



IOWA LAKES CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BUENA VISTA, CLAY, DICKINSON & EMMET COUNTIES

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Part two in a series of Strategic Planning articles about the Iowa Lakes Corridor Region

Region demographics and workforce

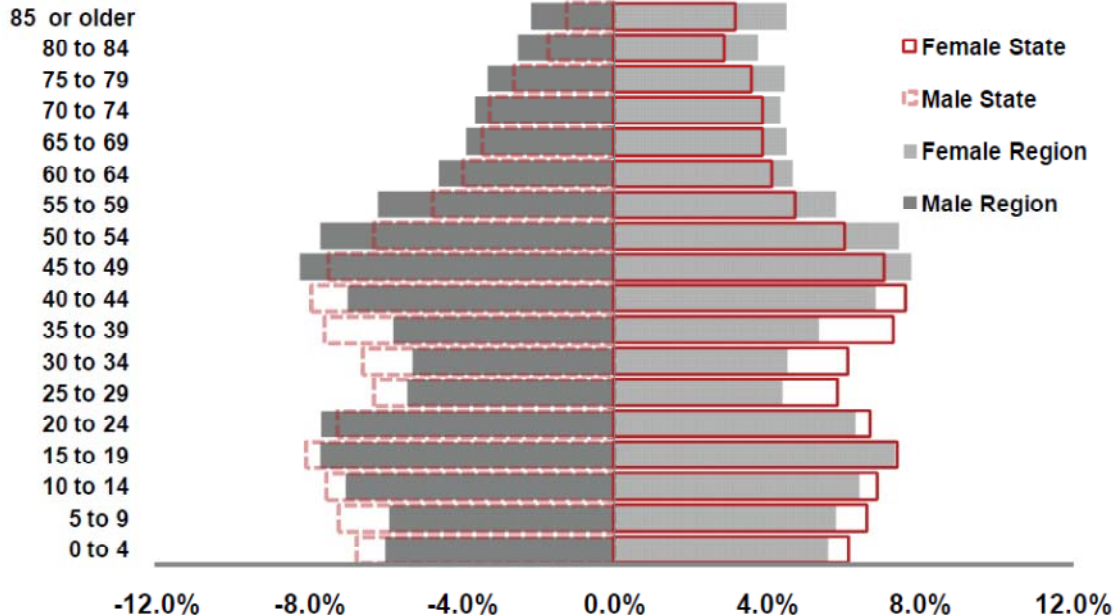
SPENCER – Part one of this series focused on the socioeconomic profile of the Corridor region. A key component of the profile that will be expanded on here is the area’s population – the size and the make-up, especially age. As was previously shared, the region’s population has been declining overall the past 20 years. While the region is growing naturally (more births than deaths), the outmigration of people from the region is greater than the in-migration and net natural growth. This has and will continue to affect the communities in many ways, and impacts existing and prospective employers if the workforce-age population cannot meet the demand.

The region has proportionately many more elderly men and women than the state of Iowa, as well as a much larger fraction of baby boom-aged people, those ages 45-64. The region has significantly lower percentages of persons from ages 25-44. This also “echoes” through, resulting in proportionately fewer children than the state average experienced. The proportion and the number of persons ages 25-39 is an important statistic for anticipating whether a region has the capacity to grow. In short, this is the prime labor force for any developing industry in any region of the United States, and a comparative deficit of persons of those ages suggests lower growth probabilities for an area. In addition, because of a comparative deficit of young adults, these regions also have a comparative deficit of children. The young adult population deficiency portends a future deficiency as its succeeding generation is also comparatively smaller.

Impacts on the communities and the region from these population characteristics include declining school enrollments, which affects the amount of funding received for area schools; fewer people paying the tax burden for public services and infrastructure; higher demand for health care services and facilities and a different housing mix required in communities. The number of workforce-age residents has not kept pace with the job growth in the region, which suggests a number of in-commuters and/or individuals working more than one job. It becomes more difficult from an economic development perspective to convince existing employers considering expansions or new employers considering a location that an available workforce is in the region when the population has not been increasing and the unemployment rates have remained comparable, but mostly below the statewide average.

“In today’s economy, companies locate and follow the talent,” said Kathy Evert, president and CEO of the Iowa Lakes Corridor Development. “This has been a significant change in the past 15 years.”

Population Distribution for 2006 -- Lakes Region and the State of Iowa



As we begin to evaluate the 2010 Census data and compare to the past decade, recent school enrollments, unemployment data and more, we are beginning to see some positive signs that may slow the downward trend. “A few years ago we had no school districts in the region post an increase in school enrollments; today we are seeing some increases and anticipate more when the 2011-12 enrollments are certified,” said Evert. “While the overall population decreased from 2000 to 2010, we realized an increase in the 18-64 age group of over 230 people, with significant increases in Buena Vista and Dickinson Counties.”

A common topic across the entire country this year has been the skills gap; it has been difficult for regions, employers and policy makers to get their arms around this topic. How is that 14 million people in the country are unemployed and there are over three million job openings today? Many of the job openings require skill sets that are not available, and in many cases do not have enough individuals training for them. In the Corridor region there continues to be a demand for engineers, welders, millwrights, quality managers, sales representatives, maintenance technicians, mechanics, construction trades, and more. How the region will fill the current needs of employers as well as the projected future needs has been a key question the Iowa Lakes Corridor has been researching.

The Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation has become more involved in promoting existing employers and jobs/careers in the region through social media, online advertising, the Why Go Back? campaign, attending college and other career fairs outside the region, holding two regional jobs fairs each year, creating an employment directory and establishing a resume database for job seekers to promote to area employers. Career awareness events at area high schools, in partnership with area employers, to raise awareness are held regularly; a promotion to encourage employers to hire interns and offering training to employers on how to establish an intern program has also been emphasized. “Internships are a great way for employers to recruit and for communities to retain or attract young people to their community,” said Evert.

The big question for everyone in the region is what can be done to narrow the skills gap and attract and retain a workforce age population? The Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation is examining other models across the Midwest to help bridge this gap. There is a lot of work being done at a national level through large foundations as well as local and regional groups, all forming new

connections and collaborations to fill this gap. The Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation anticipates playing a new role in helping make these kinds of connections and building new collaborations to ensure the future growth of the region.

During several focus group sessions and a new movers study conducted this year, other factors were identified that may also contribute to the population and workforce challenges; they will be highlighted in part three of this series.

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The Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation is the regional economic development agency for Buena Vista, Clay, Dickinson and Emmet counties. Its mission is to foster, encourage, aid, promote or otherwise assist in the economic growth and development of the region. For more information about the Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation, call 712-264-3474 or visit www.lakescorridor.com.