

## **John Imes: Wisconsin poised to be global leader in green economy**

John Imes | Wisconsin Environmental Initiative director    Nov 28, 2009

When it comes to Wisconsin's business climate, critics' obsession with the tax code and regulations not only hurt the state's image, but it doesn't tell the real story. Wisconsin is a leading destination for business.

Several factors position Wisconsin for success in a high-end economy: talent pool, superior work ethic, quality of life, research and development capabilities of the University of Wisconsin System, fast-growing export markets, abundant clean water, clean air, reliable energy supply, and good roads and infrastructure.

And with new economic development tools like the Enterprise Zone program, we're able to compete and keep companies like Mercury Marine in Fond du

Lac, Oshkosh Corp. and Republic Airways in Milwaukee. All have recently announced plans to add or retain jobs and add new plants and equipment in Wisconsin.

Still, the toll from the Great Recession of 2008-2009 will require new directions and bold and persistent actions.

One area where Wisconsin is poised to be a global leader is the emerging green economy, which includes renewables and biofuels, energy efficient manufacturing, high-speed rail, and green urbanism -- a business climate that attracts clean jobs and investment while pursuing our competitive advantage. For example:

- New North's work in northeastern Wisconsin to establish a wind energy manufacturing cluster, Milwaukee's effort to create a hub for clean water technology, and the Capital Region's focus on the cutting-edge technologies and high-paying jobs of the future "bioeconomy" are good examples of key regions helping brand the state as a great place for green job growth.
- Our state's innovative Green Tier law offers a better way for industry and small businesses to make environmental improvements and reduce costs while receiving incentives such as fast-track permitting, one-stop approvals and lower fees.
- Wisconsin companies are also leading the response to concerns about climate change. Quad/Graphics, Johnson Controls, Miller Brewing and other

innovators are setting goals and making investments in technology, practice and mind-set to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Fast-growing Orion Energy Systems of Manitowoc is the leading provider of energy-efficient lighting technologies and other solutions that can reduce energy use by 50 percent or more. And by combining reduced energy use with new sources of clean energy, Wisconsin can dramatically reduce emissions while continuing to add new jobs, growth and investment.

Wisconsin has a great heritage of entrepreneurship -- think Sam Johnson of SC Johnson, Ken Hendricks of ABC Supply and Harry Quadracci of Quad/Graphics -- all Wisconsin originals who had a passion for business, took risks and created thousands of jobs. Who will step up and showcase our state as an innovator and build on that legacy?

The angst over Wisconsin's business climate reminds me of a story Harry Quadracci once told about his early obsession with the tax code and the extraordinary time and effort he would take to find every angle and loophole. After many fits and starts, his accountant called and said he had found the perfect solution; in fact, the company would not have to pay any taxes at all! Harry was very excited to hear this and wanted to know what they needed to do. The accountant said it was very simple -- just make no money.

Quad/Graphics began in 1971 with Harry, 11 associates and a second mortgage on a house. Today, Quad is one of the state's most successful companies with 12,000 employees and over \$2 billion in sales. The company also ranks among the best places to work with nationally recognized health

and wellness programs, employee stock ownership, on-site child care and recreational facilities, and award-winning environmental stewardship, all incorporated into a fun, high-performance workplace.

As we emerge from the Great Recession, let's not forget all this state has to offer. The leaders go beyond the bottom line and provide inspiring examples of how businesses can be wildly successful while taking better care of their customers, employees, communities and our natural environment. Indeed, isn't that what business is all about?

*John Imes is director of the Wisconsin Environmental Initiative and co-owner with his wife Cathie of Arbor House, an environmental inn. He also worked for Quad/Graphics for 11 years.*