

April 2010

Volume 13, Issue 4

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Annual Tax Study Shows Wisconsin's Continued Advantages

In mid-March, the Minnesota chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP) released its 23rd annual comparative tax study for the payable 2009 tax year. NAIOP concludes that the property tax burden under which Minnesota businesses toil tops all other states in the study except one. Meanwhile, property taxes paid by business and industry in Wisconsin rank much lower than the taxes paid by Minnesota businesses. Wisconsin's taxes were found to be lower than all of Minnesota's neighboring states except for North Dakota.

The study compares property tax and other tax costs of doing business in Minnesota for a typical manufacturing business with taxes paid by a similar business in comparable, competing states. The businesses used in NAIOP's study were typical small firms with 99 employees, occupying 70,000 square feet, single tenant buildings located in several states adjacent to, or competing with, Minnesota. The buildings were selected for similarity in age to eliminate any effects of local tax incentive programs, and in size, type of construction, and land area. The tax data was obtained each year from local assessment records—adjusted only by taxes, tax rates, and valuation occurring at the local jurisdictional level.

The estimated tax burden for the Minnesota manufacturer was estimated at \$128,975 (or \$1.84 per square foot) compared to \$59,545 (\$0.85 per square foot) in Wisconsin, meaning Minnesota's tax burden was 2.16 times higher. The highest property taxes paid in the study were attributable to Illinois at \$192,390 (\$2.75 per square foot) or 3.23 times higher than in Wisconsin. South Dakota's tax burden was estimated at \$111,506 (4th highest; \$1.59 per square foot); Iowa was 6th highest at \$90,586 (\$1.29 per square foot); Wisconsin was 9th overall; and North Dakota was 11th at \$55,095 (\$0.78 per square foot).

Because property taxes are recurrent costs, they are typically evaluated in the site selection process for the expansion, relocation or consolidation of facilities. NAIOP has compared actual property tax costs on comparable buildings throughout several states since 1986, and Minnesota consistently leads most other states by a wide margin.

President Obama Signs Job Bill

On March 18th, President Barack Obama signed into a law a job creation measure passed by Congress one day earlier. "It is the first of what I hope will be a series of jobs packages that help to continue to put people back to work all across America," said president Obama.

The bill is a \$17.6 billion package intended to spur hiring nationwide by, among other things, granting employers a payroll tax "holiday" for the rest of the year for hiring new workers.

The measure grants employers an exemption for their 6.2% Social Security payroll contribution for every new employee hired through the rest of the year, as long as that employee had been out of work for at least 60 days. The federal government would reimburse the Social Security trust fund for the lost revenue. There is an additional \$1,000 corporate income tax credit for every new employee kept on for 52 weeks.

Experts are split as to whether the payroll provision will boost hiring. A spokesperson for the National Federation of Independent Business said the tax breaks will likely help companies that had planned to do some hiring because it is now cheaper for them to do so.

The bill makes it easier for businesses to write off equipment purchases by extending a tax break to small businesses that buy new equipment. The bill also authorizes the transfer of \$20 billion into federal highway and mass-transit funding programs, in hopes it will jump-start construction projects.

The bill had previously passed the Senate in February, but was modified by the House, which required a second vote in the Senate.

The House is currently considering a \$140 billion package passed by the Senate in early March that contains a series of industry-friendly tax breaks such as a credit for research and development as well as extensions of unemployment benefits and COBRA insurance subsidies through the rest of the year.

The Senate is now expected to turn its attention to legislation that would provide struggling small businesses with increased access to credit.

River Falls Offers Innovative Renewable Energy Finance Program to Residents

On March 9th, River Falls Municipal Utilities (RFMU) announced that the innovative renewable energy finance program called “Save Some Green” will be offered to its residential customers interested in installing qualified renewable energy systems and making efficiency improvements to their property. To accomplish this goal, a loan pool has been established to offer low cost financing, with annual installment payments collected through property tax bills.

River Falls is the first community to offer an innovate program such as this. This finance program was patterned from a similar program called Berkeley FIRST (Berkeley, CA). Berkeley’s program provides financing to property owners interested in installing solar photovoltaic electric systems. While Berkeley’s primary focus is on solar, “Save Some Green” is designed for improvement projects such as solar photovoltaic panel systems, solar hot water, solar thermal heating, geothermal systems, wind turbines, and major energy efficiency projects in connection with a renewable energy project.

