



The Torch

The official newsletter for Indiana state employees

January, 2021

Gov. Holcomb unveils 2021 Next Level agenda

2021 NEXT LEVEL AGENDA

Governor Eric J. Holcomb [announced his 2021 Next Level Agenda](#) in December, which is focused on safely navigating out of the pandemic and emerging as a stronger Indiana.

“The 2021 Next Level Agenda is focused on making sure Indiana remains a state of opportunity for all,” Gov. Holcomb said. “To do that, we must manage our way through the world’s worst pandemic in over a century.”

The 2021 Next Level Agenda includes five pillars detailing legislative and administrative priorities for the year ahead. To watch Gov. Holcomb’s agenda speech at Dentons Legislative Conference and learn more about the 2021 Next Level Agenda, visit <http://www.in.gov/gov>.

- Cultivate a strong and diverse economy
- Maintain and build the state’s infrastructure
- Education, training and workforce development
- Public health
- Deliver great government service

To watch Gov. Holcomb’s agenda speech at Dentons Legislative Conference and learn more about the 2021 Next Level Agenda, visit <http://www.in.gov/gov>.

In this issue

- 2 Construction returns to help restock food pantries
- 3 New year, new opportunities to be well!
- 8 Indiana Grown launches online marketplace
- 10 Wild, wild life

The Torch is published monthly by the Indiana State Personnel Department and is available online at <https://www.in.gov/spd/employee-resources/the-torch/>

Got a story?

Submit your story ideas to: spdcommunications@spd.in.gov

Social media



Follow [@SOIEmployees](https://twitter.com/SOIEmployees)



Like [@SOIEmployees](https://www.facebook.com/SOIEmployees)



Follow [State of Indiana Employees](https://www.youtube.com/StateofIndianaEmployees)

Canstruction returns to help re-stock food pantries

Registration opens Jan. 6

Your chance to do your part to help food pantries throughout the Hoosier State is almost here!

Registration opens for the third annual [State of Indiana employees' "Canstruction Competition"](#) Wednesday, **Jan. 6**. Want to be part of the fun? Head to [this link](#) and complete your registration by **Jan. 15**. Make sure you include your team name, the name of your team captain, and the recipient of your donation and you'll be all set!

The competition is open to all state of Indiana agencies and will allow YOU to help Hoosiers in need by donating a variety of canned goods to a food pantry of your team's choice. The holiday season is typically a time during which food pantries see an increase in need. By providing canned goods and other non-perishables to Hoosiers facing food insecurity due to economic conditions or other hardships, those non-profits provide an invaluable service. Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, their work is all the more important.

Time and time again, state of Indiana employees have shown they are always willing to help their Hoosier neighbors when needed. The Canstruction Competition is a way to do just that while also having fun and being creative.

So, what you can build? Almost anything!

Last year alone, we saw a re-creation of the field and end zones of Lucas Oil Stadium, American flags, state agency logos and program promos, a tribute to Super Mario Bros., and at least two "baby Yoda" (do we have to call him 'Grogu'?) assemblies. The winner for "Best Structure" (one of two contest awards) was



The Indiana State Fair Commission won the award for "Best Structure" with this entry in the 2020 Canstruction Competition. The agency also collected the most cans.

compiled by the Indiana State Fair Commission who used just shy of 5,100 cans to preview the 2020 Horizon Basketball Championships at the Indiana Farmers Coliseum. The monumental can total also secured the second award of the competition, "Most Cans Collected," for the State Fair Commission.

By far the most important number, however, is the total amount of canned goods collected and distributed to the selected charitable institutions. Last year's Canstruction Competition resulted in an astonishing 23, 620 total cans being collected by 49 different teams!

State agencies will compete for the same awards this year with can totals tallied by agencies as a whole. For example, all Indiana Department of Transportation entries, regardless of location, will be added together.

The winner for "Best Structure" again will be determined by a panel of judges. This year, the judges will include the Office of Gov. Eric J. Holcomb, Indiana State Personnel Department (INSPD) director Matt Brown, the Indiana State Fair Commission's Cindy Hoye, and a special judge from a Hoosier food pantry.

Teams can begin collecting canned goods Jan. 18. All participants have until noon Jan. 29 to finish their Canstruction and submit at least one photo of their completed creation to INSPD at spdccommunications@spd.in.gov. The panel of judges will vote on the competition's "Best Structure" award Feb. 2. The winner of that award as well as the agency that collected the most cans will be announced via statewide email on Feb. 3.

