

Review & Commentary on Health Policy Issues for a Rural Perspective - January 1, 2025

Rural Wisconsin Hospital CEDA Awardees

From “Rural Healthcare Partnerships Fuel CEDA Awardees,” by Marie Barry, RWHC Director of Community Economic Development, *Wisconsin Economic Development Institute News*, 11/20:

“The Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA), founded in 1975, is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to expanding Wisconsin’s economy. Driven by the needs of their 450-plus members, they represent the economic development interests of both the private and public sectors through leadership on statewide initiatives to advance economic development in Wisconsin.”

“Reading through WEDA’s annual Community and Economic Development Award (CEDA) is always an exciting experience as the projects coming to fruition across Wisconsin highlight the creativity, tenacity, and local commitment that economic development embodies in our state. **This year’s CEDA Finalists and Awardees highlighted a unique theme in our state’s economic development landscape: the engagement of rural hospitals!**”

“In this year’s CEDA Awardees, two of the category winners included deep involvement from local rural hospitals. In the Community Impact category, the Green County Home Construction Cooperative was launched when **SSM Health Monroe Clinic** donated a

hospital-owned home to Green County Development Corporation in order to launch this new program. In the last **Community Health Needs Assessment** undertaken in Green County, housing was identified as the second highest priority item because ‘safe, affordable housing is imperative to the health of an individual and for a thriving community.’ The **improvement plan** prepared to take action on this need asserts that the

hospital’s vision is ‘to have available, affordable, accessible, and safe housing for all Green County residents.’ Partnership with the Green County Development Corporation through the Green County Home Construction Cooperative allowed both organizations to take action on their goals of improving local housing conditions.”

“In the Business Retention and Expansion Category, Encompass Early Care and Education was recognized for drastically

expanding the childcare availability in Oconto Falls, WI. Statistically speaking, the healthcare workforce is likely to be disproportionately impacted by childcare challenges due to the concentration of females in the workforce. **According to the US Census Bureau**, women hold 76% of all healthcare jobs. Women account for more than 85% of registered nurses. Post-pandemic, additional evidence shows that childcare is more likely to influence a woman’s employment decision than a man’s. For example, 51% of women indicated the cost of childcare was a consideration for their career compared to only 34% of men (**Conroy & Runge, 2020**). Therefore, it is highly logical that **both HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital** in Oconto Falls



and **Bellin Health Oconto Hospital** in Oconto are supportive of this exciting development in their community. The **HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital Foundation** supported the project with a \$10,000 donation and both organizations support local economic development activities with staff time dedicated to serving on local boards.”

“Finally, a rural hospital fueled one of the CEDA Finalists in the Talent Attraction, Development and Retention category: **Grant Regional Health Center and Growing Lancaster**. Growing Lancaster focuses on growing the local workforce through being more welcoming to immigrants and newcomers in the Lancaster community. Organic conversations between the hospital CEO and other local business leaders spawned this ongoing collaboration. The hospital serves as the lead organization in organizing meetings, acts as a fiscal agent on grants for Growing Lancaster, and has donated time and money to support the group’s activities. The group has started English Language Learner classes, organized cultural events, celebrated Welcoming Week, hosted workshops on translation resources for businesses, secured grant funding to boost local banking access and successfully seen an increase in the number of local businesses employing newcomers and immigrants to fill crucial workforce gaps.”

“Rural hospitals and economic developers have organically synergistic goals of strengthening communities in order to grow vibrancy, wealth and health. This year’s CEDA Awards provided a beautiful

illustration of what can be accomplished when these organizations work in partnership with one another with the ultimate winners being our Wisconsin communities and their residents!”

New Source re Community Econ Development

A Community Vitality and Rural Healthcare section has been added to the Rural Health Information Hub. The RHI Hub is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy to be a national clearinghouse on rural health issues. They are committed to supporting healthcare and population health in rural communities: <https://bit.ly/4f9SMmv>

“The recently updated topic guide provides information and resources on the impacts and connections between strong, healthy rural communities and the provision of healthcare services in rural areas. Shares economic development and impact resources, covers asset-mapping, infrastructure investment opportunities, and more.”

