

# CONNECT

Spring/Summer 2020



## On a path to success in Windom

Windom students Daniela Bonilla, Ryan Fauglid, Isaac Entinger, Trey LaCanne and Christopher McKibbin explore new career pathways.

*Page 3*

Glen and Jackie Herfurth support community solutions to child care in Montevideo.

*Page 8*



SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE  
FOUNDATION



# STAYING CONNECTED

*President/CEO Diana Anderson*



*Diana Anderson, President/CEO*

I've been spending my days with my chocolate lab, Leo, by my side. He hangs out in my home office and he joins my husband, John, and me on walks. I've been playing peek-a-boo on video calls with my seven-month-old grandson, chatting on the phone with my mom and attending virtual meetings with many colleagues.

There are brief moments when life seems almost normal. And yet, we couldn't be further from the world we knew not long ago—before COVID-19.

Days are also filled with moments of sadness, anxiety, fear and frustration. It's hard not knowing what will come next. But I find comfort in the ways in which I see people coming together, caring for one another and helping those who need us the most.

More than 30 years ago, our southwest Minnesota region was facing its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Farmers were losing land their families had owned for generations. Businesses along main streets and industrial parks were closing. Homes were being foreclosed. Families were moving away. People were losing hope.

That's when concerned and committed community members created Southwest Initiative Foundation to help.

Our immediate goal was to alleviate human distress and support economic recovery. Since then, we've built incredible relationships, developed unique programs

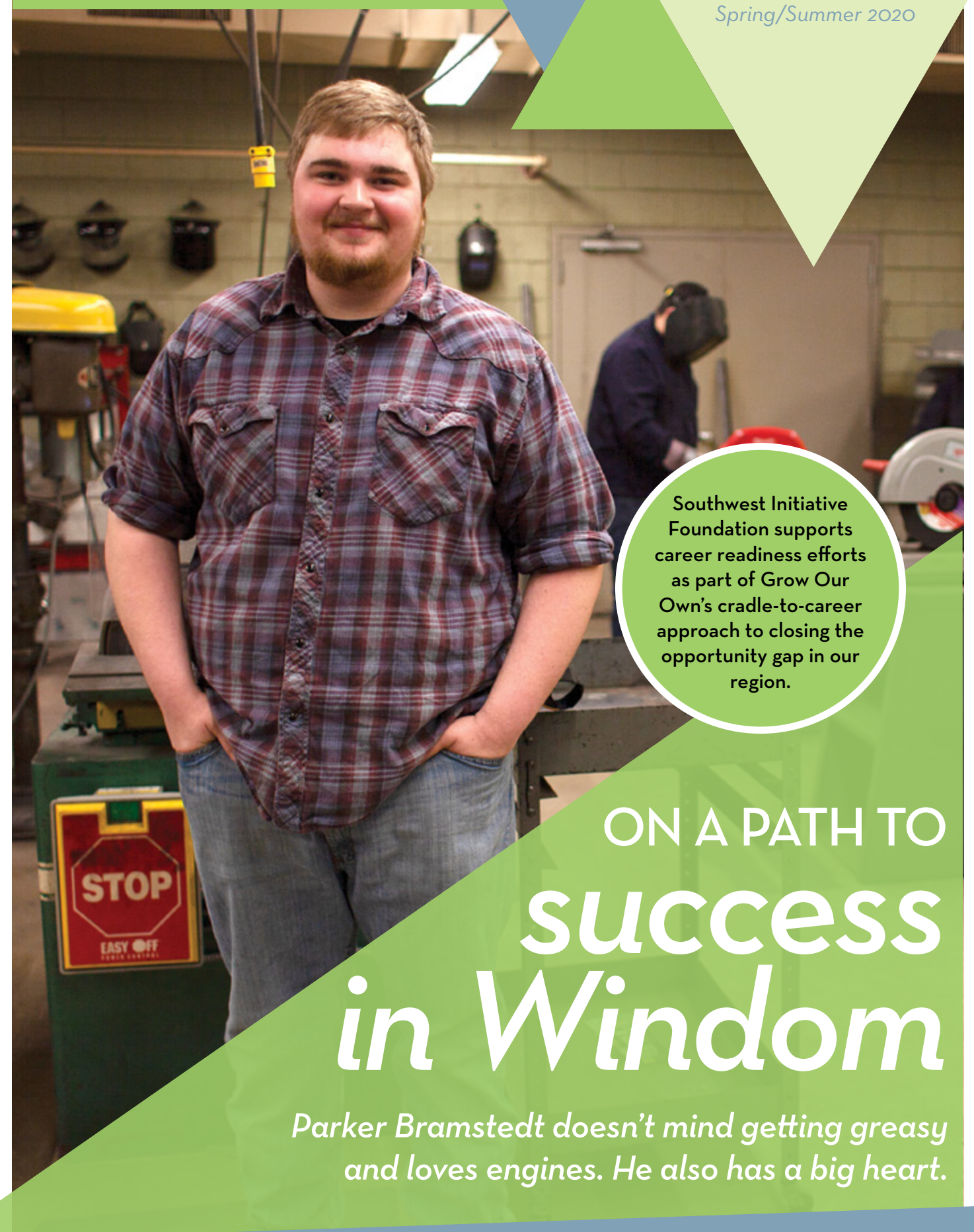
and collaborated across all sectors to keep our southwest Minnesota communities strong and vibrant.

