



A Wealth of Opportunities in a Beautiful Setting

Located on the I-94 corridor in west central Wisconsin, Dunn County is 850 square miles of charming rural towns and villages, and breathtaking natural landscape. Not-for-profit Dunn County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) promotes economic development by providing support for new and existing businesses in the greater Dunn County area.



DUNN COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Written by Ryan Cartner

Established in 1990, the Dunn County EDC has been involved in a number of successful projects including creating the Stout Technology and Business Park and encouraging some major companies such as Andersen Windows & Doors, Phillips-Medisize, and 3M to relocate in the area.

Dunn EDC's approach to economic development is built on collaboration. Through partnerships with regional organizations and stakeholders, the communities in Dunn County can work together. The EDC works closely with municipal representatives from the county's seat, the City of Menomonie, the various villages, businesses, universities, and colleges in the area.

"We look at it as a team approach," says Dunn County EDC Executive Director Eric Turner. "We try to put people in touch with resources. The right people who can help get a business up, running and expanding."

Beyond the county borders, the organization also works with Momentum West, an economic development organization working within a region of ten counties. Dunn County is at the very center. Momentum West's goal is

to encourage development by facilitating a means of connecting the state and county development groups to boost growth throughout this region.

One of the organization's most important strategies is assisting businesses already located within the region. While bringing in new business is important, the Dunn EDC is committed to keeping its area businesses profitable and expanding by providing the services and support needed to be successful. "It also fosters a conversation, so if they need assistance, we can help them before a minor problem becomes a crisis," says Turner. "It's a very personalized relationship that we have with our area businesses."

Some of the many area projects that Dunn EDC worked with include a one-million-square-foot Walmart distribution center, five Phillips-Medisize plants for manufacturing medical devices, a 3M manufacturing plant, ConAgra Foods, an Andersen Window plant that makes top-of-the-line windows, a Cardinal Glass plant that makes float glass, and a Mayo Clinic Health Systems center. This list represents Dunn County's top employers, as well as the fastest-growing industries in the region: agriculture, manufacturing, distribution, and medical. »

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► The most significant challenge faced by Dunn EDC is its low unemployment rate. The national average currently is 4.1 percent, while the average in Dunn County, at the end of 2017, was 2.4 percent. This has resulted in companies having to reduce the amount of work taken on because the workforce is not available to fill necessary positions. The Dunn EDC has implemented programs to help.

Connecting students with businesses in the community is one way that the Dunn EDC is working to develop the labor force. It has begun a project with the Cooperative Educational Services Association (CESA), an organization that helps Wisconsin schools communicate with each other and share resources. The EDC and CESAs 10 & 11 are working together on youth apprenticeship programs that enable high school students to be able to take on an apprenticeship, within their area of interest, at a local business.

