

Vital *Signs*

Pursuing Economic Opportunity & Growth
in the South Wood County Area



A Note From Incurage

People make a place.

Authentic and informed conversations between people create connectedness.

And when connected, especially around topics important to a shared place, our desire to do more together, for each other, surfaces.

On behalf of our place, thank you for opening this issue of Vital Signs.

Inside Vital Signs, you'll find reliable data important to the south Wood County area. But we understand that data is best understood and more beneficial when placed into context and paired with relevant examples you can share.

To help foster conversations and drive connectedness to one another on topics that affect us all, we've added probing questions throughout this issue. And we've continued our commitment to facilitating conversations between individuals and organizations, in furtherance of a community that works well for all people.

Incurage recognizes our community is ready for more connectedness. Engaging residents of all ages, businesses, entrepreneurs, organizations and governments in a culture of change, we are shaping a new economy.

Together, we own our future.

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We are privileged and excited by the work we do together with south Wood County area community members. In this 2014 edition of Vital Signs, all photos are of local residents – thank you for gracing the covers and pages of our annual publication!









Why Vital Signs Matter

If you've lived in the south Wood County area (SWCA) for even a few years, you've seen, firsthand, the tremendous amount of change that has come to our region.

This report is for the people who care deeply about the long-term social, economic, and physical health of our region - people like you. Its goal is to help connect the dots between what is working well, what may well need more work, and what lies ahead for our region. Countless times, this community has proven that it can come together and address real concerns. Vital Signs is designed to help kindle that passion and direct action toward the efforts that will best strengthen and sustain us, together, through the changes yet to come.

This report presents just a subset of the data available about our community. For more data, as well as information on sources for data in this report, please see: incouragecf.org/learn/vital-signs.

At-A-Glance

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY AREA (SWCA)

Population: **45,759**

Public School Enrollment: **7,023**

K12 Population Identifying as Non-White: **13%**

Median Household Income: **\$49,042**

37% of Residents Commute Out of SWCA for Work

WOOD COUNTY ECONOMIC REGION

Unemployment Rate: **6.4%**, compared to 6.0% for Wisconsin

Business Starts: **306** in 2013, up from 257 in 2012

Self-Sufficiency Wage (with benefits) for worker with children: **\$25.97**

8% of Residents Lack Health Insurance Coverage



PEOPLE

WHY IT MATTERS

Understanding our people is the first step to building a community that works well for all. At a most basic level, who lives in SWCA and what trends have we seen over the years?

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Population | Diversity | Age ▶ ▶ ▶

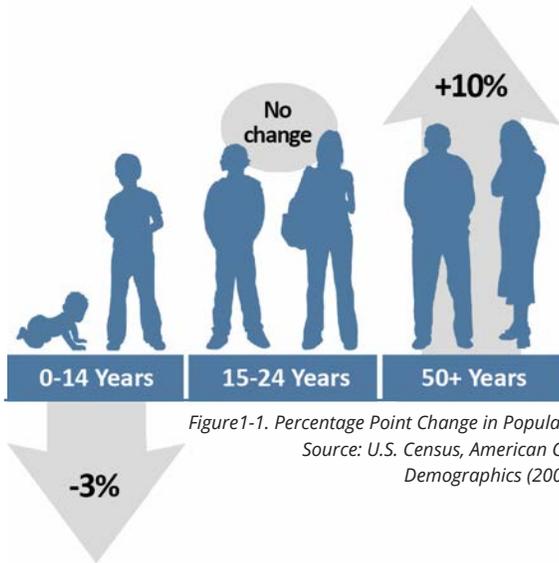


Figure 1-1. Percentage Point Change in Population by Age Group in SWCA, 2000–2012. Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Table QT-P1 Age and Demographics (2000) and Table S0101 Age and Sex (2012).

Historically, the population in our region has been relatively stable, neither growing nor shrinking, but over the past few years, our community has experienced slow population decline. There are now 45,759 SWCA residents. Since 2000, the state of Wisconsin has grown by about 6%, while our community has shrunk by 2%.

SWCA also lags the state in its diversity with a non-white population of 7% compared to Wisconsin at 17% and the nation at 38%. For our youth, the future is one of diversity. The Census Bureau projects that by 2043, or when today's first graders are 30, the U.S. will be a "plurality nation" with no one ethnic or racial group being a majority.

SWCA's greatest diversity is among our youth. The number of local youth who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Native American or Hispanic continues to rise. This is good news given that research shows economic opportunity is increasingly tied to a worker's ability to navigate and contribute to a diverse, global environment. The experience of growing up in an inclusive and equitable community will help prepare our youth to succeed in the new plurality nation.

Wisconsin is aging more rapidly than the nation, and SWCA is aging more rapidly than the state, with more than half of our population over the age of 44. Our older residents tend to stay in the community but some young people and families with children are leaving for jobs elsewhere. Over the past 14 years, the school-age population of the region has dropped 20%, significantly faster than in comparable communities.

