NFL draft promotes Wisconsin

I’ve done many jobs and traveled many places, but one thing I will always be – a proud Wisconsite.

Don’t get me wrong – I have nothing but deep respect for my nearby Iowa and Minnesota neighbors as I frequently work with them in my day job as CEO of the 7 Rivers Alliance, a regional economic development organization that serves part of the tri-state region. But being Wisconsin born and raised, my affinity for the Badger State and its people runs generations deep.

As such, I am a lifelong Green Bay Packers fan like many other WIsconsinites. The public ownership of the Packers and the unique small market feel of the team is truly unique in the world of the National Football League and professional sports.

It’s that culture and pride that was on display recently in Green Bay for the annual NFL draft. I was part of a group of state and regional development officials who attended the draft and used it to showcase Wisconsin with national site selectors.

Site selectors help companies find the best location for their business operations. They find the best locations based on factors like real estate market conditions, labor availability, tax incentives, and regulations.

After an opening night reception on Wednesday night April 23 at our lodging in Sister Bay – about 90 minutes north of Green Bay (lodging was a little tight in Titletown) – we met with the site selectors Thursday morning for a breakfast gathering at the Donald and Carol Kress Pavilion in the Egg Harbor Library. After a presentation from Missy Hughes, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation secretary, we all pitched the positives of our regions of Wisconsin.

Holding up the back of my hand to represent Wisconsin, I pointed to my thumb as Door County and said we were located all the way over on the other side of my hand on Wisconsin’s west coast. And even with the views of Lake Michigan out our window at the time, I told them we were located in the most beautiful part of the state with our hills, bluffs and streams. Our quality of life, our workforce and our people are second to none.

Then we climbed aboard our coach bus and went to Titletown and Lambeau Field to experience the draft. Many of us wore the NFL garb of our favorite team. While the green and gold dominated, our guests represented teams like the Bears, Browns, Giants, Eagles and other NFL teams.

We walked the draft grounds and were given a private tour and history of Lambeau Field. We intermingled with the masses – which included Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and other officials. We then adjourned to EUA Architects located above the Packers Athletic Club in Titletown to view the draft on large screen TVs with a view of the Titletown District and Lambeau Field from the windows.

When the Packers first round draft selection of receiver Mathew Golden was announced later in the evening, the roar of the estimated 205,000 people was loud and long. After the first round, we boarded our bus and took the trip back to Sister Bay, finally ending what for me was a 19-hour day.

Absolutely, it was fun. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, mingling with fans from around the country and some pretty interesting costuming. Those attending can attest to the endurance test it had on our bladders as we patiently waited in line for bathrooms.

But more importantly, it gave us connections with the folks who help guide businesses all over the world. We made some personal connections and are hopeful that it will lead to a follow-up meeting where we can bring those interested to Wisconsin and our respective regions to have them see first-hand why we are the perfect location for their clients.

Whether it’s the NFL or economic development, it’s all about setting yourself up for winning.

Speaking of winning, I’m happy to report that our rototiller is once again up and running as we engage in spring gardening activities.

As I wrote about a couple of weeks ago, the tiller broke down after throwing a belt.

I ordered a replacement and was able to repair the tiller with a little help from an online video as a guide. I’m still a little slow to embrace such technology as I was raised in an era where you just figured it out, but am certainly not opposed to working smarter and not always harder.

I’m still learning.