



ADVOCATE

AN INDIANA STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



**Growing the
Power
of Indiana Educators**

SUPPORT AND PROTECT FAMILIES
FACING ICE THREATS.

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AMERICAN FIDELITY 
a different opinion

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We'd love to hear from you!

Are you passionate about defending public education, advocating for equitable schools, building strong locals, protecting our future, culturally responsive teaching or new education trends? Email us at communications@ista-in.org to contribute to The *Advocate* or fill out the interest form by scanning the QR code.



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PURPOSE, MISSION AND GOALS

PURPOSE

To advocate for and advance the interests of Indiana's students, educators and public schools.

MISSION

The Indiana State Teachers Association is a professional association organized to sustain quality public education, improve students' educational opportunities and advance the professional status of educators.

GOALS

- Unify our voices — we are stronger together.
- Provide economic security and professional working conditions for educators.
- Create a premier public education system that serves all kids regardless of ZIP code, culture or ability.
- Fight for racial and social justice.

The *Advocate* is the official quarterly publication of the Indiana State Teachers Association, the state level of the United Education Profession. The content of the Association's publications will be consistent with its mission, strategic objectives and policies.

Greetings, fellow ISTA members! As we close out another school year, I hope that you will take some time to reflect on the successes you have had with your students this year and the difference you have made in their lives. I hope that you will also make plans to take time for yourself to rest and recharge over your summer break so that you come back renewed and ready to go when we begin next school year.



Jennifer Smith-Margraf, ISTA President

There are still a few weeks left in this school year to talk with potential members in your local about early enrollment and the power of our collective voice and actions and to ask them to join us in our work. As we learn the results from the May primary, it will be time to turn our collective voice and actions to ensure that folks vote for pro-public education candidates in the November elections. Be sure that your local leadership knows how to reach you at a personal email address or phone number with important updates and actions that you can take to make a difference in this election over the summer and as we head into a new school year this fall.

As part of recharging your batteries, we look forward to seeing you at the Educators of Color Conference and the Summer Conference to connect with fellow members and enhance your leadership and union skills. Both events are a great way to build your support system and connections statewide in preparation for another school year.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Smith-Margraf". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Smith-Margraf
ISTA President



PREPARING FOR RETIREMENT



**JANET
HAYES**

Janet Hayes is a member of ISTA-Retired. She is also a district council and PAC committee member.

A comfortable retirement requires reliable income. Retirement planning for educators starts with understanding how to make all of your retirement income sources work together. Planning is important even if your expected retirement is decades away. In fact, the earlier you start, the more options you have. Taking advantage of NEA Member Benefits programs and attending a pre-retirement is just what educators need.

ISTA-Retired Vice President and Membership Chair Ginger Calhoun along with committee members Jan Hayes and Terry Tafflinger are **ready to help you make a smooth transition into retirement.** Pre-retirement seminars are held throughout the state for all ISTA members and can be scheduled by a local president or UniServ Director in your area. Seminars often feature expert speakers, including Attorney Don Evan, who covers elder law, estate planning, probate and estate administration; Craig Blume, a registered Social Security analyst and independent insurance agent, who explains Medicare and Social Security options; and a representative from the Indiana Public Retirement System (INPRS), who presents available pension choices. After each session the speakers are available to answer questions. A box lunch and beverage is provided. Each participant is given a folder filled with information regarding NEA products/services and the **advantages of continuing ISTA membership.**

Contact Ginger Calhoun at gingercalhoun2@gmail.com for further information. At last year's NEA-Retired representative assembly, Indiana was recognized nationally for this program.



KEEPING FAMILIES SAFE: WHAT EVERY EDUCATOR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ICE



MONICA SHELLHAMER

Monica Shellhamer is a member of Indianapolis Education Association. She serves as vice president of IEA and as an association representative.

As an educator who serves in a district with a large population of immigrant families, their protection is always on my mind. In the recent months, we have seen ICE raids increase dramatically and threaten to come to Indianapolis and other parts of our state. As an educator it is important to know your rights and the rights that your families have.

The first thing that you need to do is inform families of their rights. AFL-CIO created a flyer to help everyone know their rights in the face of an immigration agent. **Remain silent, don't sign any documents without an attorney, carry federal immigration documents, make sure they have a warrant and document any interaction with law enforcement.** The Immigrant Legal Resource Center's (ILRC) Red Cards are super helpful for sharing rights with families and can be found in many languages.

