

Things are getting better.

The unemployment rate in Milwaukee County dropped from 6.7% last March to 6.0% in 2005. First quarter residential home sales rose 6.1% over 2004 and the average price of a home in Milwaukee County increased by \$12,000.

Roundy's moved their corporate offices into the county. GE Health Care Technologies is finishing work on an \$85 million, 500,000 square foot facility for 2,000 employees at the Milwaukee County Research Park.

Sales began on pieces of the Park East Corridor. Manpower is seeking upward of 250,000 square feet for new office space for 2,100 employees in the Milwaukee area. Whole Foods, House of Blues and Gameworks are all coming to town and Ikea is interested in space to put up a new retail outlet in the county.

County government is getting stronger too. While we continue to face significant budgetary challenges because of the inherited pension and sick leave benefits and because of previous employee contracts.

Smart fiscal policies to reduce spending by holding vacant positions after retirements and enacting a conservative capital budget help keep the budget together. Milwaukee County will repay 87% of its debt within 10 years. In comparison, xxxxx

Changes in fiscal management are helping to control the budget. In 2003 and 2004, problems in the Familycare program forced a shortfall in that area. Improvements made last year helped the department realize a surplus through the start of 2005.

Traditionally, deficits were large in the budgets for the Sheriff and the courts. Credit goes out to both for effectively managing their budgets this year.

Thanks to new programming by the county and our partners, the decline in the number of young people being sent into the state detention (prison) system continues to improve and save the taxpayers money. Watch for further improvements in the next year.

State aid cuts may not be as bad as once thought thanks to actions of the Joint Finance Committee in state government.