

CONNECT

Advancing southwest Minnesota through leadership, relationship-building, program development and philanthropy.



“We embrace what we have and make the most of it...”

— Glen Herfurth, Montevideo

SPRING 2010

LOW TEMPERATURES MEET
HIGH ENERGY AT YES!
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Photo courtesy of: *Kristi Link Fernholz*

EMBRACING WHAT WE HAVE

CHIPPEWA COUNTY REPRESENTS SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA'S ENVIABLE QUALITY OF LIFE

Spring is here and with it, we're seeing melting snow and rising flood waters. An unpredictable, but hopeful economic recovery and changing community needs. In the midst of all this, we could easily forget that here in southwest Minnesota, we enjoy a quality of life envied by communities across the country. We could forget just how much we have to be celebrating.

The February 2009 issue of The Progressive Farmer magazine's fifth annual list of "Best Places To Live in Rural America" ranked Chippewa County second in the Midwest. Taking top honors was Hamilton County, Nebraska. The article noted top counties had smaller student-to-teacher ratios, incorporated agricultural education

at school and rallied around FFA and 4-H programs. It also mentioned that studies show rural students score well in science and have the advantage of real-world experiences, exposure to nature and better attention spans.

While the magazine considered these benefits for students, we might surmise that they translate into a strong work ethic, a collaborative spirit, integrity and creativity shared by youth and adults alike. We would also argue they are characteristics of all 18 counties within our region.

"Chippewa County is an example of our region's quality of life, innovation and progressive thinking in action. Their values directly align with ours," said SWIF President/CEO Sherry

Ristau. "It's not the only place in southwest Minnesota where good things are happening, but we can watch and learn from the local citizens who keep pushing boundaries to make their communities a better place."

Glen and Jackie Herfurth, SWIF Growing Home Circle members, make their home in Montevideo, where they raised five children.

"They were given not only a good education, but were raised in a good environment," Glen shared. "They learned a lot of things not just in school or from us as parents, but from quality people in the community."

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



*Sherry E. Ristau
President/CEO*

I recently discovered another southwest Minnesota “gem” during the February SWIF board meeting in Bird Island. This gem is a locally-owned business, Rural Computer Consultants (RCC), and the family behind it.

Siblings Brian Sheehan, Kevin Sheehan and Susie Peterson are following in footsteps of service and quality instilled by their father Fabe and his business Sheehan’s Gas. RCC has been transforming into a growing, 38-employee, fuel distribution software business since 1979. Along with a fourth partner, Brian Fagerstrom, RCC owners are committed to their customers—including international fuel companies—their family legacy and their community.

Our Board of Directors looks forward to traveling throughout the region for meetings, allowing us to see success stories like RCC in action while hearing from local community and business leaders. It’s inspiring to hear what’s happening—collaboration, networking and innovative thinking—and it’s important for us to hear about the challenges—aging populations, tight budgets and constant change.

This issue of Connect highlights just a few of the success stories from our region. As you flip through the pages, I urge you to consider who or what is a gem in your community. What don’t people know about that business on Main Street? Whose idea was it to get a great project started? Who has given their time and resources to make something good happen?

The things that set our communities apart are exactly the things that bring us together as a region. Individually, we have great stories to lift up and celebrate. Together, we have endless shining examples of hardworking, generous, creative people and businesses that make southwest Minnesota a unique and great place.

I look forward to uncovering more hidden gems as we connect, promote and engage this region!

LOW TEMPERATURES MEET HIGH ENERGY AT YES! WINTER WORKSHOPS



YES! participants endure frigid January temperatures to test their handmade solar collectors.

Temperatures hovered around freezing as students carried their newly-constructed solar collectors into the bright January sunlight for testing. Looking like a simple wooden box, each solar thermal panel had an interior of black-coated insulation board, a cover of clear vinyl and a probe thermometer.

Minutes after placing their panels properly in the sun, students were watching interior temperatures rise to 54, 72 and eventually 125 degrees Fahrenheit. Meanwhile, full-sized panels assembled by workshop presenter John Duevel registered temperatures around 170 degrees.

These and other area students were participants in the Youth Energy Summit (YES!) Winter Workshops held at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center near Spicer and Shalom Hills Farm near Windom. More than 150 students and 20 coaches took part in activities and education at these events, which included tracks covering Wind and Solar Energy, Food/Energy/Waste, and Energy Audits and Green Building.

