

# Vital Signs

Measuring the Vitality of the South Wood County Area

Presented July 2012

# 2.0



**incourage**  
community foundation

Written By:

**COWS** | BUILDING  
THE HIGH ROAD

# A NOTE FROM TEAM INCOURAGE



## inside:

Population Trends 5

Demographics 6

Income Wages Benefits 7

Unemployment 8-9

Economic Support 10

Childcare 11

Homelessness 12-13

Education 14

Workers 15

Employers 16-17

Community Engagement 18-19

A successful team needs **equipment**.

We have the tools and knowledge included in Vital Signs 2.0, as well as the results of our 2012 Community Survey. With that...

A successful team needs a **game plan**.

Incourage is committed to helping our community use these tools to coordinate efforts focused on community priorities and a shared vision for our future. We need your help, because....

A successful team needs **courageous people with the heart to play the game**.

The information in this report is something everyone needs to know. Help us spread the word. Recruit your family, friends and neighbors to build our community team. Contact us and we'll help you get involved.

As a team, and as individuals who live in and love this community, **we're all in**.

## Are you in?



2012 Community Survey Key Findings Report  
available at [incouragecf.org](http://incouragecf.org)

# DATA. COMMUNITY. RESPONSE.

## DATA: *Identifying What Matters*

This report summarizes the most recent and best available data to help focus discussions on economic opportunity in the south Wood County area.

From schools to employers, wages to social supports, and employment to homelessness, we offer data that builds a picture of where we are, and where we need to improve.

Data alone cannot make a community stronger, but a shared understanding of what data tells us about local life, and how it is changing, can start a conversation.

Data can seem abstract, even alienating, but it also quantifies the experience of education, work and life. Data can provide a foundation for informed, collective action to move our community forward. Where available, data is presented for economic and cultural sub-county regions. This information will be updated annually as a way for our community to come together, discuss challenges, and chart progress.

## COMMUNITY: *South Wood County Area Matters*

The challenges of our community are, perhaps, familiar. The area's population is both aging and declining. These trends relate directly to the serious economic restructuring that we have faced for more than a decade with the decline of jobs in the paper industry. As the job base contracted still further with the Great Recession and weak national recovery, we faced even more acute economic challenges. Measures of economic need in our community – unemployment, food and medical assistance caseloads, and disadvantaged children – are all on the rise. The data presents a picture of the many ways in which our community is confronted with increasing need: residents in need of jobs (or better jobs), families in need of supports to make ends meet, and workers in need of advanced skills. We face these challenges with fewer resources – tax base, jobs, and state support.

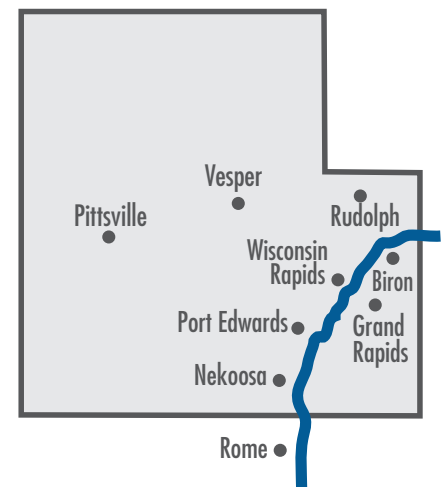
But, the south Wood County area is not simply a community facing challenges; we have opportunities as well. We have a significant manufacturing base (19.6% of jobs), offering residents family-supporting jobs. Students in our K-12 schools perform above state averages on mandatory testing. Nearly 12% of residents have earned an associate degree, higher than both the state and national rates. We actively participate in volunteerism to strengthen our community, and our voter participation is above 77%.

## RESPONSE: *Working Together Matters*

This is the second edition of *Vital Signs*. The challenges that we face have become even clearer over the past two years. In many ways, our challenges are shared by the nation, having been generated by a deep recession and slow recovery combined with the long-term decline of manufacturing. Other small communities across the country also face declining and aging populations, as the younger (and often more educated) generation moves to urban areas for work. Yet, our capacity to face and overcome our challenges is unique because we have the tools to start a community conversation. We can use this report to guide conversations and solutions by highlighting *who we are* as a region, what our *families* and *communities* need, and where we have *drivers of economic health* to build upon.

## SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA

*Vital Signs* covers the south Wood County area of Wisconsin, including the municipalities of Biron, Cranmoor, Grand Rapids, Nekoosa, Pittsville, Port Edwards (Town and Village), Rome (Adams County), Rudolph (Town and Village), Saratoga, Seneca, Sigel, Vesper, and Wisconsin Rapids.



This report is available online at  
[incouragecf.org](http://incouragecf.org)

# SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AT-A-GLANCE



## SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA

**POPULATION: 45,778**

Wood County **UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 8%**

**MEDICAID** Caseload Increase since 2007: **39%**

**FOODSHARE** Caseload Increase since 2007: **75%**

Economically Disadvantaged **STUDENTS: 44%**

Annual **CHILDCARE COSTS** over age 2: **\$6,336**

Adult Population **EDUCATION:**

**90%** High School Graduates

**12%** Associate Degree

**11%** Bachelor's Degree

**6%** Graduate Degree

**VOTER PARTICIPATION** Rate: **77%**

## WISCONSIN RAPIDS

**POPULATION: 18,367**

**MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$51,301**

**MEDIAN EARNINGS:**

**\$22,971** High School Graduates

**\$29,805** Some College

**\$31,836** Bachelor's Degree

**\$51,932** Graduate Degree

*Includes most recent and best available data at time of printing, July 2012.  
See pages 5-19 for explanation of At-A-Glance numbers.*

# WHO WE ARE POPULATION TRENDS



*We need: "More opportunities for our kids. They're the future, and the future tax base. We need to encourage them to stay, and they won't stay without jobs."*

- 2012 Community Survey

## POPULATION MATTERS

Declining and aging populations signal a lack of economic opportunity in a community, as young people leave for jobs elsewhere.

Declining population also reduces a community's resources by decreasing the local tax base, as well as state and federal funding (often distributed on the basis of population).

The first decade of the 21st century has been a time of dramatic change internationally, nationally, and in Wisconsin. Our community has felt these changes, and population data makes clear that those changes have brought challenges to the people of our region.

Our population is edging downward, declining nearly 2% since the turn of the century. The population decline, hastened by the nation's Great Recession (beginning December 2007), stands in contrast to our previous decade of modest population growth. Over the 1990s, we added 6% to our population, even as the state of Wisconsin grew slightly faster (adding nearly 10% over the decade). In the new century, Wisconsin's growth has slowed to 6%, and our region has moved into very slight population decline. Our current population puts us back to the area's population of the mid-1980s.

The south Wood County area has just over 45,000 residents and is dominated by Wisconsin Rapids (population 18,367) where 41% of people live. If the populations of Grand Rapids, Saratoga, and Biron (all part of the Wisconsin Rapids metropolitan area and schools) are considered, Wisconsin Rapids and its suburbs account for just over 70%. While population has declined slightly over the decade, that decline has not shifted the population location or density; metropolitan Wisconsin Rapids held just over 70% of the region's population in both 2000 and 2010.