This aging could present challenges for local businesses and social support networks, but it also provides opportunities. An informal survey of eight major local employers has identified 1,500 expected job openings due to retirements over the next five years alone. With vacant family-sustaining career jobs, SWCA can both employ more young people who grew up here and attract families to the region.

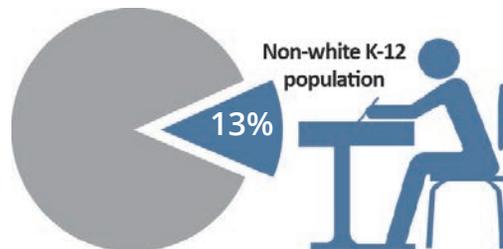


Figure 1-2. Youth Diversity in South Wood County Area, Classes of 2017-2026. The racial/ethnic minority share reported in this figure includes those who report multiple races (including white) and white Hispanics. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

This Is Our Home

Jamie and Kuba Jestadt are raising their two daughters in a place they love. The young family moved to Wisconsin Rapids five years ago and enjoys discovering new community treasures every day. They value the quiet, country feeling of the area, with the benefit of being centrally located.

"We love how the community is constantly changing and improving to meet the needs of its residents," Jamie said. "We are excited about the new YMCA and Tribune Building project, and what they will bring for families in the community." For the Jestadt family, there is no question – they have found their home.



What does living in a diverse community look like to you?





EDUCATION

WHY IT MATTERS

School is often the first place people learn about their passions and talents, and how to be good citizens and neighbors. Together, educators, parents and the community help prepare our youngest residents for the future of work, and participation in the future of south Wood County.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

K-12 Quality | Post Graduation Plans | Educational Attainment ▶ ▶ ▶

SWCA public school districts serve over 7,000 students and they do so admirably. State standardized test scores show that local students are getting a better education than the state average in nearly every grade level and every subject – particularly in science. Public school graduation rates are excellent, and about 75% of graduating seniors intend to go to college. Another 6% intend to enter the job market. Notably, the Wisconsin Rapids School District earned a 74 on its DPI “district report card,” which is significantly better than the state average.

In addition to quality public schools, SWCA also has quality private schools with a total enrollment of 650 students and composite ACT scores above 23. This is slightly above the state composite of 22.2, which is excellent performance compared to national results; Wisconsin composite scores are second highest in the U.S.

SWCA	Wis Rapids	Stevens Point	Wisconsin
Enrollment: 7,550	Enrollment: 5,292	Enrollment: 7,353	Enrollment: 865,119
Rating: 72	Rating: 74	Rating: 72	Rating: 70



Figure 2-1. Public School Enrollment and Ratings, SWCA, Wisconsin Rapids, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 2013-14. The report card focuses on student achievement, student growth and postsecondary readiness within a school district, as well as progress on closing the performance gap for certain minority student populations. Source: Department of Public Instruction District Accountability Scores, wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/portalHome.jsp.



Turning to adults, the distribution of education levels shows us a few things about SWCA. First, at the bottom tiers of education, our population is well-educated with relatively few adults lacking a high school degree. We have more adults with two year college degrees than the state and nation as well. But at the four year and graduate degree level, SWCA lags behind the state and the nation. Over the next decades, two and four year and graduate degrees will all be important assets for securing strong economic development for our region. Attention to building skills and credentials at all levels of the educational distribution may provide one key for economic success.

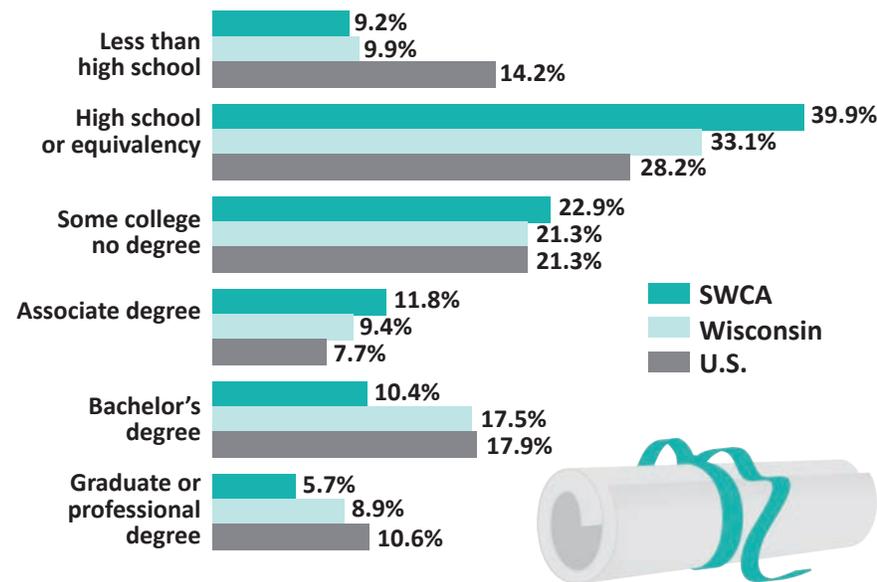


Figure 2-2. Average educational attainment of the population 25 and older, 2008-12. Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Table S1501 Educational Attainment, Five-year Estimates.

