

CONNECT

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



WINTER 2010

2010 YEAR IN REVIEW
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS
PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:
OUTLAND RENEWABLE
ENERGY

PLUS, YES! EXPANSION,
EARLY CHILDHOOD
WORKSHOPS,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AWARD AND MORE!



FLYING WITH THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE

SWIF CELEBRATES REGION'S GREATEST GENERATION WITH \$25,000 GRANT TO HONOR FLIGHT SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA

We go to work. We get kids to and from school. We volunteer with local organizations. We gather with family and friends for the holidays. In the midst of our busy everyday lives, two days can seemingly pass with the blink of an eye, making it easy to miss opportunities to reflect, remember and celebrate. But two days is enough to create once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for southwest Minnesota veterans to do just that.

That's why SWIF made a \$25,000

grant to support Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota and kick-off our 25-year anniversary.

Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota, a chapter of the national, nonprofit organization Honor Flight Network dedicated to honoring America's WWII veterans with a two-day trip to Washington, D.C., took its second flight Oct. 1 and 2 from Sioux Falls. This trip included 108 veterans—mainly WWII—from throughout the region, giving

much-deserved recognition to those deemed the Greatest Generation.

"It was heartwarming," said Navy Veteran John (Bud) Qualley of Canby as he recalled the trip.

Qualley remembered the excitement and overwhelming show of gratitude received as veterans made their way

SEE HONOR ON PAGE 10 ▶

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



*Sherry E. Ristau
President/CEO*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Over the past few months, the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) has successfully ended our Fiscal Year 2010 and jumped right into 2011. We've continued key efforts throughout the region and created meaningful partnerships to leverage our work. We've kicked off our 25th anniversary with special activities and plenty more to come. We've started celebrating the holidays and reflecting on our many blessings.

As we take time to share stories of this work with you, I find myself absolutely overwhelmed...but for all the right reasons.

Our cover story features what I believe is one of SWIF's greatest contributions, not just of the past months, but in our entire 25-year history. I feel truly blessed to have accompanied Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota for its October flight and can say with conviction it changed my life. It was an honor to give back to a group of people who have given our communities, our region and our country so much. Thank you again to all involved with Honor Flight and a special thank you to all southwest Minnesota veterans.

Another recent highlight has been connecting with so many people through our 25th anniversary county receptions. It's been a joy to see familiar faces and meet new people and I've been reminded of all the amazing things we've been able to accomplish when working together in the region.

You'll see additional highlights from the past fiscal year in our 2010 Year in Review section of this Connect issue. With an incredible Board of Directors and dedicated staff, SWIF is well-poised to carry our accomplishments far into the coming months and we hope you'll join us in celebrating and carrying our mission forward. Thank you for your continued support!

HELPING WHERE WE CAN



SWIF staff (from left) Janet Menton, Marsha Frauendienst and Deb Berggren have led SWIF's efforts in collecting and distributing more than 400 pounds of food to local food shelves throughout the region.

We realize that people in our region continue to face challenges that fall outside of SWIF's focus areas but that hasn't stopped us from helping where we can. Over the past 20 months, SWIF staff collected food and personal cash donations for 14 food shelves throughout our region, selecting each recipient based on what we knew was happening in specific counties – company layoffs, businesses closing, tragic accidents, fires – that would increase needs at the local food shelves.

This fall, Accounting Specialist Deb Berggren, Loan Specialist Janet Menton and Community Resource Assistant Marsha Frauendienst made a challenge to the SWIF staff and board of directors. To honor our 25th anniversary, they challenged us to collect at least 25 pounds of food, \$25 or 25 items for the counties in our region that we hadn't yet given to before the end of our anniversary year.

With additional support from our board, we made a great start to that challenge by collecting 107 pounds and \$424, which was delivered to Jackson and Rock counties in November. More boxes are being filled and will continue to be delivered throughout the region.

NEW PARTNERS, NEW TEAMS, NEW WEBSITE...NEW SEASON!



West Central and Southwest CERTs Coordinator Jeff Vetsch shows YES! students how much energy different types of light bulbs require at the Sept. 28 Fall Summit and Career Expo in Marshall.