YES! teams are currently working on energy action projects ranging from recycling program expansion to solar panel installation. Grants totaling more than \$52,000 were recently awarded to 20 of the 21 participating teams to assist with their projects. Grant funding was provided by SWIF, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, and Minnesota Renewable Energy Marketplace: An Alliance for Talent Development.

In coming months, team projects will be judged by a panel of experts. Prizes for excellence will be awarded in April. Check out the teams’ projects at www.youthenergysummit.com.

FRED COMES TO SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA



Do you remember as a child, curling into a comfy chair or quiet corner to read a story with someone special? Maybe now as an adult, you look forward to spending those moments with a special youngster in your life. Thanks to a

program of the Minnesota Humanities Center, last year alone thousands of children across the state participated in Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) events.

FRED is designed to help parents—especially fathers—understand the importance of reading daily with their children. Local FRED programs usually run through agencies like Head Start, elementary schools, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and community centers. The events include an opening session highlighting the fun and importance of reading with children, group read-alongs led by men from the community, activity and snack time and a closing celebration. Participating families also receive a free book to take home.

Since 2005, SWIF's Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) has provided grant funding to support the FRED program, as well as financial and technical assistance to support local FRED events in our region. SWIF's contributions total about \$10,000 and more than 25 southwest Minnesota sites have hosted FRED events as a result.

“This partnership is one of the value-added ways ECI can reach beyond our coalition communities,” said SWIF Program Specialist Brad Kramer. “As an early childhood professional, I understand that when the male care-giver reads to the child there is such an added benefit. As a father, I appreciated the FRED program as an opportunity to talk and learn with other men about the importance of reading with our kids.”

This year, non-coalition communities hosting FRED include Bird Island-Olivia-Lake Lillian (BOLD), New London-Spicer and Tracy. Two additional FRED sites include Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg, one of SWIF's newest coalition communities, and Ortonville, a coalition community with a priority around engaging dads.

Nearly 100 fathers, grandfathers and children attended BOLD's FRED event in February. Local ECFE and School Readiness Coordinator Renae Saunders was pleased with the turnout. She hopes families left understanding the importance of reading and ideas for how fathers can spend more time with their children.

“The atmosphere surrounding the evening was one of fun,” Renae said. “We wanted to model how much fun reading together can be and to share different reading styles with dads. People tend to do things they enjoy.”

If your community hasn't had the opportunity to be a southwest Minnesota FRED site and is interested in hosting a future event, contact SWIF Program Officer Sara Carlson at sarac@swifoundation.org or 1-800-594-9480.



Children at the Bird Island-Olivia-Lake Lillian (BOLD) FRED event enjoyed story time with their fathers and grandfathers.



Workshop Opportunity: Attracting & Building Support for Your Mission

Thursday, April 29
1 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

SMSU Conference Center in Marshall

Whether you need additional funding, volunteers, partners or political allies, garnering the support needed to carry out your mission starts with effective communications. Jeanne Murphy of Strategic Solutions for Nonprofits will lead this hands-on workshop designed for staff, board members and outreach volunteers from organizations of any size.

There is no cost to participate.
Visit www.ResilientNonprofits.org
for more information or to register.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

SWIF, community foundations and donors partner to help meet local needs

Last year's weakened stock market affected many businesses, communities and individuals. SWIF and our fund partners were not spared of unprecedented financial challenges. Endowments specifically took a significant hit, resulting in fewer dollars being available for our community foundation partners to award grants. With local needs on the rise and fewer grant dollars available, the SWIF Board of Directors knew that action was needed.

After endowments were balanced and calculated last year, the figures were dismal. Community foundations that normally had several thousand dollars available for grantmaking now had significantly less. One community foundation partner went from approximately \$20,000 last year to a meager \$3,000 this year.

In response, SWIF issued a special challenge grant to eligible community foundation partners. Rather than focus on raising endowment gifts, this new challenge was meant to stimulate giving to their unrestricted non-endowed accounts. This would ensure that immediate needs could be met while endowments rebounded. Participating partners were given a timeframe of Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, 2009, to raise funds for SWIF's special dollar-for-dollar match. These funds, the local gifts and SWIF's match will be granted by community foundation partners this spring.

