

PRESS RELEASE

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County Commissioner Penny Githens announces her bid for re-election in 2024

“Being a County Commissioner is both the hardest and the most rewarding job I have ever held,” said Githens. “Being a commissioner isn’t about power – it is about responsibility and the ability to work with others. I have had to learn so much about roads, public health, stormwater drainage, parks, trails, and a host of other concerns. My past didn’t include thinking about leachate, ensuring that the scales in a store are accurate, harm reduction, or failing septic systems. Experience and a deep dedication to the residents of Monroe County, along with a strong work ethic, are critical in this job.”

“Prior to when COVID hit in 2020, I had never had contact with any county elected official. Penny Githens reached out to me and asked if Pantry 279 needed help. She has been a steadfast supporter ever since, securing funding from the County to help feed people and personally delivering and distributing our Thanksgiving meals. She understands that we are not only providing nutrition - but we are also providing community and hope.” Cindy Chavez, Executive Director, Pantry 279.

“I was pulled into politics because of my son with autism. I had to advocate for him, which broadened to advocating for others. It’s been a natural next step for me to champion funding for childcare, food, housing, and treatment for those with mental illness and/or substance use disorders,” explained Githens. When asked for examples, Githens pointed to the work she has done with others to allocate American Rescue Plan Act money to the Hoosier Hills Food Bank, Pantry 279, Summit Hill Childcare Center, the kitchen at New Hope for Families, Beacon, the Community Foundation’s Smart Start program, and the Heading Home initiative. She has also been involved in securing additional money from the State to assist the Indiana Recovery Alliance in its efforts to expand harm reduction and outreach for those with substance use disorders.

“Penny Githens is the most responsive public official I have ever worked with,” said Nick Voyles, Executive Director of the Indiana Recovery Alliance. *“She sincerely cares about harm reduction and helping those in recovery. Having her involved has truly helped us save lives.”*

The COVID pandemic brought about new needs and new alliances. Commissioner Githens worked with her colleagues and those in the Monroe County Health Department, IU Health, Indiana University, and the City of Bloomington to fight not only the spread of the disease, but also to ensure there was support for local businesses and non-profits. She explained, “No one anticipated a pandemic or what it would mean for our community. Suddenly weddings, birthday celebrations, and graduation parties were cancelled. Tourism came to a complete halt,

threatening restaurants and bars, event venues and caterers, DJ's and florists, even Wonderlab and the Monroe County History Center. We Commissioners led the initiative to use food and beverage revenue dollars – money which can only be used for economic sustainability/vitality and tourism-related activities – to support local businesses and non-profits to keep them afloat and provide employment for our residents. No other county in the entire State created this type of program or provided this type of funding.”

“As a township trustee, I see firsthand the impact that the Monroe County Board of Commissioners has on the lives of our residents. When people talk about affordable housing, they often overlook maintaining our current housing stock. Penny and her colleagues worked with the County Council to allocate some of the county’s American Rescue Plan Act funding to create a rural housing repair program which allows low- and moderate-income homeowners to maintain a habitable home. This has especially helped seniors on fixed incomes. Re-electing Penny Githens is a step toward retaining that type of passion, caring, and vision.” Efrat Rosser, Bloomington Township Trustee

Commissioner Githens sits on the Boards of the Bloomington Economic Development Center, Downtown Bloomington, Inc., the Heading Home Advisory Group, and the Substance Use Disorder Awareness Board. Along with her colleagues, she is a member of both the Monroe County Solid Waste District Management Board and the Storm Water Board. Although not a voting member, she regularly attends the Monroe County Parks and Recreation Board. In the past she has been a board member of local and state autism support groups as well as the Bloomington Commission on the Status of Women. She has been a volunteer with the Monroe County YMCA, the Hoosier Hills Food Bank, Pantry 279, and IN*SOURCE as a special education advocate for students with special needs. She holds a B.S. from Purdue and an M.S. from IU. She and her husband, Ed Buffie, returned to Monroe County over 30 years ago shortly after the birth of their second son because it was where they wanted to raise their family. Commissioner Githens has never regretted that decision and looks forward to continued service to this County she loves.