



DIGGINGS

PUBLISHED BY THE BADGER INSTITUTE

Firefighters
almost
never
fight fires
nowadays.

Time to Hang it Up?

BY DAVE DALEY

Catholics and older folks
are eschewing marriage

BY MARIE ROHDE

TIF: A valuable tool or
crony capitalism?

BY KEN WYSOCKY

Conservative young women
defy stereotypes

BY EMILY JASHINSKY



**BADGER
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Digging into the decline of marriage, fire department staffing, overused TIFs and driverless transit

I wasn't personally surprised by Paul Ryan's decision, but I know why so many others were.

The House speaker did two things many Americans consider lunacy. He gave up a government job, and he made a public commitment to his family.

Two of our stories in this issue of *Diggings* chronicle just how ardently many Wisconsinites avoid doing either nowadays.

Marie Rohde and Michael Jahr look at the disintegration of marriage — and even the language that we use to talk about it.

Dave Daley takes a look at the misnomer that is still known as the local "Fire Department." You'll be stunned at just how few fires that firefighters actually fight nowadays compared to decades past — although most firefighters remain on the government payroll doing other things.

Two other stories in this issue demonstrate how, once set in motion, government programs and laws and spending almost invariably expand in size and scope over time.

Ken Wysocky chronicles the changes in how tax incremental financing districts are used — or abused — 43 years after they were first created by Wisconsin statute to help alleviate urban blight by giving developers financial assistance.

And Baruch Feigenbaum looks at why the thing that's all the rage among some progressives in Milwaukee this spring — a new downtown streetcar — is actually an incredibly shortsighted investment that will appear hopelessly outdated in no time at all. Milwaukee, he points out, has had streetcars before. They were torn out years ago. They're back at the same time that the really chic cities are starting to ponder driverless transit.

All, though, is not lost. Emily Jashinsky's piece on what it's like to be young and female and conservative will restore your faith. And Betsy Thatcher's profile of Badger Mining Corp. tells a tale of ingenuity and determination and smarts that illustrates what's still possible in the heartland of America.

Paul Ryan is not the only one we should admire.

Mike@BadgerInstitute.org

MISSION STATEMENT/

Badger Institute

Founded in 1987, the Badger Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) guided by the belief that free markets, individual initiative, limited and efficient government and educational opportunity are the keys to economic prosperity and human dignity.

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JEFFREY PHELPS PHOTO

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Numbers and nuggets from trends we've observed on everything from Wisconsin's corrections system to the decline of the mainstream media to highway funding to socialism.

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The state Legislature should fix the complex process of tax incremental financing that benefits a few well-connected developers and politicians at the expense of taxpayers.

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The Sheboygan Fire Department took on EMS 10 years ago, but critics question whether the arrangement was just a way to prop up staffing as fire calls have dwindled.

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Add Catholics and older folks to those who are choosing to be single — with Catholic weddings dropping by 40 percent in recent years and many baby boomers opting against marriage for financial reasons.

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On a recent March day, several couples tied the knot at the Milwaukee County Courthouse — illustrating that the institution still holds value for many Americans.

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JEFFREY PHELPS PHOTO

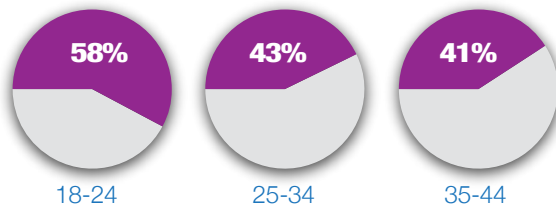
Badger Briefing: Here's what we're hearing...

Socialism Poll

Attitudes among younger generations in the United States.

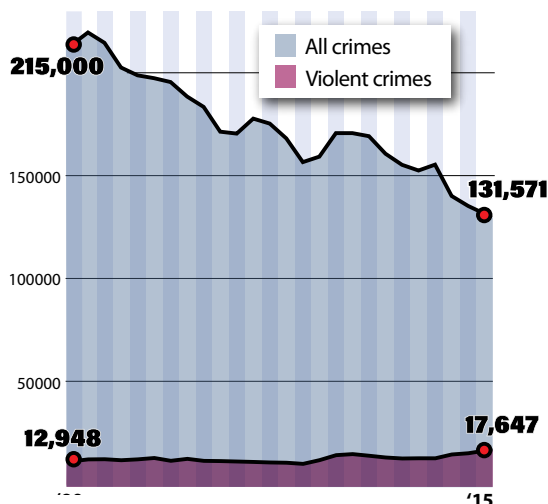
► Would you say your opinion of Socialism is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable?

Favorable responses



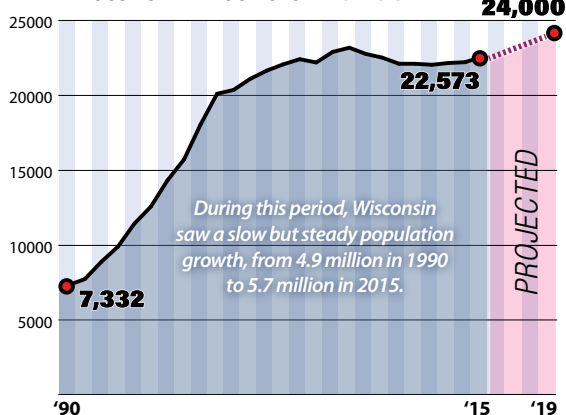
Source: Reason-Rupe, Aug. 2014

Wisconsin Crime 1990-2015



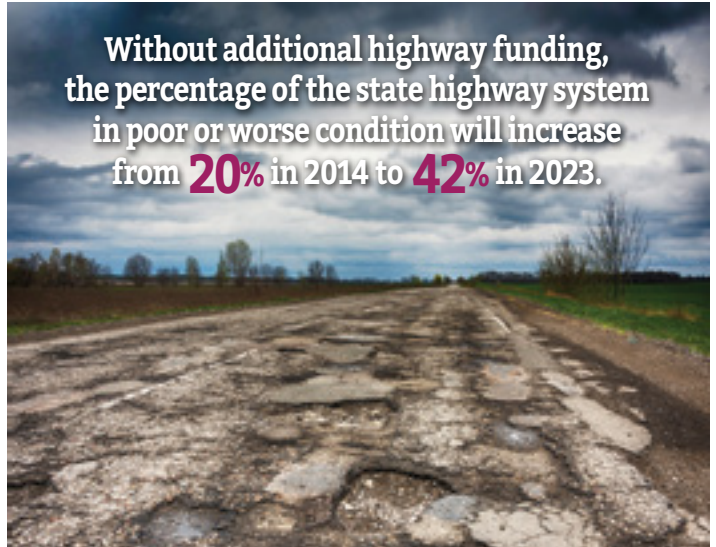
Sources: FBI, U.S. Department of Justice, Wisconsin DOC

Wisconsin Prisoners 1990-2015



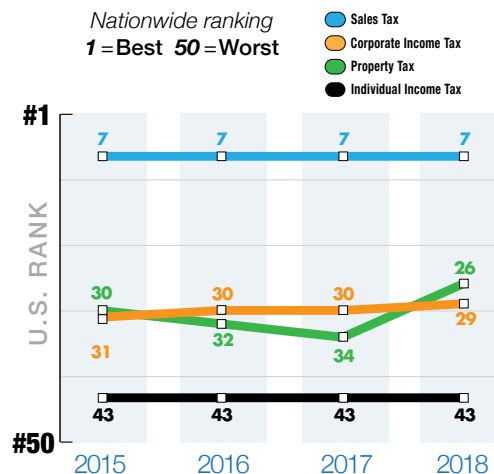
According to Wisconsin Transportation and Finance Policy Commission in 2013...

Without additional highway funding, the percentage of the state highway system in poor or worse condition will increase from **20%** in 2014 to **42%** in 2023.



Wisconsin Tax Rankings 2015-2018

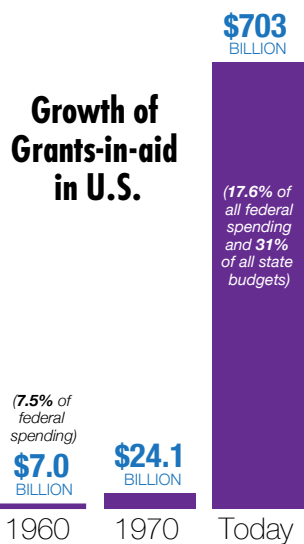
Nationwide ranking
1 = Best 50 = Worst



“Wisconsin has an opportunity to take itself out of the high-tax category by reducing state income and real estate taxes.”

— Jay Miller,

tax attorney and Badger Institute visiting fellow



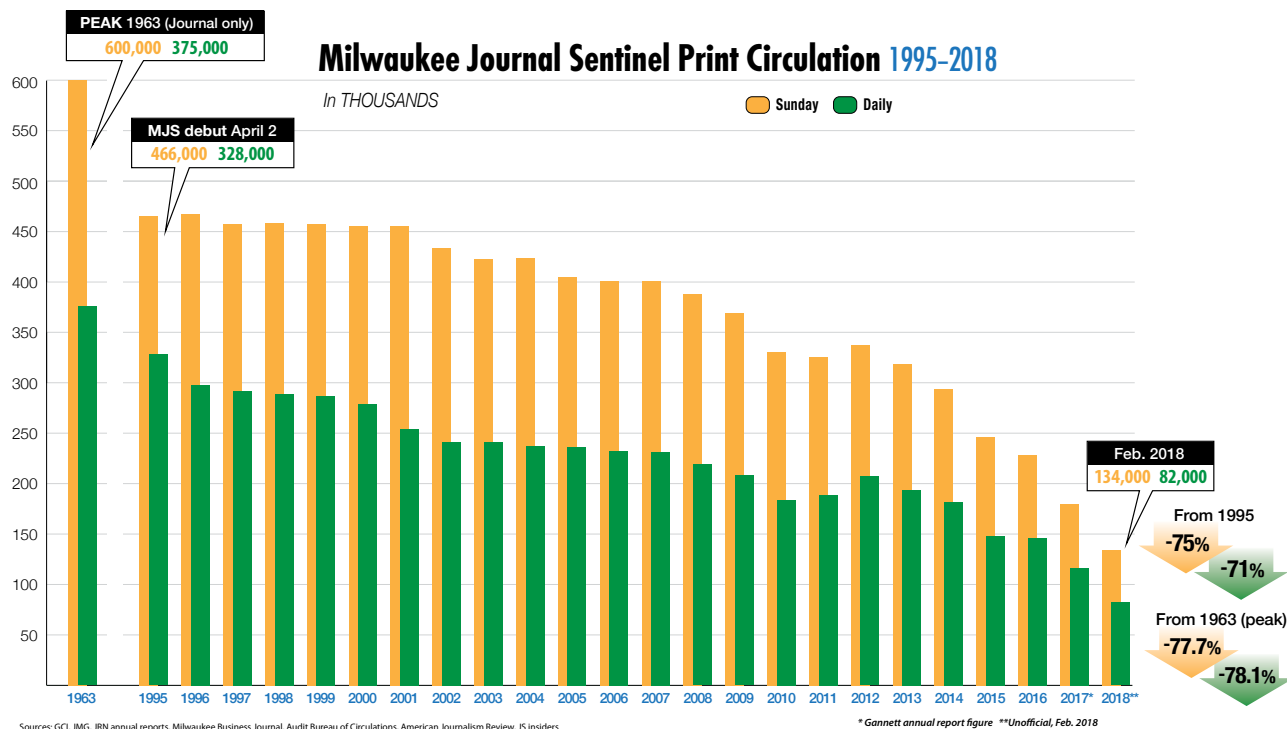
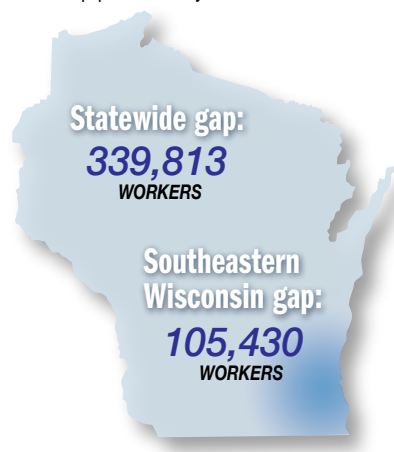
“Federal regulations do not coincide with what actually happens in an educational setting. The government is making rules and regulations without any knowledge of ‘real’ education.”



— **Mary Musil,**
Waupaca School District teacher

Workforce Squeeze

Gap predicted by 2027



CEO Mark Thompson on how long The New York Times' print version will survive:

"I believe at least 10 years is what we can see in the U.S. for our print products. ... We'll decide that simply on the economics. There may come a point when the economics of (the print paper) no longer make sense for us."

DEFYING



Conservative young women spurned for not fitting the liberal mold, but they stand strong

By Emily Jashinsky

Tori Ziemanski has to be careful.

"I have strong political opinions, but I'm careful about when I talk about them and what I say," says Ziemanski, a conservative University of Wisconsin-Madison business graduate who works as a project manager.

"I'm very aware that I could miss out on career advancements and opportunities if I'm vocal about my political beliefs, especially because they don't match that of a stereotypical 25-year-old woman," she says.

Defying those stereotypes can be challenging for conservative young Wisconsin women in the workplace, on college campuses and in social circles.

Alivia Fenney, 25, a recent college graduate who grew up in Hartford, says, "As a millennial woman, I often feel like people check the boxes for me and

ROBERT HELF
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION



immediately assume that because I am a woman, I have liberal ideas.”