Participants should also make arrangements to have their Canstruction dismantled and the canned goods delivered to the chosen food pantry by Jan. 29.

If you need a little inspiration, have a look back at last year's entries at the [State Employees' Facebook page](#), and read details about last year's competition as well as a unique can drive effort by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority [here](#). If you have questions, send us an email at spdccommunications@spd.in.gov.

Story by Brent Brown, Indiana State Personnel Department

New year, new opportunities to be well!

It's a brand new year, and that means new opportunities to be well and earn rewards through the ActiveHealth program in 2021!

This year's rewards include e-gift cards and a 2022 Premium Discount.

ActiveHealth is a wellness program offered by the Indiana State Personnel Department (INSPD) as part of your medical benefits package. The ActiveHealth wellness program is focused on helping you make little changes that can have a big impact on your health. You get unlimited access to health coaches, a library of health information, and rewards!

How to earn rewards through the ActiveHealth program:

2022 Premium Discount

Employees and spouses enrolled in coverage must each fully complete **one** of the following three options by Sept. 30, 2021:

- Complete four individual health coaching sessions (in-person or by phone) through ActiveHealth
- Reach Level 5, which is 9,000 hearts, in ActiveHealth's online portal by completing health education modules, health goals and challenges
- Record 200 days of physical activity tracking through a device synced to the ActiveHealth portal. Any day with 10,000 steps or 30 minutes of physical activity counts toward the 200 day goal. **Only activity that occurs after you have synced your fitness device will be tracked and credited.**

Track your progress toward completing an activity in



your Rewards Center on the [ActiveHealth portal](#).

Health Assessment

Complete the health assessment to earn a \$25 e-gift card (for eligible employees and spouses).

A health assessment is a private and confidential questionnaire to check in on your general health and well-being. Taking the health assessment is a great way to see where you are and find areas that need some work. The Health Assessment provides an easy-to-understand report so you can take action.

- Log in to www.myactivehealth.com/stateofindiana and click the health assessment link. If you do not already have an account, creating one is easy. The only information needed is your name, birth date, and mailing zip code.
- Complete by Nov. 30, 2021 to earn the \$25 e-gift card.

Wellness Visit

Complete a wellness visit to earn a \$100 e-gift card (for eligible employees and spouses).

A [wellness visit](#) (sometimes referred to as an annual physical or yearly check-up) with your health care provider is an opportunity to assess your current health, identify any necessary preventive care, and review health changes over time. A wellness visit checks the same health indicators as a biometric screening plus your medical history, medication needs, and current diet, exercise and other routines. During a wellness visit, your provider can also order additional lab work based on your health history, and work with you to create a plan to improve your overall health.

Pick the option that works for you:

- See your doctor for a physical with lab work. Have your doctor complete the Annual Physical Results Form. Submit the completed form by secure upload or fax.
- Go to a CVS MinuteClinic for a wellness visit. Print the voucher and locate providers in your [ActiveHealth portal](#).

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

New year, new opportunities to be well!

Results must be visible in the ActiveHealth portal by Nov. 30, 2021 to earn the \$100 e-gift card.

Note: For annual physical results forms, processing time is up to four weeks from the date the form is accepted to when the results are visible in the ActiveHealth portal. Data from MinuteClinic wellness visits takes two to four weeks from the date of the visit to be loaded

and visible in the ActiveHealth portal.

Flu shot

Don't forget, employees and spouses who received a flu shot between Aug. 1, 2020 and Dec. 31, 2020, and are currently eligible for the ActiveHealth program, have earned another \$25 e-gift card. Visit your ActiveHealth Rewards Center to redeem your e-gift card.

For specific details check out the [flu shot reward FAQ](#).

Questions?

- Visit [InvestInYourHealthIndiana.com/activehealth](https://www.investinyourhealthindiana.com/activehealth)
- Call the INSPD benefits hotline at 317-232-1167 or 877-248-0007 Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Email spdbenefits@spd.in.gov

How to make your resolutions work in 2021

2021 is a new year, and a time to really think about goals you would like to achieve.