“In rural communities, healthcare and the overall vitality of the community are intrinsically linked. A robust and economically vibrant community supports and sustains quality health and social services for its residents by attracting and retaining well-trained and committed healthcare professionals. Additionally, communities with strong economies may offer a variety of other benefits for their local healthcare system through greater availability of infrastructure investment and philanthropic giving, facilitation of partnerships between healthcare systems and other organizations, and presence of a balanced payer mix for healthcare services, among other factors. In return, a high-quality healthcare system can support economic and community development initiatives. Together, strong rural economies and rural healthcare systems can address the five domains of the social determinants of health: economic stability, education, health and healthcare access, the built environment, and social cohesion.”

“This topic guide focuses on how community and economic development can complement health services in

Eye On Health is the monthly newsletter of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative. Begun in 1979, RWHC has as its **Mission** that rural Wisconsin communities will be the healthiest in America. Our **Vision** is that... RWHC is a strong and innovative cooperative of diversified rural hospitals... it is the “rural advocate of choice” for its Members... it develops and manages a variety of products and services... it assists Members to offer high quality, cost-effective healthcare... assists Members in partnerships to make their communities healthier... generates additional revenue by services to non-Members... ongoing use of strategic alliances in pursuit of its Vision. Tim Size <timsiz@rwhc.com>, Editor, 880 Independence Lane, Sauk City, WI 53583

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rural areas, how rural communities can identify and build on their unique assets, and how collaboration between various sectors can address challenges, including issues related to population health and public health.”

Questions that you will find answered:

- “What is community resilience and how does it affect the health of rural populations?”
- How do healthcare services, facilities, and providers contribute to the economic vitality of rural communities?
- How can the availability of healthcare services be leveraged in economic and community development efforts?
- Why should local healthcare leadership be involved in community and economic development efforts and what role can they play?
- How can communities illustrate the importance of healthcare to our local economy?
- Where can our rural community find the resources to determine the economic impact of our healthcare sector or a component of the healthcare sector?
- Where can our community find training on economic impact and other tools to enhance our local healthcare services and ultimately enhance our local community?
- What is asset-mapping and how does it contribute to rural community vitality?

- How does the vitality of a rural community affect health workforce recruitment and retention?
- What opportunities are available for rural communities to invest in their infrastructure to support their healthcare system?
- Why is it important to consider the capacity of local healthcare to anticipate economic growth?
- What is the role of philanthropy and nonprofit organizations in community development?
- Who can I contact regarding additional information and resources focused on community vitality and its effect on the healthcare system?”

Can We Better Understand Each Other?

From “AS SAUK COUNTY GOES ... President Trump’s win confirms bellwether reputation” by Molly Reinmann, *Wisconsin State Journal*, 12/16:

“After a divisive election, voters in Baraboo are gravitating toward the healing message of ‘Be kind’ signs, which have become ubiquitous in Sauk County. The narrowly divided county has now backed the winner in the last five presidential elections.”

“Since last week’s election, most of the political signs in Sauk County have come down. But one slogan can still be found on signs throughout this purple county, nestled within a purple state.”

“It’s a simple message: ‘Be Kind.’ ”

“ ‘We’re in the healing process right now,’ Baraboo resident John Haggard said of an election that challenged friendships and neighborly relations in this tightly knit community. ‘We’re all Americans and we all have to move forward.’ ”

“Few places know how fine the line can get between friend and foe, Democrat and Republican, than Sauk County. With its narrow vote for Donald Trump this year, the county is Wisconsin’s last bellwether county,

having successfully picked the winner in the last five presidential elections. (Door County, which had backed the winner in the previous six elections, broke its streak when it went for Vice President Kamala Harris.)”

“Despite losing the county in 2020, Trump carried the county by 1.6% this year. Yet Democrats down the ballot also won. Incumbent U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin won the county by less than half a percentage point, and Democratic Assembly candidate Karen DeSanto won with more than 56% of the vote.”