What do you think makes our K-12 schools strong? What could make them stronger as they seek to prepare our young people for today's economy? How can you help?



HEALTH

WHY IT MATTERS

Our sense of wellbeing is influenced by our clinical health and also by other factors. By improving all factors contributing to health, communities can help their residents achieve better health outcomes – fewer acute injuries, less chronic disease, and longer, healthier lives. Healthy communities are key to a strong economy.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Health Behaviors | Healthcare | Community Health ▶ ▶ ▶

As tracked by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Wood County residents experience better health behaviors and outcomes than their peers in the rest of the state. Most of us have access to healthy food and exercise opportunities.

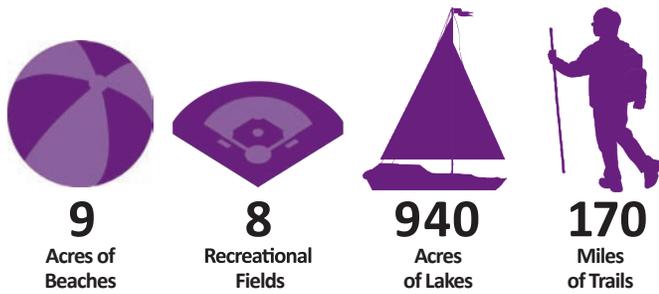


Figure 3-1. Just a few recreation options for Wood County. Source: Wood County Parks and Forestry Department Report, 2011



We asked residents, "What does a healthy community mean to you?" See how they responded in two to three words each. Watch video online at: <http://bit.ly/1o3s1cp>

Wood County's obesity rate of 28% is comparable to the rest of Wisconsin. When medical care is needed, more than 92% of Wood County residents have health insurance.

Wood County also has a relatively good supply of doctors, about twice as many per capita than typical in Wisconsin. However, mental health access lags the state average resulting in 100 more residents per mental health provider. For residents in need of emergency care, the average waiting time to see a doctor at Riverview Hospital is about 18 minutes, much faster than the national average of 26 minutes.

These are the types of data that people typically list to describe a "healthy community." But community health is a much broader concept. It reflects not just clinical health but also the role of social, economic, environmental, and safety factors on quality of life.




	Wood County	Wisconsin
Uninsured rate	8%	10%
Adult Obesity	28%	29%
Access to Exercise Opportunities	73%	78%
Food Environment Index	1,158:1	1,050:1
Mental Health Provider Ratio	8.4	8.3

Figure 3-2. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation public health statistics for Wood County. The data compiled in this figure come from a variety of original data sources, and reflect different time horizons. The food environment index scores the factors that contribute to a healthy food environment (food insecurity and access to healthy foods). Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, countyhealthrankings.org

Why should we talk about mental health?
How can we talk about mental health as a community?



By providing access to healthy food and recreational activity, communities can improve health outcomes for their residents and facilitate economic activity.

SWCA's rich agricultural assets create opportunities for greater use of fresh local food not only at the supper table but also by our schools, restaurants and innovative entrepreneurs. Rural communities across the country are reaping the economic and health rewards of creating locally grown, locally branded consumer products. SWCA has a growing local food infrastructure with community supported agriculture (CSAs), you-pick-it farms, and farmers' markets.



Figure 3-3. Local Farm Fresh Atlas farms by distribution type, 2014. To be included in the Atlas, farms pledge that they are cooperatively or family-owned and operate in a way that reduces the application of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, protects land and water resources, and treats animals with care. Farm Fresh Atlas farms must also provide safe, fair working conditions for employees, and sell products grown or produced in Wisconsin. Source: Farm Fresh Atlas for Central Wisconsin, farmshed.org

Health, food and economic activity are connected

For the past seven years, Central Rivers Farmshed has steadily implemented efforts to build, support, and educate our communities about their local food system. This has included production of the Farm Fresh Atlas, distributed to eleven counties and in-community programming to residents of Portage and Wood County. "These efforts have garnered awareness around the health, environmental, and economic impact our food system has on residents and productive lands," shared Layne Cozzolino, executive director, Central Rivers Farmshed.

In partnership with the Wisconsin Rapids Mall and Get Active Wood County, Farmshed has served the Wood County Farmers Market by providing a wireless Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machine. The machine enables residents on the FoodShare program to purchase tokens that can then be used to buy locally grown foods directly from the farmer. In place since 2011, this has resulted in a win for participants and regional farmers. In 2014, more than 300 EBT transactions were processed over the market season.