It usually takes students awhile to get back into the groove of a new school year. But participants of the Youth Energy Summit (YES!) program have jumped back into another exciting season.

The YES! program and partners were honored by receiving the 2010 Minnesota Environmental Initiative Award for Environmental Education last May and haven't slowed down since. Over the summer, a new website www.youthenergysummit.org was launched to provide more resources and the new site has been a great way for coordinators, coaches and teams to connect, share ideas and generate enthusiasm for the new season and their energy action projects.

With great success in its first three years, YES! was approached to expand further into Owatonna-based Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation's service area as well. This partnership, along with continued partnerships with Prairiewoods Environmental Learning Center and Prairie Ecology Bus Center, added capacity and funding to support teams throughout all of southwest and southern Minnesota.

Thirteen teams kicked off the 2010-2011 season at the Fall Summit and Career Expo Sept. 28 at Southwest



A total of 18 teams are participating in this year's program. Learn what teams are doing in your community at www.youthenergysummit.org.



Minnesota State University in Marshall. At the Summit, students learned about energy opportunities and issues and begin planning for their energy action projects. They also connected with businesses, organizations and other resources in the clean energy industry that will serve as great contacts throughout the season.

2010 YEAR

The past year marked a time of new and continued challenges but also one filled with amazing opportunities for southwest Minnesota. The recession created both an increased demand for SWIF's program services and pressure on private and public revenue streams. Collaboration across traditional programmatic lines and practical use of process improvement tools helped SWIF focus on the best use of our resources while leveraging those available to the region.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- | Awarded \$1.65 million in grants to meet regional and local needs
- | Closed 45 loans totaling \$2,107,061 to support businesses
- | Created or retained 176 jobs through the Revolving Loan Program and Microenterprise Loan Program
- | Approved 13 REDI loans throughout the state encompassing an estimated 1,088 MW of community wind and estimated total development cost of \$2.5 billion
- | Educated nearly 2,000 people about wind energy development at Rural Energy Development Initiative (REDI) forums
- | Hosted second annual business leadership development event, Leading By Example II: Boomers to Rock Stars, attended by 250 regional leaders
- | Provided 4,260 hours of technical assistance in partnership with the Small Business Development Center to 390 entrepreneurs
- | Expanded YES! program to 20 teams, engaging more than 275 students, 175 businesses and organizations and impacting 42,000 community members
- | Established new Early Childhood Initiative sustainability funds for the Willmar and Ortonville teams
- | Launched the new Nonprofit Leader's Academy
- | Administered a \$1 million land acquisition and planning grant from the Legislative Citizen Committee on Minnesota's Resources for the Minnesota River Valley Green Corridor Project
- | Helped all fund partners raise more money, acquire more donors and award more grants
- | Received awards for the Entrepreneurship Initiative and YES!
- | Appointed three new members to our Board of Directors, including Marcy Costello, Lakefield; Janice Nelson, Montevideo; and Robert Thurston, Olivia



