NEWS

Schmitz leaves lasting mark on Vilas through entrepreneurial, broadband programs at VCEDC

BY NEWS-REVIEW STAFF

Kathy Schmitz, the executive director of the Vilas County Economic Development Corporation (VCEDC), has announced her retirement at the end of 2026, concluding more than six years of leadership that transformed the regional economy.

Schmitz, who joined the VCEDC in November 2019, will leave a legacy defined by massive infrastructure expansion, new educational initiatives, and increased financial resources for local businesses.

"Kathy's vision and tenacity have touched the life of small business owners and entrepreneurs across the county, and that impact will outlast any program or title," said Kate Ferrel, VCEDC Board chair. "She leaves behind an organization with deep roots, strong programs, and a tremendous reputation that extends well beyond Vilas County."

Under Schmitz's collaborative leadership, Vilas County saw its county-wide broadband coverage expand from just 5% to 86%. To cement this progress, she spearheaded the Midwest "Northwoods Charm. Big City Connection." broadband advertising campaign to market the county as a premier destination for connected remote workers.

Her tenure was also marked by substantial financial growth for the community.

Since 2020, Schmitz secured more than $344,000 in grants to build organizational capacity and programming. Furthermore, local businesses successfully accessed $2.2 million in financing and grants under her direction.

During her six years with the organization, Schmitz has worked to grow Vilas County into a premier destination to live and work. Here, Schmitz presents the VCEDC's 2025 Business of the Year award to Andy Lichtfuss, owner of Andy's Pontoon Saloon in downtown Eagle River.
—Contributed Photo

During her six years, Schmitz evolved and branded the VCEDC from a localized small business consulting service into a comprehensive, state-recognized economic development organization.

Her strategic expansions included creating the VCEDC Women in Business Program, a structured year-round initiative to support female entrepreneurs, and developing virtual "Lunch and Learns" featuring regional and national business experts.

To cultivate future business leaders, Schmitz established a first-of-its-kind entrepreneurship education program in partnership with Northland Pines High School. She also led the organization to secure two WEDC Thrive Rural Wisconsin grants to advance community redevelopment in the towns of Phelps and Land O' Lakes.

For Schmitz, the leadership role was a deeply personal homecoming.

"Vilas County has a special place in my heart," Schmitz said. "I grew up spending family vacations here and coming to the VCEDC felt like coming home. Getting to spend six years building something meaningful alongside our board, partners and colleagues who care so deeply about this community and its small business owners, has been one of the greatest privileges of my life."

Schmitz expressed complete confidence in the future of the organization, noting that the foundation is strong and ready for its next chapter.

"The next leader will make it even stronger," she added.

The VCEDC Board of Directors is embarking on a thoughtful search process for the next executive director to ensure a seamless transition. Schmitz will remain fully engaged through the end of 2026 to support the transition and remains deeply connected to the Northwoods community.

The Vilas County Economic Development Corporation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Forward expands advisory services in the Northwoods

Forward Investment Services, located at Forward Bank, is making it easier for Northwoods residents to access personalized investment and financial planning services.

Madelyn Wanke

Financial Advisor Madelyn Wanke will now offer office hours by appointment at Forward Bank locations in Three Lakes and St. Germain, bringing investment and advisory services closer to customers throughout the region.

The expansion reflects Forward's ongoing commitment to providing comprehensive financial solutions where customers live, work and retire.

Through local office hours, customers can meet with Wanke to discuss retirement planning, investment strategies, education savings, wealth management, and other financial goals.

"Helping people feel confident about their financial future is what drives me every day," said Wanke. "Whether someone is preparing for retirement, saving for a child's education, or building long-term wealth, I'm excited to provide local guidance and build trusted relationships with customers throughout the Northwoods."

A native of Medford, Wanke joined Forward Investment Services in 2024 and recently became a Financial Advisor after earning her Series 7 and Series 66 registrations. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance, Investments and Banking with an emphasis in Wealth Management from the Wisconsin School of Business at UW–Madison. In addition to her role at Forward, Wanke has served in the National Guard since 2020.

"At Forward, we're committed to being a true full-service financial partner for the communities we serve," said Jake Weinand, market president at Forward Bank.

Forward Investment Services provides access to personalized financial planning and investment strategies tailored to each customer's unique needs and goals. By offering local office hours by appointment, Forward continues its mission of making financial guidance accessible throughout the communities it serves.

Safety on waterways urged with the approach of Labor Day weekend

As the last hurrah of summer arrives this Labor Day weekend, the Wisconsin DNR reminds all boaters to share the water and boat safely on waterways.

Wisconsin's waters are enjoyed by swimmers, anglers, recreational boaters and paddlers alike during the summer months. Boaters should be aware of others on the water and give space.

"We urge boaters to be mindful of their speed and wake size and how it can impact all others enjoying the water — including other motorboats, paddlers and silent sport enthusiasts," said Lt. John Sinclair, DNR Boating Law administrator. "A little courtesy goes a long way towards keeping everyone safe out on the water."

Sinclair shared some helpful reminders for boaters navigating busy waterways, noting that wearing life jackets, avoiding alcohol consumption while operating a boat and being considerate of others using the water are all part of being a responsible boater.

Maintaining a safe speed is important, and he encourages reducing speeds in congested areas like channels and near shore, and avoiding repetitive passes in the same location.

"Watch your wake. Be aware of the size and impact of your wake. Large wakes can cause damage to other vessels and docks, erode shorelines and even swamp or capsize other boats," Sinclair said. "Respect no-wake zones. These areas are specifically designated to protect wildlife and reduce shoreline erosion."

He also urges lake users to teach their passengers and ensure all aboard the boat understand wake safety and rules.

Paddling safe

Whether in a canoe, kayak or on a paddleboard, Sinclair urges recreationists to make these safety tips part of any outing:

Wear it: All paddlers are required to carry a life jacket onboard. The DNR strongly encourages you to wear it. Make sure it is a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket of the correct size and ensure it is properly fitted.

Plan your trip and share the plan: Let someone know where you're going and when you expect to return. Store a communication device in a dry bag while on the water.

Make it identifiable: Put your information on the paddle craft so it can be identified by first responders in an emergency.

Stay visible: Wear bright clothing. Use lights – especially at dawn, dusk and during other periods of reduced visibility.

Monitor young, inexperienced paddlers: Be the lookout and help develop their skills as they gain confidence on the water.

Paddle sober: Impairment impacts judgement and reaction times and can greatly increase risk of injury or death.

Watch the weather: Check the forecast, monitor conditions and plan accordingly.

Learn more about boating safety on the DNR's Boating Safety webpage.

Higher costs, traffic delays expected during Labor Day holiday weekend

Nationwide, Americans are closing out summer with Labor Day getaways despite higher travel costs and expected traffic delays.

AAA booking data shows strong demand for destinations across the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Travelers are facing higher fuel, airfare, and hotel costs this year, while domestic cruise prices trend lower.

"Labor Day has long been a popular time for a final summer getaway, and travelers continue to prioritize vacations with family and friends," said Nick Jarmusz, director of public affairs for AAA – The Auto Club Group. "Whether it's a cruise, a national park adventure, or an international trip, travelers are eager to make the most of the holiday weekend."

Travelers are paying more for several major components of a Labor Day vacation this year.

AAA booking data shows average domestic airfare is up 2% compared to last year, averaging $750 for a roundtrip ticket. For travelers flying to the most popular Labor Day destinations, airfare is nearly 20% higher than last year, averaging $790.

Travelers are also paying more for accommodations. Domestic hotel bookings are up 9% compared to last Labor Day weekend, while international hotel bookings are 12% more expensive.

Not every travel category saw price increases. International airfare is down 4% year over year, creating opportunities for travelers looking beyond U.S. borders.

To TRAFFIC Pg. 8

QUICK AND EASY CHANGE OF ADDRESS FOR THE DELIVERY OF YOUR NEWSPAPER

Go to vcnewsreview.com

Scroll all the way down to address change

Click on address change.

Fill out the form and click on submit.

It's That Easy!

500177

CITY OF EAGLE RIVER, WISCONSIN

PUBLIC NOTICE
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)
GARBAGE AND RECYCLING COLLECTION SERVICES

The City of Eagle River, Wisconsin is soliciting sealed proposals from qualified and experienced contractors to provide municipal and residential garbage and recycling collection services within the City of Eagle River.

SERVICE AREA: City of Eagle River, Wisconsin
APPROXIMATE RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS: 675
CONTRACT TERM: Three (3) years, commencing January 1, 2027, with the option for the City to approve renewal terms.
RFP DOCUMENTS:
Complete specifications, requirements, proposal forms, contract documents and instructions to proposers will be available beginning August 31, 2026, from the City of Eagle River website; https://eagleriverwi.gov under Resources or from the City Clerk
PROPOSAL DEADLINE:
Sealed proposals must be received no later than:

October 5, 2026 at 4:00 P.M. Central Time

Proposals received after the stated deadline will not be considered.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals shall be submitted in a sealed envelope clearly marked:

"RFP – GARBAGE AND RECYCLING COLLECTION SERVICES"
and delivered to:
RFP CONTACT
Becky Bolte, City Clerk City of Eagle River
525 E. Maple Street • P.O. Box 1269 • Eagle River, WI 54521
(715) 479-8682, ext. 224 • bbolte@eagleriverwi.gov

Sealed proposals will be opened October 6, 2026, at 12:00PM, Central Time at Eagle River City Hall, 525 E Maple St, Eagle River WI

CITY OF EAGLE RIVER, WISCONSIN
Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

4475_1

Published Aug. 26, Sep. 2, 2026 WNAXLP