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Generation Iowa fights to keep young residents Lake View's Judisch chairs state commission

By

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The reason many of Carroll's college-educated young people don't live here comes down to simple math.

More than 60 percent of Iowa's high school graduates go to college but only 12.2 percent of the jobs available in the Hawkeye State require a bachelor's degree or higher, according to the Generation Iowa Commission.

The commission has worked since 2007 on the specific challenge of attracting and retaining more young people in Iowa - an issue politicians and state leaders have fiddled and fought with for decades.

As it stands, in 10 years Iowa's workforce will lose about 60,000 people every five years - which is like absorbing the departure of Principal or Rockwell Collins each year, says Rachel Judisch, chairwoman of Generation Iowa.

"That's equivalent to losing one of the major employers of the state," Judisch said.

Judisch recently spoke to the Carroll Area Development Corporation and the Carroll Daily Times Herald about what the commission calls "the great migration of Iowa's young professionals."

Judisch, 31, of Lake View, is a speech-language pathologist in Storm Lake. She grew up in rural Vail.

Iowa tops the Midwest in drawing students to college, but does a poor job of retaining them, and the U.S. Census Bureau projects a population decline of 200,000 white Iowans under age 64 by 2025.

During this time, minority groups - Asian, African-American and Hispanic - will all see population increases, with Hispanics leading the way in youth demographics.

This diversity brings both opportunity and challenges. For example, Judisch noted that 48 percent of Hispanics in Iowa have less than a high school degree, setting up a scenario in which lower-wage earners in some cities, like heavily Latino Storm Lake, will be asked to support a larger retired general population.

By 2025 there will be 216,000 more white people in Iowa over age 65, according to the Census.

State and local leaders have eyed a variety of amenities to retain young people but wages are clearly the determinative factor, Generation Iowa reports.

The commission surveyed 1,000 Iowans in 2008 and the No. 1 priority for people making a residency decision is finding the highest-paying job in their field.

Carroll is well positioned to attack the problem of talent drain as Generation Iowa sees community and economic development partnerships with colleges as being vital. The presence of Des Moines Area Community College will continue to help Carroll, Judisch said.

But rural Iowa in general faces a major challenge with keeping young people as 81 percent of the college-educated migration went to urban areas.

Generation Iowa is urging state leaders to take better advantage of two "raw ingredients" - a whole-some, hardworking brand and strong education, Judisch said.

Some specific Generation Iowa recommendations are the appointment of more young people to boards and commissions in Iowa as well as an increased support of small business internships and more ambitious state job creation programs.

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