

*Work Here, Live Here*

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### *Executive Summary*

The goal of this project is to create a plan to market the quality of life in Kosciusko County in order to retain current and attract future employees to reside in Kosciusko County. Our County offers much to prospective community members. A great deal of work has been completed focusing on bringing visitors to this community and not necessarily looking at quality of life for prospective residents. During the course of our work we have identified perceived drawbacks to living in this area, such as location in the state and the lack of big city amenities. We have also identified opportunities for growth. Statistics from 2007 indicate 7,681 residents of other counties commuted into our county to work (Indiana Department of Workforce Development, <[www.in.gov/dwd/](http://www.in.gov/dwd/)>). If 10% of those commuting decided to reside in our county, at an average annual wage per job of \$40,746 (Indiana Bureau of Economic Analysis, <[www.bea.gov](http://www.bea.gov)>), that would keep \$31.3 million circulating within our community. Lastly we have identified current and future threats to our community. We have what other communities want, our orthopedic industry. We must build the assets of our community to bring in highly specialized labor in order to adjust to future industrial changes. Finally, we proposed, and succeeded, in calling upon the City of Warsaw and the Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau to partner together to dedicate website space to the *Work Here, Live Here* project. This site will contain 15, 3-5 minute web based videos detailing community churches, downtown Warsaw, restaurants, arts and entertainment, schools, lake activities and education. This site will also be a link to many other city and county sites for detailed information in an effort create one place for the prospective resident to go for a portrayal of what it is like to live in Kosciusko County. Ultimately, we encourage employers to work with the Convention and Visitors Bureau to create other marketing ideas such as a bus tour or a DVD to introduce potential residents to our county.



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One of the hardest parts about deciding whether or not to accept a new job is finding a good community to live in. The decision to reside in a new community gets even tougher when you are trying to make a decision that affects your entire family. When looked at on a map, Kosciusko County appears to be in the middle of nowhere, which would lead people to think there is little quality of life. This alone would turn off many people interested in working for one of the major employers in the county. After researching what Kosciusko County has to offer, that opinion probably wouldn't change much. There are websites with information about Kosciusko County, but none that go into any great amount of detail about moving into the county. Most websites just list visitor information, what shops the county has or what attractions there are, without giving any specific information about things that relate to the quality of life. Other features that Kosciusko County lacks that were discovered while researching this topic include a major airport with commercial airlines, broad-band access, a shopping mall, and a certified non-denominational day care. Unless you are currently a resident or you know someone familiar with the area, you really wouldn't understand all that the county has to offer.

Because jobs are scarce these days it is even more important that people see a certain quality of life in the community when applying for a new job. Why would someone leave a current job with a decent quality of life for a less desirable area? If the quality of life isn't in the community they will continue to look elsewhere for work. People want to find not only a job that makes them happy but a wonderful place to live and play. Kosciusko County has a great quality of life that can easily be overlooked. Being the "orthopedic capital of the world" ([www.warsawcity.net](http://www.warsawcity.net)) gives the county a thriving economy and community to live in. Parks, lakes, world-class arts and entertainment, secondary education opportunities, a low crime rate and extremely low property taxes are just some of the things that give the county a great quality of life. The cost of living is incomparable for all that the county



offers. Kosciusko County is home to the headquarters for three of the largest companies in the orthopedic industry, along with the numerous companies that provide the manufacturing needs in orthopedics. In addition to the orthopedic companies, there is a large agricultural business in the area. Our county is home to the “world's largest integrated soybean-based biodiesel plant” (Brownfield, AG News for America, <[www.brownfieldnetwork.com](http://www.brownfieldnetwork.com)>) and the “leading producer of quality duck products in North America” (Terry Tucker, Maple Leaf Farms, <[www.mapleleaffarms.com](http://www.mapleleaffarms.com)>).

