

There is a Solution

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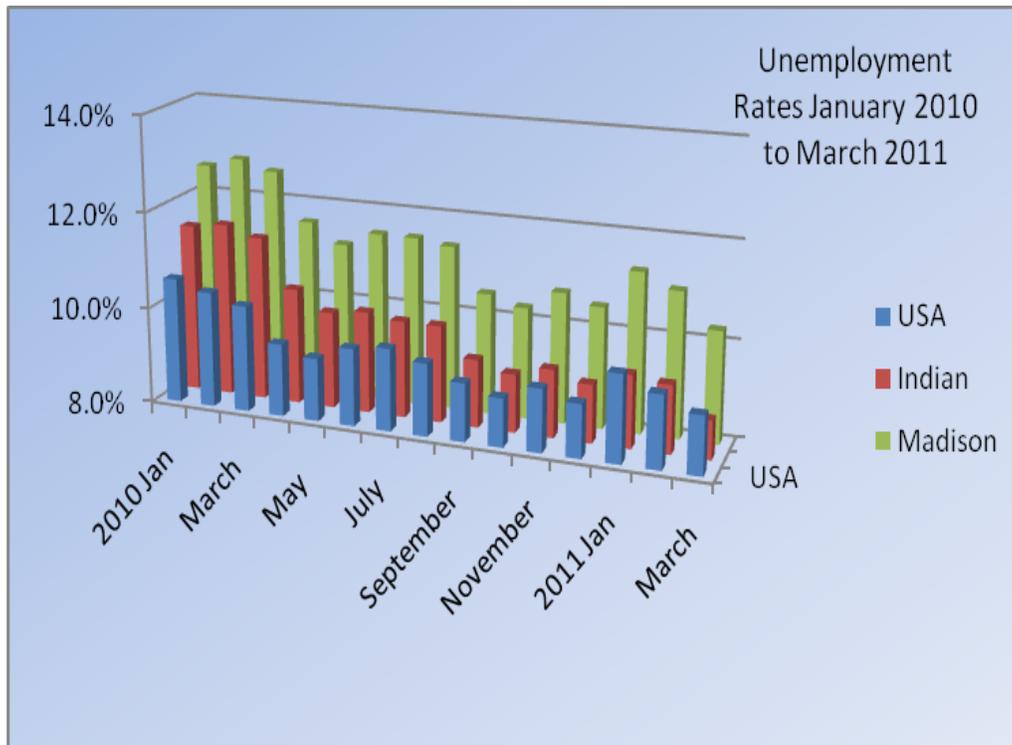
It's a site seen all too often: a man, grizzled and dirty, standing beside the road with a cup or a sign. He is a statistic, one of the 6,226 unemployed in Madison County.

As the light up ahead turned red, I realized that I would stop right beside him, so I checked out the sign he held: "Will work for food." I rolled down my window and looked into a face full of hurt, humiliation and despair.

"Do you mean that?" I asked, pointing at his sign. He glanced at it and nodded. I handed him my business card. "Give me a call. I have work for you to do."

The Statistic called me Monday morning. His name is Dennis. Dennis thought he would never stop working. He was strong, intelligent and knew his job well, working hard and long, reliable and determined. But the GM factory closed down, and at 60, Dennis found himself unemployed. He had planned wisely, but not wisely enough. His wife became ill and lingered long after his retirement funds ran out. After she died, he sold the house to pay off the debts. Now he had nowhere to live and could not find work.

The good news for Madison County is that in the last 15 months the unemployment rate has been dropping. In January, 2010 unemployment was at 12.6%, and by March, 2011 it was down to 10.3%, proof of an excellent job done by both the city and county councils, and the Flagship Enterprise's two incubators, which have supported many start-up small businesses. However, Indiana Department of Work Development statistics confirm that at 10.3%, we are is still 1.1% higher than the average in the United States. ("Hoosiers by the Number", 2011)



There is a solution for Madison County that could solve several challenges at one time:

- Creating jobs in the short term for architects, engineers, contractors and laborers
- Developing jobs in the future for people from every walk of life, including those who may be considered ‘unemployable’ due perhaps to age, disability, former training, or situation
- Establishing an attraction to draw more tourists to the County, bringing in fresh money to the County coffers.

This solution is based on an already developed and very successful model built in Cornwall, England, called The Eden Project, which was built in a 160-year-old china clay quarry “transforming (the quarry) into a rich, global garden where people can learn about nature and get inspiration about the world around them,” states the website. This leading edge, contemporary operation may be viewed at www.edenproject.com.