"The weakened state of our economy suddenly became very real and posed new challenges," shared SWIF Development Officer Liz Maiers. "This special opportunity helped maintain grantmaking for our partners in an innovative way."

"SWIF was responsive to the issue, found an avenue to provide funds and it was successful."

— Erik Thompson, Milan Community Foundation

Fifteen of SWIF's 21 community foundations participated in the challenge, with 13 of them meeting or exceeding the full match amount of \$1,350. For those communities, over \$2,700 immediately became available for grantmaking. With needs mounting, community foundations aren't waiting long to start awarding these dollars.

SWIF's community foundation partner in Milan used one of the most creative fundraising strategies for this challenge. Milan Community Foundation (MCF) advisory board members talked with many community members and asked residents to consider a small gift. Their goal was to secure 100 donations of \$13, and they came very close. MCF received 63 donations totaling \$1,219, resulting in \$2,438 in grantable funds after SWIF's match was applied.

MCF Chair Erik Thompson shared, "(The match) was a great opportunity. SWIF was responsive to the issue, found an avenue to provide funds and it was successful." He noted that MCF has already awarded several grants

from these funds, including \$750 for the Syttende Mai Celebration; \$500 to the Milan Caregivers for a mentoring program; and \$500 to the Greater Milan Initiative which oversees usage of the old school building to help with their roof project.

There is still time to support your local community foundation and help support their spring grantmaking. For more information about SWIF's community foundation program or to make a gift to participating community, visit www.swifoundation.org/donate or call 1-800-594-9480.

Grantmaking impacts important local projects and programs, including Milan's annual Syttende Mai Celebration where the community's heritage is celebrated with activities like the Maypole dance.

Photo courtesy of: Kristi Link Fernholz



NEW BUSINESS STARTUPS SHINE OPTIMISTIC LIGHT ON SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA ECONOMY

Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie announced last November that more than 63,000 new businesses had started in Minnesota in 2009, the largest single year of business starts since 2002. That entrepreneurial spirit was certainly evident in southwest Minnesota as well.

Last year, SWIF closed 44 loans totaling more than \$1.8 million through our Revolving Loan Fund, Microenterprise Loan Program, Renewable Energy Loan Program and other funds. These loans assisted 33 businesses that created or retained more than 190 jobs.

Businesses recently receiving SWIF loan assistance include:

- Appleton Veterinary Clinic, LLC in Appleton
- Country Alterations in rural Glencoe
- Chokio Agri-Center, LLC, Agri-Business Group in Graceville
- New Edge, LLC, lawn mower blade manufacturing in Hutchinson
- The Loon 94.1 radio station in Willmar

To learn more about SWIF's business financing options e-mail loans@swifoundation.org or call 1-800-594-9480.

Support Your Community
Using GiveMN.org

Did you know you can support SWIF's General Endowment and any SWIF community foundation endowment online at www.givemn.org? Check out this unique giving tool and help us continue making a permanent difference in your community!

giveMN.org
Click. Contribute. Change Your World.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE NETWORKS GONE?

Step Up Your Business explores networks of past, present and future



The number of people who can remember thrashing crews moving from one farm site to another during harvest is dwindling. A network that was once integral to our region's livelihood has completely vanished, having been wiped out by technological advances in equipment and techniques.

When it comes to doing business, what hasn't vanished is the need to connect with people.

During three recent seminars hosted by SWIF's Step Up Your Business program in Montevideo, Slayton and Olivia, groups of area business owners, economic development professionals and community leaders explored networking of the past, present and future.

Presenter Jerry Peterson, Norstar Associates, challenged participants to understand their networks. He noted networking isn't simply shaking hands, smiling and passing out your business card to potential customers; it's about participation.

In terms of technology, it's no secret that new tools, marketing tactics and cultural shifts have changed far more than traditional working networks. Social networking—through online tools like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn—means we can connect with customers, vendors and colleagues with the click of a mouse instead of a handshake.

When Steve Gasser, Vivid Image, asked seminar participants what is working in their marketing today, the resounding answer was word of mouth and referrals.

Gasser compared social media to "word of mouth on steroids." Businesses can connect not only to their contacts, but their contacts' contacts and so on, exponentially expanding their reach.