More than half of all New Year resolutions fail, but that doesn't have to happen to you! One of the main reasons a resolution may not be accomplished is because the goal is not thought through well enough, or realistically able to be achieved. But you can avoid these pitfalls and make your goals happen with a solid plan in place.

First, identify the right resolution to improve your life, then create a plan on how to reach it. Follow these simple steps to help set a goal for 2021:

Write down your goal. Use the SMART method.

Specific – Your resolution should be 100 percent clear. For example, if you are wanting to lose weight, instead of saying “my goal is to lose weight,” be more specific. How much weight would you like to lose?

Measurable – Define what evidence will prove that you are making progress and reevaluate when necessary.

Achievable -Make sure you can reasonably accomplish your goal within a certain timeframe.

Relevant – Your goals should align with your values and long-term objectives.

Time-based – Set a realistic end date for task prioritization and motivation

Other tips

Develop micro goals. A small change to a current habit might make more sense than setting a large goal that's unrealistic.

Do something daily. Little actions every day help shift your focus to your effort and away from unattainable perfection.

Are you planning? Create a plan to deal with challenges that could get in your way.

Use these questions to help shape your goals:

- **What** do you want to achieve?
- **Why** is it important?
- **How** motivated, on a scale of 1 to 10 are you?
- **What** are the obstacles?
- **Who** else can support you?
- **How** will you know that you achieved this goal?

Need help with setting a goal, or perhaps some motivation to help along the way? ActiveHealth is here to support you! Onsite & telephonic health coaching is available. Call 855-202-4219 to schedule an appointment.



FSSA names agency's first chief health equity and ADA officer

The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) recently announced that Breanca Merritt, Ph.D., will serve as the agency's first chief health equity and ADA officer, beginning Jan. 4.

Merritt is the founding director of the Center for Research on Inclusion and Social Policy at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, as well as a clinical assistant professor in IUPUI's O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, and adjunct faculty for the Africana Studies program.



FSSA recently created the chief health equity and ADA officer position to provide leadership in the evaluation of policy decisions that affect race equity, to build metrics for agency accountability, ensuring agency adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act, and to serve at the executive level working to build a culture of equity

across the agency. The position will report directly to the FSSA secretary and also be responsible for leading FSSA's Office of Healthy Opportunities.

"Dr. Merritt has a long history as an academic and practitioner with real-world experience working among marginalized populations to understand racial and ethnic disparities and encouraging policies that promote equity," said Jennifer Sullivan, M.D., M.P.H., FSSA secretary.

Dr. Merritt earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Oklahoma's Gaylord College of Journalism before a master's degree in political science from Texas A&M University. She then earned a Ph.D. in health promotion sciences from the University of Oklahoma's Hudson College of Public Health with a specialty in health disparities.

"My career has always been dedicated to informing government efforts to improve outcomes for local communities, especially the populations served by FSSA," said Dr. Merritt. "I look forward to working collectively to address racial and social equity for Hoosiers who receive services and interact with the agency."

Dr. Merritt resides in Indianapolis with her husband.

Stay up to date with COVID-19 news

- [2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Indiana Department of Health](#)
- [Governor Eric J. Holcomb](#)

Helpful resources

Anthem Resources

- [Anthem Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)
- [Anthem NurseLine](#)
- [LiveHealth Online](#)
- [211.org](#)

General Resources

- IDOH COVID-19 Call Center— 877-826-0011
- Contact the INSPD Benefits Hotline – 317-232-1167 (Indianapolis area), 1-877-248-0007 (toll- free outside Indianapolis)
- Disaster Distress Helpline – 800-985-5990, or text "TalkWithUs" or "Hablanos" to/al 66746.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Helpline – 800-662-HELP
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 800-273-TALK or 888-628-9454 (español)

You're dedicated to serving your community.
We're devoted to helping you.

Exclusive scholarship opportunity for State of Indiana employees.



\$2,500

Eligibility to apply for the Public Service Recognition Scholarship valued at \$2,500

WGU
INDIANA



Artwork by
Jerry Williams

Be Well Crisis Helpline answers the call for Hoosiers in need

The Be Well Crisis Helpline recently passed an important milestone as it enters its sixth month of operation.

The free service was [launched in July](#) to support the mental health needs of Hoosiers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The service has answered more than 6,000 calls for help as it continues to provide 24/7 access to experienced and compassionate counselors, specially trained to help with the personal challenges that have come along with this pandemic.

