



Organization Overview

2024-2025

Chamber Events

Chamber Bucks Program

Finalized: April 10, 2025

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Ely, Minnesota 55731

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Ely.org



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Introduction

July 2025 marks the 117th anniversary of the Ely Chamber of Commerce (ECC). Our organization started in 1908 as the Ely Business Men's Association. In 1916, it was renamed as the Ely Commercial Club and remained as such until the 1950s, when it officially named as the Ely Chamber of Commerce. As the needs of the business community have changed, our organization has evolved to accommodate those changes.

Meeting Business Needs

As a 501 (c) 6 Business Association, the ECC serves the business community through advocacy, education, leadership, workforce development, resources, and networking. In 2024, as a way to meet the challenges of expanding our services, the ECC embarked on two new endeavors: creating a 501 (c) 3 foundation and expanding its service area.

Our new foundation will house our events, which range from the Blueberry Art Festival, a festival which brings thousands of visitors to Ely, to the Mrs. Claus Party, which caters to our local families. The advantage of a 501 (c) 3 foundation is tax-deductible sponsorships, the accepting of donations, and a wider range of grant opportunities. The Ely Area Chamber Foundation will function as the philanthropic arm of the Ely Chamber of Commerce and we will continue to provide free event planning support to businesses, clubs, and organizations. Advertising sponsorships to area nonprofit events will also fall under the foundation.

Before 2024, the ECC's service area included Ely, Babbitt, Winton, Embarrass, Isabella, and all townships and unincorporated areas within those boundaries. We have expanded the service area to include Tower, Soudan, Lake Vermilion, and the associated townships and unincorporated areas.

In the past, the ECC did not pursue memberships or provide support in the Tower, Soudan, and Lake Vermilion area since there was an active chamber presence. Several years ago, the Tower Chamber of Commerce closed. There were several attempts to restart the Tower Chamber; however, no one could maintain the organization.

The ECC already serves a large area with a diverse business base. Our organization has a positive impact through advocacy, networking, education, and other programs. Expanding the service area provides even more opportunities to provide business support for the region—particularly for an area with no business association representation.

It's important to understand that in regions like northern Minnesota, where tourism and interconnected communities are vital, supporting neighboring areas can create a "rising tide lifts all boats" effect. Here's how the Ely Chamber of Commerce's support of Tower, Soudan, and Lake Vermilion can benefit Ely, Winton, Babbitt, and associated areas:

Regional Tourism:

- These areas share a common tourism draw: the natural beauty of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Superior National Forest, Lake Vermilion, and related outdoor activities.



- When the entire region thrives, it attracts more visitors overall. Tourists often travel between these towns, meaning that a visitor staying at Lake Vermilion might also spend a day shopping or dining in Ely.
- Therefore, supporting the region as a whole increases the potential customer base for all businesses, regardless of their specific location.

Economic Interdependence:

- Businesses in these towns often rely on each other for supplies, services, and customers.
- A strong regional economy benefits everyone. For example, a healthy tourism industry in Tower and Soudan can lead to increased demand for goods and services from businesses in Ely.
- Many people live in one town, and work, or shop, in another. So, the health of all of the towns, effects the entire area.

In essence, the Ely Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the economic health of its surrounding communities is closely tied to its own. By fostering a strong and vibrant regional economy, it creates a more prosperous environment for all of its members.

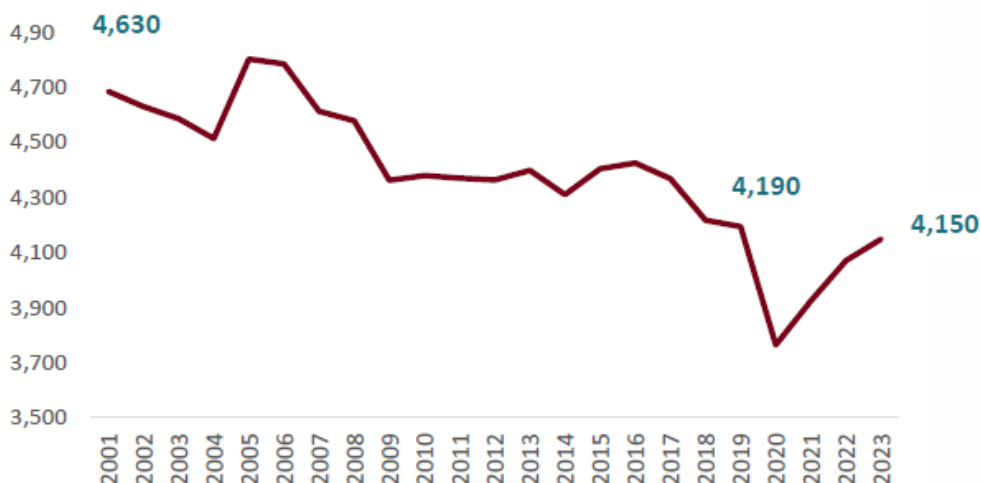
Area Economic Report

The full *Overview of the Ely Area Economy* report is in Appendix D

Over the years, there have been many discussions about the industries that drive the economy in the Ely area. After meeting with the staff from the University of MN Extension-Department of Community Development, the Chamber requested workforce and industry data for Ely, Winton, Babbitt, Tower, Soudan, and the surrounding townships. The results provided not only data but also some unexpected insights that we are excited to share with you.

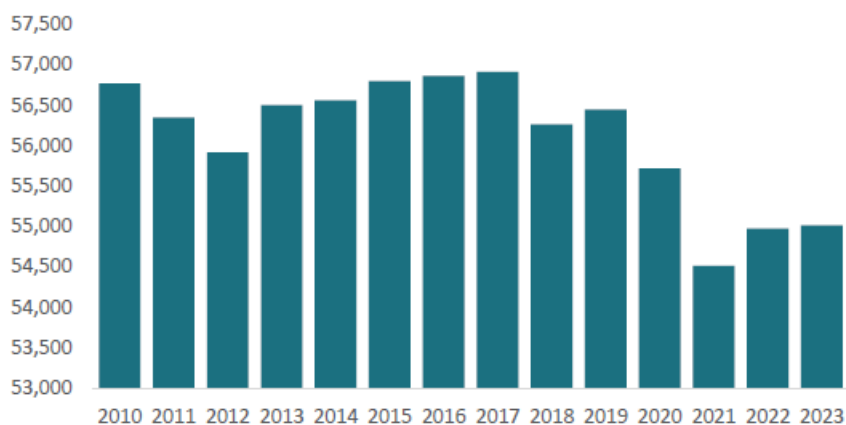
The number of jobs peaked in 2005 at over 4,700 and steadily decreased until 2009. From 2009 to 2018, the employment level remained relatively stable. In 2019, the area's employment level was 4,190. However, there was a significant drop in employment in 2020 due to the pandemic, with levels falling to just over 3,700. Since then, there has been a steady increase in employment, with levels reaching 4,150 in 2023. (Chart 1)

Chart 1: Number of Jobs in the Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes, Minnesota Source: Lightcast



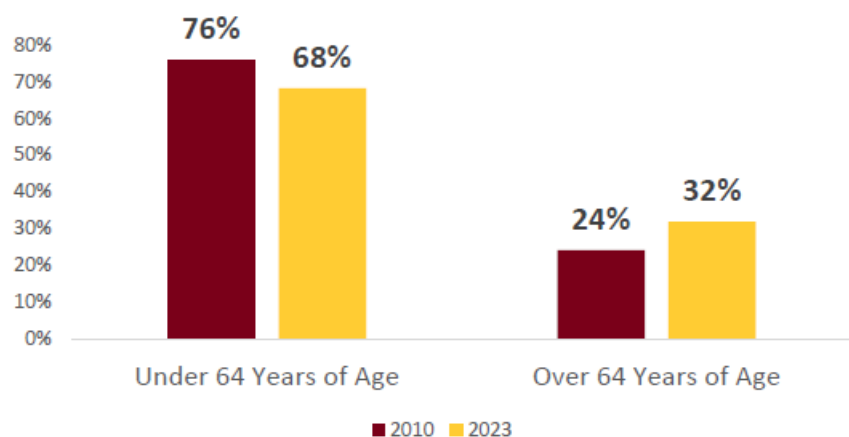
The Ely area has experienced a 4.2% decrease in jobs. At the same time that businesses struggle to find staff, they have also halted service expansion, product lines, or locations. This trend is not unique to the area and has been reported across the state and country. (Chart 2) While the workforce levels for greater St. Louis County (excluding Duluth) remained relatively stable at 56,500 from 2010 to 2019. There was a significant drop in 2021 to 54,500, resulting in a loss of 10,000 people in the workforce over two years. However, the workforce has since rebounded to around 55,000 in the last two years, indicating a promising sign of recovery. (Chart 3)