Caroline Kitchens, 28, who grew up in Sturgeon Bay, where her father, Joel, serves in the Assembly, admits she’s “had some awkward social interactions that have left me feeling ostracized because of my political identity.”

Kitchens, a federal affairs manager and policy analyst at the R Street Institute in Washington, D.C., adds, “I think that’s inevitable for young conservatives in any major city. But I think that’s a good thing for conservatives in the long run because our views are constantly challenged and we’re forced to refine our political views.”

Melika Willoughby, 26, is similarly unintimidated. She believes time spent in the ideological minority has made her stronger.

“Growing up in Madison gave me an incredibly thick skin,” she says. “I was a Christian, conservative, home-schooler in the hotbed of progressive liberalism and teachers unions. I learned that my beliefs were worth holding and defending because they were true, even if they weren’t electorally successful or popular.”

Willoughby now works on Capitol Hill as communications director for Rep.



Kitchens

Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) and notes, “Being a conservative in Washington is a little like being a conservative in Madison!”

Wisconsin’s political landscape

Nationally, adults have long been more likely to identify as conservative than liberal, and that’s been the case as well among women in Wisconsin, where a 2014 Pew survey found 35 percent of women identified as conservative, 38 percent as moderate and 22 percent as liberal.

But the numbers change dramatically when looking solely at younger women, who — based on the 2016 presidential primary vote — are even swayed by socialist messages.

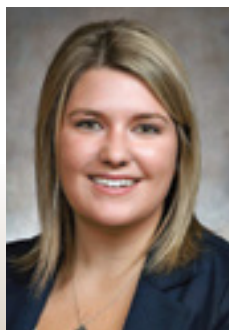
A 2016 ABC News poll found women ages 18 to 35 were much more likely to identify as liberal (38 percent) than conservative (26 percent). And although Wisconsin famously swung in favor of Donald Trump in 2016, exit polls show he captured only 43 percent of the women’s vote here and 44 percent of the 18- to 29-year-old vote.

Since the election, Trump’s support among Wisconsin women as a whole seems to have slipped further. Some female conservatives, of course, feel he does not represent their fundamental beliefs, while others remain committed to supporting the president.

The latest Marquette Law School poll released in March found a full 60 percent of Wisconsin’s female voters disapprove of Trump, with only in one in three expressing approval, roughly the same rate as his approval rating among voters ages 18 to 29.

Nationally, GOP support among women has declined as well since the presidential election. A recent Gallup Poll found the number of U.S. women who identify as Republican or Republican-leaning decreased from 37 percent to 32 percent from November 2016 to November 2017.

In this context, it’s easy to see why →



“As a millennial woman, I often feel like people check the boxes for me and immediately assume that because I am a woman, I have liberal ideas.”

— Alivia Fenney

Women ages 18 to 35 are much more likely to identify as liberal (38%) than conservative (26%), according to a 2016 ABC News poll.

young women with conservative identities — regardless of their feelings about Trump — are acutely aware that their beliefs put them at odds with other members of their demographic.

The bias on college campuses

For young women concentrated on Wisconsin's college campuses, mustering the courage to be open about their conservative beliefs can be daunting.

"I usually just don't tell anyone what my viewpoint is because they often equate conservative with woman-hating, homophobic, racist, mean or other hateful things," a young woman named Maddie says. (She asked that her last name not be used for fear of reprisal.)

After putting a sticker on her laptop that identified her as a Republican, Maddie worried that professors would downgrade her, so she bought a new laptop cover. To get better grades, she often masks her conservatism and writes what her professors "want to hear" so as not to risk academic consequences for siding with Republicans.

Maddie thinks it's even harder to be a young woman with conservative beliefs on social issues. "In my generation, it is really hard to be socially conservative," she says.

"It's one thing to tell people, 'I'm fiscally conservative but socially liberal' — usually people can accept that. But the minute you tell them you're socially conservative, they either want nothing to do with you or they want to debate you for the rest of the day or night," she says.

Kara Bell, a 20-year-old senior at UW-Madison who's active in campus politics, has had similar experiences. "When advocating for conservative groups on campus, girls will approach me and ask, 'What's your stance on abortion?' and then dutifully await a response in which they will

counter with a barrage of eye rolls and disgust," she says.

"Then, as a parting goodbye, they will ask, 'How can you be a woman and still be against women's reproductive rights?'"

Bell recounts an incident in which a student targeted her by tweeting at her sorority to ask how it felt about having a "white supremacist" in its chapter. "Conservative women have many targets on their back," she says. "Oftentimes, they are stereotyped or squeezed into molds that portray them as someone they aren't."

But it's not all bad news. Bell says incidents like the Twitter insult draw her closer to other conservative women.

"When that happened," she says, "young women across the country contacted me to support me. I grew stronger in my beliefs, feeling more confident to speak up."

Kitchens, too, finds support in her professional circles. "Through my job, I have a huge network of like-minded friends, including many smart, supportive women."

Footsteps to follow

Young conservative women don't have to look far for role models in Wisconsin. To name just a few: Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, state Sens. Alberta Darling and Leah Vukmir, state Rep. Jessie Rodriguez and Wisconsin Supreme Court Justices Rebecca Bradley, Patience Roggensack and Annette Ziegler.

Rodriguez, of Franklin, tells of being rebuffed by a minority caucus for being a Republican after first being elected to the Assembly in 2013.

"I learned quickly the power of stereotypes after my election to the state Legislature. A news outlet had informed me that the Democrat-run Black and Latino Caucus wasn't sure whether to let me



"Conservative women have many targets on their back."

— Kara Bell

join their group, which would have been all but automatic if I were a Democrat,” Rodriguez says. “Perhaps the snub wouldn’t have been so big if they hadn’t already begun opening their doors to white legislators elected in minority districts.”

“I told the reporter I didn’t need to be a member of the Black and Latino Caucus to understand how to empower minority communities. This was something I did long

before I ran for office,” she says, adding that voters didn’t send her to Madison to get bogged down in identity politics.

Rachel Campos-Duffy, a Fox News contributor and author who is married to U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy (R-Wis.), says, “Today, there are lots of angry people — and marches — purporting to speak for women.” She advises her state’s young conserva-

tive women to “speak out in confidence and good humor.”

“Conservative women consistently poll as the happiest demographic. It’s not surprising. Conservative women embrace and celebrate our femininity, including marriage and motherhood — which we do not see in conflict with our happiness. We seek cooperation and love with men, not a gender war that shames men and boys with dangerous name-calling like ‘toxic masculinity,’ ” she adds.

Campos-Duffy says a career spent in the media has taught her “there are many more people who think like us and share our values than we ever see on TV, in movies or in pop culture in general.”

Jill Didier, who served as the Republican mayor of Wauwatosa from 2008 to 2012 and is now vice president of Miron Construction in Milwaukee, advises young female conservatives to “stay true to your values that guide you. Then you can always stand strong in discussion, debate and decision.”

Tiffany Koehler, a Republican from Slinger, offers

similar advice: “Always remain true to yourself — in truth you will find peace.”

“As a conservative woman, more than half of my friends are liberal, and we have grown to find strength in our differences,” says Koehler, an Army veteran who has run for the Assembly. “We attack the issues, not each other. Listening to one another is so important. Many of us have much more in common than what divides us.”

Women feel empowered

Women’s empowerment has been in the spotlight lately, and young female conservatives — despite their unique challenges — are feeling empowered, too.

“The current message of equality for women has given all women a platform to stand firm in their own convictions, even if they are conservative,” says Fenney, who works in public affairs.

The consequences that come with defying stereotypes actually fuel her drive to combat them. “I feel empowered as both a woman and millennial to use the tools in my own pocket to share my views and be a role model to young women everywhere who may feel that because they believe in conservative ideas, they are not valued,” she adds.

Citing the outpouring of encouragement she received following the Twitter incident, Bell says, “**Being a young conservative woman is empowering.**”

Even if their numbers are relatively small, there is still strength in them. Expressing a sentiment echoed by the other women, Bell says, “The support I receive from other conservative women encourages me to be more vocal.”

“You fight the fight because it’s good and true — not because it’s popular and en vogue,” says Willoughby. “You fight because you believe freedom empowers individuals, government exists to preserve equally the rights of all citizens, and the dignity of all life deserves defense.”

To borrow a catchphrase made popular recently by their liberal counterparts, these conservative Wisconsin women do what they feel is right: They persist. ❏

Emily Jashinsky is a commentary writer for the Washington Examiner. Jashinsky, a Delafield native, was a Badger Institute intern in 2014 and served previously as the spokeswoman for Young America’s Foundation.



Rodriguez



Campos-Duffy



Koehler



Valuable tool or crony capitalism?

By Ken Wysocky

With the stroke of a pen in 1975, Gov. Patrick Lucey signed a bill that gave municipalities a valuable tool for financing infrastructure improvements on blighted urban land: tax incremental financing (TIF). In the ensuing decades, municipalities in virtually every Wisconsin county have used it to coax developers to convert difficult-to-improve property into higher-value real estate that generates more property tax revenue.

Developers, municipal officials and politicians have all embraced the funding mechanism, originally designed to fill the void left by reductions in federal block grants. In fact, ***there were 1,238 active tax incremental districts (TIDs) in 456 municipalities in 2017***, according to data compiled by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue.

But a growing number of politicians and other observers are less enamored with how tax incremental financing is used. They generally see TIF as an initially good idea that has become a gravy train for well-connected developers and distorts free-market principles.

Changes to TIF regulations have broadened over the decades and diluted the financing mechanism's original intent, which was to fund infrastructure improvements — water and sewer lines, for example, or cleaning up environmental contamination, detractors say. By assuming

Tax incremental financing has become a gravy train for developers and distorts free market, critics say

the cost of these improvements, municipalities removed expensive obstacles to profitable development. But today, many municipalities — in addition to finance infrastructure — are handing out direct payments to developers.

As the rules governing TIFs relaxed, the funding mechanism has become overused, if not downright abused, critics say. They're particularly concerned about violations of the crucial "but-for" test, in which municipalities must determine that a development would not occur "but for" the financial assistance from a TIF, and about handouts to wealthy developers who don't really need the help.

"One of the biggest problems is that there's now such

incentives to encourage development. For instance, in charming Cedarburg — hardly a hub of blight — the city is giving Brookfield-based developer HSI Properties a \$1.925 million public subsidy to build an apartment complex on a 4.25-acre prime parcel owned by St. Francis Borgia Catholic Church.

Moreover, Stroebel asserts, the use of TIF perversely affects the market value of property. “Instead of the market truly defining what land is worth, the price goes up once landowners know that TIF is involved,” he says.

Rick Esenberg, president of the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, a conservative law-and-policy think tank based in Milwaukee, asserts that too often TIF becomes a form of corporate welfare for wealthy developers, with municipalities picking winners and losers. And its spread becomes contagious; think of it as municipal peer pressure, where one municipality sees neighboring communities attracting development with TIF and feels compelled to join the party to remain competitive. (See related story on Page 15.)

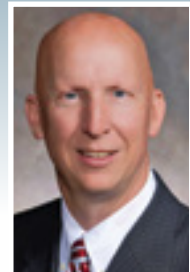
“When developers know they can be subsidized in this way, it becomes much harder for anyone to refuse to do it. And because the prerequisites for TIFs have expanded and aren’t rigorously observed, there’s really nothing for which you can’t use a TIF. Developers know it and communities know it ... so it become more of a presumption than an exception,” Esenberg says.

Direct payments to developers

Esenberg and Stroebel question why TIF projects increasingly include direct payments to developers. Wauwatosa officials, for instance, are close to approving a TIF that would pay \$13.8 million to developer Mayfair Hotel LLC over the course of 18 years.

The money would defray some of the costs associated with converting an 11-story, 150,000-square-foot of- →

“It’s like a drug for some developers — they can’t develop without it. I think communities get hoodwinked.”



State Sen.
**Duey
Stroebel**

an ad-hoc, free-wheeling nature to TIFs,” says state Sen. Duey Stroebel (R-Cedarburg), who is also a longtime real estate developer. “There’s also the whole issue of what defines blight. Blight has essentially become whatever officials define it to be ... even if it’s a prime piece of real estate, there’s a way to define it as blighted.

“I know it might seem strange that a developer is against TIFs,” he adds. ***“But while the original intent was good, they’ve now morphed into something so much different.”***

Stroebel prefers a free-market approach, noting that property in a desirable location shouldn’t require added

fice building into a 12-story, 196-room luxury hotel near N. Mayfair Road and W. North Ave., according to news reports.

It's difficult to assess how widespread the practice of direct payments has become. According to a 2009 study of 81 closed TIDs, compiled by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (now the Wisconsin Policy Forum), grants to developers accounted for just 2.7 percent of expenditures. Only 11 of those TIDs provided grants to developers, but in those 11 districts, grants averaged almost 20 percent of expenditures. While it's hard to ascertain the percentage of current TIF expenditures that are developer grants, observers believe direct payments are much more common now.

"We're seeing more and more of these kinds of payments," Stroebel says. "They're problematic because there's even less accountability in those situations. It's one thing if taxpayers are subsidizing specific infrastructure improvements. But if a developer says it has a million-dollar income gap that must be filled to make a project feasible ... who provides the data that proves the developer actually needs that money to make it feasible? The developer. ***It's like the fox guarding the henhouse.***"

Regarding the Cedarburg project, John Czarnecki — a member of the Common Council since 2014 and a principal at Commercial United LLC, a real estate development firm — defends the use of such grants on a case-by-case basis. For the 69-unit Arrabelle apartment project, for instance, the subsidies were necessary to help ensure HSI Properties could meet its profitability targets.

