

## Sunday Business

Section 3

## On Lake Michigan, a Global Village

By STEVE LOHR

RACINE, Wis.

**G**ARY BECKER, this city's mayor, remembers handing out fliers at local factory gates as a 10-year-old campaigner in Hubert H. Humphrey's ill-fated presidential bid in 1968. Mr. Becker, 48, is still a Democrat, but the factories and the traditional blue-collar jobs that filled the streets of his childhood are mostly gone, replaced by condominiums, restaurants and shops along Lake Michigan as well as an increasing number of service-sector jobs.

As Racine has changed, so have its politics. Once, a ritual antagonism for business was a sure vote-getter among Democrats. But Mr. Becker was elected three years ago with a pro-development message, pledging to trim jobs from the public payroll to free resources to attract new residents and businesses.

Racine's future, Mr. Becker believes, lies in forging stronger links with the regional economy and global markets. Re-invention can be unnerving, he acknowledges, but he says it is his hometown's best shot at prosperity and progress. "In the past, Racine was a self-contained economy," he said. "But that is not an option anymore."

No local economy truly mirrors the nation. But for Racine and its surrounding suburbs, the last few years have been marked by gradually rising prosperity, in step with the national trend. And the recent history of Racine, like that of the nation as a whole, is also the story of how a community comes to grips with the larger forces of globalization and technological change.

This continuing transformation helps explain why the peo-

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ple of Racine, like people everywhere, often appear apprehensive about the seismic changes that surround them. In a world where new technologies can quickly upend an industry and China and India loom large on the economic horizon, nobody knows exactly which businesses and skills will prove to be winners.

"If you're not somewhat anxious, you don't understand," Mr. Becker said. "And the businesses and people who are still here and doing well have sort of figured that out." For Mr. Becker, his neighbors and his constituents, figuring out the proper marriage of policymaking and personal choice to nurture a vibrant economy is a delicate task — an uncertain balancing act that will determine Racine's destiny.