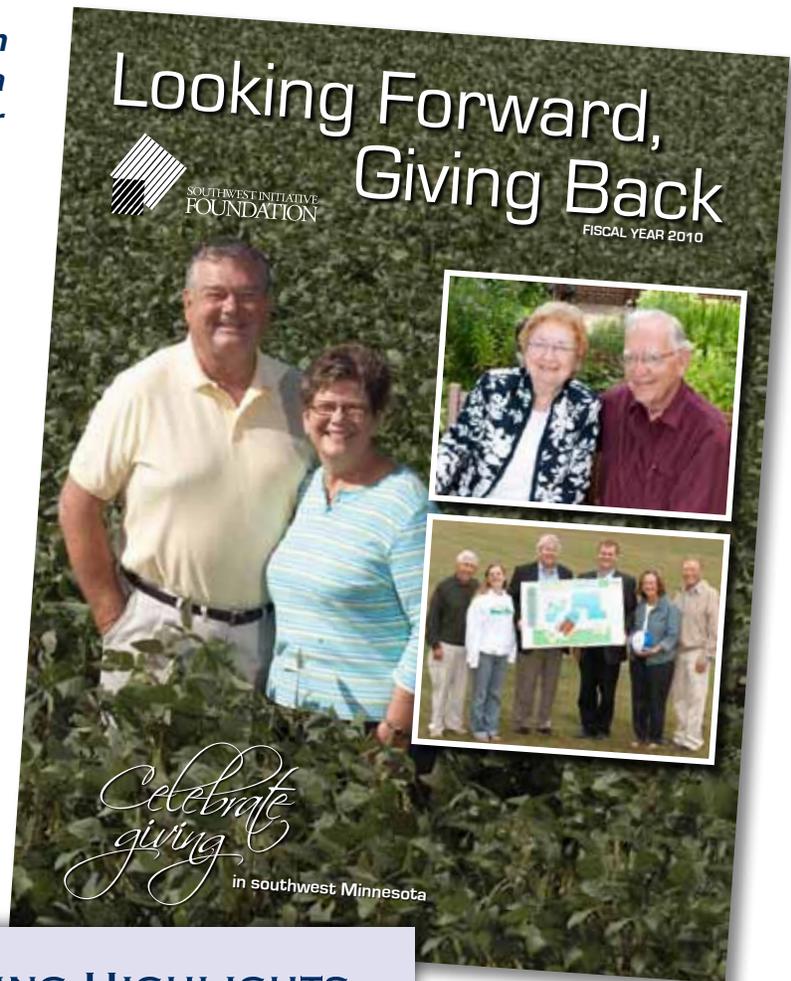
- 1. Families read the Willmar ECI's newly published book at their annual Read Aloud at the Fire Station event.*
- 2. REDI helped Minnesotans understand and capitalize on wind energy development opportunities.*
- 3. Loan clients like Tammy Lauer, owner of My Computer Tutor, pictured with Bette Corbin provide needed services to the region.*

IN REVIEW

This overview, as well as the recent edition of Looking Forward, Giving Back, provides a snapshot of SWIF's work during Fiscal Year 2010 (July 1, 2009, through June 30, 2010). The examples show how dedicated leadership and creative partnerships have helped entrepreneurs strengthen their businesses, community leaders meet local needs, our youngest children become school ready, high school students connect to future workforce opportunities and southwest Minnesotans give back to the causes they care about most.



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GIVING HIGHLIGHTS

- | \$137,253 raised for the SWIF General Endowment through the Growing Home Circle
- | \$1,350 special grant match opportunity provided to eligible affiliate community foundations to help off-set reduced endowment earnings
- | 120 acres of farmland received from a planned gift, bringing total acres managed in the Farmland Retention Program to 330
- | 100 percent giving from the heart of the organization through board and staff campaigns



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4. Volunteers like Del Rutz, Dennis Swan and Gayle Kaup of the Balaton Area Community Foundation work to make a positive difference in our communities.
5. YES! representatives were excited to receive the Minnesota Environmental Initiative Award for Environmental Education in May.

To review additional highlights, including our audited financial information, visit www.swifoundation.org/annualreports.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF OPPORTUNITIES, IMPACT AND CONNECTIONS

SWIF KICKS OFF MILESTONE YEAR WITH SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

For 25 years, SWIF has been impacting communities, businesses, organizations and families throughout the region. This year, we've seen amazing things happening—people throughout the region are supporting our business, energizing our future, capturing our community spirit and leveraging our resources. We've also seen people throughout the region and hope you'll join in our continued special activities and recognition opportunities.

STAFF TOUR OF SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA

While we constantly have staff throughout the region, this past summer marked the first time that all staff traveled together for a tour of southwest Minnesota. For two days in July, our group of 24 staff could be spotted in the southern portion of our region sporting blue shirts, connecting with partners, seeing the sites and completing strategic planning activities as we kicked off our anniversary year. We're looking forward to touring the northern portion of our region in 2011.

Check out our *Believe in Southwest* blog at www.swifoundation.org to read stories written by staff about our trip.



The breath-taking view from Hole in the Mountain Prairie near Lake Benton was one of many highlights for the anniversary staff tour.

