

# Businesses tuned in

## Network Night is all about making contacts

By JULIE AULT

Post-Tribune correspondent

VALPARAISO — Businesses from across the county gathered recently at the Porter County Expo Center for the annual Porter County Chamber Network Night.

This business-to-business event is presented by the chambers from Valparaiso, Hebron, Kouts, Portage and Duneland-Chesterton.

"We all work together on putting this on," said Amy Page, vice president of member services at the Valparaiso Chamber. "We're trying to show the best of Porter County."

Page said Network Night, which sold out at the end of the July, is always scheduled on the Thursday before Halloween to tie in to that holiday.

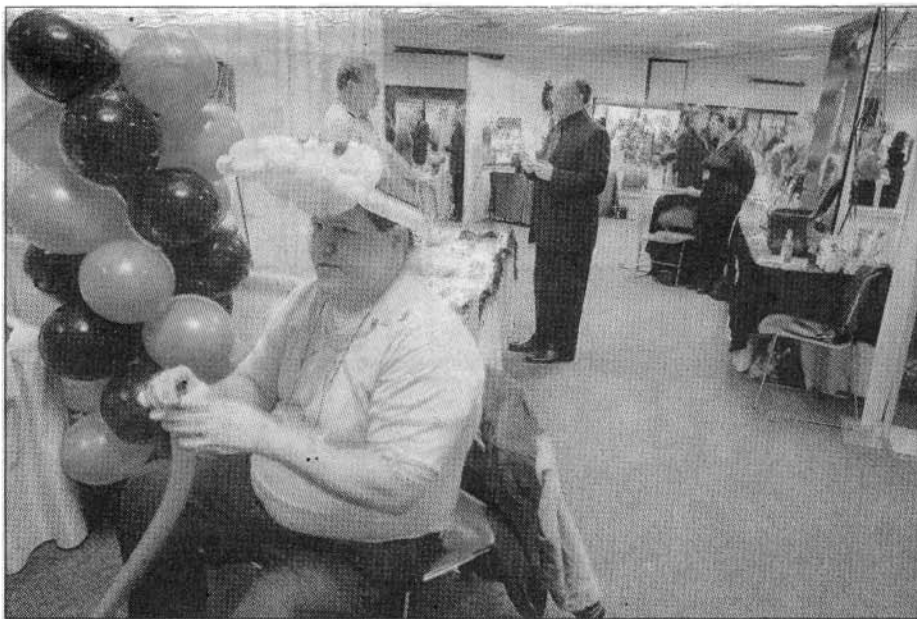
"People are dressing up and having fun; it's a neat atmosphere," she said.

This year's event drew 126 businesses. That number included 13 food vendors providing samples of their best items and 18 booths in Entrepreneurs' Row, a section designed for companies that have been in business for five years or less and have five or fewer employees.

"E-Row is a special feature of this event," Page said. "It's to help those just starting out. They're prime locations. A lot of success stories have come out of that."

Stephanie Jones of Kouts had a spot in E-Row to showcase her business, Innovative Organizing, which she opened in March.

"I was told it was a great way to get my name out," she said. "It's been awesome; I've made so many contacts. It didn't cost me much, and that's important when you're just starting out."



Popo's owner Mark Popovitch makes balloon figures at the Porter County Expo Center.

Page said fees for booth spaces, which are slightly lower for chamber members, have not been raised in several years.

"We try to keep it reasonable," she said.

Page also said more than 700 people attend the event, which is open to the public.

Tim Teets, an account representative from Home Mountain Printing in Valparaiso, said the clientele for Network Night is the reason his company keeps coming back.

"We've been in this just about every year; a lot of our contacts are out here. Our customers are here," he said.

Page said that's the point of the event.

"It's about building relationships," she said. "Obviously, it's about building businesses, but you want to get to know the people with whom you're doing business."

Page pointed out another reason the event has become so popular.

"People are looking for solutions to their business needs," she said. "If you need something, you can find it right here in Porter County and not go to Chicago. A lot of people don't know that."

After the booths shut down, the event features an after-hours segment, which Page said is more for casual networking.

"It's a time to talk more with the people you've met," she said. "There are tables to sit down. By that time, everybody is ready to sit."

**"We all work together on putting this on. We're trying to show the best of Porter County."**

Amy Page, vice president of member services for the Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce