

March 12, 2009

Monroe County Networking

Attendance: Brian Winnekins; Pat Wall; Grace Jones; Karen Joos; Mary Wallerman; Dennis Hubbard; Don Peterson; Bill Halfman; Chris Hanson; Nodji Van Wyche; Dori Stowell; Kelly Murray; Patty Clark; Theresa Burns-Gilbert; John Hendricks; Joanne Westpfahl; Amy Schanhofer; Martha Klatt; Jerry Bloom

Amy Schanhofer, Community Resource Development Educator, UW-Extension

- Jackson-Monroe-Vernon County Leadership Program
 - Soon to be recruiting for 2009-2010
 - Looking for 12 to 15 adults from 3 counties for 9-month program
- Comprehensive Planning
 - Working with municipal governments to meet January 1, 2010 deadline
- Downtown Revitalization Webinars
 - Monthly program open to the public
 - Presentation provided across the state and then small group discussion

Martha Klatt, Financial Advisor, Coordinated Capitol

- Challenging financial markets
- Individual concerns about 401K
 - trying to answer questions for people
 - Grows to businesses and municipalities
- Involved in JMV leadership
- Tomah BGC – challenge to meet needs of community
 - Fear has spread from news of La Crosse troubles
- Tomah ACT – challenges in fundraising

Jerry Bloom, Director of Energy Services, Oakdale Electric

- Utility/electricity rates are driven by many factors
- Legislators more involved
- Adapting to “Go Green”
 - will affect energy rates
- Dairyland & Alliant serve Oakdale Electric
 - Coal driven plants
 - Coal legislation will affect electric rates
- Concern about families not being able to afford rates
 - Families looking for other options
- Would like legislators to hear these messages
 - Keep electric affordable
 - Balance green with impact on prices

Brian Winnekins, Agribusiness News Director, WCOW

- Jerry’s electric rate concerns could be opportunity for anaerobic digesters for farms
- Proposal from Doyle for money for 5 small farms in Dane County to power city of Madison
- Farmers are concerned about low prices
 - Many local farmers had contracted at higher prices so are not impacted as negatively
 - For those not contracted cost of production is \$14-\$15, price is \$11
- Spring is time of hope

- Concerned about regulations
 - New EPA proposal that farmers get air permits per animal - very costly
- More city people moving to rural areas, “rural lifestyle” – small hobby farms
 - Looking to tailor on-air lifestyle issue segments to them
 - Ex.) well water testing and clean-up
- A lot of ag opportunities in Monroe County
 - Ex.) proposed expansion of cranberry

Pat Wall, Franciscan Skemp, Sparta

- Healthcare has swung 180° from 40 years ago
 - Quick transition out of hospital
 - Expect people to be successful in their recovery
- Price of healthcare is extraordinary
- At Franciscan Skemp there are people in ER for non-emergencies because they know they won’t be turned away
 - Creates an unnecessary excessive cost
- Sparta hospital is building a new section
 - Transitional care unit (used to be called swingbeds)
 - Care for people through rehab process
 - Fruitful for the hospital
- Sparta has grown
 - Franciscan Skemp-Sparta has faced threats of being closed
 - Franciscan Skemp-Sparta found strengths and capitalized on those
 - Now Franciscan Skemp Sparta Clinic will expand
 - Move ER to full ground level and build out to North and add 2nd story
 - System will look for assistance from Franciscan Skemp stakeholders and community
 - Need to raise \$1.6-\$1.8 million to outfit new ER

Grace Jones, Executive Director, CouleeCap

- Primary focus anti-poverty, help families achieve self-sufficiency
- Use of food pantry doubled last August
- Foreclosure prevention has shifted from adjustable-rate mortgages and bad loans to people losing jobs and facing foreclosure
- Receiving American Recovery and Reinvestment money (stimulus bill)
 - Home weatherization doubling from 400 to 800 homes
 - Income limits raising from 150% of poverty to 200% of poverty
 - Summer youth program
 - Put low-income youth to work in summer
 - 125 youth, 8 weeks at \$8/hour, age 16-24 (about 20-30 allocated to Monroe County)
 - Looking for green work sites
 - Non-profit and public sites
 - Right now, recruiting for youth and for work sites
- Receiving more money to directly help people with poverty needs (food, rent, transportation, legal)
- Developing housing element arm of agency
 - Interested in housing development in Sparta area
- Provided land trust fact sheet to group

