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LOCAL NEWS

Posted Sept. 26, 2003

Student impact massive

\$417 million went to region

By Nick Sargent

of *The Northwestern*

Last year UW-Oshkosh made a \$417 million impact on the region and was responsible for creating almost 7,200 jobs. But Chancellor Richard Wells believes his institution can do more.

Over the last eight months the college surveyed students and faculty to find out their financial influence and their potential spending habits in the community.

Over the last 130 years, businesses have exploited much of the university market, but Northstar Economics, Inc., the Madison firm that did the study, found \$4.3 million in unmet market potential.

Wells said he hopes to develop ways to partner with the Oshkosh business community to benefit both the school and the city.

"The typical economic impact study is an in-your-face thing --- look how big and important we are," Wells told a group of businesspeople and university officials during a session where he discussed the results of the study. "That really isn't respectful."

Kevin McGee, an economics professor at the university, has been a vocal critic of other economic impact studies and was on hand to give a commentary Thursday. He told the audience he believed the information was accurate because Northstar used reasonable multipliers to factor how much money spent by UWO students and faculty actually stays in the community.

Paid for through residence hall rentals during special events in Oshkosh, the \$26,000 study is another indication of the university's commitment to bridging a gap between the community and the university. Wells pointed to programs like the accelerated online-nursing degree where the school and private enterprises work together to solve a problem -- like the city's nursing shortage.

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In the next few months, the UWO Center for Community Partnerships will hold a three-hour session on how interested entrepreneurs can do business with the university, said Susan Neitzel director of the CCP. Bidding for contracts and services with a government entity is different than doing business in the private sector she said, and university officials will be on hand to help explain the bureaucracy.

The CCP will also work with interested businesses in doing further market research studies on the untapped market potential. The preliminary findings of the study indicated that more places to find hip clothes and a wider variety of restaurants within walking distance of the university ranked high on both faculty and student surveys.

"I think it's wonderful that the university is trying to work with the community to bring businesses to serve the UW community," said Sarah Pietkivitch, a broker associate with Remax Valley Realtors, who plans on attending further seminars on business-university relations. "I think there are a lot of opportunities for business that fill big needs."

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