

## WHY INVEST IN THE VCEDC

Our vision is to create a successful public-private partnership that stimulates sustainable economic growth throughout Vilas County.

We provide innovative leadership and regional infrastructure to:

- Improve the economic well-being of businesses, communities and residents
- Promote the creation and retention of viable businesses and quality jobs
- Provide increased opportunities for education to strengthening workforce development.

## 2016-2017 Strategic Initiatives

### 1 Connect Information and Knowledge Within the Business Community

- Identify and build relationships with existing businesses.
- Research trends and issues of major industry types.
- Develop a business survey for face-to-face visit with businesses.
- Plan for Round Table forums to address critical business topics.

### 2 Link Entrepreneurs with Needed Skills and Resources

- Partner with Nicolet College to expand NET programs in Vilas, Forest and Oneida counties.
- Survey NET graduates since 2013 to improve services to them as they grow their businesses.
- Design recruitment strategies to ensure a continuing wait list for the NET program.
- Involve NET graduates in VCEDC events and the Annual Meeting.

### 3 Provide Technical Assistance Planning to Vilas County Town Boards

- Develop a Tool Kit of resources to assist with issues of development and planning.
- Hold a Town Forum and survey attendees for information on critical economic development topics.
- Create an Outreach Plan for visits to all Townships and the City of Eagle River.

### 4 Drive Organizational Financial and Operational Sustainability

- Benchmark VCEDC for organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
- Prepare and present a Gap Analysis comparing VCEDC to selected comparable EDOs.
- Develop financial projections for three to five years into the future.
- Develop a comprehensive funding strategy to create ongoing sustainability.



# 2016 Annual Report

[www.VilasCountyEDC.org](http://www.VilasCountyEDC.org)

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Eagle River, WI 54521  
715-337-0061

### *To Our Investors and Friends,*

Vilas County Economic Development Corporation thanks you, our investors and friends, for your support during 2016. All we have accomplished we share with leaders in the communities we serve, the businesses we learn from and assist, the organizations we collaborate with, as well as our active board of directors. We are energized to be a part of the larger economic development activity in Vilas County.

We strongly believe that through our combined efforts we can continue to build the economic environment that helps businesses create jobs to grow our local economy.

In the following pages you will read about our successes of 2016, and what we are planning for 2017 and beyond.

We held an event in June for Town Board Supervisors in Vilas County to discuss workforce challenges, affordable housing and broadband infrastructure developments.

Read our monthly newsletter to learn about additional discussion events in Fall 2017.

*Carl Ruedebusch, Chairman*

*Bob Egan, Executive Director*

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Vilas County Broadband

Increasing broadband use in the Northwoods is a long-term problem considering the number of lakes, trees, and the lack of density in housing throughout the region. There is no one simple solution and many solutions are necessary. However, in spite of this, VCEDC has had significant involvement and success in broadband expansion in Vilas County since its inception in 2010 – primarily through helping local telecommunications companies apply for state grants.

#### Fast Facts:

- \$600,000 - the total amount awarded by the State to Vilas County telecommunication businesses since 2014. The grants helped leverage over \$1.1 million in total project costs.
- Specific grants have been awarded to CenturyLink, Choice TEL and SonicNet.
- \$249,000 - Amount Choice TEL received for Land O' Lakes (Phase I) and will receive \$131,475 (Phase II) during 2017.

#### Into the future:

Recently the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) took action to increase funding for broadband expansion in the state. \$14 million could be available for expansion grants in the upcoming budget, 2017-2018. In addition, funding will be ongoing with a proposed additional \$2 million per year.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Incubators

#### Eye on Entrepreneurs (EOE)

We moved into the newly renovated EOE building in mid 2015. We manage and approve tenants located in the privately-owned building. This building is full, with five businesses operating successfully including StitchIt, Goose Cap Media, The Blank Canvas, ProByte Performance and Muggsy's Gallery.

#### Manitowish Waters Business Incubator (MWBI)

We remodeled the interior of the MWBI. We added two offices, new restrooms, a breakroom and a new public art gallery space. Five tenants share the beautiful space including Our Wisconsin Magazine, FYI Northwoods, The Great A&P Stores Museum, ProSera Innovations and Second Time Around. The former restaurant space was remodeled to include tenant space, a conference center, a commercial kitchen and bathrooms.



#### Hwy 70 Incubator

In early 2015, we moved our offices located in the Eagle River Cranberry Products building to the Hwy 70 Incubator. Horant's Floral found a home in the incubator after a devastating fire in 2015. The incubator had walk-in freezers that were converted to refrigeration units. As a result, four full-time and three part-time jobs were saved.

#### Phelps Accelerator Building

Businesses operating in the Accelerator needed space due to the loss of a building in Downtown Phelps. This privately-owned building offered space to two businesses: the Phelps Chamber of Commerce and The Village Barber.