Chart 3: Number of People in the Labor Force, Saint Louis County, Minnesota (Excluding Duluth) Source: LAUS, MN DEED



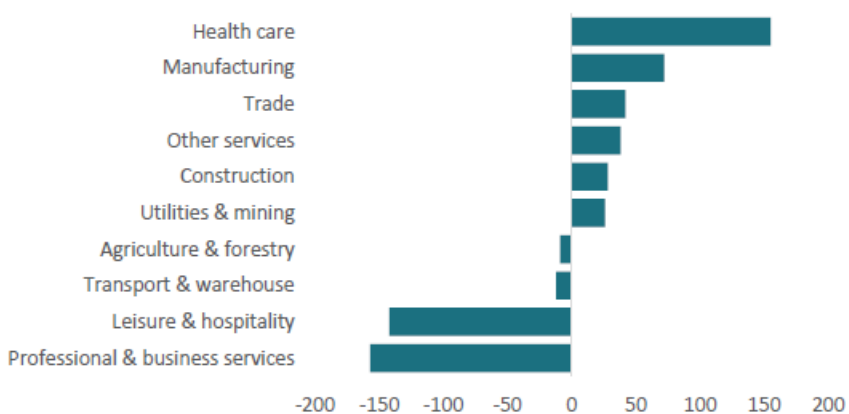
There has been a noticeable shift in the workforce. The percentage of individuals over 64 years old has increased from 24% to 32%. This trend, observed during the pandemic and continuing post-Covid, has significant implications for workforce dynamics, retirement policies, and healthcare needs. (Chart 4)

Chart 4: Age of Population, Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes, Minnesota Source: Lightcast



Tourism employs the highest number of workers, with over 800 employees, followed by over 450 in the trades and over 400 in other services. Healthcare comes fourth, with just over 400 workers. From 2010 to 2023, healthcare has added over 150 jobs, and manufacturing has added over 70. The number of workers in tourism-related positions has decreased by 150, while professional and business services have also seen a decline of over 160 positions during the same period. (Chart 6)

Chart 6: Change in Number of Jobs by Industry, Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes, 2010 to 2023 Source: Lightcast



The average weekly wages in the area are \$775. This is 44% lower than the state-wide average of \$1,389. When comparing different industries, the education and healthcare sector has a weekly wage of \$1,395, which is slightly higher than the state average. The professional and business services sector has an average weekly wage of \$1,134. Weekly wages in the tourism sector amount to \$432, while those in the trade, transport, and utilities sector are slightly higher at \$497. The financial services sector falls in the middle, with an average weekly wage of \$793. (Charts 8 & 9)

Chart 8: Average Weekly Wage, All Industries
 Source: QCEW, MN DEED

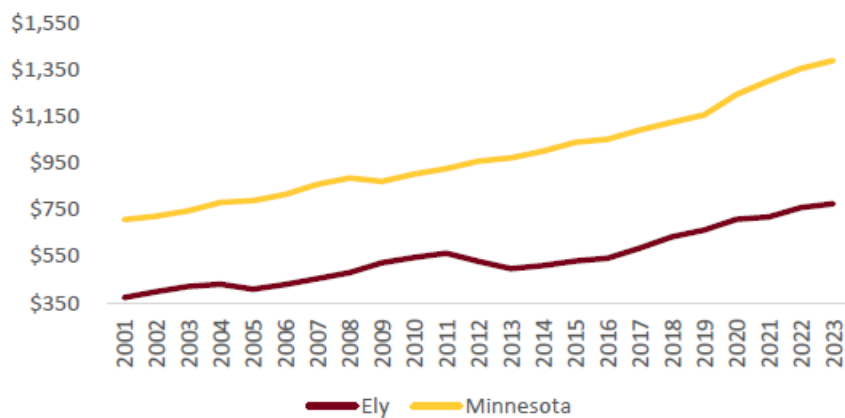
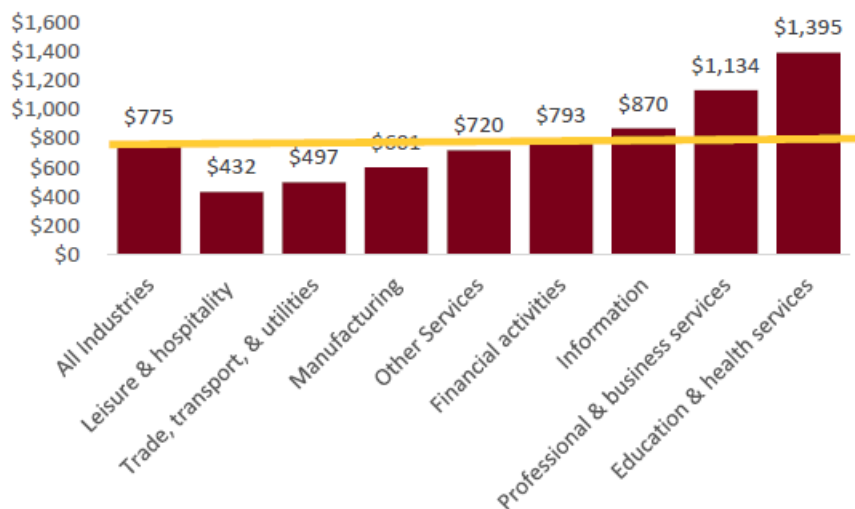
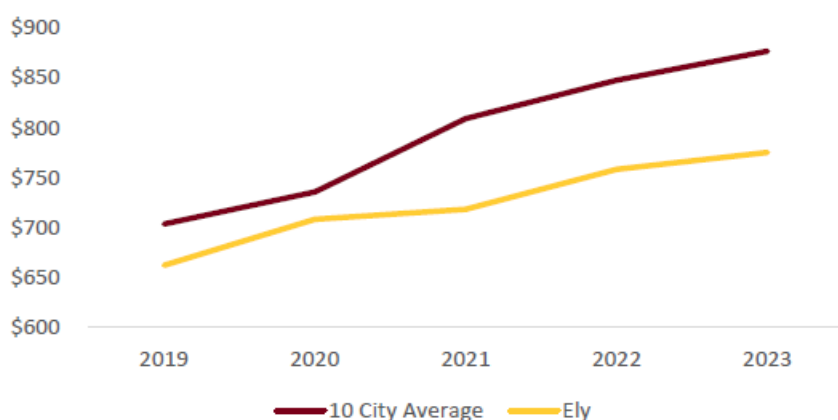


Chart 9: Average Weekly Wage by Industry, Ely Minnesota, 2023
 Source: QCEW, MN DEED



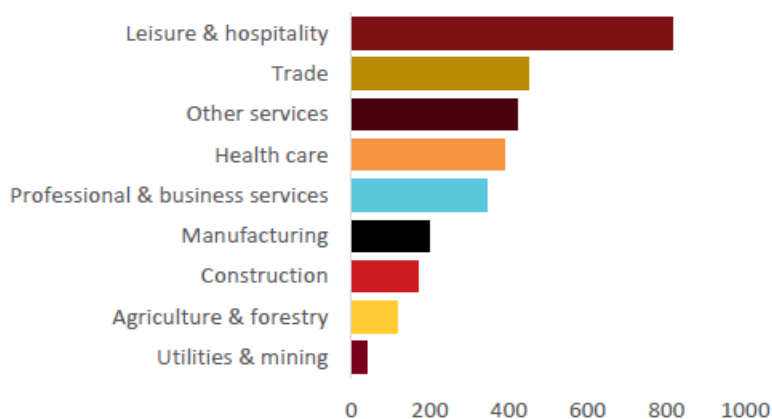
A final area of research showed the commuting patterns of area residents. Of the 830 working residents, 400 held jobs within Ely. The remaining 430 commuted outside of the city, while 678 individuals commuted to Ely to work. (Chart 10)

Chart 10: Average Weekly Wage: Ely Compared to the Average of 10 Similarly Sized Minnesota Cities, Source: QCEW, MN DEED



An essential part of a stable economy is a diverse economy. The economy in Ely and the surrounding area features a wide range of sectors, including tourism, trade, other services, healthcare, professional and business services, manufacturing, construction, agriculture and forestry, utilities, and mining. This diversity provides a strong foundation for our economy. Professional and business services include consulting, accounting, attorneys, advertising, engineering, and computer systems and support. Trade includes financial and insurance institutions and “other services,” encompasses repair and maintenance services, personal and laundry care, and social, civil, and religious organizations. (Chart 5)

Chart 5: Number of Jobs by Industry in 2023 for Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes Source: Lightcast



Area leaders have recognized the need for services in three key areas, including childcare, housing, and workforce, to allow area businesses and organizations to grow. The Ely Area Community Foundation’s innovative solution, using the old revenue building to create the Hub, a community-based childcare center, has supported a number of families with daycare challenges. The Hub now provides space for over forty children, which has aided some households in returning to two-paycheck families. The Hub's



success in addressing the childcare issue is a testament to the power of community-driven solutions in overcoming economic challenges. A lack of housing is the second critical point and can directly impact the workforce. We know Ely’s elected officials are diligently working to create housing solutions that can in turn lead to workforce solutions. Ely isn’t the only solution, as the area workforce looks to Babbitt, Winton, Tower, Soudan, and our local townships for housing. Communities working together to address and solve these deficiencies will help strengthen each community and the regional economy.

