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# Steuben REMC buys iMAN network

Fiber will be deployed in rural areas over 4-5 years

**BY MIKE MARTURELLO**  
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ANGOLA — Steuben County REMC has taken a significant step forward in bringing broadband to rural Steuben County with the purchase of the Steuben County Fiber Network, perhaps better known as iMAN, an REMC news release said.

The REMC’s Board of Directors recently authorized the acquisition of iMAN for \$2.8 million, effective January 2021, in an effort to provide fiber optic services to its members. The deal was signed on Oct. 12 and made public in conjunction with the REMC’s annual meeting this week.

The fiber network was the creation of the Steuben

County Community Foundation two decades ago.

Over the next 4-5 years, REMC plans to deploy fiber to its home network of customers, the news release said. This will represent a \$25 million investment in infrastructure.

The acquisition mirrors the mission of the REMC, delivering a needed utility to rural customers through a member-owned, not-for-profit company.

“The (REMC) board recognizes the importance of internet access, and the impact it has on the quality of life. They also understand the advantages broadband will bring to future growth and economic development to the region,” the news release said.

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Posing for a photo after the completion of the sale of Steuben County Fiber Network to Steuben County REMC on Oct. 12 are, front, from left, Jennifer Danic, president and CEO of the Steuben County Community Foundation, and Kevin Keiser, CEO of Steuben County

REMC. In back are Randy White, foundation board chair; John McCoy, Steuben Fiber board chair; Wayne Gingerich, REMC board president; and Gary Shough REMC board secretary-treasurer. Those pictured removed their masks for the purposes of this photo.

# Unemployment rate drops, still above year ago

**BY MIKE MARTURELLO**  
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INDIANAPOLIS — Unemployment across northeast Indiana continued its decline yet is still running well beyond where it was a year ago, before the coronavirus outbreak that struck in March.

Indiana’s unemployment rate dropped to 6.2% for September and the national rate was 7.9 percent.

Locally, unemployment rates declined between September and August but still remain well above the benchmark of September 2019 when northeast Indiana was considered at full employment. Also, labor force numbers are declining for the most part because some people have stopped looking

for work.

“The monthly labor force numbers are a dynamic statistic, with change to be expected month over month,” said Rachel Blakeman, director of Purdue University Fort Wayne’s Community Research Institute. “September’s numbers reflect six months into the pandemic and the associated economic consequences. Most of the northeast counties have returned to full employment as measured by the unemployment rate being below 5%, but that may provide a false narrative. Some of this decline has been achieved through people who left the workforce in September, instead of more people working.”

The one county that comes close to a return to pre-pandemic numbers was

LaGrange, where unemployment declined to 3.3% from 3.9% in August. The September rate was still one percentage point higher than a year ago when the rate was 2.3%.

The number of people employed is still running well beyond a year ago. In LaGrange, there were 640 people unemployed this September and 448 in September 2019, a 30% difference.

In Steuben County, unemployment declined to 4.1% in September from 4.6% in August. The rate was 2.2% in September 2019. There were 843 people unemployed this September compared to 460 a year ago, a difference of 45%.

DeKalb County had the next lowest rate in the

four-county area at 4.6% compared to 5.2% in August and 2.4% a year ago. DeKalb County had 1,017 people unemployed in September compared to 536 a year ago, a difference of 47%.

Noble County improved to 4.9% unemployed in September from 5.7% in August. A year ago the rate was 2.6%, the high for the area. There were 1,125 people unemployed in Noble County in September versus 611 a year ago, a difference of 46%.

Whitley County had an unemployment rate of 4.2% in September compared to 4.7% in August and 2.4% a year ago. There were 722 people unemployed in September and 428 a year ago, a difference of 41%.

Allen County had an unemployment rate of 6.0% in

Unemployment		Steuben 4.1	4.6
In percentages		Allen 6.0	6.8
County Sept. Aug.		Whitley 4.2	4.7
DeKalb 4.6		Indiana 6.2	6.4*
LaGrange 3.3		U.S. 7.9	8.4*
Noble 4.9		*Seasonally adjusted	

September compared to 6.8% in August. There were 11,134 people unemployed and a year ago that number stood at 4,995. Unemployment was 55% greater last month than a year ago.

“On the surface, the latest unemployment numbers appear promising and, the labor force dip notwithstanding, suggest improvement in the employment status for some people,”

said Rick Farrant, director of communications for Northeast Indiana Works. “Another promising sign is that employers across many industries have stepped up hiring and training, and are partnering with our WorkOne Northeast career centers in promoting those opportunities. But there are so many evolving factors at play during this lingering

SEE **UNEMPLOYMENT**, PAGE **A6**

# Steuben virus keeps climbing

**BY MIKE MARTURELLO**  
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ANGOLA — Steuben County continues to see increases in its COVID-19 cases.