#### Incubator Information

For more information on the Hwy 70 incubator contact Bob Egan at 715-891-2099. For more information on the Manitowish Waters Incubator, the Phelps Accelerator, and the Eye on Entrepreneurs facility in Eagle River, contact Barry at 715-891-1284.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### NET - Nicolet Entrepreneur Training

NET is a 10-week program designed for new and existing business owners. It is a guide for starting and running a business – a roadmap of critical knowledge to becoming a successful business owner. Topics include:

- Analysis of specific industries and potential market competition
- Legal issues; accounting and recordkeeping systems
- Financing options and opportunities; government and insurance regulations
- Developing a business plan

Entrepreneurship is especially important in rural areas where transportation systems, resources, broadband, and a limited workforce cannot compete with larger cities in attracting large new businesses. However, with community support and a focus on creating an entrepreneurial environment, small locally-grown businesses can help a rural economy thrive.

NET, formerly known as E-Seed, is entering its fifth year as a joint partnership between Nicolet College and VCEDC. It has grown from an eight-week to a 10-week course.

To date NET has had 81 participants. Of these, 31 have started a new business or grown an existing business. Equally, others have found that becoming an entrepreneur and starting a business is not for them.

Cheryl Hull, Owner of Universal Compounds, is a 2013 graduate: "I called the VCEDC and said I need a business plan. Without the VCEDC, I would not be here."

VCEDC helped Cheryl enroll in the NET class and stood by her every step of the way.



April Leanna, owner of Starlight Centers for Inclusion, is a 2016 graduate: "I signed up for the E-Seed course offered through Nicolet. The VCEDC follows up with you after you take the course. They help you even after - and they've stuck by my side since that course." April is now a successful tenant in the Eagle River Incubator.



If you know someone who has expressed an interest in starting a business, contact Bob Egan, Executive Director, at 715-337-0061, or visit our website at [www.VilasCountyEDC.org](http://www.VilasCountyEDC.org).

## BY THE NUMBERS



### Requests for Business Assistance

VCEDC staff receives many questions and requests for assistance from individuals looking to start or expand a business. In 2016, staff received 25 requests for assistance.



### Attends Township and Other Community Meetings.

VCEDC staff attends monthly Township Board and regular Chambers of Commerce, Downtown Retail, Art, Planning and other meetings important to the communities in Vilas County. In 2016, staff attended 62 meetings to answer questions and provide support.



### Nicolet Entrepreneurial Training (NET) Classes

Each year, two 10-week sessions for budding entrepreneurs are held in the Spring and Fall. Staff attends these classes and helps graduates continue their journey toward business success. VCEDC and Nicolet College have provided 20 eligible participants with a \$500 scholarship from the Judy Foundation.