Do you know where your food comes from? Name one health-focused action you can take to help strengthen our community.







RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

WHY IT MATTERS

Our region does better when we are engaged with one another and working together for a more abundant future. At its best, that strength of purpose can translate into a stronger economy. There are countless ways to connect, meet our neighbors, grow our community, and create a better, shared future.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Voting | Volunteerism | Resident Decision-making ▶ ▶ ▶

Shaping a new economy requires engaged residents committed to a long term vision. Volunteering, giving and voting are three easily measured and important ways we engage; they often times serve as the entry point to community leadership. Through engagement we learn how decisions are made, where to find and access reliable information, dialog with neighbors and leaders, and ensure each of us has a voice in shaping the future.

Voter turnout is a common measure of resident engagement through civic participation. In the most recent mayoral election, Wisconsin Rapids saw 3,376 voters head to the polls (35% turnout). Although turnout fell from the previous mayoral election, our electoral participation remains well above the national turnout norm of 25%.

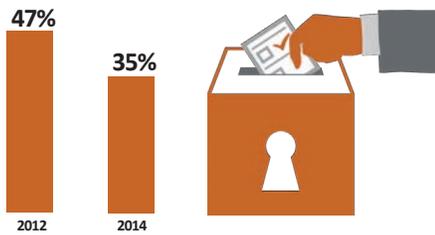


Figure 4-1. Voter turnout in the 2012 and 2014 spring (mayoral) elections, Wisconsin Rapids. Source: Wisconsin Rapids City Clerk's office

Volunteerism is another indicator of a connected community. United Way of Inner Wisconsin reported over 182,000 hours volunteered in 2013; that is the equivalent of 91 people volunteering as their full-time job! High school students are actively involved. For example, Lincoln HS logged 9,836 volunteer hours this past year alone, which is almost 44 hours per student. Each year, InCourage's Teen Leadership program provides unique, hands-on engagement experiences for local sophomores in all five high schools with 149 youth participating since 2006. A key opportunity is engaging the waves of retirees who were the innovators of their time. They have experience, knowledge and history to share with a cadre of youth as our community works to shape a new economy.



Figure 4-2. Total SWCA volunteerism through United Way, 2013. Source: United Way of Inner Wisconsin, uwiv.org

Financial contributions are another measure and means of community engagement. While charitable contributions are notoriously tricky to measure, our best numbers show that SWCA gives less per person to charities and other non-profits than does the rest of Wood County, the rest of Wisconsin, and the rest of the United States. Charitable contributions in south Wood County constitute more than \$14 million per year, or about \$280 per person. The national average is around \$430 per person.

Building Our Shared Future Through Resident Engagement

Katrina Hittner knows what it means to own her future. And while her feet have taken her all over the world, she's returned home to the Wisconsin Rapids area – the place she is rooted to. Through her involvement as a Community Fellow with the Tribune Building Project*, Katrina is helping to ensure her neighbors have an opportunity to own their future as well. "I believe that together we're continually creating a better community through action, interaction, and contribution of resources and energy," she shares.

Since joining the Tribune Building Project as a Community Fellow in September 2013, Katrina has given countless hours of time and talent through table hosting, meeting preparation, and dedicated community outreach. Beyond these duties, it is her passion for place that will help advance residents' vision. As an owner of a third-generation community-minded business, Katrina understands this process is much more than a series of community meetings. It is shaping the future. Her entrepreneurial experience and commitment are helping to shape a new economy as well.

* The Tribune Building Project engaged over 700 additional residents. Read more on page 16.





Tribune Building Project: A Community Incubator for Entrepreneurship and Economic Opportunity

Physical space strengthens the connection between people and place. Our built environment reflects the vision of how residents see their community and is a critical factor in attracting new residents, jobs, and investment, and retaining those connected to this place. Buildings and spaces matter for inclusive communities designed to work well for all.

Incourage is embracing this understanding through the Tribune Building Project – a resident-centered redevelopment effort in downtown Wisconsin Rapids. The project began in December 2012 when Incourage purchased the former Daily Tribune property with the intent that residents would decide its future use. The building has served as an architecturally unique symbol of local information and communication in our community for over five decades.

Throughout the resident-led decision-making process, participants have remained conscious of economic impact, as well as the entrepreneurial opportunities the space could support. Attracting and retaining young adults and families is a critical component to the future economy of an aging community. Knowing this from past editions of Vital Signs, residents worked to balance the design to ensure accessibility for our elder adults and provide our youngest residents with a designated space to “be kids.”

Decision-making began by welcoming any and all community members to share their ideas for the future of the 20,000 sq. ft. space. To date, more than 700 residents have been involved; over 25% are under the age of 18. Recommendations for use of the space include a number of local food-focused entrepreneurial operations: culinary kitchen, microbrewery and café have topped the list.