“While we recognize that each of these calls is a cry for help from a Hoosier experiencing feelings of distress and anxiety, likely aggravated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also comforted to know that, through the Be Well Crisis Helpline, they are connecting with someone who can listen, assess their needs, and help,” said Jennifer Sullivan, M.D., M.P.H., secretary of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.

To date, the Be Well Crisis Helpline has answered 6,049 calls, with an average talk time of 18 minutes and 10 seconds, but with an average wait time of only 16 seconds. To reach a counselor, anyone in Indiana can simply call 2-1-1, enter their ZIP code, and follow the prompts to reach the Be Well Crisis Helpline.

According to data collected by the counselors, 46 percent of callers have a pre-existing trauma or substance use or mental health problem. Following their conversations, the counselors



referred 29 percent of the callers to mental health treatment, 24 percent for additional community-based resources such as food, clothing, housing or utility assistance, and another 16 percent for additional crisis counseling. In slightly more than 1 percent of cases, following telephone counseling, Be Well Crisis Helpline counselors determined the situation was critical and called 9-1-1 to provide immediate assistance to the callers.

“This data tells us that the Be Well Crisis Helpline is playing a critical role in the health care continuum for Hoosiers who feel like they are in distress as a result of this pandemic,” said Jay Chaudhary, director of FSSA’s Division of Mental Health and Addiction. “Hundreds of our fellow Hoosiers have begun to receive treatment for the mental health issues they face, and likely faced prior to COVID-19. We strongly encourage anyone who feels like they could use the help to call us at 2-1-1.”

The top distress reactions counselors are encountering on the calls include isolation or

withdrawal (34 percent), issues with sleep (34 percent), anxiety or fearfulness (32 percent), and difficulty concentrating (27 percent).

“We are also getting referrals from first responders who know they can rely on the Be Well Crisis Helpline as a new resource in their toolkit to deal with persons under mental stress,” added Chaudhary. “This helpline has come at the right time for Hoosiers who are under real mental distress and need someplace to turn for help.”

The Be Well Crisis Helpline is funded by a [Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program](#) grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. More information on the Be Well Crisis Helpline can be found at www.bewellindiana.com. Indiana 211 is a free service that connects Hoosiers with assistance and answers from thousands of statewide health and human service resources — quickly, easily and confidentially. Indiana 211 [became part of FSSA](#) in 2020.

Indiana DNR receives Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation award

Recently, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was given the State Agency of the Year Award by the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) during the 17th Annual National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC) Sportsman-Legislator Summit.

"The State Agency of the Year Award is presented to one state fish and wildlife agency each year in recognition of their dedication to furthering science-based wildlife management policies, promoting our outdoor heritage, and partnering with legislators and members of the hunting and fishing community in their state," said Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation President Jeff Crane.

"We are honored to present the 2020 NASC State Agency Award to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, who has been a true partner to both CSF and the Indiana Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, and has demonstrated commitment to sound policy

priorities and working with the sportsmen's community in the Hoosier state."

The award recognizes Indiana DNR's work hosting the first Legislative Rendezvous at Atterbury Fish & Wildlife Area. This event was an opportunity for legislators, conservation partners, and agency staff to participate in recreational shooting at the Atterbury Shooting Complex while sharing the DNR's work to ensure conservation and recreational access.

"We are privileged to receive this award, and we are grateful for our partnership with the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation," said Amanda Wuestefeld, director of the Division of Fish & Wildlife. "Through this partnership, we can continue advancing fish and wildlife habitat management and the recreational opportunities they afford."

Hosted by the CSF, the NASC Sportsman-Legislator Summit



Amanda Wuestefeld, DNR director of Division of Fish & Wildlife.

brings together caucus members, non-governmental organization representatives, key staff from state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, representatives of the outdoor industry, and other conservation policy professionals for two days of educational programming, networking, and discussion on enhancing access, opportunities, and #ResponsibleRecreation.

Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Receives Grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. for Master Planning

The Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites (ISMHS) was awarded a \$196,140 grant by Lilly Endowment Inc. to develop a comprehensive master planning process to guide the ISMHS board of directors and staff on addressing the museum's role and value to neighboring communities in Indianapolis.

The planning process, which will take place throughout 2021, will serve as a template to inform its approach to future master

planning for each of the museum system's 11 historic sites around the state.