### FAB LAB Grants

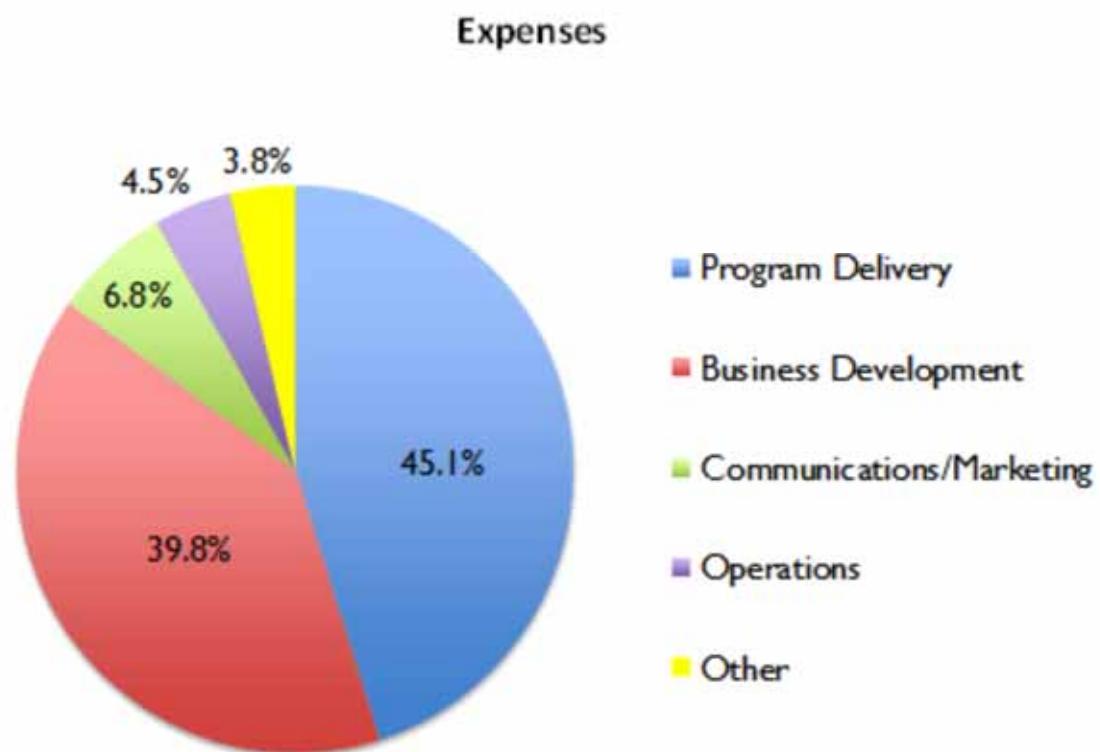
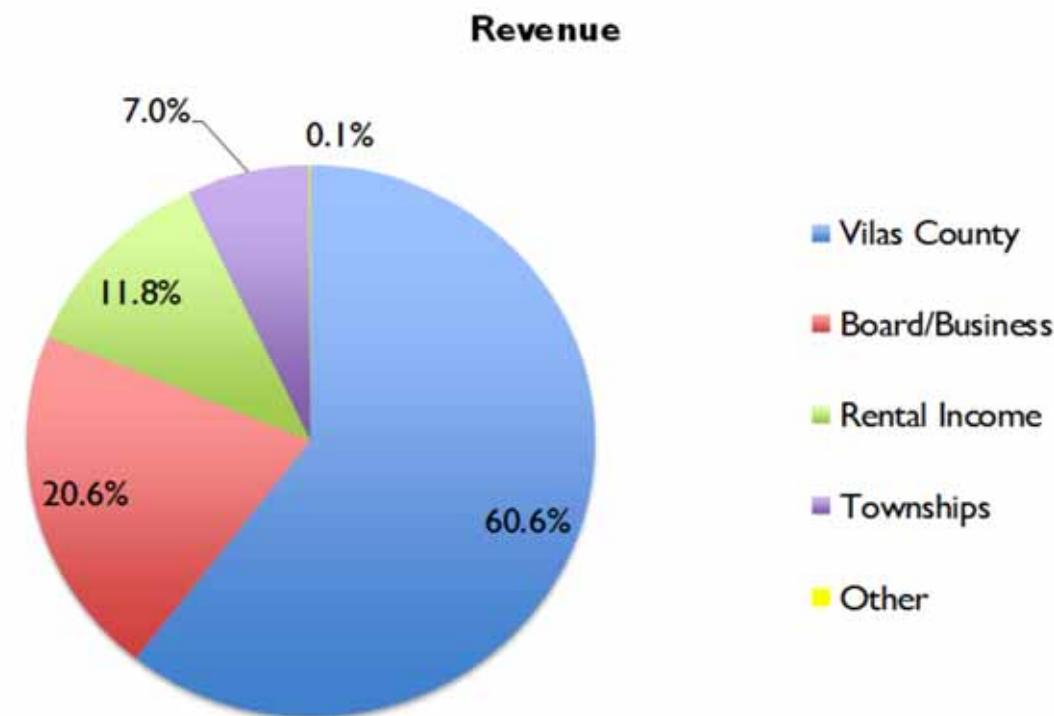
VCEDC assisted Northland Pines High School and Phelps High School to secure \$25,000 in Fab Lab Grants from the State of Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).



### Art as an Economic Development Strategy

Art events in Vilas County, attended by summer visitors, provide a large economic boost to our communities. The VCEDC supports these efforts, and helps plan monthly art exhibits at our incubators. We sponsored the 2016 NPHS K-12 exhibit at VCEDC's Eye on Entrepreneur building, and 150 students, parents and visitors attended.

## BY THE NUMBERS



These graphs were developed based on information from the VCEDC's year-end financial statements produced by Reach & Schwaiger, LTD., Certified Public Accountants. Revenue for 2016 totaled \$165,073 and expenses totaled \$162,417.

These charts detail our revenue and expense categories.

## TESTIMONIAL

I have been town chairman of Manitowish Waters for the past 16+ years. A lot of positive changes have occurred during that time. One has been the creation of the Vilas County Economic Development Corporation by the Vilas County Board.

It has been my honor and privilege to serve as a member of the board of directors of VCEDC for the past five years. The depth of talent and commitment of the board and staff is truly a great asset to the residents of Vilas County. Substantial financial investments have been made by members of the board to create business incubators in several communities in the county, one of which is in Manitowish Waters. These facilities provide affordable space for people to start businesses that eventually become a permanent part of the economy. As important is the time donated by board members to support and mentor businesses, and to promote programs implemented by VCEDC.

For every dollar invested by the county in VCEDC, I believe the return of that investment is at least six or seven dollars. In addition, I also believe the message is being delivered that Vilas County is open for business, and we welcome entrepreneurs who are looking for a great place to live and do business. Supporting VCEDC benefits everyone in Vilas County.



Photo Courtesy of the Lakeland Times

### Our Staff

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### Our Board of Directors

Carl Ruebusch, Chairman  
Dave Juday, Vice Chairman  
Denise Jantzen, Treasurer  
Nicole Justa, Secretary  
Emil Bakka  
Wally Beversdorf  
Gloria Cobb  
Lori Collins  
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Steve Doyen  
Dick Hansen

John Hanson  
Mary Cole Laub  
Laurie Oungst  
Kim Simac  
Mark Rose  
Jim Tuckwell

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G. Steven Burrill  
Richard Nelson  
Ron Skallerud  
Chris Stark