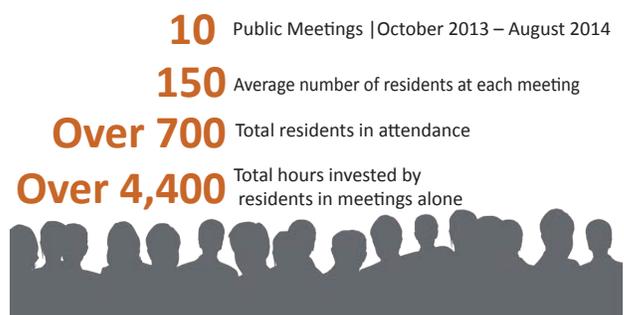


Figure 4-3. Tribune Building Resident Engagement Source: Incourage Community Foundation, incouragecf.org; TribuneBuilding.org

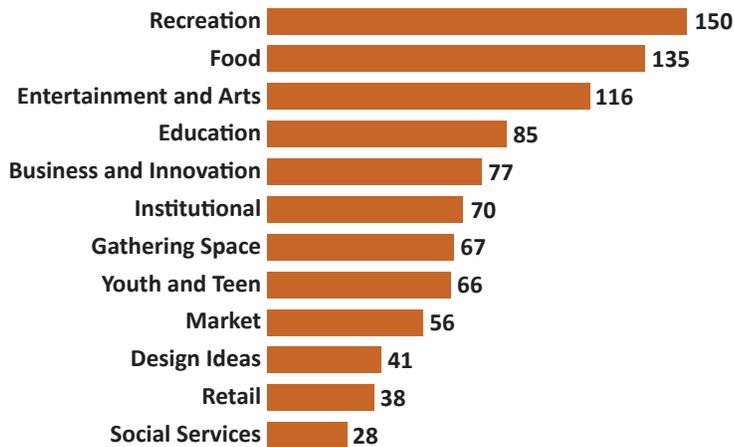


Figure 4-4. Tribune Building Project Submissions. Over 900 ideas were originally submitted by residents who attended Tribune Building meetings, 2013-14; these Ideas were grouped into 12 categories shown above. Details are online at TribuneBuilding.org. Source: Concordia LLC, concordia.com

Mindful discussion continues to take place about how the building can celebrate community resources and enhance existing assets, while connecting residents to the broader community landscape and to one another. Incourage is committed to investing in the people who will inhabit the space as much as the functional space needed for production of their goods and services – being ever mindful of the value of connected chains of resources, production and delivery. (Read more about Value Chains, page 25.)

In September 2014, Incourage’s Board of Directors resolved to permanently own the property. Once complete, the Tribune Building will serve as an important physical manifestation of resident ownership in local community development. Our shared investment has grown to become about far more than the adaptive redevelopment of a historic downtown landmark. This space advances: the value and importance of relationships and human potential; an environment that fosters risk and accepts failure; creativity, innovation, and new enterprise.

We believe that through this process, residents have a renewed expectation for their role in future development efforts – as equal partners in shaping a community that works well for all people.

Complete details about decisions made by residents at all 10 meetings are online at TribuneBuilding.org.





ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

WHY IT MATTERS

Economic opportunity is the essence of the American Dream. It is based in the hope that communities can leverage their economic vitality to provide a better future for all, especially the next generation. Beyond what can be easily measured, economic opportunity flows from relationships, community building, and shared prosperity.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Employment | Earnings | Cost of Living ▶ ▶ ▶

In a measurable way, “economic opportunity” is about jobs – job quality, compensation, and security. But economic opportunity has also meant something more. For some, economic opportunity is the hope that their children will achieve a stronger standard of living than they ever experienced. For others, economic opportunity comes from the experience of inclusion and fairness in their community and jobs – their ability to do more and feel valued for their contribution.

Economic opportunity in the U.S. starts in the labor market, and unemployment is one key measure of this opportunity at the local level. When SWCA’s job base is falling or stagnant, more people seek work but cannot find it. Those with jobs feel less secure about asking for a raise or even time off to attend a parent-teacher conference. When the economy is creating jobs, unemployment falls, and workers have greater opportunities to not only find work but to improve the quality of that work. Fortunately, unemployment has been inching downward. At 6.4% the unemployment rate in Wood County is just above the state rate (6.0%) and is coming closer to national levels experienced in the early 2000s.

Understanding economic opportunity in SWCA also requires attention to the types of jobs that we have. With one in five workers, manufacturing remains the dominant sector of employment (exceeding the state share of 18%). The region also has a notable concentration of information jobs (5.6% in SWCA compared to 2%). Mostly due to our strong manufacturing base, industries that require workers to have significant training in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) account for more than 40% of employment in the region, slightly higher than the state average.