The moderate population decline of our region points to real challenges, and a divergence from Wisconsin's population trends. Even so, the area's population is relatively stable. We are clearly facing the challenges of the new century, but with more resilience than many cities battered by economic restructuring and even more dramatic declines in population.

## POPULATION BY MUNICIPALITY

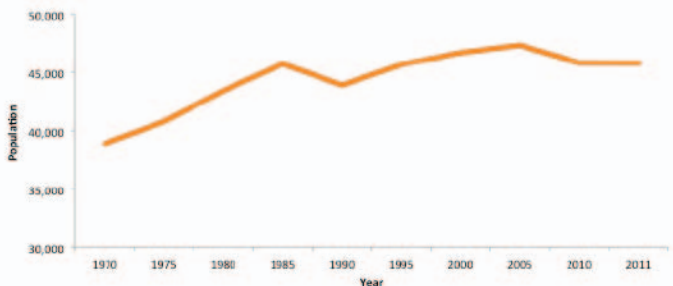
SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA AND WISCONSIN 2000 AND 2010 CENSUS, 2011 CENSUS ESTIMATES

Municipality	2000 Census	2010 Census	% Change 2000-2010	2011 Estimate
Biron	915	839	-8.3%	838
Cranmoor	175	168	-4.0%	166
Grand Rapids	7,801	7,646	-2.0%	7,658
Nekoosa	2,590	2,580	-0.4%	2,575
Pittsville	866	874	0.9%	873
Port Edwards (Village & Town)	3,390	3,245	-4.3%	3,221
Rome (Adams Cty)	2,656	2,720	2.4%	2,725
Rudolph (Village & Town)	1,584	1,467	-7.4%	1,466
Saratoga	5,383	5,142	-4.5%	5,136
Seneca	1,202	1,120	-6.8%	1,119
Sigel	1,130	1,051	-7.0%	1,049
Vesper	541	584	7.9%	585
Wisconsin Rapids	18,435	18,367	-0.4%	18,367
<b>AREA TOTAL</b>	<b>46,668</b>	<b>45,803</b>	<b>-1.9%</b>	<b>45,778</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>5,363,715</b>	<b>5,686,986</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>5,694,236</b>

Source: <http://www.doa.state.wi.us> Wisconsin Department of Administration

## POPULATION

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA 1970-2011



In 2011, the area's estimated total population was 45,778, down from the 2010 Census.

The south Wood County area experienced an overall drop in population from 2000-2010 of 2% compared to population growth of 6% for the state.

Source: <http://www.doa.state.wi.us> Wisconsin Department of Administration

# WHO WE ARE DEMOGRAPHICS

Age and household income statistics clarify some of the challenges facing the south Wood County area. Our population is declining and aging, and will almost certainly continue to age into the foreseeable future. From 2000 to 2011, the local population aged 0-29 declined by just over 10%. Over the same period, the Wisconsin population in this age range grew very slightly. We also lost population in the 30-59 age range, ending the period with 4% fewer prime age adults. Wisconsin's 30-59 group grew by 5% over the period. These population declines were mitigated only by the growth in the local 60+ age group. The older population grew by 20% over the decade, matching Wisconsin growth in that demographic.

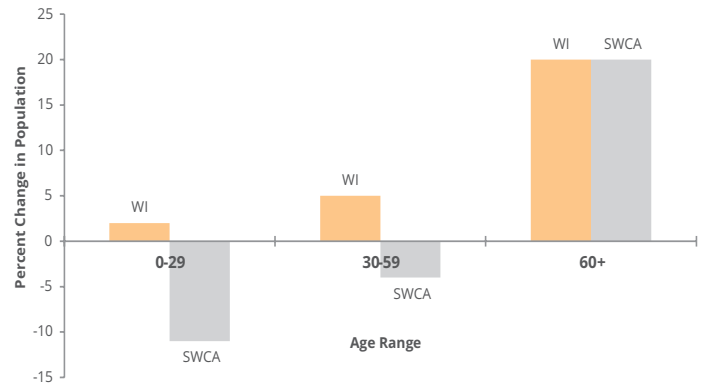
The current population challenge is likely to grow as the population ages, with serious impact especially on employers who will face a shrinking workforce as fewer new people enter the labor market to fill jobs left by experienced, retiring workers. Even as the number of residents and families falls, the number of households in the region may also continue to grow slightly as the population ages. This is because many seniors live alone, constituting a "household" of one.

The income of households in the area is also declining, forcing residents of the region to increasingly make do with less money. The first decade of the 21st Century was marked nationally by a decline in income. With inflation taken into account, median household income in the United States fell by just over 5% from 2000 to 2011. In Wisconsin, the news for households was worse, with income down some 10% over the same period. Household income in our area was also down, in general falling further than even the negative Wisconsin trend. In Wisconsin Rapids (which accounts for the bulk of the region's households), income fell nearly 17%.

Decline in real median household income brings challenges to households and to communities. However, the aging of the population may actually help provide an answer to the income decline. As we age and workers increasingly retire, employers will need to find ways to increase the productivity of their shrinking workforces. Investments in skills to increase productivity could lead to increased wages for workers, as employers recognize the increased value of enhanced skills.

## POPULATION CHANGE BY AGE

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA AND WISCONSIN, 2000-2011



Sources: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>  
QT-P1: Age Groups and Sex: 2000 and QT-P1: Age Groups and Sex: 2010

## INFLATION-ADJUSTED MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA BY MUNICIPALITY, WISCONSIN, AND U.S., 2000 AND 2010 (2012 DOLLARS)

Municipality	2000	2010	% Change 2000-2010
Biron	58,155.19	57,131.87	-1.8%
Cranmoor	63,201.76	82,872.06	31.1%
Grand Rapids	85,428.29	78,829.47	-7.7%
Nekoosa	53,806.91	35,948.99	-33.2%
Pittsville	50,219.78	45,471.84	-9.5%
Port Edwards (Town)	59,859.24	57,504.60	-3.9%
Port Edwards (Village)	66,754.73	55,335.05	-17.7%
Rome (Adams County)	60,127.08	54,272.20	-9.7%
Rudolph (Town)	69,490.51	63,885.88	-8.1%
Rudolph (Village)	56,198.32	60,922.84	8.4%
Saratoga	66,276.44	54,347.37	-18.0%
Seneca	73,953.58	58,533.00	-20.9%
Sigel	67,268.54	57,542.18	-14.5%
Vesper	52,952.83	55,209.76	4.3%
Wisconsin Rapids	47,768.23	40,067.79	-16.7%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>59,613.27</b>	<b>53,871.28</b>	<b>-9.6%</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>57,190.42</b>	<b>54,201.20</b>	<b>-5.2%</b>

Source: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

*VITAL SIGNS 2.0 reports real median income, wages and earnings. "Real" means inflation-adjusted, (calculated using the Consumer Price Index Research Series Using Current Methods, or CPI-U-RS). "Median" means the center of a distribution, or the value where exactly half of the distribution lies above and half below it. We prefer the median to the average, or mean, because the mean can mislead with very high-earning individuals raising the mean.*

# FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES INCOME, WAGES & BENEFITS

Here, we focus on families (defined by the U.S. Census as households with two or more related individuals) and consider the median income of south Wood County area families, as well as wages and benefits that directly influence family life and standards of living.

