

Alumni Pride: Hicks-Sorensen boosts the economy

by Natalie Johnson - Thursday, September 16, 2010

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/5843/alumni-pride-hicks-sorensen-boosts-the-economy/>

A strong educational foundation from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh helps alumna Brenda Hicks-Sorensen '98, of Fond du Lac, strengthen the region's economic foundation.

Hicks-Sorensen, who majored in sociology, is a certified economic developer and president of the Fond du Lac County Economic Development Corporation. She recently played a critical role in the effort to keep Mercury Marine jobs in Fond du Lac.

She is one of four UW Oshkosh alumni to be honored with an Outstanding Young Alumni Award at a dinner Friday, Oct. 22, as part of the University's 2010 Homecoming activities.

In her own words ...

Career:

Immediately following graduation, I worked at a variety of positions, all with increasing levels of responsibility while continuing with my education. Following graduation from UW-Milwaukee with my master's degree, I was able to enter the world of economic development as the economic development coordinator for Washington County.

While at Washington County, I was responsible for all economic development activities within the county, including the administration of two revolving loan fund programs, one of which was a new concept for the county. We also initiated a cluster-based approach, which at the time was a model for the state of Wisconsin. I was employed at Washington County until 2004, at which time I was recruited to Fond du Lac County.

I became president of the Fond du Lac County Economic Development Corporation (FCEDC) in July 2006, after serving as the interim president since August 2005. Prior to that, I had served as a director of client services and then vice president. FCEDC is the only Accredited Economic Development Corporation (FCEDC) in Wisconsin and one of only 25 nationally.

Describe the achievement(s) you are most proud of:

I am extremely proud to be leading an organization that has so many talented individuals involved — staff, committee members and Board of Directors. FCEDC led the local efforts and provided significant support to the state of Wisconsin for the retention of Mercury Marine. We also have significantly grown the revolving loan fund programs under my tenure at FCEDC and significantly increased our grant revenue, including a grant of just under \$440,000 from the Economic Development Administration for the implementation of an economic gardening program, Impact!

However, while the prior accomplishments are something I am very proud of, I think one of the most defining moments for us as an organization, and me as a leader, was our response to the needs of local businesses following the June 2008 floods. We developed and implemented the Disaster Recovery Microloan Program in the days following the flood with the initial loan funds disbursed within one week of the flood.

Favorite UWO professor:

Dr. Gerard Grzyb.

Favorite UWO memory:

Hanging out with fellow sociology students in the student lounge area. I always enjoyed it when various professors would stop in and spend time with us. I didn't realize at the time how much I learned from those professors during those informal discussions.

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