"We are delighted that Lilly Endowment Inc. recognizes the value of this work and has awarded us this generous grant," said Cathy Ferree, President and CEO of the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. "We are a visitor-centric organization whose mission is to serve as a catalyst for informal lifelong learning that connects the stories of real people, places

and things. The master planning process offers an opportunity to have the biggest possible impact by helping us to understand how to best use our resources and serve our expanding and diverse audiences, including surrounding neighborhoods."

Boston-based TDC Corp., one of the nation's oldest nonprofit management consulting and research firms, will conduct the study.

Indiana Grown launches online marketplace

[Indiana Grown](#) recently launched the [Shop Indiana Grown](#) online marketplace.

The free service is offered to all qualifying Indiana Grown members, and provides them with an additional sales outlet during a time when online retail is critical to the success of many farms and businesses in our state and nationwide.

Indiana Grown is housed within the [Indiana State Department of Agriculture \(ISDA\)](#) and offers free resources to farms and businesses who grow, raise, produce or process an agriculture product in the state of Indiana. Members range from traditional row crop farmers to wineries to artisans to value-added food producers

“One of my favorite activities during the Indiana State Fair is shopping at the Indiana Grown Marketplace,” said Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch. “I am continually amazed at the variety and quality of products that Hoosier farmers and producers provide, and consumers should have access to those items every day.”

Consumers will initially find nearly 40 vendors with more than 100 products to purchase on the platform with an increased selection available as new vendors and items are added daily in categories such as cheese, honey, coffee and skin care. With the popularity of the Indiana Grown Marketplace at the Indiana State Fair, the online store will allow the public to purchase local products year-round from anywhere.

“This project has taken months of hard work to ensure it will truly benefit our membership,” said Indiana Grown Program Director Heather Tallman. “We

often get asked how to purchase from our members, and we are thrilled to see the consumer response to this exciting solution.”

The new marketplace will help the Indiana Grown program accomplish its goals of helping Indiana farmers and producers have a greater market for their products and educating consumers on the importance of buying locally grown, raised, processed and packaged items.

“Having celebrated its fifth anniversary this summer, Indiana Grown is stepping up its ability to serve its members and consumers,” said ISDA Director Bruce Kettler. “This new benefit of Indiana Grown membership is addressing the ever-changing needs of Indiana’s agriculture community.”

Indiana Grown is also partnering with the [Indiana Small Business Development Center \(Indiana SBDC\)](#), which provided support to fuel the e-commerce platform leveraging relief funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Indiana SBDC, which provides no cost, expert guidance and resources that farms and small businesses need to grow, has launched a number of programs and initiatives to help entrepreneurs and business owners access relief funding and adapt to the

new economic climate. Through this collaboration, Indiana SBDC and ISDA are helping farms and small businesses tap into larger consumer markets, and the Indiana SBDC will serve as a trusted resource for Indiana Grown members that may need customized assistance related to COVID-19 recovery, e-commerce, market research or export assistance.

“With more than 520,000 companies employing 1.2 million Hoosiers, small businesses play a critical role in fueling Indiana’s economic engine,” said Indiana Secretary of Commerce Jim Schellinger. “As more small businesses shift their operations online, the Shop Indiana Grown marketplace will provide an important tool for Indiana companies to reach new customers and elevate Hoosier-made goods in new markets. We’re excited to partner with Indiana Grown to continue providing the support small businesses need to compete and lead in today’s 21st century economy.”

The Shop Indiana Grown online marketplace is another way Indiana Grown can promote all forms of agriculture in the state and allow its members to share the stories behind their farms and businesses.



www.ShopIndianaGrown.org

DNR Fish & Wildlife receives Excellence in Conservation award

The Indiana DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife received this year's Excellence in Conservation award from the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies for installing native plant habitat at an Indianapolis school.

The annual award recognizes the agency that has shown excellence in conservation through a specific project.

The project recognized was funded through grants from the [Indiana Natural Resources Foundation's Give Adventure](#) program and [Reconnecting to Our Waterways](#). The goal of the project is to foster a conservation ethic in an underserved Indianapolis community. To achieve this goal, Fish & Wildlife focused on specific activities that took place in 2019, including native habitat installation at Wendell Phillips School 63 (WPS 63), workforce development, conservation education, and community engagement.