Median family income demonstrates a trend very similar to household income trends, with family income for many local residents lagging behind the poor performance posted by the nation and Wisconsin over the last decade. Specifically, U.S. real median family income fell by 4%, from \$68,400 to \$65,800 per year. Wisconsin family income also declined, but by 10% (more than twice the U.S. decline), falling from \$72,300 (above the U.S.) in 2000 to \$64,800 (below the U.S.) in 2010. Family income fell in nearly every community in the region, and generally fell further than the Wisconsin decline.

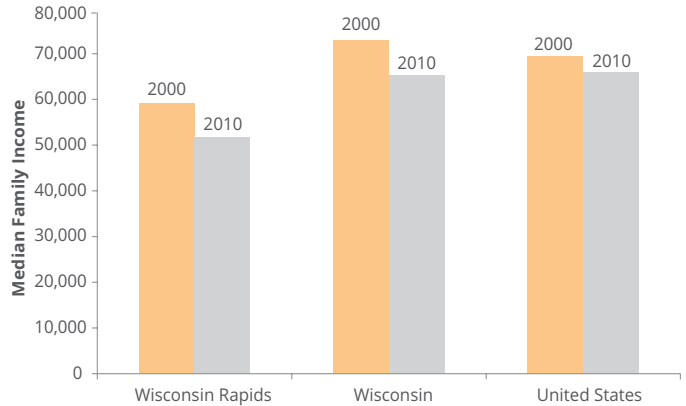
Family income in Wisconsin Rapids, for example, fell from \$59,600 in 2000 to \$51,300 in 2010, a decline of 14%. In only two communities did family income rise over the 2000s: Cranmoor (up 19%) and Vesper (up 8%). But these two communities account for just 200 of the 12,800 families that live in the south Wood County area.

Health insurance benefits are also a key issue. On a recent survey of local families, respondents were asked about their health insurance, specifically whether all members, some members, or no members of their families were covered by health insurance. Just under 90% of respondents reported having health insurance for all family members, leaving more than one-in-ten area families who make do with one, or all members of their family uninsured.

Finally, we offer some data on the wage required to support a family at a basic standard of living. Working full-time and living alone, a single adult needs to earn a wage of nearly \$11 per hour (\$22,000 per year) to reach self-sufficiency in the region. If that worker has a six year-old child, a wage of \$17 per hour (\$34,000 per year) is required to reach self-sufficiency. That wage is higher than the wage earned by half of the workers in the Wisconsin labor market, making it clear that earning a wage sufficient to meet basic needs is a challenge, especially for primary caregivers.

## INFLATION-ADJUSTED MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WISCONSIN, AND U.S., 2000 AND 2010 (2012 DOLLARS)



Sources: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>  
QT-P11: Households and Families: 2010, and QT-P10: Households and Families: 2000

## INFLATION-ADJUSTED MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME

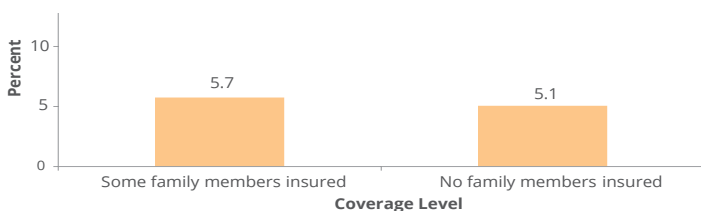
SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA BY MUNICIPALITY, WISCONSIN, AND U.S. 2000 AND 2010 (2012 DOLLARS)

Municipality	2000	2010	% Change 2000-2010
Biron	70,675.29	61,990.91	-12.3%
Cranmoor	73,109.07	86,787.28	18.7%
Grand Rapids	90,768.66	84,366.11	-7.1%
Nekoosa	60,923.77	50,752.68	-16.7%
Pittsville	56,975.88	52,724.90	-7.5%
Port Edwards (Town)	71,884.66	64,660.57	-10.0%
Port Edwards (Village)	74,886.92	64,557.21	-13.8%
Rome (Adams County)	63,651.35	58,283.47	-8.4%
Rudolph (Town)	73,734.93	72,711.30	-1.4%
Rudolph (Village)	69,180.31	62,056.69	-10.3%
Saratoga	72,084.17	59,183.44	-16.1%
Seneca	80,283.32	68,064.20	-15.2%
Sigel	73,166.46	64,869.38	-11.3%
Vesper	61,493.61	66,558.66	8.2%
Wisconsin Rapids	59,572.27	51,300.81	-13.9%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>72,304.18</b>	<b>64,823.44</b>	<b>-10.3%</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>68,389.09</b>	<b>65,756.83</b>	<b>-3.8%</b>

Sources: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>  
QT-P11: Households and Families: 2010, and QT-P10: Households and Families: 2000

## LIMITED TO NO FAMILY HEALTH COVERAGE

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY



Source: Edge Research, 2012 Community Survey

## NECESSARY HOURLY WAGE TO SATISFY BASIC NEEDS BY HOURS (2012 DOLLARS)

	One Adult Household	One Adult and One Child (age 6)	Two Adults and Two Children (ages 3 & 12)
<b>40 hrs/week</b>	\$10.95	\$17.30	\$22.82
<b>35 hrs/week</b>	\$12.51	\$19.77	\$26.08

Source: Wood County Homelessness Initiative Committee, September 2010

# FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES UNEMPLOYMENT



## UNEMPLOYMENT MATTERS

Unemployment measures the share of the population that is actively seeking work, but cannot find a job. (Note, it is not just those people who receive Unemployment Insurance.)

Unemployment rises in recessions, and falls in economic recovery and expansion. At the local level, unemployment rises in situations of economic restructuring. It falls when workers find work, drop out of the labor force (“I’ve retired”), or leave the area.

Our community is currently facing both the recessionary economy and a longer-term restructuring in manufacturing. This leads to higher unemployment rates and longer terms of unemployment.

Long-term unemployment drains financial and emotional resources, leaving many with a sense of worthlessness. At the same time, employers may interpret long spells of unemployment negatively, making it harder to get a job the longer someone is out of work.

The Great Recession devastated the labor market. Over the course of the recession, Wisconsin lost more than 200,000 jobs. The recovery from the downturn has been anemic, and Wisconsin’s job base is still some 140,000 jobs behind where it was when the recession began. Like nearly every community across the state, the recession continues to extract a toll in the south Wood County area. Trends in unemployment in Wood County make this obvious.

