

DAKOTA COUNTY'S NEWS LEADER SINCE 1909

DAKOTA COUNTY STAR



Two Sections 18 Pages Volume XCVI Number 26

September 9, 2004

SSC first community to use consulting firm to become more cost-effective

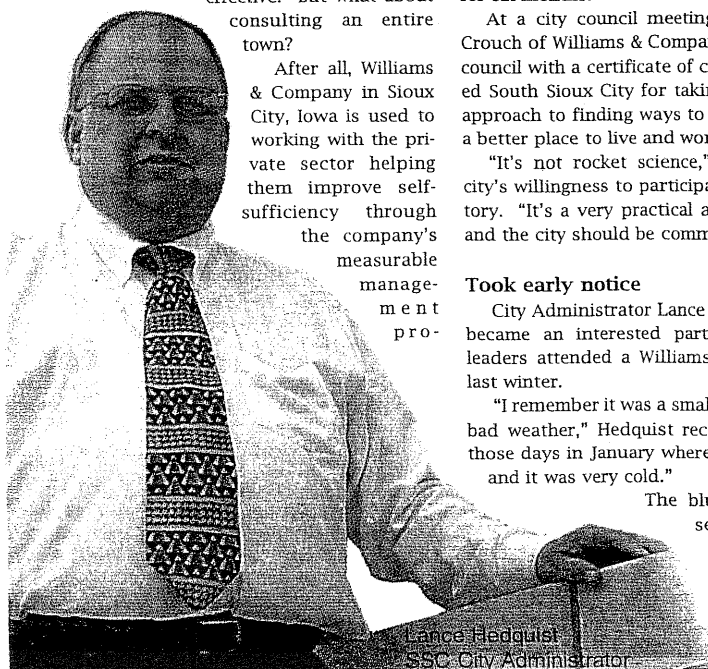
Williams & Company program to potentially save \$2.6 million

By Phil Carter
Star Editor

E-mail: news@dakotacountystar.com

It's not uncommon for a consulting company to deconstruct a corporation looking at ways number crunchers in the front office can help departments shore down expenses in order to be more cost-effective. But what about consulting an entire town?

After all, Williams & Company in Sioux City, Iowa is used to working with the private sector helping them improve self-sufficiency through the company's measurable management program.



gram, so was it conceivable that the same programs designed to help companies run more effectively could also do the same for community government?

That's what the City of South Sioux City is about to find out after 14 civic leaders, including Law Enforcement Center Director Pat Foust, Library Director Kathy Jacobs, Public Works Director John Vaughn and Parks and Recreation Director Jack Wardell, participated in the Williams & Company Consulting, Inc. Measurable Management Program for six months.

At a city council meeting last month, Harlan Crouch of Williams & Company, presented the city council with a certificate of completion and credited South Sioux City for taking an unconventional approach to finding ways to make the community a better place to live and work.

"It's not rocket science," Crouch said of the city's willingness to participate in uncharted territory. "It's a very practical approach to do things and the city should be commended for it."

Took early notice

City Administrator Lance Hedquist said the city became an interested partner after community leaders attended a Williams & Company seminar last winter.

"I remember it was a small crowd because of the bad weather," Hedquist recalled. "It was one of those days in January where we had a lot of snow and it was very cold."

The blustery weather didn't seem to freeze South Sioux City's thoughts about utilizing the Measurable Management Program. If anything; the city

warmed to getting help at becoming more efficient.

"Our city council has always been business-like in its approach," Hedquist said in an interview at his office recently. "And the city has been known for its efficiency, but we also know we can always do better."

Enter Williams & Company, who helped the city look at several different departments, including the police, library, streets and utilities.

Similar to what Williams' consulting services do for businesses who want to cut costs while maintaining effective customer service, the city was asked to look at ways of saving even the most miniscule dollars because even a little can go a long ways in terms of the city's budget.

"(The program) was designed to have everybody stop and think how they're doing things," Hedquist noted. "For department heads to see how they can save money and improve community services."

South Sioux City identified four key organizational areas in formulating a strategy to use for the Williams & Company plan: increasing revenue, cost reduction activities, economic development opportunities, and ways to make the city a better place to live.

"All the pieces are achievable," added Hedquist. "They're all realistic things that are doable and practical."

For example, Police Chief Scot Ford said the program helped him identify where the police department was already saving money.

"It helped me formulate presentations on how technology was helping us as a department," Ford described. "I was able to look at some things, whether it was software for records keeping or technology officers can use on the street, as a means to quantify that things we're doing and the technology we're using is saving money for the city."

It also helped Ford take a look at the department's policy on overtime and holiday scheduling.

"We took a look at what can we do with minimum staffing on holidays or how little can we get be with in certain situations," he noted. "It came down to us identifying that we can get by with giving some employees the day off and some we cannot."

Millions in savings

Leasing library books rather than buying them, using better markers and more durable signs for public hearing notices, requiring reservations at community camp sites; those things might not sound like much, but the potential savings, based on a five year span, is \$2.6 million.

"The real success isn't saying, 'here's what we're going to do,'" Hedquist admitted. "It's making you continually look at things and where we can get things done."

Leave it to South Sioux City to be a risk taker. In the end, they might be considered a trendsetter. While South Sioux City was the first municipality to complete the program, they're certainly not going to be the last. According to Hedquist, Carroll, Iowa and Yankton, S.D. are also interested in using the Measurable Management Program to better their city governments.

"Adopting new ideas that are practical, tangible and achievable, shouldn't be limited to just the private sector," Hedquist said. "These things can be done as an overall benefit to an entire community."

Lance Hedquist
SSC City Administrator