



Observations of Life in Illinois

By Pat Norton
Nettle Creek CC

At the risk of offending some of my friends, neighbors, and colleagues...I'd like to make a few observations about life here in 'the Land of Lincoln'. These comments are admittedly quite biased, very subjective, and not backed up by lots of fact. They are simply my common man observations and opinions of the subtle differences in living and working between two quite similar, but uniquely different, neighboring upper midwestern states...namely Wisconsin and Illinois.

I am able to make such comments because I've now lived down here for three and a half whole years. That is not a lifetime's worth of experience with which to begin a critique, I readily admit. But it is a long enough period of living here...just outside of Chicagoland...and our past homes in Fond du Lac, Madison and Onalaska.

Most of us have moved a time or two in our adult years to date...either across town...or to another part of the state of Wisconsin. And yes, there are some real differences and some real adjustments to be made with each change.

But moving out of state is a whole new thing. Living in one state since birth...and then moving to a state that I'd really tended to look down upon...as an early middle aged adult...has been a big adjustment for the heads of this family. Children, as they say, adapt and adjust easily.

During the time our maturing family has been here we've all begun to put down some strong roots...especially our children...to the extent that their predominant feelings are of not wanting to return to Wisconsin.

They have many friends and connections that are very positive and very strong here...as does wife Susan. They are, in effect, forcing us to constantly reconsider our mutual feeling for wanting to relocate back to 'BuckyLand' ASAP.

Of all in our family, I probably have the weakest connections to this place and this town...but ironically...it is my

link to the golf course that keeps us here.

And our link to the golf course is, in a way, very weak...considering the age and investment attitude of our ownership group.

Personal and family issues aside, there are some very real differences between the states pertaining mainly to social, economic, educational, governmental, environmental, and agricultural issues...and the interrelationship among them all.

From the standpoint of being a citizen in first one state, and now the other, it becomes rather obvious and easy to notice some of the differences between them. It's from this point of view that I'd like to make a few admittedly biased comments.

Educationally, we're now part of a city that has three elementary school districts...operating independently from each other...feeding one area high school district...also funded and operating independently. Separate school boards...separate school calendars...and definitely separate...and desperate...financial situations.

Susan, my mate of fifteen years, is on the school board for the elementary district that our three children are attending. Her school board is wrestling with a decade old problem of school funding...for almost ten years this district has been operating in the red...and has had the local voters deny a school funding referendum **nine times. NINE TIMES!!!**

So, the school district does the only feasible thing...they watch expenses closely to try and close the annual \$2,000,000 gap between revenues and expenditures...and annually issue working cash bonds that cost the district \$200,000 annually in interest costs.

Funny thing is...the Morris Area High School District has been facing the same situation for the same length of time...and solves it with the same answer...borrowing money through bonding!!! The local voters do not support public education...these


referendums get blown out of the water every time...people here are much more concerned about paying that property tax increase of \$150 per year than they are of supporting public education!

The public educational situation across Illinois has for years replicated that of our little adopted town of Morris. Local school districts have long been denied enough financial support from the state...and been forced to operate by borrowing money.

Sounds like something that might happen in Mississippi or Florida...not the mighty and enlightened state that claims the great President Lincoln as one of its own...I think that he would be ashamed of the general condition of public education in his home state if he were alive today!!

Would such a lack of financial support for the public schools in the state of Wisconsin ever be allowed to happen? To my knowledge, it has almost never been the case in your state.

Isn't that one of the basic underlying concepts of the Wisconsin Idea? That the University of Wisconsin at Madison...and now the UW



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System...offer basic support for nay and all citizens of the state...in the areas of social concern, economic development, the educational infrastructure, the government at all levels, environmental and natural resource protection, and the linchpin of any midwestern state...its agriculture?

Isn't that really why the UW and the UW System came into being so many years ago? The state and its people...our ancestors from the past century...needed help to lead productive, enlightened, and prosperous lives...and University of Wisconsin was there to help.

The Wisconsin Idea was and is a great Idea, a great concept, and a great feeling...and is something that I truly wish was alive and well down here as well. There is much that the University of Illinois could contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the people of this state.

Don't misunderstand me...I am certainly no expert on the University of Illinois System and I do know that the agricultural sector, in particular, depends heavily on the U of I for research and guidance. Other sectors of the states economy seem to have little contact with Champaign-Urbana.

In an overall sense, there certainly is not the same feeling here people

in whatever walk of life turn to their university system for whatever reason in time of need.

All of the universities of this state are almost all separate...the University of Illinois System has only three member campuses...while NIU at DeKalb, SIU at Carbondale, Eastern Illinois University, Western Illinois University are all state funded...but are operated as totally separate facilities from each other.

As parents of elementary school children bound someday for college, Sue and I can't help but notice the differences between Wisconsin...with a population of about five million people...and a university system with dozens of campuses to choose from...and Illinois...with the sixth highest population of all of the states...eleven and a half million people...and a system of high education that really is...each campus for itself.

These differences filter down into the everyday life of the citizens of the state. Wisconsin is a much more united, cohesive state...definitely more liberal politically...and more socially concerned for the welfare of those who reside within it borders.

Illinois suffers from lots of polarity in all areas between Chicagoland and what's known here as 'downstate' (i.e.

anyplace other than Chicagoland). I had heard about it before moving here, but did not realize how strong, pervasive, and negative this whole concept could be.

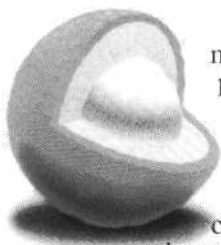
People in Wisconsin would do well to reflect on the condition of their lives and the lives of their loved ones by virtue of living in a state such as Wisconsin. Clean and honest government...bountiful natural resources and a real statewide concern for protecting those resources...a great university system...good roads...great public schools...a rich and diverse heritage in agriculture...and a much greater public concern for protecting and enhancing it all along the way.

Believe me...these words are coming from one couple who had this life for many years...probably took it all a bit for granted...and assumed that this quality of life was the standard throughout the Midwest.

We fully realize now that it's not automatically the case.

We do enjoy our life here in Illinois and appreciate what life here is offering us. We do, however, reflect back on life in Wisconsin, and know with certainty that life there would not again be taken for granted should the future opportunity to relocate back home ever arise. ♣

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