"We hope to inspire entrepreneurs to select the tools that are right for their business and not be afraid to give social media a try," said SWIF Program Specialist Jackie Turner-Lovsness. "Our networks may look different today, but the bottom line is that we're still here to support each other and our businesses."

Want to learn more? Share your ideas? Network with southwest Minnesota entrepreneurs? Join Step Up Your Business on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Find the links at www.swmncore.com.

WILLMAR ECI PUBLISHES ONE-OF-A-KIND BOOK

Firefighters:
On call for their community.



Bomberos:
Listos para su comunidad.

Serving half the population of the United States, more than four out of five fire departments use on-call and volunteer firefighters, rather than full-time career employees depicted in most children's books. Given this reality, the Willmar Early Childhood Initiative, in partnership with SWIF, decided to publish a new firefighter-themed book for their fourth annual Read Aloud at the Fire Station event held last October and attended by more than 500 children, families and community members.

This book tells about a community's on-call firefighters, provides fire safety information for children and families and is written in both English and Spanish on each page. Photos were taken by Kelly Welch, Willmar, and feature local firefighters and their families.

Books are available to purchase for \$10 each. All proceeds support the Willmar Early Childhood Fund at SWIF, working to ensure all children ages birth to 5 in the Willmar community have the best possible start to life. To purchase this book, visit www.swifoundation.org/earlychildhood to download an order form.

► CHIPPEWA FROM PAGE 1

Glen spent 49 years in the banking industry and has been extremely involved in the Montevideo Industrial Development Corporation. He points to the industrial park as a key economic achievement, crediting hard work to attract and keep employers for the creation of 1,700 jobs.

"I think the community gains strength by everyone knowing they need to be part of a project," he said. "We embrace what we have and make the most of it, rather than looking across the fence, looking somewhere else."

Audrey and Richard Arner of rural Montevideo represent a unique aspect of the area's deeply-rooted agricultural industry. They own Moonstone Farm, a perennial permaculture that takes into account human effects on the natural environment and follows organic and sustainable practices. The farm features river-friendly meats, local artisan foods and a vineyard.

"There's a growing respect and appreciation for what we do," Audrey said. She also noted there are many opportunities in the area for "weaving the local foods web" by connecting local farmers and merchants.

Strong ties to land stewardship and conservation ethic greatly impact this part of the region, although Audrey feels there is still much more to be done.

"Part of our goal is to create beauty, so that we can look

in all directions and see beauty," Audrey said. "Knowing that's where we're headed is pleasing to the eye and pleasing to the heart."

Both Glen and Audrey point to the scenic convergence of the Minnesota and Chippewa Rivers, historical preservation and fostering new leadership as keys to their community's success.

Both also participated in SWIF's pilot community leadership program, Connected Communities Partnership (CCP), launched in Montevideo in 2007. Outcomes of CCP include the Hill Grocery House project, discussions around a Boys and Girls Club and perhaps most importantly, a renewed recognition of local strengths, skills and talents.

From a regional standpoint, one of the greatest outcomes is the intentional inclusion of leadership skill development and community building through all SWIF programs, to all SWIF communities.

In addition to CCP, SWIF impact in Chippewa County includes an Early Childhood Initiative coalition and multiple fund partners. SWIF has made 23 loans to local businesses totaling more than \$1 million and awarded 74 grants totaling more than \$317,000 to benefit area organizations.

This issue of Connect mentions additional connections to Chippewa County as a representation of the great things happening throughout southwest Minnesota. To learn more about SWIF connections in your county, visit www.swifoundation.org/servicearea.

CELEBRATING OUR COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE VALUABLE STAFF LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE



*Scott Marquardt
Sr. Program Officer*



*Cheryl Glaeser
Program Officer*



*Liz Maiers
Development Officer*



*Karen Grasmon
Communications Officer*

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

SWIF Sr. Program Officer Scott Marquardt, Montevideo, recently earned the designation of Certified Economic Developer (CEcD), a national recognition that sets the standard of excellence within the profession and denotes a mastery of principal skills in economic development, professional attainment and a commitment to personal and professional growth.

CEcD candidates must pass a rigorous and comprehensive three-part, two-day examination. The exam tests knowledge, proficiency and judgment in the key areas of economic development including business retention and expansion, marketing, finance, workforce development, community development, real estate, strategic planning and management.