“Sauk County owes its swing status to the independent-mindedness of its residents, many of whom don’t identify with one party or the other but are attracted to populist appeals, said Brian Reisinger, a former Republican strategist who grew up on a small family farm in Spring Green and has written about the economic challenges facing rural America.”

“Trump had the populist edge on Hillary Clinton in 2016, but Joe Biden’s working-class background likely appealed to voters in 2020, Reisinger said. This year, he said, voters returned to Trump, likely due to disaffection over the economy.”

“ ‘Driving a lot of people’s attitudes in rural areas is a feeling that they have been left behind in one form or another for decades upon decades,’ Reisinger said. ‘And when you’re left behind, you look for someone who is going to shake up that status quo that left you behind.’ ”

“Sauk County voted twice for Barack Obama, for Trump in 2016 and for Biden in 2020. But voters in the bellwether county seem torn this election.”

“Sauk County is a mixed bag in more than just its political identity. With an almost entirely white population of 66,000 people, a \$2 billion tourism industry, easy access to Dane County and 1,400 farms surrounding its urban centers of Baraboo and Reedsburg, rural and urban America coexist in close quarters. Residents describe a devoted church community at odds with a growing drag queen scene, and Democrats and Republicans mingling peacefully at art exhibits and performances.”

“Although no means a majority, the county’s 2,700 farm producers could determine the outcome in the county of presidential elections, the last three of which have all been decided by fewer than 650 votes.”

“Yet, farmers do not ‘fall into any nice, neat political box,’ Reisinger said, adding he knows several who voted for Trump this time around but said they would have voted for independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders had he been the Democratic nominee.”

“ ‘These people, they might not have a completely strong opinion on every economic policy, but what they do know is what’s going on right now is not working,’ Reisinger said.”

“ ‘Mass deportation would have a dynamic, negative economic impact, to the point where it would destroy the food cycle in our country,’ said one...”

“Trump wins on ‘authenticity’— As a child, John Haggard went door to door in his home county of Racine campaigning for Walter Mondale. As soon as he was old enough to vote, he began casting ballots for Democrats.”

“After serving in the military, Haggard moved to Baraboo,



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where he now lives with his wife and four children. Ever since, he has become increasingly conservative.”

“When Trump first came onto the political scene almost a decade ago, Haggard was a reluctant supporter. But now, citing what he described as Trump’s authenticity and an elitist streak in the Democratic party, he has become ‘full on MAGA.’ ”

“ ‘I think he changed as a person after the first assassination attempt,’ Haggard said. ‘He became much more real and humble, talking about how God spared his life for a purpose. And I think a lot of people here could relate to that.’ ”

“Like others interviewed after the election, Haggard said the national political parties feel increasingly out of touch to residents here; Trump’s pledge to ‘drain the swamp’ more appealing.”

“ ‘I really think a lot of people here are driven by a rebellious attitude, you know, ‘Screw all you politicians, we want nothing to do with all y’all,’ ” said Kurt Hanusa, a Trump voter and lifelong Sauk County resident. ‘So when the Washington establishment and the elites say, ‘Hey, here’s who you have to vote for,’ that doesn’t sell very well here.’ ”

“Sarah Cronn was a lifelong Democrat, but she said she has voted third party in the last three elections—for Jill Stein in 2016, Jo Jorgenson in 2020 and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. this year, even knowing he had dropped out of the race and endorsed Trump. The major-party candidates, she said, are dividing the country.”

“ ‘If you break your ankle, Hillary Clinton is not going to make you a casserole and walk your dog, but your coworker of 25 years who voted differently than you, she will take care of you,’ Cronn said. It disillusioned her to see people in both parties—but mainly Democrats, she said—‘sever human connections’ on account of political disagreements.”

“Trump’s gains among young white men nationally were also echoed across the county.”

“In a typical presidential election, two or three people will come in to vote and register on Election Day in the town of Greenfield, said Susan Knower, chair of the Sauk County Democratic Party. This year, she said, close to 50 same-day registrants — mostly young white men—cast ballots in Greenfield alone.”

“Working a registration table at the Baraboo Gun Show in late September, Sauk County GOP chair Jerry Helmer said he registered a dozen men in their early 20s who had never voted before.”

