

# UW panel works to 'preserve pathways'

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**MARINETTE** — UW-Marinette hosted a "Preserving Pathways" roundtable Thursday at the student union.

Preserving Pathways was a series of three roundtables — held Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday — that focused on the rural economy, health-care and education. In order to address the crucial issues and to help provide solutions, UW-Colleges and UW-Extension partnered with northern Wisconsin organizations, communities and government agencies to host the series.

"Over the past 50 years, much of the country's population — and especially the Midwest — has been shifting further away from rural areas, opting for urban and suburban settings instead," said Cathy Sandeen, chancellor for the UW-Colleges and UW-Extension. "This trend causes a negative ripple effect across communities and industries. As the population declines, local



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**UW Chancellor Cathy Sandeen (center) talks with fellow panelists Interim State Program Director Patrick Robinson (left) and Jerry Murphy before the roundtable discussion of Wisconsin's rural issues Thursday at UW-Marinette.**

businesses face a reduced available workforce, funding for school districts decreases, fewer classes are offered to students and access to quality health care grows

restrictive."

The seven panelists, which consisted of Sandeen; Jerry Murphy,

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## PANEL:

executive director of New North; Cindy Bailey, regional associated dean of student affairs & enrollment management; Mary Kluz, community resources development agent for UW-Extension; Mark Lange, executive director of the division for business & entrepreneurship; Patrick Robinson, interim state program director for community, natural resource & economic development program for UW-Extension and David Brukardt, associate vice president for economic development, discussed the issues that many rural areas are facing.

"This is important for the whole State of Wisconsin," she said. "Today, I thought this panel was very optimistic with what's going on. Yes, things are changing and are different from the past, but as long as we look at the data and adapt to it, there's a lot of promise out there."

Education in rural areas was one of the three main topics of conversation.

"I think what we learned here is that education is changing," Sandeen said. "Even in the first two years, we have a greater awareness of careers and students are thinking about

their futures. They're doing internships with employers and are trying to connect the real world with their studies.

"I think that's a trend throughout higher education in the U.S. and we're certainly seeing it played out at UW-Marquette in the conversation regarding the various internships students are participating."

Sandeen also pointed out that relationships between employers and universities have become extremely important.

Along with education, the expansion of broadband was essential to the discussion as well.

"We're hearing a cry for better broadband, faster speeds and greater bandwidth throughout the rural part of the state," Sandeen said. "It's not just nice to have, it's an absolute need. When we look across education, if we want to bring all the educational resources into the classroom to support teachers, they need to have dependable internet.

"If we talk about bringing specialists in healthcare out to rural areas through tele-medicine, that depends on dependable internet. We also learned today, specifically, about the importance of business. If we want companies that are bringing in dollars from outside the

community into the region, then they're going to need internet to connect with their customers.

"Broadband access is becoming a critical issue across all rural areas and it's particularly relevant in the under served parts of the state."

Another essential aspect of the rural economy are natural resources.

"When we think about natural resources, we are looking at how to preserve things like good water," Sandeen said. "We are looking at how to preserve and grow trees sustainably for the forestry industry or how to maintain our pristine environment because of the tourist industry — that's so important, especially in the northern part of the state. It really connects in with economic development directly."

Sandeen said, "At the UW-Colleges and UW-Extension, we are very tapped into local communities and local issues. We do a lot that's under the radar. I think the benefit of the panel today is to highlight some of the work we're doing and also show we're really connected with our partners, not only in our own organization, but in the community. We're really trying to understand these issues and doing the best we can in helping confront challenges."