Next, **find out if there is an immigration rapid response team in your area or your school.** These are places where immigration agents are reported so that families can be aware. If there isn't one, get creative! Report on maps that there are "icy" conditions, so families know to steer clear. Pass out whistles to help distract officers and alert families to danger.

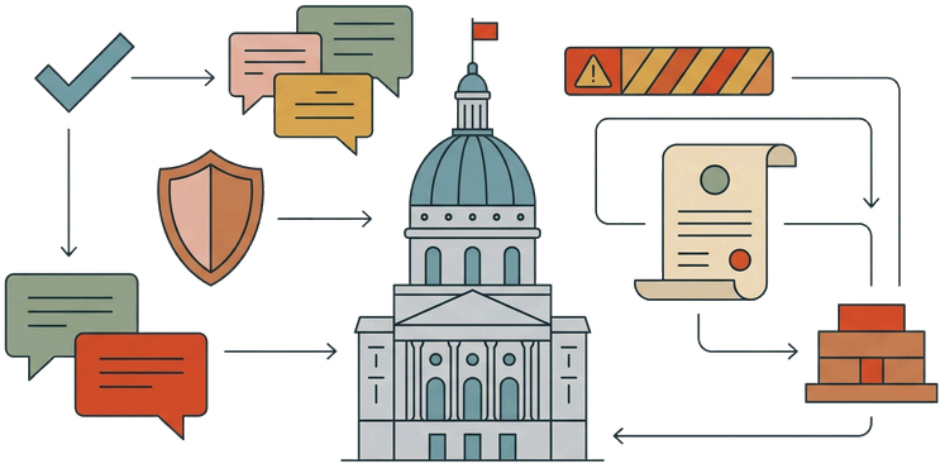
Finally, be ready for the worst-case scenario. **No one wants families to be separated, but when they do, students will need more support than ever.** Have a plan in place with a counselor, social worker or other trusted adults to help students in the event of family members being detained.

Under federal law, all children, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, are entitled to a K-12 education. It is our responsibility as educators to ensure that they can receive that education in a space that will protect them from those trying to remove them from our country.



REVIEW

Check out the resources on the ISTA Federal Resources webpage.



A SESSION OF ADVOCACY

PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND EDUCATOR VOICES

Indiana’s 2026 legislative session was **brief—even by the standards of a “short session.”** Lawmakers began their work earlier than usual in December as part of the state’s redistricting process, compressing an already tight legislative calendar. Despite the fast pace, **educators across Indiana remained engaged**, speaking up on issues affecting public schools and helping shape the outcome of key proposals.

Throughout the session, ISTA members contacted lawmakers, shared their experiences and helped elevate the voices of educators in policy discussions at the Statehouse. **That advocacy helped produce several meaningful wins while also preventing some troubling proposals from becoming law.**

Among the positive developments this year was legislation addressing **student device use during the school day.** Educators across Indiana have increasingly raised concerns about the impact of phones and other devices on classroom learning. A new law limiting device use during the school day gives schools clearer tools to reduce distractions and keep the focus on teaching and learning.

Lawmakers also **approved a 13th check for retired educators**, providing additional financial support to those who dedicated their careers to serving Indiana’s students.

Just as important were **several defensive victories that protected public schools and educators**. Notably, no legislation advanced this session that would have eliminated educators' collective bargaining rights.

Several other controversial proposals also failed to move forward. These included bills requiring the display of the **Ten Commandments in every classroom**, a bill targeting and censoring curriculum in schools and a proposal that would have **replaced the elected South Bend school board with an appointed body**. In each case, educators and community members made their voices heard and helped stop measures that could have had far-reaching consequences for schools.

At the same time, **the session also brought new challenges**.

One law removes the requirement that teacher contracts include **the number of hours educators are expected to work each day**. ISTA opposed the change, noting that educators already devote countless hours beyond the school day supporting students and preparing lessons.

Other legislation affecting public schools also advanced, including measures related to **governance changes in Indianapolis Public Schools and a broad immigration bill** that includes provisions affecting schools' interactions with federal immigration enforcement.

ISTA remains focused on the work ahead. We will be monitoring the implementation of new laws and continuing to advocate for policies that support students and respect educators.

Educator voices made a difference this session, and that work is far from over. Continuing to stay engaged will be critical to protecting and strengthening public schools in the years ahead.

