

The New Guard

All this recent nostalgia for the Pan Am Games in Indianapolis in 1987 reminds me of the time I met Mark Miles at a reception in Lee's Inn at Franklin.

He and Ted Boehm were there to pitch potential sponsors on the equestrian events planned for the Hoosier Horse Park being built at nearby Camp Atterbury. I scribbled quotes in my cub reporter's notebook that evening in fall of 1986.

Miles was a lot younger then.

And that's the point. The protégé 26 years ago was the master this time who led the incredibly successful Super Bowl effort. Already we're seeing Miles' protégé's taking new leadership roles in key spots around town: Alison Melangton, CEO of the Super Bowl Committee, now leads the Indiana Sports Corp. Host Committee spokeswoman Dianna Boyce has taken a similar post with Finish Line.

A changing-of-the-guard is under way in Central Indiana. While Miles and others like him still hold sway, they're increasingly joined by people with new ideas and new energy to pursue them.

Their ascendance is a sign of health here that shouldn't be taken for granted. Do you want to know how to end so-called brain-drain? Embrace these new leaders, support their effort and, gradually, make room for them in the most powerful positions.

Before naming just a few of these emergent leaders, please allow a short digression: The political realm around here could use a good shaking up. Current party leaders regularly fail to find enough people to fill precinct leadership posts even after the number was nearly halved a few years ago. Yet, at the same time, these same

people do all they can to limit access to the polls.

Then they have the gall to blame the public when fewer than 20 percent of registered voters cast ballots in the last primary. I hope that the folks I'm about to list are able to inspire new energy in the political process so that it may change to actually serve the people rather than exist to be served.

Sherry Seiwart knows what it's like to lead a group that serves people. The new head of Indianapolis Downtown Inc. spent years in the trenches in various roles helping people buy into their neighborhoods and put down roots. You rarely heard about her work as executive director of the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority because the agency functioned so well during her seven years there.

John and Abbi Adams, co-owners and co-chefs of Bluebeard, are off to a great start at showing what the next generation can do for the region's restaurant scene. Neither is yet 30, but they have earned their stake working with some of the city's finest chefs and showing an inspiring creative streak.

Keira Amstutz has remade Indiana Humanities and, as a result, more people are taking the time to think about the things that will not only sustain the region, but also help it prosper. In this techno-driven age, it's easy to overlook the importance of context and history, but Amstutz's work at Indiana Humanities ensures this important aspect of community isn't overlooked.

Doug Masson's blog is an island of reasoned arguments amid the raging storm of intolerance that too often passes for political discourse these days. The Lafayette attorney with a libertarian bent has found a way to engage people and create a community that self-polices the polemics.

Nikki Woodson's starting her second year as superintendent of the Metropolitan School District of Washington Township and she's not even 40 years old. Her fresh perspective, though, has already caught the attention of parents, teachers and students -- in a good way.

Shauta Marsh and Jim Walker make a power couple in the creative realm. Marsh recently was named head of IMOCA, the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, after a year-long demonstration that she had the goods to make it go. Walker has defined the arts collective in Indianapolis through Big Car and as director of Second Story works to instill creative writing in kids.

John Barth was plugged into his Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood long before he decided to run for the City-County Council. Now he's got a seat at the big table as one of four council members elected to represent the entire city, not just a single district. His thoughtful and inclusive nature hopefully will mend some of the council's many rifts.

Jesse Kharbanda knew his job as head of the Hoosier Environmental Council would be difficult, but the Oxford-educated leader has brought a savvy approach to the cause. As a friend notes, "He's still bare-knuckle, but he's smart enough to know how to woo while he whacks."

Some of these folks were infants when Miles and I met to talk about the Pan Am Games. A lot of great things have happened around here since then and these folks -- along with a slew of others like them -- are the people who make this place tick.

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