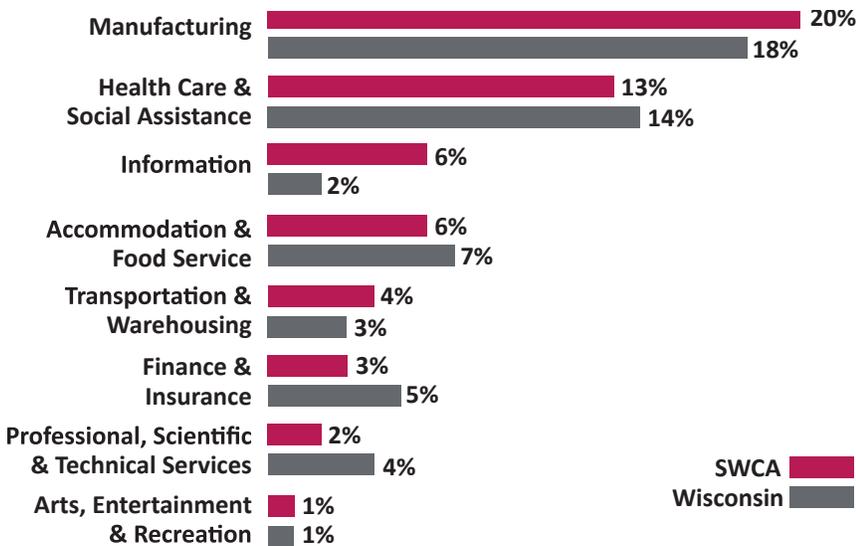


Figure 5-1. Share of total employment in selected industries in SWCA and Wisconsin, 2011.
Source: OnTheMap, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau



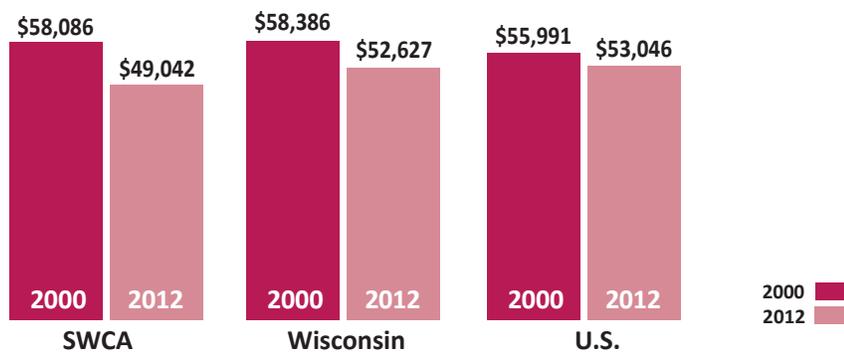
How can we create economic opportunity for all—so that today’s residents and future generations don’t just find a job and earn a wage, but so they thrive?



Economic opportunity is closely tied to what workers earn at their jobs. Perhaps no surprise but the data make it clear that education pays. In SWCA, the median worker with less than a high school degree earns just under \$20,000 per year. Median earnings rise to \$33,000 with either an associate degree or some college. A four-year degree or more pushes the median to over \$35,000. Interestingly, however, local bachelor's holders (median of \$38,000) seem to face a significant wage penalty for their location. The state median for bachelor's degree holders is \$47,000. Like many rural communities, our bachelor's degree workforce may be concentrated in occupations with lower pay. But the bachelor's degree wage differential is a challenge for our community.

In SWCA, we face many of the same economic headwinds that confront the nation. Two changes are challenging most communities. The first is the stagnation, even decline, of income for most families over the last decade. The second is the increasingly unequal distribution of family income. Income is surging ahead for those at higher income levels and stagnating for the middle class. And the poor have generally fallen further behind. These trends are not unique to our community, but are quite evident and challenging for extending opportunity to all in our region.

Median household income was the current equivalent of \$58,000 in 2000 and has fallen to only \$49,000 today. That presents a significant challenge to families – to the ability to pay bills and to feel any sense of economic security. But this is not equally true of all households in SWCA. For the half of households in the region with annual income above \$50,000, there may be some stress but basics are covered. The one-in-three households with an annual income below \$35,000 often experience more severe economic stress left to work multiple shifts, juggle second jobs, and rely on friends, family and neighbors.



Median household income adjusted for inflation in 2012 dollars

Figure 5-2. Median earnings in SWCA, Wisconsin, and U.S., 2000 and 2012 (2012 dollars). Sources: U.S. Census 2000, Table DP-03, Selected Economic Characteristics and American Community Survey, Table B19001 Household Income in Last 12 Months, Five-year Estimates 2008-2012

What can we as a community do, that no family can do on its own, to reduce the costs of living: housing, energy, healthcare, childcare, and transportation?