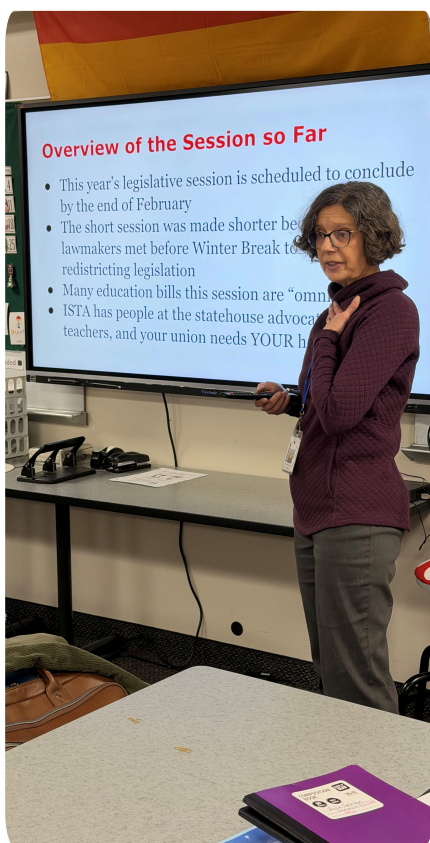


READ MORE

Find ISTA's full legislative summary of the 2026 General Assembly under the Our Advocacy tab on ISTA's website, ista-in.org.

Meet ISTA Member: Annemarie McClung

Annemarie McClung is a member of Jay County Teachers Association, where she teaches German. She serves on the LAT team and recently obtained her U.S. citizenship.



Q. What did becoming a U.S. citizen mean to you as an educator?

Becoming a U.S. citizen allows me to vote. Of all the things that citizens have the right to do, voting is the one you cannot do as a non-U.S. citizen. In any political climate, voting is an important thing in a democracy. As an American now I feel like I can fully participate in what's going on in my community, state and nationwide. Before that, I felt as if I was viewing from an outside lens because I was not an American citizen.

Q. Where were you born and when did you move to the U.S.?

I was born and raised in Germany, and I was an exchange student in U.S. for one year when I was in the eleventh grade. After that year, I moved back to Germany and finished high school and went to college. In college, I rekindled with one of my friends from my exchange year. Once I finished my master's degree, we got married and I decided to move to the U.S. So, I moved here when I was 25 years old.

Q. How do your students inspire you at this moment of your life?

My biggest motivation is the fact that I want students to know that there is a different world out there than the one they are living in. I find that students are increasingly living in a bubble that they've created. I'm motivated that I can show them that there are things that they have never tried and they should. For example, I take my advance German kids during the school day downhill skiing. In Indiana that's not a thing, but in Germany, we went to ski camp and learned how to ski. I'm still very motivated by introducing them to a world that they wouldn't know otherwise. I want to open their eyes and ears and allow them to travel, be curious and learn new things. That motivates me.

Q. What lessons from your own journey do you carry into your teaching practice?

Since I was an exchange student, I often make a point to meet the exchange students in our school and take them along on our field trips. I've taken our advance German students to Chicago and that's something I do because of my own experiences. I believe that the more they can see and travel, the more enriching their experience will be, so I share a lot about my parent's home in Germany, pictures I've taken when I was there...I integrate real life examples in the class.

Q. What are you most excited about now—both personally and professionally?

I am taking my biggest group ever - 41 students and parents on a trip to Germany, Australia, Italy and Switzerland - on spring break. I've never taken a big group. That worries me a bit, but it also excites me that I can share my home area and other European areas with so many people. Over the years through the exchange program about 140-160 students of mine have been to my hometown and the school I attended.

Q. What would you want immigrant students—or students from immigrant families—to know?

The United States has always been a land where immigrants could come for opportunities and none of that is happening right now. I would love to tell immigrants that they don't have to be afraid, but I don't think I can. I would tell immigrant families to keep doing what they've been doing, don't be afraid, you're valuable and you should be valued. I completely disagree with what's happening and that's why I wanted to be able to vote. I used to think that it wouldn't make a difference if I voted or not, but I do now feel like it must make a difference. We're going backwards. Why can't we all just be who we are?

Q. What's something that you do that brings you joy?

Ice skating. I have a little ice rink in my back yard and in the winter, I love to ice skate and be outside. I love going on long walks with my husband or reading a good book. I always finish my day with ten minutes in a book.





Take a closer look

Our *insurance and retirement solutions* help educators protect what they have today and prepare for a successful tomorrow.

