

taking THE INITIATIVE

News from Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

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www.smifoundation.org

June 2015

Message from Tim Penny



In early June, I attended a gathering of all six Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIF) where we took time to reflect on the future of the regions we serve. In the past decade, there has been a lot of speculation on the “decline” of rural Minnesota, much of this driven by the documented “rural brain drain” of the younger generation moving out.

We were joined by Ben Winchester, a rural sociologist, of the University of Minnesota Extension program in Morris. Ben’s research over the past several years has formed another narrative about what’s happening in greater Minnesota, one that’s more nuanced, and also more hopeful, for those of us who call it home. His research points to an overlooked demographic trend: there is a cohort of people who are choosing to move back. This cohort, specifically those aged 30-44, are seeking a simpler pace of life, better quality schools for their children, and a lower cost of living. They are often wealthier and more educated than the 18-29 year old cohort which leaves, leading Winchester to flip the narrative and coin this phenomenon as “rural brain gain.”

My decision to stay in rural Minnesota boils down to fact that this is where my roots are. My great-great grandfather homesteaded in rural Freeborn County northwest of Albert Lea in 1862. The following reasons are why I love calling the area we serve “home:” rural values resonate with me, I enjoy the open space, I celebrate that schools provide every student personal attention, I like having my community services delivered by people I know, and I love the spirit of collaboration that keeps this region vibrant.

Join the conversation of why you chose to stay, returned, or made the move to rural Minnesota by tweeting to @Tim_Penny.

Program Spotlight

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) currently administers 23 community foundations in southern Minnesota. One of these is the Madison Lake Area Community Foundation (MLACF). MLACF first became a foundation in 1991, but was reenergized in 2013 when a new board formed. A couple recent MLACF projects include a grant to support the Veterans Memorial and a grant awarded to the City of Madison Lake to start a farmers market. SMIF also provided a \$3,000 matching grant to support the farmers market.

“So far, the farmers market has been a big success,” said Ryan Sanders with MLACF. “The Madison Lake Area Community Foundation grant and the matching grant from SMIF made it easier to promote and market the farmers market.” The market kicked off the beginning of May and currently has seven vendors.

Besides grantmaking, MLACF raises funds to support local projects and is also able to accept planned gifts to support the longevity of their community. In 2015, SMIF’s 23 community foundations are now able to accept farmland donations through SMIF’s Farmland Retention Program. This is a great way for farmers looking towards retirement to ensure their land continues to be farmed while giving back to their community.

For more information about community foundations, contact Alissa Blaha at 507-455-3215 or alissab@smifoundation.org.



Partner Spotlight



In July, we will say good-bye to our AmeriCorps LEAP (Learning Early Achieves Potential) members. This past year, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) placed 25 members in 22 sites across our region. SMIF has been an AmeriCorps host for the state program since it started in 1994.

This month, our partner ServeMinnesota announced that SMIF will receive another year of funding for our AmeriCorps LEAP Program. “AmeriCorps members develop important skills for a lifetime. They also prove to be better workers and citizens in society,” said Senator Al Franken during the recent award announcements. He highlighted that for every dollar spent on AmeriCorps members, there is a return of \$3.95 back into communities.

Last year, SMIF’s AmeriCorps LEAP members worked with over 200 preschool children through our social-emotional learning program. By the end of the year, 94 percent of these children showed gains in all 36 proficiencies for school readiness, as measured by Teaching Strategies Gold Social-Emotional Proficiency Skill Year-End Assessment.

SMIF is still looking to fill five AmeriCorps positions for the 2015-2016 service year, which begins in August. “Consider applying if you want to experience life-changing growth while making a difference by giving preschool children the social-emotional support that will prepare them for kindergarten,” encourages SMIF AmeriCorps Director, Barbara Gunderson.

If you would like to learn more about AmeriCorps LEAP, contact Barbara Gunderson at 507-455-3215 or barbarag@smifoundation.org.

Capstone Club (\$50,000 & Above)

*Otto Bremer Foundation, Saint Paul

Keystone Club (\$25,000-\$49,999)

*The McKnight Foundation, Minneapolis

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

*The Bush Foundation, Saint Paul
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*Albert Lea Economic Development Authority
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City of Eagle Lake
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Root River State Bank, Chatfield

*Rushford Foods
Sibley County
Sterling State Bank – Austin, Lyle, Rochester
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Watowan County
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Partner (\$500-\$999)

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Northfield
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*PROGRAM DONORS

To make a donation,
visit www.smifoundation.org.

Recent Activity

Grants

One Big Thing Grants: \$120,000 to three projects

Incentive Grants: \$127,909 to seven projects

Reading Oasis Room Grants: \$10,000 to four communities

BookStart Grants: 28 organizations received 10,000 books,
valued at \$163,421

Loans

Amanda's Daycare, Hokah
Gypsoil Pelletized Products, Winona
JIT Companies Inc, Green Isle
Jordan's Learning Tree, Albert Lea
KIS Fashions LLC, Wabasha
Limberg Productions, Owatonna

Squash Blossom Farm, Oronoco
Whitewater Gardens Farm, Altura

Equity Investments/Seed Fund

75F, Mankato
Sonex Health, Rochester
Thaddeus Therapeutics LLC, Rochester

For more information about these grants, loans, and equity investments, visit www.smifoundation.org.



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- "Rural Brain Gain"
 - An update on our AmeriCorps Program
 - Madison Lake Farmers Market
- Read More Inside!**