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State, Green Bay pushing for 'brand' new approach

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Brand name would show off Wisconsin's lesser-known assets

By **Bob Van Enkenvoort**

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When Mike Hildebrand heard state officials and the Department of Tourism wanted to create a new state brand to explain why Wisconsin is a good place to visit, live and do business, it sounded familiar.

Hildebrand and Donsia Strong Hill are co-chairs of a consortium of Brown County businesses and agencies that began the process in October to create a similar brand for greater Green Bay.

An Assembly committee passed 7-1 Thursday a plan by Rep. Steve Wieckert, R-Appleton, to require the Department of Administration to study whether to create a new national brand for the state.

And Tourism Secretary Kelli Trumble has been leading a separate effort for the state to come up with a new brand.

"There are a lot of similarities there," Hildebrand said, between what is happening locally and on the state level. "Because of that, I look at that as a positive. If they can help better brand the state and we can help better brand greater Green Bay and they're complementary to one another that's only going to be a good thing all the way around."

Wieckert agrees.

"It (the local initiative) dovetails perfectly with what we are trying to do for the whole state, and I see a synergy developing between the greater Green Bay group and what we can do as a state. The whole effort will be much, much bigger than the sum of its parts. We would be happy to work with that group and provide any background information or research on what works well and what doesn't work or what other areas or regions have tried."

The effort — on both the state and local level — isn't to turn away from what the state and area are known for.

"We are the Green Bay Packers. We are a great agricultural state. We are America's Dairyland," Wieckert said. "But we are more than that."

"There is a lot to be proud of in the state," Hildebrand said. The goal is, he said, to get people to also learn about the other positive assets that they might not know about.

Marketing experts say the state faces a tough and long challenge in creating an image that goes beyond foam Cheeseheads, beer and brats.

"There are certain stereotypes that people have about Wisconsin and it's very, very difficult to change those stereotypes," said Linda Gorchels, a marketing expert at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "Nothing is going to happen very quickly."

But Wieckert called Wisconsin "America's best-kept secret," with good public schools, nice and hardworking people and beautiful lakes and parks.

"We need to create the image of the hotshot state that we are," he said. "We need to broadcast that around the world to say what a great place Wisconsin is."

Weickert's bill will now go to the full Assembly. Senators Alan Lasee, R-Rockland, and Carol Roessler, R-Oshkosh, are pushing similar efforts in the Senate, Weickert said.