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Study offers Fox Cities' perspectives

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Every five years, the LIFE (Leading Indicators for Excellence) study provides an intermittent in-depth look at the socio-economic conditions in the Fox Cities region and how these impact on the quality of life for its citizens.

Sponsored by the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Economic Development Partnership and United Way Fox Cities, the **LIFE study** has again demonstrated that the Fox Cities is a vibrant community characterized by a highly valued quality of life.

Residents and leaders are adept at identifying problems and working together to solve them to protect this quality of life.

The 2006 **LIFE study** used a variety of data sources to examine nine areas of life.

Here are the key findings:

-LIFE in our community: The area has a growing recognition of and initiatives fostering diversity, proactive community leadership and quality public services. Some areas of concern: addressing quality-of-life issues for those with lower incomes and people of color. Leadership circles need to include more minorities, young people and women.

-A healthy LIFE: The area has quality health and dental care, which has been expanded for the uninsured, underinsured and homeless. While heart-disease rates are decreasing, chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and hypertension, are increasing. The increased costs of health care, high deductibles and lack of insurance coverage in lower-paying jobs is still adversely affecting access to good health care. The impact of untreated mental illness and substance abuse is yet to be appreciated by the community. If addressed on a community-wide basis, lifestyle issues would have a positive impact on the overall health of the community.

-LIFE at home: This is a great place to raise a family and programs to support the elderly and people with disabilities are expanding. Affordable childcare, especially for part-time workers, is an issue. Older youth are looking for opportunities to socialize in safe, healthy areas besides the mall.

-LIFE of learning: The area provides high-quality K-12 education and has expanded its literacy services. However, the rate of higher education among its citizens is lower than other areas. Access and affordability of higher-education options are concerns.

-LIFE at leisure: The area abounds in shopping, restaurants, outdoor recreational activities, arts and cultural opportunities. People are looking for increased access to waterfront activities.

-LIFE in our natural environment: The area has great air and water quality, with an abundance of nature preserves and city park areas. The Fox River cleanup continues to progress. There is a concern over the future use of land for development versus protecting green space.

-A safe LIFE: The area is considered one of the safest in the nation with regard to major

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crime. However, the awareness of and incidence of domestic and sexual violence have increased.

-LIFE of self-sufficiency: This area has strong and effective non-profit human services and a cadre of dedicated volunteers. However, a growing number of citizens still need help in affording the necessities of life, such as food, shelter and health care.

-LIFE at work: The area has a favorable cost of living and a varied economic base that includes retail sales, tourism and professional services. The shift in jobs from manufacturing to service industries with lower earnings is a concern. Regional efforts, such as "New North" are focusing the attention of the region on ways to attract and retain a diverse business base.

The **LIFE Study** report provides information but not solutions. Its purpose is to spark regional leaders and citizens to action based on accurate understanding of the way things are and the way they're heading.

Margie Weiss, a Neenah resident, is the chair of the **LIFE study** steering committee. Weiss can be reached by e-mail at pletters@postcrescent.com.

On the Web

To learn more about the study results, go to www.foxcitieslifestudy.org

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