

Vincennes District And Others Get In The Dirt To ‘Keep Evansville Beautiful’

Vincennes District Deputy Commissioner Rusty Fowler joined more than 100 volunteers April 27 to plant approximately 8,500 native grasses and various wildflowers, fulfilling a long-awaited dream by many to enhance the northern gateway to the city of Evansville on U.S. 41 south of State Road 57.



Vincennes District Deputy Commissioner Rusty Fowler, second from left with papers in hand, speaks to local media earlier this year at a press conference announcing the event. INDOT's Highway Roadside Coordinator Bill Fielding is in attendance, second from right.

“INDOT was approached more than a year ago to partner on this project near the city’s airport,” said Fowler. “We loved the idea and started regular planning meetings and developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the city to define who would be responsible for different aspects of the project.”

In addition to Fowler and others at the district, INDOT’s Highway Roadside Coordinator Bill Fielding was instrumental in the planning process because of his in-depth knowledge of native species and his oversight of INDOT’s [Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program](#).

“INDOT has a partnership with the Department of Correction’s Putnamville Correctional Facility,” said Fielding. “INDOT supplies containers and seeds to the offenders at the facility, and the offenders plant seeds and take care of the flowers and grasses until they are ready to be used on roadsides. This partnership greatly offsets the cost of roadside beautification efforts.”

Fielding added that the selected plants are species that will not grow too high, allowing for clear sight distance in the median area.

“Prairie Dropseed and Little Bluestem grasses will complement wild flowers like the Butterfly Weed, Purple Coneflower and Brown-Eyed Susan,” said Fielding.

Other district departments got involved with the project as the planting date neared.

“I’d miss someone if I pointed out everyone by name who played a critical role in the success of the event,” said Fowler. “I must again thank our herbicide, safety and communications staffs, along with employees from the Evansville Subdistrict. The herbicide staff prepped the soil at the site and coordinated plant deliveries, while the subdistrict staff made sure proper traffic control was in place the day of the event. Safety staff conducted training sessions and briefings, and communications was involved in notifying the media about the project, including traffic restrictions the day of the event.”



Volunteers brightened a cloudy day by planting grasses and wildflowers in the median on U.S. 41 in Evansville.

“Besides making a nicer gateway to the city of Evansville, district personnel have strengthened and developed relationships with those involved in the project,” said Fowler. “Those include the city of Evansville, Keep Evansville Beautiful and its partners — the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society, Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden, local Master Gardener’s Club members, and local universities. There were also many individual citizens who helped with this tremendous effort.”

The volunteers’ work has not gone unnoticed. Fowler says that the district, city and other groups involved in the project have received many phone calls praising the new median.