for small business survival, according to the Kauffman Foundation, with 84% of Indiana businesses remaining open after one year. Additionally, Indiana companies in their first five years account for 74% of net new job growth, and, at the local level, just one successful new company has been shown to increase the median income of neighboring households.

“Under Governor’s leadership, we are fueling Main Street entrepreneurship and small business innovation across the state,” said Secretary of Commerce David J. Adams. “This week – and every week – we celebrate Indiana small businesses that are creating jobs and driving our economy. As a state, we are committed to providing the programs and resources needed to inspire continued entrepreneurship and support the growth, technological advancements and success of our small businesses.”

On Friday, the [Indiana Small Business Development Center](#) (Indiana SBDC), an Indiana Office of Commerce program, will present the 2026 Small Business Impact Awards. The eight Hoosier small businesses being recognized have been selected through their work with the Indiana SBDC, which offers no-cost advising and training to help small businesses start, grow or pivot. The awards, presented in conjunction with the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) National Small Business Week, honor the entrepreneurs' and small businesses' achievements and contributions to grow Indiana's economy and strengthen communities across the state.

The 2026 honorees are:

- **Community Impact Small Business of the Year:** The Emporium (Clay County)
The Emporium, established in 2023, is a shared retail and small business hub designed to help local Brazil entrepreneurs connect and thrive together. Brazil-native Chris Godfrey founded the space, repurposing a former Main Street bank building into a welcoming destination where small business owners can grow while offering the community high-quality products and services. The Emporium is now home to numerous local businesses, offering vintage clothing, a massage spa, nail studio, dance instruction, an imprinting service and a cafe, helping drive the local economy.
- **Entrepreneur of the Year: Be Happy Pie Company** (Vanderburgh County)
Be Happy Pie Company is a small-batch, made-from-scratch bakery known for its sweet and savory pies, cookies, cheesecakes and classic baked goods “just like grandma used to make”. Founder Jenny Lamble initially started the business as a side project while working as a school counselor, baking in her home kitchen and selling at local farmers markets. Business boomed, and Jenny opened her first storefront in 2017. Be Happy Pie Company now operates two Evansville storefronts—serving the west and east sides of the city—as well as franchise locations in Kentucky and soon Kansas City, Missouri. Each new location brings pies, baked goods and happiness to even more communities across the Midwest—continuing a tradition of made-from-scratch baking that started right here at home.
- **Family-Owned Small Business of the Year:** Southern Indiana Spray Foam (Floyd County)
New Albany-based Southern Indiana Spray Foam is a locally owned insulation company, providing spray foam services for residential and commercial properties and specializing in attic, wall, basement, and roof insulation, along with concrete lifting and other applications that improve energy efficiency, comfort, and long-term performance of a building. The company, which is

owned and operated by Keith Norton and his son, Blake, has grown into a family legacy, bringing the two together after finding each other later in life. Southern Indiana Spray Foam prides itself on providing experienced, top-quality services with the heart, honesty and dedication of a family-run business.

- **Innovative Small Business of the Year:** Encore Event Group (Clark County)
Encore Event Group is a full-service event production and logistics company that designs and executes large-scale, high-impact experiences for corporate, public and private clients. Based in Sellersburg, the company's services extend beyond traditional event planning to include production design, technical execution, logistics coordination and immersive experience creation, providing one streamlined and cohesive experience for customers. Owned and operated by Robert and Nicole Reno, Encore Event Group serves Louisville, southern Indiana and nearby Kentucky communities and has helped create more than 10,000 celebrations and events.
- **Main Street Small Business of the Year:** The Harvest Hangout Play Café (Newton County)
The Harvest Hangout Play Café was founded and is led by twin sisters Zahira Montoya and Mirahida Kindig, providing a welcoming, safe and enriching play cafe designed to bring families together in Goodland. The new space, which opened in 2025, is rooted in connection and community impact, focused on serving its rural community, expanding partnerships with local businesses, and hosting creative and inclusive events. The sisters say the space is more than a business, it's a way for them to give back, nurture connection and invest in the next generation.
- **Startup Small Business of the Year:** Gene's Camera (St. Joseph County)
Gene's Camera has been the area's premier retailer of cameras and related products and services since 1939 – the lone full-service camera shop in northern Indiana. In 2025, longtime employee Jon Gilchrist, along with his partner Melaney Miller, purchased the store, keeping the long-time South Bend institution alive. The two acknowledge the important role Gene's Camera has played in the community and see themselves as stewards of the store, with a commitment to maintaining its services, expanding community-driven events and workshops, and preserving its legacy.
- **Veteran-Owned Business of the Year:** Elkins Mowing & Landscaping (Blackford County)
Elkins Mowing & Landscaping is led by founder Austin Elkins, who got his start as an entrepreneur mowing lawns with his grandfather at just 4 years old. The business began when Austin was serving in the National Guard, and his unit was asked to handle snow and ice removal for an armory. That spring, the

armory asked him to bid on mowing, and Elkins Mowing & Landscaping was officially founded in 2020. Today, Elkins Mowing & Landscaping operates 116 acres of land for businesses, residential and military customers, including four armories, across east central Indiana, providing mowing, trimming, pruning, snow removal and leaf cleanup services.

- **Women-Owned Business of the Year: Beyond the Bra (Allen County)**
Founded in 2021 by Amanda White, Beyond The Bra is a vibrant Fort Wayne boutique and mobile bra fitting business. Dedicated to helping women feel confident, comfortable, and truly supported. As a Certified Bra and Mastectomy Fitter, Amanda brings personalized, educational fittings directly to her clients—whether in-store or out in the community. With a passion for connection and exceptional service, she’s redefining the bra fitting experience and empowers women through proper fit, education and care.

Additionally, at the awards ceremony, the Central Indiana SBDC will be honored with the SBA Indiana District’s Small Business Development Center Excellence and Innovation Award, recognizing its impact on current and aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses in the state. The office, which is hosted in partnership with Butler University, won the Indiana recognition and has also gone on to win the regional award, being named the top SBDC office in the SBA’s Great Lakes Region spanning Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

In 2025, the Indiana Office of Commerce supported more than 10,000 entrepreneurs and small businesses through its programs like the Indiana SBDC, helping launch 453 new businesses. Indiana SBDC offers 10 regional offices, supporting aspiring entrepreneurs and current small businesses statewide through business advising, training, referrals and tools and resources to help businesses at every stage of their journey.

To learn more about the many resources available to Indiana entrepreneurs and small businesses, visit iedc.in.gov/entrepreneurship.

About the Indiana Office of Commerce

The State of Indiana’s Office of Commerce was created by Governor Mike Braun to align and accelerate the state’s economic development efforts and is led by Indiana Secretary of Commerce David J. Adams.

About the Indiana Small Business Development Center (ISBDC)

The Indiana Small Business Development Center (Indiana SBDC), hosted by the

Indiana Economic Development Corporation, helps entrepreneurs and small businesses by providing expert guidance and resources on how to start and grow a business. The Indiana SBDC creates a positive and measurable impact on the formation, growth and sustainability of Indiana's small businesses. The Indiana SBDC is funded, in part, through a [Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration](#). All opinions, conclusions, and/or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA.

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