We have the resources and experience to respond to our region's changing needs. It's positioned us to respond quickly during the current crisis with support to businesses, child care providers and nonprofits. We know there will be more we can do.

This issue of *CONNECT* comes at a time when "connecting" looks very different. But connecting people remains an important part of our mission, and I'm excited to share stories highlighting recent Grow Our Own successes. They serve as examples of how our educators innovate to ensure our kids get a quality education. How our entrepreneurs work hard to keep businesses going and growing. And how generous people give what they can to make a difference.

These people—and so many others—give me hope. Southwest Initiative Foundation was created in response to challenging times in 1986, and we will be here to respond to the challenging times ahead. Now is the time for us to work together!

Stay updated with our response and work at [swifoundation.org](http://swifoundation.org)



Southwest Initiative Foundation supports career readiness efforts as part of Grow Our Own's cradle-to-career approach to closing the opportunity gap in our region.

ON A PATH TO  
*success*  
*in Windom*

*Parker Bramstedt doesn't mind getting greasy and loves engines. He also has a big heart.*



*“At the end of the day, I love being able to help somebody – if that’s keeping a truck on the road so they can get food to a town or keeping a tractor running so a farmer can plant a field,” said Parker, a senior at Windom Area High School who wants to be a diesel technician.*

He’d considered a few other careers – engineering, welding, manufacturing. The new Windom Career Pathways program let him try out those opportunities and see what fit best.

The Pathways Program launched at the start of the 2018-19 school year and has five pathways for students to explore: Agriculture and Manufacturing, Health Science, Education, Business and Marketing and Information Technology. Many courses offer credits that give students a jump on post-secondary education and connect students to outside opportunities.

“The coursework students are doing is far more hands on and practical than before. And the courses are very popular; that tells me a lot,” said Principal Bryan Joyce, who has 13 years of teaching experience and is passionate about advancing work-based learning.

While Parker loves engines, he’d never had a chance to rebuild one entirely himself until he took Intro to Mechanics in the Manufacturing and Engineering Pathway. He has been under the hoods of cars and trucks his whole life, which helped when fuel started pouring out of the carburetor of his project and all over his sweatshirt. He

worked on the small four-cycle engine until “it just ran like a top. It’s a nice thing when you get something and it doesn’t run, and you take it apart and you rebuild it and then you see it run and work the way it should,” Parker said.

In addition to hands-on classes that help him hone and apply skills, Career Pathways connected Parker with an internship at Ziegler CAT in Jackson. Ziegler deals in construction and farm equipment and employs Intern Technicians at locations across the upper Midwest. Its internship program is primarily for technical school and college students. Chris Jones, branch operations manager for Ziegler in Jackson, said Parker is the first high school intern his branch has hired.

“How do we get these young people that want to get into the trade? We have to start them as



Windom Area High School Principal Bryan Joyce (left) is passionate about advancing work-based learning for students like senior Parker Bramstedt.



In addition to hands-on classes that help him hone and apply skills, Career Pathways connected Parker with an internship at Ziegler CAT in Jackson. He’s pictured with Branch Operations Manager Chris Jones.

sophomores, juniors and seniors,” said Chris, who manages 21 full-time technicians over two shifts and is always looking for more to hire.

Ziegler Intern Technicians assist in troubleshooting and repairing heavy diesel engines and construction and agriculture equipment in a shop environment. They learn to respond to customer needs in a positive, supportive, and timely manner to ensure maximum value for work performed.

“I’ve learned a lot there; it’s a big jump from working at a small shop,” said Parker, who has also worked at a local towing company in Windom. “After my first week at Ziegler, I had my own laptop.”