The Eden Project in England was designed and developed in response to changing industries and an increasing rate in unemployment in the last decade of the 20th Century. At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century, Madison County, Indiana is facing the same challenges. The Eden Project developers assessed what was needed, determined what was available and examined what was possible. In Cornwall, England, the closing of lots of the mines increased the unemployment rates. In Madison County, the closing of almost all the GM plants raised the local unemployment rates several points above the average rates for the whole country. The Eden developers found an old abandoned quarry in which to build. In Madison County, we have many tracts of land where old factories have been razed and the land leveled, ready for use. The Eden developers then looked at what possibilities were available to create renewable and sustainable income. The two major sources of income that they determined were viable at the end of the 20th Century are the same two sources that are still the best in the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century: Tourism and Ecology.

In the past, Madison County has not looked favorably upon encouraging tourism. Instead, it has preferred to focus on drawing in businesses like Nestles or another auto manufacturer, believing that a company like one of these will add jobs in the upper level of employment, when in fact, they bring their own upper management with them and hire only a few lower level white collar and mostly blue collar workers. However, according to the United Nation's World Tourism Organization's article, "Why Tourism?" (2011), tourism has experienced continued growth over the last five decades. In today's global economy, the volume of the tourist business surpasses even that of oil exports, food products and automobiles. It has become one of the major players of international commerce. The growth goes hand in hand with the variety and competition of destinations, meaning that major cities are no longer the focal points of interest.

And, most important to this argument, tourism in industrialized and developed states has produced economic and employment benefits in many related areas, including construction, agriculture, and even in telecommunications.

At the end of the article, “Why Tourism?” is a list of current developments & forecasts:

- “International tourist arrivals grew by nearly 7% in 2010 to 940 million;
- In 2010, international tourism generated \$ 919 billion in export earnings;
- UNWTO forecasts a growth in international tourist arrivals of between 4% and 5% in 2011.” – That’s 977.6 to 987 million tourists looking for somewhere to vacation in 2011, and revenues of between \$955.76 to \$964.95 billion.

Returning to our model, the Eden Project, how do their statistics compare to those above? Eden opened in 2000 and just ten years later in 2009 they welcomed their 10,000,000th visitor – that is an average of one million visitors a year. (Annual Review 2008-09)

Another point made by the United Nation’s World Tourism Organization is that a deepening diversification of points of interest is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. (“Why Tourism?”, 2011) In other words, it is important to have a variety of points of interest available for the visiting tourists. Madison County has this. It goes without saying that the close proximity to Indianapolis with the famous Indy Speedway and a wide variety of entertainment is, in itself, a draw. But within Madison County there are many attractions that can be tied in, or included in vacation packages, depending on the interests of the tourist: in Anderson alone there is the Hoosier Park Racing & Casino, Mounds State Park, Shadyside Park and Wetlands, Paramount Theatre & Ballroom, Anderson Speedway, Anderson Center for the Arts, McClain's Museum, White River Paintball, Historic West 8th Street, Anderson University. In the surround areas there are in Pendleton the Heritage Antique Mall, the "Giant" Earth Home

with the Art & Science of Vic Cook, and the Madison County Winery. In other towns close by there are the Gaither Family Resources, Alexandria, Camp Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp, House of Glass, Elwood, Elwood Opera House, Orestes Historical Society Museum. This is certainly not a full list, but shows a variety of points of interest that can be used as an extra draw.

