

# WISCONSIN CENTRAL TIME

Marathon County Newsletter

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*Andy Johnson and Deb Hager*

## Creating a Vision for a Prosperous Community

*By Andy Johnson and Deb Hager*

Prosperity is the state of flourishing, thriving, and experiencing good fortune as well as reaching a successful social status. Prosperity often encompasses wealth, but it also may include others factors independent of wealth, such as happiness and health. The purpose of creating a community with personal and collective prosperity is to ensure that all citizens believe in, and have access to, opportunities for realizing their uniquely expressed happiness and desired quality of life.

In previous newsletters, we have stated our organizational efforts to create a safe and healthy community. This desire, along with our commitment to be the most prosperous county in Wisconsin, are the foundation of our mission to become a preferred place to work, live, play, and do business. Let me share what our role is relative to prosperity.

### **Vision**

Every successful journey requires leadership to define “where we are going” and to provide an image of “what we will strive to be.” The vision must serve to genuinely inspire everyone in the organization and our partners to be committed to prosperity. Marathon County’s vision is balanced with an understanding of how prosperity supports our desired quality of life, but also how the lack of prosperity impacts our most vulnerable populations and drives the service needs and costs of public programming.

### **Partnerships**

We must identify and develop effective partnerships with both private and public groups to create and support prosperity. We will not, and cannot, do it alone. We must recognize and embrace the fact that business strength is key to our success.

*continued . . .*

# Creating a Vision for a Prosperous Community *continued*

By Andy Johnson and Deb Hager

## Citizen Perspective

Marathon County must have an understanding of our citizen's circumstances and expectations. Through public engagement, preliminary discussions suggest our citizens expect the following:

- People have economic security
- A community where everyone can belong, participate, and excel
- A commitment by public, non-profit, philanthropic, and business leaders to work together and provide services, and come together with focus on people, place, and opportunity
- Improved health and well-being
- Living wage and safety nets for our most vulnerable citizens
- A business environment of wealth-building potential

## Accountability

We are entrusted with the public's trust and fiscal resources to develop efficient and effective programs. Marathon County must implement practices that track the results and efficiencies of our investments. The citizens need timely communication and meaningful opportunities to participate in our work.

Marathon County understands that there is a level of safety, health, and prosperity that all individuals must realize, or at least hope to realize, in order to feel and experience a sense of stability and security. Prosperity is realized when individuals and the larger community experience and feel a part of an emotional and material abundance.



## Partnering for Prosperity

Marathon County's goal is to create an environment where the economy can thrive. By providing first-class public services and infrastructure, we help the economy grow. But we must also be a good community partner and support and collaborate with other organizations to achieve mutually agreed upon goals and activities intended to create long-term benefits including a strong foundation for economic success. One of many ways both government and businesses can achieve this success is by supporting the arts.

A BCA National Survey of Business Support for the Arts report examined the giving habits of 600 small, mid-size, and large U.S. companies that gave philanthropically from 2009 to 2012. Of those businesses included in the BCA study, the percentage of giving to any philanthropic cause was up from 52 percent in 2009 to 64 percent in 2012.

According to the report, the four main reasons when deciding to support the arts and are cited as very important by around half of arts givers. They are all in the area of how the community (including a business' employees and their families) benefits from the arts:

- Improve the quality of life in the community (54%)
- Help create a vibrant community and society (49%)
- Improve academic performance for students (47%)
- Offer education initiatives that benefit the community (47%)

The study also reinforces findings about positive effects of the arts on the workforce. About four in 10 respondents strongly agree that the arts:

- Stimulate creative thinking and problem solving (44%)
- Offer networking opportunities and the potential to develop new business and build market share (39%)
- Enhance acceptance of diversity in the workplace (37%)

The BCA Survey of Business Support for the Arts is the nation's largest survey of its kind, delving beyond pure numbers into the motivations behind and goals of business partnerships with the arts. The specific findings from the survey are used to project national trends in support for the arts by businesses large and small across our nation. The study acts as a resource for current and potential funders of the arts, and for local advocacy organizations to encourage increased partnership between the business community and the arts.

