

CONNECT

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



SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION

The long-term economic impact

of developing recreation opportunities while preserving the environmental and geological attributes of the Minnesota River could be immense.



WINTER 2007

SEEING GREEN

LISMORE COMMUNITY
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RECEIVES GIFT

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OUR MINI-
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BUILDING NURTURING
COMMUNITIES OF
THRIVING CHILDREN

COMING SOON!
SWIF PODCASTS

CREATING A GREEN CORRIDOR FOR THE MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY



Photo provided by Izzac Holt of CURE.

Hiking and biking trails along the Minnesota River could draw many outdoor enthusiasts to the region.

For some, the dream dates back to the early 1970's when a few far-sighted people began to imagine the possibilities for recreation and conservation along the Minnesota River Valley through public land

ownership. Today, decades later, new life has been breathed into the dream with a \$1 million grant from the LCCMR (Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources).

The LCCMR is made up of 17 members (five Senators, five Representatives, five citizens appointed by the governor, and one citizen appointed by each the Senate and the House). Its function is to make funding recommendations to the Minnesota State Legislature for special environment and natural resource projects, primarily from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which receives its proceeds from the Minnesota State Lottery. The application process is highly competitive – LCCMR received 118 proposals this year for a combined \$98.5 million, with only

\$22.8 million available to be granted. The fact that the Minnesota River Green Corridor project was selected just goes to show how compelling the project is and the vast opportunity it holds for the region.

The Green Corridor citizen-based collaboration approached the Southwest Initiative Foundation several months ago about being the fiscal and administrative host for the grant application. The Foundation saw the potential for the project and the grant from LCCMR, as well as how it complimented the Foundation's goals for regional economic advancement, and agreed to become the sponsoring organization. "I really don't think we would have received the LCCMR

SEE RIVER VALLEY ON PAGE 3 ►

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



*Sherry Ristau
President/CEO*

I love to give gifts for Christmas. I especially love watching my children's reactions when they receive something they've really been hoping for. It's a wonderful feeling to know that a simple act of generosity has brought someone else so much joy.

The board and staff at the Southwest Initiative Foundation also love to give gifts, and this year we've taken the concept to a whole new level. Rather than giving material gifts, we've been making donations to charities and causes in honor of our friends and partners. For example, this year, instead of giving small tokens of appreciation to our Growing Home Circle members like we've done in the past, we made a donation to a regional nonprofit organization in their honor. Our staff also decided to forego a Christmas gift exchange and instead, made a donation to the young nephew (and his family) of one of our staff members, who has recently undergone brain surgery.

I think honoring family and friends by giving gifts to their favorite charities is a wonderful way of capturing the Christmas spirit and making a positive difference. If you have people on your Christmas list who care deeply about southwest Minnesota and want to make it even better for future generations, perhaps a gift in honor of that individual to the Southwest Initiative Foundation could be just the present you've been searching for!

Enjoy this special "season of giving" and may you experience much joy being with your family and friends. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

SEEING GREEN

YES Teams at Work on Community Energy Projects



*Students from Montevideo's YES team
decorate downtown using solar powered lights.*

Nearly 100 students and 20 coaches from throughout the region who attended the Youth Energy Summit (YES) at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) in Spicer this fall are now busy working on energy projects in their own communities.

YES, a program of PWELC in partnership with the Southwest Initiative Foundation, provides participating students the necessary knowledge and resources to make a difference in their community, and in the world, through energy conservation and community-based energy projects.

Many of the teams are completing "quick-start" projects which include displaying solar-powered holiday lights, creating educational films, changing exit sign lights in their schools to energy efficient lights, working with local grocery stores to provide reusable cotton bags, recycling and composting at their schools, educating their communities through energy presentations at various organizational meetings, campaigning for efficient lighting in the community, promoting an electronic waste collection program and writing grants to accomplish their larger projects.

Larger projects underway include constructing a wind turbine, greening a theater, greening a school building, creating a local foods and community greenhouse and designing a large-scale community awareness campaign with monthly education, action and political components.

Participating teams, with the guidance of their coaches and YES staff, will work on their community energy projects through Earth Day 2008. Teams will also convene January 15th at Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Granite Falls for workshops on carbon footprints, wind and solar hands-on projects, green buildings, locally-produced foods and careers. Everyone is welcome to attend the YES wrap-up event April 19, 2008. Watch the Southwest Initiative Foundation's Web site at www.swifoundation.org for more information.

GLACIAL RIDGE WINERY:

PRODUCING A NEW CROP FOR SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA

Napa Valley, Sonoma, New Zealand, Australia, Italy....and now, southwest Minnesota can be added to the list of places known for wineries and vineyards! Thanks to a variety of hearty grapes that have been developed to withstand the harsh Minnesota winters, wineries and vineyards represent a new “crop” for rural Minnesota, and may represent another economic advancement opportunity for the region.

Ron and Kimberly Wothe of Spicer, Minn., have owned and operated Jimmy Appleseed Orchard in Spicer, Minn., for some time, and were looking for a new business opportunity to compliment the orchard. After some research, the Wothe's felt wine making would be a natural fit with their apple orchard. They started out with a home winemaking center and have now expanded to produce over 3,000 gallons of high-quality wine each year. The Wothe's are currently using grapes produced by growers throughout the state to produce their wines, but have plans to start their own vineyard in the near future. They will also be producing apple wine using apples from their own orchard.

Recently, the Wothe's business got a huge boost when they were awarded a \$71,700 Value-Added Producer Grant



Kimberly and Ron Wothe

from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The grant will be used to help the Wothe's market their wines and reach their business goals. The grant has also helped them add two full-time, three part-time and two seasonal jobs.

The Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) is also honored to be helping the Wothe's expand their business by providing a micro-enterprise loan and technical assistance. “This unique business has great potential to thrive in a strong tourist area,” said Berny Berger, SWIF micro-enterprise program officer. “Ron and Kim are well-prepared for this exciting endeavor, and we hope the business will demonstrate what a great

economic opportunity the wine industry can hold for our region.”

When you're in the Spicer area, plan to visit Glacial Ridge Winery. Spend some time sampling wines in the tasting room, browsing the gift shop, and then settle into a chair in the uniquely-decorated barrel room to enjoy a glass of wine. The winery and orchard is located on Highway 23 between New London and Spicer. Log onto their Web site at www.glacialridgewinery.com for driving directions and more information about special events and wine promotions.

► RIVER VALLEY FROM PAGE 1

grant if the Foundation hadn't agreed to take on this role,” said Loran Kaardal, Green Corridor collaboration member. “The Foundation brought the needed reputation and visibility to make this project happen.”

So, how will the \$1 million be used? According to Brad Cobb, Minnesota Valley Green Corridor project manager, the funds will be used to “connect the dots” through public ownership of acquired properties between Upper Sioux State Park and Fort Ridgely State Park, both located along the Minnesota River. “We want to enhance and expand the two state parks, and we'd like to connect them with hiking and biking trails along the 45-mile corridor in between,” said Cobb. “We want to build upon the conservation, cultural, and historical aspects of this

area. It's a unique project because it doesn't just focus on one particular use for this land. We're creating a comprehensive usage plan.”

Both the Green Corridor collaboration members and the Southwest Initiative Foundation believe the long-term economic impact of developing recreation opportunities while preserving the environmental and geological attributes of the Minnesota River could be immense. Kaardal said the question has been raised whether a recreation/tourism project like this can work in a part of the state that doesn't have many lakes. “You only have to look to Lanesboro, Minn., to see the potential!” said Kaardal.

The next steps for the project will include seeking to acquire parcels of land along the river valley from willing sellers. A letter of support for the LCCMR grant proposal, signed by Sherry Ristau, SWIF president/CEO, and Brad Cobb, stated, “We have a

closing window of opportunity to ask this generation of ownership to help us leave a legacy of public access to this pristine land. This is perhaps the last generation of ownership with local connections that has a heart for the Green Corridor. [If action isn't taken now] the potential for public access could be lost for decades, and the eventual acquisition costs will be significantly higher in the future.” Kaardal said, “We're now in the process of leveraging the \$1 million grant from LCCMR and finding other groups, organizations and individuals that would be willing to donate and supplement the grant for the purposes of land acquisition.”

Other partners in this project include: Great River Greening, Trust for Public Land, Parks and Trails Council, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and National Park Service Trails and Conservation Assistance.

SWIF Celebrates the Future at the 2007 Banquet

Just Imagine



From calypso steel drum music to yodeling, elk hide paintings to a mini-documentary – people who attended the Southwest Initiative Foundation 2007 Banquet found all this and more at an event that they won't soon forget!

