

# taking THE INITIATIVE

News from Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

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[www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org)

July 2016

## Message from Tim Penny



"Our survival relies on the ability to reintegrate investing and philanthropy," said Woody Tasch at the second annual Slow Money Minnesota gathering in May. At this meeting, Renewing the Countryside and SMIF announced a new fund: Grow a Farmer Fund. In its beginning stages, this will be a donation-based fund made up of funds from individuals, restaurants, and others interested in supporting a stronger local food economy in southern Minnesota. SMIF and its

partners are aiming to raise \$100,000 to launch this fund.

The Grow a Farmer Fund will be used to give lower-interest loans to farmers such as John Mesko, who shared how a \$350 investment in a three-point hitch helped him move his hog farm business from "just getting by" to a profit generating enterprise. The lower-interest loans will recycle into a revolving loan fund, becoming an "evergreen fund" that can help others down the road.

Given SMIF's 30-year history of small-scale, "seed" investments for a sustainable region and the Foundation's shorter-term interest in supporting a local food economy, the principles of Slow Money align closely with SMIF's philanthropic efforts. For example, Slow Money Principle Six quotes Paul Newman: "I just happen to think that in life we need to be a little like the farmer who puts back into the soil what he takes out."

Please join us on August 4 at the Mankato Brewery or August 10 at Squash Blossom Farm in Oronoco to learn how you can help support small-scale, sustainable farmers in the region.

**Visit [slowmoneyminnesota.org](http://slowmoneyminnesota.org) or read my May op-ed to learn more and to RSVP for the August events.**

## Community Philanthropy

In 1991, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) helped establish its first Community Foundation in Wannamingo and from there has branched out to other communities in its 20-county region, focusing on smaller communities without established foundations.

SMIF is happy to announce the launch of three new community foundations this past year: Eagle Lake Community Development Foundation, Lanesboro Area Community Foundation, and St. Charles Area Community Foundation. SMIF manages funds for 26 community foundations and 37 designated funds as part of its mission to encourage local community philanthropy in southern Minnesota, investing more than \$345,000 in matching dollars to community funds in the past 30 years.

"We know a key component to a thriving community is an active local community foundation," says SMIF's Development Coordinator Alissa Blaha. "Our goal is to make it easy for southern Minnesota's small towns to raise and grant money towards local projects. SMIF provides technical and administrative assistance such as yearly filing with the IRS and board trainings to free up the time for foundation boards to focus on with matters most: increasing the quality of life in their community."

**Contact Alissa Blaha at [alissab@smifoundation.org](mailto:alissab@smifoundation.org) to learn how to establish a foundation in your community.**



## Pre-K to Grade 3 Alignment

Minnesota's Department of Education (MDE) awarded the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations a total of \$180,000 to carry out the Pre-K to Grade 3 Alignment Initiative. This program arose from observations by The McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, and the MDE that school districts have been making progress in Pre-K to Grade 3 alignment work; however, a lack of funding streams make it challenging for them to make it a priority.

"With SMIF's strong relationships within the region and some additional dollars to support Pre-K to Grade 3 alignment work, we hope to provide strategies, resources and tools to help our Greater Minnesota school districts enhance their Pre-K to Grade 3 alignment work," said Teri Steckelberg, SMIF's Early Childhood Director. "The goal of this initiative is to bridge the communication gap so that our pre-k work is truly a foundation that can be successfully built upon in the early elementary years."

In June, SMIF hosted its first two strategy sessions, one in Lake Crystal and the second in Kasson. About 120 school

administrators, educators, early childhood professionals and early childhood service providers attended these sessions. Dr. Adam Holland of FirstSchool Pre-K to Grade 3 Initiative at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute came up from UNC-Chapel Hill to present on best practices for curriculum alignment.

SMIF has also awarded its first four Pre-K to Grade 3 Alignment mini-grants to help school districts implement some of these alignment tools and strategies.

**If you would like to learn more about SMIF's Pre-K to Grade 3 Alignment Initiative, contact Rae Jean Hansen at [raejeanh@smifoundation.org](mailto:raejeanh@smifoundation.org).**



April 1, 2016–June 30, 2016

## Capstone Club (\$50,000+)

\*The McKnight Foundation,  
Minneapolis

## Cornerstone Club (\$10,000-24,999)

\*Neil and Susan Eckles, Blue Earth  
Mark and Mary Davis, Saint Peter

## Champion (\$5,000- 9,999)

Albert Lea Economic Development  
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\*Dan and Angie Bastian, North  
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\*Renewing the Countryside –  
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Steele County

## Leader (\$1,000-4,999)

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## Contributor (\$100-499)

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## \*PROGRAM DONORS

To make a donation, visit  
[www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org).

## Recent Activity

### Grants

**Book Start:** \$168,305 to 26 projects

**Community Growth Initiative:** \$25,000 to start CGI in St. James

**Early Childcare Dental Network:** \$20,000 to start in three counties

**Incentive Grants:** \$69,020 to four projects

**Opportunity Grants:** \$60,000 to seven projects

**Paint the Town:** \$3,534 for paint for five community mural projects

**PreK-Grade 3 Alignment:** \$8,000 for four mini-grants

### Loans

**Law Office of Daniel D Kalk P.L.L.C.,** New Ulm | Specializing in criminal defense & immigration law

**Five Lakes Dental Studio,** Fairmont | Dental laboratory

**The Local Joint,** Northfield | Vintage goods & local vendor store

**Sollid Yoga LLC,** Owatonna | Yoga studio

**River Bluff Technologies,** Red Wing | Smart Agent™ insurance agency management system

**Happy Joe's Pizza & Ice Cream Parlor,** New Ulm | Family-friendly pizza parlor

### Equity Investments

**Leading Edge Technologies (Aker),** Winnebago | Drone technology for soil & field assessment

For more information about these grants, loans, and equity investments, visit [www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org).

## Where we'll be (and hope to see you!):

### July 26

Meeting of Blue Earth & Nicollet Counties ECDN, North Mankato

### August 3

Supplier Diversity Summit & Chamber Business Expo, Rochester

### August 4 & 10

Grow a Farmer Fundraisers, Mankato Brewery & Squash Blossom Farm

### August 10

Early childhood oral health training, Owatonna

### August 10

ECFE Networking meeting, Owatonna

### August 16

AmeriCorps LEAP Orientation Retreat, Spring Valley

### Save the Date: October 12

SMIF Annual Luncheon & Open House, Owatonna

Visit [www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org) for full event calendar.

 Southern Minnesota  
INITIATIVE FOUNDATION

Celebrating 30 years of community investments

525 Florence Avenue | PO Box 695 | Owatonna, MN 55060

- SMIF Launches Grow a Farmer Fund Campaign
- Pre-K to Grade 3 Alignment Initiative underway
- Three new community foundations help spur local philanthropy

Read More Inside!