Since 2007, Scott has led SWIF's economic advancement efforts. He also currently serves as president of the Economic Development Association of Minnesota (EDAM), Blandin Foundation Broadband Strategy Board and Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership's Marketing and Development Committee. Prior to joining SWIF, he was the economic development director in Montevideo.

Scott holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and political science, and a master's degree in public administration from the University of South Dakota, Vermillion. He is a certified Economic Development Finance Professional through the National Development Council and the EDAM 2005 Minnesota Vision Award recipient.

CHANGES AND PROMOTIONS

In recognition of their leadership capabilities, increased responsibilities and dedication to their areas of focus and the region, SWIF is pleased to announce recent staff changes and promotions.

Cheryl Glaeser was recently promoted to program officer and will continue serving SWIF's Economic Advancement Initiative, leading our commitment to renewable energy, currently including the Youth Energy Summit (YES!) and statewide Rural Energy Development Initiative (REDI). Cheryl has filled a number of different roles since joining SWIF in 2005. She lives in Hutchinson and travels extensively throughout the region.

SWIF recently assessed vacant leadership positions in the areas of development and communications, and the decision was made not to fill those positions as previously structured. Instead, a development/communications specialist position was created to add staff capacity to both teams, while fostering leadership from within the organization to take on increased responsibilities.

Development Officer Liz Maiers continues to serve SWIF's 21 community foundations and more than 65 designated fund partners, providing organizing assistance, fundraising expertise and other support to volunteers throughout the region. In addition, she now provides leadership to all development strategies of the Foundation, including mail campaigns, donor stewardship activities, major gifts and planned giving. Liz has been working with SWIF's development team for six years. Originally from Stewart, she lives in Litchfield and travels extensively throughout southwest Minnesota.

Karen Grasmon was promoted to communications officer and now leads SWIF's overall communications, marketing and public relations efforts. She manages general SWIF promotion, education and outreach while supporting SWIF programs and projects with marketing assistance. She is responsible for SWIF's online presence including Web sites and social media, print publications and major event coordination. Originally from Olivia, Karen has been with SWIF for three years and lives in Hutchinson.

ROBERT THURSTON JOINS BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Robert Thurston

Robert (Bob) L. Thurston, president of Thurston Genetics in Olivia, was recently elected to the SWIF Board of Directors. He grew up on a small family farm near Brewster and has worked in agriculture his entire adult life. After graduating with a degree in Agriculture Business from Willmar College, he held manager and executive positions with a number of seed companies before founding two Olivia-based businesses including Thurston, Inc. in 1980, which has been recognized as one of the leading hybrid seed brokerage firms in the U.S., and Thurston Genetics in 1994, a national and international corn genetics licensing company. Bob has served as president of Thurston Genetics since it was sold to BASF in 2000.

He also holds leadership positions with the Ridgewater Foundation, Corn Capital Trust in Olivia, American Bank of Olivia and Renville, Minnesota Postsecondary Agricultural

Students Organization, Minnesota Renewable Energy Marketplace – Alliance for Talent Development, American Seed Trade Association, Independent Professional Seedsman and other state and national agricultural organizations and committees.

Bob and his wife, Joanne, currently make their home on Green Lake near Spicer.

MEET OUR STAFF

SWIF is pleased to welcome Development and Communications Specialist Garrett Backes to the staff as of Feb. 1. Garrett is a native of Cold Spring, Minn., and a graduate of St. John's University, Collegeville. He earned a bachelor's degree in communication with a minor in sociology.

Prior to joining SWIF, Garrett served as a campaign consultant with United Way of Central Minnesota, and a communications and marketing intern with them prior to that. He also served as a communications and web assistant in the Office of Institutional Advancement at St. John's University.

Garrett is an active member of Association of Southwest Minnesota's Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), St. John's University Alumni Association's Communications Committee and an enthusiastic advocate of community philanthropy. Garrett will support SWIF's development efforts, which will include leading annual fundraising campaigns.



Garrett Backes

CONNECT

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.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS

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15 3RD AVENUE NW

HUTCHINSON, MN 55350

WWW.SWIFFOUNDATION.ORG



CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

CALL: 1-800-594-9480

E-MAIL: INFO@SWIFFOUNDATION.ORG



COMMENTS? CONTACT:

KAREN GRASMON,

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

KARENG@SWIFFOUNDATION.ORG