The ECW gained 42.5% over the period January 2005 – March 2012 (Figure 1). Thus, a $100,000 initial investment became $142,526.80. Adjusting for inflation, this investment in the ECW yielded a 19.4% return or $19,386.37. There were three distinct divisions in the performance of the ECB over this period. First, the ECB rose to $135,509.40 on April 4, 2007 and then subsequently declined 5.4% to a low of $63,878.97. However, the ECB rebounded strongly, gaining over 123% to end the first quarter of 2012 at $142,526.80.

Although the ECB is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the level of economic activity in the Eau Claire area, it does reflect the stock performance of companies with a significant employment presence here. That said, some companies in the ECB reflect the local identity more so than others. Three companies – Hutchinson Technologies, National Preco Company, and Marten Transport form the ECB Core and are denoted with an asterisk in Table 1. Overall, the ECB outperformed the Core with a 42.5% gain compared to 34.3% (Figure 2). In particular, the Core did not experience as much growth as the ECB at the peaks in June 2007 and March 2012.

The ECB also performed quite well compared to the three most familiar market measures: NASDAQ, Dow, and S&P 500 (Figure 5). Recall that the ECB rose 37.7% between January 2005 and June 2007. Compared to 23.1% (NASDAQ), 27.5% (Dow) and 28.0% (S&P 500), the ECB outperformed these three measures prior to the economic decline.

As the market turned downward, the ECB, NASDAQ, Dow, and S&P 500 all fell to between 56% and 64% of their 2005 levels. Coming out of the Great Recession, the ECB and NASDAQ performed the strongest, rising to 42.5% and 43.7% of their 2005 levels respectively. Both the S&P 500 and Dow also performed well sitting at 17.2% and 23.3% above their 2005 levels at the end of the first quarter of 2012.

Of all the investments that could have been made over this period, gold has almost certainly been the most attractive. Compared to the Dow Jones Industrial Average (Dow), the S&P 500, and NASDAQ, gold has outperformed all three indices by a wide margin. For example, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (Dow) would have returned 277%. In conclusion, one could say that everyone should have bought as much gold as possible!