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# Initiative looks to drive Lakeshore economy

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Written by [Richard Ryman](#)  
Green Bay Press-Gazette

**MISHICOT** — The five counties that make up the Lakeshore Industrial Cluster Initiative are responsible for a \$3 billion regional economy. They hope to make it bigger.

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The initiative is designed to maximize opportunities in agriculture/food processing, manufacturing, energy and tourism in the region, which includes Calumet, Door, Kewaunee, Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties. The goal is to identify strengths, weaknesses and assets within the cluster areas, attracting new businesses and allowing existing businesses to operate more efficiently and grow.

“We have to figure out how to create jobs in sync with the economy and provide a work force for those jobs,” Mark Masden, economist for Vital Economics, an economic development consulting firm, said during a kick-off meeting Tuesday at Fox Hills Resort. About 120 people attended.

As throughout Wisconsin, manufacturing is expected to lead growth in the region. Improvement in manufacturing employment and income will drive other segments of the economy, Madsen said.

“People say manufacturing is dead in the U.S. The numbers don’t show it. Is employment growing? That’s another question,” Madsen said.

Madsen said there have been losses in manufacturing employment, but there’s a trend toward manufacturers returning to the United States from overseas, in some cases because of quality, in some because of

efficiency.

## Lakeshore Industry Cluster Initiative

For more information, got to [www.lakeshoreinitiative.webs.com](http://www.lakeshoreinitiative.webs.com) or contact one of the following:

- Connie Loden, EDC Manitowoc County, (920) 482-0540 or [cloden@edecmc.org](mailto:cloden@edecmc.org)
- Julie Schmelzer, Calumet County, (920) 849-1493, Ext. 442
- Bill Chaudoir, Door County EDC, (920) 743-3113
- Jennifer Brown, Kewaunee County EDC, (920) 487-5233
- Randy Hopper, Sheboygan County EDC, (920) 946-9379 or Dane Checolinski, (920) 452-2479
- Peter Thillman, Lakeshore Technical College, (920) 242-0689
- Lori Suddick, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, (920) 498-5401
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“Sometimes local is better because it’s closer. You have more control,” Madsen said. “Sometimes you have a qualified work force, or can develop one.”

Baby boomer demographics will both help and hinder the process. Madsen said national unemployment of 7 percent or more will continue through 2015, but as boomer retirement accelerates, employers will be desperate to replace workers. Already, employers, manufacturers in particular, are warning of skills gaps. Madsen said that by 2018, 63 percent of all jobs in the United States will require a post-secondary education.

That is one area where the Lakeshore regional is lagging. While the region is better than the national average at producing high school graduates, it is worse in providing workers with post-high school degrees.

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