Early last summer, Fish & Wildlife staff worked alongside WPS 63 students and youth as well as young adults participating in [Groundwork Indy's](#) GroundCorp program in planting approximately 750 plugs in three habitat installations at the school. In addition, the project team



developed three bilingual signs that were installed to highlight the front pollinator garden, as well as the wetland pond and monarch waystation behind the school.

In July, the project team worked with staff across DNR to host a workforce development day for Groundwork Indy at Atterbury Fish & Wildlife Area. Twenty-six Groundwork Indy youth and young adults participated in the event, where they experienced fishing and attended an information session about potential future careers with DNR and in natural resources fields.

Before the 2019-20 school year, Fish & Wildlife's education outreach specialist conducted a [Project WILD](#) educator workshop with 55 teachers to introduce them to the school's habitat installations and provide training to incorporate the habitat installations into curriculum.

The project culminated in a community festival event at Reverend Mozel Sanders Park in Indianapolis in September 2019.

The project team worked together with partners and other Fish & Wildlife staff to host booths around the park focused on topic-specific activities, including pollinators, wildlife tracks, watersheds, archery, fishing, and macroinvertebrates and water quality.

"Through a variety of experiences, this team and our partners helped to deepen people's connection to nature and conservation," said Angie Haywood, Fish & Wildlife's assistant director of planning & public engagement. "The project required a great deal of coordination and effort, and we are so proud of the results. We are excited to continue our work with these partners in the future."

Although the primary grant activities have concluded, Fish & Wildlife staff continue to work with Groundwork Indy youth and young adults to maintain WPS 63's pollinator habitat.



Wild, wild life

IURC attorney volunteers for animal rescue, teaches ‘lost’ art

Animal Crossing is a popular video game series where the player creates a village and invites any number of anthropomorphic critters to settle in an idyllic hamlet where days consist of little more than collecting fruit for sale, fishing, fossil-hunting, watering flowers, and watching fireworks shows.

It’s a relaxing virtual trip to a town where turnips are a top commodity and a top-hatted tortoise holds the highest elected office.

At no point is the player ever chased by a hungry 200-pound pig with a hankering for pumpkin pies, however; and in that regard, real life – for DeAnna Poon at least – will always be infinitely more interesting.

Wild world

The pig incident was one of the more humorous – if not harrowing – experiences Poon, assistant general counsel with the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission, can recall throughout three years of volunteering at an animal rescue.

The Plainfield-based [A Critter’s Chance](#) specializes in rescuing and rehabilitating domestic as well as exotic animals. The nonprofit assists animal shelters and rescues that are unable to care for exotic animals, helps with pet adoptions, and even works with government officials to enhance and improve laws related to animal abuse and neglect. Though it’s based in Indiana, A Critter’s Chance provides services throughout the country.

That work was a natural fit for DeAnna who, in addition to fostering, has been part of bunny yoga – which certainly sounds like something from Animal Crossing, but is really just “ordinary” yoga.

But with rabbits.

“I’ve always loved animals and volunteering,” said Poon. “I tell people I went from pen to pitchfork.”

DeAnna said a colleague invited her to A Critter’s Chance and that led her to begin fostering animals on her own. She has continued volunteering at the rescue and that experience, while often far from glamorous, provided tales such as the previously mentioned “hangry” hog incident.

“We happened to have these little pumpkin pies the day the pig escaped [her enclosure],” said Poon. “I used one to lure her back to her pen, so I’m running as fast as I can because a 200-pound pig is very pie-motivated and surprisingly fast.”

Poon explained that the tasty snacks were donated to the animal rescue by a food pantry, which is common when some of the goods pass their sell-by date. But clearly, the pig didn’t care about the pumpkin pies’ origins as it chased DeAnna back toward its pen.

“I’m trying not to slip and fall and thinking, ‘Please, don’t let this be the way I die -- trampled or eaten by a snacky pig,’” Poon recalled, fully aware of the hilarity of the story.

Animal farm

At home, things are a bit more serene.

DeAnna, a married mother of one, is a human mom to two dogs, four Pekin ducks, and a chicken. Her daughter also has a trio of rats. Husband Peter works as an electrical engineer for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s Office of Water Quality/Drinking Water Branch.

The Poon family’s chicken – “Betsy” to those to whom she’s



Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission assistant general counsel DeAnna Poon has volunteered for a Plainfield animal rescue for the last three years. She’s pictured here with a gecko.

acquainted – is a hoot of a hen that DeAnna calls her favorite of the family’s flock.

