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Setting the Stage as Northwest Indiana's Economic Engine



City of Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson and Indiana Senator Joe Donnelly cutting the ribbon at the GCIA Extended Runway Opening in summer of 2015.

In early February, the airport played host to innovative thought-leaders from around the state at a public forum "[Unlocking Potential in the Region.](#)" Leaders included Stephen Mays, then-GYY Authority Chairman and current GYY Board member, Kevin Brinegar, president and CEO of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, Leah Konrady, president and CEO of One Region and State Rep. Earl Harris Jr. (D-East Chicago) who called the airport "one of the shining stars" of Northwest Indiana.

Over the last few years the airport has witnessed continued growth and investment with the opening of B. Coleman's new 40,000 square foot hangar, the opening of a new operations terminal at Gary Jet Center and the on-going construction of a new U.S. Customs facility scheduled to open this year. New GYY Executive Director Duane Hayden said all these factors allow the airport to set the stage to excel as an economic engine for the Region.

GYG was also praised by [Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly](#), noting that airport improvements, especially the addition of a new U.S. Customs Facility, positions Northwest Indiana for "amazing success." [Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson](#) pointed to the airport as one of the many businesses contributing to the city's bright future during her State of the City Address.

Below is the full article published by [The Times](#) regarding the public forum.



The GCIA Authority met on Friday, February 23 to approve contracts on the Runway 12-30 Rehabilitation Project and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol facility to further advance the airport.

At its last meeting, the GYG Authority continued to advance the construction of a new permanent general aviation U.S. Customs and Border Patrol facility, approving eight contracts for continued work on the facility. All contracts were awarded to local businesses or included team members who are Gary residents, reinforcing the airport's commitment to working with and serve the community. The facility is anticipated to open in 2018 and will allow airport users to fly directly into Gary from any destination in the world.

The GYG Authority also approved a contract to [advance Phase 1 and 2 of the Runway 12-30 Rehabilitation Project](#). The new advancements will replace the current runway with concrete adding a 20+ year lifespan to the runway, as well as allowing the airport to serve the largest and heaviest planes. Currently, the airport's 8,859 foot runway is the longest in the region other than O'Hare, so the new runway improvements will continue to affirm GYG as the premier mid-sized airport in northwest Indiana and the Chicago metropolitan region.



How do we unlock potential in the region?



Duane Hayden, the Gary/Chicago International Airport's new executive director, speaks at an "Unlocking Potential in the Region" public forum, held at the airport. (Photo courtesy of Northwest Indiana Times)



From left to right: Heather Ennis, president & CEO of the Northwest Indiana Forum, R. Luis Gonzalez, Lake County Campus chancellor for IVY Tech and Kevin Brinegar, president and CEO of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce

By Lauren Cross
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GARY — Community leaders on Thursday pitched the Region as a lower-cost alternative to Chicago with fewer taxes and regulations while noting the area has its challenges in recruiting young professionals and cultivating skilled workers.

State Rep. Earl Harris Jr., D-East Chicago, said he couldn't have picked a more opportune location to host his "Unlocking Potential in the Region" public forum — the Gary/Chicago International Airport.

"This airport is one of the shining stars" of Northwest Indiana, he said.

Duane Hayden, the Gary/Chicago International Airport's new executive director, said with its newest hangar, extended runway and Jet Center, the airport is setting the stage to excel as an economic engine for the Region.

More infrastructure improvements are needed, however, to enhance its marketability for cargo, corporate flying and general aviation.

Hayden was among five speakers who participated in Thursday's event.

Others included Kevin Brinegar, president and CEO of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce; R. Louie Gonzalez, Lake County campus chancellor for Ivy Tech; Leah Konrady, president and CEO of One Region; and Stephen Mays, chairman for the Gary/Chicago International Airport Authority.

Konrady said one great example of a community investing in regional tourism is the city of Whiting, which brought in the Whoa Zone floating water park and is working to build a Mascot Hall of Fame.

Brinegar said a push to designate the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore as a national park "will go a long way" in attracting tourists to Northwest Indiana.

He said the West Lake Corridor extension and double track expansion between Gary and Michigan City are prime examples of ways to attract families to the area.

Both Gonzales and Brinegar, however, also warned the Region will lose out if governments and schools fail to collaborate with business in recruiting and training highly skilled workers.

"What we don't want to see is all these good things we've done to build our tax climate, our business climate, our infrastructure, our efficient workers comp system," Brinegar said, "... we don't want to see all of that overshadowed by the inability of employers to find skilled workers."

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