“GOP claims ‘too much to fight against’—Yet, Democrats were hardly absent. Ahead of the election, Knower said, the Sauk County Democrats amped up their ground game.”

“ ‘We were like locusts,’ she said of the volunteers working in get-out-the-vote efforts. ‘We were everywhere.’ ”

“Knower was stunned by Harris’ loss. She blames Biden and the Democratic Party nationally for failing to effectively counter Republican claims that immigrants would take their jobs, or

that a Harris administration would pay for gender-affirming care for inmates and put ‘boys in girls’ sports.’ ”

“ ‘It was too much to fight against, and we didn’t do enough to fight against it,’ Knower said.”

“ ‘I don’t think Sauk County is any different from the nation this year,’ she said. ‘It’s the anger at the economy, the fear about immigration, the resistance to the wokeness. I don’t think we did a good enough job showing people here that we are moderate.’ ”

“While Harris and the Democratic Party did raise other issues central to many voters, like protecting abortion rights and preparing for climate change, those didn’t resonate in rural areas, where people only wanted to

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“Sorry, there is no political exemption to ‘Love Thy Neighbor.’ ”

hear how the candidates' policies would improve their lives, Reisinger said."

"Many of the Harris-Walz platform positions — such as a ban on corporate price-gouging — probably could have sold well in Sauk County's rural communities, he said. But he said the campaign failed to sell them."

" 'People were hearing from Republicans, 'Here is how I am going to make your economic situation better,' but they were hearing all kinds of things from the Democrats.' "

"Local Democrats seen differently—The elitism some said they detected among Democrats on the national level didn't filter down into local campaigns, as the Baldwin and DeSanto victories showed."

"Knower said down-ballot Democrats were able to outperform Harris in Sauk County by emphasizing their commitment to small communities."

" 'These are our local people, our neighbors, and we were able to really show people that we are fighting for them,' Knower said. 'But we don't have enough of a platform to counter what's happening with the party nationally.' "

"Joscelyn Jackson, a lifelong Democrat and Sauk County resident, agreed that community values transcend party lines in Sauk County. Simple name ID and Sauk County street cred likely encouraged ticket-splitting and moved the needle toward down-ballot Democrats. 'Tammy Baldwin is someone we all know, someone we're familiar with,' Jackson said. 'Same with Karen DeSanto. She's a local person, she's always been a part of this community, probably for my entire life.' "

"Even Helmer, who ran against DeSanto and lost both across the 40th Assembly District and among voters in Sauk County, acknowledged her advantage locally."

" 'I think a lot of Republicans voted for DeSanto just because they knew her name and reputation,' he said."

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"In it together—In the last days of the campaign, Brett Klawitter, owner of The Baraboo Shop, said demand skyrocketed for the ubiquitous 'Be Kind' signs, supporting empathy, understanding and mental health."

"The signs seemed to acknowledge that, regardless of the outcome, people knew they still needed to live together."

" 'Conservatives go to the theater and so do liberals,' Hanusa said. 'We come together and

spend time in these different places, and we just know that for a few hours, we're just going to laugh, we're just going to relax, and we're just going to enjoy.' "

"Going forward, Jackson said she hopes the neighborly vibe that defines her community extends to discussions about politics and values. 'My reaction was really just surprise, and I felt that I didn't know my community as well as I thought I did,' Jackson said of the election. 'Now I'm really just thinking about what we can do to better understand each other, and not just know where each other stands but also why.' "

Leadership Insights: "Closing Argument"

The *Leadership Insights* series is by Jo Anne Preston, RWHC Workforce & Organizational Development Senior Manager. Back issues at: www.RWHC.com.

This is my last leadership commentary as I come to what I've been calling my "graduation" instead of



retirement the end of this month. After a 44-year career that was more than I could have hoped for, it seems like a good time to make my closing argument for how to be a great leader.