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Learn more



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horacemann.com



INSIDE A BUILDING BLITZ

On February 5, ISTA staff joined the Elkhart Teachers Association (ETA) for a building blitz, **visiting schools across the district to connect with members**. The outreach was successful, resulting in **four new members** joining the local.

A building blitz is a strategic organizing tactic used to achieve a specific goal.

During contract hours, local leaders and identified members dedicate time to engage coworkers in **one-on-one, structured conversations designed to move people to action**. These conversations may invite educators to share their working conditions, provide feedback on school or district climate, weigh in on upcoming district changes, sign a petition or take other actions aligned with the local's goal.

ISTA has used building blitzes in a variety of ways. For example, through the Year-Round Organizing program, locals have used blitzes to secure paid release time for Member Organizers to step out of their classrooms and connect with colleagues. During these visits, **organizers have invited potential members to join the union**, gathered information from educators in schools facing possible closures, and collected feedback on climate surveys and other initiatives.

To conduct a successful building blitz, a local must first establish a clear purpose. Leaders should determine **why** they are engaging workers, **who** the target audience is, **when** the blitz will take place, **what** the specific “ask” will be and **how** they will access the buildings. Planning also includes assigning responsibilities and preparing materials in advance. Locals interested in conducting a blitz can work with their staff to review a checklist and walk through key planning questions and logistics.

Sample questions to consider:

1. Why do I want to talk with workers? What is the purpose of my visit and what am I asking the workers to do?
2. Who is my target audience? Who are the best people to talk to them?
3. Is there a “good” time to get into the building? Are there tests, special events, or schedules that I need to consider when picking a day and time to be in the building?
4. What information about workers do I need to know before I get into the building? Is there data that I need to collect from them during conversations?
5. How will the results of the blitz be collected? What is the plan for follow up? Who follows up and when?
6. What materials, training, or resources are needed before the blitz can be planned? What is needed the day of?



INTERESTED IN HOSTING A BUILDING BLITZ?

Contact your UniServ Director for details.

Two Conferences



One Powerful Summer

EDUCATORS OF COLOR CONFERENCE

June 11 - 13

ISTA is hosting its annual Indiana Educators of Color Conference for Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) members and allies at Intech in Indianapolis. **This year's theme, Still We Rise: Unapologetically, centers empowerment, authenticity and collective strength.**

Attendees can expect **phenomenal keynote speakers, powerful community-building experiences and enlightening breakout sessions** designed to uplift and inspire. The conference will also feature a special evening dinner where participants can **enjoy cuisines from various cultures** while continuing meaningful connection and conversation.

ISTA members are encouraged to attend, learn and engage with fellow BIPOC educators and allies in a space intentionally created to support leadership, advocacy and community.

Learn more about one of this year's keynote speakers, **Dr. Tia Mills** below:



DR. TIA MILLS

Dr. Tia Trumaine Mills is a veteran special education teacher from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with more than 20 years of classroom experience and was elected to the National Education Association Executive Committee in 2025. She is the immediate past president of the Louisiana Association of Educators and the youngest person to serve in that role, where she led advocacy efforts at the state legislature and worked to improve educator pay and membership growth. Dr. Mills holds degrees from Southern University and A&M College and an EdD from Nova Southeastern University and is a nationally recognized advocate for public education, equity and social justice.



REGISTER TODAY

Secure your seat by registering to attend at ista-in.org/educators-of-color. Registration deadline is May 22.

SUMMER CONFERENCE

July 14 - 15

ISTA's Summer Conference **brings members together from across Indiana for a week of learning, leadership development and connection.** This annual gathering offers engaging professional development sessions and hands-on training **designed to strengthen local associations and member advocacy.** Whether you are an early career educator or an experienced leader, Summer Conference provides practical tools, fresh ideas and meaningful networking opportunities to **help you start the new school year energized and informed.**



LEARN MORE

For more information about this event, visit the webpage.





Introducing ISTA Reads & ISTA Academy

Professional growth looks different for every educator. Some of us are looking for practical strategies we can use tomorrow. Others are searching for connection, inspiration and space to reflect. With the launch of **ISTA Reads and ISTA Academy**, the Indiana State Teachers Association is expanding opportunities for members to learn, lead and grow together. Whether you're early in your career or a seasoned educator ready to deepen your impact, these two new programs were created with you in mind.



ISTA Reads is a statewide book club created exclusively for ISTA members. The program offers educators a low-pressure way to connect, recharge and build community through shared reading experiences. By bringing members together around meaningful books and conversations, ISTA Reads supports educator well-being and strengthens connections across locals and regions.