2024-2025 Board of Directors

- Dave Sebesta, Williams & Hall Outfitters, President/Chair, 218-365-5837
- Jodi Martin, Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital, 2nd Vice President, 218-365-8739
- Dafne Caruso, The Art Corner, Secretary, 218-365-2263
- Kris Winkelman, Arrowhead Outdoors, Treasurer, 218-365-5358
- Tanner Spicer, Voyageur North Outfitters, Director, 218-365-3251
- Jill Leary, North of North Resort, Director, 320-267-8894
- Patrick Ferguson, Sheridan Inn, LCC, Director, 314-753-6267

Chamber Staff

- Eva Sebesta, Executive Director, director@ely.org or 218-365-6123
- Kristen Switajewski, Event Director, events@ely.org
- Lori Boes, Visitor Center Coordinator, fun@ely.org

Economic Impact of Chamber Events

The Ely Chamber of Commerce holds three major events: the Blueberry Art Festival in late July, the Harvest Moon Festival in early September, and the WolfTrack Classic Sled Dog Race in late February. Each event draws event participants from across the country and Canada, plus event enthusiasts from across the state and surrounding locations.

Our surveys have two components. The first targets the event and asks for feedback on how we can improve it. The second part asks specific economic-based questions about the money spent on retail, restaurants, services, and lodging. In 2024, we surveyed both the Blueberry Art and Harvest Moon Festival vendors, and in March 2025, we surveyed the WolfTrack Classic mushers. The economic impact from each group is as follows:

<u>Blueberry Art Festival Vendors</u>	Vendor Average	All Vendors
Retail, restaurants & services	\$250.40	\$53,584.75
Lodging	\$455.61	\$97,500.32
Totals	\$706.01	\$151,085.07

<u>Harvest Moon Festival Vendors</u>	Vendor Average	All Vendors
Retail, restaurants & services	\$197.83	\$18,108.36
Lodging	\$287.97	\$26,493.03
Totals	\$485.80	\$44,601.39



The Harvest Moon is about half the size of the Blueberry Art Festival, so fewer vendors exist. Many Harvest Moon vendors are local artists, so they do not require lodging, meals, or additional services. Blueberry Art Festival vendors tend to stay at motels, resorts, and vacation home rentals during the festival, paying a higher rate per night.

<u>WolfTrack Classic Sled Dog Race</u>	Musher Average	All Musers
Retail, restaurants & services	\$158.33	\$6016.54
Lodging	\$96.38	\$3675.74
Totals	254.71	\$9692.28

WolfTrack Classic Sled Dog Race has a capacity for 60 mushers. In 2025, 38 teams ran in the race. Due to limited snow in southern areas of the Midwest, some mushers withdrew before the race.

We will continue offering surveys annually to review our events' economic impact.

Ely.Org Website

Ely.org continues to offer businesses a powerful marketing tool. We are sharing highlights from 12 months (March 2024 - March 2025). Businesses may find the information valuable for planning marketing and advertising. Web browser and platform information can provide insight into website layout and formatting.

Acquisition statistics:

- General overview
 - User total 232,588
 - Sessions 376,365
 - Event count 3,987,341
 - Events per session 10.59
 - Engagement rate 65.66%
- Users by Landing Page:
 - Webcams 12%
 - Lodging 8.4%
 - Events 4.5%
 - Things to do 3.4%
 - Blueberry Art Festival 2.9%
 - Restaurants 2.4%
 - Attractions 2.1%
 - Plan Trip 1.7%
 - Campgrounds 1.2%
- India 1.5%
- Philippines 1.1%
- Canada 1.0%
- Users by City (% of US users)
 - Minneapolis 14% of total
 - Chicago 13.5%
 - Dallas 6.0%
 - Ely 3.1%
 - Duluth 1.6%
 - Saint Paul 1.5%
 - New York 1.4%
- Users by Age
 - 55-64 22.3%
 - 25-34 20.9%
 - 35-44 20.3%
 - 45-54 19.2%
 - 65 + 15.4%
 - 18-24 11.6%

Demographic statistics:

- Users by country
 - United States 86.2% of total



Technology statistics:

- Users by Operating System:
 - iOS 40.3% of total
 - Android 26.4%
 - Windows 18.8%
 - Macintosh 10.9%
 - Linux 2.7%
- Users by Browser:
 - Chrome 41.2% of total
 - Safari 37.9%
 - Android Webview 6.3%
 - Edge 4.8%
 - Safari (in-app) 4.4%
 - Firefox 3.0%
- Users by Search Engine:
 - Google 99.1%
 - Bing 6.0%

- M.Facebook.com 4.3%
- SyndicatedSearch.goog 3.8%
- 3461 2.9%
- Yahoo 2.1%
- DuckDuckGo 2.1%

- Users by Platform:
 - Mobile device 63.3%
 - Desktop 33.1%
 - Tablet 3.6%

Search statistics:

- Organic search 53.6% of total
- Direct search 16.8%
- Cross Network 12.9%
- Organic Social 5.7%
- Referrals 3.5%
- Paid Search 3.2%
- Email links .9%

2024-2025 Focus: Workforce & Business Development

Continuing our efforts, which started in 2021, Chamber staff have expanded ways for businesses to connect with potential employees.

1. Ely Chamber of Commerce members can list job openings on our website at Ely.org. Our Employment page received over 2375 views, followed by our Relocation page, which received over 345.
2. We continue to provide a Workforce Resource packet containing internship opportunities through Midwest colleges and universities, the USA Bridge program, and state and regional resources.
3. The Chamber hosted an August virtual J1 VISA – USA Bridge session with InterExchange.
4. Three job fairs targeted two different communities and age groups. All businesses were encouraged to submit job openings for a combined job list at job fairs and the Chamber office.
 - a. The Ely High School Job Fair was a joint event with Northeast Range School. The Chamber and nineteen area businesses participated.
 - b. The Ely Job Fair, hosted at the USFS Kawishiwi Ranger Station, was open to high school and college students, and residents. The Chamber and eleven area businesses attended.
 - c. The Tower Job Fair, hosted at the Tower Civic Center, was open to all ages and had twelve participating businesses.
5. The Northwoods Business Incubator sessions featured:
 - a. Marketing Assistance – Katherine Lahti & Molly Solberg
 - b. Purchasing a Business – Nick Dunnom



- c. Employee Retirement Accounts – Jeff Sundell
- d. Minimum Wage, Youth Wages, and Earned Sick & Safe Leave – Melissa Parra-Huisar

Transportation Survey

At the September Networking Breakfast, the Arrowhead Transit team shared their services in the Ely area. Arrowhead Transit is looking to expand services; however, they need to know what the population needs, such as days and hours of operation, where they need rides and any limitations that potential riders may feel keep them from public transport.

In January 2025, the ECC launched a transportation survey to identify needs within the Ely area. Twenty-two individuals responded to the survey. Nineteen lived within the Ely city limits. Fifty-five percent were 65 or older, followed by 25% in the 55–64-year-old category.

When asked about their transportation needs, 81% needed transportation for grocery shopping, followed by 57% for doctor visits. 47.6% of the respondents needed transportation to Duluth and Virginia.

Over half of the respondents identified as having a disability. Some indicated that their disability limited their access to transportation. Limitations ranged from wheelchair use to age to vision impairment.

Over twenty-seven percent use Arrowhead Transit. Those who do not use Arrowhead cited the rides not being available when they need them, not knowing how to schedule a ride, and the transit not going to the locations needed.

In the last three months, 50% of respondents had to cancel one or more appointments due to a lack of transportation. When transportation was unavailable, respondents also gave up shopping (58%), social and family events (63%), and work (16%).

Arrowhead Transit currently runs Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Over 78% of respondents indicated running Monday-Friday from 3 to 6 p.m. would be beneficial, and 50% indicated 6 to 9 p.m. would help. Over sixty-four percent noted Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and 50% suggested Sundays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Over 54% drive themselves, 45.4% walk, 50% receive rides from others, and 27.3% use Arrowhead Transit.

