



**Economic
Development and
Growing the
Economy**

**UW
Extension**

Profiles of Best Practices

Capturing Outside Dollars—“Rooted in Resources” Heritage Project

Community, County

Iron County

Area of Project Impact

Iron County

Population Affected

6,861

Situation

Facing difficult economic times, Iron County determined the need to create a theme around which it could offer a unique and exciting tourism campaign to bolster the local tourism industry and strengthen the local economic base.

Economic Development Strategies

In 1992, the Iron County Development Zone Council took a leadership position in tourism development by creating the Task Force on Tourism Development. Through the efforts of this task force, strong support was created for promoting the unique cultural and historic resources of the county as a theme for a tourism-related economic development initiative. In 1994, Iron County was selected as a Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Pilot Project opening the door for a successful, long term economic development effort.

Implementation

The Heritage Tourism Pilot Project, entitled “Rooted in Resources,” successfully packaged a variety of projects under the theme of Heritage Tourism. The “Rooted in Resources” project included several key components:

1. Historic and cultural sites and corridors were inventoried and identified with signage detailing their cultural and historical significance;
2. Signs were erected along designated historical corridors at the five major entry points to the County;
3. The Pines and Mines Mountain Bike Trail System was designed to include major interpretive sites;
4. Signage and promotional materials incorporated the customized “Rooted in Resources” Heritage Tourism logo;
5. An aggressive marketing program was developed for the Iron County Heritage Tourism Area through brochure development, media releases, customized logos, banner advertising, newspaper and magazine articles, business tie-ins and event development;
6. An employee training manual was made available to area businesses to improve hospitality skills and increase employee awareness of local historic and cultural sites;
7. Communities were encouraged to develop heritage related events to be incorporated under the umbrella of the popular Iron County Heritage Festival; and
8. A concerted effort to secure additional sources of funding to maintain the project over time.

Partners and Leadership

The Iron County Development Zone Council's Task Force on Tourism Development provided the leadership for the "Rooted in Resources" project. The Task Force partnered with a vast variety of local organizations, including the Iron County Historical Society, the Mercer Historical Society, the National Finnish American Festival, the Hurley Chamber of Commerce, the Mercer Chamber of Commerce, the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage Club, the Springstead Business Association and many business establishments throughout the county.

Outcomes

After 10 years, Iron County's Task Force on Tourism Development continues to manage and maintain the County's Heritage Tourism efforts. In the first year of the program, tourism related expenditures in the county grew by over 11 percent and tourism-related jobs increased by 8 percent. Based on tourism referrals and web site visits, the positive economic impact of the "Rooted in Resources" project continues to be felt throughout the County.

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