Over 350 people from throughout the region gathered on November 8th at the Southwest Minnesota State University Conference Center in Marshall for the banquet, "Just Imagine," a celebration of the opportunities southwest Minnesota has to prepare for a bright and prosperous future.

The evening event began with a social time, which gave guests the opportunity to visit and network with friends – both new and old – from throughout the region. As part of the banquet's youth-focused theme, the Foundation displayed an art exhibit showcasing the work of young artists from the region including photographs by Paul Jerve from Montevideo, artwork by sophomore Brandon Swartz from Pipestone, painted hides by youth from the Suntanka program in Redwood Falls and pencil drawings by high school students from Lester Prairie.

Lively music filled the air as the Redwood Valley High School Pandemonium! Steel Drum Band played a variety of traditional music of Trinidad, classical selections and popular hits. Other youth providing musical entertainment throughout the event included pianist Elise Ristau, Hutchinson; violinist YeJin Jung, Marshall; pianist Betsy Vomacka, Willmar; the West Metro Orchestra band with pianist Eric Radloff and guitarist Mike Lauer, Hutchinson; and country singer Kayla Daniels, Tracy.

Along with musical performances, the dinner and program were highlighted by the premiere showing of the Southwest Initiative Foundation's mini-documentary, "Just Imagine," and the Southwest Initiative Foundation Award presentation to Connie Connell of Luverne.

The Foundation would like to thank all guests who attended the banquet and made it an enjoyable celebration!

BANQUET WORKSHOPS EDUCATE AND INSPIRE

The Southwest Initiative Foundation hosted four free workshops prior to the banquet in Marshall, including:

Building Inclusive Communities

Dr. Okokon Udo, founder/president and CEO of "Distinctive Leader Options, Inc.," spoke about Minnesota's changing community, evaluating cultural biases and prejudices, and strategies for bridging the gap between cultures.

Capturing the Energy

John Farrell, research associate at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, presented findings from his report, *Wind and Ethanol: Economies and Diseconomies of Scale*, addressing the economics of wind energy and the need for policy to support community-based energy. Cheryl Glaeser, program specialist at the Southwest Initiative Foundation, also presented a summary of the information gathered at the Local Energy Initiatives meetings recently held in Marshall and Morris.

Creating a Vision

Co-facilitators Sherry Ristau, Southwest Initiative Foundation president/CEO, and Randy Abbott, Schwan's University president, led a hands-on work session for private, public and non-profit leaders to create a regional vision for southwest Minnesota, and discuss how such a vision can help the region work toward a brighter future in a more cohesive and collaborative way.

Growing Resources

A panel of Southwest Initiative Foundation Community Foundation and Designated Fund Partners – all volunteers – shared success stories regarding three different fundraising strategies they have implemented in their local communities. Panelists included Jan Lundebrek and Chuck Koenigs, of the Benson Area Community Foundation, Kari Harding and Loren Hacker, of the Blue and Gold Foundation of Canby, and Collette Diemer and Becky Cselovszki, of the Heron Lake-Okabena Community Foundation.

2007 SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE FOUNDATION AWARD RECIPIENT CONNIE CONNELL



Connie Connell

Looking at her extensive resume of volunteer involvement in the community of Luverne, the southwest Minnesota region, and at the Southwest Initiative Foundation, it is

clear that Connie Connell is a worthy recipient of the 2007 Southwest Initiative Foundation Award. No one knows Connie's dedication to philanthropy, innovation and collaboration better than the board of directors and staff at the Foundation, since Connie served two three-year terms on the Foundation's Board of Directors. The Foundation staff and board are so pleased to recognize Connie's outstanding leadership and commitment to the entire region through this prestigious award.

During an award presentation at the Foundation's Nov. 8 banquet, SWIF president/CEO, Sherry Ristau, and SWIF board chair, Dr. Wayne Freese, presented Connie with a framed Jim Brandenburg photograph, commissioned exclusively for this award, as well as a \$2,000 grant to be

awarded to the nonprofit organization or project of her choice.

Connie was surrounded by her family and numerous friends at the banquet. "I am very proud of Connie," stated her husband, Tim Connell. "Our community and her many friends are proud that she is being honored with this award. We are all happy and excited that others who know Connie join us in recognizing what a deserving and special person she is."

As a tribute to Connie, the Foundation produced an award booklet filled with stories and photographs shared by friends, family, and colleagues, which was distributed at the banquet. If you would like to receive a copy of the award booklet, please contact the Foundation at (800) 594-9480.

SWIF PRODUCES MINI-DOCUMENTARY

The Southwest Initiative Foundation has produced a mini-documentary titled, "Just Imagine," about the opportunities southwest Minnesota has to prepare for a bright and prosperous future. The video explores five areas that will be critical to the region's future growth including the changing face of rural, protecting and capitalizing on our resources and assets, educating future leaders, emerging technologies, and visionary leadership and planning.

The people, communities, businesses and organizations depicted in the video are examples of progress and innovation in the region today. "It is our hope that this video will spark dialogue and brainstorming about how we can help southwest Minnesota adapt and thrive in a changing world," said Sarah Libbon, SWIF senior communications officer. "We hope this video engages, educates and inspires audiences across the region and beyond."

The mini-documentary is available for viewing on the Foundation's Web site at www.swifoundation.org/newsevents.html or on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0sjil3w-ic. It is divided into five chapters for



easier Web viewing, so be sure to upload all chapters and watch them in order. Copies of the video on DVD are also available for \$4.50 each. Contact Sarah Libbon at (800) 594-9480 or by e-mail at sarahl@swifoundation.org to request a copy.

NEWLY-FORMED LISMORE AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION RECEIVES \$50,000 GIFT

Earlier this year, the Lismore Cooperative Telephone Company (LCTC) initiated the creation of a community foundation, through the Southwest Initiative Foundation, for the Lismore area as a way to capture local charitable resources and enhance the vitality of the community and area.

You may wonder why a telephone company would undergo such an endeavor for the community. It's really quite simple...and visionary.

The LCTC owned a percentage of Midwest Wireless, a cellular company headquartered in Mankato, Minnesota. In 2006, Midwest Wireless was purchased by Alltel, which created substantial gains for the Lismore Cooperative Telephone Company and its local shareholders. The newly-formed Lismore Area Community Foundation was created to help capture some of these gains for community improvement.

To jumpstart the fundraising and impact of the Lismore Area Community Foundation, the telephone company recently made a \$50,000 gift to the Community Foundation's endowment fund. The gift represented a portion of the company's earnings from a local investment, and LCTC has continued to pledge a portion of those earnings annually to the community foundation.

With \$25,000 in matching funds from the Southwest Initiative Foundation, the Lismore Area Community Foundation endowment fund has quickly grown to over \$75,000 in just six months, and grant distributions from those earnings will be made to the Lismore area in the fall of 2008 to help meet community needs. A local board of directors will oversee future fundraising, as well as the grantmaking process.

The partnership between the Lismore Area Community Foundation and the Southwest Initiative Foundation allows all gifts to the community foundation to be tax-deductible. Southwest Initiative Foundation administers the

fund, invests the assets, processes and receipts all gifts, and provides technical and professional support to the local advisory board. The local advisory board, made up of residents of the community, is responsible for fund development, raising awareness, identifying needs of the community,

and awarding grants to meet those needs once funds are available for re-investment.

A big thank you from the Lismore area and the Southwest Initiative Foundation to the Lismore Cooperative Telephone Company for its generosity and visionary philanthropy!

MEET THE NEW SWIF STAFF!

We are pleased to introduce two new staff who've recently joined the Southwest Initiative Foundation.

Kari Becker of rural Biscay was hired as the new program assistant. She works directly with Diana Anderson, chief operating officer, and provides administrative support to a wide variety of SWIF activities and initiatives. For the past ten years, Kari worked as executive assistant for Schneider Consulting Associates, Inc., of Atwater. She also has extensive experience related to community development and productive aging through her service on local senior commissions, senior housing start-up projects and local health collaborations.



Kari Becker

Scott Marquardt of Montevideo is the Southwest Initiative Foundation's new senior program officer for economic advancement. Scott will lead SWIF's economic advancement activities and programs, securing financial resources and working with partners to advance regional economic development opportunities for southwest Minnesota. Before joining SWIF, Scott served as the economic development director in Montevideo for nearly eight years. He brings tremendous knowledge and understanding of the region's economic and community opportunities and challenges to his new position.