18 COUNTY RECEPTIONS HIGHLIGHT LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Our service area, made up of 18 counties and 12,340 square miles, is a lot of ground to cover. We have board members and staff living and working in many communities throughout the region—and during our anniversary year, we'll be hosting celebrations throughout the region as well!

We held our first six county receptions in Cottonwood, Jackson, Nobles, Rock, Pipestone and Murray counties in November and had a wonderful time visiting and sharing memories with people connected to many areas of our work. We'll be visiting the remaining 12 counties in 2011, so watch for details about your county's reception.



Former SWIF Board Chair Connie Burchill (center) with wife Cec (left) and SWIF President/CEO Sherry Ristau (right) are all smiles at the Worthington County reception.

RS OF ND GROWTH

IVITIES AND RECOGNITION

in southwest Minnesota. Since our inception, businesses, investing in our youngest citizens, already begun celebrating this milestone year opportunities.

NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR ANNIVERSARY AWARDS

During this special year, we especially want to honor individuals, businesses, organizations and communities that personify SWIF's mission. In addition to the Southwest Initiative Foundation Award, four new awards will be made including a Philanthropist Award, Leadership Award, Innovation Award and Collaboration Award.

Nominations for these new awards are open to the public and will be accepted until March 1, 2011. Award recipients will be selected by a committee of regional southwest Minnesota representatives and announced at our 25-year banquet celebration Friday, May 20, 2011.

Visit www.swifoundation.org to make your nomination.

SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendar and plan to join us for our 25-Year Anniversary Banquet!

Friday, May 20, 2011
Jackpot Junction
Morton, Minn.

HELP SWIF MAKE THE MOST OF THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION'S CHALLENGE

WHAT WILL YOU GIVE?

SWIF was established in 1986 by The McKnight Foundation in response to the economic crisis of the 1980s. Greater Minnesota was struggling to survive and McKnight was one of the first to take notice and take action. They created six Minnesota Initiative Funds to deliver an economic counterpunch and become leaders of Minnesota's rural resurgence.

Since then, SWIF has received significant financial support from The McKnight Foundation. As of the beginning of Fiscal Year 2011 (July 1, 2010), we had raised just over \$1.5 million of the \$1.8 million goal – the amount that McKnight challenged us to raise from Fiscal Years 2006 through 2011.

With just six months left in our current challenge, we are striving to meet the match! We need to raise just over \$250,000 for the SWIF General Endowment by June 30, 2011, to meet our goal. We would love nothing more than to cap off our 25th anniversary year by achieving this ambitious goal and meeting the challenge—doing so will ensure that southwest Minnesota will be that much stronger for years to come!

There are several great opportunities we have within The McKnight Foundation's matching challenge grant:

- *All gifts of any size to the SWIF General Endowment are matched dollar-for-dollar*
- *Gifts of \$25,000 are matched 2:1, making for a total gift of \$75,000*
- *Any kind of planned gift of any amount to SWIF or any of our family of funds qualifies for a \$1,000 bonus gift to SWIF's General Endowment – and it's as simple as notification of intent*

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: OUTLAND RENEWABLE ENERGY

SWIF Loan Assists Wind Energy Firm Expansion



Outland Renewable Energy's team is made up of industry-leading professionals, including Field Technician Jordan Bielefeld, pictured at a wind farm near Luverne.

Outland Renewable Energy, a Canby-based wind energy firm with additional offices in Mendota Heights and Guymon, Okla., recently received a loan through SWIF's Revolving Loan Fund to support a major business expansion. The firm is focused on developing, owning, operating and maintaining commercial renewable energy

projects in partnership with landowners, rural communities and municipalities. They have an unwavering commitment to leading-edge technology and investor-owners, as well as remaining environmentally responsible.

Outland's steady growth of business and competitive safety record has also garnered them the ISO 9001:2008 certification as commissioners, operators and maintenance of wind energy facilities throughout the U.S. and abroad. They now have more than 125 service technicians and nearly 1,000 megawatts under service agreements.

The Outland founders believe in improving rural communities through profitable investments in and management of renewable energy projects. The catalyst for the Canby expansion was re-purposing an old furniture store and tractor dealership to accommodate Outland's growing service division and create a secure warehouse area for high-value inventory.