## Red Carpet Rollout

By Kathy Kelsey Foley, Director, Woodson Art Museum

Under the cliché heading of either “be careful what you wish for” or “life is like a box of chocolates,” I don’t think I could have anticipated the multiple positive outcomes when Marathon County administrator Brad Karger asked if the Executive Committee could hold its monthly meeting at the Woodson Art Museum.

I didn’t have to think twice about my willingness to roll out the red carpet. To my delight, the Wednesday, July 9, meeting vastly exceeded my expectations.

The meeting agenda kicked off with an educational presentation and discussion about how the arts help build a community in which people want to live and that’s good for business. No surprise, this is a topic near and dear to my heart.

What made the conversation so productive – especially from my perspective – was that for four of nine Executive Committee members, the meeting represented a first visit to the Woodson Art Museum. Each and every visitor is important to me, but for first-time visitors I have an opportunity to create “who knew?” and “wow” responses that likely will be shared with family and

friends. It’s human nature to want to tell others about something you’ve experienced for the first time or anew; an unexpected outcome from the meeting.

As I talked about the varied ways the Museum serves the community – from Art Babies to SPARK! programs and through wide-ranging exhibitions, visiting artists, and hands-on learning – there were nods of approval, surprised expressions, insightful questions, and comments stemming from personal experiences that demonstrated the broad reach and intensity of the Museum’s impact.

I remained at the table for the entirety of the Executive Committee meeting – three hours! – and I was fascinated by the discussions, depth of knowledge, engagement, and civility. I had multiple “takeaways” from the meeting, not the least of which was the number and variety of issues the County Board must address. While I know the departments and services that are the County’s responsibility, I hadn’t previously considered how needs and priorities are determined, especially in light of budget allocations and the tax rate. The County’s challenges, which impact the quality of life here, are significant and residents need to be informed.

*continued . . .*



Marathon County Executive Committee members learn about the Woodson Art Museum.

## Red Carpet Rollout *continued*

By Kathy Kelsey Foley, Director, Woodson Art Museum

Quality of life is a catch-all phrase often used by museums and cultural and recreational attractions when we collectively talk about how what we do enhances our communities. I stand by that thinking and steadfastly believe the Woodson Art Museum contributes significantly to the high quality of life we enjoy in Marathon County.

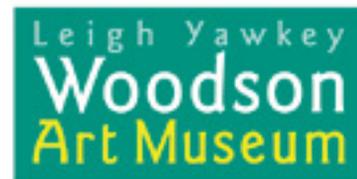
Continuing to reflect on the Executive Committee meeting, I also realize in a profound way how the discussions and interactions I observed affect other vitally important quality-of-life issues, including the jail and incarceration, drug abuse and treatment, child safety, farmland, and County infrastructure.

Brad Karger, County employees, and County supervisors – including the nine members of the Executive Committee – have a lot on their respective plates, some of which we might take for granted. These folks deserve

our thanks and respect for stepping up to ensure that Marathon County is where we want to live, work, raise our families, and enjoy the quality of life.

*“We roll out the figurative red carpet for every visitor!”*

If you haven't visited the Woodson Art Museum recently – or previously – make a point to do so and learn what County Executive Committee members learned . . . that the Art Museum is one of the assets that makes our community great.



Weekly Blog Woodson Wanderings



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# What is Economic Development?

David Eckmann, Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Economic Development, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

When people think about economic development, they often possess an idea of what it is and what it should accomplish. Put simply, every person has his or her own perspective. From an economic development profession perspective, a definition that is often cited is from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC).