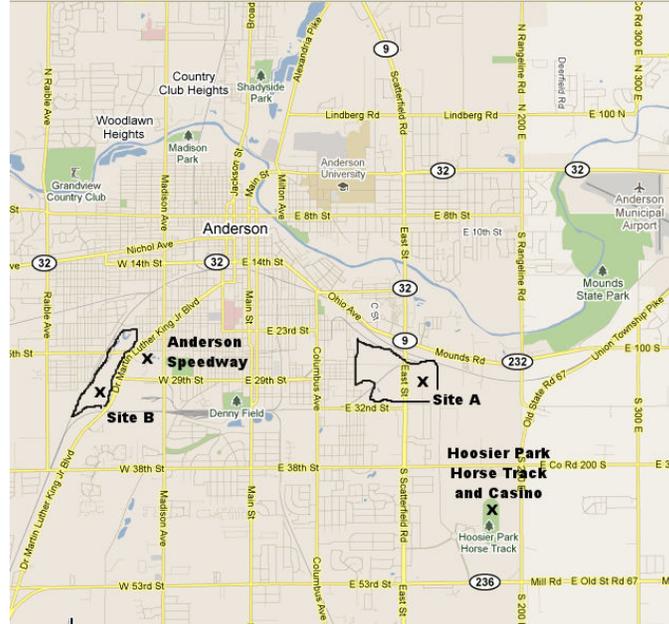
The second source of income into which the Madison Project can tap is Ecology. The Eden Project once again is a good example of how this can be done. The Madison Project will establish an Enviro-Park that includes showcasing new technologies in gathering, storing and using water, heat and energy. We will develop Gardens, some under Biospheres and others which promote ideas for sustainable food production that can be emulated in the community. Following Eden's example, we will create our own rich soil by composting green waste with the existing elements of the land. We will also create a water recovery system to collect the run-off from the buildings and re-use it to water the gardens. Our gardens will be filled with plants grown for food, fuel, materials and medicine and will be designed to create a environment, not only to be enjoyed by the senses, but to also develop an ecosystem to provide clean air and water. The gardens are also an educational outreach, empowering, engaging and connecting with people from all walks of life. Continuing in the line of educating and empowering people, we will create an Exploratorium for children and adults alike to learn and experience new ideas in many different technologies. Again, following the Eden Project lead, we will include a Central Core for the performing arts, art shows and exhibits, classes, meetings and different dining experiences, as well as other activities and events that engage people in environmental issues, helping them develop their own creative talents, and reminding us that, together, we can make amazing things happen.

Having established the need and exploring the possibilities, the next questions to be addressed are funding, site and design.

Currently, both the Federal and State Administrations have programs in effect to help establish funding to grow the economy in communities by developing small businesses. The Flagship Enterprise, mentioned earlier, has Angel Investors that can be approached to assist also. And there are Guilds and Artisan groups and associations that can be screened to determine levels of interest in such a project as it will incorporate the arts in many forms in the gardens and in the Central Core. And, within the private sector in Madison County, there are many who are interested in investing in and supporting many different aspects address by this project, including, the arts, gardening and green technologies. Once the ideas and concepts of the Madison Project are fully explained, funding through any or all of these avenues should come through.

Establishing a site within Madison County, especially in Anderson, will not be a problem, as so many of the old factories have been razed, leaving large tracts of land leveled and ready to be used. The City is willing to offer several different tax incentives to encourage enterprise development on any of these sites. Two sites in particular are excellent choices, both being on main roads into town from I69, linking it to the Indianapolis Metropolitan Area. Site A lies across Scatterfield Road and 32nd Street on what was once the Plant 20 Factory grounds. The office building still remains, but the factory buildings have been razed and the land is cleared ready for building. Site B is on Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd and W 25th Street where another factory once stood. Again, the land has been cleared and it is ready to build. Both sites have added attractions: Site A is just north of the Hoosier Park Race Tracks and Casino, as well as the majority of the hotels and motels in Anderson along Scatterfield Rd, North of the Freeway; Site

B is across the Boulevard from the Anderson Speedway. Either site would be an excellent choice for the Madison Project.



The next challenge that will need to be addressed is the design and layout of the project. A representative from the Eden Project will be very helpful in the feasibility studies and preliminary designs, helping to guide the Madison Project in the right direction and assisting in setting timelines. Local Architects and Contractors will be invited to bid on the designs, keeping in mind the desire to use the most efficient, ecologically sound technologies that are currently known as we plan for the Enviro-Park and Central Core.

Using the Eden Project as a model in design and theory, working together in stages, and incorporating the insight from research, it is very possible to change the statistics of our County by developing tourism with an ecological state-of-the-art Park and Core. We can give back hope, respect and dignity to people like Dennis. When we create an Enviro-Park that can display ongoing innovations for the creation, storage and use of water, light, heat and energy; a Core for the arts, entertainment and education; Gardens to promote a return to home grown fruits and

vegetables; and an Exploratorium to encourage adventure, knowledge and experiences otherwise missed in life, we generate not only jobs, but also an income stream from tourism for our County. A project like this becomes self-sustaining and creates its own regeneration as the knowledge and experience gained here will spread, encouraging awareness of environmental challenges and renewable resources, drawing the community together to share and build together. And, like the Eden Project in England, our Enviro-Park will become a tourist magnet, refilling our County coffers with fresh revenue, which in itself will generate more growth, more jobs, better schools – a better life for so many of the Dennis's of this County – and for each one of us, too. Together we can do it!

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