Parker also has a toolbox that was his dad’s, and his grandpa’s before that.

“I’ve got a lot of tools that my grandpa had. My grandpa worked for the state as a mechanic for 40 years before he retired. He’s got tools he wasn’t going to use anymore, and he gave them to me because he knows I’m going to be going to school for something he did,” Parker said.

This fall, Parker plans to attend Alexandria Technical and Community College for a diesel technician degree. Then, he sees his career path leading him back home for the opportunities and the lifestyle. “I’m more of a country kid.”



# A COMMON PURPOSE: Vibrant Community

Windom Public School District serves about 1,100 students, split evenly between grades K-5 and 6-12. In 2018, voters overwhelmingly approved a bond vote for construction of a new elementary school and an expansion of the high school's career and technical education programming, including a new 7,100 square foot career and technical education expansion and remodel now under way. It will have an auto shop, welding and medical careers spaces.

Windom's business community has also taken an active role, including through a Pathways Advisory Committee made up of business leaders. Cottonwood County experienced a 4.4 percent job growth according to a trend report published by Minnesota Compass before the coronavirus outbreak. As the economy recovers, these positions will need to continue being filled. The pandemic has reinforced the growing need for more healthcare professionals in our rural communities and beyond.

Emily Masters is the Chief HR Officer at Windom Area Health and serves on the committee. She sees benefits from this education model as an employer and community member. The Health Science Pathway provides

job shadowing opportunities and weekly speakers on topics like insurance, politics, clinicals and more. She noted that for employers, a partnership like this involves time, energy, policies and some risk: "If you can get past some of these barriers, the return is tenfold," Emily said.

Grants have been key to launching Windom's Career Pathways Program. Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) is the hub agency for a Greater Twin Cities United Way (GTCUW) grant –funded in large part by the Bush Foundation – that's supporting readiness efforts in the Windom, Worthington and Jackson County Central school districts.

"Just the coordination of resources has been really vital for us. If we don't have an answer, Southwest Initiative Foundation can connect us to someone who does. I really appreciate that we can get ahold of them for anything," Principal Joyce said.

Scott Marquardt at SWIF is supporting the three school districts engaged in this program.

"With the generous financial investment and ongoing technical assistance from the GTCUW, visionary leadership of school administration and faculty, incredible engagement of the private sector, and strong collaboration with our regional partners, students in these three districts receive outstanding experiences and educational opportunities to help build the talent pipeline that our region's businesses need to compete in a global marketplace," Scott said.

"It's exciting that you have so many people coming together around a common purpose," Principal Joyce said.

**"We have to have a team approach and keep our minds on what keeps our community vibrant in the future."**

Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, Southwest/ West Central Service Cooperative, and Minnesota West Community and Technical College are partners in the Windom Career Pathways Program, ensuring this grant project complements and leverages other education and workforce development underway, including the regional LYFT career pathways initiative funded by the state legislature. Projects like these are part of Southwest Initiative Foundation's Grow Our Own efforts, which aim to support all southwest Minnesota kids from cradle to career.



## Growing good things

Diego Martinez is a freshman at Windom Area High School who's been playing varsity football since 8th grade. He'd like

to play professionally but knows it's a long shot. He's interested in the Health Science Pathway and becoming a physical therapist.

This school year, Diego learned to care for plants in the Green House Management course, part of the Agriculture Pathways. Students are responsible for planting, harvesting and managing a hydroponic tower garden.

The towers are futuristic white poles dotted with bouquets of green plants, all of it gleaming under grow lights. Lettuce is the main crop and is served in the school cafeteria. Diego notes students also see how well they can grow other plants hydroponically. Among the greens, an experimental sunflower raises its yellow head. The test plants are a way students learn to take risks to see if their ideas take root – or not.

"It could be a good risk or a bad risk," Diego said. "You learn to care for something, too. It's almost like having a pet."

Left: Maria Sanchez Macias (left) practices checking the blood pressure of fellow Windom Area High School student Daniela Bonilla. Right: Mr. Jim Axford helps Health Science Pathway students Neena Hubbard (left) and Angela Rodriguez Cerda with a blood pressure cuff. Mr. Axford is a certified EMT with the Windom Ambulance Service and teaches Introduction to Medical Careers in the Health Science Pathway. He also teaches 5th and 6th grade music, oversees the school district's three media centers and assists with district testing.







## Glen and Jackie Herfurth

### SUPPORT CHILD CARE IN MONTEVIDEO

When Glen and Jackie Herfurth came to Montevideo in 1961, the young couple had two small boys and a deep desire to make connections. After living in Minneapolis and traveling five days a week for work, Glen had taken a job at Anderson Super Service, a local petroleum jobber and regional tire distributor.