HSI initially planned to build a 100-unit project on land currently occupied by an abandoned church school building. But after residents objected to the size, the city asked

HSI to scale it back. Only then did HSI ask for financial assistance via TIF, says Czarnecki, who did not run for reelection in April.

"It all came down to the building that Cedarburg approved there, which features high-end apartments, is too expensive to build for the rent the market will support," he points out. The math is simple: Fewer units means less revenue generated.

Is the church property truly blighted? Czarnecki says it is because the school, which closed a few years ago, is vacant and the building is "functionally obsolete." He says the project passes the "but-for" test because without a TIF, the project would not have moved forward. In the end, city officials had to opt for the HSI project or gamble that something better would come along.

More pressure on government services

Stroebel and others point out that TIF projects, such as apartment complexes and mixed-use commercial buildings, put increased pressure on municipal services such as police and fire protection, schools, garbage collection, road maintenance, snowplowing and the like.

But while the now-developed property typically increases in value and generates more property tax revenue, that additional revenue doesn't go toward funding

the increased demand for services. It also does not relieve the property tax burden on residents for quite some time because the bonds typically are issued in terms of 20 years or more.

"The demands on infrastructure increase, but everyone else (except the property under development) keeps paying for them," Stroebel says. "They (TIF proponents) say there's no tax impact, but the benefits to residents are years and years off. So taxpayers subsidize the development un-

Use of TIF grows

1979 - There were fewer than 100 tax incremental districts statewide.

1989 - There were over 450 active TIDs.

2000 - There were more than 750.

2017 - There were 1,238 active TIDs.

2013-2017 - The number of distressed or severely distressed TIDs — districts that weren't generating enough cash flow to pay off the bonds — averaged 93 a year, ranging from a low of 73 in 2013 to 106 in 2015 and 2016, DOR figures show.

How TIF works

- Municipal officials set the boundaries of the tax incremental district.
- Officials determine its base property value.
- They issue municipal bonds to fund infrastructure improvements related to the development.
- Any property tax revenues generated by incremental increases in the TID's value above its base value go toward paying off the municipal bonds.
- Tax revenues derived from the base value of the TID keep flowing to the municipality and any other taxing districts to which it belongs.



AG Architecture

Cedarburg's TIF-funded Arrabelle apartment project is expected to be completed by fall 2019.

til the bonds are paid off. It's like a drug for some developers — they can't develop without it. I think communities get hoodwinked. It's a shame."

The converse also is true: If developers improve properties without TIF assistance, the gains in property tax revenues immediately benefit the community, rather than waiting decades.

Instrumental to development

TIF proponents take issue with the criticisms. To illustrate the effectiveness of TIDs, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities (LWM), for instance, noted that the 1,128 TIFs that were active in August 2015 had generated property value growth of more than \$16 billion since their inception — or \$14.4 million per TID. In addition, 447 TIDs were terminated (the debt paid off) in Wisconsin between 2000 and 2015, adding nearly \$9 billion of new value to tax bases.

Furthermore, the league asserted that property value growth occurs at a faster rate in TIDs. The total equalized value of all active Wisconsin TIDs increased by 6.4 percent from August 2014 to August 2015. In comparison, the state's overall equalized value grew by only 2.4 percent in that period, according to the league.

"TIF is a very effective mechanism for municipalities to share in the equity creation of property value with a developer," says Pete Moegenburg, president of Moegenburg

Research, a Brookfield commercial real estate appraisal and consulting firm and a 29-year industry veteran. "Without that assistance, development often won't occur."

Moreover, Moegenburg says, without the additional financial shot in the arm provided by TIF, most developers could not afford to develop profitable projects.

He cites 5 percent annual increases in construction costs (think lumber, steel, concrete and labor, just for starters) since 2010. Then there's often the issue of contaminated brownfield sites that require expensive clean-up, another disincentive for developers. In short, he says, many TIF opponents are long on vague rhetorical criticism but short on intimate working knowledge about the nuts and bolts of how real estate development really works.

"Labor costs have increased exponentially, too," Moegenburg points out. "And at the same time, the income generated by projects has remained relatively flat ... The result is that developers need a cushion to provide some means to succeed."

Moegenburg also scoffs at the notion that TIF equates to capital cronyism. "They call it corporate welfare ... like developers get a TIF approved, then run off to Las Vegas for the next party," he says. "TIF is a very real financial consideration provided by municipalities to assist in developing property ... improving it to its best and highest use. →



Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture / Strang Architects

Eau Claire's Pablo Center at the Confluence will reportedly cost \$15 million more than its original \$45 million estimate.

“Crony capitalism is a terribly simplistic and ill-founded argument against TIFs,” he adds. “People that make that argument probably don’t have a lot of dirt beneath their fingernails.”

Moegenburg does concede that some TIF projects don’t meet the strict letter of the law posed by the “but-for” test. But if developers don’t obtain sufficient financial resources from communities, they either will walk away from developing, say, an apartment complex or agree to build it but “impose the costs on society” in the form of rents significantly higher than the prevailing market rates for similar units, he says.

Controversy in Eau Claire

Kerry Kincaid, who’s been president of the Eau Claire City Council since 2009, is a strong advocate of TIFs, including one created in 2014 that’s become controversial: the downtown development of the \$80 million, publicly and privately funded Confluence Project. The mixed-use development is so named because the site overlooks the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers.

On behalf of 19 clients, WILL in 2015 sued the City of Eau Claire and its Joint Review Board. The lawsuit challenges a \$1.5 million payment to a real estate developer to cover project-related expenses as well as the review board’s designation of properties within the development as blighted. An Eau Claire County circuit court and the Wisconsin Court of Appeals have sided with the city; WILL appealed to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments in February. A decision is expected later this spring or early summer.

Kincaid says the city has used TIF for decades to spur economic growth — 12 TIDs in all, with about half of them still active. Regarding the Confluence Project, she says public support has been overwhelmingly positive.

“I’m a proponent of TIF because I have seen what a city can do by using TIDs,” she says. “Our first TID was in 2002 ... to build what’s now called Phoenix Park, which has become the jewel of our city.” TIF revenue was used to pay for cleaning up the brown-field site, which helped attract private investment. To date, the project has generated \$69 million in new property value and \$8.2 million in additional tax income for the city, she says.

“Crony capitalism is a terribly simplistic and ill-founded argument against TIFs.”

— Pete Moegenburg
of Moegenburg Research

The properties that make up the Confluence Project were blighted, including vacant land and commercial buildings and unmaintained parking lots, she says. “I’m confident it could not have been developed without a TIF,” Kincaid says. “I’ve lived in Eau Claire since the mid-1970s, when the downtown was vibrant. In the 1980s and ’90s, things emptied out and downtown was hanging on by a fingernail. We brought life back to downtown, and it wouldn’t have happened without public investments through TIF.”

Kincaid also rejects the crony capitalism argument, noting that only one of the city’s TIF projects included a financial incentive for a developer. “There are no cronies, just capitalists who want to invest in improving land,” she says.

Esenberg disagrees, saying that the properties in question were not blighted as defined by state statutes. **“Blight is not what you’d like it to be,”** he says. “Blight is defined as slum-like conditions where the physical condition imperils life and property.”

Looking for solutions

So if TIF is being overused or abused, what should be done? Esenberg says the state Legislature should strengthen the “but-for” test

and tighten up the definition of blight, as well as more narrowly define the circumstances under which TIF can be used.

Stroebe suggests several remedies, including the use of so-called pay-as-you-go funding instead of cash incentives for developers; this technique is already used for some TIDs. Under this scenario, developers would have more skin in the game by funding some of the costs up front, then getting repaid via new property tax revenue generated by any increase in the site’s value.

“It’s better because instead of a city borrowing money, the developer technically fronts the money, and he gets paid off by the incremental increases in property value,” he explains.

Stroebe says he has introduced bills to reform TIF use every year he’s been a state legislator, since 2011. “But special interests recoil at them,” he says. “We get good sponsorship, but, again, it’s about special interests that bring funding into the political process.” ❏

Ken Wysocky of Whitefish Bay is a freelance journalist and editor.



Eau Claire's Confluence Project did not meet TIF requirements, a lawsuit pending before the Wisconsin Supreme Court argues.

Holzman Moss Bottimo Architecture / Strang Architects

Tax incremental financing is a recipe for abuse

Legislature should fix the complex process that benefits developers and politicians at the expense of taxpayers

By Richard Esenberg

Tax incremental financing might seem to be a dry and technical subject. The details are real green-eyeshade stuff. But their impact on the political process teaches us a tantalizing lesson: Tax incremental financing is an occasion of sin.

There are two problems — one related to the obscure and difficult to understand nature of tax incremental districts (TIDs) and the other related to the simple way in which politicians can sell them. In other words, what we can't see is critical and what we do see can be misleading.

Let's start with the fuzzy stuff. The idea behind tax incremental financing (TIF) is that a subsidy to a developer is necessary to cause the development to happen. Because the subsidy is "paid for" from the taxes levied on new development that would not otherwise occur, the creation of a TID is supposedly a win-win. But determining whether the conditions for creation of a TID and whether the subsidized development would not otherwise occur is a complicated inquiry.

It can involve inscrutable financial calculations and often faith-based economic predictions. ***It requires concluding that the development subsidized by taxpayers would not be replaced by something different in the absence of a tax incremental district.***

The process of making this determination is likely to be dominated by the highly interested persons with the most to gain. Because any individual taxpayer will not be much affected by the revenue improperly diverted →

to the developer should the requisites for TIF not be met, the public is much less motivated to wade into the morass.

When political processes are obscure and of much greater import to a few well-heeled interests than the public at large, there is a substantial risk that they will be “captured” by those with the most to gain.

But it gets worse. Politicians who create TIDs can claim that they have delivered something — a shiny new development — without costing taxpayers a dime. TIF combines a complicated process dominated by people with an ox to gore, presided over by politicians given the chance to promise something for nothing. What could go wrong?

A prime example is the use of a tax incremental district to help finance the Milwaukee streetcar. The relevant district consists of two very expensive skyscrapers. One was already under construction, and the other already had been announced. Whatever you think of spending this money on the streetcar, it was most decidedly not “free.”

Of course, the Legislature knew of these risks, and so it attempted in various ways to restrict the use of TIDs. Here, we learn a second lesson about the risks presented by courts that are overly quick to defer to politicians. Restrictions on the use of TIF are not self-executing. If politicians ignore them, it takes litigation — and courts — to enforce them.

In *Voters With Facts v. City of Eau Claire*, my colleagues and I at the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty represent a group of taxpayers who believe that these requirements have not been met in connection with two tax incremental districts associated with the Confluence Project in downtown Eau Claire. In particular, it was necessary for the city to determine that the affected area was blighted (i.e., “slum-like”) and that the subsidized development would not happen “but for” creation of the districts.

Our clients believe that neither of these conditions are true and want a chance to prove it in court. Al-

though its decision is a bit unclear, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals held that the conditions need not be true. Although they might seem to be preconditions to TIF, they need not actually be present. It is enough for the city and, in the case of the “but for” determination, a joint review board to say that they are.

The case is pending before the Wisconsin Supreme Court, with a decision expected in late spring or early summer. If the Court of Appeals is right, tax incremental financing can more or less be used whenever politicians want to give away money.

Some see little problem with that. If voters allow their local politicians to divert tax money to private interests, they deserve what they get.

But there are at least two problems. The first is that state law protects all taxpayers from the unnecessary diversion of public funds. This includes the minority who might oppose an improperly cre-

ated tax incremental district as well as the majority who might be willing to tolerate it. The second is that, as we have seen, the process by which these districts are created is subject to distortion by interested developers and politicians who cannot resist seeming to provide a free lunch.

While courts have a role in reining in TIF, the principal responsibility lies with the Legislature. ***A hard-to-decipher process that yields huge benefits to a few and opportunities for politicians to pose for holy pictures calls for change.***

One of the more positive aspects of the populist turn in our politics is that it has highlighted the ways in which government is used to distort markets and reward political cronies. From our nation’s founding, we have understood that limiting the power of government to dispense favors and impose burdens is the best way to address this.

The Legislature has created a vehicle for abuse. It needs to fix this. ❏

Richard Esenberg is president of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty.

Politicians who create tax incremental districts can claim that they have delivered something — a shiny new development — without costing taxpayers a dime.

From The Ground Up

At the Fairwater Sand Plant, what was once a mine site now contains prairie land and a lake full of fish and other wildlife due to Badger Mining Corp.'s reclamation practices.



Photos by Jeffrey Phelps

Family-owned for five generations, Badger Mining thrives with its inclusive team approach and commitment to environment

Berlin — Brandon Hess runs a large sand mine in south-central Wisconsin, yet his two young sons don't even have a sandbox in their back yard.

"I deal with it enough," Hess says as he scuffs sand off his boots before swinging up into his pickup truck on a recent sunny spring day in the heart of the Badger Mining Corp. mine in nearby Fairwater.

"The sand gets everywhere. It's messy," he joked. But to Hess, the silky silica is also golden. →

**ON THE
FRONTLINES**
by Betsy Thatcher

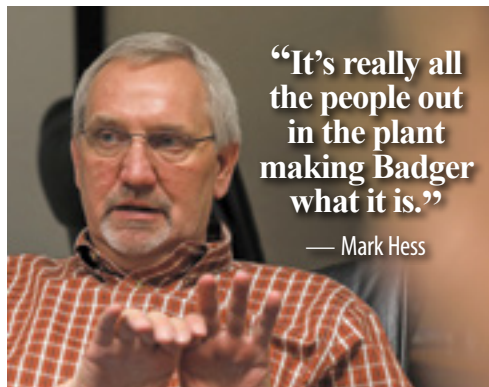
It has run through the veins of his family for five generations and spurred a resurgent economic boon across Wisconsin's Driftless Area.

The area — which spans Minnesota, northwestern Illinois, northeastern Iowa and Wisconsin, where it sweeps along its western side from Burnett County and into the south-central region — was never glaci-

ated and holds a mother lode of sandstone. ***Because of the unique geology, experts say, the mineral deposits yield the best industrial sand on the planet.***

Consumers often don't realize that silica is in myriad common products — from toothpaste to glass to deodorant to bath tubs. It turns out that silica is also the ideal material for propping open fractures in shale made when "fracking" for natural gas and oil.

Around 109 million metric tons of silica sand were



"It's really all the people out in the plant making Badger what it is."

— Mark Hess

produced in the United States with a value of \$8.23 billion in 2014. Of that, Wisconsin contributed 38.3 million tons valued at \$3.15 billion — making the Badger State the nation's largest producer of fracking sand.

That translates into thousands of jobs and 92 active industrial sand facilities in the state, mostly in west-

ern and central Wisconsin, according to the state Department of Natural Resources.

Badger Mining has long been one of the biggest and most successful of those companies.

Roots go back to 1800s

Brandon Hess' grandfather, George Hess Jr., co-founded Badger Mining in 1979 with brother-in-law Russell Chier (pronounced "shire"). But the families' mining legacy dates to the 1800s, when Russell's grandfather,



Photos of nearly all of Badger Mining's roughly 280 employees are displayed in the lobby of the company's Berlin headquarters.

In 1949, Clifford Chier and his half-brother Edward purchased land with a sand deposit in Fairwater. The plant built on the land is shown here in the 1960s.



George Hess Jr.



Russell Chier



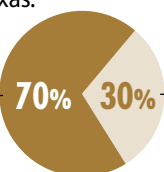
Clifford Chier

Badger Mining Corp.

- **Founded in 1979** by George Hess Jr. and Russell Chier in Berlin in Green Lake County.
- **Originated in 1949** when Clifford Chier started the C.A. Chier Sand Co. in Fairwater in Fond du Lac County.
- **Employs** about 280 people.
- **Operates three sand processing facilities** in Wisconsin – in Alma Center and Taylor, both in Jackson County, and in Fairwater.
- **Operates three sand coating facilities** in Wisconsin – in Merrilan and Taylor, both in Jackson County.
- **Operates a transloading facility** in George West, Texas, and has a new sand mine in Kermit, Texas.

Of the **700,000 to 800,000 tons of sand produced** annually at the Fairwater mine

Sand sold to foundries



Sand sold to companies that extract oil and natural gas



Chier sand trucks are shown at New Holstein Foundry in 1951.

Michael, toiled in bank sand mines. He established his own mine in Berlin in 1900.

Michael Chier's sons followed him into the business.

Son Clifford started his own operation, C.A. Chier Sand Co., in 1949, when he saw the opportunities created by foundries shifting from bank sand to silica sand for their castings. He and his half-brother Edward purchased a burned-out sand plant in Fairwater, 20 miles south of Berlin, which was sitting on a large deposit of sandstone.

At the time, the mine encompassed about 20 acres. Today, the total mine — open pit, production facilities and, the largest chunk, reclaimed land — covers about 900 acres.

Clifford's son Russell and son-in-law, George Hess Jr. (who married Russell's sister, Sharon), learned the business from the ground up. Like Clifford, they saw opportunity.

When the Fairwater mine was purchased, hydraulic fracturing (now commonly called "fracking") came into use. Sand was a key ingredient in the process, and over the years, it became clear the Upper Midwest's sandstone silica was the perfect size, shape and hardness for the job.

With that market in mind, Russell Chier →



Brandon Hess

Frontlines

The Fairwater Sand Plant is Badger Mining's oldest sand mine. A loader hauls sand from the stockpile to the dry plant.



and George Hess Jr. purchased their next and largest mine — in Taylor in Jackson County. They purchased the land in 1978 and opened the mine in 1979.

While Wisconsin sand is the best in the world for fracking, there is one drawback. It's far from the oil and gas fields, creating competition in places like Texas.

While Texas "dune" sand is inferior in quality for fracking and more of it needs to be used compared to Wisconsin's sand, it is far cheaper — mainly because of the high cost of transporting sand from the Midwest.

"When they buy a ton of sand down in Texas that came from Wisconsin, it costs more to get it there than the actual cost of the sand," says Mark Hess, who is George Hess Jr.'s son and Brandon's father.

Badger Mining, as a result, operates a transloading facility in George West, Texas, and has a mine in Kermit, Texas, which will begin operating soon.

Unique leadership structure

Keeping the business in the family has been a priority for Badger Mining. Yet, unlike a lot of family-owned operations, the company uniquely incorporates non-family members into its top tier of decision-makers and does not equate family status with automatic employment.

It operates under a philosophy of collective manage-



"We always say we are just a small time in that piece of land's life."

— Nick Bartol

ment and is led by a four-member advisory team, rather than a CEO or president.

Two on the team are family members, two are not and each holds the same power. Helping the advisory team is an eight-member leader group, also made up of family and non-family members.

Mark Hess, who is on the four-member team, says every employee has a voice. A large display in the lobby at the Berlin headquarters includes photos of nearly every employee, many of whom have been with the company for three decades or more.

"When you come in the front door and you look up on the wall and you see all the associates of Badger Mining, that's really who Badger Mining is," Mark Hess says. "It's not the four or eight people that are supposedly the ones in charge. It's really all the people out in the plant making Badger what it is."

That team approach began with Clifford Chier. ***He was known for sitting down with his lunch pail in the mining plant on Fridays with all the workers*** and hashing out the week's events and seeking the miners' ideas.

Russell Chier and George Hess Jr. continued the tradition, although the ritual morphed into an after-work case-of-beer and bottle-of-brandies affair.

Friday evening beer and fish fries at the local tavern

with Russell Chier and workers weren't uncommon, either, longtime employees say.

At one point in the company's history, it tried the traditional top-down, CEO model, but it was short-lived. The owners opted for the team approach.

"That's actually the way Cliff operated back when he was at the plant," Mark Hess says. "It's really a way for us to get back to our roots and operate the way we had ever since the beginning."

"Nobody is going to be given anything (only because) they're in the family," he adds. "They have to earn any position that they would get."

Six percent of the current Badger Mining workforce are third- and fourth-generation family members. The company understands, though, that it has to grow and plan for the future. Many of its approximately 280 employees are in their 50s and 60s.

A fifth-generation potential employee is now an eighth-grader, says Deanne Bremer, a Fairwater operations coach and a fourth-generation Chier.

The company has a summer program for high school family members interested in the business. They shadow employees in all facets of the operation to see what interests them most.

Environmental stewardship

While Badger Mining's business model and culture have drawn praise, landing the company on several "best places to work" lists, the nature of its work has drawn criticism.

Mining operations often cause consternation among neighbors who fear water and air pollution, health concerns or noise and traffic issues. Some environmental groups oppose natural resource mining for many of the same reasons and because they view it as stripping and permanently damaging the land.

Silica sand mining ventures get a black eye for their



Samples from outbound sand shipments are retained at the plant for quality assurance purposes. Different customers request different grades (sizes) of sand grains.

Wages

\$57,000

The average annual wage in 2016 for sand mining workers in Wisconsin.

\$44,000

The average wage among all workers in 2014 in Wisconsin.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources



Joyce

connection to oil and gas drilling, says Nick Bartol, Badger Mining's government and public relations specialist.

"We're not the prettiest industry; we realize that," he says. "So we try to be good neighbors. We donate quite a bit to our local communities. We are heavily regulated, and we strive every day to remain in compliance."

Some mine operations are "environmentally irresponsible," but Badger Mining has a commitment to the community and good practices, says Mark Hess.

"You can wreck the environment by going in mining, but *there are ways you can effectively mine and do it in an environmentally friendly way*," he says.

The company uses "geomorphic reclamation" practices to restore the land after sandstone has been extracted, Bartol says. For instance, slopes and valleys are created in the mine for water to flow into. "We always say we are just a small time in that piece of land's life," he adds.

Sara Joyce, quality technical assurance leader and a 34-year employee, says that philosophy dates to the early days of Badger Mining. "We reclaim the land to better than or

close to what it was before," she says.

Mining is a heavily regulated industry in Wisconsin. Badger Mining has earned the DNR's Green Tier designation for its operational practices, given only to businesses that exceed regulatory requirements and implement rigorous environmental management systems.

Brandon Hess, like his father before him, spent his childhood in the sand mines and appreciates the natural beauty of Wisconsin. They are part of who he is.

"The idea (of the company's reclamation system) is that 150 years from now, you couldn't even tell we were here," he says. "I have a passion for that." ❏

Betsy Thatcher of Menomonee Falls is a freelance writer and a former Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reporter.

Time to bu



“We have to admit it; we’re an EMS department. ... We recognize the changing field and are doing something about it.”

— *Greenfield Fire Chief-Emergency Manager*
Jonathan Cohn

Fire departments today have so few fires to fight that many have become EMS agencies. Is there a better way?

By Dave Daley

The ever-blaring sirens in Cudahy suggest the small city of 18,000 is perpetually ablaze. Fire Department vehicles rolled out of the city’s two fire stations on almost 2,400 calls in 2016.

But just 3 percent of those calls involved fires of any sort.

A whopping 86 percent were for medical calls and most of the rest for traffic accidents, falls in homes, hazardous material spills, false alarms and the like.

Still, at a city meeting last December, Cudahy Fire Chief Daniel Mayer set off a minor squabble when he would not acknowledge the changing landscape.

“We’re staffing for fires, but we’re still staying busy with EMS (emergency medical services),” Mayer argued to an alderman asking if medical calls were not the department’s main business these days. “We run the ambulance on the side,” Mayer insisted. “It’s what we do in our spare time.”

Not really.

Cudahy’s own data for 2016 show the reality: 2,058 calls for emergency medical services, 270 calls for other services and

a mere 70 calls to fight fires in dumpsters, buildings, vehicles, fields and the like.

The department’s annual report listed only \$428,306 in total fire losses for 2016 — the two most notable being a condo fire on Creekside Drive that caused \$65,000 in damage and a garage fire on College Ave. with an estimated loss of \$30,000.

It’s the same story all over Wisconsin. Less than 3 percent of calls to fire departments in Appleton, La Crosse and Sheboygan were for fires, most of which were hardly infernos. Less than 2 percent of calls to fire departments in Madison,

See **DALEY** on Page 24

Government



YOUTUBE



At the Greenfield Fire Department in 2016, 87 percent of total calls were for EMS/rescue.

ALLEN FREDRICKSON PHOTO

grows at expense of private sector

By Dave Lubach

The Sheboygan Fire Department recently marked its 10th year of providing emergency medical services (EMS) to the city's residents. But not all of the parties associated with the decision are celebrating the milestone.

When the Common Council voted to roll EMS into the Fire Department

and move on from a private ambulance service, there was plenty of outcry from critics on the council and in the city's business community who wondered if it would be a successful money-making venture for Sheboygan and if private-sector jobs would be lost.

"For aldermen on the board at the time that had business experience, it was never an issue of providing a quality ambu-

lance service," recalls Ald. Jim Bohren, a frequent critic of the arrangement who was on the council then. "It's the reimbursements and the city being in the bill-collecting business" that are problematic, he says.

In addition, Bohren says the council had concerns that the EMS arrangement was a way for the Fire Department to

See **LUBACH** on Page 24



ALLEN FREDRICKSON PHOTO

Firefighters/paramedics chat over lunch at the Greenfield Fire Rescue Department.

The Sheboygan Common Council reportedly had concerns that the EMS arrangement was a way for the Fire Department to keep up its staffing despite the decreased fire calls.

DALEY

Greenfield and West Allis involved smoke or fire. In Eau Claire? Just 1.2 percent.

And even those percentages are a little misleading because most “fires” included in “fire call” statistics in most cities are not a threat to life or valuable property. In Milwaukee, where 3.4 percent of Fire Department calls in 2016 were classified as “fire calls,” for example, only 1 in ev-

ery 164 actually involved fire or smoke in structures other than garages. Even in the category of “fire calls,” rubbish fires were more prevalent than structure fires. And for every one fire of any sort, the department responded to 24 emergency medical calls.

The fact is that fire departments nowadays don't deal much with fire.

Throughout the Badger State and much of the rest of America over the

LUBACH

keep up its staffing despite the decreased fire calls. Last year, the department had 4,126 EMS calls and only 126 fire calls, a trend seen nationwide. Of the department's total calls last year, only 2.4 percent were fire calls.

“I think there could be some reduction of staff without the ambulance service, but figuring the number is above my pay grade,” Bohren says.

Since taking on EMS in 2008, the Fire Department reports responding to nearly 35,000 requests for EMS and making 30,000 transports to medical facilities.

The transports have generated revenue for the city that didn't exist previously — nearly \$7 million from 2013 to 2017, according to the department's 2017 annual report. City budget allotments for the department have ranged annually from \$7.4 million to \$8 million from 2015 to 2018.

