

Fox Cities

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Flowing Forward

FOX CITIES COMMUNITIES FOCUS ON THEIR DOWNTOWNS

Sports and business drive local tourism

Five reasons this region is the place to build a career

Chamber celebrates 150 years of advocacy

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Fox Cities

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livability.com/find-your-next-place



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You've got your sights set on a new place to live! But here's why you should take that city for a spin first before making the final decision to pack up and move there.
livability.com/test-drive-city



Make Your Move

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New City! Now What?

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PHOTOS: FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU; NEENA BRIDGE: MIKE ROEMER

WORK & PLAY

Young professionals thrive in every way in the Fox Cities





Young professionals in the Fox Cities have an abundance of opportunities for personal and professional development, while also finding time for fun with family and friends. Networking organizations like the Fox Cities Chamber's PULSE Young Professionals, along with a range of other opportunities, provide plenty of incentives for people to build a life and career in the area. Here are two professionals who came to the

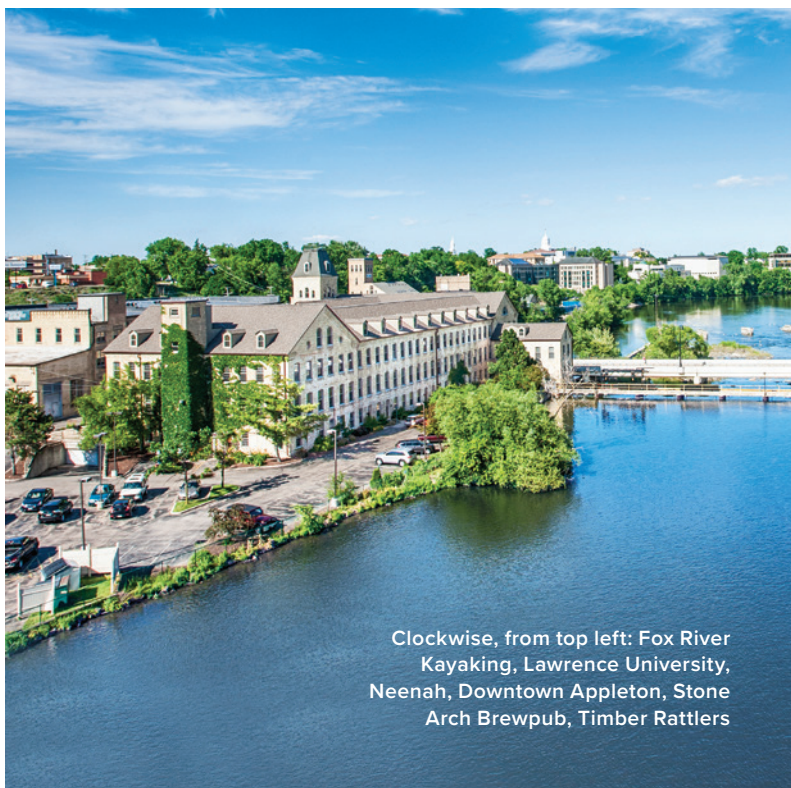
Fox Cities at different times in their lives and found compelling reasons to stay.

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Kayla Fischer works as the community outreach lead for Scheels, a sporting goods chain that has a store at the Fox River Mall in Appleton. Fischer grew up in the Fox Cities, having moved to the area in second grade. She attended the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

for college and considered moving to Milwaukee or Texas before deciding to settle in the Fox Cities.

"Growing up, I always had those big city dreams," Fischer says. "Appleton and the Fox Cities have that big city heart, where you have everything so close to you. It also has that more local heart and core to it. You can leave your door unlocked, and people are just more friendly. You can drive 2 miles, and it's not going to take you 30 minutes."



Clockwise, from top left: Fox River Kayaking, Lawrence University, Neenah, Downtown Appleton, Stone Arch Brewpub, Timber Rattlers



“I just fell in love with the area. It’s a great place to raise a family, develop my professional goals, and just network and grow.”

— Carissa Paul, resident

Fischer lived in the Fox Cities while commuting to school, which she says allowed her the opportunity to network in her community through internships and volunteering with local nonprofits.

Fischer credits PULSE Young Professionals as being one of the most beneficial groups she has joined. Now vice president of PULSE, she helps organize a variety of events to help connect young professionals with peers in their community.

“When you attend a PULSE event, there’s just something different that makes it so much easier to connect,” Fischer says. “When you’re meeting with people who are all around the same age as you, they’re all in relatively the same boat. ... So, it’s really great to connect in that sense with professionals who are in similar seasons of life as you.”

Aside from professional opportunities, the Fox Cities offer much in the way of entertainment. Fischer’s personal go-to has been

Yoga3, a hot yoga studio that recently reopened. For lunch or dinner, she recommends Katsu-Ya of Japan and Rye Restaurant, both in Appleton. She also points out the abundance of great local coffee shops, including Copper Rock Coffee Co. and Bedrock Coffee Roasters.

Yet, it is ultimately the community of Appleton that keeps Fischer in the area.

“The biggest reason I love it here is the people,” Fischer says.

PURSUE YOUR PASSION

Originally from Wausau, Wisconsin, Carissa Paul found her way to the Fox Cities, thanks to her husband.

“I just fell in love with the area,” Paul says. “It’s a great place to raise a family, develop my professional goals, and just network and grow.”

Paul now works as the program manager for the Fox Valley Memory Project, which offers support for people with Alzheimer’s and related dementias and their families. While she works in Menasha, Paul lives

with her husband and children in nearby Neenah, allowing her to experience the best of both worlds.

Paul also utilizes networking groups, including PULSE as well as LINC, which is affiliated with United Way. While PULSE allows her to connect with other professionals in the area, LINC provides a way for members to give back to their community.

“These are professional networking groups providing a fun way to broaden my professional connections, acquire new skills and unlock potential leadership prospects,” Paul says.

Living in Neenah, Paul frequents the downtown area, which is packed with shops and restaurants to explore during her free time.

Broken Tree Pizza and Zuppas Café have become her favorite restaurants. In the summer, Paul enjoys golf, Wisconsin Timber Rattlers baseball games and the Mile of Music festival. For families with young children, she recommends the Building For Kids Children’s Museum in Appleton, which offers hours of interactive play.

Paul counts herself fortunate that she enjoys going to work each day in a close-knit area like the Fox Cities, where her work has a direct impact on the local community.

“I love what I do,” Paul says. “I love the organization I work for, and I love the people I work with. Opportunities to be involved in the community through my young professional network groups have just brought so much joy and so much passion into what I’m doing.”