"We're very thankful to have the support of SWIF," said Outland President and COO Steve Scott. "Without their resources, our expansion here in Canby would have been insurmountably more difficult. They provided the flexibility and speed we needed to clear several key hurdles hindering our growth in the local community."

Learn more about this business at www.outlandenergy.com and more about SWIF's loan programs at www.swifoundation.org/loans.

A TOOL TO QUANTIFY OUR QUALITY OF LIFE

Our state is changing dramatically—residents are aging, communities are becoming more diverse and local economies are evolving. These trends will have a major impact on everyone who lives here in the coming years. An innovative initiative, Minnesota Compass, helps communities across Minnesota assess and improve their quality of life.

Minnesota Compass makes available a host of data measuring progress for our counties, regions and entire state in a user-friendly, easy-to-navigate website. It provides data, offers commentary and insight from nonpartisan experts, and points to a variety of initiatives for local communities to try. It even includes strategies that are

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

Minnesota Children's Museum Brings Professional Development to Region

After the regional Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) team experienced a Minnesota Children's Museum workshop by trainer Nikki Polifka at a statewide meeting, they knew this was a professional development opportunity that must come to southwest Minnesota.

"We became determined to bring the workshops to the region so our educators who really needed access to professional development opportunities could attend and in turn, can help kids become more school ready," said SWIF Program Officer Sara Carlson. "Individual ECI coalitions couldn't afford to bring the workshops out on their own so it was a perfect opportunity to leverage our collective resources in the region."

Ortonville, Redwood Falls, Slayton/Murray County and Willmar ECI teams served as hosts, with the Flexible Learning Year (FLY) schools consortium offering an extra training at the Redwood Falls site. In addition, Ortonville, Slayton and Wabasso area ECIs paid for add-on evening sessions for child care and early care professionals who couldn't attend a daytime session. No fees were charged to participants.

Topics varied by community but included science, music and movement, literacy and math. They incorporated theory, best practices and discussion about why the subjects are critical to early development as well as time for participants to experience hands-on activities. Each participant received a packet with 10 to 20 lessons to bring into their own classrooms.

"When given an affordable, accessible option, teachers



Marcia Kunze and Diane Ellens try out a hands-on science lesson presented by the Minnesota Children's Museum in Slayton. Participants were also taught how to set up the station and learned the concepts behind this and other lessons.

who are responsible for our next generation of learners will engage in quality professional development," Carlson said. "This was a wonderful way to provide an opportunity in locations making it much easier on stretched program budgets and staff schedules across the region."

The response to these sessions has been so positive, SWIF and Minnesota Children's Museum are in conversation about a fall 2011 series in southwest Minnesota.

based on research evidence of what works and what does not.

This online tool covers a wide range of issues including aging, civic engagement, early childhood, economy and workforce, education, environment, health, housing, public safety and transportation. It's useful for city officials, educators, grant seekers, business owners—anyone interested in learning about and improving their community.

Led by Wilder Research, the initiative builds on the prior success of Twin Cities Compass, a similar project for the seven-county metro region. Nine foundations support Minnesota Compass, including SWIF.

Visit www.mncompass.org to see how our rural quality of life measures up in Minnesota.



▶ HONOR FROM PAGE 1

through the airport. Area Patriot Guards, Boy Scout Troops and others lined the walkways, saluting and shaking hands with passing veterans. Cheers rang out as the plane landed in Washington, D.C., and was met by a water cannon salute from local fire trucks, followed by patriotic music playing through the terminal and greetings from local volunteers.

A highlight at the end of the trip was Mail Call, where each veteran received letters and pictures from southwest Minnesota students.

“Everybody I talked to on that flight had a wonderful experience,” Qualley said. “Even the weather cooperated! I was very impressed with the efficiency and with the help we got to make the operation run smoothly.”

Visits to the WWII Memorial, Navy, Air Force and Marine memorials, National Air and Space Museum, and attending ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery kept veterans on the go. Honor Flight’s two-day itinerary would seem ambitious

to see what the experience did for veterans. They need and deserve the chance to connect, reflect and share their stories and Honor Flight provides that.”