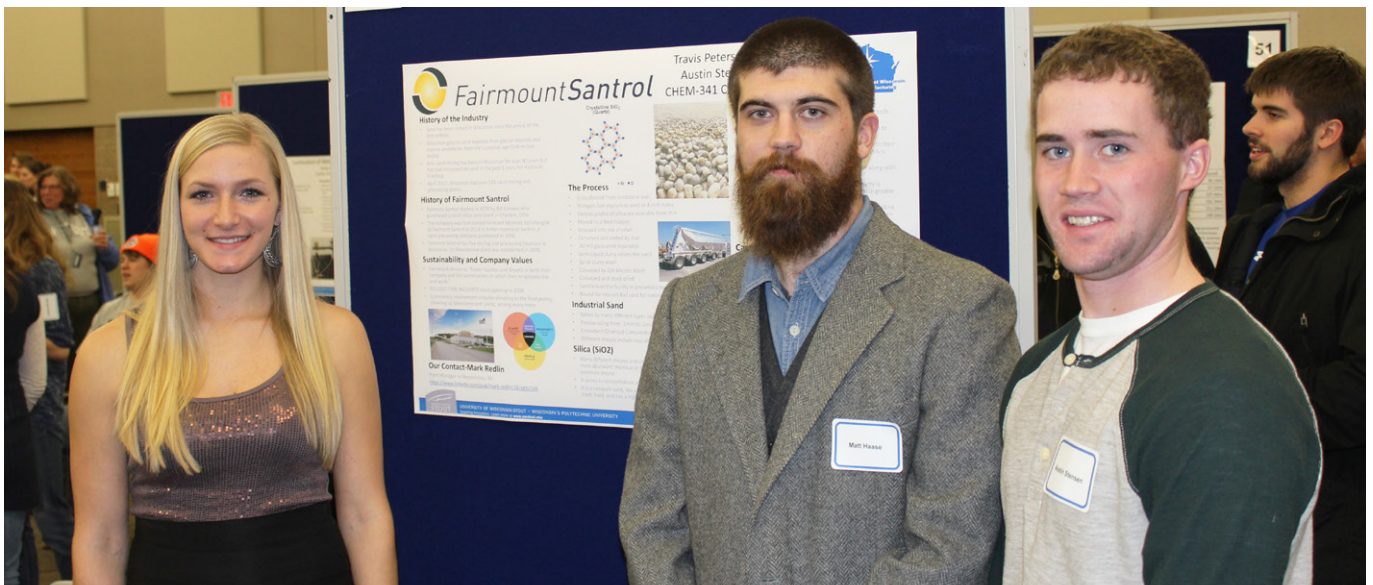


"It's a paid program," says Turner. "They work part of their day, and the other part, they're back at school taking core classes. What they're doing is finding out if they like the work, as opposed to leaving school and then having to figure out what their passion is." If the students go through the two-year program, they are usually offered a job with the company.

Along the same line, the EDC is now working with the University of Wisconsin-Stout, the University of River Falls, and the University of Eau Claire, on the University of Wisconsin Internship Network (UWIN). This program helps students from these schools find internships at local businesses. In the past, Dunn County students would frequently take internships with companies from outside the area, develop relationships and relocate to continue a career with that company after graduation. "We feel that by getting our students immersed in business and industry here in Dunn County," says Turner, "once they graduate, instead of going elsewhere to find and start a career, they'll start it at home with our businesses."



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The Dunn County EDC, in collaboration with its many area partners, is committed to finding every possible way to help companies looking to locate in the area. The county EDC works closely with the state EDC on everything from loan incentives to tax increment funding and much more. One of the more significant factors that contribute to making this area a desirable location for manufacturing companies is low tax rates on manufactured goods. Where neighboring states have a seven percent tax, Wisconsin's is 0.5 percent.

With the help of the Greater Menomonie Development Corporation, the Dunn EDC has developed what it calls a virtual spec building. Often, to attract prospective businesses to an area, an EDC will invest several million dollars in building a ready-made facility. The Dunn EDC has developed an approach that eliminates the need for risky investment while enabling the business owners to request customizations rather than having to fit an operation into an existing plant. ►►

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- The Dunn EDC website features a video that walks through a virtual model of the design of the building. It shows the exterior of the facility and the six-acre parcel where it will be constructed. It then takes viewers through the interior, showing the layout of the entire building including the reception area, two floors totaling more than 6,600 square feet of office space and a 27,397-square-foot production floor.

A collection of plans and other resources are available about the plant, and plans are certified to meet all state legal requirements. “What makes this nice,” says Turner, “is if I’m relocating my business and I find an existing building, invariably there are going to be some changes that I’m going to need to make. If you choose to build here, we have the site in place. You can look at it virtually and make minor changes to the plans. Instead of getting a building that was built hoping somebody would like it, the customer can get their exact building customized for them.” While the EDC has yet to complete one of these buildings, it has had a great deal of interest in the project so far.

“There’s lots to do right out your back door, but at the same time you have close proximity to metropolitan areas.”

Another important initiative of the Dunn County EDC is the Stout Technology and Business Park. This 403-acre park contains a community of business, educational facilities, and resources in an open setting with green spaces and paths for walking and biking. It is a novel blend of business and culture.

For these many reasons, Dunn County is a very advantageous place for a business to be, but life in Dunn County is an



incentive of its own. With a population of fewer than 50,000 people, the region is considered rural, and that comes with all the charm of small-town Wisconsin. However, directly to the east is the Eau Claire-Chippewa Falls metropolitan area, and just over an hour's drive west are the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Dunn County has beautiful lakes, the Chippewa and Red Cedar rivers, rolling hills and forests, many beautiful camping and hiking spots, and more than three hundred miles of classified trout streams that make this an angler's paradise.

"Living here and being able to work in a place where people go to have their vacations is a great thing," says Turner.

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Dunn County is a great location for businesses, with a substantial manufacturing industry centered on medical, precision manufacturing, and agriculture. Nearby universities and technical colleges provide skilled talent to the local labor force. There are communities in the region of every size to suit every lifestyle, and there are plenty of jobs to go around.

"It's a great place to work and a great place to live," says Turner.

"Whether it's for an education, a career, retirement, or just a visit, it's fun in Dunn." ■





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