

Regional Health Cooperative Discussed

On April 18, over 100 people attended a 2-hour workshop on regional health cooperatives hosted by State Senator Sheila Harsdorf and St. Croix Economic Development Corporation (EDC). Bill Oemichen, president and CEO of the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives, was the guest speaker. Oemichen and the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives oversaw the launch of a statewide health co-op for farmers and agri-businesses that recently marked its one-year anniversary.



(l -r): William Rubin, executive director, St. Croix EDC, State Senator Sheila Harsdorf, and Bill Oemichen, president and CEO of the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives

“Health care coverage for workers and their families is a top issues for small businesses and the employees,” said Sen. Harsdorf. “Cooperatives are an innovative reform measure at the state level that may be able to help those struggling with costs and access.”

In 2005, the State of Wisconsin expanded legislation, authored by Sen. Harsdorf, which enabled the creation of health care cooperative. A health co-op empowers small businesses and individuals, including the self-employed, farmers and early retirees, to band together to purchase healthcare as a group, leading to better coverage, lower deductibles, and potentially lower premiums.

Individuals that join a health co-op have a voice in the health care decisions made by the cooperative.

Several regional business cooperatives currently operate in Wisconsin. Nearly 3 million people in Wisconsin are members of one kind of co-op or another, including rural electric cooperatives and farmer’s co-ops.

“Expanding health cooperatives for small businesses and the self-employed to the St. Croix Valley region is worth exploring,” said William Rubin of St. Croix EDC. “The informational session enabled the public to learn more about the benefits of a cooperative, what it would take to establish one, and how it would operate.”

Rubin indicated that a small group will meet in the near future to discuss the next steps toward the formation of a cooperative in the St. Croix Valley.