The orthopedic companies want to attract top talent to work for them. One of the largest hurdles employers in Kosciusko County have to overcome is the stigma of being located in a small town. Most of these companies go out of their way to make generous offers to professionals in order to bring candidates to Kosciusko County. Local companies need support to help them sell the benefits of working for their company and the benefits of living in Kosciusko County. This is where our community leaders should step in to show all that Kosciusko County has to offer.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a tool for selling what a unique place Kosciusko County is, not only to work, but also to live. We are proposing a major addition to the Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau website ([www.koscvb.org](http://www.koscvb.org)) through video tours of various sites. This addition would be focused on introducing Kosciusko as a place to live, work and play. As stated earlier, the main websites that give any kind of information about Kosciusko County do so with a different objective. There are links to lists of local shops or attractions that only offer contact info and hours of operation. There is no one site that offers an actual look at some of the major things that make Kosciusko more than a small rural town in northeast Indiana.

The site we are proposing would include actual footage of various places and things that people would be interested in learning about when investigating a new place to live. Links to things such as schools, youth sports programs, churches, parks, businesses, government buildings, and shops. An





example of one link would be education. In this link, extensive video footage of each school in the county could be accessed along with detailed narration about the schools. The narration would include key statistics that are important to parents looking to move to the county (i.e.; size of classes, experience of teachers, graduation percentage, college attendance of graduating classes, etc).

We have worked with several local groups to get guidance for our project. Mary Kitrell of the Conventions and Visitors Bureau (CVB) has expressed interest in the idea and has confirmed that there is still plenty of space on their website to house all of this information. Mary would also recommend that the maintenance of the website be handled by staff from the CVB. Costs to implement this initiative have been investigated. Vision It Now Inc., has quoted the filming of 15 three minute videos at \$2,250. They would also provide a 3-5minute video of highlights for an additional \$250.00. \$2,500 is a relatively inexpensive cost to invest in the future stability of Kosciusko County.

At a recent Kosciusko Human Resources Association (KHRA) Luncheon, a survey was given to 35 human resources professionals from businesses around the county asking what they thought would best sell Kosciusko County to potential recruits. The top scores included schools, Winona Lake village, Downtown Warsaw, Greenway trails and parks. These are the areas that the county should focus on first. Other areas that could potentially be added to the site would include lake activities, churches, housing sub-divisions, golf courses, hospital, Wagon Wheel theater and local (non-chain) restaurants.

Kosciusko County should work with the larger companies in the county to attract and keep professional employees in the area. According to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development website (<[www.hoosierdata.in.gov](http://www.hoosierdata.in.gov)>), over 13% of the employees that work in Kosciusko County commute into our county. This means that there are potential dollars that the county is losing due to the amount of commuters. This money could be used to sustain and improve the quality of life in our county. Could these people have been persuaded to reside in Kosciusko County had they known a little



more about the county before choosing where to reside? The opportunity to increase the residential and working population in Kosciusko County is definitely available and is something that should be actively pursued by government officials and businesses of Kosciusko County.

The authors of this paper feel that if the county works hard to market themselves as a location with a desirable quality of life, then businesses outside of the orthopedic industry would look to the area as either a large manufacturing site or even as a potential spot for a headquarters for their business. This is the type of thinking that the county needs to have in order to ensure that a proper amount of diversification of employment can be found in the county. With limited industry in the county and a very specialized work force, Kosciusko is in an extremely risky spot when it comes to long term stability.

The virtual tour that is being suggested should just be the start of this initiative. There are ample opportunities for expanding this marketing plan. Employers could work through the CVB in order to develop a bus tour of the county, giving new hires an opportunity to see everything that the county has to offer. The videos could be put on a DVD that employers could send out to potential recruits to show them that Kosciusko County is much more than a small rural town between Ft. Wayne and South Bend. The site could be expanded to include areas for advertising which would in turn help pay for the upkeep of the site going forward.

How the marketing plan is moved forward isn't important at this time. Implementing such an initiative is what matters right now. Although the current economic state hasn't affected the orthopedic industry as heavily as some other industries in the area (RV, automotive, boating, etc.) there may come a time when the need for traditional metallic implants becomes obsolete. If this happens, Kosciusko County will find itself in the same situation as many similar towns that were once financially sound with an ability to provide the types of things that would help make a county maintain a high quality of life. Attracting top talent to the area will in turn bring in other employers, which will provide diversification



to the county, resulting in a secure place to live with a sustainable high quality of life no matter what the economic environment.





