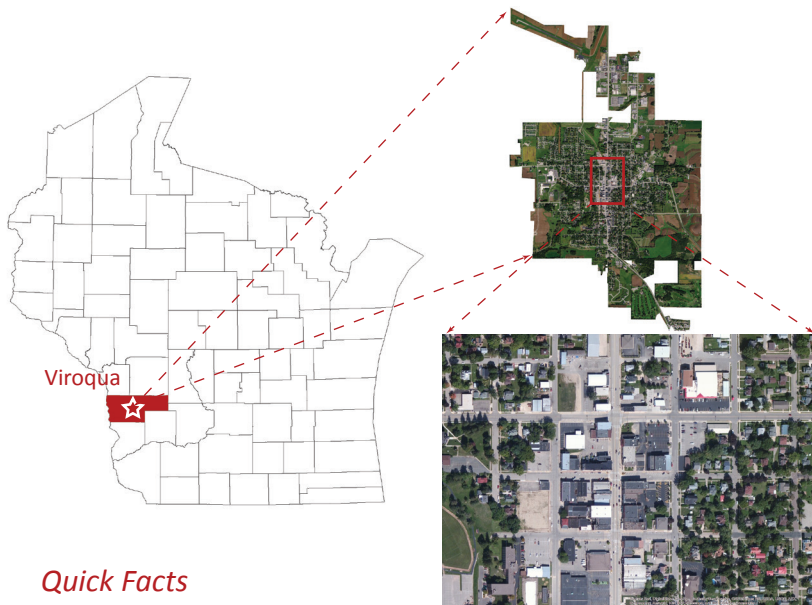


Viroqua, Wisconsin



Downtown Viroqua

Quick Facts

Population: 4,395 Housing Units: 2,279 Median Household Income: \$37,477 Median Age: 46.2

Viroqua, Wisconsin

The City of Viroqua is nestled in the Driftless Area of southwestern Wisconsin—an unglaciated region featuring scenic bluffs, rolling hills of deciduous forests, trout streams, and farmsteads. Originally established as a collection of farm settlements and lumber mills in 1851, the community was awarded the county seat for Vernon County in 1852.

Norwegian settlers flocked to the area for its rich soil. They established a diversity of crop and livestock operations that would eventually become the foundation for one of the most successful organic farming cooperatives in the world, Organic Valley.

The community grew to 4,395 people (2016 US Census) and has become a destination for local food and local art enthusiasts. Over time, the community has reinvested in its cultural identity through the arts and education. Its historic theatre serves as a cultural center for the region and the community boasts strong public and private schools. The last few years have seen an immigration of younger families who are attracted by the diversity of educational and cultural opportunities coupled in such a small and safe community.

What Makes Downtown Viroqua Successful?

1. Leveraging Community Strengths
2. Active Chamber of Commerce
3. Outreach and Marketing
4. Community Culture



The historic Temple Theater brings national performing arts downtown

Leveraging Community Strengths

Viroqua community leaders identified several of the city's key assets that help contribute to the community's success in the downtown area and community wide:

- **Beautiful Countryside:** The idyllic countryside setting makes Viroqua attractive as a tourist destination as well as enhances the quality of life of Viroqua's residents.
- **Excellent Schools:** Viroqua schools provide an excellent learning environment and are attractive to potential new residents as well as providing the foundation and preparation for Viroqua youth to continue on to higher education, start a business, or enter the workforce.
- **Appreciation for the Arts:** Associates of the Restored Temple Theatre (ARTT), a non-profit volunteer group, led the \$1.6 million dollar restoration of the 1922 Temple Theatre. ARTT's mission is "to preserve the Historic Temple Theatre as a regional, civic, and cultural center, and to present activities and events for the enrichment of our rural community." Each year, ARTT produces 5 shows as well as hosts a number of independent productions.
- **Support for Local Entrepreneurs:** In 1992, Smithsonian Magazine dubbed Viroqua "The Town that Beat Walmart" for supporting and growing local businesses that offered goods and services unavailable at the superstore.
- **Strong Organic Farming Industry:** Viroqua has a very robust organic farming industry. In fact, Viroqua has the highest concentration of organic farms in the nation.



The historic Fortney Building features shopping, apartments and a performing arts space

Active Chamber of Commerce

Representatives of the Viroqua Chamber of Commerce mentioned that their organization has 200 member businesses. An active chamber provides a platform for the business community to share expertise and a vision for the development of downtown Viroqua. Chamber leaders stressed the importance of working together and collaborating to foster a sense of ownership in the bigger picture for the community. The Chamber also exhibits a collaborative approach by acting as an informational resource for neighboring communities.

Resilient Downtowns - Viroqua, WI



Situated in the Driftless Region, Viroqua is the heart of a vibrant fly fishing scene and features specialty shops catering to anglers

Outreach and Marketing

Community leaders stated that both traditional and social media play an important role in informing the public about events and plans in downtown Viroqua. Press releases, weekly newspaper columns covering business activity, e-newsletters, meetings, posters, a well maintained website, as well as numerous social media platforms are all utilized to engage and inform the public. Additionally, the community features a new and highly visible visitor's center which has been an asset for disseminating information about the community to tourists and out of town guests. Finally, the Chamber mentioned the use of Google Analytics and point of sale data to track the reach of their marketing efforts.

Community Culture

Viroqua leaders celebrated the culture and character of the community. People from the area often call Viroqua the "Portland of the Midwest." Viroqua residents are diverse in terms of their background, education and their specialties; this diversity strengthens the local culture. Besides just the people who reside in the community, the natural amenities in the area also contribute to the community's culture. The community has several amenities for an active outdoor lifestyle. For example, the community boasts class-A trout streams, biking and hiking trails, and streams to kayak.

Festivals and public events in Viroqua are important for both enhancing the quality of life for Viroqua residents as well as capturing dollars from visitors to the area. Wild West Days, the Vernon County Fair, various music festivals, and the Pop-Up Shop program are all events that spur economic activity and add to the community culture. Finally, Viroqua SOUP is a unique event where community members pay a small admission fee and share a meal while listening to business idea pitches from local entrepreneurs. The attendees then vote for the best idea and that entrepreneur is then awarded all of the admission proceeds from the event to provide seed funding for their business idea.



Main Street Station is a case study in rural, mixed-use redevelopment of a downtown space

Resilient Downtowns - Viroqua, WI

Look for These Other Resilient Downtown Case Studies:

Canton, Illinois

Farmington, Illinois

Galva, Illinois

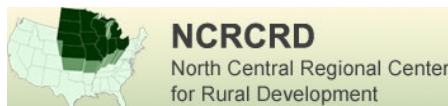
Silvis, Illinois

Alexandria, Minnesota

Lindstrom, Minnesota

Mineral Point, Wisconsin

Viroqua, Wisconsin



Available for download at: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/resilientdowntowns/>



Recruiting Successful Former Community Members

Undoubtedly, the major investments made by William Cook's medical plant have much to do with Canton's capacity to transform. Mr. Cook, having grown up in Canton, was compelled without a great deal of persuasion to make investments in the town. This strategy, to recruit previous community members with investment capital or to maintain alliances through alumni networks, is one that can possibly do as much for other small communities as it has for Canton.