

Toyota Indiana names new president

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EVANSVILLE — Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) announced Wednesday that Jason Puckett will become president of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana effective Monday.

TMNA said Puckett also will serve as group vice president of Manufacturing Region 2, which includes Toyota Motor Manufacturing Missouri (Toyota Missouri) and Toyota Motor Manufacturing Tennessee (Toyota Tennessee).

Puckett’s career with Toyota stretches back to 1997, according to TMNA. He has been vice president of administration and manufacturing at Toyota Indiana and president of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama (Toyota Alabama).

“I am excited to be back at Toyota Indiana,” Puckett said in TMNA’s news release. “It’s where I got my start as an engineer in assembly, so returning as president is an honor. Since my move to Alabama four years ago, so much has changed, but the heart of Toyota and our team members remains the same. I have big shoes to fill, and I am ready to carry the torch.”

Puckett succeeds current president

Tim Hollander, who has been named president of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada (Toyota Canada) and group vice president, Manufacturing Region 1.

Hollander said Toyota Indiana is “in excellent hands” with Puckett.

“Toyota Indiana is like family to me, and I think that is a testament to the team-member-first environment we have created,” Hollander said. “Much of my 27-year career with Toyota has been spent here, and I have been honored and humbled to serve our team members, our community, and our customers. I am excited to take this next opportunity and know Toyota Indiana is in excellent hands with Jason.”

In addition to Puckett’s ascension to Toyota Indiana’s presidency, TMNA announced that Derek Kidnie, vice president of administration, Toyota Canada, has been named vice president of manufacturing at Toyota Indiana.

According to TMNA, Toyota Indiana “represents an \$8 billion total investment and has donated over \$54 million to local organizations since breaking ground in 1996.”

Toyota directly employs nearly 48,000 people in the U.S. who contributed to the design, engineering, and assembly of more than 35 million cars and trucks at 11 manufacturing plants, TMNA reports.



Puckett



Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear speaks in Pikeville amid flooding in February. SAM UPSHAW JR./COURIER JOURNAL

Beshear

Continued from Page 1A

current president is we need to restore our humanity, the rest of the world needs to see that. We need a lot more love and a lot more kindness and a whole lot less cruelty.”

The answer was nearly identical to what he told WDRB when the TV outlet asked him about his future plans in early May ahead of the Kentucky Derby.

“If you’d asked me a couple years ago if this is something I’d consider, I probably wouldn’t have,” the governor said. “But I don’t want to leave a broken country to my kids. So if I’m somebody who can bring this nation together, hopefully find some common ground, it’s something I would consider.”

Beshear’s name has frequently come up in discussions about the future of the national Democratic Party, which has faced questions about who will lead it going forward following former President Joe Biden’s decision to drop out of the 2024 presidential race and ex-Vice President Kamala Harris’ defeat to Trump.

Beshear was considered as a potential running mate with Harris after she ascended to the top of the ticket last summer, a role that eventually went to Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. A new book about Biden’s decline from CNN’s Jake Tapper and Axios’ Alex Thompson reports Beshear was courted by former President Barack Obama’s White House chief of staff to challenge Biden in the 2024 primary, according to the New York Times.

Politico recently reported Beshear, who has said he does not plan to run for the U.S. Senate seat Sen. Mitch McConnell is vacating next year, is “ac-

“I’m committed to not leaving a broken country to my kids or anyone else’s.”

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear

tively laying the tracks” for a potential run in 2028.

The national political outlet traveled with the governor on a recent trip through Eastern Kentucky to meet with flooding victims and community organizations, hearing his advice for Democrats seeking to regain power — “get dirt on their boots” and “talk like a normal human being,” he recommended — and noting he’s been in touch with some Democratic senators to “talk about how he’s framing key issues.”

The article also raised questions about his current level of recognition nationally, though, compared to other potential contenders such as Democratic Govs. Gavin Newsom of California, JB Pritzker of Illinois, Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan and Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania.

Beshear made several stops around the country last year in support of Harris’ campaign, including speeches at the Democratic National Convention as well as appearances in Iowa and Georgia.

In December, he was selected vice chairman of the Democratic Governors Association and was voted chair-elect of the group in 2026.

Beshear appears in no rush to announce his plans. And, to be fair, we’re more than three years away from Election Day in 2028. While campaign season never stops, potential presidential candidates still have plenty of time to lay their groundwork.

Reach Lucas Aulbach at laulbach@courier-journal.com.



The University of Southern Indiana Screaming Eagles gather ahead of their game against the Campbell University Fighting Camels in the second round of the WNIT at Liberty Arena in Evansville March 23. MACABE BROWN/COURIER & PRESS

Bridges

Continued from Page 2A

him. We had to shock him three times. That’s unusual to be able to overcome that.

... So I feel like we’ve got a perfect blend through wellness with the EMTs and helping students (with our security). We still give them rides if they worked at the library late. We have Flock cameras, as another example. ... It’s just such a good partnership with the sheriff. Noah Robinson’s first class. I really enjoy working with him.

As far as the amount of crimes on campus – whether it be assaults, fights, burglary, marijuana possession, whatever – have you seen any increases?

We’re a safe campus and we continue to be. I haven’t seen any big spikes. It is an interesting element, though, that in some areas marijuana is legal pretty close by. That may be interesting at some point if marijuana is legalized. But by and large I think we’re still the same safe campus we were.

And we’ve enhanced our public safety just by having the sheriff here. For things like free speech, they’re already here. I don’t want to pick on a school but I will say, for those that actually have their own armed officers, if they need additional help you’re bringing in a whole new police force. Sometimes that oddly creates this line in the sand. Whereas if we have two more sheriff’s office members here to help us, it’s not that threatening because they’re already here.

Enrollment

Enrollment has waffled a bit over the last few years. Sometimes new

student enrollment is up while the rest of the undergraduate population goes down. Is increasing enrollment a priority? Or, with the cost of higher education skyrocketing, do you think USI has reached the population it can handle?

It’s definitely something on the radar. Because I think we have pockets where we can still help the community and our students better.

We’re definitely working to increase enrollment. That’s probably one of the three top things to me – working more with the business community, expanding our regional approach with the state chamber (of commerce), and enrollment and retention.

... We have had freshman classes that have been a little higher. We want to retain students as well and we want to increase our graduate program. I think one of areas that might help will be the adult-learner market. We haven’t really fully developed that. When you’re out working and you think “I could really use a credential in this” – being able to meet your needs that way.

We do count our high school (college credit) students, and that’s always been a question. But I’m a big advocate of that, because when you and I were here, you may recall there were so many English classes. We were constantly adding classes. Now they’re taking those in high school and we’re giving the credit for that and we get a small amount of money from the state – not the full cost. And those are classes they took here.

At least having them broken out and counted is important because they’re part of our student population.

... To me, education goes all the way from pre-K through graduate (school). It’s aligned. And we should all be working together.

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