In the weekly demographic report prepared by the Steuben County Health Department, it showed an increase of 72 case for the week ending Wednesday, bringing the county’s total to 612 cases since the pandemic began.

The previous weekly

increase was 71 cases.

The greatest single increase was among people ages 20-29 where there were 30 cases logged in one week’s time. There are now 150 people in this age group who have contracted COVID-19.

“Steuben County has a total of 612 COVID-19 positive cases, 372 individuals considered recovered and 8 deaths associated with COVID-19,” said

SEE **STEUBEN**, PAGE **A6**

Steuben County COVID-19 cases*	
Age	Cases
0-19.....	75
20-29.....	150
30-39.....	77
40-49.....	69
50-59.....	87
60-69.....	93
70-79.....	43
80+.....	20
TOTAL.....	612
* As of Oct. 21, 2020	
SOURCE: STEUBEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT	

# Virus revisits long-term care

**BY STEVE GARBACZ**  
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INDIANAPOLIS — With greater community transmission of COVID-19 around the state, the virus is now snaking its way back into long-term care facilities and impacting populations of vulnerable residents with often deadly consequences.

As such, the state is now surging its response in an effort to shove the virus back out of those facilities.

Long-term care facilities were the primary focus of Wednesday’s statewide COVID-19 press conference, with Gov. Eric Holcomb and state health officials spending much of the time

discussing a recent uptick and the planned response to new outbreaks.

Indiana has seen record-high numbers of new cases around the state and health officials have repeatedly warned that unchecked spread in the community and among people less at risk can and would eventually find its way back into places where it could do significantly more damage.



Holcomb

And the state is starting to see exactly that, Holcomb said.

“From the very, very beginning, (Indiana State Health Commissioner) Dr. (Kris) Box and her team have operated with a sense of urgency to serve those long-term facilities,” Holcomb said. “Deaths and cases continue to mount at these facilities. We need to initiate an even more targeted, surgical if you will, even more targeted effort to support residents where they are.”

In April and May, when Indiana was recording 30 and more deaths per day

SEE **HOLCOMB**, PAGE **A6**

# Indiana growing increasingly orange

**BY STEVE GARBACZ**  
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INDIANAPOLIS — Just in time for Halloween, Indiana is growing increasingly orange.

The increasing prevalence of that festive color on the statewide county COVID-19 metrics map, however, means that virus transmission is continuing to grow across the state.

A week after the state saw a worsening overall in ratings of the 92 Indiana counties, this week the

situation degraded more, with almost half of all counties in the orange and red, the highest two ratings for COVID-19 spread.

The four-county area is no exception, with three of four counties in orange this week and the only one that didn’t land there — Noble County in the yellow — was about as close as you could get to ticking up a level without breaking the threshold.

Last week, Indiana had just one county rated red for

high spread of COVID-19 and 21 in the orange for moderate to high spread. That level of orange itself was a significant increase from the week prior, when there were only eight counties at that level.

This week, however, the ratings have continued to decline, with four counties in red, 36 in orange and 44 in yellow. This week, just eight counties received the best rating of blue, representing low transmission.

The state has seen

increases in every metric this October — cases are up, positivity rates are up, hospitalizations are up and deaths are up — so the worsening ratings are no surprise.

In the four-county area, LaGrange and Steuben counties were rated orange for the second straight week, while DeKalb County entered the orange again for the first time since the first week of ratings back on

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15 FURY

10 DAY FORECAST

THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
20%	40%	0%	30%	30%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%
77	74	52	53	58	50	48	52	52	51
61	40	40	45	41	36	36	35	34	

Wednesday's Statistics

LOCAL  
HI 58  
LO 47

FORT WAYNE  
HI 60  
LO 50

SOUTH BEND  
HI 56  
LO 46

INDIANAPOLIS  
HI 66  
LO 56

Quite a bit warmer in the low 70s on this day with rain showers in the morning and partly cloudy in the afternoon. Mostly clear skies in the evening.

Sunrise Friday 8:02 a.m.

Sunset Friday 6:47 p.m.

Today's drawing by: **Jeriah Kauffman**

Submit your weather drawings to: Weather Drawings, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 39, Kendallville, IN 46755

Forecast for Thursday, October 22, 2020

Forecast for Thursday, October 22, 2020

Bands separate high temperature zones for the day.

## REMC: Control of iMAN will remain local in co-op

FROM PAGE A1

The decision followed more than 24 months of due diligence, including feasibility studies and market analysis.

This is the first step in the expansion of fiber to the home network that will bring broadband availability to REMC's membership over the next 4 to 5 years.

Steuben County REMC expects this \$25 million investment in infrastructure to be capable of meeting the regions broadband needs into the future. The iMan acquisition will provide a reliable backbone that will bolster the project economics and build-out.

