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FEATURED

Batesville facility impresses Holcomb

Debbie Blank The Herald-Tribune Apr 9, 2016



Debbie Blank | The Herald-Tribune Lt. Gov. Eric Holcomb table hopped at RomWeber Flats' Big Four Café, visiting with abo chef Adam Israel, other facility leaders and developers Bruce and Mary Ellen Rippe.

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On the job for just over a month, Lt. Gov. Eric Holcomb breezed through Batesville April 7.

Because he oversees the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, the state leader asked his staff to show him a great example of senior citizens housing, which led to a tour of RomWeber Flats, which caters to the over-55 crowd and recently added assisted living services.

His reaction? "I'm overwhelmed with the incredible attention to detail in every respect starting with the resident. Everything is centered around the resident's experience and quality of life from the first second they walk through the front door. You just get the feeling that you're home. That's a pretty fulfilling feeling."

The longtime politician guesses he's been to the city between five and 10 times. "I've traveled the state for the last decade plus. Batesville is a special place, always has been. I'm just excited to see projects like this come to fruition."

Earlier that day, the lieutenant governor had chatted with Batesville Mayor Mike Bettice at one of four regional Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs conferences in Lawrenceburg.

When asked what advice he'd give to mayors of small cities like Batesville, the Indianapolis resident answered, "They should know they have partners at the state. We try to serve as coaches or mentors or certainly partners in helping communities align their assets with their vision. That's evidenced here in this building where there's an incredible vision" that became reality.

"I encourage leaders to dream big and execute a plan."

Getting out around the state is the favorite part of the job, which Holcomb began March 3, when the General Assembly confirmed him. "It's such an opportunity to see so many success stories and to be able to share those secrets of success with others – swap lessons learned, different ways of doing things. You see seeds grow... to know we are able to control our destiny.

"We are blessed in this state with a lot of advantages and we've complemented those blessings with our our hard work and determination and dreams. When you're in places like Batesville, you're reminded of what can be – to see transformational projects improve not just the quality of place, but the quality of life of Hoosiers."

The lieutenant governor's greatest challenge? "There's so much work to do (please see box). You can only be in one place at one time. You have to prioritize your day When you're out trying to do good, you want to do more of it."

It was obvious the former Indiana Republican Party state chairman didn't want to discuss politics. He was asked if Donald Trump gains the party's nomination for president, what will that do to his run for lieutenant governor? Holcomb paused, then said, "Well, I guess life is full of what ifs. I choose to focus more on what I can control and I'm at peace with that Do the work necessary to try to determine the outcome ... In a political sense ... that approach has worked out pretty well." He called his current post "more than a 40-hour-a-week job and it's one I enjoy. I'll continue to focus on good policies and let the politics take care of itself."

The adviser to Sen. Dan Coats and former Gov. Mitch Daniels majored in U.S. history at Hanover College with a focus on the Civil War and Reconstruction era. The student of history collects presidential signatures and currently has documents signed by 40 of the nation's 44.

He admitted, "The most interesting part of the collection for me is the hunt. I think everyone should collect something beyond bad habits." Before a purchase, he considers the document's affordability and how historically significant it is. Holcomb recalled proudly, "My William Henry Harrison document comes from the time he was an aide-de-camp to General (Anthony) Wayne authorizing rations for spies. That took me a while. The content convinced me to make the leap."

"My JFK is one of my favorites." The collector considered many before zeroing in on a trifold brochure that John F. Kennedy and a congressman signed at a fundraiser for the Hoosier at Notre Dame, "a Catholic university." The document resonated with Holcomb because later Kennedy was criticized for being a Catholic when running for president. "I had to have" the memento signed in Indiana.

The four signatures he's lacking will be a challenge. All are famous early Americans: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams (the first one) and Abraham Lincoln – "very pricey and highly sought after."

After visiting presidential sites Monticello and Mount Vernon with his family as a boy, Holcomb served in the Navy and was stationed in Lisbon, Portugal. "That whetted my appetite" for travel. In the future, he hopes to journey with wife Janet to see the pyramids in Egypt.

Daily duties

Holcomb oversees a varied and diversified portfolio that includes the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, Office of Defense Development, Office of Community and Rural Affairs, Office of Tourism Development and Office of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, according to his biography at www.in.gov/lg/2347.htm.

He also serves as chairman of the Indiana Counter Terrorism and Security Council and president of the Indiana Senate, where he presides over the chamber during each year's legislative session.

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