



Governor's Northern Wisconsin Economic Development Summit Summary

Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, November 17-18, 2008

Executive Summary

State leaders and national experts cited broadband technology and access to quality healthcare as two key issues facing northern Wisconsin during the second annual Northern Wisconsin Economic Summit. More than 120 business and economic development leaders met this week at Lake of the Torches in Lac du Flambeau for the two-day summit, which addressed the region's economy, tourism, environment and more. Among those attending were Gov. Jim Doyle and several members of his cabinet including Secretary Kelli A. Trumble (Tourism), Dick Leinenkugel (Commerce) and Matt Frank (Natural Resources). Also in attendance was state senator-elect Jim Holperin of the 12th Senate District.

Throughout the summit, members of the public and regional business leaders met with state leaders and experts during a series of forums, lectures and workshops to discuss issues facing the region. Topics addressed during the summit include tourism's role in the economy, broadband communications, healthcare, jobs and workforce development, efforts to control and eliminate invasive species, and more.

Several experts from a variety of market segments also attended the summit and include Kenneth J. Schlager, chief telecommunications engineer for the Southern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and president of HierComm, Inc.; Dan Kuzlik, University of Wisconsin-Extension economic development educator; Sheila Clough, president of Woodruff's Howard Young Health Care; and Sarah Klavas, the newly appointed brand manager for the State of Wisconsin.

Speaker Summaries

■ **Kelli A Trumble, Secretary of Tourism**

Opening remarks, Monday, November 17

For those of you who've gotten to know me over the years, you know it takes the most unusual of circumstances to move me off center from "cautiously optimistic." But these financial times are testing us all, and we have to be realistic as to what lies ahead for the tourism industry if we are to successfully combat it.

Every penny a traveler spends in Wisconsin is discretionary income. Every penny. Travelers could just as easily stay home, and some of them will given the economic freefall. But we believe there are more families who will find a way to vacation here, because it's that important to them. And for every guest who makes their way to the Northwoods, the reward must come in the form of stellar customer service. You understand what I mean about the importance of customer service better than just about anyone because your economy, in such large part, has been built on tourism.

We're going to weather these times... we have to. And let's not lose too much momentum in the process. Last year, this 22-county Northwoods region – and those are counties that I arbitrarily selected... I could have included even more – was credited with \$1.867 billion in traveler expenditures. From 1994 to 2007, you've had a 130% increase in traveler spending. 130%! And that includes years when weather wreaked havoc on your region. That's a tribute to you – you know how to conduct business.

Yet, proclaiming we can trump the current financial angst based on past results is a lot different than actually doing it. So I see this summit as our chance to develop specific action steps.

You've heard the talk of Wall Street affecting Main Street, and it has. You're seeing fewer people strolling your downtowns, aren't you? That's why it's so important to have a strategic business plan that addresses more than just the short-term. Since we last met, we developed a long-term strategic business plan for Tourism. Note I said "business" plan and not "Department" plan...we're intent on bringing best business practices to government. And that business plan is wrapped in the strength of our new brand strategy for the state.

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For a refresher, here's the statement that's at the core of that brand strategy:

"Because of the passionate nature of the state's people to create fun, express themselves in original ways and feel more comfortable doing it here than anywhere else, in Wisconsin originality rules."

I'm quick to remind people that Wisconsin's brand of originality is both the fun kind that makes life worth living and the serious kind that gives business a competitive edge.

Our intention is for this brand to work across diverse economic sectors. To that end, I'm pleased to announce our own Sarah Klavas was named Brand Manager for the state.

Sarah will be mapping out the specifics of her work tomorrow during her general session. So, to avoid taking the wind out of her sails, let me simply say that defining our brand meant taking a good look at our DNA as Wisconsinites. We discovered there are four strands to our DNA:

- our work ethic,
- our ability to make original thinkers feel valued,
- our passion for good times that unbridles the imagination,
- and our stewardship of the land.

I'm compelled to start with that last one, stewardship of the land, by virtue of where we are — Wisconsin's incredible northwoods. Here, travelers are in awe of the Apostle Islands and the original thinking that led to the designation of a national lakeshore. Here, visitors have come to appreciate the Travel Green Wisconsin movement and the commitment to tread more lightly on the land, as exemplified by Nancy and Steve Sandstrom, owners of the Pinehurst Inn, among many, many others.