— Wesley Broome

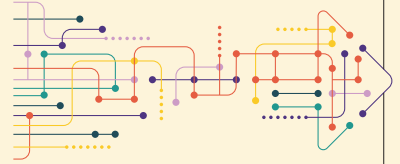


PULSE connects workers ages 20 to 40 through events such as Lunch 'n Learn.

PHOTOS: FOX CITIES CHAMBER

Make Connections

THREE WAYS TO GET PLUGGED INTO THE REGION



Anyone new to the Fox Cities will quickly take notice of its low cost of living, high-quality schools and beautiful scenery. But longtime locals will say it's the sense of community they love most about the region. For those planting roots in the Fox Cities, here are a few ways to get involved.

FOX CITIES CHAMBER

With more than 1,400 business members and 700-plus young professional members, the Fox Cities Chamber offers a plethora of opportunities to get plugged

into the community. Network with peers as well as CEOs of the area's largest companies. Learn and socialize through many programs and services. Or, volunteer to be part of the Octoberfest Committee.

PULSE YOUNG PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

The PULSE Young Professional Network is sponsored by the Fox Cities Chamber, and it provides programs that allow individuals ages 20 to 40 to connect. PULSE meets at least once a month, and

the 2024 event calendar includes both professional development and social events such as Lunch 'n Learn, CEO Breakfast, Cocktails & Conversation, Mini Golf Outing and Night at the Museum.

VOLUNTEER FOX CITIES

Volunteer Fox Cities connects individuals and businesses with a heart for their communities to volunteer projects across the Fox Cities region. To find available opportunities, reference the Volunteer Fox Cities website at volunteerfoxcities.org.

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK.COM/MATROT

GREENVILLE, WISCONSIN

Rolling Hills of Opportunity

LOCATION

Greenville is part of the Appleton MSA and is located 30 minutes south of Green Bay. Greenville is only minutes west of Interstate 41 (65,000 ADT) with State Highways 15, 76, and 96 running through it.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Air, rail, and road transportation. Public sewer and water and with fiber connectivity.

WORKFORCE

Fox Valley Technical College, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Lawrence University, and St. Norbert College all within the travel region.

LIFESTYLE

Greenville has many parks and recreation areas, close proximity to the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, minor league baseball Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, Fox River Mall, and Appleton International Airport (ATW). Greenville is a welcoming community with amenities to **Live/Work/Play**.



Greenville is committed to economic growth and has several TIF Districts. Greenville looks forward to meeting with developers to explore the opportunities available for its planned growth.

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Community Foundation

Perfect Place to Start

5 REASONS TO BUILD YOUR CAREER IN THE FOX CITIES • *By Kevin Litwin*

Along the Fox River in northeastern Wisconsin are the communities that make up the Fox Cities, a region with natural beauty and a strong economy. Here are some reasons why the Fox Cities is ideal for anyone wanting to establish their career here.

1) PICTURESQUE LIFESTYLE

Companies want their employees to enjoy a strong quality of life, and that's what the Fox Cities offer. The economy is diverse, schools are highly rated, travel is easy, health care is abundant and entertainment options are plentiful. The housing market is also affordable, with beautiful scenery

in every direction. Popular outdoor destinations include Lake Winnebago and High Cliff State Park.

2) TOUCH OF CLASS

Fox Cities has a 90% high school graduation rate, and area students have a number of higher education options. Postsecondary schools in the region include Fox Valley Technical College, which also has the Chilton Regional Center in Calumet County; Lawrence University; and the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Fox Cities Campus. All three institutions prepare students for the top regional careers of today and tomorrow. They also provide

courses to assist entrepreneurs. Fox Valley Technical offers a small business entrepreneurship degree, Lawrence University has an Innovation & Entrepreneurship program and UW-Oshkosh, Fox Cities has a Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation.

3) TUITION ASSISTANCE


An attractive part of living in the Fox Cities region is that several area companies offer tuition reimbursement so that workers can bolster their education. For example, Kimberly-Clark Corp. offers up to \$5,250 per year for employees to enhance skills in their current job,

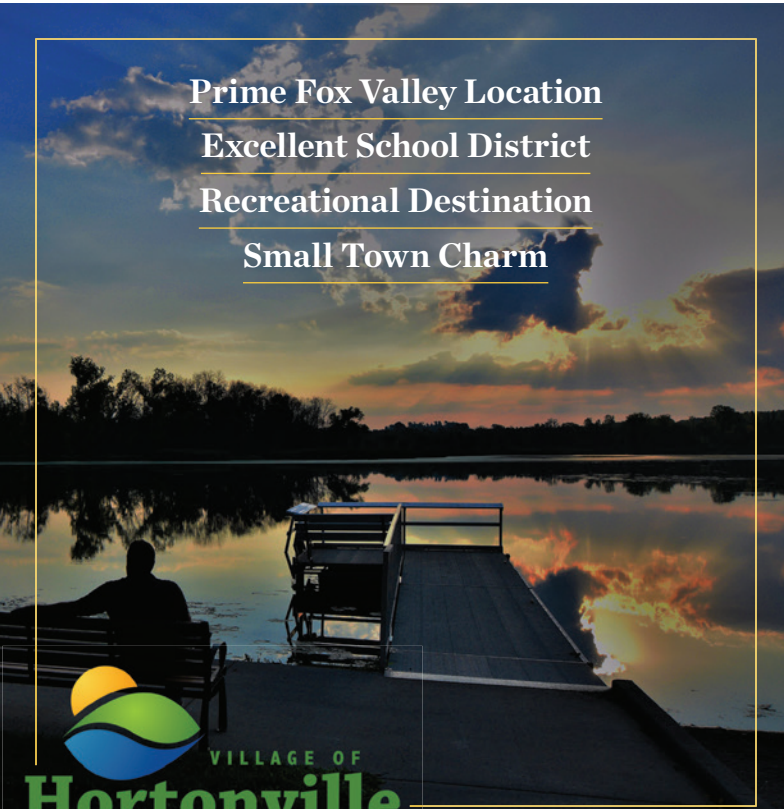
while Appvion Operations provides up to 100% tuition reimbursement for continuing education. Employees at Pierce Manufacturing can receive up to \$10,000 per year in educational assistance for completing courses toward an associate, bachelor's or master's degree.

4) EMPLOYEE-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES


Top economic sectors in the region include education, insurance, finance, food and beverage, health care, and technology. Plus, more than 20% of the employment base works in the advanced manufacturing industry. Several companies have earned designation as an Employee Friendly Workplace, meaning they have completed a certification process that proves they have a positive employer/employee relationship. The certification is administered by the Fox Cities Chamber through employee surveys, asking about their paid leaves, flexible work schedules, health and wellness support, financial support and other employee benefits.