Read one book every two months.



Submit book suggestions and vote on each selection.



Read at your own pace.



Participate in polls, engagement prompts, virtual discussions and optional in-person events.



Celebrate completion and be entered into a drawing for ISTA Reads merchandise and other small giveaways.



JOIN THE COMMUNITY

Start reading with fellow educators.



ISTA Academy is a comprehensive online professional learning hub designed exclusively for ISTA members, offering high-quality courses and resources to support educators at every stage of their careers. The platform provides flexible, on-demand professional development aligned with current educational priorities, classroom practice and leadership growth, allowing members to learn anytime, anywhere.



Register and create your profile.



Complete the required course.



View the course catalogue and get familiar with your learning options.



Enroll in a course and begin learning at your own pace.



Earn professional growth plan (PGP) points upon course completion for some courses.



BEGIN LEARNING

Enroll in self-paced and facilitated courses that support will support your professional growth.



Make the most of your new **MEMBERSHIP!**

Find out how NEA Member Benefits can help you:

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- Get insurance that fits your schedule
- Sign up for free life insurance
- Plan ahead for retirement

And so much more!

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DRIVE FORWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION



The new **ISTA Foundation specialty license plate** is now available for purchase. When you choose this plate, **you're helping champion public education across Indiana.**

A portion of every plate sale contributes to scholarships and grants benefiting current and aspiring Indiana educators. Show your pride in public education every mile you drive.

ISTA Foundation license plates may be purchased at a BMV branch, online via myBMV.com or at a BMV Connect kiosk. When you purchase a plate, you'll pay registration fees and taxes.



MORE INFORMATION

Visit the webpage for more information about purchasing.



A FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE

TO THE NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY



PHILIP WARD

Philip Ward is a member of the Westfield CTA. He serves as vice president of the Westfield CTA, association representative and an ISTA board member.

The first National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assembly (RA) that I attended was in 2017 in Boston. **What makes the RA so powerful is being in a room with thousands of educators from across the country — and even the world — all united around one common goal: improving public education.**

HERE ARE TIPS TO SUCCEED AT YOUR FIRST RA:



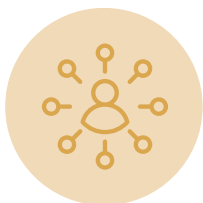
Comfort is Non-Negotiable

One long-standing RA tradition is that it takes place around the Fourth of July. Many delegates lean into the patriotic spirit, so feel free to dress festively, if you'd like. That said, comfort is key. You'll spend long hours — often seven to nine at a time — on the convention floor, and it has a reputation for being cold. Bring layers, comfortable shoes and snacks to keep your energy up throughout the day.



Know the Issues Before You Arrive

One thing I wish I would have known before my first RA was to review the New Business Items (NBIs) and proposed constitutional amendments and bylaws. Once you arrive in the host city, everything moves quickly and you do not have time to catch up. Expect to be busy all day with state caucus meetings in the morning until the late afternoon or early evening with RA business.



Build Connections

While the schedule is full, I would encourage anyone attending to explore the host city and get to know fellow educators. To this day, I connect with people that I met during my first RA in Boston, and those connections helped me become more involved with ISTA on a state level.



Lean on Experienced Leaders

Find someone that has been to one or multiple RAs to help guide you. I remember in Boston sitting next to the late former president Nate Schnellenberger. Having an experienced leader nearby made a lasting impression and helped me better understand the process.



LEARN MORE

Review more details about the NEA RA by visiting the webpage.

JOIN DURING EARLY ENROLLMENT

No Dues Until the New School Year

Early Enrollment is here. **From April 1 through Aug. 31**, educators who have not previously enrolled during an early enrollment period **can join the union at no immediate cost.**

Being part of a union protects our careers — including help with bargaining and maintaining a fair contract, lawyers to guard our employment rights, and liability protection in case the unthinkable happens.

