



**Economic
Development and
Growing the
Economy**

**UW
Extension**

Profiles of Best Practices

Attracting New Businesses—The “Work & Play” Program

Community, County

Burnett County including the Villages of Grantsburg, Siren, and Webster

Area of Project Impact

Burnett County

Population Affected

15,674

Situation

A rural county with abundant natural resources, lakes, rivers and wildlife, Burnett County's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. Lower paying jobs and seasonally high rates of unemployment are the results of relying heavily on a tourism-based economy. Furthermore, the resort industry has been declining steadily over the last 20 years. Only 40 resorts remain from over 100 in years past.

Economic Development Strategies

In an effort to increase wages and diversify its economy, the Burnett County Development Association developed a marketing strategy targeting secondary homeowners, many of whom live in the Twin Cities metro area and work in manufacturing and high technology industries. This strategy was designed to promote second homeownership in Burnett county as well as amenity-based tourism. As a consequence of this strategy, new businesses have come into the area to fill gaps in the tourism sector as well as to maximize the locational advantages created by the growth of a high-skilled workforce in the area. This has had the effect of increasing wages and diversifying the economy.

Implementation

A “work and play” marketing strategy was developed and focused toward secondary homeowners. The campaign emphasized quality of life as an influential recruitment tool and an important part of creating a happy and productive workforce. The campaign also noted the time savings in working where you play.

Each year half of the secondary homeowners with improved properties were mailed a “Work and Play” brochure with attractive photos of the recreational and business resources in the county. A response team contacted those who made inquiries as a result of the mailing and communicated the financial resources available. Many were surprised that a revolving loan fund, incubator and enterprise center were available to assist with business start-ups or relocations. Recently, a technology tax credit incentive program was also developed.

The campaign has successfully created increased inquiries by secondary homeowners to start or move businesses to the county. Several businesses have moved to the county and had significant positive impacts on the local economy.

Partners and Leadership

The Burnett County Development Association is a nonprofit quasi-county development organization representing all geographic areas of the county and development interests. Members include representatives from each financial institution, each utility, the St. Croix Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and representatives from each general commercial area including the villages of Grantsburg, Webster and Siren. The organization's purpose is to promote economic development in the county and it has been in existence since 1987. Funding for the organization and the marketing campaign come from county government funding sources. Board members serve without pay and also spend time responding to business inquiries.

Outcomes

The “Work and Play” campaign has helped in the development of two major hotels in Siren, WI. The hotels fulfill the amenity-based trend in tourism and attract visitors who spend more dollars per visit. One of the hotels also has conference space available, which adds to the overall business climate in the county. At least three manufacturers have moved or started businesses in the county as a result of being a secondary homeowner. Two plastic injection molding companies and an industrial clutch manufacturer have been in existence for several years. These businesses have increased manufacturing jobs to 21% of the total jobs in the county. That number is equal to the statewide average in the manufacturing sector.

Contact

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