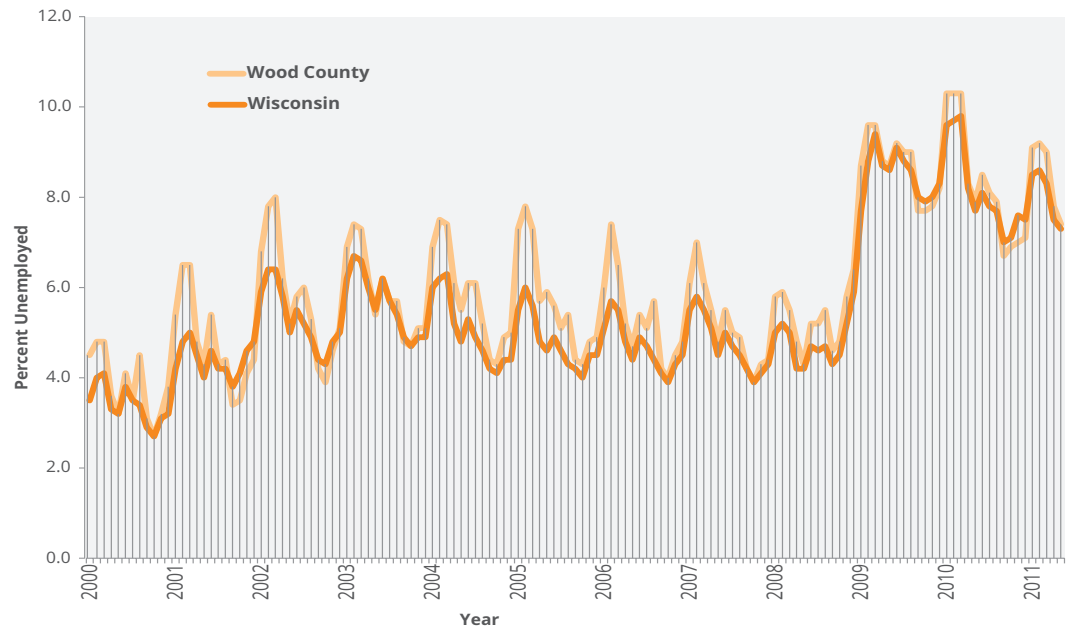
Wood County unemployment tracks state unemployment fairly closely. Both in the state and in Wood County, unemployment shifted up dramatically starting in late 2008. While unemployment had hovered in the county around 5% for most of the decade, unemployment doubled during the recession rising to over 10% in 2010. From that high, unemployment in the county and the state has fallen slowly, now registering below 8% both in Wood County and Wisconsin. It will take stronger growth of jobs in the region to pull unemployment to the level that was so regularly posted before the recession.

Successful economic growth efforts will require significant collaboration across the south Wood County area, while being connected to regional and state strategies. In this new era, economic growth and opportunity are both essential to creating a sustainable, strong economy. Restructuring and strengthening our economy is everyone’s business.



## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, WOOD COUNTY AND WISCONSIN

2000-2011  
(NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED)



Source: <http://worknet.wisconsin.gov/worknet/dalrus.aspx?menuselection=da>

## “Unemployed” means more than “no job”

Often unemployment is viewed simply as not having a job. In fact, unemployment creates a diverse set of experiences endured by people who have lost a job and are seeking work.

*“My positions have always been eliminated. I’ve had fifteen plus years in food manufacturing and I decided to take these courses to enhance my experience. I thought for 20 credits, I’ll be able to start work at the end of August . . . hopefully this will get me a position.”*

- Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program Participant

The face of unemployment here varies widely. We have long-term workers dislocated at mid-career and middle-age. We have many workers with limited education, experience or skills. And, like all communities across our country, we have people at risk of being dismissed as “long-term, chronically unemployed.” Whether an experienced worker, a new entrant, or a low-skilled individual, people increasingly face lengthy and unpredictable gaps in employment.

What these “faces of unemployment” share is an experience of loss, fear and economic insecurity. Our community has a demonstrated empathy for our neighbors. Incentive Community Foundation, south Wood County employers, community service providers and philanthropies have partnered as Workforce Central to provide a path to self-sufficiency that supports a person’s strength of spirit to earn new credentials and embark on a career in local growth industries like manufacturing and food processing.



# FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Examining public economic supports (e.g., food assistance, medical assistance, and subsidized childcare) received by families and individuals over time is one way of measuring the extent and character of local financial distress and informing the scope and nature of a community's strategy to alleviate it.

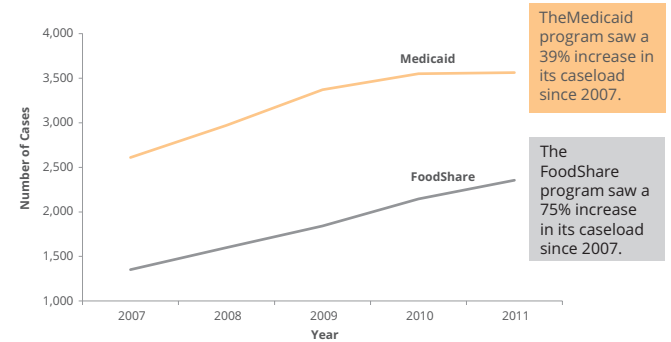
South Wood County (Rome excluded) showed dramatic growth in FoodShare and Medicaid assistance between 2007 and 2011. Food assistance caseloads increased by a stark 75% over the five-year period. Likewise, the Medicaid program saw a 39% increase in recipients, to 3,648 in 2011. More families taking advantage of both programs signal a significant level of financial insecurity at the household level.

Subsidized childcare is a much smaller program in the south Wood County area, with caseloads of less than 300. From 2007 to 2011, the program remained flat (pre-recession levels of 313 cases increased during the recession to a high of 491 cases and have since fallen to a low of 289 cases in 2011). This is explained, in part, by a population decline in younger families. In addition, employment is a major determinant of eligibility for childcare assistance, and with the region witnessing historically high unemployment levels, fewer families than ever before qualify for support.

Community financial distress can also be measured by observing trends in Free and Reduced Lunch program enrollment in local school districts. Children in households with incomes at or below 130% of the federal poverty rate, or a \$28,665 annual income for a family of four, receive free meals under the guidelines of the National School Lunch Program. The data on enrollments presented here shows a dramatic increase in south Wood County in the intervening time period from the 2000-2001 school year and the 2011-2012 school year. For 2011-12, 43% of south Wood County's student body was enrolled in Free and Reduced Lunch, up from 22% in 2000-2001. This tracked closely with percentage trends in Wisconsin as a whole: 41% for 2011-12.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAM UTILIZATION BY CASELOAD

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY, 2007-2011  
CASELOAD AT START OF CALENDAR YEAR



Economic support caseloads represent total open cases as of January for each year, as reported by Wood County Human Services.