The idea of this project was first discussed in January of 2008, as part of RFMU’s POWERful Choices! project. The “Save Some Green” program was an obvious fit for the POWERful Choices! mission, as a community-wide effort, to instill strong conservation ethics while demonstrating the effectiveness of energy efficiency, conservation and renewable resource development.

Mike Noreen, Conservation and Efficiency Coordinator for RFMU, credits the involvement of many individuals and groups with making this program implementation successful. “Our POWERful Choices! committee consists of volunteers from residents, businesses, local government, the River Falls High School, the River Falls Area Hospital, and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls community,” said Noreen. “They have all played an important role in establishing this renewable energy finance program. The idea behind the ‘Save Some Green’ program is that residents would see a decrease in their electric bill roughly equivalent to the loan payments. As the high upfront cost of a renewable energy system often deters residents from proceeding, this program seeks to eliminate these barriers to spur installations within the community.”

Funding is available to RFMU customers with property within the city limits of River Falls. The program may fund up to 100% of the cost of a qualified improvement with a minimum loan allowance of \$2,500 and up to a maximum of \$50,000 per property. Loan terms range from 5 to 20 years and are offered at a 4 percent interest rate.

“RFMU’s POWERful Choices! plans to establish River Falls as a model in the state and region by implementing community-wide sustainability initiatives, such as ‘Save Some Green,’” said Carl Gaulke, General Manager of RFMU. “We are excited to see the River Falls community work together to create a strong conservation ethic for a better energy future.”

For more information visit “Save Some Green” or contact RFMU at (715) 426-3467 or mnoreen@wppienergy.org.

Valley Cartage Celebrates 75th Anniversary With May 8th Open House

From a Team of Horses, the Company Has Grown to Six Terminals

Valley Cartage, a third generation trucking company based in Hudson, Wisconsin, will celebrate its 75th anniversary with an open house on Saturday, May 8, 2010 from 11:00 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 3011 Enloe Street in Hudson's St. Croix Business Park. A short program will begin at 1 p.m.

In 1935, Norman R. Gilbert launched Gilbert Truck Line and used a team of horses from Hudson to Trempealeau, Wisconsin, a distance of 120 miles. The fare was \$1.50. The company has remained in the family and is owned and operated by Norman's son, Jerry, and grandson, Todd.

For more than 50 years, Valley Cartage operated out of a small facility along 11th Street with a handful of trucks. Hudson grew up around the terminal.

A new chapter in the company's history was realized in 2000 with the completion of a new terminal and corporate office complex in the St. Croix Business Park. This facility was doubled in 2005 to accommodate the rapid growth of their customer base and strategic acquisitions.

Valley Cartage now operates six terminals, allowing it to become one of the fastest growing less-than-truckload (LTL) service providers in the midwest region. Valley Cartage now offers overnight service to points in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, and Illinois. Customers range from Fortune 100 companies to start-up businesses.

In addition to LTL, Valley Cartage offers truckload logistics, guaranteed service, and a freezable option.

Please join Valley Cartage and the Gilbert family on May 8th in helping them celebrate 75 years.



The Gilbert family (l to r) Todd and Heidi Gilbert with their sons Brady, Blake, and Brandon; Jerry and Sue Gilbert; and Eric and Jamie Gilbert

J&L Steel & Electrical Services Re-certified as a Women's Business Enterprise

J&L Steel & Electrical Services has received national re-certification as a Women's Business Enterprise by the Women's Business Development Center - MN, a regional certifying partner of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

J&L Steel, located in the St. Croix Business Park (Hudson, Wisc.), is a business specializing in electrical service, commercial/industrial new construction, expansions and service contract work and steel installation including structural steel, reinforcing steel, miscellaneous metals, and post tension materials.



LouAnne Reger

WBENC's certification process is designed to confirm the business is at least 51% owned, operated and controlled by a woman or women. By including women-owned businesses among their vendors, corporations, and government agencies demonstrate their commitment to fostering diversity and the continued development of their supplier/vendor diversity programs.

