



Sherry Ristau with retiring board member Jim Keul at their last board meeting (left) and Ristau volunteering with Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota (right).



CHANGE, OPPORTUNITY ENCOMPASS SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE FOUNDATION LEADERSHIP

After 17 years with steady leadership, longtime Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) President/CEO Sherry Ristau made the difficult decision to leave southwest Minnesota for the Community Foundation of the Great River Bend, serving communities along the Mississippi River in the Quad Cities area of Davenport and Bettendorf (in Iowa) and Rock Island and Moline (in Illinois).

Ristau had spent her entire career in rural Minnesota. She was employed over 20 years at SWIF.

As a program officer in 1991, she secured a \$1 million gift from Marvin Schwan to honor his parents and create the Paul and Alma Schwan Aging Trust Endowment Fund. This was the first

designated fund created by SWIF and paved the way to support our work around productive aging—including through programs like Parish Nursing and Encore Entrepreneurship, and grants like those made to Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota.

And, her impact touches all areas of SWIF's work today. Under Ristau's leadership, SWIF has become a trusted partner and regional leader. She led major change and growth of the organization, both internally and externally. SWIF's net assets grew from \$23 million to \$63 million since Ristau took leadership in 1997.

Beyond SWIF, Ristau has also been a voice for rural philanthropy across the nation while serving on the Council on Foundations and Orton Family Foundation boards.

"Sherry is an inspiring and visionary leader who has challenged southwest Minnesota to be the best it can be," said SWIF Board Chair Rob Saunders. "She has built a team of visionary people who will continue the great work of Southwest Initiative Foundation. We will miss her, but Sherry leaves us in very good hands."

U.S. COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS CELEBRATE CENTENNIAL

For 100 years, community foundations have been a unique tool for Americans to address opportunities and challenges through philanthropy. The Cleveland Foundation was the first and today there are more than 700 across the country, including SWIF and our 24 local community foundation affiliate partners.

Something that makes community foundations truly unique is our use of endowments, permanent resources that provide the greatest flexibility to respond to the needs and opportunities of our region. The contributions to the endowment are invested and never spent—only the earnings are used to support our work.

Our Early Childhood Initiative is a great example of why SWIF's General Endowment is important. The program has been in place for 10 years and supported by some external funding. However, as funders have moved their resources to support other compelling projects, our endowment continues to provide a steady stream to support this work. After all, helping our young children thrive is work that will never be finished.

Learn more about our role as a regional community foundation at www.swifoundation.org

WELDING TECHNICIAN PROGRAM OFFERED IN WINSTED

Winsted is home to about a dozen manufacturing companies—and many “Now Hiring” signs posted outside of them.

MOVE, LLC is a recent brainchild of 14 area manufacturers to help fill these jobs. The present partners alone currently have openings for more than 35 welders and over 15 machinists.

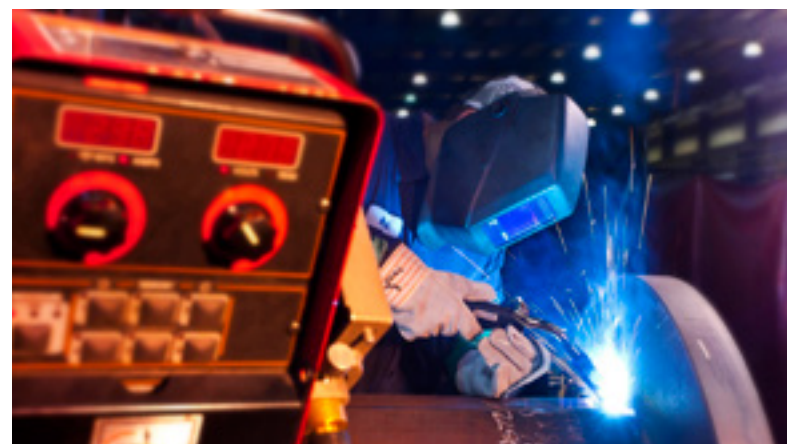
“This is a regional issue,” President & CEO of Millerbernd Manufacturing Company Trever Millerbernd said.