“She is so funny,” said Poon. “She will come when you call and she loves treats. We let her into our garage and she will hunt around for bugs to eat. She keeps the window sills very tidy.”

Betsy is clearly quite a chicken, but DeAnna cautions that keeping such pets is a big responsibility. To that end, she recently conducted video programs during the Indiana State Employees’ Community Campaign (SECC) to answer questions about caring for exotic pets and to showcase how these rewarding relationships require unwavering commitment.

The family’s ducks are a prime example.

“If you want to keep ducks and chickens, you have to be very mindful that they are domesticated prey animals,” she explained. “That means they are not meant to be wild and ‘releasing’ them into the

(continued on page 11)

Wild, wild life

wild is a death sentence.”

The birds’ coops must be secure so as to deter predators, and an adequate food and water supply is a must. Beyond that, be prepared for fowl that might not rate highly with Animal Crossing’s “Happy Room Academy.”

“While ducks are very cute, they are also very gross,” DeAnna said. “They need an area to swim and they get mud everywhere.”

Much to consider

While children are undoubtedly bound to be big fans of animals of the barnyard and beyond, they are unlikely to be good caretakers of pets – especially those that require more diligence.

“For parents, whatever expectations you have about your child’s ability to care for an animal, lower it substantially,” the attorney said. “Younger children frequently don’t have the motor skills or understanding of how to properly pick up an animal, pet it, or remember to provide it with food and water.”



DeAnna Poon recently conducted a video series where she gave advice on how to care for exotic pets, such as the chickens seen here, as well as how to preserve veggies and other food.

As is the case with the family cat or dog, the joy of raising a pet is immense, but respect for the animal’s nature and its needs will go a long way in providing it the pleasant life it deserves.

The cost involved is another factor that must be considered. Many veterinarians who care for more typical pets, such as cats and dogs, don’t offer similar services for exotic animals; and finding a proper vet can be a bigger expense than some might imagine.

This is the type of knowledge DeAnna shared last fall during her SECC video presentations, which were well received.

“I did receive a lot of great feedback,” she said. “People found it helpful to know the detailed care that goes into exotic and farm animals.”

A lost art

Appropriately enough, Poon’s SECC presentations were intended to raise money for A Critter’s Chance. And while caring for exotic pets – like a lamb... or an emu – may not be for everyone, another of DeAnna’s hobbies and talents could be appealing to just about anybody.

“My grandmother canned food and it is a lost art,” said Poon who is also an avid food preservationist. “When I tell people that I can, many of them perk up and tell me their mother or grandmother used to do it,” she continued. “I started helping my mom when I was little. I started doing it again as an adult. I like it because I know exactly what is going into my food, it’s made for my taste, and I’m in charge of the quality control.”

There’s a technique to it, of course, and DeAnna shared advice on this time-tested practice during her SECC video series as well.

Your grandmother definitely was onto something when she meticulously sealed up those green beans and tomatoes for future rainy days, however, and Poon believes there are quite a few advantages to at-home canning in spite of how modern life has relegated the practice to the back of the proverbial kitchen cupboard.

“Canning is beneficial if you have a large garden and won’t be able to eat all the food before it spoils,” she said. “It’s also great for people who don’t have a lot of fridge or freezer space but want to keep a large amount of food available. Finally, once you have all the supplies, it is very cost effective. Jars of pasta sauce, pizza sauce, and salsa cost me around \$2 per jar.”

Living wild, wild life

A lifelong Hoosier, DeAnna Poon began her career with the state of Indiana as an intern in 2003. A year later, she started as a full-time employee. These days, she’s more than happy to share her advice on canning and caring for critters, and she does it all with a wry sense of humor.

After all, with exotic animals, it’s probably best to expect the unexpected. It’s a bit of a dirty job, to be sure, but someone’s gotta do it and DeAnna wouldn’t have it any other way. Just be prepared to clean up a mess.

“Pretty much all the rest of my funny stories involve poop,” she said facetiously. “So. Much. Poop.”

All in a day’s (chicken coop-cleaning) work, we suppose.

Heavens to Betsy.

Story by Brent Brown, Indiana State Personnel Department

Photos provided by DeAnna Poon, Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission