

# Waukesha County gets high ranking for employee benefits

Study looked at unemployment, insurance, cost of living

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**WAUKESHA** — A survey of employment and health data ranking each of Wisconsin's 72 counties determined Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington counties to be in the state's top 10.

Smartasset, a financial technology and advising company, created an Employee Benefits Index score based on metrics such as the unemployment rate, percentage of the local population with employer health insurance and cost of living.

Waukesha was ranked second in the state, while Ozaukee took first and Washington took fifth.

"(Waukesha) ranked first in the state in the 'health insurance coverage' category, and outperformed the statewide average by 1.40% in unemployment," said Smart Asset Vice President of Financial Education AJ Smith.

Smith said Ozaukee stuck out for its top 10 status in retirement savings and health insurance contribution rates.

Nationally, Waukesha County is ranked 54th in the United States on the Employee Benefits Index. Ozaukee County is ranked 49th.

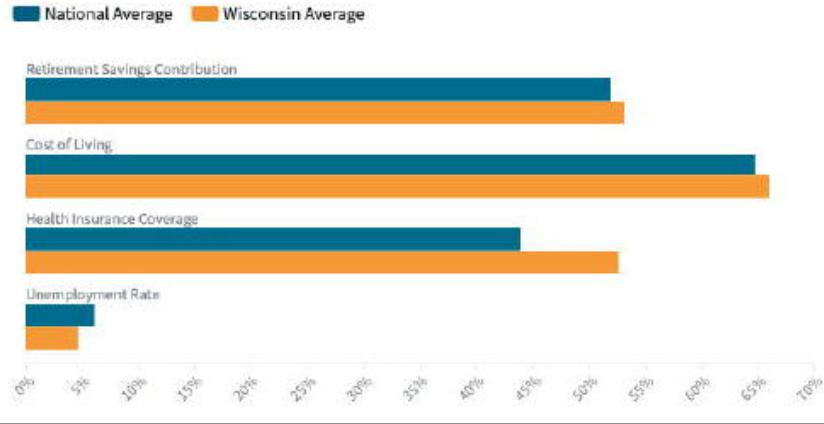
Ozaukee's total index score was 70.81 while Waukesha's was 70.46. They are the only two counties in the state with scores higher than 70.

Most counties scored between 40 and 60. Washington County's score was 64.6.

Menominee County's score was 27.9, the lowest in the state by more than eight points.

## Wisconsin and the U.S. overall

Rate comparisons between Wisconsin and the rest of the country



When compared with life expectancy data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and given a combined score, Ozaukee and Waukesha keep their top spots, while Washington slides from fifth to eighth.

The life expectancies in Ozaukee, Waukesha and Washington are 81.8, 81.5 and 80.4 respectively.

If only life expectancy is taken into account, Kewaunee County takes first place with a life expectancy of 82.

"We have a dynamic business community that really is focused on attracting, developing and retaining employees," said Suzanne Kelley, president and CEO of the Waukesha County Business Alliance. "I think that creates a great environment (at) our area companies."

Kelley also cited competitive schools as a factor in Waukesha's success.

According to Kaiser Family Foundation, employer health insurance coverage in Wisconsin declined from

50% to 48% from 2008 to 2009, but climbed to 56% in 2010.

It remained steady at 56% or 55% until reaching 57% in 2017 and maintaining that coverage rate in 2018.

Medicare and Medicaid accounted for 15% and 16% of health insurance coverage in 2018. An estimated 6% of Wisconsin did not have health insurance coverage that same year.

Ozaukee County Economic Development Council Executive Director Kathleen Schilling said the county's relatively high residential income helps lift other factors in the community.

"Often people with (those incomes) have higher quality benefits," Schilling said.

Schilling also emphasized Ozaukee County's location along Lake Michigan and the several recreational access points along the coast, such as the one at Concordia University of Wisconsin's campus in Mequon.

"One of the other things

we have going for us is we're an incredibly safe county," Schilling said. "When you feel comfortable and safe, you're more likely to (go) outdoors."

Both Schilling and Kelley said the counties' proximity to Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city, creates a mentality of an interdependent economic region.

"We're a region, so it's important for the region as a whole to work together and make sure we have a thriving economy," Kelley said.

Schilling said the contract manufacturers in Ozaukee are directly linked to market fluctuations in Milwaukee, while Kelley said the city's recreational amenities offer "a lot" to residents.

"We have a low unemployment rate in the county and in the state so companies are competing for workforce," Kelley said. "I think a lot of them are doing a lot to enhance their businesses (and) become employers of choice."