With wages failing to keep up with inflation and few additional hours to commit to work, families increasingly face difficult choices each month just trying to cover costs. The BEST wage is defined as the minimum hourly wage for different family types in Wood County to meet the costs of living without social or public assistance. Using local costs for a single worker supporting two young children, the BEST wage shows that the worker must earn about \$25.97 per hour (including benefits) to be self-sufficient. While education pays, most one-earner families have a difficult time meeting the self-sufficiency threshold.

Economic conditions are leaving too many behind. It is often young families with children in school, who experience significant financial stress. But wages and hours of work are not the only ways to improve our economic circumstances. There are many things that we can do collectively that no family can do on its own. Local communities across the nation are improving the lives of their residents by working together to systematically reduce the costs of living: housing, energy, healthcare, childcare, and transportation.

Housing and healthcare costs often account for the largest portion of a family's budget. Data on the cost of living in SWCA present both good and challenging news. Median housing values are well below the state and national medians at \$118,000 compared to Wisconsin at \$169,000 and the nation at \$181,000. While Wood County residents enjoy high quality healthcare and rates of insurance coverage, these come at a cost. Our residents and businesses tend to pay high premiums for health insurance coverage. Since 2000, the region has seen a 203% increase to an average monthly premium of \$758 for a single person in a large group policy (usually employer provided).



Figure 5-3. Commute trends – inflows (non-SWCA residents), outflows (SWCA residents), and local work trips, 2011. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Commute time also raises a family's cost of living, and since 2002, finding economic opportunity has led to a longer commute for many SWCA residents. One measure of this is that 23% of SWCA workers traveled 25 miles or more to get to their primary job in 2002. Almost a decade later, 30% of SWCA workers went to these lengths for work. Another measure of this is that the number of SWCA residents working locally fell from 46% in 2002 to 38% in 2011. Outflow of SWCA workers increased by 3% during the same time period resulting in just over 10,000 residents traveling outside the region for work. Our workforce is increasingly tied to a broader regional economy, and families are increasingly facing the stress and costs of working outside the local area.

Last winter slammed SWCA

Many residents rely on propane to heat their homes when the weather turns chilly. While prices for propane have increased over time, they exploded last year. The winter of 2012–13 saw Wisconsin propane prices at a reported peak of \$1.57 per gallon, but in the winter of 2013–14, they hit \$4.49. During the worst of it, Wood County Human Services observed local propane prices spike above \$6. Energy assistance alleviated some of this price shock for 3,212 Wood County residents (up slightly from 3,117 in 2013). Each family received an average of \$515 to offset costs, but it was clear to everyone that something needed to change.

In 2014, local leaders, including Wood County Human Service staff, collaborated with state and national officials to get new energy policies. They advocated for a program that would allow low-income families to buy propane during the summer months when it is cheapest. And use that fuel in the winter when prices peak. This idea made it all the way to the federal agency responsible for disbursing energy assistance funds to the state. By July, Wisconsin had a “Low Income Summer Fill” program in place. Only 74 low-income customers in Wood County currently qualify, but it allows families to contribute \$50 or more in order to offset about \$300 worth of wintertime propane. To learn more about this and other energy assistance programming, please visit: co.wood.wi.us/Departments/HumanServices/EnergyAssistance.aspx.

If commuting is the reality, how can we support workers in order to retain them as residents of our community?





ECONOMIC GROWTH

WHY IT MATTERS

SWCA has financial capital, expertise, physical space, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit needed to generate growth from within. Our regional economy has begun producing “green shoots” of economic growth. Our decisions and actions – as consumers, business owners and community leaders – can nourish this growth to yield a locally-driven economy, providing economic opportunity for all.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Business Starts | Financial Support | Future Jobs ▶ ▶ ▶

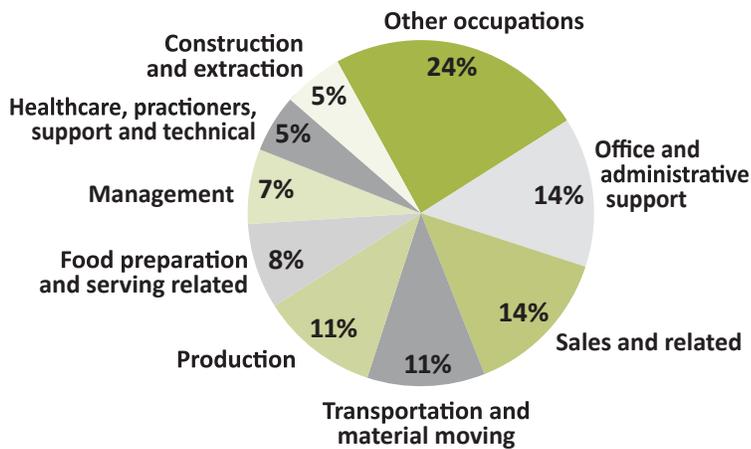


Figure 6-1. Projected job openings in SWCA by occupation, based on 2010 local employment and statewide occupation projections. See inouragecf.org/vital-signs for details of Other Occupations. Source: Department of Workforce Development, Long-Term Occupational Outlook