SWIF’s grant to support Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota was made through the Paul and Alma Schwan Aging Trust Fund, a designated endowment fund established in 1990-1991 with a generous gift from Marvin Schwan in honor of his parents. The fund was created to help communities prepare for and respond to the opportunities and challenges of our aging rural region, including the increasingly urgent need to honor our WWII veterans.

“We’re losing about 1,100 WWII veterans every day across the country and that means we’re losing opportunities to do something very special for our veterans right here in southwest Minnesota, too. Not only is this a great way to honor people who have done so much, it’s a great way to honor our region.”

Honor Flight Southwest Minnesota is accepting additional donations to cover trip expenses, which for the two-day trip total about \$800 for each veteran. They’re also



for any visitors to our nation’s capital but for a group of 80- and 90-year-olds, it was especially demanding and made the volunteer medical team and guardians even more important.

SWIF President/CEO Sherry Ristau accompanied as a guardian and Jim Keul of Slayton, who serves on SWIF’s Board of Directors, went as part of the medical team. Volunteers helped in administering medication and oxygen, getting veterans in and out of wheel chairs and overall watching for signs that anyone may need assistance. They felt it was truly an honor to return the favor of serving those who had served our country decades before.

“This trip—these veterans—are truly amazing,” Ristau said. “The experience was one of my top five, right up there with my wedding and the births of my children. It was incredible

recruiting veterans to participate in the next flight set for April 2011. Those interested in participating must complete an application. Applications are currently accepted from World War II Veterans of southwest Minnesota on a first-come, first-served basis.

Guardians are also needed to make these flights possible, ensuring that every veteran has a safe and memorable experience. Guardians are responsible for their own expenses, approximately \$800.

Find more stories and photos from the flight captured by the Worthington *Daily Globe* online at www.dglobe.com. To obtain a veteran or guardian application, or to make a donation, visit www.honorflightsouthwestminnesota.com or call 888-283-4061.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVE RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

SWIF recently received an Excellence in Economic Development Award from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) for our Entrepreneurship Initiative. The awards annually recognize the world's best economic development programs and partnerships, marketing materials and the year's most influential leaders.

The award honors organizations and individuals in 28 categories for their efforts in creating positive change in urban, suburban and rural communities. SWIF's award represented the Entrepreneurship category for communities with populations of 200,000 to 500,000 and was presented to Program Specialist Jackie Turner-Lovsness at an awards ceremony Sept. 28 during the IEDC Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio.

"We recognize the Southwest Initiative Foundation for providing successful strategies to promote new paradigms in economic development in this period of global recovery," said William Best, IEDC chair. "Our awards honor organizations and individuals for their efforts in creating positive change in communities. The Southwest Initiative Foundation is showing that they are at the forefront of the economic development profession and are using innovative and effective practices that can be replicated in other communities."

SWIF's Entrepreneurship Initiative was created in 2006. With the growth of an existing Microenterprise Loan



The Excellence in Economic Development Award was presented in Columbus Ohio to Jackie Turner-Lovsness (center) with Chairman of the IEDC Board of Directors William Best, FM, (left) and Chairman of the IEDC Awards Task Force Timothy Solomon, CECD (right).

Program, SWIF recognized the needs of entrepreneurs in its 18-county service area and continues to provide education, networking, financial and other resources to southwest Minnesota entrepreneurs.

MEET OUR STAFF



Kim Morrow

Kim Morrow of Hutchinson joined the staff as front desk coordinator in July. She is the friendly face greeting visitors and the first voice people hear when calling the SWIF office. In addition, she manages the scheduling of our conference room facilities and provides administrative support to various program areas.

Prior to joining SWIF, Kim was an operations manager for a mental health clinic. She also worked for seven years

as a media assistant for the Hutchinson School District and has worked for a number of companies in the administrative assistant field.

Kim has been actively involved with delivering meals on wheels, church activities, has served on a local preschool board of directors, volunteered in school and continues to support her children in their many school and extracurricular activities.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays

SWIF's Board of Directors and Staff located throughout our 18-county region are honored to serve you and grateful for your continued partnership and support. We wish you the very best this holiday season!



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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