Available Benefits:

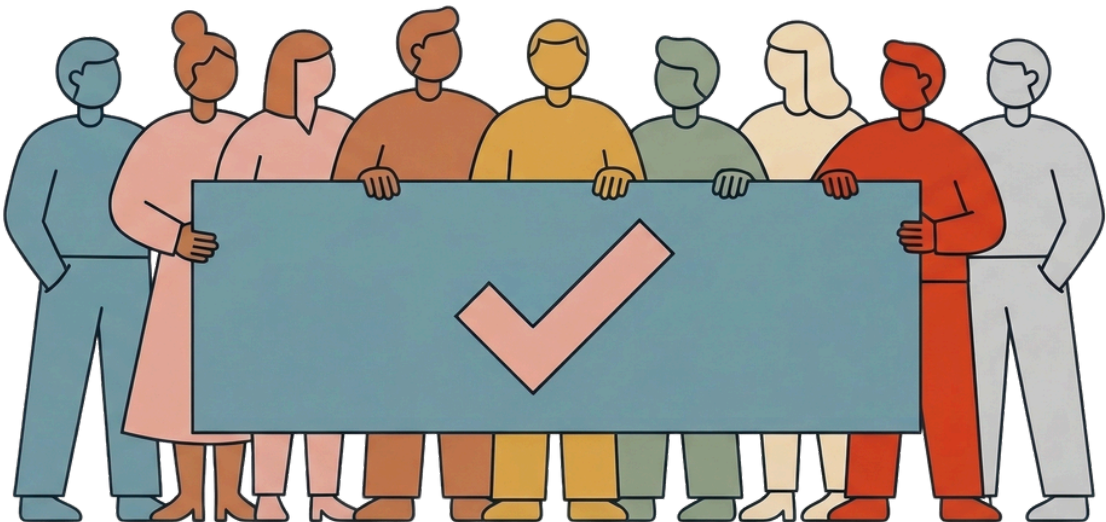
- Professional learning opportunities and resources
- Collective power and a voice in bargaining and legislative action
- Select access to NEA Member Benefits program

Be part of the largest labor union in Indiana. With over 30,000 members, we stand together to ensure that educators have a stronger voice.



TAKE ADVANTAGE

Encourage your colleagues to take advantage of early enrollment today. Visit the Resources webpage for flyers and enrollment forms.



EXTRA CREDIT





Mark your calendars and enjoy a day out with your family or friends. Participate in these amazing events this spring and summer across Indiana.

INDY A TO Z

At Indy A to Z, you can discover not only the city, but the people who call it home. Through artifacts from the city's past and present and hands-on interactives, Indy A to Z delves deep into our city's history, culture and current happenings.

Feb. 27 - June 28 | Indianapolis



ROMEO & JULIET

Indiana Ballet Conservatory brings Romeo & Juliet to life in a breathtaking production that will move your heart and ignite your imagination.

May 30 | Wabash



OUTDOOR EXPLORE! 2026

Outdoor Explore! provides citizens of all ages and interest-levels with opportunities to learn about and participate in some aspect of over 30 different outdoor pursuits.

June 13 | West Lafayette



SILENT BOOKCLUB

Having a "silent" bookclub allows everyone flexibility to come and go as they please each week while getting to see both new and familiar faces. This means everyone gets to bring their current read and read at their own pace.

Every Thursday | New Albany



VALPARAISO FARMERS MARKET

Explore farm-fresh produce, specialty goods, and bakery items and chat with the farmers and makers who made them.

June 2 - Oct. 10 | Valparaiso



WAYNE COUNTY 4-H FAIR

4-H shows, track events, vendors, food, free entertainment, carnival, tractors, car show, special events, fireworks and more. Follow us on Facebook.

June 20 - 27 | Richmond



STRAWBERRIES ON THE SQUARE

Celebrate the arrival of strawberry season with live music, family activities and strawberry shortcakes served from 11 a.m. until they run out.

May 22 | Franklin



JUNETEENTH FOODWAYS FESTIVAL

Save the date for the 5th annual Juneteenth Foodways Festival!

June 12 | Indianapolis



MARION COUNTY FAIR

Join us for our 96th annual fair! You won't want to miss this Indiana summer tradition with scrumptious food, live entertainment, world-class attractions, livestock shows, thrilling Midway rides, and all your other fair favorites.

June 26 - July 5 | Indianapolis





150 W. Market St., Ste. 900
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nea Retirement Program

NAVIGATING YOUR INVESTMENT JOURNEY

Which Path Are You On?

Saving and Planning Workshops for ISTA Members

As part of your membership, NEA Member Benefits and Security Benefit are offering free, local workshops to help members build a successful path to retirement. Regardless of where you're at on your retirement journey, our workshops can help you find answers to your fundamental questions.

Don't miss this opportunity to get on the right path and take control of your retirement journey.

For more information contact Nick Dobelbower

Indiana Regional Vice President, Security Benefit | Nick.Dobelbower@SecurityBenefit.com | 785.438.3078

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