"We have a big job ahead of us, but our members have been here before when we collectively worked together to provide rural Steuben County with electricity at a time when no one else would. Today we find ourselves in a similar circumstance and it is again time to cooperatively light our future with broadband services," Kevin Keiser, CEO Steuben County REMC. "We have got a lot of work to do. The board has worked very hard on this the last couple years."

This is the same principle that brought about the creation of iMAN in 2000; investor-owned utilities would

probably not take the risk of stringing fiber in a small community, so the Steuben County Community Foundation did through the creation of a new entity that started in the core downtown Angola area.

"I think we're going to expand on a great idea and make it even better," Keiser said.

In late 2018, the Community Foundation proclaimed that the original mission of the fiber network had been achieved and began a robust process of determining the next chapter of the network. The proceeds from the sale of iMAN will be permanently endowed in a Community Leadership Fund designed to support innovative ideas and foster development of new cross-sector community initiatives.

"We look forward to creating similar partnerships for our community's benefit year after year, forever," said Jennifer Danic, president and CEO of the Community Foundation.

The iMAN network currently serves every resident in our community through educational, governmental, health care and business connections that provide high-speed internet connectivity.

"The Steuben County REMC is committed to honoring the founding spirit and future growth of this community resource. They are dedicated to ensure that current access will not be disrupted, and the networks governance and management will remain local," added Danic.

Steuben County REMC is an electric distribution cooperative with a not-for-profit business model that provides service to individuals and businesses across rural Steuben, LaGrange and DeKalb counties. Optimizing engineering and deployment, as well as the opportunity to be awarded state and federal grants, the REMC will be able to maintain similar competitive rates, as they do currently.

"If we consider the alternative of doing nothing as the rest of the world passes us by; the cost to our rates, and more importantly, our way of life, will be far greater," Kaiser said.

Steuben County REMC taking over iMAN, Kaiser said, wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the original foresight of Angola government, Steuben County government, the Community Foundation and many others who made the network a reality.

## UNEMPLOYMENT: State labor force had a net decrease

FROM PAGE A1

pandemic that it would be premature, I think, to wholeheartedly celebrate the unemployment numbers."

The monthly unemployment rate is a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicator that reflects the number of unemployed people seeking employment within the prior four weeks as a percentage of the labor force.

With the exception of Steuben County, all counties cited above experienced

declines in the labor force. Steuben County saw a minute increase of 33 people.

"Unfortunately, the state's data only tell us what is happening, not why, so we aren't sure if these workers have left the workforce for an extended period, such as supervising children who are in online school, or those who stopped looking for work temporarily but intend to find a job when the economy improves," Blakeman said.

Indiana's labor force had a net decrease of 19,691 over the previous month. This was a result of a decrease of 6,289 unemployed residents and a decrease of 13,402 employed residents. Indiana's total labor force, which includes both Hoosiers employed and those seeking employment, stands at 3.33 million, and the state's 63.0% labor force participation rate remains above the national rate of 61.4%.

## RATINGS: Noble County on verge of orange rating

FROM PAGE A1

Sept. 2.

All three counties had an average score this week of 2.5, which is worse than the averages of 2 for LaGrange and Steuben last week and 1.5 for DeKalb.

LaGrange County was dinged with 3 points for its very high positivity rate of 22.39% — far above that highest point level's threshold of 15% — and then 2 points for 118 new cases per 100,000 residents.

That positivity rate was second-highest in the state, exceeded by only Ohio County at 28.77%.

LaGrange County's positivity rate can swing wildly, however, because the county does very little testing in comparison to other areas. Therefore, every positive case turned up will have a larger percentage impact than in areas that test more such as neighboring Noble County, for example.

Testing has been increasing recently, but prior to the latest increase, LaGrange County only records around 40-50 tests per day, meaning that just five cases per day can send the local positivity rate over 10%.

Noble County, which is averaging around 175 tests per day recently and has the highest testing count in the four-county area, would have to post more than three times as many cases daily to have similar returns.

Steuben and DeKalb counties both were hit hardest by high per-capita case rates, earning three points for new case ratios of 225 and 202 per 100,000, respectively. Positivity rates were lower, but still above the 10% mark to earn each county two points, with Steuben County at 11% and DeKalb County at 10.99%.

Noble County held in the yellow, it's seventh yellow

rating in the eight weeks this metric has existed, but just barely. Positivity was up compared to last week at 8.76% and the per-capita case rate was also up to 198 cases per 100,000, just shy of the 200 per 100,000 mark that would have earned the county three points in that grade and thus pushed the county into the orange with its neighbors.

Nearby Whitley and Allen counties were also in the yellow this week, but outside of that the region is blanketed in orange ratings.

