

Development director sees positive trends when taking a long-range view of local business climate

It is easy to get caught up in thoughts of financial doom and gloom when focusing on reports of the nation's stumbling economy.

To counter that fixation on the negative, Kathleen Schilling, executive director of Ozaukee Economic Development, presented the Ozaukee County Board a long-term perspective in a recent report titled "Evaluation of the Ozaukee Business Community."

"I thought the report showed that businesses are definitely optimistic for the future, expecting both growth in sales and employment. Anecdotally, speaking to businesses, I am seeing this increase with many who are contacting me," Schilling said.

The study noted that the county has not been immune to the ravages of the current recession.

Unemployment in Ozaukee County was 7.44% last year, and 7.85% so far this year. That is more than double the annual rate throughout the preceding years of the decade, which saw unemployment rates as low as 2.48%.

But Schilling's study, which used statistics collected by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, showed a much more powerful economic current at work over the long haul.

With the exception of the most recent two-year period, employment growth has ranged from steady to staggering since 1950. The statistical report showed employment grew by 716% from that entry date to 2007.

The 1960s brought 3,600 new jobs to the county, a gain of 54.5%; the 1970s, 11,100 new jobs, a gain of 108.8%; the 1980s, 6,900 jobs, a 32.4% gain; the 1990s, 7,100 jobs, a 25.2% gain; and the early 2000s, 15,500 jobs, a gain of 43.9%.

Even as recently as 2007, the county workforce grew by 3,051 employees, an increase of 6%.

In that same year, the county's per capita personal income was calculated at \$60,059 — tops in the state and 156% of the national level of \$38,615.

The county's median annual household income, according to figures gleaned from the 2008 American Community Survey, was \$73,186. That figure trails only Waukesha County.

Eight other counties in Wisconsin paid higher weekly wages in 2008 than Ozaukee County, at \$730. That discrepancy with the high per capita rating reflects the great number of local residents who work outside the county.

Economic news not all bad in county

Written by Mark Jaeger

Wednesday, 18 August 2010 16:37

The analysis, using 2007 numbers, shows that manufacturing tops the list of county jobs, with 10,227 workers, followed by retail with 6,008 jobs, and health care with 4,205 jobs.

During the past decade, the largest increase in employment came in finance and insurance, with 708 new jobs. Other fields logging employment growth included construction with 614 jobs, food service with 548 jobs and health care with 485 jobs.

Schilling also provided a summary of the business community survey prepared with Nicole Sidoff of the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

The highlight of that survey showed just 27% of county employers reported a declining or stagnant workforce over the past three years.

Similarly, 23% of employers responding to the local survey said annual sales were flat or dropped over the past three years. In contrast, 29% reported moderate growth in sales of 5% or less, and 32% reported sales growth of more than 5%.

Schilling said the updates are important to make sure county officials have latest economic information while facing critical financial decisions for the region.

“It is important for county officials to have the big picture – our local government representatives are often the people directly on the front line, speaking to residents and business owners daily,” she said.

“Understanding what is going on in the business community, their concerns and potential opportunities, allows them to provide quality information to Ozaukee County residents. Thus, sending that big picture out to everyone.”

Schilling said she sees cause for economic optimism in many of the statistics included in the report to the board, and to remind leaders that Ozaukee Economic Development is available to help companies further the economic wellbeing of the community.

“We do need to work to ensure that we are bringing in family-supporting jobs and we do try and focus on companies that provide those. However, our organization works with all businesses no matter what size,” she said.