



**Economic  
Development and  
Growing the  
Economy**



# Profiles of Best Practices

## **Economic and Community Development Through Air Industrial Parks**

### **Community, County**

City of Rhinelander, Oneida County

### **Area of Project Impact**

City of Rhinelander; Oneida County; Vilas, Lincoln, Forest and Price Counties; Lac du Flambeau and Forest County Potawatomi

### **Population Affected**

113,308

### **Situation**

The City of Rhinelander lacked land, particularly land with public infrastructure in place, to provide for the expansion of existing business and attract new industry to relocate. At the same time, there was a need to improve air transportation services and efficiency; and as a consequence, a runway was closed.

### **Economic Development Strategies**

The closing of the airport runway made surrounding land available for development in 1980. The City of Rhinelander immediately recognized the opportunity to purchase the land and sought to use it to advance economic development by building an air industrial park to attract new and relocate existing businesses in the area.

### **Implementation**

In 1980, the City of Rhinelander established its first air industrial park by purchasing the land surrounding the closed airport runway. After purchasing the site, the city designated the area a tax incremental financing (TIF) district to provide incentives for public and private investment, and then it invested in infrastructure improvements on the land in anticipation of business development. Four years later, the first business arrived and after a few false starts, Air Industrial Park I took off when a Danish business making popsicle sticks needed an invaluable Northwoods natural resource—birch trees.

In 1989, there were two businesses located in what was called the Air Industrial Park I. Around this time, an inquiry came to the City of Rhinelander from Lakeshore Unlimited, a ship builder, because the company was seeking to relocate its business operations onto an eighty-acre site. As a result, when more land became available, the city decided to work with Oneida County to develop an Air Industrial Park II, and when it received designation as another tax incremental financing district, TIF 3, the city took on sole ownership of the land. Throughout this time, other businesses were relocating to the air industrial parks, including American Plastics, Red Arrow and Superdiesel. In addition to these manufacturing companies, Lazerpros also relocated to the area to rebuild and refurbish HP laser printers. This arrangement using airport land for Air Industrial Parks I and II fostered phenomenal economic development for the city over the past two decades by attracting and supporting business and industry. Furthermore, this economic growth also cultivated the air service needs of business and industry, so the airline profited from this unique arrangement. In the summer of 2002, Air Industrial Park III was created and designated as TIF 6, which promises continued economic development.

### **Partners and Leadership**

Partnerships involved in the Rhinelander/Oneida County Airport and Airport Industrial Park include: City of Rhinelander, Oneida County, Federal Aviation Administration, Wisconsin Bureau of Aeronautics, Oneida County Economic Development Corporation, Rhinelander Area Chamber of Commerce, co-location of businesses and agencies and the Air Industrial Park Businesses.

## **Outcomes**

In summary, this creative arrangement using airport land for Air Industrial Parks I and II fostered phenomenal economic development for the city over the past two decades by attracting and supporting fourteen businesses with 1,180 employees. Additionally, economic development supported the airline industry. Ultimately, the airport provided for commercial airline service, which brought industry, increasingly gaining additional industry, which required more services and support to meet the demands of industry and expanded local business. Furthermore, this innovative arrangement allowed the airline to offer residents and businesses additional services, including the first non-motorized disabled lift, the third passenger boarding bridge, a transponder landing system and an infrared deicer.

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