



## Bill Chaudoir

*Promoting the Door peninsula comes naturally to Bill Chaudoir, who has served as executive director of the Door County Economic Development Corp. since its creation 20 years ago. Insight Co-Publisher and Editor Margaret LeBrun sat down with Chaudoir during a visit to Stone's Throw Winery to talk about his role attracting business to a place best known for its tourism.*

### on opening the Door to business

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE southern part of Door County, grew up on a dairy farm and still have a lot of family in the area. It's very rewarding to be giving back to the community in your hometown. I've done this kind of work elsewhere, and it's just not as rewarding.

Door County is such a unique place. It allows us to promote economic development from a quality-of-life perspective. It's such a beautiful place, there are so many recreational opportunities, that it's a very desirable place to live. That's represented by the over 2 million visitors that vacation here every year or live here on a seasonal basis.

It's a challenge for some businesses in that we're surrounded by water. But we have tons of manufacturing here that

is very successful. We're successful here because of the quality of the workforce – that's what we hear constantly.

Prior to 20 years ago, this place had more manufacturing jobs than most other communities. We had a 2,000-employee shipyard, plus two other shipyards. But if you recall, back in the '80s there was a recession and our shipyards were impacted, particularly our shipyard that serves the Great Lakes, the freighters and commercial shipyards. They struggled for a few years; they operated with just a couple hundred people until they started growing again in the mid-'90s.

Like most places we are being impacted by the downsizing of the economy, but we are probably faring better than a

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lot of communities. We have a good strong group of manufacturing companies and they're somewhat diversified.

It can be challenging for shipping materials in and out of here. One of the first projects we took on as an economic development corporation was to get Hwy. 57 to Green Bay improved to four-lane status. It took 20 years but it's done. Last year we helped cut the ribbon on opening the last leg of that \$70 million project.

One of the other huge challenges that we're working hard on is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century highway, which is broadband access. We want to leapfrog [the technology]; we want to be a premier broadband destination. We're hopeful we'll get some stimulus funding for broadband improvements in underserved areas. We've got our sights on \$15 million to \$20 million of improvements to our broadband access, working with Norlight Telecommunications. The engineering is being worked on as we speak and we think we can be in the ground by this fall, when construction will start on a more robust telecommunications network to serve all parts of Door County.

Washington Island just deployed a very unique technology, which is called broadband over power lines. They're one of the first in the Midwest and certainly in the state of Wisconsin to do that.

Now that our tourism industry has united, every community in the county contributes a room tax to a joint group called a Door County Tourism Zoned Commission. The Visitors Bureau has about \$2 million to market this place – and a few years ago, their budget was \$200,000 to market to the rest of the world. We have a treasure here that's been rated as one of the top 10 tourist destinations in North America by *Money* magazine. We've just got to let people know.

With Palmer Johnson's ownership from England and Bay Shipbuilding being part of the Fincantieri Marine Group, we have a strong, committed investment in improving those shipyards and facilities. PJ's has added probably close to 50,000 square feet of new facilities in the last two years. Bay Ship is on the verge of a huge investment in new facilities and infrastructure that will position them to be one of the most competitive shipyards in the country. It's very good news.

When I retire I will not be bored at all. I took a class from your father at NWTC back in the 1980s and I got hooked on woodworking. Ray (LeBrun) lit a spark in me that really has been so much a big part of my life for the past 30 years. Right now I'm building a cedar-strip canoe. I've been working on that since Christmas and there's nothing more rewarding. ①

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