According to the IEDC, “No single definition incorporates all of the different strands of economic development. Typically, economic development can be described in terms of objectives. These are most commonly described as the creation of jobs and wealth, and the improvement of quality of life. Economic development can also be described as a process that influences growth and restructuring of an economy to enhance the economic well-being of a community.” In the broadest sense, economic development encompasses three major areas:

- Policies that government undertakes to meet broad economic objectives including inflation control, reducing high employment, and addressing sustainable growth.
- Policies and programs to provide services including building highways, managing parks, and providing medical access to the disadvantaged.
- Policies and programs explicitly directed at improving the business climate through specific efforts, business finance, marketing, neighborhood development, business retention/expansion, technology transfer, real estate development, education and others.

This point of reference is important because it provides greater context about how all of us play a role in economic

development. If you look closely at the three areas, you can fit work, your leisure time and your family life into one or more of these categories.

Now, consider how these principles are applied by people in communities, states and nations around the world. The highly competitive global economy is in full throttle and we are a part of it. People, like you and I, all over the world, are working to improve the quality of life and business environment, trying to gain an edge – a competitive advantage. Because of increasing technology and access to worldwide transportation, people have choices as to what they want to do for a living and where they want to live. The global economy is about developing, attracting and retaining talent to support new and established industries.

As you work and foster the well-being of the public good that our communities enjoy, know that what you do matters, every day.

In Marathon County, current economic models suggest that between 2014 and 2023, there will be 5,600 new jobs added, a 7% increase. And during the same time frame, it is projected that population will increase by 2,500 people, a 2% increase. Do the math. While the two percent may appear positive, the worrisome part of the narrative is that the age cohort 60-80 year olds is going to increase while the age cohort 15-59 year olds will not be replaced and there will be a sizable decrease in the availability of labor. We are aging fast, but we are not alone. Virtually all of the states in the northern tier of the United States, from the Midwest to the East Coast, are in a similar position.

As you work and foster the well-being of the public good (education systems, roads, air service, wireless connectivity) that our communities enjoy, know that what you do matters, every day.

# Why Care About Tax Increment Financing?

*Jim Rosenberg, Chair, Education and Economic Development Committee*

Municipalities in Wisconsin have few tools in the area of economic development, but Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is one that is extremely useful. Properly employed, it puts property that would be more challenging to develop on a more equal footing with previously undeveloped property, making better use of existing infrastructure. It enables municipalities to renew themselves, create jobs and host industries instead of promoting urban sprawl.

It sounds like a good deal all around, right? So what does the county care if a municipality creates a Tax Increment District (TID) and invests money in it? One important aspect is that the county is sacrificing increases in property tax revenues for decades because it can only collect on the base value. The municipality captures all increases in value for decades, (including those that would occur solely as a result of appreciation in the existing value without any improvements at all.)

A key aspect for justifying TIF is the “but for” finding. It means that officials must agree that the new development would not occur in a similar scope, scale or timeframe without TIF assistance. By making the finding and approving the TID, they are sacrificing some amount of tax revenue for many years into the future to direct it into the development project. If TIF assistance is not needed to make a development happen, it should not be approved. If it is simply a public works project that will not produce proportionate economic development in comparison to the investment being made, then it is not an appropriate use of TIF.

If the developments in the TID would not have occurred, then it can be argued that the payoff after closure of the TID will eventually make up the lost revenue. However, if the improvements would likely have occurred anyway, then it's simply lost revenue. It's literally a case of time

## **What is TIF?**

Tax Increment Funding (TIF) is an economic development program that helps promote local tax base expansion by using property tax revenues to fund site improvements to attract new development, rehabilitation/conservation, industrial, mixed-use, eliminate blight and environmental remediation.

## **What is a TID?**

A Tax Increment District (TID) is the actual area (parcels) designated for expansion where improvements are being made.

[More information on TIF and TID](#)

being money, and taken together, there can be hundreds of millions of dollars of property value locked up in TID's across the county at any given time.