5) HEARTFELT CARE

A high level of care is provided throughout the region by health systems like Ascension, ThedaCare, Prevea and Children's Wisconsin-Fox Valley Hospital. Ascension NE Wisconsin - St. Elizabeth Campus in Appleton has a Level III trauma center and earned an "A" in 2023 for hospital safety excellence in patient care from Leapfrog Group. ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Appleton has more than 20 doctors on staff and is open 24/7. Prevea Appleton Health Center specializes in services such as behavioral care, gastroenterology and weight loss. Children's Wisconsin-Fox Valley Hospital in Neenah is the only hospital in northeast Wisconsin dedicated exclusively to the care of children. The health care industry promises meaningful career opportunities for some residents and the assurance of quality care for the rest of the community. 



Prime Fox Valley Location
Excellent School District
Recreational Destination
Small Town Charm



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Reshaping the Landscape

FIND OUT HOW THE FOX CITIES ARE FOCUSING
ON THE FUTURE OF THE REGION'S DOWNTOWNS



PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT, MIKE ROEMER;
ZIMMERMAN ARCHITECTURAL STUDIOS, INC.;
FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

The Fox River winds from Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin's largest inland lake, through Neenah, Menasha and Appleton. While the river moves effortlessly in the right direction, the downtowns it passes through require strategic initiatives to do the same.

"In a downtown, there is always momentum, and it's either positive momentum or negative momentum," says Chris Haese, director of community development and assessment for the City of Neenah. "You're always working hard to make sure your momentum stays positive."

Communities in the Fox Cities region have dedicated significant resources to maintaining positive momentum in their downtowns in recent years. These investments in

housing, infrastructure and amenities benefit residents and businesses across the region, attracting visitors and new talent.

"All of the major cities in the region are reinvesting in the heart of their communities," says Kara Homan, director of community and economic development for the City of Appleton. "Others will see that and view this as a place that they want to live."

Activate Appleton

In 2022, the completion of Appleton's College North Neighborhood Plan served as a catalyst for more downtown development. A renovated public library and a new building housing the Trout Museum of Art and

academic spaces for Lawrence University are just the start.

The new Rise Apartments offers 48 downtown residential units, with a mix of apartments and townhomes. Phase one of Urbanel15 combines 56 apartment units with 6,600 square feet of ground-floor commercial space. A second phase is anticipated to break ground in 2024.

Another catalyst is the Fox Commons redevelopment, which reimagines a former shopping mall as a mixed-use space, including student housing and active learning for Lawrence University, health care facilities, and retail and commercial space on the first floor.

"We're really getting people to work and live downtown 24/7," Homan says. "We're creating a place to be that is going to have activity, livelihood and vitality throughout the week."

Explore Menasha

Menasha is working on public and private investments to revitalize the community's core, says Sam Schroeder, community development director for the City of Menasha.

The Banta Lofts, built in a former publishing plant, provide 34 apartments and 3,000 square feet of commercial space. Both former office buildings, Discovery Point offers 27 apartments, while Harbor Lofts adds 14 higher-end apartments with 6,000 square feet of commercial space.

The latest mixed-use complex to come onto the market is the Brin development. After a historic building burned down, the city cleared the property to allow for 43 units and 8,000 square feet of commercial space.

Clockwise, from left: The Fox River winds through Neenah; Fox Commons is a new mixed-use space in Appleton; Downtown Menasha is a great place to spend the day.



Known as “Your Place on the Water,” Menasha is also investing in off-street trail connections. These include the Gilbert Trail, Trestle Trail, Loop the Little Lake trail system and an added Water Street trail connection.



“These developments enhance the economic vitality and livability of the downtown, adding density of storefronts and additional expendable income to support new business growth,” Schroeder says. “Menasha is an underappreciated and positively changing gem that we will continue to grow.”

Celebrate Neenah

After three decades in city planning, Haese has seen many changes. But it wasn’t until the past few years that he saw new multifamily structures rise in downtown Neenah.

Solaris on Main opened in 2022 with 71 apartments. Then, the 201 West project brought 39 units that feature first-floor retail spaces and top-floor penthouses.

Another recent addition to downtown Neenah was The Plaza at Gateway Park. The outdoor ice-skating rink measures the same size as that of Rockefeller Center.

To maintain its positive momentum, the city is exploring what’s next, such as additional biking infrastructure. Since the work is never finished, it’s easy to forget to celebrate what’s been accomplished, Haese says – not just in Neenah but throughout the Fox Cities.

“There have been significant improvements made in all facets of our community, from economic growth to quality of life to environmental [impact],” he says. “All those things are moving in the right direction, and it’s an exciting time.”

—James Figy

Thinking about relocating to the Fox Cities region? Learn more online at livability.com/fox-cities.



PHOTOS, FROM TOP: FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU; MIKE ROEMER

Handcrafted From Home

An entrepreneur shares why he built his business in the Fox Cities • *By Rebecca Treon*

Tom Dunsirn is the owner of Sunset Hill Stoneware in Neenah, which is one of the largest producers of handcrafted mugs in the country. With over 40 employees, a 16,000-square-foot production facility and warehouse, and custom-engineered equipment, the company is an asset to the community.

Dunsirn was born and raised in Neenah, and thought it was the ideal place to stay and open Sunset Hill in 1998. Here's what he has to say about being an entrepreneur and calling the region home.

Why did you stay in Neenah instead of choosing a different location for your business?

My family has a lot of entrepreneurs in it, and I wanted to be my own boss. I had a friend who taught me about production pottery, and I just ran with it and kept growing. We produce custom stoneware mugs featuring brands and logos. Everything we do is made by hand and starts as a lump of clay.

One thing that made me stay in Neenah is the strong work ethic of the people in the Fox Cities. It's a great place to raise a family. The community is full of hardworking people, the cost of living is affordable and there's lots to do outdoors.

What are some of the things that you attribute to your success?

We have great employees, which helps tremendously. I couldn't do it all by myself. My father is my mentor, engineer, banker and everything else. His leadership is the biggest reason that we've stayed



in business and have grown throughout the years. We've done things from an engineering and safety standpoint that most *Fortune 500* companies would be jealous of. The way we operate our facility, the clean air standards, the safety of the equipment and the factory's cleanliness have all factored into our success, too.

What is one of your proudest accomplishments as a business owner?