The group partnered with Dunwoody Institute to offer a specialized “fast track” 16-week welding and machining course. There are financing options and job placement available for those who complete the course. SWIF is an administrative partner to help keep this program moving forward.

But, more students are needed to start the course.

“Everyone we talk to—students, companies—say it's a great opportunity,” Millerbernd said. “This would be a great opportunity to stay close to home, get training and get connected to 14 solid companies to get a job. Welding is a great opportunity by itself, but it can also be a lead-in for other positions.”

For more information about the welding program visit www.dunwoody.edu/wtce then click on Corporate & Community Training Center—West Region or your local Minnesota Workforce Center.



Welding jobs throughout our region, including at Millerbernd Manufacturing Company in Winsted, present great career opportunities.



Diana Anderson, Interim President/CEO



Rob Saunders, Board of Directors Chair

A NEW DAY

*Interim President/CEO Diana Anderson
Board of Directors Chair Rob Saunders*

Change is nothing new to our organization. In our nearly 30-year history, SWIF has seen many changes to both our work and our region.

We haven't seen a change in our president/CEO leadership in 17 years. But, this stability has made us stronger than ever before and ready to take on this new challenge.

Sherry Ristau's vision, drive and inspiring approach to our mission pushed SWIF forward for nearly two decades. We developed into a trusted regional partner. We built a culture of excellence. We have her to thank for so much of who we are today.

We also have each one of you—our donors, partners, colleagues—to thank for supporting us along the way. Whether you have a long history with SWIF or are just getting to know us, we're excited for our continued work together.

It's a new day at SWIF. Each fall, we feel the excitement as we dive into a new fiscal year, ready to take on more big ideas that will support people, businesses, entrepreneurs and communities in our southwest Minnesota region.

As a Board of Directors, we can assure you that our commitment and impact are going strong. SWIF is in excellent hands with professional, experienced staff to continue this impactful work.

Hiring the president/CEO is our board's number one responsibility, and it's a job that we're taking very seriously. As announced, we're implementing SWIF's succession plan which includes appointing Diana Anderson as interim president/CEO. Diana also has an accomplished history at SWIF and is providing great leadership during this time of transition.

A search committee was established and search firm hired to help us lead this process. We're well on our way to filling this position long-term.

We're ready and excited for new opportunities to be a catalyst—that spark—for positive, powerful impact. The word “catalyst” has been in our mission statement since 1998. Today, we find ourselves living out our mission to the fullest, including by challenging and developing new leadership within our own foundation.

We look forward to learning and growing through this process—and for the unlimited possibilities in store for our entire region!

NEW FUND HONORS SHERRY RISTAU, SUPPORTS REGIONAL IMPACT GRANTS

In honor of Sherry's 20+ years of service with SWIF, the Board of Directors has established the Sherry E. Ristau Regional Impact Endowment Fund. This fund will support projects that are unique, innovative, collaborative and benefit the region or multiple communities.

Since 1999, SWIF has awarded 28 Regional Impact Grants totaling \$814,000—including those shared in this issue of *Connect*. These grants supported projects involving the arts, community development, education, health/wellness, seniors, tourism, youth, the environment and more.

Will you please consider a special one-time gift—of \$200, \$20 or any amount—to the Sherry E. Ristau Regional Impact Endowment Fund?

Your gift will honor Sherry's regional leadership and support impactful work throughout our region. And, all gifts to this fund will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to \$20,000.

Please use the enclosed envelope or visit www.swifoundation.org/donate to make your gift today.

Thank you for honoring Sherry's legacy in southwest Minnesota!

REGIONAL IMPACT GRANTS TOTAL \$75,000

Regional Impact Grant Projects must be unique, innovative and benefit the region or multiple communities. Projects must demonstrate exceptional leadership, have collaborative partners and provide obvious benefit for southwest Minnesota. SWIF staff and Board of Directors select the projects.