It comes at a challenging time for me to write about leadership as the world itself feels like it is shifting. Heightened political emotions must be navigated in everyday conversations. What we expect in leader role modeling is up for grabs. Most of us are reckoning with immense uncertainty and anxiety about the future, but as my boss reminded me recently, “*Leaders don’t get to just sit out a crisis.*” Ok. So here are some parting thoughts on leading that have mattered most to me the last 4.5 decades.

1. **Decide on your phrase to be remembered for.** “*Be courageous*” was Ed Ravine’s phrase. He was my boss in the 1980s when I was struggling with a very bold, aggressive employee who was older and more experienced than me, had applied for my job but was not selected, and then was hired as my assistant. Ed listened to my struggles but let me own the follow-up actions. His advice as I left our discussions was always, “**Go be courageous.**” **What phrase can you make ring for over 30 years in someone’s head?**
2. **Care.** “*If you don’t care about people get out of management,*” says Marcus Buckingham. Another resonant chord, people can sense whether or not you actually do care about them. Do a little soul searching, and only accept a leadership title if you are truly willing to care about the growth of others. **What is your way of showing that you care?**
3. **Walk your talk.** If you *say* something is important to you, make sure it is something you are **demonstrating yourself**. There is nothing more deflating to your team than variations of, “*We all need to be sure we are here on time and ready to go when the first patient arrives,*” and then being late yourself. **Where do you have room to improve the match between your words and actions?** This doesn’t mean you have to be perfect...
4. **Own up when you screw up.** We all do, many times. People can handle the truth. Saying, “*I missed the mark, I own it, and I’m making it right,*”

brings people to your side, as long as you actually do make it right. Blaming, covering up, and image-control actions just make people not trust you. **What are you afraid of losing if you admit you were wrong and is that really at risk?**

5. **Be honest.** Seems obvious. You may be thinking you can skip this section. But do you hold back tough feedback because of discomfort? Do you say yes when you know you should say no? Do you tell the truth but so bluntly that people feel like they’ve been smacked with a ball bat over even the smallest thing, and then blame them for taking your response personally? **Where do you need work on balancing honesty with compassion?**
6. **Manage your ego.** *Confidence* comes from meeting challenges and succeeding over time, growing from mistakes, and lots of practice and experience. It is a solid thing that can be shoved hard at times but not knocked down. *Ego* is fragile. The “high” lasts only as long as the most recent success, and is threatened when others do well. One practice for keeping ego in check is to highlight the successes of others that otherwise trick your ego into thinking you are being threatened. **How could you build in a habit to look for others’ wins and support them, open doors for them, shine a light on their value?** To that end,
7. ***Keep learning.** These commentaries will continue! Corrie Searles will be taking over and she, along with all the others I’ve had the privilege to mentor, are part of my story, too. Believe in the next generation of leaders. We need their success as much as they do and it is in our interest that they do well. Own your identity as a mentor, where the definition is that learning is a two-way street, not a top-down approach. **Who are you missing that has something to teach you because you have thought of mentoring as one-way learning?**
8. **Identify your own guideposts.** This final blog would not be complete without my two favorite go-to reminders on how to conduct myself daily:
 - “*Every day do one thing you think you cannot do.*” Eleanor Roosevelt

- The Four Agreements, “*Do your best. Don’t take things personally. Be impeccable with your word. Don’t make assumptions.*”
don Miguel Ruiz.

9. Be the person that other people want to work with. We tend to think about whether or not we want to work with others but flip that on its head. It’s the little things in our everyday actions, words, body language that make the big difference. Every. Day. **What have you done today that makes other people not want to call in sick tomorrow?**

10. Manage your emotions. That doesn’t mean don’t have them. In life we get frustrated, angry, irritable. We go through grief, divorce, illness and death of our loved ones and even our coworkers. Find your “off-stage” person with whom you can take turns supporting each other at these times. A “best friend at work” is a lifesaver over the course of a career. I know this for a fact. **Who is this for you, and who can you be there for in this way?**

It’s harder than I thought it would be to write, and then to end this piece. But as I review what I’ve written, I know I’ve written most of it before in some other context. A little repetition in this case probably means I’ve said what I need to say. All except thank you for reading and inspiring me. I am humbly grateful to you, reader. Ever onward...

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