There's no question that original thinkers feel welcome and valued here too. And the Department of Tourism has rewarded your creativity with Joint Effort Marketing grants, like the Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival and the Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention & Visitor Bureau 3-day weekend incentive program....and Ready, Set, Go grants awarded in just the last week to the Hayward Snowmobile Sno-Cross that will bring visitors to the area in March at a time when you really need visitors, and the North American Ice Fishing Tournament in Rhinelander.

Original thinking turned the Northwoods into a four-season destination with a diverse product offering that blunts the effects of weather. And it will be original thinkers who find a way to make meetings and conventions an even bigger part of your economy. This is one area where we're seeing growth in our industry — and I'm certain people want to attend conventions here because the Northwoods inspires them, allows them to be creative. And it doesn't hurt that they can tack on a family vacation too. Meeting planners will love the Northwoods when they see how attendance goes up thanks to the location. I implore you to find a way to make meetings and conventions work for you by considering the infrastructure necessary to grow this market segment. We're committed to promoting it.

Looking ahead to the next few months, our Joint Effort Marketing grant criteria for the Destination Marketing category will now be tied very closely to the brand strategy, so watch for that. And our co-op marketing toolbox will include more e-marketing tools pushing people to the web site, making it more important than ever for you to make certain your listings on the TravelWisconsin.com web site are up to date and loop into the brand by spelling out what makes you original, relevant and valued by travelers.

In the end, we know the Wisconsin brand will only be as strong as the partnerships it pays tribute to. In fact, we wrote that right into our strategic plan — "increase effectiveness of collaboration with other state agencies." And our partners are here:

- The Commerce Department — When Tourism contributes to the quality of life, we help sustain commerce in this state.
- The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection — We can send the message to Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin and to introduce visitors to our organic food movement.
- The Department of Natural Resources — We're connected at the hip. And we have as much at stake with invasive species as anyone.
- The Department of Transportation — Safe roads, scenic byways, and an easy-to-use system constitute Tourism's life-line. And never was that more apparent than this summer when flooding closed the Interstate.
- And the Department of Workforce Development — Our work ethic is seen as a selling point by visitors, and retaining the best talent for tourism will always be our goal.

We're not blind to the work ahead. But with the investment we make in tourism marketing and a steely focus on furthering our state brand, we will get people to Wisconsin and to your doorstep. You have my word.

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■ Governor Jim Doyle

Address to the Delegates

As Governor, I've remained committed to developing economic engines for high end growth for our entire state, which is why I've been working hard to boost worker skills and grow family supporting jobs in Northern Wisconsin.

There is no denying that we are facing difficult economic times. Here in Wisconsin we have done some smart things to insulate the state from these sharp economic turns – from strong bank oversight to a steady real estate market, and a pension system that is 100 percent funded, the state has taken steps to protect our citizens with smart financial management.

However, with falling tax revenues and a growing budget gap, it has become clear that Wisconsin is not immune from the dramatic national economic downturn. In these challenging times, we cannot hide under the covers and wait for it to pass. Instead, we must forge ahead and invest in our infrastructure, jobs, and companies that will succeed in the new economy.

We must protect our priorities. We must protect the great progress we have made in areas like renewable energy, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing. It's extremely important that we don't fall backwards and find out in a couple years that we have lost the competitive edge and momentum we worked so hard to build.

We must move forward and continue to invest in basic health care and education.

Recently, we received federal approval to expand BadgerCare Plus to cover childless adults, furthering our quest to ensure that 98 percent of Wisconsin residents have access to health care. And we have expanded FamilyCare to four new Northern counties in the past several months: Chippewa, Dunn, Marathon in November and St. Croix in September.

Anyone who knows me knows that education is one of my top priorities and that will continue as we face the incredible budget challenges ahead. Lately, I've been thinking more and more about my parents, who were both educated during the Great Depression and were deeply committed to public education. I went to Stanford University before transferring to the University of Wisconsin and graduated from Harvard Law School, some of our nation's most respected institutions. But in my parent's eyes, it never compared to the high schools in their hometown.

My father stood on a corner selling magazines to finance his way through college. Just imagine if 80 years ago, during our nation's most severe economic crisis, if we would have given up on education. Education is the foundation for our future. My parent's generation went on to be the leaders that build the economies of the fifties and sixties.

We didn't back down then and we can't back down now. I am committed to continuing to invest in Northern Wisconsin and build off the great work we've accomplished.