Municipalities have an obligation to manage their investments in TIF projects to be sure that they make sense from the standpoint of taxpayers recovering their investment within a reasonable period of time. The new property tax revenues being generated from taxable developments need to pay the freight for public investments in the TID, whether the investments are for road improvements or for public art. When that doesn't happen, we end up with distressed districts in which the already lengthy lifespan can end up being 30 years or longer. There are several of these in Marathon County right now. While there are different factors involved in each of them; it all boils down to municipalities making large investments in infrastructure based on the speculative prospect of development that ended up being insufficient to justify the public dollars being invested up front. The county has only one vote on the

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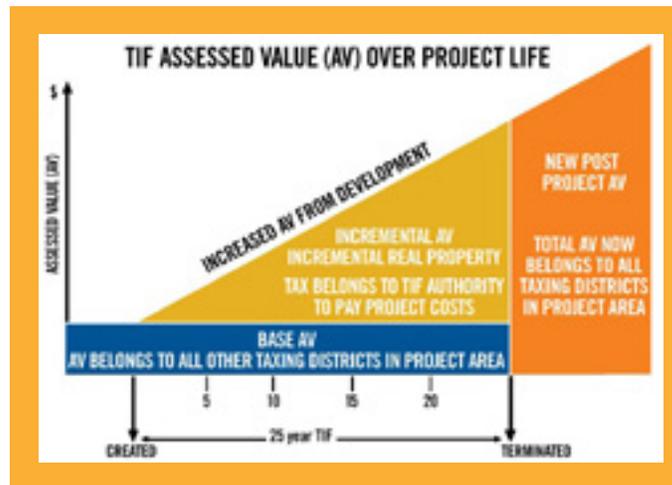
## Why Care About Tax Increment Financing? *continued*

Jim Rosenberg, Chair, Education and Economic Development Committee

Joint Review Board, but we have been involved in a lot of discussion aimed at promoting sensible policies regarding TIF over the past several years and we believe this can have a positive impact going forward.

In a perfect world, there would be private developers waiting to invest substantially as a TID is being created, and sometimes it works that way. As an example, the Wausau West Industrial Park involved the acquisition of hundreds of acres of land and the installation of millions of dollars' worth of improvements using multiple TIF districts over several decades. Much of this work and expense was undertaken without any specific guarantee of development as these investments were being made, but with an understanding of what might be anticipated, in terms of additional property tax base and employment opportunities. By creating a positive environment for development with a multitude of individual actions over many years, large-scale industrial investment became a reality. In some other communities that tried to replicate that outcome, the results haven't been as positive.

Now let's take a look at Wausau's TID 3, which includes the riverfront development area on the east side of the river. In 2000, the City of Wausau expanded the district to include new property on both sides of the river. This enabled the city to accommodate the Pic 'n Save development, in which a substantial piece of property with difficult soil conditions that had been blighted for decades became used, useful, attractive - and far more valuable. With the Pic 'n Save project, the city invested



around \$750,000 under the assumption that at least \$6 million in new tax base would be developed; a figure that has since been far exceeded. While it might seem like a no-brainer in retrospect, it was tremendously controversial at the time the project was being undertaken. That being said, the life of TID 3 was extended 10 years by special legislation solicited by city

officials because overall, the city doesn't expect to complete its investments or recover its costs within the original lifespan of the district. (TID 3 was originally set up in 1994 to accommodate a convention center and hotel development that never happened. Amendments in 2000 and 2006 increased the area of the TID and project costs.) While this project was successful in its early stages, increasing the tax base by much more than anticipated, there is no guarantee that it will continue to succeed, but more land and more money has been tied up without ensuring a successful outcome.

One of the many lessons learned is to invest in infrastructure in a measured way, rather than assuming a best-case outcome at the onset. Ensure a successful outcome rather than just hoping for one.

The county benefits from the success of economic development projects in municipalities, but county taxpayers can also lose when tax increment financing projects fail to deliver in proportion to the amount of money being invested and that is why Marathon County is taking a more active interest in TIF.

## Family-Centered Customer Service

Kelly Gross, Child Support Program Supervisor

When parents separate, child support payments are often ordered to assist families in raising their children. The belief is that child support agencies focus primarily on collecting the money and enforcing against a non-paying parent. However, this is only one facet of the evolving world of child support. The National Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is the overseeing body of individual state and local programs. We embrace the vision they strive to achieve: to effectively use “child support enforcement tools coupled with family-centered customer service” to ensure that “children can count on their parents for the support and love that they need to be healthy and successful.”