“We've brought approximately \$8 million-plus in revenue into the city,” says Deputy Chief Charles Butler, the department's EMS Health and Safety Emergency Management leader. “So if you look at it from a fire department perspective on what you're paying for the

past two decades, fire departments have morphed right before our eyes into EMS agencies. And this raises sometimes uncomfortable questions about whether our most cherished of public servants are really serving the public as efficiently and effectively as taxpayers and policy wonks would hope.

The questions are obvious: Have fire departments downsized to the extent possible? Are they really the best and most logical way of providing medical services and transportation? Separating emotion from fact is particularly difficult given America's debt to firefighters of the past.

In an increasingly volatile world, public safety professions have taken on "sainthood," former Beaver Dam Mayor Jack Hanks says. ***Too many cities view fire and police positions as a "sacred cow."***

"They're untouchable since 9-11," he adds. "No elected official I know will whack public safety without a lot of thought, as it is tantamount to political suicide — that is, 'How dare you put my children at risk?'"

Risks and rewards

The risks, any actuary would conclude, are nowhere near what they used to be.

While the nation's population grew over 40 percent since 1977, structure fires plunged 57 percent over the same period, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Big improvements in fire safety — more fire-resistant building materials, tougher building codes, quicker fire detection through increased use of smoke alarms and automatic sprinkler systems — are behind the sharp drop in fires, the experts say.

Fire deaths across the United States match that downward trend: Home-structure fire deaths fell 56 percent since 1977, NFPA data show. You're now about seven times more likely to be murdered in America than you are to die in a fire or from smoke. (See graphic on Page 28.)

Fire chiefs and the often unionized firefighters they manage saw this coming decades ago. Fire departments across the country and in Wisconsin started providing ambulance and emergency medical services in the mid-1970s. Levels of acknowledgement of the extent of the transformation vary widely, however.

Mayer, the Cudahy chief, says his remarks at the December meeting need to be put in context.

See **DALEY** on Page 26

fire department, it's almost a buy seven, get one free."

"We already had that infrastructure that the city was paying for, so for us to add that capacity, it was a no-brainer. We had the people in the stations that were trained. We had all this in place already, and with a little upgrading and training, we were able to add that service for the community," he says.

"We were going to a lot of these calls already. The overall call volume at the time was a minimal increase. It's just



at that point we were now transporting to the hospital, and we had the ability to gain revenue from the transport," Butler adds.

When the department took on EMS in 2008, it added four firefighter/paramedic positions. The department, which currently has 73.5 FTEs, is back to or below the staffing level before taking on EMS, Butler says.

The new revenue would not have materialized had the ambulance service

See **LUBACH** on Page 26

MIKE NICHOLS



Clinging to an old picture

Suggesting changes to fire department practices isn't an affront to heroes

My grandfather — James Fanning was his name — died of cancer too young the year after I was born so, though he knew me, I never knew him.

In my mind, he is the prematurely white-haired chief of the Worcester, Mass., Fire Department with a wry smile and sharp Irish wit. In the pictures, he is always in uniform.

So are all the firefighters we see in newspaper clips who've died on the job: heroes of Worcester in 1999, where six firemen were lost in the Cold Storage and Warehouse Co. fire; of New York, where we all know the tragedy and sacrifice of 9-11; of so many towns and cities across Wisconsin and the rest of America for centuries.

So it's a sensitive and sometimes controversial thing to point out that ***most firefighters on the vast majority of days are no longer firefighters*** — though they are trained to be. Thanks to building codes, sprinkler systems, smoke detectors and safer building materials, there are very, very few actual →

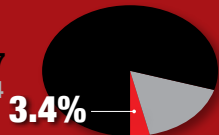
► Fire calls today are an infinitesimal percentage of the total calls to fire departments, while calls for emergency medical services are soaring. Here's a look at those percentages from 2016 and 2017 in communities across Wisconsin.

FIRE DEPARTMENT CALLS:

■ EMS ■ Fire ■ Other

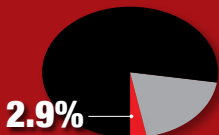
Milwaukee

Total: 98,247
EMS: 78,484
Fire: 3,322



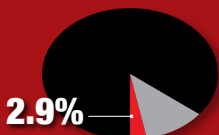
La Crosse

Total: 5,420
EMS: 4,207
Fire: 159



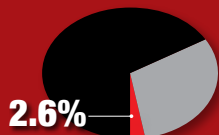
Cudahy

Total: 2,398
EMS: 2,058
Fire: 70



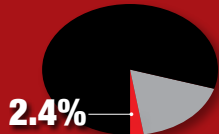
Appleton

Total: 4,705
EMS: 3,127
Fire: 124



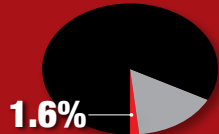
Sheboygan

Total: 5,161
EMS: 4,126
Fire: 126



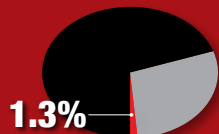
West Allis

Total: 9,535
EMS: 7,899
Fire: 156



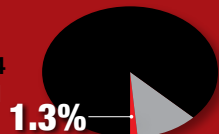
Greenfield

Total: 5,085
EMS: 4,444
Fire: 64



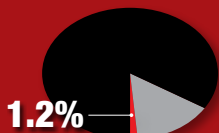
Madison

Total: 30,464
EMS: 21,291
Fire: 411



Eau Claire

Total: 8,734
EMS: 7,332
Fire: 109



Sources:
2016, 2017
annual reports

DALEY

"My complete comments relate to a longstanding understanding of the Fire Service that may not have been found or made clear in ... one specific meeting," he says. "No question, we perform more EMS responses than fire responses. But even if we eliminated the EMS calls from our responsibility, we would still need to maintain our staffing for effective and safe firefighting operations."

The Greenfield Fire Rescue Department is one of the agencies acknowledging the shift. In 2016, it had 4,444 EMS/rescue calls — 87 percent of total calls — but only 64 fire calls, or just over 1 percent.

"We have to admit it; we're an EMS department," say Chief Jonathan Cohn. In fact, Cohn's business card reads: "Fire Chief-Emergency Manager."

"We want to not just talk it but become a more EMS-centric fire department. We recognize the changing field and are doing something about it," he adds.

"The role of the fire chief is not standing in front of a burning building anymore. It is about evaluating best practices, focusing on vision and making that

happen," Cohn says.

Reshaping the department to fit that new model is a hard sell, Cohn admits. "A lot of the industry is still selling firefighting," he says. "People get in to fight fires. We recognize that. Fighting fires is sexy. *That's what we're up against — the romanticism of firefighting.*"

Cohn shrugs, laughs and adds: "It's not too sexy at two in the morning helping someone get off the toilet."

Training requirements

Greenfield firefighter Melissa Janson, an eight-year veteran of the department, admits she was surprised when she first got into the profession to discover how little firefighting is done these days.

"Most people get in to fight fires," she says. "That's what they thought the job was."

And why wouldn't they?

Despite the fact that only one in 20 calls, if that, involve any sort of fire — let alone a structure fire — personnel hired in large career departments typically are trained to fight fires in addition to having EMS skills. The minimum to get hired at most departments is Fire-

"I think there could be some reduction of staff without the ambulance service, but figuring the number is above my pay grade."

— Sheboygan Ald. Jim Bohren

LUBACH

stayed with Orange Cross Ambulance Service — co-owned by the city's two hospitals, HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital and Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center. But some aldermen wonder if the arrangement is producing enough revenue.

"We only have a chance of receiving a full reimbursement on an ambulance call for 16 percent of the calls," Bohren says.

"Our ambulance service grosses about \$3 million a year, and we're only collecting \$1.1 million or \$1.2 million per year, so we're only collecting a bit less than 50 percent of the gross billings."

Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements and service for uninsured patients can reduce the amounts that ambulance services can collect.

Butler says the Fire Department, which uses a third party to handle billing, does the best it can to generate rev-

fighter Level 1, requiring 96 hours of training. EMT-Basic is 150 hours of training, and paramedic level is 1,500 hours of training.

Responding to EMS calls, says Janson, “is an accepted part of the job now.”

Helping someone in a medical emergency, seeing that instant relief,

is gratifying, she says, but admits that responding to a multi-alarm fire “is a different kind of a rush.”

The costs

Becoming a firefighter is not a path to riches.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

See **DALEY** on Page 28



West Allis Fire Department personnel prepare lunch.

ALLEN FREDRICKSON PHOTO

enue despite the insurance obstacles. The city pays the third party 7 percent of the revenue collected.

“While there is not a good answer, there become workarounds,” Butler says. “Right now, when we bill out, a large portion of our demographic is Medicare and Medicaid, and they have mandatory write-offs.

So we submit a \$1,000 bill to them, and they’re only going to pay \$200 to \$300 and the rest we write off.”

The EMS service has proven its worth to the community, Butler says. A city-

“Is the ambulance service being accounted for correctly, and what are the true costs?”

— **Sheboygan Ald. John Belanger**

wide referendum in 2010 approved of continuing the arrangement.

Still, some aldermen believe the department can do better. Ald. John Belanger led the efforts to pay a consultant over \$50,000 to review the department. One of the areas of scrutiny figures to be the EMS arrangement. The results are expected in August.

“Is the ambulance service being accounted for correctly, and what are the true costs? Is it making money, breaking

See **LUBACH** on Page 29

structure fires nowadays. Most firefighters have worked themselves out of a job.

Although, in so many places, they’ve created another one: They primarily respond to medical calls.

This doesn’t happen everywhere.

“We don’t do any EMS (emergency medical service) calls at all,” says Steven Anderson, chief of the Peshtigo Fire Department. “We are strictly fire.”

I called Peshtigo because when you’ve lived most of your life in Wisconsin and think of fire, you think of Peshtigo, where somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 people lost their lives in the famous fire of 1871.

The Peshtigo Fire, which occurred on the same day as the Great Chicago Fire, is still described as the “deadliest wildfire in American history.” It wiped a dozen small communities in northern Wisconsin nearly off the face of the blackened earth.

But that’s history. **Today, the city of 3,500 does not have a single full-time firefighter.** Peshtigo has over 40 well-trained volunteers who are paid very modest sums to respond to calls and attend meetings. Anderson jokes that he himself makes about 10 cents per hour — and I’m not sure it isn’t close to fact.

Medical calls, he says, are handled by a separate, all-volunteer, completely unpaid Emergency Rescue Squad that has been around since the middle of the last century.

That ERS covers a lot more ground than just Peshtigo. →

Fire Departments

For Americans, the lifetime odds of dying from...

Heart disease	1 in 6
Cancer.....	1 in 7
Any injury.....	1 in 19
Any accident	1 in 28
Alzheimer's disease	1 in 37
Drugs.....	1 in 72
Any motor vehicle incident.....	1 in 108
Alcohol.....	1 in 123
Murder.....	1 in 229
Assault by gun.....	1 in 315
Suffocation	1 in 591
Drowning	1 in 1,133
Fire or smoke	1 in 1,579
Airplane, boat and spaceship incidents	1 in 2,499
Choking on food ..	1 in 3,461
Accidental gunshot.....	1 in 8,349
Mass shooting...	1 in 11,125
Heat wave.....	1 in 16,581
Tornado.....	1 in 60,000
Dog attack.....	1 in 112,382
Earthquake.....	1 in 130,000
Shark attack..	1 in 8 million

Source: Business Insider

DALEY

last year reported that the average firefighter earns \$46,870 annually, or \$22.53 an hour. The Milwaukee Fire Department last year advertised a firefighter position that paid \$44,490 after academy training and had a top range of \$74,045.

Costs to taxpayers, however, are much higher. *In Wisconsin, where firefighters were exempted from Act 10 and still have substantial collective bargaining rights, benefit costs are considerable.* In one Milwaukee suburb, for instance, the five highest-paid individuals one year were the city administrator, public works director and three firefighters, raking in big bucks through overtime.

Some departments are growing or shrinking in rough synchronicity with their populations.

In Madison, where the population jumped 47 percent from 170,000 people in 1980 to more than 250,000 in 2016, the Fire Department staff also increased dramatically, with 75 new positions in the past decade.

Milwaukee, a city that lost over 6 percent of its population since 1980 and where only 3.4 percent of calls are now for fires, has implemented cuts under Mayor Tom Barrett. The Fire Department staff dropped 13 percent from 2007 to 2016 — 1,152 employees to 1,007. And in a belt-tightening move last year, the city lost another 75 firefighter positions and closed six fire stations, though not without much doomsaying.

When Barrett proposed the changes as part of his budget last fall, the firefighters union blasted them as “destructive” and told residents to oppose them because “your life may depend on it.”

Such blowback seems inevitable.

But the big question in most cities, not just Milwaukee, is whether fire departments are restructuring as efficiently, quickly and logically as they could — especially at a time when there are a lot of



“Most people get in to fight fires. That’s what they thought the job was,” says Greenfield firefighter Melissa Janson.

options for providing medical assistance and when mutual aid agreements are increasingly prevalent.

Medical assistance

Part of the high cost of fire service is due to the way departments respond to a simple medical call, like a resident falling on ice. Typically, a department ambulance and a fully staffed fire engine are sent to the scene, complains the former mayor of a Milwaukee suburb, who called it “overkill.”



Pooler

That kind of response occurs regularly in big-city departments across the U.S., critics say.

“While firefighters’ working realities have changed profoundly in recent decades, their government structures and operating protocols remain largely frozen in bureaucratic amber,” noted a 2015 article in *Governing* magazine.