We just celebrated 25 years last September, and I think making it to that mark was huge because it's not easy to run any business – let alone run a business that does everything by hand with no machines. It's a real

milestone for us. Another is the quality products that we produce that are sold in national parks across the United States, beautiful resorts and high-end museums. The customer base is diverse and intriguing. That's what makes me get up every day and keep going.

What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs?

Have a solid business plan to be able to adapt, adjust and overcome. Not every day will be the same, so you have to be able to run with it – good or bad – and do it all over again. Have a good team around you. Don't confuse effort for results. Stay at it, and don't be afraid to ask questions. 🙌

“The community is full of hardworking people, the cost of living is affordable and there's lots to do outdoors.”

Community Profile

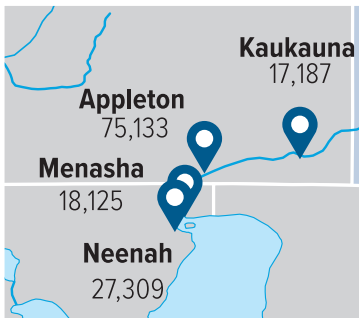
POPULATION

FOX CITIES REGION

314,540

The population is expected to grow to **325,000+** over the next five years.

POPULATION BY CITY



TOP VENUES FOR ATTENDING EVENTS

- » Community First Champion Center
- » Fox Cities Exhibition Center
- » Fox Cities Performing Arts Center
- » Neuroscience Group Field at Fox Cities Stadium

DRIVING MILES TO CITIES

(from Appleton)

Green Bay	32
Wisconsin Dells	99
Milwaukee	107
Madison	108
Chicago	195
Minneapolis-St. Paul	284
Indianapolis	382

QUALITY OF LIFE ADVANTAGES

- ✓ Small-town friendliness
- ✓ Four seasons of outdoor activity
- ✓ Premier health care
- ✓ Diverse food offerings
- ✓ Safe neighborhoods
- ✓ Affordable living
- ✓ Attractive career opportunities

Sources: Fox Cities Chamber, Census Reporter, U.S. Census, Zillow

AVERAGE HOME PRICES

(Zillow, May 2024)

\$271,948

Appleton

\$274,485

Chilton

\$279,689

Kaukauna

\$309,798

Menasha

\$282,408

Neenah

DID YOU KNOW?

The Fox Cities region has a **90% high school graduation rate.**



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150 Years of Community Building

- One of the 10 most charming ice rinks in the nation – The Plaza at Gateway Park
- Over 30 miles of off-street trails and 400 acres of parks and recreational open space
- Vibrant downtown offering retail, employment, and living opportunities
- Minutes from Appleton International Airport (ATW)
- Exceptional health care opportunities including the ThedaCare Regional Medical Center
- Located along Lake Winnebago -- largest lake entirely within Wisconsin

Learn more at www.neenahwi.gov



A Bright Future

Kaukauna's forward-thinking vision spurs growth and investment

Sure, you're captivated by the serenity and sparkle of the river, the occasional eagle cruising overhead, the quaint downtown and people who can always spare a smile. But don't be fooled by this seemingly sleepy city: there's a lot of excitement afoot in Kaukauna.

"Kaukauna's 17,187 residents are looking ahead," says Kaukauna Mayor Tony Penterman. "We're a city with a rich history and tradition – and a progressive vision. We've got a lot to offer."

Among the city's exciting plans is a 140-acre expansion of the Commerce Crossing business park, focused on light industrial and commercial use. A new hotel will further enhance the site. Through a public-private partnership, the old Eagle Mill has been rehabbed, repurposed and now houses the North American headquarters of Ahlstrom, a Finnish company, and the Kaukauna Public Library.

The revitalization of downtown was amped up with a grant from the federal government that helped bring businesses – a candy and ice cream shop, a salon, an antique shop and

a wedding cake bakery among them – to the district.

"We have several programs to help, like low-cost loans for façade renovation or downtown apartments," Penterman says. "If you want to open a restaurant, we have loans available for equipment. You can even get a loan to paint a mural on the side of your building."

In Their Nature

For up-close encounters with Mother Earth, little compares with the 1000 Islands Environmental Center, a 350-acre nature haven.

The Fox River offers an unbeatable opportunity for all kinds of water activities, and for on-land water fun, the Aquatic Center just received a \$6 million spruce-up and expansion that includes a splash pad, additional water slide and an aqua climbing wall.

The Kaukauna Farmers Market is a weekly Wednesday highlight in summer, as is the Live From Hydro Park concert series.

Also downtown, the city's Alley Activation Project will turn two



adjacent alleys and vacant lots into a community gathering spot, with landscaping, seating, and space for food trucks and live music.

"There are so many great things going on," says Andrea Fencl, marketing and communications manager. "But the most important thing about Kaukauna, I think, is our people. This is a place where people care about each other, help each other and enjoy each other. It's the kind of place that people want to live."

Learn more about the City of Kaukauna at kaukauna.gov.

Experience THE FOX CITIES

Visitors travel to the region for work, sports and leisure



Wisconsin has experienced record-breaking tourism in recent years, and the Fox Cities region is no exception. According to the Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), direct visitor spending hit \$558 million in 2022, a 20% increase over the previous year.

And while the increase can be partly attributed to pent-up demand post-COVID shutdowns, Maddie Jack, director of marketing communications for the Fox Cities CVB, points to the area's amenities

as a major tourism draw.

“We have really high-quality tourism amenities and assets in our region,” Jack says. “We also have great partners that continue to grow and thrive as well. For example, the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center brings in world-class Broadway shows every year. Our baseball team, Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (the High A affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers), just did \$10 million of renovations for fan and player experience.”

The majority of the region's tourism

comes from three markets: sports events, business and leisure travel.

SPORTS DESTINATION

“Sports tourism is absolutely crushing it,” Jack says. “They had a record-setting year in 2023 and hosted around 235 tourism-generating events. That's everything from youth sports up to professional sports.”

The World Axe and Knife Throwing League USA hosted its Pro-Am Championships at the Fox Cities Exhibition Center in downtown Appleton in November 2023.



FOX CITIES TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS

\$729M

Total economic impact

5K

Tourism industry jobs

\$141M

Tourism employee total income



Clockwise, from top: Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, Appleton International Airport

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU; WISCONSIN TIMBER RATTLETS; IMAGE STUDIOS, LLC; APPLETON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The Community First Champion Center in Grand Chute serves as the premier indoor ice and hard courts sports complex in the Midwest, hosting several events in the 164,000-square-foot facility.

“It really is quite a wide array of different sporting events that are going to be found in the Fox Cities,” Jack says.