Southwest and western Indiana are among the state's most orange areas outside of the north and northeast, while central and southern Indiana remain mostly in better shape.

The southeast corner is mostly yellow, with the exception of Dearborn and Ohio counties, which were two of the four in the red this week.

## HOLCOMB: State will send LTCs more supplies

FROM PAGE A1

from COVID-19, those high death rates coincided with significant outbreaks in nursing homes around the state.

But by late May and into June as the state gained better control of those outbreaks deaths had fallen to under 10 per day. As cases came down around the state over the summer, those infection and death rates in nursing homes stayed down.

Nursing home residents are a highly vulnerable population. In total, 2,205 deaths to date — 58% of the state's overall total — have been among long-term care residents.

Case counts in Indiana have risen sharply lately, hitting more than 2,000 new cases per day at the end of the last week, and new outbreaks are popping up in nursing homes.

In early September, long-term care facilities across the state were averaging about 25 new cases per day, but that number has been on a steady increase since, rising to upward of 70 cases per day as of last week, the highest averages in nursing home cases seen since May.

Likewise, deaths from nursing homes have gone from an average of around five per day to around 10 per day recently, which accounts for a good portion of the increase in average daily deaths seen statewide so far this month.

Holcomb connected the dots for Hoosiers, stating that bigger community numbers are leading to more facility cases, which are resulting in sharply rising hospitalizations and increasing deaths again.

Indiana's total hospital patient census has doubled since late September, hitting nearly 1,500 patients admitted, figures not seen in the state, since early May in the height of previous expansive long-term care outbreaks.

"Slowing the spread of this infection and sickness inside these facilities, there is a direct correlation on how that impacts our hospitalization rates," Holcomb said. "What happens in the community, ends up in the facility, ends up in a hospital."

Indiana State Health Department Chief Medical Officer Dr. Lindsay Weaver said in response to "a surge in our long-term care facilities," the state will be taking several actions to redouble help and protect nursing homes.

"We want to save those Hoosier lives and in doing so we can protect our hospital capacity," Weaver said.

Staffing has been one area where nursing homes have been stretched to the point of breaking, so Weaver announced that the state will activate the Indiana National Guard as well as its reserve of health care volunteers to step up and bolster nursing home staffs to help with testing, data entry and/or infection control measures.

"They have been running a marathon at a sprint pace for eight months," Weaver said. "The day-in and day-out of this pandemic has been long and hard on all of us, but especially those on the front lines in health care."

Indiana will also provide more protective equipment including N-95 masks, face shield and gowns; reinforce

infection control procedures and education; and work to reduce admissions into nursing homes by piloting a program to allow Medicaid-eligible patients to transition directly to home-based recovery instead of going into nursing homes where they may be at increased risk.

While the state did put a stop on all outside visitation to nursing homes early in the pandemic, health officials and facility operators worked together to develop safe visitation procedures when outbreaks got under control in summer. While individual facilities may temporarily restrict access amid outbreaks, the state is not currently looking to reimpose blanket bans on access to nursing homes, Weaver said.

Visitations and contact with family can be beneficial to the mental health of patients which, at older ages, can also have noticeable impacts on physical health.

As for everyone outside of long-term facilities, Holcomb said their role is to do what they can to suppress transmission and therefore should expect to continue practicing precautions as the best way to slow the spread.

The list of best practices haven't changed as Holcomb repeated them again — practicing social distancing, wearing masks, maintaining hygiene and staying home when you're sick.

"As long as there is spread of this virus, we need to practice the things we know work," Holcomb said. "We're not going to get away from those things that work."

## STEBEN: Steuben remains in the orange category

FROM PAGE A1

Alicia van Ee, the Health Department's chief environmental specialist. "The Steuben County Health Department was notified one of the COVID-19 positive cases resulting in a death recently reported was

not associated with Steuben County as primary county of residence and was transferred out resulting in the number of deaths associated with COVID-19 to be reported as eight total."

The other significant

increases in cases this past week were the 30-39 age group, which increased by 11 to 77 cases and the 60-69 age category, which also advanced by 11 cases to 93.

The other age categories saw minimal gains. The 80 and over category saw a reduction by one case, which was the death that ended up being from another county, thereby changing the county data.

The Indiana State Department of Health says Steuben County has a positivity rate of all tested at 11.0%. The Department of Health announced Steuben County has changed to a weekly composite score of 2.5, or orange, denoting an increase in the number of cases (224) per 100,000 residents and rolling average of positive tests at 11.0%.

The increase in composite score for Steuben County is a reminder that the COVID-19 pandemic is still occurring in the community and community members need to practice the following measures to ensure their safety: social distancing, masking, avoiding crowds, staying at home if feeling sick and consistent washing or sanitizing of hands.

2020

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- **Bill Konyha**, President & CEO, Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana

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