ALLEN FREDRICKSON PHOTO

A typical 911 call in many big cities means the dispatch of both an ambulance and a fire truck. “The result is an increasingly familiar tableau,” the article continued. “Five or six gear-laden firefighters and/or ambulance personnel arriving on the scene, regardless of whether there’s a fire, stroke or a heart attack in progress — or a passed-out homeless person on the sidewalk, or a motorist slightly dazed in a fender bender.”

LUBACH

even or is it losing money? If we know that, then we can make the decisions going forward that maybe we should get out of it,” says Belanger, who recently lost a re-election bid.

“I don’t care what comes out of the study; I just want an independent third party to give us a long-term plan to how we can use best practices and have a world-class fire department,” he says. “I’m not getting that from the union, who is obviously going to be skewed, and the fire chief, coming from a union background, it’s an incestuous relationship.”

In West Allis, where last year there were 50 times as many EMS calls as fire calls, Assistant Fire Chief Jay Scharf-enberg says criticisms that departments over-respond to simple falls is a fallacy. He defends the custom of training and equipping virtually all personnel to fight fires even though that is now a minuscule part of the job.

His department uses computer-aided dispatching to determine how to respond in more than 30 typical emergency calls, he says. That response can range from as little as two fire personnel in a single ambulance to more than 80 personnel in 29 response vehicles for a multiple-alarm fire in a high-rise.

“It takes a certain number of firefighters to put out a fire,” adds West Allis Chief Mason Pooler. “(But) there are less and less fires. By requiring everyone to be cross-trained, we can double-dip.”

There were only 156 fire calls last year in West Allis, many of which were not building or structure fires.

“West Allis needs at least 23 firefighters each day in case a fire breaks out. But when those 23 people are not responding to fires, they can all respond to EMS calls, which happen all day, every day.

See **DALEY** on Page 33

Butler has been with the department for 24 years and worked for Orange Cross when he first arrived in Sheboygan in 1990. He has spent many hours trying to sell the public and city officials on the benefits of having the ambulance service as part of the department. And while he is not convinced the study is necessary, he is confident it will reveal that his department is doing just fine.

“I honestly think they are going to come back and go, ‘Wow, you guys are pretty efficient,’ ” Butler says. ❏

Dave Lubach of Whitefish Bay is freelance writer.

ERS volunteers serve a 400-square-mile area that includes Marinette and nearby Menominee, Mich., according to Charles Gardon, who serves on the ERS Board of Directors. The ERS handles approximately 3,500 calls per year, everything from simple falls to cardiac arrests to strokes and the like.

Most of the 40 to 45 ERS members are emergency medical technicians, and a few are paramedics — and, no, they don’t charge anyone for anything.

Gardon concedes that it’s “just incredible,” but they survive on donations and fundrais-



ers that, according to their IRS 990 form, usually amount to less than \$100,000 per year.

Peshtigo and Marinette and Menominee are lucky. Most places aren’t able to sustain an all-volunteer, unpaid ERS nowadays, and I suspect that in many places the government-paid services and departments would not readily allow volunteers to step in or keep jobs that fire departments and ambulance services want as their own.

Gardon says there is “not a conflict” with the Marinette or Menominee departments or the Bay Area Medical Center Paramedic Service. But he says that “many times there are three different entities responding to a call” in some areas. →

Regional approach



“I’m assuming there will be some kind of regional approach in Ozaukee County... whether it’ll reach beyond the county borders, I don’t know.”

**— Grafton Fire Chief
William Rice**

By Janet Weyandt

A decade ago, the Grafton Fire Department was a private, all-volunteer service that had operated the same way for more than a century.

By 2012, however, that model wasn’t keeping up with the needs of the community and the department appealed to the Village of Grafton for help. That year, the department became part of the municipality and its structure changed to accommodate a paid chief and paid on-call firefighters.

It took a referendum to make it happen, and once Chief William Rice was employed, he swiftly realized the department also needed a paid fire inspector.

Now, that’s how the roughly 70-member department works: a paid chief and fire inspector, firefighters who earn \$10 to \$15 an hour for time spent at a fire scene and a roster of emergency medical service providers who are paid to be in the station awaiting calls during the day and on call on nights and weekends.

The department plans to add full-time firefighters/EMS, with the first such position being funded in July.

Rice, who is constantly trying to find new volunteers and juggle the needs of the community and his department, sees major changes ahead for departments like his.

“There’s no way our department or many of my neighboring departments will be able to go on like this,” Rice says. “I’m assuming there will be some kind of regional approach in Ozaukee County. Whether that’ll be a few communities that will get together, the entire



The Union Grove-Town of Yorkville Fire Department relies on 33 volunteer firefighters.

county, whether it’ll reach beyond the county borders, I don’t know.”

Most departments are volunteer

The U.S. Fire Administration, part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, registers fire departments nationwide to conduct studies and keep statistics. It estimates that 91 percent of the departments in the country are registered, and according to its numbers, 80 percent of fire departments in Wisconsin are all-volunteer. That’s about 617 of the

offers solution



ALLEN FREDRICKSON PHOTO

state's 767 registered departments.

There are about 92 mostly-volunteer departments, or 12 percent, and 5.6 percent of the state's departments are career, or all-paid.

Nationally, about 70 percent of firefighters are volunteer, according to the National Volunteer Fire Council, and one critic of traditional fire department practices suggested the volunteer model become the standard.

University of Miami law and economics professor Fred S. McChesney, in a 2015 *Washington Post* op-ed, offered a drastic remedy to cash-crunched cities:

Scrap full-time firefighters and convert to all-volunteer departments.

Big cities and taxpayers are saddled with unionized firefighters and their accompanying high salaries that are "incompatible with their declining fire-fighting needs," wrote McChesney, who died last fall.

However, according to Grafton's chief, the clock is ticking on the volunteer model.

One big problem is finding people willing to make a commitment, especially on nights and weekends when family obligations and personal interests compete. "Here in Grafton, it's kayaking on the Milwaukee River," Rice says. "I can lose 10 to 12 volunteers for half a day with that one suggestion."

He strives for at least 15 firefighters at an active fire and relies on mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments to make it happen. That's also partly why he's working to grow the paid component of his department. "By end of the year, we'll have three full-time firefighters, more than any other department in our county," he says.

Rice sees a national transition toward full-time fire personnel, but it's a slow shift because most communities are driven by "tragedy planning."

"Communities will wait until there's some kind of tragedy and plan for it not to happen again," he says. "There are people saying, 'There are so few fires. Why do you need all these people, all these engines and equipment?' I think there are economies to be looked at there. Even though we don't have a lot of fires, you need a lot of people to fight fires."

In Racine County, Tom Czerniak, →

"Our people," he says, "respond to all of them."

"Is there a little bit of duplication? Yes. But we can't help that. We are not going to dictate to the City of Marinette."

'Extra work'

Asked why the bigger departments need to respond to the same calls a trained volunteer service does, Gardon says, **"Quite frankly, I think it gives them extra work to do when it is slow."**

Jay Heckel, chief of the Marinette Fire Department, says there is a three-tiered response system in the area. The Bay Area paramedic service responds to Tier One calls that require a paramedic, the ERS responds to Tier Two calls and his department responds to more basic, lowest-tier calls.

The ERS responders can provide certain medications that the Fire Department responders cannot, according to the chief. Another difference, he says: The ERS responders live in their own homes. The Marinette Fire Department is full time.

"We are here 24/7, so we have a pretty good response time," says Heckel.

The Marinette department has responded to some medical calls for years but just started responding citywide in February. This expansion is new, so there is not a lot of data yet. But if a review shows there is no real advantage to running citywide, the department will revisit the issue, says Heckel.

That seems like a very good idea.

My grandfather might roll →

**According to
the U.S. Fire
Administration...**



**of fire departments
in Wisconsin are
all-volunteer.**

WEYANDT

longtime chief of the all-volunteer Union Grove-Town of Yorkville Fire Department, says the emphasis on medical runs compared to firefighting has not caused problems in his department. In 2016, his department had 602 EMS calls and only 118 fire calls.

His is the only volunteer department in Wisconsin deploying paramedics as well as EMTs on emergency calls, Czerniak says. He has 33 volunteers, about half of whom work as full-time firefighters or EMTs in other communities.

In Sheboygan County, the Town of Sheboygan Volunteer Fire Department has about 35 members who are paid an \$800 annual stipend. With the town's EMS service, the number grows to about 48, and there is a little overlap between the two, says Chief Roger Benzschawel.

The department's \$128,000 budget comes from the township. On top of that, however, the department runs a fundraiser that brings in \$20,000 to

\$23,000 each year.

Though Benzschawel says he has never been short-handed at a fire scene, it might only be a matter of time. "As



Czerniak

a fire chief, when you turn around, you want to see your resources. When you turn around and you don't see that, something's gone wrong. ... We've been fortunate enough to have

enough people show up."

All-volunteer or mostly-volunteer departments aren't sustainable, Benzschawel says.

"I think you might see some fire departments having to pay their firefighters more," he says. "You might see more fire departments around this area go to the wayside. Fire department territories will get bigger. I think that'll end up being the wave of the future." ❏

Janet Weyandt of Sheboygan is a freelance writer. Dave Daley contributed to this story.



DALEY

So rather than need 29 public safety employees per day — 23 firefighters and six or so EMTs or paramedics — we can get by with 23 who can do both and be prepared to respond to anything,” Pooler says.

Another way to look at it is that EMS requires fewer people to handle each incident but has many more calls, while firefighting has fewer incidents but requires far more personnel per call, he says.

Large city departments, of course, are quite different than largely volunteer departments in smaller towns and villages, but the overriding issues are the same. There aren’t enough fires to keep old staffing levels of firefighters busy. ***And while medical calls have grown, there are many alternative ways to provide that service:***

- In some Wisconsin communities, the fire department provides emergency medical care but uses private ambulance services if transportation to a hospital is needed, as is the case with the Appleton and Neenah-Menasha departments.
- In Burlington, the Fire Department provides fire and EMS services but uses a separate service, Burlington Rescue, if patients require transportation to hospitals, says Fire Chief Alan Babe. Burlington Rescue, funded solely by the Burlington Rotary Club, is a private, non-paid, all-volunteer fire and rescue service that serves both the city and town of Burlington.
- In the Fitchburg-Verona area south of Madison, Fitch-Rona EMS provides emergency medical care using paramedics delivering what it calls “emergency pre-hospital care.”

The Fitchburg Fire Department, meanwhile, provides fire protection using paid on-call firefighters, while the Verona Fire Department uses a mix of

five full-time command staff and three full-time firefighters along with paid on-premises and paid on-call firefighters to augment the full-time staff.

Back in Cudahy, the city relies on neighboring departments when medical calls require paramedic-level assistance, which its 25 full-time firefighters/EMTs cannot provide. Mayor John Hohenfeldt says that deficiency needs to be addressed — and like most city issues, the huge stumbling block is where to find the money to train, hire and pay those paramedics.

Money was also at the heart of the December squabble when a Cudahy alderman questioned why the Fire Department needed more firefighter overtime pay and asked for an audit of the department’s overtime budget. The Common Council reviewed and accepted the audit in mid-March, and the issue is now closed, Hohenfeldt says.

But challenges remain for the Cudahy Fire Department and departments across Wisconsin and the country. Firefighters seem to be slowly coming to the realization that tight city budgets do not bode well for them, that they are no longer sacred cows and untouchable. The profession is at a crossroads.

Fire departments are fair game, and big changes — including privatization of fire services — could be on the horizon if the firefighting community does not start serving up answers to the questions that the public and city hall number-crunchers are asking.

The picture is clear: With cash-strapped municipalities looking for efficiencies in a basic service like fire protection, forward-looking fire departments will themselves find more effective ways to deploy personnel before outside groups decide those better ways for them. ❏

Dave Daley, a journalist for over 30 years, covered the Capitol for The Milwaukee Journal and legal affairs for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

over in his premature grave, but I think one thing that might help when they do that review and determine if there is too much duplication would be to stop referring to the Marinette Fire Department as the Marinette Fire Department.

The department responds to less than one fire call per week, according to its 2017 annual report, and 20 of the 49 fire calls in 2017 were in response to

Most firefighters have worked themselves out of a job.

cooking fires confined to a container, chimney fires confined to a chimney, trash or rubbish fires or vehicle fires.

The truth is we don’t really have fire departments in most places in America any longer.

In 2017, even before the citywide expansion of medical call responses, the Marinette Fire Department responded to over five times as many rescue and medical service incidents as it did fires, in addition to lesser numbers of “hazardous condition” calls and false alarms.

The obvious question then becomes whether three medical response organizations are always necessary or used wisely and efficiently, or whether emotion and admiration of bygone heroics or the natural tendency of government to grow and preserve itself will eventually crowd out volunteerism and civil society.

That would be unfortunate. ❏

Mike Nichols is president of the Badger Institute and editor of Diggings.

ESCHEWING *Marriage*

Add Catholics and older folks to those who are choosing to be single

BY MARIE ROHDE

Father Timothy Kitzke is a busy man. The 57-year-old Catholic priest is co-pastor of four parishes on the east and north sides of Milwaukee and the vicar for urban ministry. He also officiated at 60 weddings last year.

That's stunning considering the Official Catholic Directory reported that the number of Catholic weddings dropped by 40 percent between 2000 and 2012.

Kitzke is acutely aware that millennials are shying away from marriage.

