

5 QUESTIONS WITH

Karl R. LaPan
president & CEO of The NIIC

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Karl R. LaPan is passionate about helping entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses in northeast Indiana. As the president and CEO of The Northeast Indiana Innovation Center (The NIIC), LaPan leads his team in accomplishing that mission every day. For almost 20 years, The NIIC has been making its mark as a center for serious-minded innovators and entrepreneurs, serving businesses at every stage. With 74,400 square feet of space on 55 acres and a can-do attitude, The NIIC has become an entrepreneurial community of choice.

Q¹ What led you to The NIIC?

I was running an advanced biometric company, a Fort Wayne headquartered entrepreneurial company owned by a group out of Canada, that we sold, and I stayed on for a few years after the sale. My wife and I were having our second son. We wanted to stay in Fort Wayne, and I had done some corporate venture work and enjoyed it. I was attracted to The NIIC because it was about building homegrown companies – creating jobs and companies committed to our community success.

Q² What are you most proud of at The NIIC?

I am passionate about the range of projects, clients and programs we offer. I'm proud of the difference we are making in creating sustainable, growth-oriented companies. We have a global reputation and are a recognized entrepreneurial thought leader. We have achieved this status because we see a wide range of ideas, inspiring business builders and cool companies. I am proud of the clients who entrust their dreams and ideas to us and our team for delivering exceptional value and services every day.

Q³ The NIIC is a unique entity in northeast Indiana, tell us what sets it apart.

The NIIC is very special. We are driven by helping

entrepreneurs and innovative companies be successful. Our metrics prove that. We help business builders across the spectrum of type and stage of business. We also do significant community outreach into underserved communities to grow the hometown team. We are inclusive, evidence-based and entrepreneurial. This is what sets us apart. We bet on the business builder – we play different roles depending on their needs – advocate, trusted advisor, accountability coach and/or a component of their support system.

Q4 Why does entrepreneurship in northeast Indiana mean so much to you?

Entrepreneurship is what makes most communities like northeast Indiana thrive. Entrepreneurship is a great equalizer for economic prosperity. Every day we make a difference, inspiring and nurturing business builders. It is both humbling and gratifying. At its core, entrepreneurship is about pursuing opportunity, creating and capturing value and managing uncertainty. We help accelerate the growth and development of innovative ideas and companies. Our region will only be successful in achieving its aspirational goals – higher per capita wage rates, population growth and better quality of

life – to the extent we embrace, encourage and nurture entrepreneurial energy and entrepreneurial action.

Q5 When you're not helping others build businesses, what can you be found doing in your free time?

I enjoy spending time with my family. We love spending vacations at the beach or on a cruise ship. In 2018, we had to put down our 14 year old lab, so our new puppy takes a lot of our free time since two of our three sons are away at college. I am also a voracious reader and agile learner. You will find me taking classes, listening to podcasts and connecting with smart people all over the world. In addition, we are a devoted tennis family, so we really enjoy watching our youngest son play tennis for Bishop Dwenger High School.

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We asked Karl even more questions!
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access to more of our interview.



YOU WHAT?

photography by Jeffrey Crane

Karl R. LaPan,
president and CEO,
The Northeast Indiana Innovation Center (The NIIC)

Do you have a nickname? Only as a child, it was Boger

Describe yourself in three words. Resilient, restless and intellectually curious

In what city did you grow up? Not a city, but the village of Turners Falls (Massachusetts)

What book has had the greatest impact on you? *Good to Great* by Jim Collins

What is the first movie you ever saw in a theater? *Rocky Horror Picture Show*

What famous person would you most like to meet? Ronald Reagan

What is your favorite part of your job? Encouraging people towards achievement of their dreams

What do you actually do at your job? Helping people successfully navigate business potholes

What do you love most about Fort Wayne? I met my wife here and raising our three boys here

What is your greatest accomplishment? Having three confident, cool and courageous children

Do you have a motto you live by? If so, what is it? Results, not effort, get rewarded

If Hollywood made a movie about your life, whom would you like to cast as you? Michael J. Fox (in his role as Alex P. Keaton on *Family Ties*)

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party (living, dead, famous, real or fictional)? Pope Francis, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Princess Diana, Jason Bourne, JR Ewing and Steve Jobs

Who would you like to see perform in concert? Rush

If you could travel anywhere, where would you go? Bora Bora

What is something nobody knows about you? I had my own classroom and taught other students while in 6th grade

If you could solve one major problem, what would it be? The lack of civility and inability to have constructive dissent that exists today

If you could give your 15 year-old self-advice, what would it be? "Always put forth your personal best and leave nothing on the table."

What's the best piece of advice you've been given? "Loyalty is 24 hours deep, and on Friday we are even."

What is the best gift you have ever been given? My parents sending me to boarding school fostering my love of learning

Name one person who has inspired you in your life. My mom. She lived with Parkinson's for 25 years, was a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ and never lost her dignity, humor or tenacity

What is one important skill you think everyone should have? Self-awareness

If you could turn any activity into an Olympic sport, what would you win a medal in? Reading books

What is the strangest thing you've ever eaten? Camel hump and donkey in China

If you could send a message to the entire world, what would you say in 30 seconds? Be watchful. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. (1Corinthians 16)

What moment in your life would you most like to go back and relive? The last time I saw my mom before she passed away. While I told her many things, there was more to say.

What is your favorite...

Vacation spot? Destin, Florida

Holiday? Why? Christmas – uplifting, joyful and spirited time of year

Sports team? Patriots

Song? *Subdivisions* by Rush

Drink? Stella Artois on draft

Movie? *Big*

Downtown locale? In the ole' days, the Summit Club and its skyline view!

Fort Wayne feature? Science Central

Fast food restaurant? Steak 'n Shake

TV show? ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder*

Flavor of ice cream? Ben & Jerry's Peanut Butter Cup 🍪