This year alone, through a combination of tax credits, grants, and transportation and training assistance we've partnered with companies like Carver Boats, Merit Gear, and Orion Energy Systems on multi million dollar expansion projects, creating good paying jobs for hardworking Wisconsin families. We've funded more than 40 Joint Effort Marketing projects in Northern Wisconsin, generating millions of dollars in increased traveler spending. And we provided close to \$6 million in financial assistance for broadband projects bringing access to an additional 101 northern communities since 2007.

We are also investing in our workforce, working with our world class technical colleges and workforce development boards to train manufacturing workers to compete at the high end. And, northern Wisconsin has led the way in Wisconsin's efforts to achieve energy independence and become a clean energy leader. This fall, I announced the state is investing in companies like Agri-Waste Energy in Emerald and American Science and Technology in Wausau to fuel the innovative technologies that create jobs. Many local communities have also joined this effort, committing their towns, cities, and villages to adopt my energy independence goals as Energy Independence Communities.

In light of these economic times, it is still my vision for Wisconsin companies to have access to the capital they need to start-up and flourish, and for those profitable companies and individuals to reinvest in our shared economic future. Wisconsin has so many great assets – outstanding schools and communities, a history of innovation, the hardest working people anywhere in the world, and a quality of life that is second to none.

Not only do we have a great story to tell, we have the right tools in place – and a strategic plan – to succeed in a global economy.

I look forward to continuing to work with you as we seize these new opportunities.

Thank you for the work you do to Grow Wisconsin.

■ **Mark Richardson** (Summary unavailable)

■ **Steve Sandstrom** (Summary unavailable)

■ **Senator-Elect Jim Holperin**

Highlights:

I'd like to focus today on a single topic that I believe is absolutely critical to the growth and progress of our north-woods economy... and that is high speed internet connectivity.

I talked about his issue frequently during my Senate campaign, and two days after the election I put together a little advisory committee of broadband providers, technology specialists and economic development staff to focus on this issue and offer some recommendations for today. The 15-member committee met for the first time last Thursday.

There was unanimity among the group, as you might expect, regarding the urgency and priority of this issue. Here are some of their opinions and conclusions:

- First. Broadband is essential infrastructure, not a luxury or an option, but an absolute requirement in today's world for commerce, education, and information exchange.
- Second. It is government's responsibility to assure affordable broadband access for all, in the same way government assures that paved roads and electric service and mail delivery are all available to those who live in rural areas.
- Third. Without universal broadband access, economic opportunities are being lost every day. Businesses will not locate or expand where there is no high speed signal. Youth will not move to or stay in an area where their main means of communicating and interacting with the world is not available. Visitors will not vacation where they cannot connect. Real estate sells more slowly if the only option is dial-up.
- Fourth. The effect of not having broadband is increasingly pervasive, rippling out to affect all facets of a community. It is like not having a school or not having a highway into town or not having mail service.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the committee agreed that while the need for broadband connectivity can hardly be overstated, it is also necessary to guard against the perception that all of northern Wisconsin is somehow a broadband wasteland.

Many areas across the north have excellent connections, and many areas are even served by more than one provider. High speed coverage expands every year and exponentially in some areas. There's much to be positive and encouraged about and we need always to acknowledge those assets we have, even as we talk about the improvements that still need to be made.

The group went on to spend most of their time talking about specific things that could be done to speed the deployment of broadband into the rest of northern Wisconsin that does not already have a signal. Here's a brief summary:

- Develop an accurate coverage map showing exactly where broadband is already available. Current coverage maps are often inaccurate and without a good map, providers cannot know where service is needed.
- Rapid technology advances have made many state rules and regulations outdated. A rules and regulations review committee could offer regular updates, assuring that providers do not have to waste time and resources complying with irrelevant government requirements.
- Cost is often as much of an obstacle as technology in extending broadband coverage. Let's investigate why a "T-1" line which delivers a primary internet signal to a wireless provider costs three times more in Wisconsin than right over the border in Michigan.
- Liability insurance coverage required of wireless providers who place their equipment on existing municipal towers is often prohibitively expensive. Could the state offer a lower cost umbrella policy?
- Similarly, negotiations between wireless providers and local governments over tower use sometimes bog down over minor details. Could a sample contract acceptable to towns be developed by the Public Service Commission and Towns Association?
- Towns are statutorily prohibited from using certain economic development tools (like Tax Incremental Finance Districts) which tend to concentrate businesses in one area where they can more easily get broadband access. Should some of these prohibitions be modified?
- Perhaps the state could consider offering low cost or longer term financing for the purpose of building or acquiring broadband infrastructure.