BUSINESS CENTRAL

For business travel, Jack notes how easy it is both to get to the Fox Cities and to get around once you arrive.

The region is located right off major highways and is also home to Appleton International Airport, which services four major commercial carriers.

“We’re really easy to get to, which is great,” Jack says. “But also, it’s really walkable once you arrive. If your conference is downtown, you’re going to have so many options of places you can walk to, without having to worry about getting transportation. That’s a big attractor for attendees and planners.”

Plus, visitors enjoy the area’s affordability when it comes to parking, hotels and entertainment.

Event accommodations include the Fox Cities Exhibition Center, with 38,000+ square feet of flexible space, hotel ballrooms and smaller waterfront venues. For attendees, the area boasts 3,600+ hotel rooms.

WEEKEND GETAWAY

The affordability of the Fox Cities region also lends itself well to people who want to get away for an extended weekend.

Brillion Hospitality

AriensCo launches hospitality sector to draw visitors to their headquarters' home



As hospitality and tourism continue to rise in the Fox Cities, a major player in the area – manufacturer AriensCo – has expanded to create AriensCo Hospitality.

A family-owned business now in its fourth generation of leadership, AriensCo began in Brillion in 1933, when Henry Ariens and his three sons developed the first American-made rotary tiller.

Now, with over 1,500 employees spread across the U.S. and Europe, the company headquarters still remain in Brillion, showcasing its commitment to local roots.

AriensCo formed AriensCo Hospitality in 2020, with hopes of making Brillion a destination. Its current venues include:

Ariens Nordic Center

This four-seasons, outdoor recreation center provides event and programming opportunities for all ages and includes a robust snowmaking system, a 5K lighted trail network, and infrastructure for biathlon, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, roller skiing, inline skating, running/walking and winter fat-tire biking. The Trailhead Building provides a great space for pre- and post-activity fun, with a retail shop

and light food and beverage options on the large patio overlooking the trail network.

Round Lake Farms

Situated on the same 400 acres as Ariens Nordic Center, it is a premier venue overlooking the countryside, making it an ideal spot for events, special occasions, weddings and fun dining experiences.

Stone Prairie

The year-round outdoor event space covers 200+ acres of preserve, and has two heated open-air pavilions, three stone fireplaces, a bridal cabin and a greenhouse.

It's a one-of-a-kind venue that is perfect for outdoor weddings and company picnics.

"This is a business venture, yes, but we're growing it along with Brillion," says Steve Servais, executive vice president of administration at AriensCo. "We talk about our facilities in the context of giving people reasons to visit Brillion, and hopefully they find reasons to stay. We want to create opportunities and build amenities for the Brillion community that wouldn't be here otherwise. It is a win for both AriensCo and our town."

"We're not necessarily that weeklong spring break type destination," Jack says. "We know that, and we embrace it. For families that are looking for an extended weekend or just the ability to get away for a little bit on a quick, affordable vacation, we are certainly the place."

The mix of urban amenities and outdoor recreation provides myriad opportunities for people to mix and match their interests. "A lot of our downtown spaces and streets are steps from the river," Jack says. "You can do your dining and shopping, then go launch a kayak."

The Fox Cities offer many amenities you don't often find in similarly sized destinations.

"You can shop at the state's second-largest mall complex," Jack says. "You can hike a state park, try authentic global cuisine and see a Broadway show. All of that can happen within miles of each other and in a couple days."

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The total economic impact of Fox Cities tourism in 2022, when those numbers were last calculated, was \$729 million. This spending supported nearly 5,000 tourism industry jobs, with employee income of \$141 million.

The Fox Cities CVB has a Tourism Development Grant program that allows them to reinvest a portion of its revenue back into tourism-generating projects each year.

"The nice part about the tourism-generating projects is that they usually benefit our residents, too," Jack says. "For example, we've funded things like the Performing Arts Center, wayfinding signage and the Timber Rattlers stadium. Tourism allows us to create a better, stronger community. We can make it a place where people want to live, work and play."

– Stephanie Figg

Endless Possibilities

One resident's journey from college grad to city mayor • *By Rebecca Treon*



Jake Woodford grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin – the fourth generation of his family to live in the area – and though he was accepted to several universities in the Midwest, he ultimately decided that the local option, Lawrence University, would offer him the best opportunities.

After graduating with a degree in political science and U.S. history, Woodford went on to work for the president of Lawrence University and was elected as Appleton's mayor at the age of 29, replacing the previous mayor, who had held the position for 24 years.

Read on to learn more about why Woodford decided the Fox Cities has everything he could ask for.

What experiences prepared you to run for and be elected mayor?

One of the things I did was serve as the president of the student government at Lawrence, and that was basically a leadership lab for me, working with a deliberative body and leading a campus community. After graduation, I had opportunities

to move out of Appleton on different career paths in both the private and public sectors – finance, government and nonprofit – in the Midwest. Then, I was offered the opportunity to work for Mark Burstein, president of Lawrence University. The chance to work with a leader like Mark in a community I'm familiar with and an institution that had given me so much was an attractive prospect. My wife and I decided that we wanted to build our careers here and experience this community in a totally new phase of our lives.

What are some of the ways you were able to transition into life after college that other residents might experience post-graduation?

This is the kind of place where if people are passionate and committed, they can make a real difference no matter what phase of life or career they're in, and that's something really special about the Fox Cities that's not universal in all places. One of the things I've seen over the last several years is a greater emphasis on making sure that

opportunities are available to people of all different backgrounds. If people really care about an issue here, they can find ways to support the issue and get involved, whether that's mentoring, providing financial support or something else, and that's really special.

What would you do on your ideal Saturday?

An ideal Saturday might include doing some kind of public event, because I love my job and the community. We have four seasons, so there are different opportunities based on the season to get outdoors, whether that's going to a farmers market, sailing on Lake Winnebago or visiting a nature preserve. I'd also love a little time to recharge at a coffee shop or the library, then go to a concert or a show. 🍷📺

Champion of COMMERCE

THE FOX CITIES CHAMBER CELEBRATES 150 YEARS
OF ADVOCATING FOR BUSINESSES



It's said that when people come together, there's nothing that can't be accomplished, and the Fox Cities Chamber is proof of that. As the organization celebrates its 150th anniversary, it shows no signs of slowing down – in fact, it's mastered the art of evolution.

“When you look at the future of the organization, you first need to look at the past,” says Becky Bartoszek,

president and CEO of the Fox Cities Chamber. “We’ve proven that we’re good at pivoting, and we do this by keeping in touch with the community and their evolving needs.”