The ECC will share the Transportation Survey results with Arrowhead Transit to aid them in identifying areas for service expansion.

Ely's First Dark Sky Festival

Todd Burllet from Starry Skies North emailed the Chamber staff in 2023 regarding the idea of a Dark Sky event. The Chamber reached out to several dozen businesses and organizations to gauge interest and numerous individuals and organizations responded with a resounding 'Yes.'



Over the next year, a working group of almost 30 people, organizations, and businesses formed. A collaborative group was also formed, including the Ely Chamber of Commerce, Todd Burlet, and the Ely Area Tourism Bureau. The collaborative group organized meetings, activities, marketing, advertising, merchandise, etc.

The event launched on January 10-11, 2025, with an incredible response from the public. Residents and visitors attended activities. Demand for several activities promoted the addition of extra sessions. The festival included educational seminars, art, health and wellness, food, and outdoor recreation.

Post-event feedback included offering the festival during a warmer time of the shoulder seasons and expanding it by at least several more days. The 2026 event is already in the works.

Ribbon Cuttings & Grand Openings

Because opening a new business is so important to our community, the Ely Chamber of Commerce provides ribbon-cutting support for new businesses, new owners of existing businesses, expansions, and relocations. The chamber also contacts government officials, provide a Chamber representative, sends email blasts to the business community, and brings the big scissors and ribbon to the event.

This year, the Chamber participated in the following ribbon cuttings:

- Footloose Cycle Cruise
- Community Center Hub
- North Country Trail

Strategic Planning Goals

The Ely Chamber of Commerce continues to work on its strategic plan. Some of the items the board and staff will focus on for 2025-2026 include:

- Increase membership in Ely, Babbitt, Winton, and surrounding areas
 - The increased presence of executive director in the business community
 - Connect with new businesses and owners and share business resource package
- Launch foundation
- Provide business support and resources to the Tower, Soudan, and Lake Vermilion business community
- Continue to draw distinctions between the Chamber and Ely Area Tourism Bureau.
- Increase visibility in the community through area events & promotions
 - Use our events and promotions to share Chamber news
 - Tuesday Group & Rotary talks
 - Participate in round table discussions
- Continue to track event value through surveys
- Continue staff development and create a staff succession plan
- Listen to the business community and adjust or create programming to meet needs



Quarterly Chamber Business Breakfasts

The Chamber's quarterly business breakfasts allow business owners and managers to gather, share their news, and learn about initiatives happening within the business community. During the past year, participants have engaged in lively discussions and invited each other to share insights. The breakfast is a great way to learn about business community initiatives, business concerns, etc. The quarterly meetings are in March, June, September, and December. Our 2024 – 2025 breakfasts included representatives from The Hub, Arrowhead Transit, and Ely Community Resource.

Celebrate Ely Business Networking Dinner

The Ely Chamber of Commerce held the 2025 Celebrate Ely Business Networking dinner at The Grand Ely Lodge on April 3. This year's theme was "Pirates" and featured Jen McDonough, AKA The Iron Jen. Matt Graves from OUTMOBILE Escape Room provided his tropical island-themed escape room, and Brainstorm Bakery supplied amazing key lime bars.

The Celebrate Ely event includes the Jackpine Bob Cary Community Spirit, Good Neighbor Business, Excellence in Customer Service, and Good Citizen Volunteer awards, an overview of the Ely Chamber of Commerce, door prizes, a social hour with fun activities, a buffet dinner, and a keynote speaker.

Celebrate Ely offers owners, employees, and interested residents the opportunity to gather for a fun evening of networking and celebrating our amazing community.

Letters of Support

The Ely Chamber of Commerce provides letters of support to various organizations seeking to expand services, purchase equipment, improve facilities, or enhance experiences. During the 2024-2025 membership year, we have provided letters of support to the following organizations:

- Ely-Winton Historical Society
- State of Minnesota – Request for state to continue AIS funding
- Ely Area Community Foundation – The Hub (2 letters)
- Ely's Historic State Theater
- City of Ely
- Adaptive Wilderness Within Reach

These organizations provide residents and visitors important services, recreational opportunities, and attractions. We also provide letters of support for for-profit businesses in the area.

Chamber Business Newsletter

Timing is everything. Our monthly Chamber newsletter reaches business inboxes between the 15th and 18th of each month. The newsletter has specific topics focusing on Chamber activities, new businesses and owners, area events and promotions, funding opportunities, and training options.

When the newsletter started in March 2012, it had an open rate of 34.2%. Ten years later, it had an open rate of 43.5%, and our latest newsletters have had an open rate of 50.7%. Thank you for



supporting the Chamber newsletter. We encourage businesses to share information, accomplishments, and news. Businesses can also provide business-to-business offers — contact Chamber staff with your details.

Video Promotion Project

The Ely Chamber of Commerce teamed up with Mike Fitzgerald from Wovenwood Studios and Chris Ellerbroek from Ten80North to create a unique opportunity for Chamber members. Mike and Chris worked with business owners to create a unique 2-minute video to highlight the business. The video is hosted on the Chamber's YouTube channel and connects to the business listing at Ely.org, other websites, or social media accounts. We completed our final round of six videos in 2024. We plan to revisit the video project in a couple of years.

Ely Economic Development Authority (EEDA)

The Ely Chamber of Commerce joined the EEDA in July 2021 to share its work with the EEDA. With many entities in the Ely area working on different aspects of workforce needs, sharing information is critical. The City of Ely, through the EEDA, has greatly supported our work. The monthly meetings allow us to share our work and efforts with interested businesses and individuals beyond our Chamber membership.

Looking to the Future

The Ely Chamber of Commerce's (ECC) 2025-2026 vision emphasizes collaboration and regional support. Key points include:

- **Collective Strength:** The ECC recognizes the power of collaboration and emphasizes that no single entity can achieve everything alone.
- **Core Services:** The focus remains on providing access to essential resources, networking opportunities, advocacy, and economic opportunities.
- **Expanded Regional Impact:** Building on its established support for Ely and surrounding areas, the ECC aims to extend its reach to Tower, Soudan, and Lake Vermilion, fostering economic stability across the entire region.



2025-2026 Events & Promotions

May 17, 2025

Citywide Rummage, Business Crazy Day, and Used Equipment & Watercraft Sale

Chamber member businesses receive a free listing and window sign. We create an event map with locations for in-town businesses and rummage sales. Those businesses outside of town have directions to their location. The Citywide Rummage Sale is for residents and nonprofit organizations, such as churches. The Business Crazy Day is for storefront retail businesses. The Used Equipment & Watercraft is for area outfitters and resorts. The combined event attracts individuals from across the Iron Range and as far south as the Twin Cities to head north and take advantage of great sales. It's a wonderful time for businesses to move last year's merchandise, used camping gear and watercraft, or other items. Sign-up begins in late April and closes 10 days before the event starts.

July 24-27, 2025

Operation Blueberry (Business Shopping)

We launched Operation Blueberry in 2020, during the time the Blueberry/Art Festival would have occurred. It was a smashing success, and businesses asked us to continue offering the shopping event. Businesses create something blueberry. Some offer homemade blueberry popsicles, others offer a pick-a-blueberry discount, and still others offer all blue-colored items at a discount. There are no rules other than creating a fantastic window display or large banner for your storefront. We provide a map and business listing for all participating businesses.

July 25-27, 2025

Blueberry/Art Festival

The art and craft applications opened on January 1. We are on our way to filling the event with arts, crafts, and food vendors. This event has a capacity for 270 vendors and fills Whiteside Park from end to end. Setup for the festival starts the week before, with us marking the park on Monday and physically setting up booths on Thursday.

NOTE: We do have sponsor opportunities for businesses. If interested, contact us for details.

Experience Ely Expo

We are excited to offer the expo, which is a way for nonprofit organizations to participate in Whiteside Park during the Blueberry/Art Festival. In the past, we had 14 nonprofits within the festival. Now, there are 20 booth spaces available and the opportunity for new nonprofits to participate. The categories are art & craft organization or



event, sports & recreation organization or event, museum or attraction, first responders, and service organizations. The application period opened on January 1. The Expo application period closes on April 15.

September 4-7, 2025 Harvest Days (Business Shopping)

Harvest Days originated in 2020 when we searched for ways to encourage shoppers to head to Ely. This event is an excellent opportunity to offer sales, clearance, or other incentives to draw shoppers through your door. How can you boost your bottom line in September? Consider making Harvest Days a shopping event for your store. We provide a map and business listing for each participating business.

September 5-7, 2025 Harvest Moon Festival

Applications for this fall event opened on January 1, and just like the Blueberry/Art Festival, it is filling quickly. This fall festival takes a slightly different direction—a more laid-back and relaxed feel compared to our bustling July event. This three-day event typically has 120 to 140 art, craft, and food vendors. Setup for the festival begins the week before as we mark the park on Tuesday, and the physical booth setup begins early Thursday morning.