Source: Wood County Human Services

## PERCENT OF STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH PROGRAM

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA AND WISCONSIN,  
2000 FISCAL YEAR AND 2012 FISCAL YEAR



Source: <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fns/progstat.html> Wisconsin Department of Instruction (DPI)

## STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH PROGRAM BY DISTRICT AND AREA

2000-2001 SCHOOL YEAR AND 2012 FISCAL YEAR

Free & Reduced Lunch	2000-2001	FY 2012
Wisconsin Rapids District	1,288	2,307
Nekoosa District	375	575
Port Edwards District	115	163
Pittsville District	214	219
<b>Area</b>	<b>1,992</b>	<b>3,264</b>
<b>Area Total Student Enrollment</b>	<b>8,896</b>	<b>7,642</b>
<b>% Area Student Body</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>43%</b>

Source: <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fns/progstat.html> Wisconsin Department of Instruction (DPI)

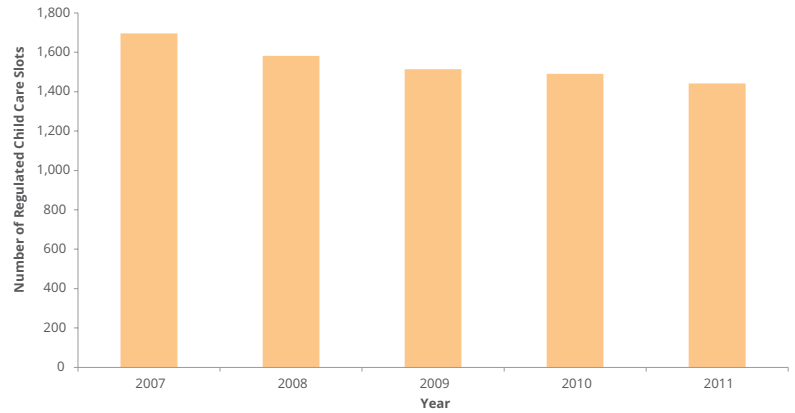
# FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES CHILDCARE

Safe, secure, high-quality childcare is essential to the well-being of both children and working parents in the south Wood County area. Time and again, national research has proven that the best way to build strong and successful adults is to invest in quality early childhood education for children in their formative infant and toddler years. Unfortunately, quality childcare costs more than many parents, especially those working for lower wages, can afford. Parents are left with desperate choices with regard to their work and the quality of care their children get.

Available data suggests that childcare availability may be declining in the area, but not dramatically faster than the demand for childcare as evidenced by the decline in population of pre-school age children. In 2011, we had just over 1,400 regulated childcare slots, down from nearly 1,700 slots in 2007.

However, childcare expenses are a real stress on working families here. In 2011, the cost of full time infant care was nearly \$7,000 and the average annual cost of non-infant care was just over \$6,000. For a full-time, year-round worker, childcare costs essentially \$3 per hour. These are significant expenditures regardless of wage, but for workers earning \$10 or \$12 per hour, childcare costs can take one in every three or four dollars earned. For families with more than one child, childcare costs can exceed housing costs.

## CHILDCARE SLOTS IN SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA

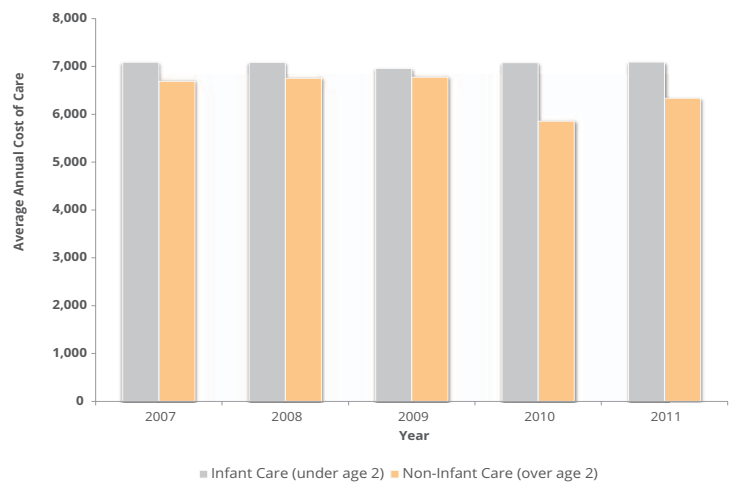


254 child care slots were lost from 2007-2011.

Source: Child Care Resource & Referral of Central Wisconsin, Inc.

## CHILDCARE COSTS, SOUTH WOOD COUNTY

(2012 DOLLARS)



Source: Child Care Resource & Referral of Central Wisconsin, Inc.

# FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness, or lack of permanent shelter, is an obvious and often brutal impediment to economic advancement for individuals and families. Acquiring and maintaining a job is difficult without a stable residence. Children worried about a place to sleep are less focused at school, and less able to engage in after-school learning.

In 2011, the North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP) reported 382 south Wood County (excluding Rome) residents at risk of losing their current place of residence, or impending homelessness. Of these individuals, 37% were children. Emergency housing services for households facing homelessness resulted in a 2011 caseload of 196, with each case requiring an average of 30 nights of housing. Wood County Human Services had an additional 60 south Wood County area cases in 2011. Given the caseload of Wood County Human Services, the available data under-represents the number of local residents affected by homelessness.

Viewing caseloads from Wood County Human Services over time shows some fluctuation, with the number peaking in 2010. These fluctuations may be explained by a number of factors, including improved tracking of homelessness, increased resources for services (as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act), and fluctuations in the local economy.

Refining the focus to homelessness among school-aged children demonstrates economic insecurity for some local families over the past seven years. Student homelessness as a percentage of the student body held to around 2% from 2003 to 2006, and experienced a drop to 1.4% during the 2006-07 academic year. Likely as a result of the Great Recession, and related foreclosure crisis, the rate of homeless students more than doubled the next year to 3.5%. Through the recession, rates remained above 3%. Rates fell to 2.6% in 2010-11. As compared to the state, our area has seen consistently higher rates of homeless students with greater year-to-year fluctuation. Over the seven-year period, the state experienced small, steady growth and the rate of homeless students did not exceed 2%.

## IMPENDING HOMELESS CASES

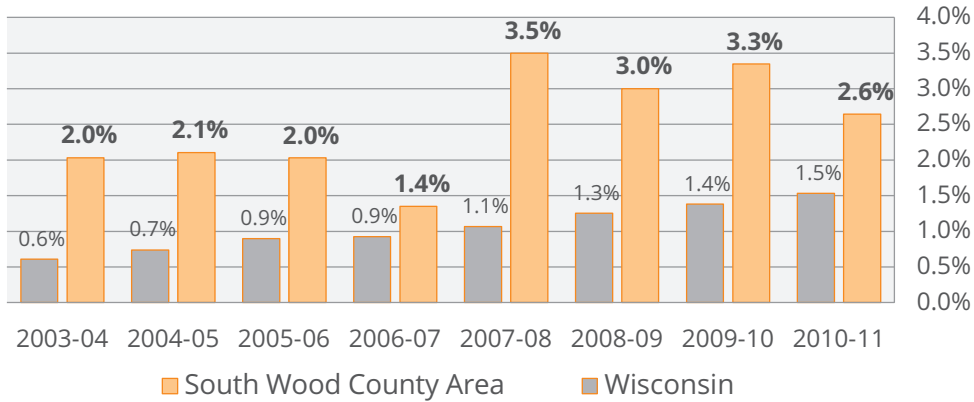
SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA

	2009	2010	2011	
<b>North Central Community Action Program</b>	252 cases	384 cases	196 cases	
			<i>People Affected</i> 382	<i>Children Affected (&lt;18)</i> 142
<b>Wood County Human Services</b>	99 cases	132 cases	60 cases	
<b>South Wood County Area Total Caseloads</b>	351 cases	516 cases	256 cases	

Sources: North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP), and Wood County Human Services

## PERCENT OF STUDENT BODY CLASSIFIED AS HOMELESS

BY SCHOOL YEAR, SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA AND WISCONSIN



Source: <http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/data.html>  
Wisconsin Dept of Public Instruction - Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY)



## No wrong door for area homeless

Homelessness has been a focus in our community for nearly a decade.