“We wanted to live in a small town with good churches, quality schools and a vibrant business community, where we could put down roots. We found all of that in Montevideo,” Glen said.

“It was exciting for me to go shopping or downtown or to the grocery store and see people I knew. It was just fun being connected. The word ‘community’ really describes it,” Jackie noted.

They settled in, and Glen changed jobs to work at First National Bank, where he stayed for 33 years.

“My work at the bank helped me become aware of the needs and opportunities in our community,” Glen said.

Their family grew, adding three girls. Jackie’s interest in school, church and other organizations further expanded Herfurths’ desire to help their community.

Glen became “Mr. Fundraiser,” advocating for projects including a new school and a renovated senior center. In 2001, he was on the founding board the Montevideo Area Community Foundation, one of Southwest Initiative Foundation’s (SWIF) 30 community foundation affiliates. Glen feels having a local community foundation connects Montevideo.

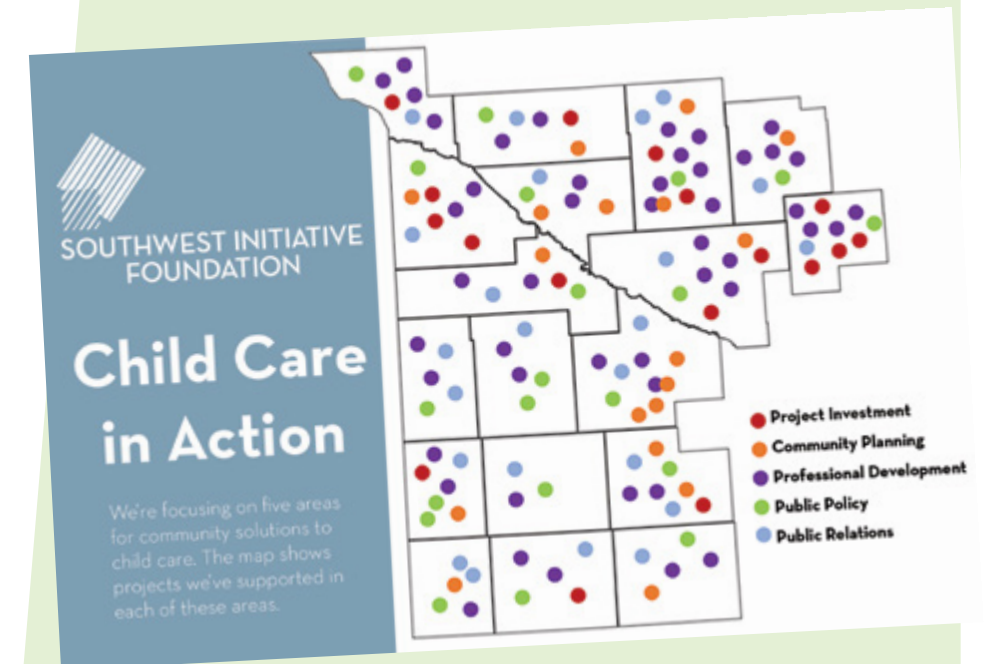
“I think SWIF through its history has done a great job of looking at the region and the economic ambitions in the region and instead of building buildings, they built the community. That was true with agriculture, with small business, and we think it’s one of the things that’s going to happen with Grow Our Own,” Glen said.

Herfurths want our kids in the region today to have a great place to grow up – just like their kids had. They inquired about how they could use a Qualified Charitable Distribution from an Individual Retirement Account to support Grow Our Own in their hometown.

Southwest Initiative Foundation’s team of staff researched opportunities and needs in Montevideo, then shared several ideas with Glen and Jackie. They chose to give \$1,000 to support Little Thunder Hawk Care, the only

center-based child care provider in town. Its staff needed a crib surveillance camera system in the infant room to help retain and expand infant spots, which are often the hardest child care slots for families to secure because of the staff-child ratio requirement.

SWIF has leveraged well over \$1 million to help communities find solutions to the child care crisis over the last several years. This work has helped create or retain nearly 1,000 child care slots in the region, benefiting kids, families and local economies. Check out the “Child Care in Action” graphic to see where we’ve helped with planning and investing in local projects, providing professional development for providers close to home, and ensuring leaders and the general public have access to information and understand current child care issues.



“We’re really pleased that SWIF exists to give us guidance on what needs there are and what kind of organization might be able to fill those. The staff at SWIF keeps in touch with our local community foundation and other organizations to help them grow and prosper and fulfill the goals that they set for themselves,” Glen said.