NOTE: We do have sponsor opportunities for businesses. If interested, contact us for details.

Experience Ely Expo

We do offer a second expo during the Harvest Moon Festival weekend. This event has the same criteria and space availability as the Blueberry/Art Festival expo. Applications for this expo also opened on January 1 and closed on April 15.

November 29, 2025 Shop Local Saturday

The nationwide Shop Local promotion is November 29. We start our social media Shop Local Business Blast in early November and will continue through the holidays. Let us know if you have specials or promotions we can share.

December 6, 2025 Mrs. Claus Holiday Hop

We combined our Shine Bright, Smalltown Christmas, and Mrs. Claus Party into one weekend. The date change allows businesses to decorate stores and enjoy a weekend-long shopping event before the holidays. Plus, a new twist entices kids and shoppers into area businesses before and after the traditional Mrs. Claus Party.



The Mrs. Claus Party is hosted at the Grand Ely Lodge and features craft tables, activities, treats, gift bags, and Santa and Mrs. Claus. Expect about 160 participants. Whatever happens after that is unanticipated and filled with extreme fun. Mrs. Claus welcomes all the youth in the area while Santa listens to all their Christmas wishes.

We gladly accept small gifts, cash donations, candy, and other items from area businesses and organizations for the traditional Mrs. Claus Party. We provide a sponsor/donor list in each gift bag so the families know which businesses support the party.

Businesses are encouraged to provide something fun for the kids to stop in and collect before and after the traditional Mrs. Claus Party. Consider a coloring sheet, craft kit, holiday stickers, treat, cookie decorating pack, or another item. Getting the kids in the store means parents or grandparents are coming through the door, too. Consider putting your kid's items in the entrance or near the register for best exposure and impulse purchases.

The Chamber will create a Mrs. Claus Holiday Hop map for kids, showing the locations and items, they can collect. There will also be a unique flyer for adults. Sales and discounts aren't necessary—consider featuring product lines or items they can only find at your location.

February 20-22, 2026 WolfTrack Classic Sled Dog Race Weekend

Up to 60 sled dog teams travel to Ely to compete in our one-day race.

Prerace activities include the WolfTrack Prance on Friday night. The Chamber hosts a Meet the Teams on Saturday at Minnesota North College – Vermilion Campus. The Vermilion Campus Wilderness Club hosts a Musher Dinner in the college cafeteria. Several hundred people enjoy the all-you-can-eat spaghetti dinner. During both Saturday events, the public can meet and visit with mushers.

Following the Musher Dinner, the mushers and their handlers head to the college theater, where the Race Director, Race Marshal, and Trail Boss discuss race rules, the trail, and racing conditions.

The race starts at 9 a.m. on Sunday as the first 8-dog team hits the trail. Once all 8-dog teams are on the trail, the 6-dog teams follow. Our 8-dog teams travel 50 miles along the Taconite Trail and come across Bear Head Lake, returning to the Ely finish line. Our 6-dog teams also travel along the Taconite Trail and head over to the Purvis Lake area before heading back to Ely, covering about 30 miles on their journey.



NOTE: Sponsorships are available for this event.

October 16-19, 2026 Northwoods Dark Sky Festival – TENTATIVE DATE

Our second Dark Sky festival is a multi-community effort with businesses, organizations, and attractions coming together to celebrate our BWCAW Dark Sky designation.

We invite you to participate in our Chamber-sponsored events. For more details, please get in touch with the Chamber office at 218-365-6123 or director@ely.org.



APPENDIX A

Chamber Bucks Program

Several decades ago, the Ely Chamber of Commerce started a promotion they used at sports & travel shows across the Midwest. Sports show guests received a card redeemable for Chamber Bucks. They would bring the card into the Chamber office and receive their Chamber Bucks, which numerous Ely businesses accepted. As time passed, the program caught on locally, and businesses began buying Chamber Bucks for their guests and staff. Of course, residents thought it was a snappy idea, too, so they became a popular way to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. The one-size-fits-all concept allowed the receiver to use the Chamber Bucks at dozens of area businesses.

The Chamber Buck program is exclusive to Chamber members. We offer increments of \$5, \$10, and \$20 Chamber Bucks. We keep a list of participating businesses and provide the list with each Chamber Buck purchase. When businesses receive the Chamber Bucks, they treat them like regular cash. When businesses bring their Chamber Bucks back to our office, we issue a check for the face value of each returned Chamber Buck. Businesses can bring them in person or send them by mail.

For example, a customer has a purchase of \$7.50 and provides a \$20.00 Chamber Buck. The cashier must provide \$12.50 in change or issue an in-store credit for that amount. Collect the Chamber Buck after the transaction, as it is no longer valid. The business must return the original Chamber Buck to the ECC office for reimbursement.



APPENDIX B

Strategic Planning Overview

2022 marked the second round of strategic planning for the Ely Chamber of Commerce. The first round of strategic planning started in 2018 with focus groups and was completed in October 2019 as board members reviewed feedback received from members and nonmembers. This fall, board members reviewed the original parts of the strategic planning to determine successes and work remaining. The following items are the outcomes of the 2022 strategic planning.

Vision: Leading a thriving, sustainable economic community.

Mission: The Ely Chamber of Commerce emphasizes leadership and advocacy, strategic partnerships, citizen career development, business diversity, and education.

Work & Actions Prioritized by: Local, Inclusivity, Relationships, Leadership, Workforce Development, and Growth

Stakeholders: Members, Industries, Strategic Partners, The Board, Volunteers, and Employees

The Next 6 Bold Steps Toward the Future Include:

- Develop/execute a comprehensive communications plan that reaches all members, nonmembers, and the community.
- Identify & prioritize the most fiscally responsible avenues for the Chamber.
- Introduce a Member Brand & Marketing Plan benefit that facilitates growth and expansion.
- Introduce Chamber Success Dashboard to track compelling progress metrics.
- Invest in professional development & succession planning of Chamber staff.
- Advance viable employment initiatives available through agencies and government programs.

As we continue our work, we will base our decisions on how efforts complement and support our strategic planning and the needs of our members.



APPENDIX C

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) For Chamber Members

Revised 04/05/2023

This document answers the most frequently asked questions of our membership. Our goal is to clearly articulate the value of Chamber membership and increase member involvement and engagement through consistent messaging and opportunities. Please let us know if you have any additional questions by contacting us via email or phone at Director@ely.org or 218-365-6123.

1. **Why should I join/maintain a Chamber membership?** As a Chamber member, you can develop yourself through networking, education, and advocacy and directly impact the business community's **success**. Full membership enables you to vote on the direction of business and economic development opportunities, participate in those opportunities, enjoy business referrals and advertising opportunities, receive aggregate news, and much more.
2. **What are the expectations of me as a member?** Please share your voice and fully leverage the membership benefits below in question eleven. Our most engaged members are those who show a passion for the advancement of the Ely business and economic community as modeled by the following:
 - **Voice:** Serve on a committee and/or the board, vote whenever asked, and/or share your perspective about an opportunity for you or the Chamber to make a difference. Demonstrate a positive leadership shadow by educating others about Chamber decisions, operations, and events.
 - **Participate:** Take advantage of the member and economic development opportunities.
 - **Endorse/Invest:** Support the Chamber's decisions by actively endorsing Chamber-sponsored member and economic development opportunities and/or the three seasonal festivals. Educate your staff about Chamber-sponsored events; their lack of awareness of an event reflects your engagement and detracts from visitor participation/awareness. Help make Ely events more inviting by acknowledging the activity(ies) and/or asking customers about their awareness regardless of your event(s) participation.
3. **What can I expect from other Chamber members?** Openness to sharing best practices and networking, offering promotional savings for your business, referrals, and participation in business celebrations such as new business ribbon cutting and anniversaries. In addition, you can expect other members to demonstrate a positive leadership shadow and an active voice in Chamber/business news.
4. **Why is the Chamber responsible for the visitor center?** The Ely Chamber of Commerce has long served as a Chamber and Visitor Center. Approximately one-third of Chambers across the United States are visitor centers. Combining these functions enables us to connect people with products



and services. We serve as an information hub that supports the Ely ecosystem—all businesses, residents, and visitors. Providing information through one location is efficient and fiscally responsible for a community of our size.

5. **How is the Chamber funded?** The Chamber receives membership dues and funds raised through the three chamber-sponsored events (WolfTrack Classic, Blueberry Art Festival, and Harvest Moon Festival). Lodging, Forest Service, City, or other tax dollars are not used to operate or pay staff.
6. **What do the membership dues support?** The membership dues support the following: a combined Chamber of Commerce and visitor/information center, building operation/maintenance, three full-time salary equivalents (FTE), business development workshops, Ely.org, social media pages, resources for new businesses including ribbon-cutting ceremonies, facilitation of business ideas and networking events/promotions that support businesses and the greater Ely area community, including the three seasonal events (WolfTrack Classic Sled Dog Race, Blueberry Art Festival and Harvest Moon Festival) and several smaller activities geared toward driving retail traffic (see question 16).
7. **What is the relationship between the Tourism Bureau and the Chamber?** As of 2019, the Ely Area Tourism Bureau and Chamber of Commerce are separate entities with separate boards and no shared funds.
8. **Does the Tourism Bureau contribute to the Visitor/Information Center budget?** The Ely Tourism Bureau does not contribute funding for the operation or staffing of the Chamber or visitor/information center. They are a separate organization that manages area lodging tax dollars.
9. **May I attend a Chamber board meeting?** All members can attend meetings. If interested, contact Eva Sebesta, Executive Director, at Director@ely.org. The board reserves the right to excuse members in attendance if sensitive topics are on the agenda.
10. **How can I get more involved in the Chamber?** Call us at 218-365-6123 to discuss your interests—we'd love to have you join us! There's always an opportunity to share your voice and/or passion, e.g., serve on a committee, event, or board, help us welcome and onboard new businesses, sponsor an event, etc.
11. **What does my membership include?** There are three types of membership: Full, Associate, and Sponsoring. Full and Associate membership is available to any business or organization in Ely, Babbitt, Winton, Tower, Soudan, Lake Vermilion, and surrounding townships and unincorporated areas. Businesses outside the area but within the state of Minnesota can join as Sponsoring members.



Full membership includes the following privileges:

- **Voice.** Vote on board members, Chamber By-laws and Articles of Incorporation, and some potential direction of Chamber business and economic development opportunities, e.g., educational series and direction of Northwoods Medallion Hunt.
- **Promotion.** Enjoy business referrals from the Chamber, visibility on Ely.org and public events, inclusion in visitor center brochure/flier display, the opportunity to participate in the Ely Chamber of Commerce coupon card, the Chamber Membership Directory, an advertising opportunity in the annual Ely Vacation Guide, social media interactions and promotions, and priority in event sponsorships.
- **News & Resources.** Receive relevant, triaged news and resources from various government/county agencies, law enforcement, and other entities in addition to Chamber and community news.
- **Personal Growth.** Enjoy access to leadership and networking opportunities, e.g., education and networking forums.
- **Economic Development.** Participate in and/or endorse Chamber-sponsored opportunities that drive traffic and/or support new businesses, e.g., the Ely Chamber Buck Certificate program, new business celebrations, and business incubation.

Associate and Sponsoring members receive a premier website listing on Ely.org, invitations to all Chamber opportunities, such as networking and workshops, a subscription to all Chamber member news correspondence, and inclusion in the brochure/flier display at the Chamber visitor center.

12. **Full membership includes the right to vote. What can I expect in this regard?** In addition to voting on board members, Chamber By-laws, and Articles of Incorporation, we often ask for the member's perspectives on the direction of Chamber business and economic development opportunities.
13. **How does the Chamber advocate for my/local business(es)?** We support and actively pursue federal, state, and local issues that may influence our area's business environment in partnership with State and Federal representatives, local officials, and area organizations. Examples include the COVID-19 pandemic, economic development, small business development, workforce initiatives, and education.
14. **Chamber oversees the Blueberry/Art Festival, the Harvest Moon Festival, and the WolfTrack Classic Sled Dog Race. For what other consumer events is the Chamber responsible?** In addition to these three seasonal events, the Chamber's Events & Promotions Committee uses some of the funding generated from the three seasonal events to oversee smaller initiatives geared at driving local traffic and sales. Most recent activities include the following and rely on Chamber member participation/endorsement: City Wide Rummage Sale and Business Crazy Day and the Used Gear and Watercraft Sale, Operation Blueberry, Harvest Days, Smalltown Christmas Shop Local, and Shine Bright Ely.

APPENDIX D



Overview of the Ely Area Economy

Prepared by Brigid Tuck and John Bennett, July 2024

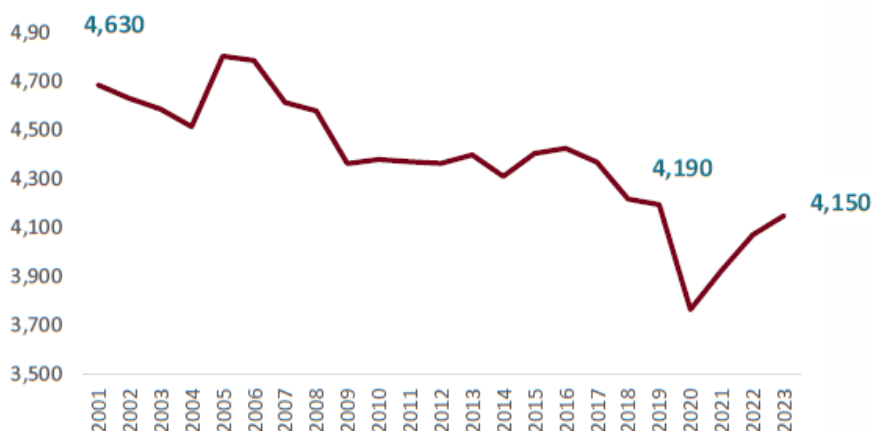
Overview

The Ely Chamber of Commerce was interested in a deeper understanding of the area's economy. University of Minnesota Extension prepared this brief overview. Unless otherwise noted, the local economy in this analysis includes the zip codes of Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower, Minnesota.

Employment Trends

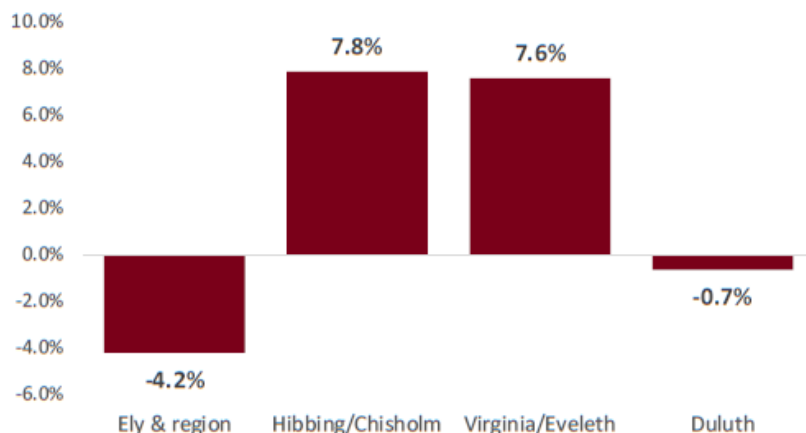
The number of jobs in the local economy has declined since 2001 (Chart 1). The first decline in jobs occurred with the Great Recession between 2008 and 2010. The number of jobs was fairly stable through 2018, showing a slight drop before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Jobs have since nearly recovered from the pandemic.

Chart 1: Number of Jobs in the Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes, Minnesota Source: Lightcast



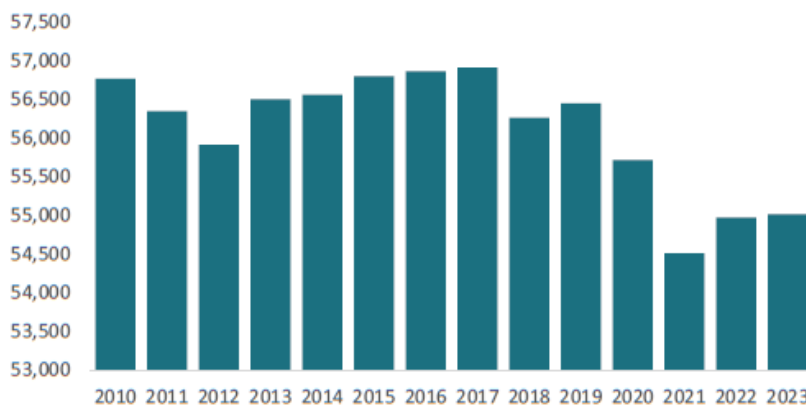
The decline in the number of jobs in the local economy is in contrast to neighboring communities (Chart 2). The Hibbing and Chisholm communities and the Virginia and Eveleth communities both gained jobs at a rate of nearly 8 percent between 2010 and 2023. Duluth, meanwhile, experienced a decline of less than 1 percent.

Chart 2: Percent Change in Jobs, 2010 to 2023 Source: Lightcast



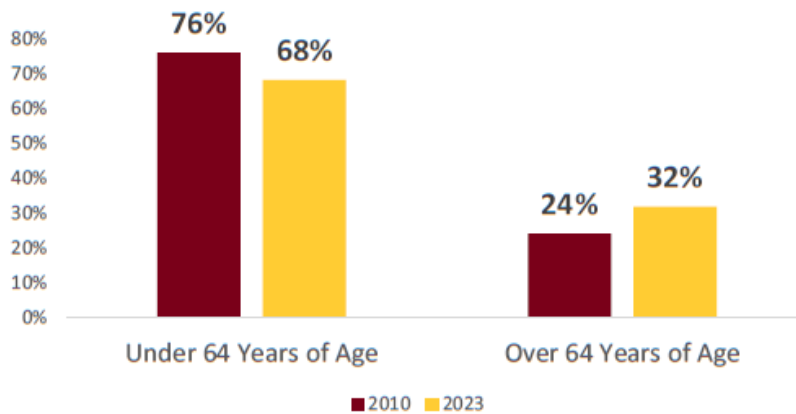
Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Minnesota has been in the position of having a workforce shortage. Businesses may wish to grow, expand, or locate to the area, but without potential employees, they might not choose to do so. The number of people in the workforce (either employed or actively seeking work) has been declining in “greater” Saint Louis County (Chart 3). “Greater” Saint Louis County excludes Duluth.

Chart 3: Number of People in the Labor Force, Saint Louis County, Minnesota (Excluding Duluth) Source: LAUS, MN DEED



The declining number of people in the workforce may, in turn, reflect changes in the population. As a percentage of total population, the number of people over the age of 64 (retirement age) has been growing in the local economy (Chart 4). It may be fewer people are available to work, as they are retired, which also limits business growth.

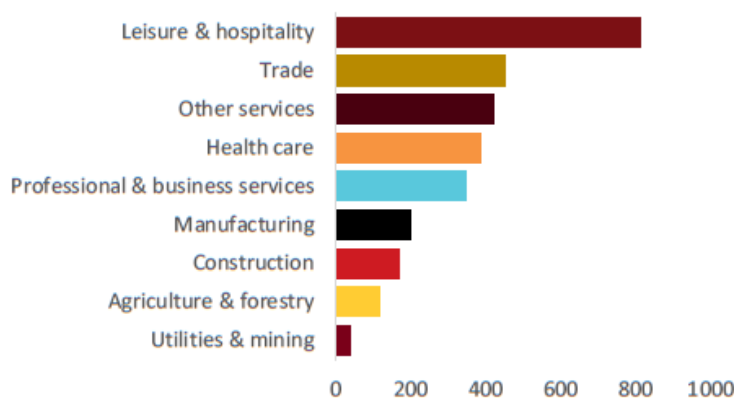
Chart 4: Age of Population, Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes, Minnesota Source: Lightcast



Industry Trends

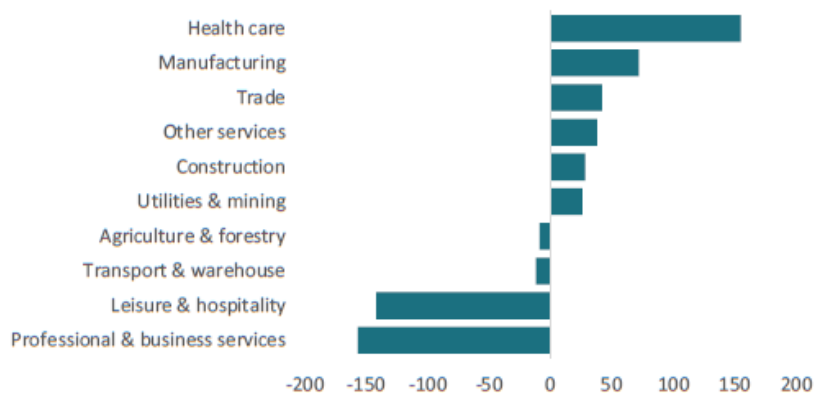
The local economy is host to a variety of industries. The highest number of workers are in leisure and hospitality (Chart 5). Other major industries (in terms of employment) include trade, other services, and health care.

Chart 5: Number of Jobs by Industry in 2023 for Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes Source: Lightcast



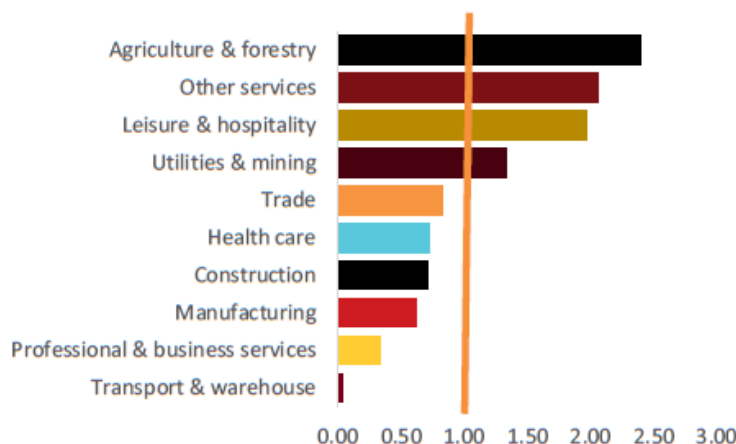
The industry mix has been changing in the local economy. Industries with growth since 2010 include health care, manufacturing, and trade (Chart 6). Meanwhile, professional and business services and leisure and hospitality businesses experienced job declines.

Chart 6: Change in Number of Jobs by Industry, Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes, 2010 to 2023 Source: Lightcast



Industry concentration is another way to measure the importance of an industry in an economy. A location quotient of greater than 1 indicates an industry is more concentrated – or has a higher percentage of jobs than expected. In the Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower area, the highest location quotient is in agriculture and forestry, demonstrating the importance of the logging industry (Chart 7). A location quotient of less than one indicates a potential opportunity for development.

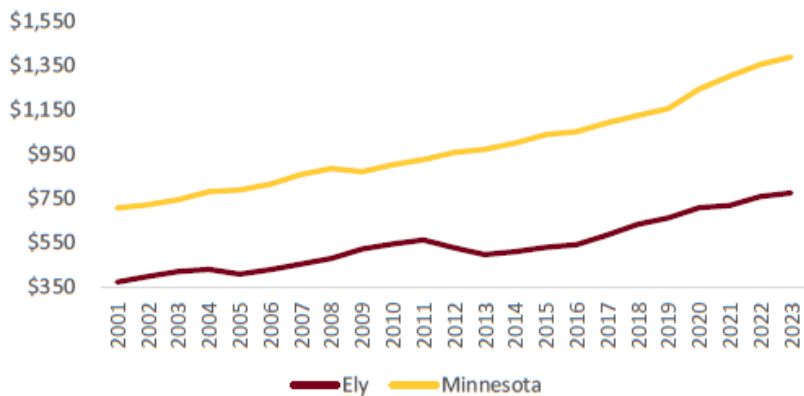
Chart 7: Location Quotient by Industry for 2023 in the Babbitt, Ely, Soudan, and Tower Zip Codes Source: Lightcast



Wage Trends

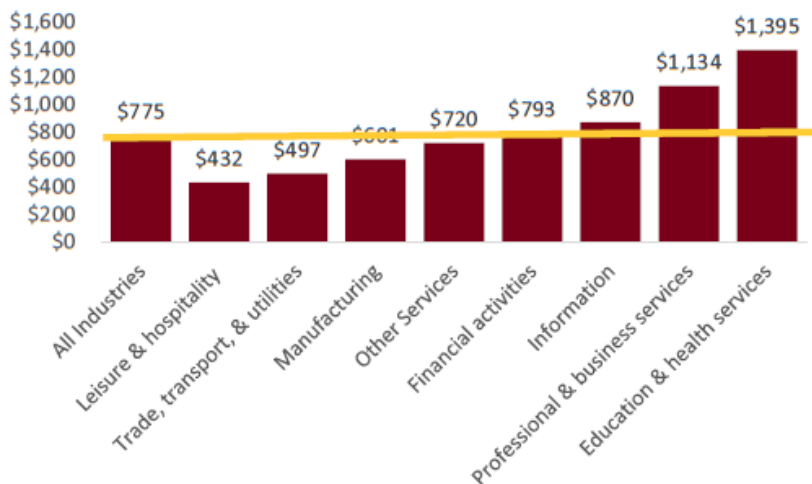
The average weekly wage has been increasing in Ely (Chart 8). In 2023, the average weekly wage for all industries was \$775. This is notably lower than the state's average weekly wage of \$1,389.