The History

Begun as the Appleton Chamber in 1874 with 21 signatures on the constitution, the chamber experienced a lull in membership but never gave up. In 1920, it welcomed 612 new

members – in a single day – and has been active ever since.

The organization was made stronger when the Neenah-Menasha Chamber joined forces with Appleton in 1976, forming the Fox Cities Chamber.

Through the years, the organization has played a role in key community developments, including the formation of the Fox Valley Regional Planning Commission, construction

of the Oneida Street bridge, opening and growth of the airport, and start of a technical and vocational school.

In 1981, the chamber's first Oktoberfest took place, a landmark event that has garnered awards and become the largest and most successful in the history of the Fox Cities Chamber.

"It was originally created by downtown merchants to give back to the community, keep downtown vibrant and support nonprofits," Bartoszek says. "Now it's in its 42nd year, drawing 300,000 to 320,000 people in two days."

Stretching a mile, the event brings together craftsmen, downtown business owners and musicians playing on five stages. Over 80 food vendors also line the street, each with a sign stating which nonprofit their sales are benefiting. Plus, beer sale revenues go into a grant program to give back to the community.

The Evolution

Over the years, the chamber has been instrumental in much community development, including the Fox Cities Exhibition Center. It created Leadership Fox Cities, a nine-month program aimed at aspiring leaders, and Smart Girls Rock, which fosters STEM awareness. And the list goes on.

In 2022, when the world was trying to bounce back from COVID, they were the first in the state and one of the first in the country to launch Connect Free Membership, a free membership model for small businesses that qualify.

"This is where we realized we could really make a difference," Bartoszek says. "When you're starting up, that's the time a small business needs their dollars the most. It just made sense."

Free webinars, monthly educational opportunities and training, consulting services, networking, insurance benefits – all of this is available to chamber members.



"Through these events, we are equipping students and young professionals with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their studies and workplaces."

Kristine Groholski, Plexus

It's no wonder that nearly 600 small businesses have signed up under the model to date, which has since been recognized at the state level as a best practice to watch, then recognized again by the folks in Washington, D.C.

The Future

A business that has been a member of the chamber for 45 years is Plexus Corp., which is headquartered in Neenah. Plexus was named Large Business of the Year by the chamber in 2023 and attributes that honor to the strength of its partnership.

"The Fox Cities Chamber has been a great partner that has tirelessly championed our success," says Kristine Groholski, senior director of brand experience at Plexus. "They have been a source of support, a forum for ideas, an enabler for

local talent, and a catalyst for us to thrive as a business, employer and member of the community."

Plexus sponsors and participates in annual Fox Cities Chamber events such as Smart Girls Rock, Future Fox Cities Career Expo and CEO Breakfast.

"Through these events, we are equipping students and young professionals with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their studies and workplaces," Groholski says.

Bartoszek says it's a joy to "lead the way" for professionals looking to connect to their community.

"We're helping to introduce them to potential employers and partners, and they are unbelievably thankful for the support."

– Rebecca Deurlein

On the MOVE

Many Fox Cities companies are linked to the transportation sector

The Fox Cities region has a strong transportation system in place, and several area companies specialize in manufacturing products that keep this industry on the move.

One such company is Utility Sales & Service Inc., or USSI, which manufactures custom-made trucks used to build and service electrical infrastructure, such as power lines and street lighting. Their product lineup includes bucket trucks, digger derricks, sign trucks, service trucks and hydraulic cranes.

Custom-Made Manufacturing

“Our customer base is largely electric utilities as well as local and state governments, contractors, telecom businesses, signage companies, and more,” says Ted Breidenbach, USSI owner and CEO.

The company’s trade area includes Wisconsin,

Michigan and Illinois. Among its customers are We Energies, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and the cities of Appleton, Menasha, Madison and Milwaukee.

In 2023, the company acquired Romeoville, Illinois-based Power Equipment Leasing, adding rental equipment sales to its business portfolio.

“For our custom-made new vehicles, we expect to increase manufacturing capacity by one-third in 2024, and we expect to double our overall production by 2026,” Breidenbach says. “We are pleased to see such strong growth in our business, and the Fox Cities region has been great for us.”

Elevating Private Aviation

Also enjoying success and growing its transportation-based presence in the region is Gulfstream Aerospace



Corp., which designs and manufactures private jet aircraft for businesses and individuals. Located at Appleton International Airport for more than 25 years, the company completed a \$40 million expansion of its Appleton Service Center in 2019, where Gulfstream employees conduct maintenance, repair and

overhaul (MRO) operations on customers’ aircraft.

The Appleton Service Center includes hangar space that can accommodate 12 Gulfstream ultra-large cabin aircraft, while an on-site showroom gives customers access to Gulfstream’s design team and portfolio. The company also has a completions



facility at the airport where Gulfstream employees outfit aircraft interiors.

Gulfstream made further news in late 2023 with the opening of a \$55 million paint hangar building at the airport, which has the capacity to paint the exteriors of up to 48 aircraft per year.

“The continued expansions are in response to the increased demand Gulfstream has been experiencing,” says Ron Aldrich, Gulfstream Appleton vice president and general manager.

“These investments have also created additional jobs at the facility, which now employs more than 1,200 – and we are still hiring.”

Building Tools That Save Lives

Fire trucks are built to live up to the demands of firefighters and the communities they serve. Pierce Manufacturing has production plants in Appleton and Neenah, Wisconsin, and Bradenton, Florida. Founded in 1913, the company makes fire trucks, including

pumpers, aerials, tankers, rescue units, electric fire trucks, and advanced technology innovations incorporated into firefighting apparatus.

“Our mantra is ‘Work That Matters’ because we manufacture the fire apparatus and equipment used by the firefighters who run into burning buildings that you and I are running out of,” says Stephen Kohler, Pierce Manufacturing’s director of human resources. “We build the tools to save lives and property.”

Kohler says the products manufactured by Pierce Manufacturing have been shipped to customers on every continent, including Antarctica. “Here in the Fox Cities, we build custom fire trucks – literally starting with a flat piece of metal and eventually constructing and fabricating the chassis, cab, body and

more,” he says. “Most of our customers are municipalities and fire departments throughout North America, but we also build trucks for oil refineries and U.S. military bases.”

Kohler adds the North American market for fire apparatus has grown about 50% from 2020 to 2022 and order activity remains strong. This growth helped lead to the company’s expansion.

“We recently completed a 90,000-square-foot expansion in Appleton and a 60,000-square-foot expansion in Neenah, and our company now has 2,600 employees in the Fox Cities,” he says. “This region is known for its skilled workforce, and we work closely with other community partners to keep a top workforce pipeline coming to Pierce Manufacturing.”

