



**Economic  
Development and  
Growing the  
Economy**

**UW  
Extension**

# Profiles of Best Practices

## Attracting Resources—Iron County Development Zone Council

### Community, County

Iron County

### Area of Project Impact

Iron County

### Population Affected

6,861

### Situation

Iron County was facing serious economic challenges. Unemployment rates were among the highest in the state while few employment opportunities offered gainful employment for young people in the community. In addition, jobs that existed in the county provided wages at rates that were among the lowest in the state.

### Economic Development Strategies

Area leaders recognized the need for an organized approach to improve the economic development climate of the community. It was understood that a cooperative and focused economic development organization was the key to the county's future economic health. In 1989, Iron County applied for and received the designation as a Wisconsin Development Zone, which included the cities of Hurley and Montreal as well as the towns of Saxon, Kimball, Carey, Oma, Gurnee, Anderson, Knight, Pence and Mercer.

### Implementation

The purpose of the Iron County Development Zone Council is three-fold: 1) to coordinate economic development efforts within Iron County; 2) to provide answers to inquiries and requests by businesses interested in investing and creating jobs in the county; and 3) to facilitate the application process for the state's tax credits.

In its 13-year history, the Development Zone Council has enjoyed many successes. In 1999, the Zone Council fought to retain 125 local jobs by providing industrial park infrastructure for two local companies, Snow Country Hardwood's and Snowbelt Hardwoods. One year later, the Council again sprung into action by providing a spec building for Art Unlimited, saving 40 jobs from moving out of the area. Recently, the Zone Council has been very active in the development of infrastructure to serve the county's only industrial park. Working with the City of Hurley and the federal Economic Development Administration, the Council applied for and received \$1.5 million for new sewer, water, roads and lot development.

The Zone Council has also been a very strong partner for tourism development in the county. In 1992, it created the Iron County Task Force on Tourism Development. In 1994, it was selected as a Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Pilot Project. And in 1995 it initiated the Iron County Heritage Festival, a two week long area-wide festival featuring a variety of community events and activities, bringing all areas of the county together in a successful, joint promotional effort.

### Partners and Leadership

One of the true success stories of the Iron County Development Zone Council has been its ability to serve in a leadership capacity to involve a variety of partners in the economic development battle. Key partners include Iron County, all local governmental units within the county, the Iron County Resource Development Association, the Hurley Chamber of Commerce, the Mercer Chamber of Commerce and many area businesses.

## **Outcomes**

A total of well over one million dollars in tax credits have been made available to businesses locating or expanding in Iron County. These tax credits have assisted in the creation of 300 new jobs and \$13 million in new private investment in the county since the Iron County Development Zone Council was created in 1989.

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