The South Wood County Homelessness Initiative was created in 2005 to help reduce the number of homeless people in the south Wood County area by enhancing current programs already in place.

Community members have been passionate about helping the homeless make progress toward economic self-sufficiency. Twenty-three organizations participate, along with concerned citizens.

In 2008, the group began working together to create a “no wrong door” approach. To achieve this goal, organizations share financial and human resources, while providing necessary case management and related services to help clients get back on their feet. This included developing a Memorandum of Understanding to provide seamless service to homeless and nearly homeless people in the south Wood County area.

Jan Rude, of Wood County Human Services, notes, “This unique collaboration has helped those we serve get access to needed shelter and lodging, to permanent and sustainable housing, to necessary eviction prevention assistance, and to the mainstream resources that they are eligible for.”

# DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC HEALTH EDUCATION: K-12

The public schools of the south Wood County area provide the educational foundation on which our economic future will be built. In this section, we look to trends in local school enrollment, performance of 4th and 8th graders on standardized tests, and the share of students who are disadvantaged to get a sense of how well we are preparing our children for the future.

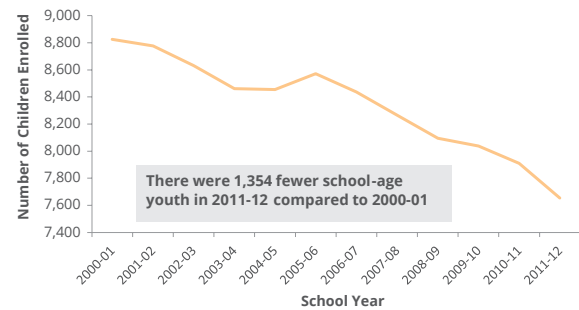
Given what has already been documented about the population decline and aging of the area, it should come as no surprise that the number of children in our schools is falling. From the 2000-01 school year to the present, the number of K-12 students has fallen by 1,354, or 15%. Over the same period, the state's total school enrollment has held steady.

However, test results offer some better news. In area schools, 4th and 8th grade students do as well as, and often better than, their state classmates. Our region demonstrates strong test performance over time with scores generally increasing over the past ten years. This is especially true for 4th graders, who score proficient or better at rates well above state rates in reading, math, and science. Eighth graders score proficient or better in about the same numbers as their Wisconsin classmates.

Even as the number of students is falling, the number of economically disadvantaged students is growing. In the 2000-01 school year, 22% of students in local districts qualified as economically disadvantaged (slightly below the state's 24% rate). By the 2011-12 school year, the local disadvantaged rate had doubled to 44%. The state rate grew as well, but more slowly (rising to 41%). Thus, the region has lost its advantage over the state's rate. The growth in economic disadvantage among students creates stress for teachers and students. When 44% of students are dealing with economic stress and insecurity, and when their parents are worrying about income and making ends meet, student and family attention can be distracted from academic achievement. The south Wood County area's ability to maintain strong test performance in the face of rising economic disadvantage may well be attributable to the tenacity and commitment of K-12 staff and students. These trends encourage continued efforts to support both the K-12 system and families, as public and personal resources become limited.

## SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

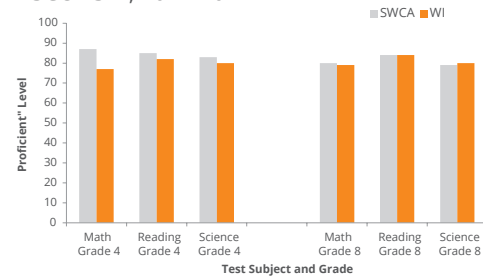
K-12, SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA



Source: <http://www.data.dpi.state.wi.us/Data>  
Wisconsin's Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS)

## STUDENT TEST PERFORMANCE

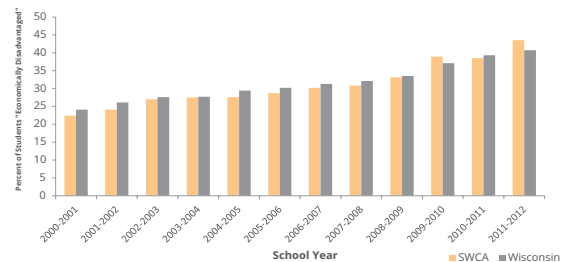
GRADE 4 AND GRADE 8, SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA AND WISCONSIN, 2011-2012



Source: <http://www.data.dpi.state.wi.us/Data>  
Wisconsin's Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS)

## PERCENT OF STUDENTS "ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED"

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA AND WISCONSIN, 2000-2012



Source: <http://www.data.dpi.state.wi.us/Data>  
Wisconsin's Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS)

## COMPARATIVE TEST PERFORMANCE, SWC AREA AND WISCONSIN, 2002-03 AND 2011-12 SCHOOL YEARS

PERCENT OF STUDENTS TESTING AT "PROFICIENT" OR "ABOVE PROFICIENT"

	GRADE 4						GRADE 8					
	Math		Reading		Science		Math		Reading		Science	
	2002-03	2011-12	2002-03	2011-12	2002-03	2011-12	2002-03	2011-12	2002-03	2011-12	2002-03	2011-12
<b>SWCA</b>	71%	87%	85%	85%	82%	83%	79%	80%	85%	84%	81%	79%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	71%	77%	81%	82%	77%	80%	73%	79%	83%	84%	74%	80%

Source: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/index.html>  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools

# DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC HEALTH WORKERS

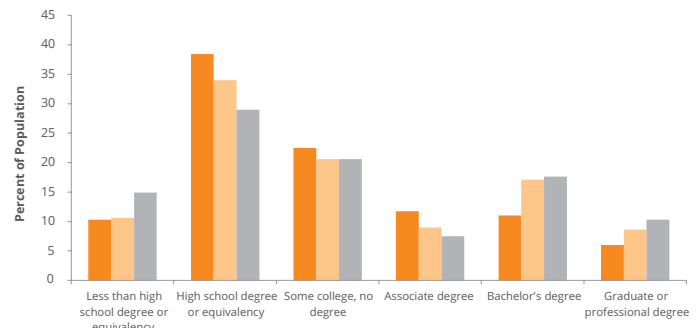
Our workers are the most essential economic asset of the south Wood County area. Local employers rely on this workforce to meet the demands of a global, fast-changing marketplace. Companies considering expansion or relocation look carefully to see if there is a fit between our labor supply and their needs. It is also this workforce that will help develop innovations and new businesses.