**Consider a gift to support our child care providers at [swifoundation.org/donate](https://swifoundation.org/donate) or by returning the enclosed envelope.**





Dr. Danielle Ourada with her son, Beau, and her mom, Connie Serbus, who is the office manager at Active Life.



## ADJUSTING TO SMALL BUSINESS OWNERSHIP IN *Redwood Falls*

When Beau Ourada is ready for his twice-weekly adjustment, he marches down the hallway at Active Life Chiropractic in Redwood Falls like he owns the place, which isn't too far from the truth: His mom is the boss, and his grandma is the officer manager. Dr. Danielle Ourada owns Active Life Chiropractic and has been adjusting Beau's spine since he was two days old.

"I love babies and toddlers. They react much quicker to the adjustment; you can see it before they leave," Dani said.

As a high school student growing up in Franklin, Dani was active in sports. After an injury that left her unable to stand because of pain, a local chiropractor in Bird Island helped her heal.

"Ever since then, that's all I wanted to be, a chiropractor," said Dani, who received her Doctor of Chiropractic degree in 2014 from Northwestern Health Sciences University in Bloomington, Minn.

Following graduation, Dani quickly realized she wanted to run her own practice and started researching opening a business.

"There was a need in Redwood Falls, and I knew I wanted to be here; this is where my family is. I would not have a business without my family," said Dani, whose mom, Connie Serbus, is the office manager at Active Life.

Creating her own job opportunity has not been easy. The first bank Dani approached for a loan turned her down. Then Dani partnered with Bremer Bank and Southwest Initiative Foundation's (SWIF) Microenterprise Loan Program.

In addition to financing, Dani wanted help with marketing and hired a corporate management firm to boost her growth. But the national firm was out of touch with doing business in a rural community, and its recommendations didn't work. Dani felt like she was throwing her money away: "No one ever came out to see me. No one ever set foot in here from the management firm."

She ended her contract and relied instead on the free technical assistance that's part of every Microenterprise Loan through SWIF. Jackie Turner, SWIF Economic Development Officer, stops to visit Dani about every six weeks and gives her personalized assistance.

"Jackie has been amazing and has really helped with marketing. If things aren't going well, she really gets you out of your funk," Dani said.

"Dani is constantly raising the bar for herself and growing the business," Jackie said. "Working with her the last five years has been such a pleasure. She understands that you cannot become complacent as a business owner. You must consistently work on it."

This fall, Active Life Chiropractic will celebrate its five-year anniversary, and Dani is starting to see the business growth she's been working toward. She's added an independent massage therapist in her space and started offering DOT and sports physicals. In the future, she hopes to become certified in acupuncture.

## Support for economic recovery

We don't just support businesses as they get started: We're here for southwest Minnesota's entrepreneurs in the wake of challenges and change, including COVID-19. Part of our immediate response was offering loan deferments for all our current business clients. We're also working with chambers, economic development partners and state and federal agencies to help ensure our southwest Minnesota businesses can access the resources they need. **Visit [swifoundation.org/recovery](https://swifoundation.org/recovery) for more small business resources.**

"It's been really fun. It's amazing to see how she grows," said Dani's mom, Connie.

Since Beau came along almost two years ago, entrepreneurship has been even more of a balancing act. If Beau's sick and can't go to child care in Seaforth, Dani's husband, Michael, often takes parenting duties. He works for Redwood Electric Co-op as a lineman and has some flexibility. In a pinch, Dani brings Beau to the office. Clients don't mind. One benefit of the small community is Dani has built relationships – even friendships – with her clients, and they understand: Her success as a business owner and a parent is part of their success as a community.



## SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE FOUNDATION

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Hutchinson, MN 55350

### NEW BOARD MEMBER



Theresa Zaske of Balaton has been elected to the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) Board of Directors.

Theresa is the Community Relations Manager at Schwan's Company and has long been devoted to supporting local nonprofits. She helped found the Marshall Community Foundation and Balaton Area Community Foundation,

two of SWIF's affiliate partners. Theresa currently serves on the Balaton Area Community Foundation advisory board and previously served with the United Way of Southwest Minnesota, Prairie Home Hospice and Healthy56258. She also helped with the start up of the nonprofit PFLAG Buffalo Ridge/Marshall.

We're also excited to welcome Tiffany Barnard as our new Philanthropy Manager! Meet Tiff at [swifoundation.org/staff](http://swifoundation.org/staff).

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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