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- Similarly, the state should consider extending tax incentives for broadband deployment in underserved areas. Such incentives were approved a couple of years ago, but will expire soon.
- The legislature should look at expanding the purposes for which the universal telephone service fund may be used, or create a similar fund for broadband service extension.

These were just a few of the initiatives discussed last week. I'm looking forward to talking to our state agencies, to other legislators and to the Governor about some of these ideas. Some sense of urgency is necessary, I believe, in order to make quicker progress on this issue.

I hope you all agree that, regarding broadband, we snooze... we lose. If you believe, as I do, that universal high speed internet connectivity is crucial to our economic success here in the north please help me keep the pressure on state government to do whatever it can to get us wired sooner rather than later.

■ **Dan Kuzlik, University of Wisconsin-Extension Economic Development Educator, Oneida County**

Keynote address: Wisconsin's Northwoods – Then, Now and Tomorrow

Highlights:

Dan Kuzlik gave the keynote presentation on November 18, titled: "Wisconsin's Northwoods: Then, Now and Tomorrow." Kuzlik began by looking at the industrial process that has occurred in the last century in Northern Wisconsin. He then went on to look at current census information to identify the changing demographics of our northern region as well as to present a picture of how employment patterns have changed in the last several decades.

Dan's next message dealt with the current economic issues that are affecting the entire global economy. Kuzlik listed the economic challenges that are inherent with rural communities, but also hastened to add that northern Wisconsin might well experience a softer landing during economic recovery than our neighbors on either American coast.

In offering some resources to individuals and businesses that are feeling the current economic crunch, Kuzlik told the "Wisconsin Story" and how the University of Wisconsin-Extension's county offices are ready to make all of the resources of the entire University of Wisconsin System available to county residents.

■ **Sarah Klavas, Wisconsin Brand Manager**

General Session, Tuesday, Nov. 18: "Branding Wisconsin"

(View Sarah's Branding powerpoint presentation at www.northwoodssummit.com)

Workshop Summaries

■ **Healthcare:**

Issues facing the Northwoods, including the Badger Care Program

Leaders:

Sheila Clough, President of Howard Young Health Care in Woodruff

Jennifer DeYoung, Budget and Policy Analyst, Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Workshop Highlights:

Let's start with the rising cost of health care. It ranks among the top issues of concern to Americans. It is frequently in the news and will remain a hot topic as costs continue to climb. A recent government report predicts that spending on health care will reach 20 percent of the Nation's Gross Domestic Product by 2016. So what's driving Health care costs? There are a multitude of factors associated with rising costs. These reasons include:

- **Ageing population:** Simple fact – as we get older our needs for healthcare grows and complexity of health care conditions expand.
- **Chronic Diseases:** More than 1/2 of Americans suffer from a chronic condition such as heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis. Between 1987-2002, private health insurance spending per person increased nearly 60%. 80% of the new spending was due to higher utilization of services in treating the disease, not the average cost of the services.

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In addition, risk factors such as obesity and tobacco and alcohol usage are increasing the incidence of these chronic diseases. According to Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA), obesity among adults doubled in last 20 years – at the same time Type II diabetes – which is linked to obesity – increased by 53%.

So what is the link with Chronic Disease and Costs? According to American Hospital Association (AHA), roughly 80% of all health care dollars spent in America goes to just 20% of its people, most of whom have a chronic condition.

● **Technology Improvements:** Better diagnostic equipment, pharmaceuticals and supplies. A couple of examples:

1. Treatment associated with heart disease and heart attacks
 - Stents used in surgeries of heart patients costs roughly \$7,000 each
 - tPA drug used in ER to save a heart attack patient costs \$2,500 for each injection
2. Radiology equipment like CAT scanners and MRI costs upwards of \$1.5 million
 - Consumers expect to be treated by the latest and greatest technology

● **Number of Uninsured/Underinsured:** Because the nation's system for paying health care is disjointed and desperate, millions of Americans find themselves without health insurance, or are covered by plans that don't do enough to cover the care they need.

So who pays when people who don't have coverage and can't pay for their care get sick or injured? Everyone else, which is a key reason costs have risen across the board, including those who do have insurance.

Wisconsin is actively trying to address this issue with BadgerCare Program.