RESTORING HOPE, RESTORING LIVES

The secretive nature and stigma associated with addiction prevents people from asking for help and often they lack self-worth, said Mike Schiks, Executive Director/CEO of Project Turnabout, an addiction recovery center with locations in Granite Falls, Marshall, Redwood Falls and Willmar.

For nearly two years the recovery center has been routinely turning away 60 or more people each month due to lack of space. This prompted SWIF to award a \$50,000 Regional Impact Grant for the organization's building project.

The organization's \$6.5 million expansion to its Granite Falls campus will expand detoxification beds by six, which includes adding a 27-bed women's treatment unit. It also includes building an educational and family center that will improve patient, staff, family and community education.

Read the full story online at www.swifoundation.org/projectturnabout



SWIF Sr. Grants/Administration Officer Nancy Fasching presented a \$50,000 Regional Impact Grant to Project Turnabout Executive Director/CEO Mike Schiks and Development Director Lois Schmidt in the expanding education area.

KEEPING AG EDUCATION STRONG

About a year ago, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities approached Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU) in Marshall regarding the need for agricultural teachers at the high school level, Gerald Toland Jr., professor of economics at SMSU said.

Among the current agriculture teachers at the high school level, many are set to retire in the coming years and the newly hired ag teachers have the communication and technical skills to be attractive to other job fields, he added.

SWIF awarded a \$25,000 Regional Impact Grant to develop curriculum for a new agricultural-related program at the college. SMSU's education department is viewed as a strong department and centrally located in the southwest Minnesota region. Additionally, the agricultural companies in the region need employees who can communicate well.

Student interest and enrollment for current agricultural related programs at SMSU have been strong in recent years, Toland said.

"And there's a job after they graduate," he added. Job placement for agriculture-related fields is near 100 percent.

Read the full story online at www.swifoundation.org/ageducation

CONNECTIONS TO NOTE

Southwest Minnesota people, businesses and organizations do amazing things. In this section, we highlight positive connections SWIF knows about. It's our way of saying "thanks" for making our regional community a great place.

Submissions are welcome! Please email Nancy Kaping at nancyk@swifoundation.org or call 800-594-9480 to share your news.

- **Ryan and Tiffany Batalden** from Lamberton were among 15 people invited to Washington, D.C. to be honored as part of the agriculture Champions of Change ceremony at the White House. This young, fifth-generation farm family has an organic farm, as well as an organic popcorn business called Patriot Pops.
- **John Jodzio**, son of SWIF Program Specialist Greg Jodzio, was one of the 2014 Minnesota Emerging Writers' grant recipients. He is the author of two short story collections, "If You Lived Here You'd Already Be Home" and "Get In If You Want To Live."
- **Emily Lodine**, a mezzo-soprano opera singer from Luverne, received the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council's Prairie Star Award. John Voit, an instrumental music instructor for Minnesota Schools and director of the Route 68 Big Band, received the organization's Prairie Disciple Award.
- **Midwest Industrial Tool Grinding, Inc.** in Hutchinson received the 2014 Minnesota Manufacturing Awards Image Award from *Minnesota Business Magazine*. They were also nominated for Best in Class: Small Company.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS TRANSITION



Randy Reinke

With a new fiscal year, we pay tribute to retiring board member Jim Keul (pictured on front cover), who served on our board since 2008.

Keul represented multiple southwest Minnesota communities, including Slayton, Tracy and

Jackson. Using his strong business acumen and background in rural economic development, Keul thoughtfully balanced local realities with a regional vision. We thank him for his ongoing commitment to SWIF and our region.

We also welcome Randy Reinke, President/CEO of Custom Products of Litchfield, who was elected to the SWIF board effective July 1. Reinke brings extensive business and community experience and perspective to our organization.