Scott Marquardt

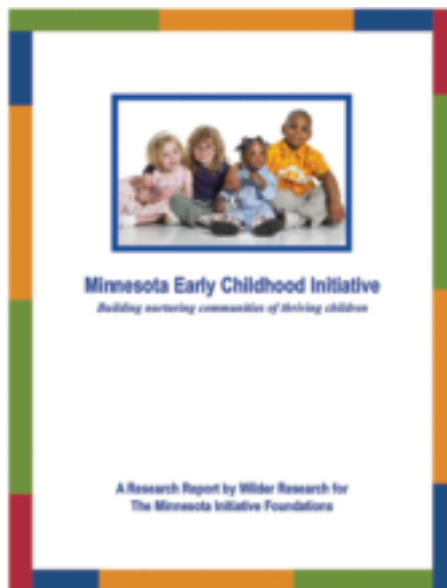
BUILDING NURTURING COMMUNITIES OF THRIVING CHILDREN

Individuals and communities involved with the Minnesota Initiative Foundations' (MIFs) Early Childhood Initiative know it's been making a difference in the lives of Minnesota's youngest children, but a recent report provides further reinforcement about the success of this initiative.

"Building Nurturing Communities of Thriving Children," produced by Wilder Research on behalf of the MIFs, examines strategies and outcomes of the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative and links them with existing research on early care and education. The report assesses 18 of the nearly 400 projects and programs implemented thus far by the Early Childhood Coalitions. The featured programs represent model or exemplary strategies in their respective regions, including in southwest Minnesota.

"This report crystallizes what has been accomplished by the Minnesota Initiative Foundations' grassroots early childhood community organizing process," said Richard Chase, Ph.D., Wilder Research. "It also illustrates the key building blocks of a nurturing community environment and how local citizens can work together to ensure young children thrive."

The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative was launched in 2003 as a collaborative statewide program of the six MIFs, who used a common process to engage community members to identify strengths and needs, create a vision, develop strategic action plans and implement projects and programs to strengthen local early care and education resources. The process is designed to help communities become more nurturing places that are equipped to provide children the best possible start to a healthy life of learning, achieving and succeeding. The Initiative has also raised considerable local, statewide and national awareness of early childhood issues.



"This report crystallizes what has been accomplished by the Minnesota Initiative Foundations' grassroots early childhood community organizing process."

**— RICHARD CHASE, PH.D.
WILDER RESEARCH**

"The 11 Early Childhood coalitions in southwest Minnesota are helping to create an even better place for our region's youngest citizens to learn and grow," said Sara Carlson, program officer with the Southwest Initiative Foundation. "Supporting children ages birth to 5 is vital in the process of building strong communities. The research presented in this report shows the importance of everything from increased school readiness to collaboration of resources for the betterment of our youngest children, their families and our communities."

To learn more about the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative or view a copy of the report, "Building Nurturing Communities of Thriving Children," please visit www.swifoundation.org/earlychildhood.html.

WORK IN PROGRESS

The Southwest Initiative Foundation supports economic and social growth in southwest Minnesota through various initiatives and programs. In addition to many new proactive programs and leadership initiatives, we are pleased to report the following grant and loan activity for the six-month period of July 1, 2007 through Nov. 30, 2007.

Grant Awards

32 grants totaling \$113,469 through SWIF's grant initiatives and its community and designated funds

Loan Awards

14 loans totaling \$384,500 to support the start-up or expansion of businesses in southwest Minnesota through SWIF's loan programs, including the Micro-Enterprise Loan Program

LOG ON AND TUNE IN!

SWIF Podcasts Coming January 2008

Do you want to hear what people are saying about topics and issues that affect the lives of people in southwest Minnesota? We do! That's why the Southwest Initiative Foundation will be bringing you conversations between people right here in our region related to communities, workforce, education, business, energy, the environment, and much more!

Beginning in January, SWIF will produce an audio file, known as a podcast, every other month for downloading and listening on our Web site. We hope you'll log on to www.swifoundation.org and tune in to the latest conversations!

If you'd like to receive electronic communications from the Foundation, including podcasts and e-newsletters, please send your e-mail address to Karen Grasmon at kareng@swifoundation.org.

Merry Christmas ^{AND} Happy Holidays

from the Southwest Initiative Foundation Board and Staff!

We wish you the very best during this holiday season and the upcoming year!



Southwest Initiative Foundation staff

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.

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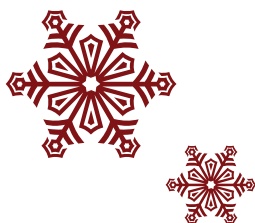


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