"Millennials are good at making short-term commitments," he says. "But too often, they're keeping their eye on the door. They want the security of a relationship, but they also fear losing personal control."

It's not just younger people who are eschewing marriage, however.

While roughly half of the unmarried couples living together are under age 35, ***cohabitation among people over 50 increased by 75 percent between 2007 and 2016***, according to an analysis by the Pew Research Center.

Many baby boomers are choosing not to be married for a practical reason: Those who collect Social Security based on a former



CELEBRATING *Marriage*

These couples still cherish the institution

Dalicha Whitelow, 37, and Damien Nelson, 32, were dressed for the occasion, she in a black and white dress with a flared skirt, he in a dark sport coat and tie. Several family members came to the Milwaukee County Courthouse on March 9 to witness their marriage.

"We love each other, and it's just time," Whitelow says, adding that they have been together for six years.

Both say few of their friends are married and finances are a big part of the reason — having jobs and financial security was important for them before taking the leap.

Damien Nelson and Dalicha Whitelow tie the knot on March 9 at the Milwaukee County Courthouse as family members look on.



Photos by Jeffrey Phelps

Both were raised by single mothers and their fathers were not a major part of their lives, although Whitelow says her grandparents had been married 32 years. Her grandfather was a big influence on her life, but many children don't have a father figure growing up, she says.

Nelson says that their six years together were important to solidifying their relationship.

"We have been trying to figure out a lot of things about life together," he says. "Marriage requires a lot of trust and communication. Loyalty and honesty are an important part of it, and we've worked a lot of that out."

Lauren Mayer, 25, and Haydar Baydoun, 27, met five years ago at the University of Minnesota, where both were architecture students.

They were among the six couples tying the knot at the courthouse on March 9.

"We're in love, and we want to be together," Mayer says. "Getting married may be the only way we can stay together."

Baydoun, a native of Lebanon, is employed but needs a K-1 visa to stay and work in the United States. Being married to Mayer, an American citizen, could help him get that visa.

When asked if many in her social circle are married or contemplating marriage, Mayer replies, "Oh, yes. I have a couple close friends who are engaged, and I've been to five weddings this past year. But most of the couples were a little older than us."

To some extent, marriage mirrors the economic divide in America.

Couples who have completed their educations, have jobs →

or deceased spouse's income could lose it.

Pew reported that the increase of cohabitating seniors coincided with rising divorce rates in that group.

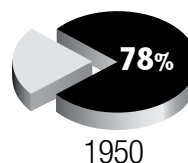
Linda Vanden Heuvel, a Milwaukee-area lawyer who specializes in divorce law, agrees that one of the biggest trends is couples who have been married 30, 40 or 50 years are call-

ing it quits.

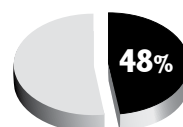
"One client I had was a man who was 86," she says. "He had been married 60-plus years. Everyone tried to talk him out of it — the judge, the lawyers. His only response was that he didn't have many years left and he didn't want to spend it with that woman."

Another reason for divorce among seniors is one partner needs long-term care. "Instead

U.S. households including married couples



1950



2010

of splitting their assets 50-50, they split it 90-10 or whatever the judge will allow," Vanden Heuvel says. "That way, the incapacitated partner gets the care they need without depleting a lifetime's savings."

But for most couples, living together is a relatively short-term arrangement that more often than not does not lead to marriage, ac-

cording to studies.

Milwaukee County Clerk George Christenson, the head of the office that issues marriage licenses, says he understands that from a personal point.

"I was married and am divorced," he says. "I think that a lot of people who →

and haven't had children yet are most likely to eventually wed, according to numerous studies.

Mayer and Baydoun, both working professionals, fit that statistic.

Maria Dorsey, the chief court commissioner in Milwaukee County who officiated at the couple's service, says marriages may not be booming by 1970 standards. However, the commissioners who do most of the weddings are so busy that officials are considering using volunteer commissioners — lawyers in private practice appointed to unpaid positions by judges — and setting aside a special room for nuptials, just down the hall from the divorce courtrooms.

Part of the demand, of course, is the result of new laws. In 2009, the Wisconsin Legislature passed a law permitting domestic partnership, aimed largely at giving same-sex couples some of the same rights as straight couples. In 2014, same-sex unions were recognized in the state after a lengthy court battle. In 2017, the domestic partnership law was repealed.

Jared Shah, 33, and Corey Dillard, 43, were among the couples marrying at the courthouse that day. The two have been together for 11 years.

They own a house, and both have secure jobs. Gay marriage has been legal in Wisconsin since 2014, so why did they wait?

"I was happy when it became legal, but it wasn't imperative to do it at that time," Shah says. "I did feel strange that straight people had to confirm our right to get married. We didn't need that to confirm our love."

Dillard adds: "In a way, we felt we had already been married for a long time."

— Marie Rohde



Corey Dillard (left) and Jared Shah exchange vows at the courthouse.

have been married and divorced are taking relationships a lot more carefully the second time around. I'm living with a woman, and we've decided to put off a decision about marriage until my son graduates from high school. I guess it's a trial marriage."

Steep decline since 1950

Most Americans know that marriage is not as common as it used to be but are likely unaware of how precipitous the

decline is in some areas and even among the religious and elderly.

Overall, the U.S. Census Bureau reported, only 48 percent of American households included married couples in 2010, according to *The New York Times*. In 1950, 78 percent of households included married couples.

Meanwhile, ***cohabitation has lost its stigma***. There were 18 million cohabitating U.S. couples in 2016, a 29 percent jump since 2007, according to Pew. To a lesser degree, having a child out of

wedlock has also lost its stigma. Nearly 40 percent of all babies are born to unmarried women.

Eloise Anderson, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, is acutely aware of the statistics that point to a retreat from marriage, particularly among the poor and the less-educated. (*See story on Page 39.*)

"It began in the 1960s when the middle class were promoting free love," she says. "It was the middle class that set the cultural standard that led to the decline in marriage."

Programs to help the poor — chiefly the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children — are biased against intact

families and, more specifically, men.

“Women could come into the program with no work history,” Anderson says. “That’s not so for men.”

“I believe the best thing we could do is put our resources on the fathers,” she says. “We need to train them in basic skills — algebra, geometry and trigonometry. If they have that, they can get any job they want.”

There’s a need for workers in the trades, electricians and carpenters and the like, she says. “This is where I’d like to see those men go.”

Until that happens, Anderson says, those men are not good marriage material. “Poor men just are not attractive in that sense.”

Trends in the black community

Only 32 percent of African-Americans are wed, far less than other racial and ethnic groups, according to the Scholars Strategy Network, but doesn’t mean they don’t value marriage.

In a 2016 Rutgers University study using data from 21 cities, sociologist Belinda Tucker found no racial or ethnic difference between values related to marriage such as the importance of marrying one day and the view that it is important in rearing children.

Charles D. Watkins, pastor of King Solomon Missionary Baptist Church in Milwaukee, agrees that the black community values marriage but adds that *there are many social issues that contribute to fewer marriages.*

In addition to the lack of good-paying jobs, the incarceration rate of black men is a factor. Watkins’ church is



Haydar Baydoun and Lauren Mayer wed on March 9 in front of more than a dozen friends and family.

just blocks outside of the 53206 ZIP code, an area that is 95 percent black and has the highest incarceration rate for any ZIP code in the country. A University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee study found that about half the men in their 30s and 40s who live there had been incarcerated at some point in their lives.

“A felony conviction stays on your record forever,” Watkins says. “You can’t get a driver’s license, and that means you usually can’t get to Brookfield and Menomonee Falls, where the jobs are at.”

There is both growing concern and attempts to reintroduce the importance of marriage.

The popularity of programs to strengthen marriages is growing, says Andrew Hopgood, who leads the marriage enrichment ministry at the New Testament Church on Milwaukee’s northwest side.

The church adopted a program created by the Wisconsin Family Life Council some years back. Like most churches, New Testament long counseled couples, but this program is designed to help couples, married or not, assess their relationship and avoid the problems that can devastate a relationship.

“It’s about communication, conflict resolution, financial management, spiritual beliefs,” Hopgood says. “Lack of communication is the biggest problem.”

The church frowns on cohabitation, or “shacking” as it is known, Hopgood says, adding that sometimes church leaders are not aware that a couple is unwed.

“That’s dishonoring God,” he says.

“Marriage is a covenant ordained by God.”

Marriage also strengthens the community, he says. →

Many baby boomers are choosing not to be married for a practical reason: Those who collect Social Security based on a former or deceased spouse’s income could lose it.

“It was the middle class that set the cultural standard that led to the decline in marriage.”



— **Eloise Anderson**,
secretary of the
Wisconsin Department
of Children and Families

Living without a father can have a devastating effect on children, especially boys. “I know some wonderful women who have raised children alone, but boys especially need fathers as role models to become men,” Hopgood says.

The church has “adopted” nearby Vincent High School, where men from the church serve as mentors for boys.

Cedric Hoard, 27, is a New Testament member and a mental health counselor. ***Every day, he sees the impact of children being raised without fathers in their lives, often in poverty.***

“They see that others have fathers, and they think, ‘I must have something wrong with me or my father would be around,’ ” Hoard says. “They feel they are not good enough, and that leads to making decisions and choices that are detrimental.”

On May 5, Hoard will marry Tierra Brown in the church after a courtship of over three years. Chastity before marriage was important for both of them, he says.

“We are modeling in the community what the church teaches,” he says. “People need to realize that when they have a child, they are creating a legacy, a person who will carry on that legacy. As a couple, we are on a mission together.”

Finances play a big role

Bishop Walter Harvey of Parklawn Assembly of God Church in Milwaukee agrees that couples are still marrying within the church but that they are waiting longer.

“They may well be dealing with the reality of student loan debts,” he says.

The Institute For College Access & Success reports that the average debt for four-year higher education institutions in Wisconsin is \$28,810 and that 70 percent owe money for their educations.

That’s an important part of his church’s marriage counseling program that also includes family, sexual and criminal history, Harvey says.

“It’s so important to discuss finances — salaries, what’s in savings, what’s in debt,” he says. “When you marry,

that becomes part of your life as well.”

David Seemuth, a former associate pastor at Elmbrook Church in Brookfield and couples counselor, says finances are important for another demographic: couples 50 or older who are remarrying.

“What about the widow getting a pension based on her deceased spouse’s income?” he asks. “There still are women who did not work outside the home or had far lower incomes. Sometimes getting married again can mean losing \$3,000 a month in Social Security benefits. Maybe we need to update our laws.”

Faith remains meaningful

Meanwhile, religion can still be an important draw.

Kitzke says, this generation’s values are much the same as those of Catholics from previous eras. For example: “They may be going away to an exotic destination to marry, but they still want to do something in the church because it’s a part of their history, part of their family.”

So entrenched is religion in the concept of marriage that even in courthouse ceremonies, the standard vows borrow religious language — referring to joining the couple in holy matrimony and saying, “there are no other vows more sacred than these.”

Kitzke says he welcomes all couples, even those cohabitating. However, when couples who are not parish members ask him to officiate at their weddings, he makes it clear that he expects to see them in the pews on Sundays — both before and after the wedding.

“I use it as an evangelization tool,” he says.

Does it work?

Last Easter, Constance Metscher was confirmed as a Catholic. She was married two years ago in a civil ceremony. Now she and her husband take part in a program through their parish that helps prepare other couples for marriage. “We are also involved in the process of getting our marriage blessed,” she says. ❏

Marie Rohde is a freelance journalist who wrote for many years for The Milwaukee Journal and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.



Marriage is a foreign concept to some

By Michael Jahr

Marriage has become so rare in some quarters that folks no longer know how to talk about it — literally.

Mike Murphy, a pastor at a Milwaukee-area church for 13 years and a board member of a Milwaukee employment ministry, discovered this firsthand a couple years back.

For years, Murphy encouraged one of the men he mentored to consider marrying his girlfriend, the mother of two of his sons. The couple had been in an off-and-on relationship since junior high.

In 2016, the man, then in his 30s, decided he was ready. He proposed via the Miller Park scoreboard between the fourth and fifth

innings of a Brewers game. His girlfriend said yes, to the delight of cheering spectators.

Murphy agreed to conduct the wedding. Along with his wife, Elizabeth, he provided premarital counseling and began to discuss the details of the impending ceremony with the couple.

“As we talked about groomsmen, ushers, vows, he stopped me,” says Murphy. “He said he had never been to a wedding before and that many of these words were foreign to him.”

Murphy was shocked. “It was like having cold water thrown into your face,” he says. **“We think there’s a vocabulary, societal norms, that everybody knows.”** He then realized he was operating out of his own assumptions and experience, failing to recognize the societal shift that had taken place.

Murphy’s experience is not surprising, says W. Bradford Wilcox, professor of sociology at the University of Virginia and senior fellow of the Institute for Family Studies.

In an email, Wilcox notes that marriage has become “comparatively rare” in some communities. Marriage is “fragile and weak” among the poor and “foundering” among the middle class, he reported in *State of Our*

Unions, a 2010 study he co-authored.

Wilcox says numerous factors contribute to the trend. “Marriage is in decline because of growing individualism and secularism, as well as a changing economy that makes it hard for men without college degrees to earn a family wage,” he told the Badger Institute. **“Government welfare policy also often penalizes marriage.”**

In the 2015 study *Strong Families, Prosperous States*, Wilcox and his co-authors found that “states with a higher number of families headed by married parents enjoy significantly higher levels of economic growth, not to mention greater economic mobility, higher median family income and less child poverty than states with more families headed by single and cohabiting parents.”