In addition to his leadership at Custom Products, Reinke serves on multiple state and local boards and committees. Current positions include Grow Minnesota!, Workers Compensation Research Institute, Litchfield Area Community Foundation, Litchfield School Board - School Improvement Advisory Council, Trifac Workers' Compensation Fund, Aggregate Security Insurance Group - A Risk Retention Group, and the Association of Equipment Manufacturers.

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Ristau said it was an honor to serve the southwest Minnesota regional community.

"I have been blessed beyond belief by what Southwest Initiative Foundation has given me. I am grateful for the relationships I've made through Southwest Initiative Foundation. Rest assured this organization is in great hands because we're surrounded by the best board, staff, donors, partners and friends."

Diana Anderson was named interim president/CEO. Anderson joined SWIF as development director in 2001, leading our fundraising efforts and starting our community foundation program.

In 2007, she was promoted to chief operating officer (COO). In this newly-created position, Anderson provided leadership and oversight to internal operations and functions, including strategic planning, management team leadership and program design. In 2011, she was again promoted to vice president/COO, playing a more visible role in program development and delivery, working alongside team leads in communities across the southwest Minnesota region.

Anderson was recently elected to the Community Foundations National Standards Board, a supporting organization of the Council on Foundations responsible for the quality, value and integrity of compliance with National Standards.

TEENS AS CEOS

Students Engage in Unique Leadership Program

Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City, New London-Spicer, and Willmar Public Schools along with area business leaders have collaborated to give 17 high school students a unique opportunity. These students are participating in the first Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) class in Minnesota.

CEO creator Craig Lindvahl presented the structure of the program to Minnesota at a workshop co-sponsored by SWIF and other Minnesota Initiative Foundations. Lindvahl emphasized the importance of connecting today's young adults—generally defined as the millennial generation—with entrepreneurial opportunities, especially in smaller towns and communities.

Thanks to a partnership with Pioneer Public Television, this workshop has aired numerous times on local Pioneer stations in southwest and west central Minnesota communities over the last year and is available online at www.pioneer.org.

Gary Geiger, a Willmar business leader and former SWIF board member, along with Craig Holmgren, a Willmar business owner, have been instrumental in establishing the Kandiyohi County CEO program and recruiting business leaders.

"When we presented CEO to the local business people we found acceptance and a willingness to become involved with donations of money, time as mentors, and facilities for classrooms," Geiger said.

SWIF provided an initial \$10,000 grant to the Willmar Area Community Foundation to establish CEO in Kandiyohi County. Additionally, 50

supporting businesses have committed to \$3,000 each over a three-year period.

The KCEO class got underway in late July with a student, parent and business orientation with regular sessions underway the first week of school. The high school juniors and seniors will visit 50 to 60 businesses and have up to 70 guest speakers through the school year. KCEO's goal is to help students view the Kandiyohi area as a place of opportunity and to give them the skills and confidence to help move it forward.

KCEO board members include SWIF Program Officer Cheryl Glaeser. She will share best practices and insight with other school districts in the region as they consider starting the CEO program. Two other groups of school districts in our region are considering this opportunity. If you are interested in learning more about CEO, contact us at (800) 594-9480 or cherylgl@swifoundation.org.



Jim Sieben, president of Nova Tech Engineering in Willmar, visited with Austin Swanson, a KCEO student, and his father, Curry Swanson, at the program's orientation in July. Students from three Kandiyohi County school districts are participating in the first CEO program in Minnesota.



**SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION**

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VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE!

This summer, we launched a brand new website that allows us to share even more inspiring stories and important information about our work.

We hope you'll spend some time clicking through the pages and learning something new about our role as one connection with unlimited possibilities for southwest Minnesota. There's even a map feature where you can find SWIF connections in your area. And, be sure you check out our special online-exclusive *Connect* articles.

www.swifoundation.org

OUR MISSION:

To be a catalyst, facilitating opportunities for economic and social growth by developing and challenging leaders to build on the region's assets.

Change of address?

Call 800-594-9480

Comments? Contact:

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