In terms of education, our potential workforce has a solid base, but is less likely to achieve post-secondary education than across the state or nation. First, at the minimum levels of education, the area looks relatively strong. Only 10% of the local adult population (aged 25+) has no high school degree or equivalent (a level matching the state rate). Nationally, 15% of workers fall in this category. But at higher levels of education, our community lags behind. Just 6% of adults in the region have a professional degree (9% in the state, and 10% for the U.S.). Another 11% of adults hold bachelor's degrees, a rate well behind the state and national rates above 17%. However, the strength of the area shows up in associate degrees. Nearly 12% of adults hold associate degrees, a rate well above the state and national rates. Moving the 22% of adult residents with some college coursework but no degree toward completion could promote economic opportunity locally.

Workers with higher levels of education earn more than their less-educated neighbors, and the economic rewards to education have grown dramatically over the past generation. For example, the real median annual earnings of Wisconsin Rapids workers with high school degrees is just under \$23,000 – income that just barely clears the poverty line for a family of four. The median worker with a graduate degree earns more than twice as much, bringing in \$52,000. Interestingly, the pay-off for a bachelor's degree in the region seems relatively low, lagging the state and national averages more than any other category. This suggests an additional economic development challenge: we must cultivate opportunities that both require and financially reward college degrees.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

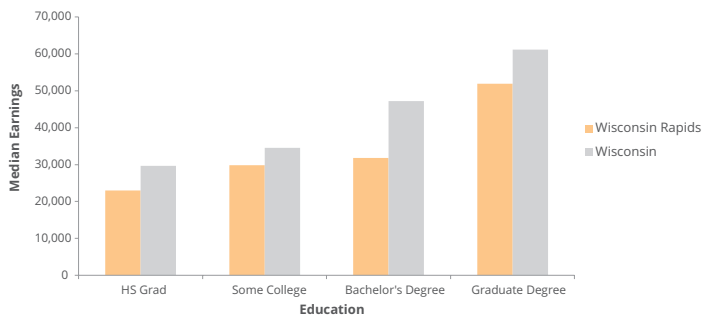
SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA, WISCONSIN, AND U.S., 2010



Source: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>  
S1501: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT  
2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## MEDIAN EARNINGS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

WISCONSIN RAPIDS AND WISCONSIN (2012 DOLLARS)



Source: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>  
S1501: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT  
2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## MEDIAN EARNINGS BY MUNICIPALITY

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA (2012 DOLLARS)

Municipality	HS Grad	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Biron	21,721	24,796	46,461	85,265
Cranmoor	32,301	28,712	58,076	45,678
Grand Rapids	28,528	41,300	53,328	63,731
Nekoosa	20,446	27,953	n/a	70,561
Pittsville	26,362	32,627	37,586	48,288
Port Edwards (Town)	28,874	38,630	39,152	n/a
Port Edwards (Village)	28,368	40,055	50,898	55,373
Rome (Adams County)	n/a	33,511	53,989	62,762
Rudolph (Town)	35,128	41,893	48,157	66,559
Rudolph (Village)	23,491	36,542	47,932	83,089
Saratoga	28,532	32,699	42,665	n/a
Seneca	34,802	35,375	48,475	47,339
Sigel	26,598	38,500	41,762	78,957
Vesper	36,869	37,123	54,068	n/a
Wisconsin Rapids	22,971	29,805	31,836	51,932

Source: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>  
S1501: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT  
2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

# DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC HEALTH

## EMPLOYERS



### EMPLOYERS MATTER

Employers provide the foundation of economic opportunity in a community. If employers are growing, jobs increase, unemployment falls, and in the long run, population may increase in response to economic opportunity. When businesses are downsizing or failing, economic stress ripples through the community.

Supporting and building local strengths requires understanding our employers, their services and goods, and building a shared infrastructure.

Our employers have invested in and created local economic assets: innovative, “advanced” manufacturing processes and workers with strong technical and business skills. These assets support growth in the area’s globally-competitive food manufacturing industries.

Economic opportunity defines and shapes communities, and recent decades have brought the south Wood County area more than its share of turbulence. Changes in population, incomes, and unemployment are all directly tied to those shifts. Employers are a dynamic contributor to our community and a central focus of our efforts to build strengths, skills, and opportunity for the area.

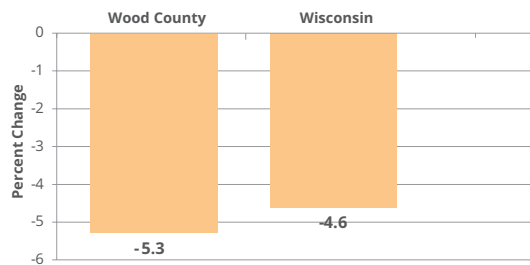
The importance of manufacturing here should surprise few, and the data makes the unique contribution of local manufacturing clear. Census data on local jobs show manufacturing as the top source of regional employment in 2010, providing primary work for 3,434 people and accounting for one-in-five (20%) area jobs. This share is slightly higher than that for Wisconsin as a whole, where manufacturing represents 17.8% of employment. Consistent with national trends, manufacturing jobs in the region are down substantially over the past decade. The sector has added jobs in the last years, however, and because manufacturing jobs tend to offer family-sustaining wages and benefits, the regional economy benefits when its manufacturing base is strong. Typical of many rural communities, we also see health care, retail, public service and education as significant employment sectors.

As with the rest of Wisconsin and the country, jobs are down locally since the onset of the Great Recession. The decline is demonstrated by pre-recession (2007), 2010, and 2011 first quarter employment in both Wood County and Wisconsin. From 2007 to 2011, Wood County experienced a 5.3% drop in total employment. This slightly exceeds the state job decline of 4.6% over the same period.

The unique commitment and active engagement of area employers to address jobs and workforce skills collectively is a community asset that is helping fuel the local economic recovery and investment.