Marathon County’s goal to be the safest, healthiest, and most prosperous county is perfectly aligned with this vision. Within our local child support agency, we provide far more services to our population than many are aware. In addition to establishing and collecting support orders, we ensure medical support and other non-financial needs are provided, ensuring that parents have the tools to work together effectively to raise their children. Often, we may not have an opportunity to share in the successes and happy endings of families, but are thrilled when we do. Our agency would like to showcase one success in particular that really embodies not only the varied services we provide, but attests to the spirit and dedication our staff bring to our community.

Several years ago, we received a referral to establish paternity for a child who was 13 years old. There was limited information from the mother regarding the father as she had made the decision when she was pregnant to move and start a new life without him. Initially, the mother didn’t want our involvement. She and her daughter were doing fine on their own.

Child Support is not only about the enforcement of a financial order. We ensure children are provided for by both parents which often creates financial security for those that might otherwise live in poverty. In addition to the financial support we:

- Seek health insurance orders
- Monitor the availability of private health insurance
- Establish and monitor other components such as job searching
- Partner with other agencies to provide additional services

Our successes assist families in sustaining income that reduces or eliminates the need for public assistance programs.

After extensive communication with the mother and utilizing a variety of “locate” tools, our agency identified the potential father in another state. We arranged genetic testing and legally adjudicated him to be the father. Throughout this process, the caseworker regularly spoke with both parents explaining each step of the process; answering all the questions they each had and assisted them in communicating with each other although they had not spoken in over 13 years. Not only was the father willing to step in and take responsibility, he also wanted to meet his daughter and try to develop a relationship.

It made our day when we received a letter from the father commending the time and effort the caseworker had invested in him and the establishment of a relationship with his daughter. In this communication, he explained how stressful the initial contact was for his current

*continued . . .*

## Family-Centered Customer Service *continued*

*Kelly Gross, Child Support Program Supervisor*

family and the amount of confusion he experienced when he initially sought legal counsel to determine his next steps. He stated that his regular communication with his caseworker each step of the way considerably reduced his stress and helped him understand his rights and responsibilities.

The outcome was not only positive, but truly life-changing for each of them. His daughter wrote a personal narrative in school where she expressed that it was one of the best moments and days of her life. She was looking forward to meeting her extended family and now has even more people in her life to support and love her. The father reflected that through this agency's persistence, caring and attention to detail, his daughter's mother and

he were able to come together to "address this unique life circumstance" which greatly benefits each of them.

While we recognize that single parent families are often successful, there are huge positives of having a legal father in the picture to provide love, guidance, financial support, Social Security benefits, health histories and connections to extended family. Through this successful outcome, our agency was able to share in the experience that serves as the reason we do what we do for our community.

For more information about Child Support Agency-Marathon County Department of Social Services, please call 715-261-7500.



*The Child Support team provides family-centered customer service.*

## Community Response Grant from Greenheck Foundation

*Dawn Perez, CPS Access/Initial Assessment Supervisor and Pam Cotton, Child Welfare Manager.*

Marathon County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) is always looking for ways to partner with community organizations to ensure the safety of the children in this great community. In June 2014, MCDSS applied for a Grant through the B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation to increase our Community Response Program budget. The Community Response Program is embedded in the Child Protective Services System, and Marathon County Department of Social Services employs one full time social worker devoted to this program.

The purpose of the Community Response Program is to increase the family's protective capacities through service linkages, case advocacy, and connections to both formal and informal resources. Community Response fills a gap in the child maltreatment prevention continuum by serving families who have been reported to a county child protective agency for alleged child abuse

or neglect, but which don't meet the safety threshold for a traditional assessment response. This program has successfully assisted families in connecting with community supports, and has reduced the likelihood that the children participating in this program will be abused or neglected.