Marriage also affects children and communities. “Neighborhoods with fewer two-parent families have markedly higher crime rates, and boys who are raised by single-mother households are twice as likely to be incarcerated by the time they turn 30,” Wilcox says.

“Policy-makers, business executives and owners, and civic leaders should experiment with a range of public and private policies to strengthen and stabilize marriage and family life in the United States,” he adds. “Such efforts should focus on poor and working-class Americans who have been most affected by the nation’s retreat from marriage.”

Specifically, Wilcox suggests that public policy start with a “do no harm” approach. “Policy-makers should eliminate or reduce marriage penalties embedded in many of the nation’s tax and transfer policies designed to serve lower-income Americans and their families,” he says.

Civic groups, “joined by a range of private and public partners, from businesses to state governments to public schools, should launch a national campaign ... that would encourage young adults to sequence schooling, work, marriage and then parenthood. This campaign would stress the ways children are more likely to flourish when they are born to married parents with a secure economic foundation.”

Michael Jahr is the Badger Institute’s vice president of outreach and special projects.



As the world moves forward with automated vehicles, Milwaukee clings to 19th century technology

THE ROAD TO DRIVERLESS TRANSIT

By Baruch Feigenbaum

Automated vehicles capable of navigating without a human behind the wheel are no longer some sort of futuristic fantasy.

Every automobile manufacturer in the world and several technology companies including Apple, Google and Microsoft are focused on building the hardware and/or software for automated vehicles (AVs).

Intel and Strategy Analytics estimate that automated vehicles will add \$7 trillion to the global economy over the next 30 years.

Automated vehicles are mostly in the testing phase, and accidents — while rare — do occur. On March 18, a self-driving Uber vehicle struck and killed a pedestrian outside of a crosswalk in Tempe, Ariz. It was the first fatality involving an AV.

These are the incidents that automated vehicles are designed to prevent. The AV industry defended its technology following the accident, with the maker of the collision-avoidance system saying that Uber disabled the software. In addition, Uber's AV project was already struggling, lagging behind Google's.



ALLEN FREDRICKSON PHOTO

Potawatomi Hotel & Casino will pay the first year's fares for the Milwaukee streetcar under a \$10 million sponsorship deal. The free rides will end on Sept. 1, 2019.

Baruch Feigenbaum

is assistant director of transportation policy at the Reason Foundation. He has a diverse background researching and implementing transportation issues including revenue and finance, public-private partnerships, highways, transit, high-speed rail, ports, intelligent transportation systems, land use and local policy-making. He earned his master's degree in transportation planning with a focus in engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

In Arizona, Google's Waymo is testing a self-driving ride-hailing service using Chrysler Pacifica minivans. Waymo is also partnering with Jaguar Land Rover to buy 20,000 electric, I-Pace SUVs for its planned driverless taxi service.

In Europe, the City Mobile 2 demonstration projects have tested automated buses in La Rochelle, France, and Oristano, Italy.

In Boston last year, both nuTonomy and Lyft launched self-driving ride-hailing services.

In Las Vegas, Keolis Commuter Services, along with the American Automobile Association and the city, launched an electric shuttle pilot project.

And in Wisconsin's largest city? Just as much of the world moves toward a 21st century, millennial-enticing mode of transportation that is sure to give cities a highly sought-after cultural cache, Milwaukee is building ... a streetcar.

Their history; they're history

Streetcars are nothing new in Milwaukee. There was an extensive network in the city from the late 19th century until the late 1950s, when they were torn out to make room for buses. Little about them has changed. They're operated on fixed routes, they're expensive and they're almost no one's primary mode of transportation.

For the initial 2.5-mile, \$128 million downtown line, Milwaukee is using a combination of federal grants (\$69 million) and tax incremental financing (\$59 million).

Federal funding is not free. But even if it were, there are substantial operating and maintenance costs. The city plans to add multiple lines if it can find the money.

The first streetcar in the fleet arrived in Milwaukee on March 26. The remaining four cars will be delivered throughout the year, with "The Hop" beginning operations by November.

Supporters argue that the streetcar attracts economic development and is being paid for by somebody else. Neither is true. In cities where economic development sprouted around a streetcar line, such as Portland, the boom occurred because the city spent money improving roads, adding street



Keolis operates a pilot project using electric autonomous shuttles near Paris.

furniture or gentrifying the area. Similar economic development has been seen in areas without streetcars.

Finally, and perhaps most problematic, streetcars don't serve traditional transit users. They are designed for folks with cars, known as "choice riders," not commuters without cars, known as "transit-dependent riders."

Supporters, as a result, often argue that streetcars will be a tourist draw or the sort of cultural amenity that lures or keeps upscale urbanites downtown. But even that argument — perhaps the most persuasive — now appears flawed.

One need only browse through the popular press to see the fascination with automated vehicles.

While millennials — many of whom are shunning car ownership and driver's licenses — may be amused by the novelty of a streetcar, they are infatuated with a bus that drives itself.

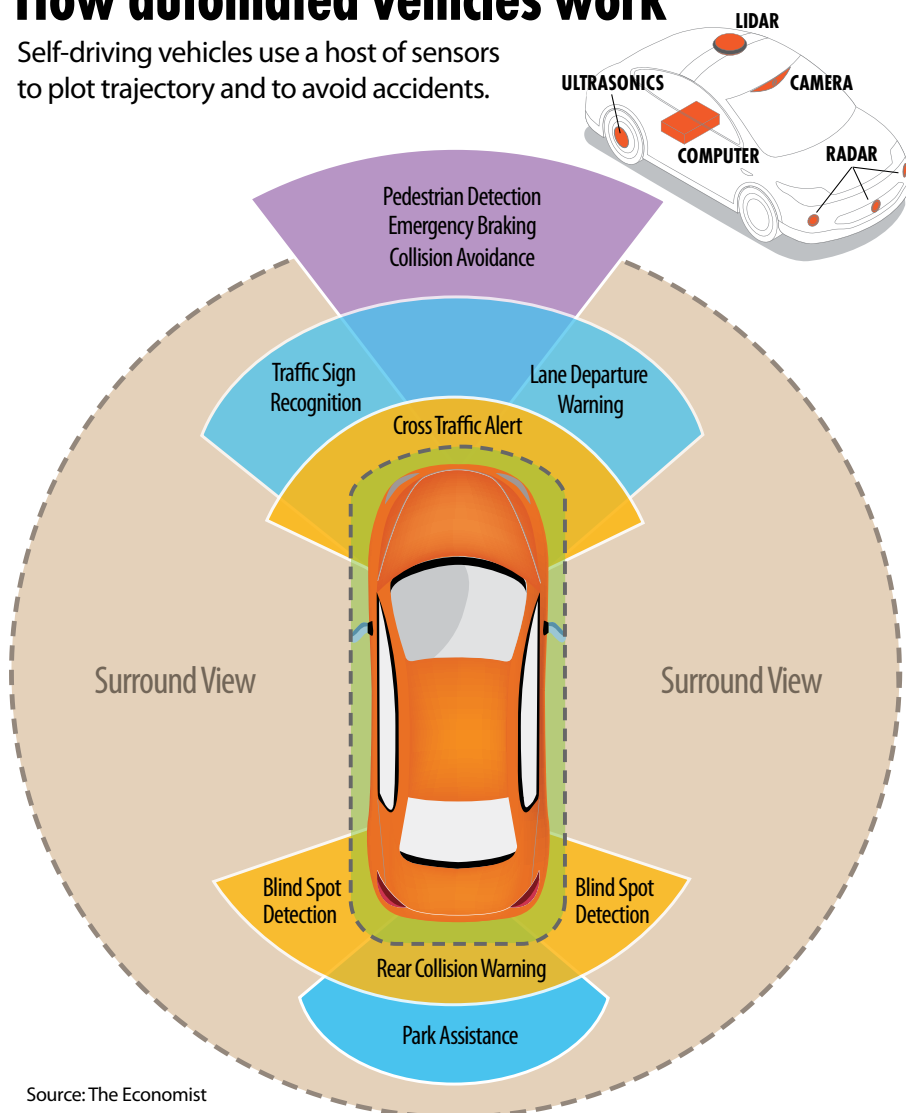
The benefits of automated vehicles

The Uber crash shows that AVs are still in the developmental phase. Self-driving vehicles use some combination of lidar (light detection and ranging), cameras and radar to sense surroundings. AVs then must make sense of all that information. Vehicles need to be able to interpret and predict human behavior. They need to understand when an ambulance needs to pass them.

Humans are good at operating a 4,000-pound vehicle, when they are paying attention. Researchers are using machine learning to ensure computers have those same →

How automated vehicles work

Self-driving vehicles use a host of sensors to plot trajectory and to avoid accidents.



Source: The Economist

CENTRAL COMPUTER

Analyzes information from all sensors to control brakes, accelerator and steering.



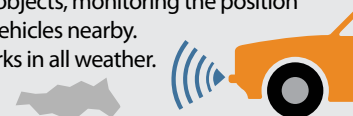
VIDEO CAMERA

Takes images of road signs, traffic lights, pedestrians and the position of other vehicles.



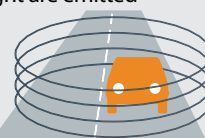
RADAR

Radio waves are emitted and bounced off objects, monitoring the position of vehicles nearby. Works in all weather.



LIDAR (Light detection & ranging)

Pulses of infrared light are emitted and reflected off surroundings. Defines road edges and lane markings.



ULTRASONICS

Sensor measures the position of objects very close to the vehicle, such as while parking.



multitasking skills to operate a vehicle.

Prototype vehicles cannot navigate rain or snow; machines have difficulty knowing when it is safe to cross a double yellow line and can have trouble seeing a pedestrian attempting to cross the road.

AV software must be more reliable than conventional computer software. If Microsoft Windows crashes, a computer can be restarted with no major consequences. If AV software crashes, a car is disabled — or worse.

But the bigger, longer view is as sanguine as it is inevitable.

• While the Uber fatality is a tragedy, the vast majority of accidents are caused by human mistakes. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, automated vehicles will reduce accidents by up to 80 percent, saving 30,000 lives per year.

• Because they can communicate with each other, automated vehicles can follow more closely together. Traffic engineers have found that “connected vehicle technology,” in fact, could increase roadway capacity by 300 percent, significantly reducing congestion.

- Automated vehicles will provide greater independence to individuals who cannot drive, including the young, the elderly and the disabled.

- Finally, *automated vehicles will save taxpayers a lot of money because one of the biggest costs in transit — 75% — is employees.* As a result, every public transit agency in the country requires subsidies.

What the future looks like depends on where you are

How transit evolves depends on the population and employment density of a particular metro area. High-density places such as New York City will continue to have rail transit and some fixed-route bus service.

Medium-density areas including Milwaukee and Madison are likely to have a combination of private transit operators in the downtown area and ridesharing services in the suburbs. Chariot — a niche bus service operating in San Francisco, New York, Seattle, London and other cities — and its competitors will offer fixed-route transit in downtowns.

Such service will be automated. Smaller, low-speed buses will operate circulator service in downtowns. Private providers will operate most of the service.

Driverless vehicles have been proposed in Racine County to shuttle thousands of employees a day to the Foxconn Technology Group factory being built in Mount Pleasant.

Ridesharing services will offer transit in low-density areas such as Green Bay and Kenosha. While individual service will be available, the focus will be on carpool service. Lyft already operates Lyft Line, which transports multiple

people, offering cheaper rates for each passenger.

Mass transit will be automated, but that doesn't mean humans won't be involved.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF ACCIDENTS ARE CAUSED BY HUMAN MISTAKES.

Transit agencies must transition to mobility managers. Instead of directly operating the transit service, mobility managers will oversee and coordinate private transit services.

Those services initially will include fixed-route bus services but also private bus and jitney services such as Chariot and personalized transit such as Lyft.

All vehicles will be automated, reducing the costs to each passenger. In comparison to

streetcars, these rubber-tire vehicles won't just be cheaper; they'll be vastly more flexible and practical.

They'll help promote the cultural "brand" that Milwaukee and Wisconsin so badly needs. They'll be a linchpin of an innovative, forward-looking place that embraces what's fresh and inevitable.

And it does seem inevitable. The old eventually will be disrupted by the new.

Residents of southeastern Wisconsin

seem to know this intuitively. *They are skeptical that a streetcar line in downtown Milwaukee will deliver the economic benefits that supporters expect*, a Marquette University Law School Poll found in October. Sixty-nine percent say the streetcar is too expensive and won't produce the economic benefits touted.

The citizens apparently realize that their leaders should be embracing innovation and bold thinking — not pricey, antiquated streetcars that few likely will ride. But, as taxpayers, we seem destined to pay for these streetcars. At least until they're torn out again. ❌



A driverless pod runs at London's Heathrow Airport.

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— Gov. Scott Walker

"I really love getting my magazine, Diggings, from the Badger Institute because this is one of those policy periodicals that you can actually sit down and relax with and dig deep into policy. That's a good time for someone who likes to solve challenges."

— Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch

"Whenever I travel around the country and visit with my fellow legislative leaders, they now look at Wisconsin as a beacon of conservative thought, and that's due in large part to the efforts of the Badger Institute ... They bring the resources, the research, the knowledge and the firepower to help people like me advocate for the ideas that we know are necessary to keep Wisconsin going in the right direction."

— Assembly Speaker Robin Vos

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— David French, *National Review*

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