Chart 8: Average Weekly Wage, All Industries
Source: QCEW, MN DEED



The average weekly wage in Ely varied based on industry in 2023. Education and health service businesses paid the highest average weekly wage at \$1,395 compared to leisure and hospitality at \$432 (excluding tips).

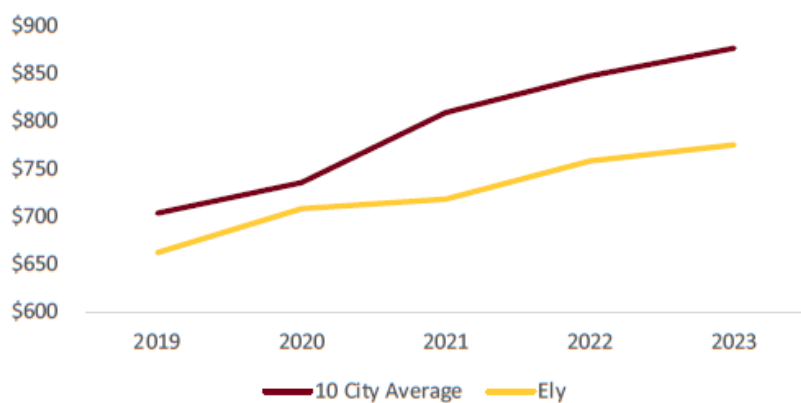
Chart 9: Average Weekly Wage by Industry, Ely Minnesota, 2023
Source: QCEW, MN DEED



The average weekly wage in Ely trails the average weekly wage in similarly sized cities in Minnesota (Chart 10). The gap appears to have been growing since the end of the pandemic, perhaps reflecting the wage pressures in other parts of Minnesota due to the workforce shortage. Leisure and hospitality businesses have also been slower to recover, and wages are not rising as quickly in that industry.

Comparison cities include Annandale (Wright County, population 3,424), Rush City (Chisago County, population 3,344), Breckenridge (Wilkin County, population 3,331), Jackson (Jackson County, population 3,272), Eagle Lake (Blue Earth County, population 3,251), Blue Earth (Faribault County, population 3,163), Proctor (Saint Louis County, population 3,087), Lexington (Anoka County, population 3,059), Milaca (Mille Lacs County, population 3,053), and Staples (mostly Todd County, population 3,035). Ely's population is 3,223.¹

Chart 10: Average Weekly Wage: Ely Compared to the Average of 10 Similarly Sized Minnesota Cities, Source: QCEW, MN DEED

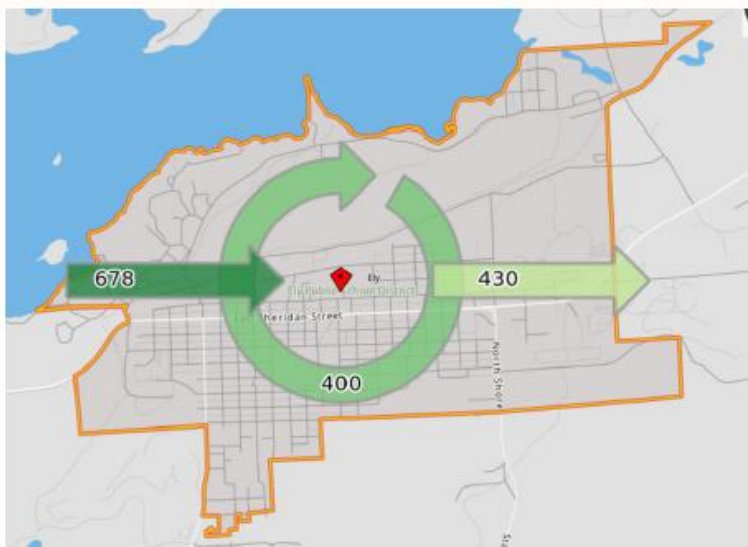


¹ Source: https://www.minnesota-demographics.com/cities_by_population

Commuting Patterns

Ely's commuting patterns are mixed. Four hundred people both live and work in Ely (Map 1), while 678 people commute into the community to work. On the flip side, 430 people commute out to work.

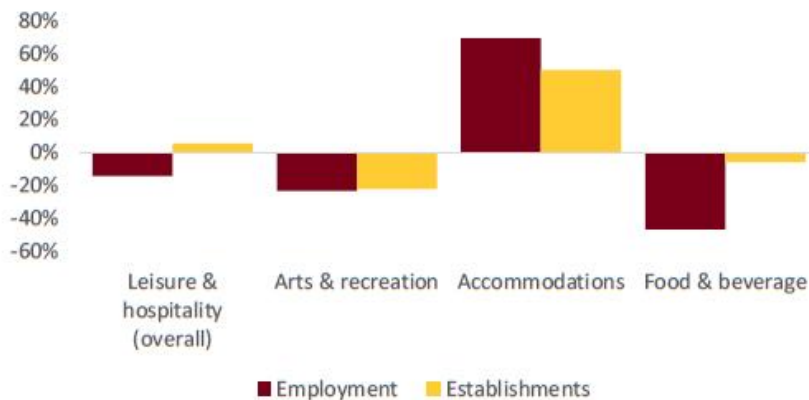
Map 1: Ely Commuting Patterns (Source, On the Map, U.S. Census)



Leisure and Hospitality: A Deep Dive

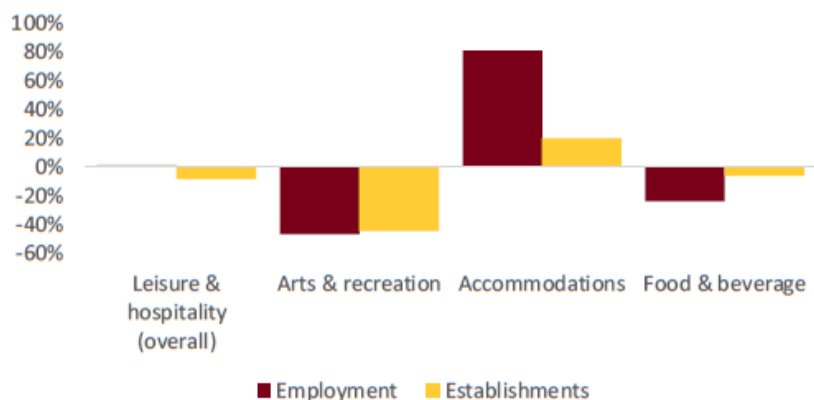
Overall, the number of jobs in the leisure and hospitality industry dropped between 2010 and 2023, however, the change in jobs varied by industry sector (Chart 11). Food and beverage businesses (restaurants and bars) experienced the largest drop as a percentage of employment (47 percent) while the accommodations sector grew by 69 percent.

Chart 11: Change in Employment and Establishments, 2010-2023, Ely, Minnesota, Source: QCEW, MN DEED



Going into the pandemic (2010-2019), the accommodations sector was growing, while the food and beverage and arts and recreation sectors were declining (Chart 12).

Chart 12: Change in Employment and Establishments, 2010-2019, Ely, Minnesota Source: QCEW, MN DEED



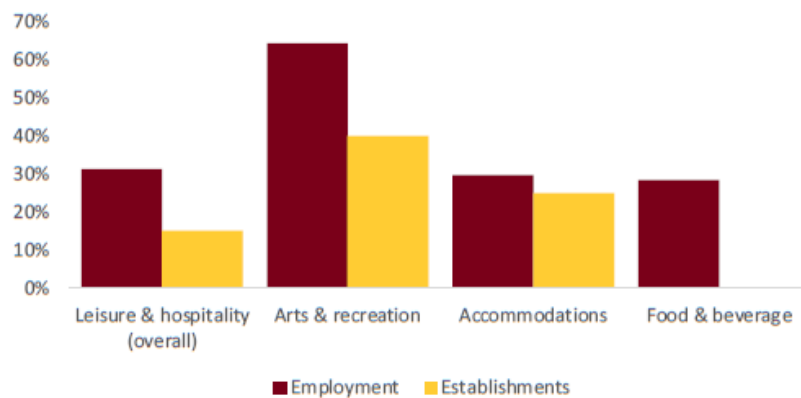
During the pandemic (2019-2020), all leisure and hospitality sectors lost jobs in Ely (Chart 13). Interestingly, there were no reported decreases in the number of establishments.

Chart 13: Change in Employment and Establishments, 2019-2020, Ely, Minnesota Source: QCEW, MN DEED



Post-pandemic (2020-2023), the leisure and hospitality industry is showing signs of recovery in Ely (Chart 14). Arts and recreation businesses have increased in number and in total employment. The accommodations sector also added both new businesses and employees. The food and beverage sector added employment, while maintaining the number of establishments.

Chart 14: Change in Employment and Establishments, 2020-2023, Ely, Minnesota Source: QCEW, MN DEED



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