– Kevin Litwin



Pierce Manufacturing

PHOTOS: PIERCE MANUFACTURING

Just Plane Busy

AIRPORT UNDERGOES EXPANSION TO BETTER SERVE PASSENGERS

The statistics are soaring at Appleton International Airport (ATW), which set a one-year record in 2023 for handling nearly 968,000 passenger arrivals and departures, a more than 14% increase from the prior year. A new Outagamie County impact study scheduled for 2025 is expected to show that ATW now contributes more than \$1 billion annually to the Fox Cities regional economy.

With sights set on eventually serving as many as 1 million passengers a year, the airport broke ground in November 2023 on a \$66 million expansion to add 47,000 square feet to its main concourse, says Jesse Funk, Appleton International Airport's air service and business development manager. Construction should be completed by late 2025.

The last expansion at the airport took place in 2001. Funk says a key part of the current expansion will be adding four new gates with jet bridges that can accommodate larger commercial planes.

"Back in 2001, airport officials never dreamed that we would be serving the large planes of today, so most of our current



gates can't handle the loading and unloading of passengers onto these larger planes,"

Funk says. "For example, Allegiant is now flying big 186-passenger Airbus planes that can only use a couple of our current gates. The addition of the four new gates is greatly needed."

Today, commercial airlines flying at Appleton International are Allegiant, American, Delta and United, and the airport supports more than 3,000 jobs.

While the primary geographic region ATW serves stretches from Wrightstown to Waupaca and down to Fond du Lac and over to Manitowoc, the airport sees passengers from as far away as Rhinelander and Houghton, Michigan.

"This expansion is great for our future as this airport continues to get busier every year," Funk says.

PHOTO: APPLETON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



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TALENT BRIDGE

Student training programs keep a pipeline of highly skilled talent flowing

As the Fox Cities region's economic landscape continues to evolve, there is a growing need for skilled professionals in fields such as manufacturing, engineering and technology.

GPS Education Partners – an innovative educational initiative established to bridge the gap between coursework and real-world workplace experiences – helps fill this void by offering specialized programs tailored to the needs of local employers. By collaborating closely with industry partners, GPS

Education Partners also provides students with apprenticeships and industry certifications. “We have education centers – eight in Wisconsin – that serve area high school students. In the Fox Cities region, the education center is hosted at the Menasha Packaging Co. plant,” says Andrew Zimdars, GPS’ partner services manager for the Fox Cities region. “The students spend a few hours a day attending classes at the education center and the rest of the day as a paid apprentice at a partner business.

Both count toward their high school degree.”

ENGAGING TO EXCEL

Laura Derpinghaus, director of marketing and fund development for GPS Education Partners, says the program serves a demographic of students who tend to be disengaged in the traditional academic setting.

“That student could be disengaged for a number of reasons. It could be that, academically, they’re just not catching on to the way the courses are being taught. It could be that they’re doing OK in

classes, but socially, they’re not engaged. Or it could be that they’re doing well academically and socially, but they don’t see that traditional high school as putting them on a quick path to their career,” she says.

In addition to career training, Derpinghaus says, students enrolled in the program learn soft skills that help make them more employable.

“We teach them the importance of getting up on time, getting out of bed and having breakfast. We give them financial literacy

training, along with those work experiences, so they are ready for a successful lifestyle as well as career,” Derpinghaus says.

POWERING UP PARTNERSHIPS

The organization partners with several community and business leaders to sponsor students’ work-based learning experiences – a relationship that benefits both the students and businesses.

“All of our businesses are partners in providing this program. While they are using the program as a talent pipeline – a way to recruit and train up the next generation of their workforce – they also see it as a community investment.

“They’re helping train these students to be good citizens and good employees no matter where they go to work,” Zimdars says.

Menasha Packaging Co. has been hosting the education center/ apprenticeship program at its Fox Cities manufacturing facility since 2016.

“By proactively investing in future talent and training the next generation workforce, we’re providing very rewarding career opportunities right here close to home. It’s a winning situation for communities, educational institutions and businesses,” says Jennifer Twombly, the company’s senior director of supply chain optimization.



GETTING READY FOR WORK

ITU AbsorbTech is another company bolstering the workforce pipeline. Since 1930, the company has provided smart and safe products to heavy-duty industrial and manufacturing companies. Its product line includes protective floor safety mats, absorbents, towels, mops, gloves, uniforms, protective garments and first-aid cabinets.

“Our association with GPS Education Partners has been [occurring] for about 15 years within the region’s school districts,” says Doug Roskopf, vice president of operations at ITU AbsorbTech. “GPS helps many students who might work better with hands-on projects rather than in a classroom setting, and that’s perfect for what we do.”



GPS Education Partners is helping students thrive through specialized programs and apprenticeships.

The career opportunities at ITU are vast and they are opening doors to exciting opportunities for students.

“Students in the program get to see the variety of jobs that are available in our ITU facilities,” Roskopf says. “We have careers for production operators, machine maintenance technicians, route service drivers, sales reps, account executives, business development

employees and more.”

Roskopf adds that one former student is a full-time employee at the ITU plant located in Neenah, and another student is working in a part-time role at the same facility.

“ITU is a great place to work,” Roskopf says. “We are good corporate citizens – proud of our sustainability efforts and how we treat our employees.”

– Teree Caruthers



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Child Care Connection

Nonprofits help make child care and early childhood development more accessible

Access to child care is critical for workforce and economic development in the Fox Cities region. Affordable and reliable child care services enable parents to enter or remain in the workforce, contributing to increased productivity and economic growth. Like in many communities, the Fox Cities region is facing a provider shortage, which makes access to child care more difficult for working parents. Organizations, such as Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR) and First 5 Fox Valley (F5FV), however, are working to make child care more available to all families.

“Affordable child care is a major issue for every community, not just the Fox Valley, and it affects all facets of the community. It affects the workforce because people can’t work if they don’t have someone to watch their children. And that impacts the economy,” says Candy Hall, executive director of CCR. “Child care makes a big impact on quality of life because it allows parents, particularly mothers, to be able to go out and work and make a living, and that enhances their quality of life.”

Investments in child care infrastructure also create jobs and stimulate local economies by supporting the growth of small businesses. CCR works to connect families with quality child care options, supporting working families while fostering a thriving child care industry in the Fox Cities region. In addition to keeping a comprehensive database of certified providers, the organization also offers training to child care workers and certification services for parents who want to become providers themselves.