J&L Steel and Electrical Services has been installing structural and reinforcing steel since 1977. In 2009 services were expanded to include electrical commercial, industrial and service work. LouAnne Reger is the Chief Executive Officer of J&L. Thanks to Reger's drive and vision, J&L reports more than \$13 million in revenues, 55 employees, and the admiration of its peers in a male-dominated industry. Reger is a two-time past president and founding member of the Association of Women Contractors, and is the second woman to serve on the board of the Associated General Contractors of Minnesota. She has also served as a member of the Mankato State University Construction Management Advisory Board, the University of Minnesota Construction Management Advisory Board, and the St. Catherine's Entrepreneurial Roundtable.

To learn more about J&L Steel & Electrical Services, go to www.jlsteelin.com.

Brent Johnson Recognized by Wisconsin Law Journal as a 2010 Leader in Law

Lommen Abdo's Brent Johnson was among 23 attorneys spotlighted by the Wisconsin Law Journal as individuals who consistently give their best to their clients, to the administration of justice, and to the organizations they enrich through their outside efforts. He was selected as one of the Wisconsin Law Journal's 2010 Leaders in the Law.

In an interview with the Journal, Brent stated that he is proud to have become a "Main Street lawyer." By that, he means he finds it extremely rewarding to walk down Main Street in Hudson and to contemplate the businesses there that he represents and their growth and success over the years.



Brent Johnson

"When I started practicing 14 years ago, my clients were typically just getting started in their businesses, too," he says. "My forte is building connections between people and businesses, to benefit each other and the community at large. I play the role of counselor at law, and seek to resolve disputes creatively and efficiently, much more often these days than I ever used to..."

Brent is a Lommen Abdo shareholder, practicing in its Hudson office, in the areas of real estate, business formation and operations, the purchase and sale of businesses, construction law, land use and zoning and creditors' remedies. He is admitted to practice in both Wisconsin and Minnesota. He is actively involved in his community as vice president of the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, president of the Little Butternut Lake Association in Luck, Wisconsin, and has been a member of the Hudson Daybreak Rotary and volunteer for local organizations such as the Hudson Community Fund, YMCA and the St. Croix Scenic Coalition. He has formed and represents several 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organizations.

Read the full Wisconsin Law Journal article about Brent at <http://www.wislawjournal.com/article.cfm/2010/03/08/Brent-R-Johnson-Johnson-builds-connection-with-people-business>. Brent Johnson can be reached at brent@lommen.com, 612-336-9347.

RESCO Adds Vice President of Marketing and Sales

RESCO announced the addition of Mike Brueske as the company's vice president of marketing & sales. For the past 27 years, Brueske has worked for Reinhart FoodService, including his most current appointment as a regional sales manager. At RESCO, he will be charged with creating, implementing and overseeing the marketing programs as well as the local, regional and national sales team efforts.

"Mike brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in the food and foodservice industries which is our largest niche market for products and services that we provide," said RESCO president John Knutson. "His proven results in leading teams will help RESCO move to our next level in business."



Mike Brueske

Brueske has lived in Hudson for the past 26 years, along with his wife, Betty, their four children.

For more information on Mike Brueske, call: 715-386-7302, extension 415, or e-mail: mbrueske@rescocompany.com. For more information on RESCO, visit: www.rescocompany.com.

U.S. Travel Promotion Act Signed

On March 4th, President Barack Obama signed the Travel Promotion Act to create the nation's first travel promotion program. The Act creates a nonprofit corporation that will promote the U.S. as a travel destination. It will be partially funded by a \$10 fee charged to visitors from countries included in the Visa Waiver Program plus matching funds from private sector contributions.

According to CNN, national tourism organizations in countries like Greece, Australia, and Mexico each spent more than \$100 million on tourism marketing in 2005. The U.S. spent about \$6 million. Attracting foreign tourists to the U.S. has fallen in recent years. The U.S. welcomed 633,000 fewer visitors in 2008 than it did in 2000, according to estimates from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Oxford Economics estimates a well-executed promotional program could attract 1.6 million new visitors each year and generate \$4 billion in new visitor spending.

Annual Report Filed on River Crossing Project

The “Annual Project Summary Report” for the St. Croix River Crossing Project, covering the period from March 1, 2009 thru February 28, 2010 has been completed and is available on the project’s website at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/stcroix/status.html> or at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/stcroix/documents.html>.

