

Shaping the Future:

UW-Parkside Leads Economic Study



They're the questions every community asks itself when its leaders look to the future:

Where is our economy going?

Where will the jobs of the future come from and who will fill them?

What can we do to make sure our community and our people prosper?

Leaders in southeastern Wisconsin now have a valuable source to use in best answering their questions: a two-year study funded by a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and spearheaded by the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. The study examined the current economies of Kenosha, Racine, and Walworth counties and offered recommendations to position the region for success.

The report found a number of reasons for concern: a continuing decline in the three counties' traditional industrial base, a relatively low level of educational attainment, the departure of talented people, and what the report called the region's "weak image."

However, a number of ongoing economic, education, and workforce initiatives are reasons for optimism. High on the list were two organizations with similar acronyms: CATT and CATI.

CATT is the Center for Advanced Telecommunications Technology. Under construction at Gateway Technical College's Kenosha campus. CATT will serve as a hub for instructional communication and distance education in southeastern Wisconsin, using the knowledge

base available from UW-Parkside, Gateway, and Carthage College.

CATI (pronounced cat-eye) is the Center for Advanced Technology and Innovation. When completed, the Racine County facility will be the first in the nation to combine business incubation, technology transfer resources, and project-based education and workforce development in a single setting.

CATT and CATI are seen as catalysts for achieving one of the DOL report's major recommendations that southeastern Wisconsin grow, promote, and support promising industries. These include technology- and knowledge-based industries and industry clusters – geographic concentrations of companies in similar fields.

The report also recommended a new set of seven priorities for the region including the creation of an entrepreneurial climate, encouragement of diversity, and the pursuit of regionalism.

Another priority is improving the quality of life and the region's image. This means, building on the area's family friendly communities, and reasonable cost of living.

Gordie Kacala, executive director of the Racine County Economic Development Corporation (RCEDC), said the importance of an area's livability cannot be underestimated.

"People have a short list of communities they would consider living in because of the amenities they offer," Kacala said. "Then they are choosing a place to work. That turns economic development upside down because you may be able to attract a business here, but if you don't have any workers they're either not going to come or not stay very long."

The RCEDC was one of several local organizations that prepared portions of the DOL report. UW-Parkside business professor Steve Hawk was part of a group that studied the strengths and weaknesses of that region's information technology infrastructure. (For more on Hawk's report, see *Fresh PERSPECTIVE* www.uwp.edu/fresh.)

"There are three things we looked at: one is the backbone connectivity of the area's network; the second piece was the quality of dial-in services – a combination of quality of the internet service providers and the local telecommunications infrastructure, like the telephone lines. The third piece was to determine how businesses use the Internet and how they engage in e-commerce," Hawk said.

In addition to providing the region with a overview of current conditions and specific recommendations for future growth and development, the DOL report forged an important link between the region and UW-Parkside.

"There's a huge level of trust between RCEDC and the university," Kacala said. "There's an acknowledgement of what the university can do for us not only in an academic perspective but also as a partner for specific initiatives."

Seven Priorities of a Highly Successful Region

To realize southeastern Wisconsin's future, Department of Labor report authors said communities must realign themselves around these new priorities:

1. Creation of an entrepreneurial culture and climate, one linking capital and creativity;
2. Infrastructure development to accommodate convenient, efficient, effective mobility of people, products, and information;
3. Development of highly skilled, educated knowledge workers – the report said workforce data suggests such a base of technological talent exists;
4. Encouragement of diversity, creating a place where people from any background can settle and thrive;
5. Reduction in healthcare costs;
6. Improvement in the quality of life and an improvement in the region's image, building on it's family friendly communities, and reasonable cost of living; and
7. The purposeful pursuit of regionalism, taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor.