

May 14, 2013

REPORT NO. 2013-14

**REPORT BY THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ON THE STATE OF THE COUNTY**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board of Supervisors, distinguished guests, and residents of Racine County; I am honored to be here tonight to present my third State of the County Address, and I am proud to report that Racine County is in excellent shape.

I have often said that it is my mission to provide our residents with the services they want and need, but at a price they can afford. This mission remains my daily focus. Working together, members of the County Board, constitutional officers, cabinet members, and all of the talented, hard working employees of Racine County are helping to carry out this mission every day.

I use the term "teamwork" frequently. Teamwork is a winning attitude in the sports arena, and I believe teamwork is just as important to manage an organization effectively and to accomplish its goals. Working together is essential between all branches of county government, local municipalities, state and federal government and public and private sectors. The combination of creative approaches and teamwork has produced positive results for Racine County this year.

I am pleased to report that Racine County is in good financial condition. Moody's has given us an "Aa1" rating. Although our 2012 audit is not finalized, we anticipate a surplus again this year, we have held the line on taxes, and we have had no increase in the general countywide levy. This has been accomplished through good management, fiscal responsibility, creative approaches and collaborative partnerships.

Our Finance Director, Dan Eastman, and his staff continue to do a great job – and it has been recognized once again. For the 4th consecutive year, Racine County's Finance Department was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. The people of Racine County should be happy to know that their tax dollars are managed by professionals who perform at the highest standards.

Not long ago, the County reached a settlement with members of our Deputies Association who agreed to begin contributing toward their retirement. The negotiations were not always pleasant, but I never once questioned the dedication and professionalism of our law enforcement officers. I thank the Sheriff, his Command Staff, and the Deputies for their continued high level of service to the citizens of Racine County.

Collaboration is essential in economic development, and economic growth affects more than one municipality or county. More than ever before, economic development is regional and competition for new business is national - and international.

The nation's economy is improving slowly, but unfortunately, Racine County's unemployment rates remain higher than I would like. Racine County's March unemployment rate was 9.8 percent this year, slightly higher than the two previous years but much lower than March 2010. The City of Racine's unemployment rate remains a challenge, and a cooperative effort will be required to address this issue.

We know part of the problem is the "skills gap", and the Workforce Development Center consistently presents creative ideas to address the needs of area employers and provide training for area workers. A new version of the already successful Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Boot Camps for adults is a Youth CNC Boot Camp. The program will allow high school students to look at manufacturing in a different way and train them to find high quality, good paying jobs.

As the County Executive, I believe it is my job to personally promote Racine County; to support existing employers, and to encourage new businesses to locate here. Our partners in the Workforce Development Center – Gateway Technical College, RAMAC and RCEDC, continue their efforts to boost two critical components of a strong economy – growing businesses and training workers.

Business development efforts in 2012 were very promising. RCEDC assisted 24 companies to locate or remain in Racine County; creating new jobs and retaining existing ones. Almost 800 new jobs are expected to be created and 116 jobs will be retained because of RCEDC's efforts.

Recently, United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) announced that it had chosen Sturtevant as the site to construct an estimated \$32 million distribution center. UNFI's decision to build in Racine County is an example of the collaborative approach needed for economic development success in these competitive times. RCEDC's recruitment of UNFI emphasized partnership - between RCEDC, local government, workforce development agencies, We Energies, and others. Groundbreaking took place last week. This 425,000 square foot building at Highways 11 and H is expected to create at least 224 jobs.

Quality of Life is an important factor in economic development, and Racine County has much to offer residents. We have wonderful parks throughout the county, two great county-owned golf courses, and last year we began operating the 921-slip Reefpoint Marina. We need to preserve this resource and to grow the marina business, but we recognize the tremendous amount of time and resources required to operate Reefpoint Marina.

The marina had a positive cash flow last year, and with money generated, we have contracted with the firm of Siegal Gallagher to market and assist in managing this valuable asset. The ice has finally melted, the marina office is now open for the boating season, 363 boat slips are leased, and the new restaurant, Reefpoint Brew House, is expected to open later this month.

Continuing to improve Racine County's quality of life and expand our economic base is only one part of our plan. Controlling our costs, and dealing with the ever-shrinking shared

revenue and decreasing amount of State and Federal aids have become a constant challenge.

In Wisconsin, County Government is mandated to provide a wide array of services, including human services to children and families, the elderly and the disabled. The Human Services Department (HSD) accounts for the largest single component in the county's budget. Human Services Director Jonathan Delagrave and his staff are continually working to reduce costs, streamline operations, and look at resourceful approaches.

Last year, the State of Wisconsin formed consortiums to provide Income Maintenance (IM) services. The Wisconsin Kenosha Racine Partnership (WKRP) has been recognized for fast processing times, low error rate, and call center answering speed in determining enrollment and case management for Medicaid, FoodShare, Badgercare and SeniorCare. Racine County was recognized as a top performer in the Mid-West Region for FoodShare payment accuracy and low error rate for the past 6 years. Our county is number one in the state for increased enrollment in energy assistance grants, and we were awarded one of only three federal grants in the nation to complement the existing program.

Racine County has made it clear that we will not tolerate fraud in our programs. Last year this County Board established a fraud ordinance that results in a citation for individuals found guilty of public assistance fraud. To date, 41 citations have been issued totaling \$20,000 in citation revenue. Just as impressive, in 2012, we recovered \$347, 409 in fraudulent benefits and \$80,281 so far in 2013.

In the Adult Services Division, our Behavioral Health Clinic opened at the Racine County Dennis Kornwolf Service Center (RCDKSC). The new clinic allowed us to expand the services we can offer, and we have enrolled over 150 people since the clinic opened on December 17, 2012. There is work to be done as we look for additional prescribers, but this is a good start. The clinic will serve more individuals and offer a wider array of services. It also opens up additional revenue streams for the county to offset levy costs in the Adult Services Division.

The SAIL Program (**S**tabilization, **A**ssessment, **I**nformation, and **L**inkage) provides 24-hour assistance to Racine County residents who experience a psychiatric crisis. SAIL has seen increased success since it moved to the RCDKSC. The average daily population has been at or near the maximum number of individuals we are allowed within the program. This not only saves the County money, but it reduces the potential admissions to state mental health facilities and the number of people who would otherwise visit the local emergency room.

Racine County's ACE Program has expanded to include out-of-county juveniles. A juvenile from Walworth graduated from ACE last week. We currently have 4 ACE juveniles from Kenosha in our detention facility, and we expect more from Kenosha in the future. This is important because every out-of-county juvenile placed in the ACE program offsets half the cost for a juvenile to be placed in state corrections.

To combat a severe shortage of Foster Care Families, HSD launched an aggressive recruitment campaign. The positive publicity has resulted in getting 25 applicants, with 17

of them qualifying as Foster Parents. Additional events, outreach and activities are planned to recognize foster families and encourage more individuals to consider becoming a foster parent.

Ridgewood Care Center also had a very good year, and was judged to be “deficiency-free”. Improvements to the dining room and atrium, excellent care and creative programming, make Ridgewood a facility Racine County can be proud of.

We continue to look for opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation and shared services wherever possible. Our Information Systems (IS) Department has successfully provided technical support for the Town of Burlington and Town of Norway for several years. Beginning in April 2013, Racine County entered into a contract with the Village of Caledonia to provide IS technical support for them. These agreements with other municipalities are a “win-win” situation for all.

Last year I announced a partnership with the City of Burlington to deliver services previously provided by our County Clerk, Treasurer, and Register of Deeds in the Western Racine County Service Center. This partnership has proven to be very successful, and we thank the City of Burlington and the staff for continuing their fine work at City Hall on behalf of the County.

To increase efficiency, I accelerated the LEAN Government initiatives in Racine County. The LEAN approach has picked up speed thanks to the leadership of our LEAN Steering Committee. We are beginning to incorporate lean thinking into the way we approach our daily business. By relying on the experience of our employees, our processes become more efficient, and we can create real change.

I want to recognize our LEAN Government “stars” at Ridgewood. They have completed 5 LEAN projects, including a reorganization of their Central Supply and Unit Supply Rooms, innovations in their laundry process, and improvements to resident transportation needs. Ridgewood staff created a sense of teamwork, produced considerable efficiencies, and improved services to the residents.

I remain convinced that further implementation of LEAN Government will improve our efficiency, promote innovation, and provide better service to all county residents.

I believe government should be proactive – not reactive. Here are a few examples: In late January, a huge fire broke out at the Echo Lake Foods plant in Burlington. The fire destroyed over a third of the 70,000 square foot facility; over 80 fire departments responded.

The fire did an estimated \$40 million in damage, and about 300 workers were displaced. One week later, Racine County organized an informational briefing in partnership with the State Department of Workforce Development, for the Echo Lake Foods workers facing job loss. We provided information on transition services ranging from unemployment compensation, job search assistance, financial management and local community resources; and we had bi-lingual staff available to assist Spanish speaking workers.

To make this briefing accessible to the displaced workers, we brought these services to them - at the Veterans Terrace in Burlington. Not only did the County provide information quickly, but on February 13th, we followed up by sponsoring a large job fair at Veterans Terrace, which was open to Echo Lake Foods employees as well as other interested job seekers.

Last month, when it seemed as though the rain was not going to end, and there was potential for flooding in several parts of the County, I quickly declared a State of Emergency. Our Office of Emergency Management and Department of Public Works and Development Services hosted a flood meeting for local municipalities. This allowed us to share information, evaluate the current situation throughout the County, determine the needs of the cities, villages, and towns, and explain how the County could assist.

This is what we can do when we work together, when we are resourceful, when we communicate and act decisively – and Racine County is doing this well.

Overall, Racine County is in excellent shape. We have challenges, but I am confident that with dedication, we will continue to meet the needs of the people of Racine County. I look forward to working with each of you to make sure Racine County is a place people choose to live, work, and play.

Thank you for your attention and your dedicated service to Racine County.

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