

St. Croix's Handprint Scores Well

Consultant Says Attracting; Keeping Young Talent is Driven by Area's Amenities

An area's success with recruiting and retaining young professional talent rests largely on the right combination of amenities and diversity that interests 20 to 40 year-old workers, according to Rebecca Ryan, a Madison, Wisconsin-based consultant and founder of Next Generation Consulting (NGC).

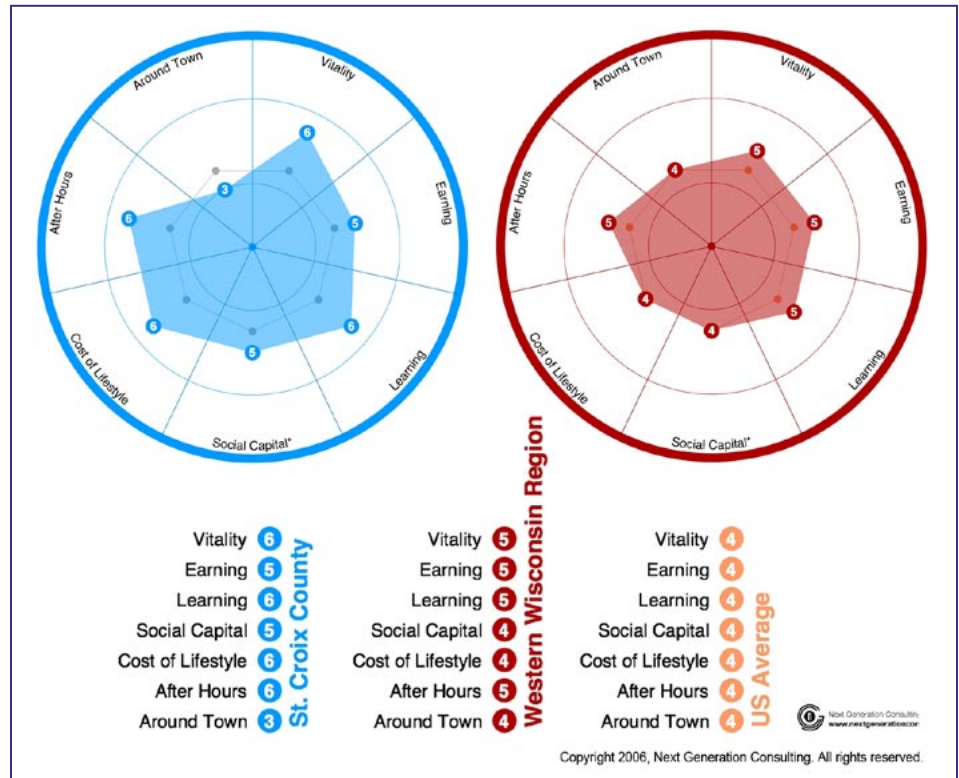
Ryan presented her findings to about 300 attendees of the 2-day economic summit known as Synergy 2006 at UW-Stout (Menomonie, Wisc.) on September 20-21, 2006.

NGC has surveyed over 10,000 young professionals to track their career and community migration trends. A byproduct of this analysis was NGC's release of a list of "Cool Communities" in 2001-2002. A cool community had the right combination of amenities and diversity – factors that are far different from what the Baby Boomers and the Greatest Generation (World War II veterans) looked for. Communities or regions with diverse amenities are successful at attracting a young, talented workforce.

Based on census information from 1990 to 2000, Ryan says that 90 percent of American cities lost young, educated talent.

To determine how cities lost or gained talented workers, Ryan and NGC created over 40 variables that are important to workers born between 1961 and 1981. The variables were distributed over seven indexes (1) vitality, (2) earning, (3) learning, (4) social capital, (5) cost of lifestyle, (6) after hours, and (7) around town. Scores from the variables can be plotted on a spider graph to create a handprint for cities, or counties and the west central region, in the case of the Synergy conference.

St. Croix County had scores of 6 on vitality, learning, cost of lifestyle and after hours, followed by 5s on earning and social capital and a 3 on around town. With the exception of the score on around town index, St. Croix's scores were higher, or equal to, the overall scores of the west central region and the U.S. average.



Vitality: The vitality index measures a community's commitment to the natural environment (air and water quality, number of parks, recreation areas, miles of trails, etc.) plus number of farmer's markets personal health, and life expectancy.

Earning: The earning index looks for the breadth and depth of occupational choices. Young workers are unlikely to work for only one company throughout their career, so they will look for a rich pool of options. They will also look at opportunities to work for start-up companies. Patents and accessing SBA loans are also examined.

Learning: The learning index looks at the number of educational and access points within the community. Young workers pride themselves on life-long learning – formally and informally. The number of wi-fi and wi-max networks are counted since young people go online for continuing their education.

Social Capital: Young workers usually prefer to look for areas that mirror what they value, including the diversity of thought,

culture and food. They prefer to live and work in communities that value diversity and inclusion.

Cost of Lifestyle: The cost of lifestyle index uses the "Cost of Living Index" from the Council for Community and Economic Research (ACCRA) and compares it to average salaries in the region.

After Hours: The after hours index tallies all the "cool stuff" young workers could do after work. Alternative newspapers, traditional newspapers, and online event listings are examined.

Around Town: The around town index helps measure the mobility options for young workers. Community scores for mass transit use, and multi-modal, in-city transportation options, direct air service to major cities, and commute times are examined.

The west central region of Wisconsin is comprised of St. Croix, Polk, Pierce, Pepin, Dunn, Chippewa, Eau Claire, Barron and Clark Counties.