This summary report is developed in accordance with the Amended Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), the Riverway Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the 2006 Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) and the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) Record of Decision (ROD).

This summary report describes the actions taken by FHWA, Mn/DOT, WisDOT and other agencies during the prior year to implement the project and the mitigation commitments. It was distributed to the signatories of the MOA and MOU’s, members of the 2003 Stakeholder Group, and interested parties.

Say Cheese: World Championship Cheese Contest Shatters Entry Records

Contest Attracts 2,313 Cheeses and Butters From 20 Nations

Entries in the 2010 World Championship Cheese Contest have risen a stunning 18 percent to 2,313 cheeses and butters from around the world, according to Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA), the competition’s host. The event was held on March 16-18, 2010.

The Contest, held in even-numbered years since 1958, received entries from 20 nations around the globe. An international panel of 30 cheese evaluation experts worked three days at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wisconsin, to select medalists in 80 cheese and butter classes.

In 2008, the World Championship Cheese Contest set a record with 1,957 entries. “For the first time, each continent has offered cheese to the contest. The art of cheesemaking is thriving in nations around the globe,” said John Umhoefer, the executive director of the cheese makers association. “No other competition captures the breadth and depth of international cheesemaking,” he added. Cheesemakers and buttermakers sent their entries to Wisconsin by March 10 for the competition, including makers in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United States.

Thirty states in the U.S. sent cheese or butter entries as well as the Canadian provinces Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Quebec. The number of participating U.S. states includes cheese and butters from California, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

Strong growth in the contest is reflected in several cheese categories. Bandaged cheddar entries nearly doubled in 2010 along with rinded Swiss styles, brie cheeses and spreadable cheeses. Significant increases are noted in classes for gorgonzola, ricotta, blue veined cheeses, smear-ripened cheeses, flavored cheeses, reduced fat cheeses and semi-soft goat’s milk and sheep’s milk cheeses. The new reduced sodium cheese class debuted with a respectable 10 entries and the shredded cheese evaluation, new in 2008, grew from 5 to 20 entries.

The World Championship Cheese Contest is a technical evaluation of entries, using an objective measure of cheese defects to select the products in each class that best exemplify perfection for a cheese variety. The highest scoring cheeses and butters earn a gold medal, with silver and bronze medals awarded to second and third place finishers in each class.

Winners from around the globe will travel to Madison to receive their awards during the International Cheese Technology Exposition, April 20-22, 2010. During the Expo, gold medal cheeses are auctioned to support the contest, scholarships and the WCMA Member Education Initiative. The Expo concludes April 22 with a gala awards banquet for the winning manufacturers.

Armor Healthcare LLC Receives 2009 Best of Business Award

The Small Business Commerce Association (SBCA) Recognizes Hudson Company



Bob Simmons

Armor Healthcare LLC (Hudson, Wisc.) has been selected for the 2009 Best of Business Award in the School Infection Prevention category by the Small Business Commerce Association (SBCA). SBCA announced the selection on March 23rd.

The SBCA 2009 Award Program recognizes the top 5% of small businesses throughout the country. Using statistical research and consumer feedback, the SBCA identifies companies that it believes have demonstrated what makes small businesses a vital part of the American economy. The selection committee chose the award winners from nominees based off statistical research and also information taken from monthly surveys administered by the SBCA, a review of consumer rankings, and other consumer reports. Award winners are a valuable asset to their community and exemplify what makes small businesses great.

“We are extremely pleased and proud to except this award,” said Armor Healthcare’s CEO Bob Simmons. “It is a reflection of the hard work of our employees and a direct reflection that schools are now taking proactive steps to protect the overall health of children in the K-12 school systems. H1N1, Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and other invasive germs and bacteria are an ever-growing concern to the school staff and parents. The Armor Healthcare Classroom Caddy™ is the only all-in-one system to combat this increasing problem in schools”, he added.

The Classroom Caddy™ was designed to be the most effective infection control tool with the smallest possible footprint on the school. The Classroom Caddy and all of the products are 100 percent recyclable and non-toxic to children and the environment.

Simmons pointed out the opportunity cost of saving teachers’ and students’ time from missing school days is extraordinary. For example, if a teacher in each classroom reduces sick days by only two days a year, the Classroom Caddy™ system pays for itself. There are several other factors that support this as a tool that has a direct return on investment (ROI) and will save schools and districts money on an annual basis. The data is so compelling the decision to install the Classroom Caddy™ becomes a “no brainer”.

