



**Economic  
Development and  
Growing the  
Economy**

**UW  
Extension**

# Profiles of Best Practices

## Supporting IT Growth — Chequamegon Group/ Ten Rivers

### Community, County

Chequamegon Bay Area of Ashland and Bayfield Counties, including the cities of Ashland, Bayfield, and Washburn, and the Bad River and Red Cliff Bands of Chippewa

### Area of Project Impact

Ashland and Bayfield Counties

### Population Affected

31,500

### Situation

The Chequamegon Bay Area had problems with low per capita income and population retention. To address these challenges, economic diversification beyond the area's traditional economic base of tourism, manufacturing and natural resource based businesses was desired.

### Economic Development Strategies

The Chequamegon Bay area sought to grow and attract Information Technology (IT) economic opportunities by creating a technology segment of the local economy in order to simultaneously promote population retention (of local graduates and high-skilled workers) while attracting and growing new businesses. This economic development strategy focused on infrastructure development, education and workforce development, financial resource development, and business development and incubation

### Implementation

The Alliance for Sustainability, in consultation with an IT entrepreneur, developed a fifty-five member Chequamegon Bay based group representing businesses, government, civic organizations, Indian tribes, school districts and education institutions that began meeting several years ago to promote ideas and discussion of developing their local economy. This broad-based group began to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to IT in the Chequamegon Bay. From this larger group, a working group developed to perform a needs assessment of the area and reported their findings in a document titled "*Bridge to the New Economy: Preparing the Chequamegon Bay Area for the New Economy.*" Based upon this research, four major initiatives were identified.

The group focused on these four distinct yet related projects to develop a technology based segment of the local economy. The first strategy, lead by the Bayfield County Economic Development group, involved attracting professionals to live in the Chequamegon Bay Area by offering high tech telecommunicating infrastructure. The second strategy was to develop the knowledge base of the workforce through education. This strategy has resulted in two federally funded efforts, including a high tech training center addition to the WITC Ashland campus and a pilot computer training program at the Washburn Public School. The third strategy focused on creating a local venture capital group, which resulted in the formation of Ten Rivers to facilitate the creation of at least one high tech business in the Bay area per year. The fourth and final strategy involved the creation of a business incubation facility—the "Bay Area Epicenter," which now houses the Ten Rivers group as well as a new high tech company.

### Partners and Leadership

Over 55 persons were actively involved in an initial one-year analysis of the potential for an IT segment in the Chequamegon Bay area; including mayors, city and town administrators, county board members, tribal representatives, local economic development organizations, school districts, utilities, bankers, businessmen,

concerned citizens and civic organizations as well as representatives from Xcel Energy, Northland College, WITC, UW-Extension and M & I Bank. Furthermore, implementation of the four initiatives has resulted in the formation of new working groups as well as a new group to support economic development—Ten Rivers.

## **Outcomes**

The outcomes of this effort have been multi-fold. The Ten Rivers Inc. has been formed to develop new IT companies, as a result of private investment of \$2,000,000. This group has already facilitated the start-up of Superior Edge LLC, a software-based knowledge transfer business; see [www.superioledge.com](http://www.superioledge.com). In addition, Ten Rivers has purchased a site for the Bay Area Epicenter in Bayfield. Furthermore, the Washburn Middle School has received a \$700,000 federal grant, with the assistance of Congressman Dave Obey, to provide a pilot program for laptop computers and IT training for students and staff and the WITC Ashland campus has completed a \$1.24 million tech training expansion. Ultimately, all of these outcomes will support continued, sustainable growth of the IT segment of the Chequamegon Bay Area.

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