Karen Joos, Family Living Educator & Department Head, UW-Extension

- Parenting skill building and family strengthening

- Program for parents and kids ages 10-14
- Raising a thinking child curriculum for younger parents to help parents help children develop problem-solving skills
- Parenting newsletter available thru Tomah Hospital
- Positive parenting
- Housing issues – homelessness
 - Monroe County Housing Coalition
 - Build awareness of housing issues
 - Education
 - Emergency shelter
 - Existing and new construction
 - Trying unearth issues and develop solutions
 - Landlord workshops
 - Rights and responsibilities
 - Energy
 - Rent Smart
 - Offered in Sparta Schools
 - Rights and responsibilities of tenants
 - Legal issues of leases and evictions
- Financial work
 - Family spending plans
- Family Impact Seminars
 - Public policy issues

Mary Wallerman, Dairy Farm Family

- Lived on farm all of life
 - Dealt with ups & downs of prices
- 2 adult sons farming with them
 - Considering expansion
- Big promoter for educating public about dairy and where their food comes from
- Volunteer at local school one day a week
 - Elementary/parochial school – struggle with number of kids living in single parent families and the impact this has on the kids
- Husband on County Board
- Have a wind test tower on farm
 - Feels community doesn't understand need for alternative energy
 - The wind tower issues has split the community
 - People sit on opposite sides of church because of disagreement
 - Community needs to learn to discuss things

Dennis Hubbard, County Board Chair

- Growth in county has brought complex problems
- Aging population is putting demand on services
 - Not growing as much on young side to fill needs of aging of population
- Health Department has been unable to fill positions
 - Health care hiring needs are important
- Recognized poverty needs in county
- Health insurance can cost \$20,000/year for a family

- Failing businesses in this economy will be a concern
 - Visionary people can be hurt by poor decisions
- How will we be able to pay for services relying on property taxes?
- Family challenges – people make poor choices
 - Interact with justice system that burns up money
 - Abuse prescription drugs
 - Don't have family skills
- Assume continued growth because of La Crosse growth
 - Perceive that the City has backed up from the Mississippi River to Bangor
 - Approaching Sparta
 - How will we meet needs of expansion?

Don Peterson, Semi-Retired Dairy Farmer

- 2 sons operating farm
- Farm subsidies sound like they will be reduced
- Milk prices at lowest in more than 20 years
- Served on milk coop boards / milk federation board
 - Developed CWT program to reduce number of milking cows in country
 - Need less than 9 million cows to help raise price
 - CWT program is dairy farmer funded
- What else can we do?
 - Price of milk at grocery store is not at lowest price in more than 20 years
- Schools – good job for taking soda machines out
 - Would like to sell milk at concession stands
- Wind energy
 - Private-use small wind generators
 - Pursing this for his own operation – grants available
- Cashton Industrial Park is positive
 - Organic Valley warehouse
 - Biodiesel plant
 - Proves things can be done in small communities

Bill Halfman, Agriculture Educator, UW-Extension

- Demand for service has increased
 - Cost of production
 - Analyze strengths and weaknesses
 - Appropriate land rents
- BadgerVAC 45
 - WI feeder calf standard preconditioning program
 - Help people capture more value for feeder calves
- Strong Beef Programming
 - Cattle feeding
- Crop Production
 - Nitrogen rates
- Small Scale Biodiesel Project
 - Producing biodiesel on a cooperating farm in Arcadia
 - Canola, soybeans, sunflowers
 - Could local farmers use this knowledge?
- Emergency responders without farm backgrounds

- Organizing on-farm education days to explore machinery
- Amish Produce Action
 - Amish growers

Chris Hanson, Executive Director Tomah Chamber/CVB

- Chamber – 2008 was great
 - new businesses on non-industrial side
- Not a lot of industrial land in Tomah (10 acres)
- 2009 – not as good of a forecast
- Many manufacturers going through layoffs
 - Snowballing – impacts vendors and utilities that served them
 - Rentals, restaurants who served employees
- People are optimistic but gun-shy, not spending money
- Tomah somewhat insulated
 - Get traffic from Interstate
 - How will this look in 6 months?
 - Will tourists spend money? Will local residents?
- Needs a new industrial park
 - Could attract businesses trying to save on transportation costs
- Has seen forecasts of gas back up to \$4 by Christmas
- Tomah Long Range Planning Commission
 - Downtown separated from north end of town with 63 acre gap in middle
 - Polluted land owned by railroad
 - DNR said city is not eligible for brownfield grants
- No countywide economic development group
 - County committee has miniscule budget
- No concerted effort to promote true economic development in city

Nodji Van Wychen, County Board/County Tourism/Warrens CVB/Cranberry Grower

- Chairs the county tourism and County Agriculture & Education committee
- Tourism Committee uses \$32,000 wisely
 - New project to use \$15,000 for Buy MoCo
 - Trying to educate people to shift 10% of spending into Monroe County
 - Looking to launch in early June
- Warrens
 - 3 Bears is not opening May 1
 - Only Jellystone campsites open
 - 260 Villas privately-owned
 - 2 LLCs to help owners rent villas out
- WABA
 - Trying to incorporate these new LLCs into their advertising efforts to bring renters into downtown
 - Changing focus from attracting 3 Bears visitors
 - Creating a community event Warrens Easter Saturday Pancake breakfast for community members
- Warrens CVB
 - Collecting room tax on villas – but not a lot
- Most organizations trying to take on challenge positively
 - Challenges make you stronger

