

Dear Editor,

I like many others was disturbed to learn RedPrairie Corporation, one of Wisconsin's largest software companies and certainly a leader in the technology sector, is exploring the idea of moving its headquarters out of Wisconsin (Journal Sentinel, June 18).

And I agree with many of the responses to this news – both the positive and negative. What has emerged is a clear fact: many Wisconsin companies have difficulty in attracting senior executive talent of international caliber to the IT sector, because it can be difficult for prospective executives to appreciate the quality of life we actually enjoy here. These executives who have never lived in Wisconsin envision only harsh winters with endless snow and taxes.

I can speak to this from first hand experience, as I moved to Wisconsin in 1985 without really knowing the state and all it has to offer. I had heard many of the negatives, but very few of the pluses. It wasn't until I lived here for a year or so that I began to understand the positive aspects of the state and how they create a high quality of family life. There is no better place to raise a family than in Wisconsin - this is a strong emotional appeal that we simply are not communicating effectively. Once here, particularly with a young family, executives find it very hard to leave. We all know this.

So what can we do? Companies like Red Prairie need our collective help to communicate the benefits of living in our great state to the executives they are attempting to woo. We need to find a way to converse one-on-one with candidates as they visit and consider a move to Wisconsin. I suggest that senior level executives make themselves available to meet, play golf, have dinner, and do whatever it takes to explain what a great place Wisconsin is to create a balanced lifestyle.

The Information Technology Association of Wisconsin, ITAWi, is working to promote Wisconsin as a state of choice for IT workers and the IT sector. One of the organization's key initiatives is to promote workforce development, and to ensure that top executive talent comes into the state. We will work with our members in whatever capacity is needed to accomplish this goal.

I make this offer to high tech companies across Wisconsin: if your company is looking for senior talent, but is meeting resistance from candidates because they do not understand the benefits the state of Wisconsin provides for quality of life issues, contact me at ceo@itawi.org. I can help connect your prospective candidates with some positive and enthusiastic Wisconsin executives who have made the decision and transition to the state, and who have also discovered what a great place it is to raise a family and live a quality life.

However, this is just a first step. We must not only attract private sector leadership, we must also inspire them to be part of the long-term solution that creates the critical mass of companies we all desire in the high tech sector. We are already recognized as a world

class center for biotech, and need to continue to foster the growth of this and other sectors in the state.

Ted Feierstein of Accent Partners has highlighted it is a little known fact that Wisconsin's companies are known worldwide for possessing top talent in the field of supply chain management and logistics - Red Prairie is a good example of such a corporation. He suggests that perhaps it is time to create a "Center for Excellence" in the Milwaukee area and claim that space for Wisconsin. Our state, both as a whole and within the southeastern area surrounding Milwaukee specifically, possesses top companies, universities and an international reputation; this is a strong foundation on which to build the region's strengths.

As Mary Burke told me, "It is time to stop beating ourselves up. We have a lot going for us. When have you ever seen a successful football team or any team for that matter succeed when it views itself negatively? Never." I could not agree more.

So thank you, John Jazweic, for leading Red Prairie to be a top company in its field and a corporation that represents the greatness of Wisconsin. But now it is time for us to roll up our sleeves and help not only Red Prairie, but other companies across all technology sectors to put Wisconsin on the map as the center of innovation in the world of IT. State Senator Ted Kanavas has put it best: "Wisconsin will be a world leader in intellectual property based businesses in ten years. We have the one commodity that is cherished: world-wide talent."

Sincerely,
Jim Rice
President and CEO
Information Technology Association of Wisconsin