On September 21, 2014, the B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation approved the grant request from MCDSS. Because of their generous \$10,000 donation, the Community Response Program will have significantly more flexible funds available to meet the immediate needs of families. This donation will help directly make a difference in the lives of children and families in Marathon County, and will reduce the risk of child abuse or neglect. MCDSS is grateful for the support of the B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation and looks forward to continued partnership to improve the lives, safety, and security of Marathon County families.



The B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation approved a grant request from MCDSS. Because of their generous \$10,000 donation, the Community Response Program will have more flexible funds available to meet the immediate needs of families.

*(pictured left to right)*

*Amber Weisnicht, Project Administrator*

*Brian Gumness, Executive Director  
B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation*

*Dawn Perez, Project Supervisor*

## E<sub>3</sub> Young Professionals (E<sub>3</sub>YP)

By Karen Nerison, Contributing Writer

Some might be business owners, others, entrepreneurs. Some are employers of community-minded businesses encouraging their employees to be the same. They get together during weekly or monthly programs to convene with like-minded people, all with a focus to make their community and regional businesses better.

Many chambers of commerce have developed a young professional organization to help support these young drivers, while other chambers sometimes work in partnership with a local young professionals' network. For some young professionals' groups, these members are made up of 21 to 40 year old chamber members, while other young professional groups are actually made up of high school or college students who have taken an interest in the local economy and use the chamber and young professionals' group as a bridge to find a job or network before entering the workforce.

E<sub>3</sub> Young Professionals (E<sub>3</sub>YP) is a workforce development initiative created by the Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce in January of 2014. The E<sub>3</sub>YP program is designed to help attract, retain, and meet the unique needs of young professionals (ages 21-45) throughout the Wausau region.



Marathon County must redefine economic development as a question of not only attracting jobs, but of attracting and retaining people as well, especially our young, our talented—our future. Young professionals seek change, opportunities, and a progressive community. That is why Marathon County is in full support of the E<sub>3</sub>YP initiative and is proud to be a corporate member.

The purpose of E<sub>3</sub>YP is to engage young professionals with each other, the community, and businesses to provide young professionals with leadership opportunities and development tools to grow, and to excite young professionals to work, play, and stay in the Wausau region. The E<sub>3</sub>YP program offers several different benefits to businesses and individuals including:

*continued . . .*



*Young professionals gather at the Great Dane for E<sub>3</sub>YP Elevating Your Future: Leadership Impact: Connect. Collaborate. Communicate.*

## E<sub>3</sub> Young Professionals (E<sub>3</sub>YP) *continued*

By Karen Nerison, Contributing Writer

### Benefits of Corporate Membership:

- Reduce turnover costs
- Improve recruiting
- Strengthen the Wausau region
- Access the E<sub>3</sub>YP Ambassadors
- Discounted educational programming
- Unlimited memberships for your young professionals

### Benefits of Individual Membership:

- Meet other young professionals
- Attend personal and professional development programs
- Discounted or free admission to events
- Represent a young professionals' viewpoint to the community
- Build relationships with business and community leaders
- Cultivate career development opportunities
- Discover cultural opportunities in the Wausau region

In this ongoing effort to make Marathon County better for everyone—economically and socially—E<sub>3</sub>YP will play a significant role in making our community a place where everyone can be part of a successful future. Visit the [e3yp.org](http://e3yp.org) to learn more or contact Amanda Murphy at [amurphy@wausauchamber.com](mailto:amurphy@wausauchamber.com) or 715-848-5966.



Networking at E<sub>3</sub>YP On the Move: Wausau County Club

## E<sub>3</sub>YP By the Numbers

# 800

E<sub>3</sub>YP Members and Growing

# 414

Young Professionals have attended the five social events

# 204

Young Professionals have attended the three educational programs.

# 22

Corporate Members - Including **Marathon County Government**

# 8

Members have hosted E<sub>3</sub>YP Events

# 3

Sustaining Partners - Aspirus, Northcentral Technical College, and Remedy Staffing

Numbers are from May - September, 2014