Dori Stowell, Interim 4H Youth Development Educator, UW-Extension

- Youth are very busy
- Volunteer base is strong
- Keep kids active in community and learning about communities
- Monroe County 4-H program – 60% in cities/villages and 40% are rural
- Statistics show 4-H kids become adult volunteers
 - Good outcome of getting kids involved
- Seeing kids and families pulling back a little from spending on extra activities

Kelly Murray, Tomah Convention & Visitors' Bureau

- Monroe County is fortunate to do well in tourism
- CVB is room tax funded
- State Dept of Tourism seeing more than \$1 million budget cut
 - Closing welcome/information center
 - Driving communities to organize together to fill voids
- Monroe County has been increasing attraction of tourists
 - Growth in motorcoach visits
 - Mainly attracted by cranberry industry
 - Groups staying for 2-3 days
 - Numbers so far have not decreased
- People seem to be taking smaller trips but are still traveling

Patty Clark, Business Manager, Handishop

- Opening new adult day center in Tomah
 - Ground floor of old Timberwood Bank
- Have one day center in Leon
- Offer employment services at Handishop in Tomah
- Day centers offer social interaction
 - Take trips
 - Visit schools
- Business is good
 - Great contracts
- Biggest challenge
 - Light assembly work that they do is cheaper to do in China
 - Except China is slower and more mistakes
 - So some contracts return
- Tomah Day Center will specialize some on autism
 - Maybe some focus on Alzheimer's and dementia

Theresa Burns-Gilbert, Director, Monroe County Housing Authority

- Likes focus on optimism
- MCHA manages 100 apartments in Monroe County
 - 83 elderly apartments, mostly in villages
 - Vacancies are being experienced – common across states
 - Elderly are staying in homes longer, not looking for 5 years in low income housing before nursing homes
 - Villages are shrinking, offering less to elderly

- Will this change as baby boom ages?
- Seeing more disabled people – looking for more housing to meet those needs
- 16 units for families in Tomah
 - Manage it and trying to purchase it
- HUD voucher programs
 - Money to support renters from private landlords
 - Renter pays 30% of their income and utilities
 - Housing authority pays the rest
 - Were serving 130
 - Could make changes in payments as living situations changed
 - Now serving with only set amount of money
 - Hard to adapt to families change
 - Have used up money reserves
- Right now serving 106/month
- Hoping to lose ~3/month
- Could get back into black if lose ~15
- Families First
 - Federal and State funding for short-term solution and local donations
 - And then transition to MCHA HUD funds for more stable support
 - Because of HUD funding change this is not happening
- Emergency Food and Shelter
 - Receive federal funds for food pantries, domestic abuse programs, and Families First
 - Money is increasing because money based on unemployment figures

John Hendricks, Superintendent, Sparta Area School District

- Expanding definition of partnerships beyond fundraising
 - Examples:
 - UWEX
 - Mathew's Bow
 - Boys' & Girls' Club
 - Need to expand partnerships
- Moving to more project-based activities for students
 - Authentic and relevant
- Expanding community learning centers
 - Partner with BGC
 - Need to expand to more partners
- Cultivate more coop learning experiences
 - Businesses shouldn't wait to be called on by school if they have an opportunity to offer students
 - Staff needs this too – need to know what is going on in businesses and communities
- Summer Staff Institute (Science & Math)
 - 9 districts + WTC + Stout
 - 3 Summer institutes – helping teachers do better teaching math, science and technology as it relates to businesses
- What does changing economy mean for school districts and students
 - Immigrant population declined some – opportunities have declined
 - Homeless population has gone down – why?
 - What changes need to be made to support families
 - Ex.) policy to limit number of different places a bus will drop kids off may not be supporting families needs

Joan Westpfahl, Tomah City Council

- On new City Long Range Planning Committee
- On Library board
- On Parks and Recreation Committee
 - Quality of Life
- Hope to revitalize downtown
 - A number of old buildings are rejuvenated
 - Had trouble with bars and crime
 - New police chief tackled this and created change
- Improved quality of life
- Feels need to work with community on Economic Development
- Council needed to learn about Economic Development and how it happens
 - Need to bring more jobs
- Looking to future
 - Wants family to stay close
 - Needs job and quality of life
- Library
 - Education system can't give everything
 - Library is important
 - Funding system – users up, money down, doesn't work
- Need groups to be communicating with each other like this
 - Evaluate who fits together
- Mention of State Budget Hearing
 - Monday, March 23, 10am, Sparta American Legion