● **Final reason for rises in health care costs and the challenge to making health care affordable involves our Healthcare Workforce Challenges:**

According to AHA, about 2/3 of every dollar spent by hospitals goes to the wages and benefits of caregivers and other staff. This translates to over 60% of the costs of hospital care. Unfortunately these costs are rising due to work force shortages.

The healthcare industry is facing a growing workforce shortage especially in Nurses. AHA projects a shortage of 1 million nurses by 2020 (at a time when our projections for services are at its highest). As the supply goes down and the demand for services goes up, the labor costs will increase as well.

A growing physician shortage is also contributing to higher costs. We have significant shortages in orthopedics, cardiology, gerontology and general surgery. These shortages in nurses, physicians, and other key professionals are exacerbated in rural communities like ours. Not surprising it takes a special person to see the many benefits of living and working in a rural community. Statistics from the American Medical Association indicates that of the physicians graduating from Medical School. Only small percentage will desire to practice medicine in a small town.

At this point, Oneida and Vilas Counties are blessed with having access to many healthcare providers. However, that is changing! It is becoming more difficult to attract these professionals. Often times, it takes higher wages and incentives to encourage nurses, pharmacists, and physicians to join our healthcare teams.

The closely related healthcare issues of affordability and workforce shortages are complex with no easy answers. Many opportunities exist to increase affordability. These opportunities include:

● **Focus on Wellness:**

- Go beyond the medical model of care and look at wellness and prevention.

● **Better coordinate care:**

- Anticipate the wave of the Boomers and the growing incidence of chronic disease

● **Achieve performance excellence:**

- Increase transparency of quality performance

● **Speed adoption of Information Technology:**

- Apply IT to improve quality and efficiency

● **Reduce administrative costs:**

- Eliminate unnecessary and duplicative paperwork
- Healthcare will be more affordable to all
- Spend more time at the bedside and less time on paperwork.

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- **Address supply of healthcare professionals:**

- Increase admissions to professional programs
- Increase number of instructors
- Find ways to support work life balance

At the end of the day, it will take a real effort by everyone to tackle our healthcare issues. The Wisconsin Hospital Association created a task force to assess major healthcare reform proposals. In their guiding principles they indicate each health care stakeholder has a shared responsibility.

- **Government:**

- Guaranteeing access to services for most vulnerable populations
- Adequately pay for services provided to patients covered by its programs

- **Individuals:**

- Share financial responsibility for covering the cost of health care needs
- Engage in behaviors to improve health status
- Be prudent buyers – be knowledgeable about quality, efficiency

- **Hospitals and Physicians:**

- Deliver health care guided by clinical best practices
- Be accountable for costs and quality

- **Employers should consider:**

- Offering a basic health benefit to employees
- Provide financial incentives to employees to select the highest quality, lowest cost providers and participate in wellness and prevention programs

- **Payers:**

- Provide meaningful incentives for providers to coordinate developing of care

To sum it up – it will take everyone working together to address our health care challenges! But I have no doubt we can. As anthropologist, Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

■ **Broadband Efforts:**

Closing the Digital Divide in Northern Wisconsin with Advanced Wireless Communications Technology and Public/Private Partnerships

Leaders: Kenneth J. Schlager, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Engineer & HierComm, Inc. President

Workshop Highlights:

Northern Wisconsin, like most rural areas and related small communities in the U.S., is on the wrong side of the “digital divide” that separates areas with and without the broadband telecommunications infrastructure necessary to compete in today’s global economy. This digital divide exists not only between Rural America and Metro America but even more so with competitive countries in Europe and East Asia.

This presentation, which will include ample time for discussion and Q & A, will focus on two initiatives crucial to closing this digital divide now and not in some distant future:

1. Advanced broadband wireless communications technology
2. Public/Private Partnerships linked with broadband public safety communications networks

(See details on this workshop presentation in Ken Schlager’s Broadband powerpoint presentation at www.northwoodssummit.com)

■ Aquatic Invasive Species:

What are our lakes worth? Keeping the "north" the "North"

Leaders:

Larry Wawronowicz, Lac du Flambeau Tribal Natural Resources Director
John Gozdziowski, Regional Director, Dept. of Natural Resources
Robert Korth, University of Wisconsin-Extension Lakes Specialist
Pamela Toshner, Department of Natural Resources Lake and River Management

Workshop Highlights: Unavailable

■ Workforce Development:

The Northwoods unique economy economic and social issues

Leaders:

Dan Kuzlik, University of Wisconsin -Extension Oneida County
Will Anderson, University of Wisconsin-Extension Iron County

Workshop Highlights:

Dan Kuzlik, UW-Extension Assistant Professor from Oneida County and Will Andresen, UW-Extension Associate Professor from Iron County, co-presented a workshop on Workforce Development. Kuzlik first spoke of the changing segments of employee patterns in Wisconsin's Northern Region. He used examples from his own Oneida County showing that in the 1990's the largest employer in Oneida County was the Wausau Paper Mill in Rhinelander, a manufacturing sector company. However he noted that today, the largest employer in Oneida County is Drs. Foster & Smith, a pet supply retailer selling primarily via catalogs and the internet, a great example of the service sector economy. Professor Kuzlik then went on to talk about the aging demographics of our Northwoods and the "brain drain" of our younger aged population who are moving away from our region. That provided a great segue for Andresen who then presented his original research among college students measuring what they would find attractive in a community where they wished to live and work. Andresen suggested that there are things that we can proactively accomplish in our northern communities that would keep younger aged populations here and would also attract other younger populations to relocate to our northern region.

Round Table Discussions

Grants and Loans

Discussion Highlights: Unavailable

Native American Economy

Discussion Highlights: Unavailable

Nature Is Our Business

Discussion Highlights: Unavailable

Online/E-Marketing

Discussion Highlights: Unavailable

Sustainability

Discussion Highlights:

- The discussion opened up by a brief talk about “System Theory” by Dorothy Lagerroos. Formerly the world was looked at as a machine, but this is not true. Nature, like our bodies are systems, not machines, and therefore not predictable. Whereas we know the outcomes of machines, how systems react to inputs are unique. Systems are fine grain structures that have the ability to repair itself. Systems are efficient and stable when in balance. Systems are adaptable and therefore innovative. The main conclusion is that we have to start looking at the environment not as a machine that we can manipulate but a system that we can be a part of.
- Many municipalities in the North have become “Eco-municipalities” under the Natural Step framework.
- Natural step creates a framework of values that everyone agrees with through an inclusive democratic process. It is a tool to “Backcast,” rather than forecast the vision of how the citizens want their community to look like in the future. Backcasting is similar to what is trying to be achieved through the Smart Growth process, identifying how a community wants to grow rather than blindly growing to meet any demand. The costs to the environment must be considered for sustainable economic development. (www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/cea/environmental/).
- Green Tier is based on a collaborative system of contracts and charters crafted jointly by participating businesses and the DNR. These contracts and charters streamline environmental requirements in many cases and encourage new environmental technologies. Green Tier is designed to help environmentally responsible companies achieve environmental and economic gains.
- Focus on Energy (www.focusonenergy.com) offers many resources and tools for businesses of all kinds to reduce. It works with eligible Wisconsin residents and businesses to install cost effective energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Focus information, resources and financial incentives help to implement projects that otherwise would not be completed, or to complete projects sooner than scheduled. Its efforts help Wisconsin residents and businesses manage rising energy costs, promote in-state economic development, protect our environment and control the state’s growing demand for electricity and natural gas.
- Travel Green Wisconsin Certification (www.travelgreenwisconsin.com) is one way that the Wisconsin Department of Tourism can help turn the tide toward environmental sustainability in our corner of the world, benefiting our state, our tourism businesses and our visitors by preserving the natural resources that define us. It is a simple, affordable and voluntary program that reviews and certifies tourism businesses and organizations that have made a commitment to reducing their environmental footprint. Wisconsin’s natural resources, wildlife and cultural diversity are among our most important tourism assets. Efforts to preserve these for future generations are good for the Wisconsin travelers, the tourism industry and the state’s overall economy.
- The developing Oneida Eco-Business Park was also discussed. The development will attempt to attract high-tech and research firms to a campus environment focused on reducing the environmental impact and have a more natural setting rather than the standard business park look. Many participants were interested in this and thought that the developer and businesses should look into the Green Tier program and the resources Focus on Energy provides.
- Bottom line was there is a need for continued leadership to encourage a sustainable economic development in the North. It is important to communicate the marketing advantage of sustainability and that being sustainable doesn’t have a negative effect upon profit. Wisconsin and especially the North have an opportunity with the concentration of sustainability research being done in the state to lead the way nationally.