Armor Healthcare, LLC is an education infection control company that was born out of sheer need in September of 2007. With combined 40 plus years of experience in the healthcare industry, Armor was able to see what has been missing in the education market and resolved to create a venue to fill the void.

To learn more about the company, visit <http://www.armorhealthcare.com> or contact Armor Healthcare directly at (888) 339-2766.

SBA Lending Programs Extended

On March 2nd, President Barack Obama signed legislation that extended the Small Business Administration’s (SBA’s) ability to provide small business loans through March 28. These loans are enhanced with special provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) including a higher guarantee of SBA-backed loans and a waiver of loan fees normally paid by borrowers.

The SBA estimates the additional funding will support about \$1.8 billion in small business lending.

New approvals of eligible loans with the higher guarantee and reduced fees were expected to resume on March 10th.

“These key loan programs have been successful in helping jump-start the economic recovery for America’s small businesses,” said SBA Administrator Karen Mills. “The increased guarantee and reduced fees on SBA loans helped put almost \$22 billion into the hands of small business owners and brought more than 1,100 lenders back to SBA loan programs.”

As part of the Recovery Act, the SBA received \$730 million, which included \$375 million to increase the SBA guarantee on 7(a) loans to 90 percent and to waive borrower fees on most 7(a) and 504 loans. The funds for these programs were exhausted in late November and an additional \$125 million was provided in December. Those funds were exhausted in late February.

The Latest extension authorizes the higher guarantee levels through March 28, 2010 for 7(a) loans. The fee relief is available until the additional funding is exhausted at the end of the fiscal year on September 30th—whichever comes first.

The extension does not affect other SBA Recovery Act programs, including the America’s Recovery Capital (ARC) loan programs or the agency’s microloans. Recovery Act funding still remains available for both of these programs.

For additional information, go to www.sba.gov.

St. Croix County’s Unemployment Rate Rises in January

On March 17th, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) released the January unemployment rates for Wisconsin’s 72 counties. St. Croix’s rate was estimated at 8.2%. It is up from the December rate of 7.3% and November’s rate of 7.0%. A year ago, the county’s unemployment rate was estimated at 7.5%.

Fourteen counties had unemployment rates lower than St. Croix in January.

Dane County recorded the lowest rate at 6.8%, followed by the La Crosse metro area with 8.0%. Rusk County had the highest rate in January at 13.6% and Iron County was at 13.8%.

The adjusted unemployment rate for Wisconsin in January was estimated at 9.6% which is higher than the January rate of 8.7% and the November rate of 8.2%. The state’s rate was 7.7% one year ago.

The U.S. unemployment rate was estimated at 10.6% which is up from the December and November rate of 10.0% the November rate. One year ago the U.S. rate was estimated at 8.5%.

<i>County</i>	<i>January 2010 Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Rate One Year Ago</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>January 2010 Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Rate One Year Ago</i>
Barron	10.6%	37	9.7%	Pepin	9.3%	53	9.0%
Chippewa	10.0%	43	9.3%	Pierce	7.7%	69	7.1%
Clark	12.3%	15	10.1%	Polk	11.5%	25	10.5%
Dunn	8.3%	62	7.3%	Rusk	14.2%	1	12.3%
Eau Claire	7.6%	71	6.3%	St. Croix	8.2%	63	7.5%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development; St. Croix Economic Development Corp.

Note: The 10 counties of western, west central, & northwest Wisconsin comprise Momentum West, a regional economic development & marketing organization

St. Croix County Recycling Event: May 15th Clean Sweep

CLEAN SWEEP Hazardous Waste Collection: May 15th from 9a.m. to 1 p.m.

at County Highway Shop just east of Hudson at 666 E Hwy 12

Households and farms with up to 500 pounds of waste are fee exempt. Small businesses (defined as those generating no more than 200 pounds of waste per month) may participate but will be charged. Clean Sweep events are only open to St Croix County residents. A photo ID will be required to participate.

Farms and businesses must pre-register by May 12th by calling (715) 386-4675.

[*Click here for a Business and Farm Pre-Registration Form*](#)