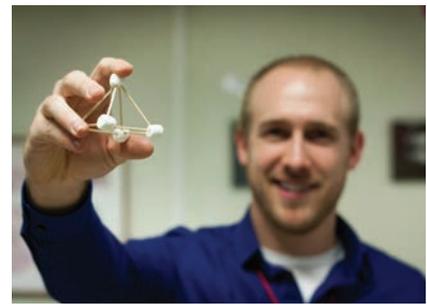
Growing SWCA's economy allows us to think about how best to leverage our local resources – human, physical, financial, and natural. We must focus on both our traditional drivers of economic growth, and new opportunities coming to our region.

The aging of SWCA's workforce and the age profile of some local businesses has led the state to project that most jobs (67%) created over the next decade will come from businesses replacing workers, not industry growth. Production, transportation, sales, and office and administrative support alone are projected to have over 2,400 combined replacement jobs.

Although national research suggests that small businesses – and certainly young businesses – are not a consistent source of new or particularly high-wage jobs, entrepreneurship remains a key asset for communities. Entrepreneurship can help keep talent, financial resources and innovation within a community. The data on SWCA business starts demonstrates impressive entrepreneurial energy. 306 businesses were started in the region during the last year and 800 over the last three years.

Two community resources for economic growth are financial and physical capital. SWCA benefits from both. In terms of financial capital, SWCA is helped by a banking industry with 18 financial institutions, operating a total of 30 branches locally. Seven of these branches are community banks – institutions that typically have local ownership, lend within the region, and consider factors such as personal character and integrity when making lending decisions. Another seven are credit unions, which have a similar community focus.

SWCA also has good availability of commercial space (at least 570,000 square feet) and potential industrial sites (over 100 acres).





Chloe Ann Photography LLC

Many of our dominant industries operate within international markets impacting local job opportunities, quality, and security. This can make it feel as though forces far outside our community control our access to a “good job.” But our local economy is also built from locally-owned businesses of all sizes and geographic reach, and from the residents who supply and consume products within the region. The stronger we build this local economic infrastructure, the more we sell products and services throughout it. A stronger local economic infrastructure, attention to and support of local purchasing, and greater flow of goods and services inside our region can build a stronger and more resilient economy for us all.

This is important not only to help further our economic growth, but to extend and sustain opportunity. Communities across the country have begun to take back control over their local economies. One approach taps local agricultural and natural resources to create a local value chain – embedding value in locally sourced raw materials, employing residents to add that value, and returning the financial gains back to those workers.



Ryan and Amy Scheide, Great Expectations owners, are committed to using ingredients that are grown, packaged, and distributed locally – returning extra economic, nutritional, and community value back to SWCA.

Building a Local Value Chain

Great Expectations: Buying Local and Returning Value to SWCA

Ryan and Amy Scheide have a vision for SWCA. Successful veterans of the restaurant industry, they also have launched a new venture – providing their own manufactured products (jams, jellies, sauces) for sale through their Eatery restaurant and Great Expectations custom catering.

The Scheides are committed to using ingredients grown, packaged and distributed within 100 miles of Wisconsin Rapids. They view their supply chain as an opportunity to keep money flowing through the local economy. “Buying from multinational suppliers sends money out of the community, and too little of it ever comes back,” says Ryan.

Great Expectations has grown its local buying power to 53% of overall food product purchases, sharing its success with over 40 local suppliers and 750 workers within a 100-mile radius. To the Scheides, it is worth the modest added cost to reap the extra economic, nutritional, and community value of buying locally. They are committed to increasing their local purchase power as the value chain strengthens. They not only know where the food comes from, they also return more of its financial value back to their home community.

The Scheides see the Tribune Building (page 16) as an opportunity to further build our local infrastructure and realize a true value chain. “We have brewing expertise and talent right here in south Wood County. Food services in the café and pub will not only offer local food, but also will use that local food to tell the area’s history and establish a regional brand that can in turn be leveraged by food-based microenterprises that use the building’s commercial kitchen,” says Amy.

Like Amy and Ryan Scheide, what informed choices can you make to help strengthen the local economy?





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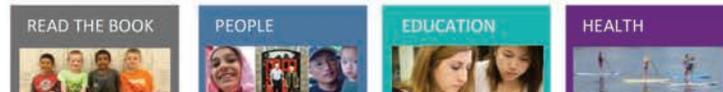
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Stay current and grow your understanding of our place by visiting incouragecf.org to view supporting data points and examples that build upon this and previous issues of Vital Signs.



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We are committed to facilitating conversations, connections, and the change needed to realize a community that works well for all people. Together, we are shaping a new economy.

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