Many times, one of the quickest ways to add more child care options is to certify

people to open child care in their own homes.

“So we have a certification specialist on staff,” Hall says. “We also offer training and advice to current child care providers. They may have questions about things like staffing or room arrangements, and we can offer support and advice.”

Hall says another way CCR is combating child care provider shortages is through a substitute worker program. With help from an Outagamie County grant, the organization provides substitutes to allow workers to be able

to take time off without a disruption in care.

For its part, F5FV connects families and child care providers to early childhood development resources. For example, F5FV helps them find dental or vision checkups or mental health care, provides information about immigration and citizenship, and teaches parents about child development and screenings.

In 2023, the organization was awarded an Outagamie County grant to open a new Family Resource Center.

– Teree Caruthers



ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK.COM/SEAHORSE VECTOR

It's Personal

GREAT LOCAL SERVICES ENSURE A HAPPY AND HEALTHY COMMUNITY

The Fox Cities region is home to health care professionals – both natives and newcomers – who take a personal interest in providing the very best services to their community.

Dr. Taylor Doberstein

ThedaCare

Dr. Taylor Doberstein is a rheumatologist with ThedaCare, a leading not-for-profit health system in northeast and central Wisconsin.

“The Fox Cities is a great place to work and to raise a family,” she says. “I was born and raised in this area and had the opportunity to live in other cities and another state during my medical training. Without a doubt, I knew I wanted to come back here to work and be with family. This area offers great schools, activities for all interests, and most importantly, is safe.”

A mom to two young daughters, Doberstein is grateful for the flexibility ThedaCare provides. “Having a good work-life balance is important to me,” she says.

“I am proud to be serving my

community and those in need,” Doberstein says. “As a rheumatologist, I am treating chronic and often lifelong conditions. This allows me to establish long-term relationships with my patients. I enjoy getting to know each person, more than just treating the disease. It’s very rewarding.”

She says she enjoys educating and providing guidance on a particular disease or treatment.

“My goal is to make each person feel comfortable with treatment plans and decisions that affect them daily.”

Dr. Jonathan Gutzeit

Children's Wisconsin

Dr. Jonathan Gutzeit is associate chief medical officer and a pediatric hospitalist at Children's Wisconsin-Fox Valley Hospital. Gutzeit spent his residency training at Children's Wisconsin-Milwaukee Campus and says he was fortunate to have the opportunity to relocate to the Fox Cities afterward.

“Whether it be a sick child needing admission to the hospital or the

family of a newborn headed home for the first time, on any given shift there are many ways to positively impact a child's health,” he says.

Gutzeit says he is especially proud of the team structure that his workplace fosters.

“The care that is offered would not be possible without a robust team of individuals from various backgrounds, training and experiences,” he says. “Children's Wisconsin recognizes that no two children are identical in terms of their overall needs, so having diverse teams who can coordinate care and services is a key focus.”

The mission and vision of the health care system align with Gutzeit's professional calling.

“The vision of the organization is that the children of Wisconsin will be the healthiest in the nation. I appreciate the emphasis on turning these words into action,” he says. “Children's Wisconsin has done a lot to advance the care for children in the region. If you want to be at the forefront of advancement for children, this is a great place to work.”



“My goal is to make each person feel comfortable with treatment plans and decisions that affect them daily.”

– Dr. Taylor Doberstein, ThedaCare



Ascension Wisconsin



Children's Wisconsin



ThedaCare Regional
Medical Center Neenah



“We have everything a family could want – good schools, an affordable place to live, wonderfully kind people.”

– Dr. Nicholas Freeman, Ascension

Dr. Nicholas Freeman

Ascension

Dr. Nicholas Freeman is director of the intensive care unit and pulmonary rehabilitation at Ascension NE Wisconsin Hospital – St. Elizabeth Campus, a critical care hospital with advanced specialty care services. As a pulmonologist, he focuses on the diseases and conditions that affect the respiratory system.

Freeman, who came to this role nearly five years ago, says that as a leader at Ascension, he is able to influence how care is delivered while still directly caring for his

patients and connecting with them on a personal level.

“I am truly proud and humbled to work at Ascension Wisconsin with so many exceptional, talented and dedicated clinicians, leaders and associates who have been providing compassionate, personalized, high-quality care to our community for more than a century,” he says.

One of the best parts about his job, Freeman notes, is the people he has the privilege to work alongside.

“We’re all united by a common goal and mission – to deliver compassionate, personalized care to all, especially those most in

need,” he says. “I appreciate that Ascension has established a culture that embraces a commitment to excellence and gives me the ability to adapt quickly to challenges and implement positive solutions.”

Of life in the Fox Cities, Freeman says, “We have everything a family could want – good schools, an affordable place to live, wonderfully kind people. We are easy to get to by car or plane, and close to many lakes, great food and state-of-the-art health care. We have a ‘college town’ feel and world-class professional athletics. What more could anyone ask for?”

– Karen Vernon

PHOTO: ASCENSION WISCONSIN

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Economic Profile

WORKFORCE

177,500

total employees

Workforce expected to grow to **182,000+** over next five years

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

(by number of employees)

- ✓ Manufacturing
- ✓ Retail
- ✓ Health care
- ✓ Government
- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Accommodations and food service
- ✓ Finance
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Technology

Sources: Fox Cities Chamber, Census Reporter

FOX CITIES TOP EMPLOYERS

(by number of employees)

1000+

ThedaCare	Pierce Manufacturing
Kimberly-Clark	The Boldt Company
JJ Keller & Associates	SECURA Insurance
Plexus Corp.	

500-999

West Corporation	Faith Technologies
Miller	VF Outdoor
Essity	Network Health
GFL Environmental	Voith Paper
Nestle USA	Bergstrom Automotive
Air Wisconsin Airlines	AFRY
Expera Specialty Solutions	Ascension
Alta Resources	Rockwell Automation
U.S. Venture	Great Northern

HIGHER EDUCATION

- ✓ Fox Valley Technical College & Chilton Regional Center
- ✓ University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Fox Cities Campus
- ✓ Lawrence University

Companies That Offer Tuition Reimbursement

- » Appvion
- » Bergstrom
- » Calumet County
- » Kimberly-Clark
- » Miller
- » Oshkosh Corp.
- » Outagamie County
- » Pierce Manufacturing
- » Plexus Corp.
- » Werner Electric

EMPLOYMENT

The average salary in the region is **\$69,900**.

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Thanks for leading the way.

The Fox Cities Chamber Regional Partnership thanks its lead investors for their commitment to growing our economy and making the region a great place to do business.

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