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Centergy looks to Central Wisconsin's future

BY NICK SARGENT

Leaders across central Wisconsin know where they want to go with the region's economy, but first they need to figure out how to get there.

Centergy, the Central Wisconsin Alliance for Economic Development, has hired a Madison-based consulting firm to draw it a map, a strategic economic development plan for Marathon, Portage and Wood counties.

"What Centergy is hoping to do is bring together private businesses, education institutions and units of governments to improve economic development in the central Wisconsin region," said William Tehan, president of Centergy. "And we believe that a strategic plan ... helps all parties and communities to see that there is something that can be done, and by working together we can make the central Wisconsin economy stronger."

Madison-based NorthStar Economics Inc. has won awards for the same type of plan it did for an 18-county partnership in northeastern Wisconsin, including the Fox Valley and counties to the north.

Regional economic partnerships are seen as a necessity by some of the bright minds in the field

and as a concept that NorthStar promotes.

"Fifty years ago when a community had a problem, it could solve it itself. Today, the scale of problems in the new economy goes well beyond the local governments and even beyond the county governments," said David J. Ward, president of NorthStar Economics. "Things like labor force, energy, the skills of the labor force, capital, are larger scale problems that require everyone to get in on the solutions. A regional approach begins to take advantage or leverage all the strengths of the region."

NorthStar will compile economic statistics available from the state and federal government and will conduct face-to-face interviews with business owners, educational leaders and entrepreneurs. The company will work with a regional steering committee to prepare an economic development strategy that will include economic benchmarks for each county and major municipality, an analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, an evaluation of the economic relationships among the selected counties, and a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing the region.