#### CHANGE IN TOTAL EMPLOYMENT

BETWEEN Q1 2007 AND Q1 2011



Source: <http://lehd.did.census.gov/led/datatools/qwiapp.html>  
 U.S. Census Bureau Local Employment Dynamics (L.E.D.)  
 LEHD State of Wisconsin County Reports -  
 Quarterly Workforce Indicators

#### TOTAL EMPLOYMENT IN WOOD COUNTY AND WISCONSIN

2007-2011

	Q1 2007	Q1 2010	Q1 2011
Wood County	43,648	41,079	41,348
Wisconsin	2,694,991	2,523,433	2,570,304

Source: <http://lehd.did.census.gov/led/datatools/qwiapp.html>  
 U.S. Census Bureau Local Employment Dynamics (L.E.D.)  
 LEHD State of Wisconsin County Reports -  
 Quarterly Workforce Indicators



## TOP 10 INDUSTRIES BY NUMBER OF JOBS

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA, 2002 AND 2010 DATA

2002	Count	Share	2010	Count	Share
Manufacturing	5,054	25.38%	Manufacturing	3,434	19.6%
Retail Trade	2,389	12.00%	Health Care and Social Assistance	2,115	12.1%
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,880	9.44%	Retail Trade	1,835	10.5%
Public Administration	1,614	8.10%	Public Administration	1,792	10.2%
Educational Services	1,533	7.70%	Educational Services	1,440	8.2%
Accommodation and Food Services	1,354	6.80%	Accommodation and Food Services	1,134	6.5%
Information	1,008	5.06%	Information	936	5.3%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	931	4.67%	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	748	4.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	779	3.91%	Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	740	4.2%
Construction	619	3.11%	Transportation and Warehousing	739	4.2%

Source: <http://lehd.did.census.gov/led/datatools/qwiapp.html>  
 U.S. Census, LEHD-OnTheMap, Wi. DWD, Office of Econ Advisors



## ERCO invests – the community benefits

An \$18 million expansion at ERCO Worldwide’s Port Edwards plant will double the plant’s hydrochloric acid production capacity.

Add this to a major conversion project completed in 2009 and ERCO’s investments total more than \$150 million since 2007. Investing in workers is key to capitalizing on these projects.

“Our positions here are highly technical in nature,” notes Geoff Bertin, ERCO’s Port Edwards plant manager. “For ERCO to continue to compete and prosper in our industry, we need to hire employees who can demonstrate the skill sets required for our operating environment. Then we must continuously enhance the skill sets of our workforce.”

ERCO supports this need by taking part in developing and implementing the strategies of the Workforce Central Peer Council. This local network of manufacturing CEOs meets to explore and share best practices for an improved, skilled workforce and enhanced organizational growth.

“The Peer Council allows companies such as ours to take part in joining with others in the area who need a highly-skilled workforce,” Bertin explains. “We can also support those seeking jobs, by enhancing their skills to become the best future employees they can be.”

# DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC HEALTH

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

Our sense of shared identity and purpose strengthens the more we work together as a community.

Strong engagement in the community helps us build the knowledge and relationships needed to solve the challenges facing the area.

Voting and volunteerism are just two ways of building a better community. Our size allows each voice and each contribution to help shape the future of our community.

### UNITED WAY VOLUNTEER HOURS AND FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) PER YEAR

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA, 2008-2011

Year	Volunteer Hours	Total Full-Time Equivalent
2011	163,106	82
2010	163,575	82
2009	188,499	94
2008	189,879	95

Source: United Way of Inner Wisconsin

Resident participation directly relates to the health and growth of communities. It can be accomplished through a variety of avenues such as voting, attending public meetings, and volunteering time or donations. Whether engaging in your community at a large scale by attending a council meeting, or at a small scale by educating a neighbor about a worker training program, each action plays a role in increasing the health and connectedness of a community.

When Wisconsin became a hotbed for political debate in 2011, south Wood County area residents did not sit idly by. There was an increase of over 1,000 constituent contacts made to the State Assembly from the previous year and over 2,700 additional contacts made to the State Senate. These increases point to our community's awareness of, and engagement in, political decision-making.

That shows strength in one area of civic life. Yet, the economic and social vibrancy of our community depends upon increased participation, not acceptance of the norm — whether it is who participates or when participation occurs. For example, local voter turnout has slowly decreased in recent years. Additionally, according to Wood County election results, in April 2011, 82% of local elected government seats were uncontested. Whether due to population loss or disinterest, declining civic engagement is a challenge. Community engagement, such as attending municipal meetings, running for office or volunteering, is critical for the growth of any area.

United Way of Inner Wisconsin reports that their volunteerism was the annual equivalent of over 82 full-time paid employees in 2011. Moreover, the 2012 Community Survey shows that more than half are interested in getting more involved and participating in community meetings.

## TOTAL VOTER PARTICIPATION AND PERCENT CHANGE IN PARTICIPATION

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA, 2010-2011

Municipality	2010 Participation (% of Population 18+ 2010 Census)	2011 Participation	% Change 2010-2011
Biron	523 (77.4%)	506	-3.3%
Cranmoor	115 (85.2%)	110	-4.3%
Grand Rapids	5,065 (86.3%)	4,917	-3.0%
Nekoosa	1,363 (71.9%)	1,262	-7.4%
Pittsville	491 (77.4%)	477	-2.9%
Port Edwards (Town & Village)	1,900 (76.5%)	1,827	-3.8%
Rome (Adams County)	2,254 (94.7%)	2,044	-9.3%
Rudolph (Town & Village)	942 (82.8%)	915	-2.9%
Saratoga	3,380 (82.5%)	2,997	-11.3%
Seneca	707 (83.1%)	684	-3.3%
Sigel	657 (77.8%)	644	-2.0%
Vesper	358 (79.0%)	337	-5.9%
Wisconsin Rapids	9,882 (69.7%)	9,508	-3.8%
<b>Area Total</b>	<b>27,636 (77.6%)</b>	<b>26,228</b>	<b>-5.1%</b>

Sources: State of WI, Government Accountability Board (GAB) - Elections & Voting, [http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/results/#s by Municipality](http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/results/#s%20by%20Municipality); ACS, QT-P1: Age Groups and Sex: 2010, 2010 Census Summary File

## LEGISLATIVE CONTACTS

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA SENATE & ASSEMBLY REPRESENTATIVES, 2010-2011

Representative	2010	2011
WI State Senator Julie Lassa (Senate District 24)	800	3,540
WI State Rep. Amy Sue Vruwink (Assembly District 70)	22	1,024
WI State Rep. Scott Krug (Assembly District 72)	n/a	3,996

Sources: WI State Senator Julie Lassa (SD-24);  
WI State Representative Scott Krug (AD-72);  
WI State Representative Amy Sue Vruwink (AD-70)

## Renewing Rapids through civic engagement

When Zach Vruwink campaigned to become Wisconsin Rapids' next mayor, he asked residents for their pledge to "Renew Rapids".

Now, as the City's youngest mayor at age 24, Vruwink is putting the wheels of civic engagement in motion.

"Civic engagement is a vital part of changing a community for the better," Vruwink emphasizes. "Having people who are engaged brings new, fresh ideas. If we don't have new blood that's informing and engaging City officials, then we don't have a feeder for new thought."

Mayor Vruwink plans to harness this inspired energy by creating discussion groups that bring citizens together to share ideas in areas they're passionate about. He calls them "Mayor's Councils" and he lists beautification, sustainability, redevelopment for new projects and new construction, and developing an entertainment district as primary areas.

"I've had interested individuals come to me, saying, 'I've never gotten involved in government before. I'm interested now because I was inspired by your campaign,'" Vruwink says. "In general, feedback has been, 'Tell me where you need me.' People want to get involved, but they still may be looking for an invitation. These Mayor's Councils will provide people with a formalized opportunity for civic engagement."



Photo by: M.P. KING/WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

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serving the south Wood County area

**incourage**  
community foundation



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