

RMJ

Rural Minnesota Journal

Women in Rural Minnesota

Fall 2008



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Any opinions voiced in the Journal are those solely of the authors and not necessarily of the Center.

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Editor's note

Marnie Werner

So where's the Journal?

That's the question I've been fielding for the last eight months. Yes, we did skip an issue. The Center has undergone some major changes in the last year, but those changes haven't affected our core mission, which is to generate timely, useful research on public policy issues affecting rural Minnesota and those who live there.

So, welcome back to the Journal. In this issue, we're going to talk in particular about women in rural Minnesota. What is it about life in rural Minnesota that makes circumstances different for women? That's the question we asked when we first set out to put this issue together. Is life really any different for women living outside the Twin Cities metro area compared to those who live within those seven counties?

We brought together a group of talented authors to address just those questions, and their answers can be found within these covers. From the economic and socio-demographic realities of being female in Greater Minnesota to integrating work, life and children to growing old here, our authors looked at, analyzed and discussed just what unique issues greet women here every day. And the answers are interesting.

There's the fact that jobs are fewer and farther between and generally lower paying.

Childcare options are scarcer and so is healthcare.

Living in a small town can be isolating, especially if you're not too fond of everyone knowing what you're doing every minute of every day.

And the distance and time involved in getting from point A to point B is an issue in itself. It just takes longer.

So why do we do it? Why do we stay? Some don't, but for those who do, the answer is different for every one of us. Many women

don't mind, even thrive, in the society of close-knit communities and would feel lost in a big city. There are friends and family to help out in a pinch, especially when it comes to looking after the kids. There's a certain freedom from fear, or at least from the tension of always needing to be on the lookout for trouble, again where children are involved. And then there are the people who just like the calmer life, the lower level of rush and crowds and traffic.

So in this issue of the *Rural Minnesota Journal*, we chose to examine what concerns are unique to rural women and how they can be addressed through public policy. Not because these are special problems or new problems or more important problems than those experienced by people in other parts of the state, men or women, but because our rural population holds so much possibility, and there may be things we can do to help let loose that potential.

Women are working outside the home and off the farm, helping to make ends meet, and that's nothing new. Women have worked alongside their husbands and fathers and brothers in households and on farms and businesses since families first set foot on the prairies and in the forests of this state. Women also keep the unpaid wheels of community moving, volunteering to help the elderly, running the local fundraiser or helping out in the classroom, providing valuable services that would otherwise cost somebody, most likely taxpayers, significant money.

Today, though, more than ever, rural women are moving into roles of leadership, too. They're graduating from college at a higher rate than ever, starting their own businesses at record rates, too, getting elected to local and state office and operating their own farms. They're taking the initiative and doing the best they can or better to improve their lives for themselves and their families.

So where does the *Journal* come in? We think more information is better than less when it comes to decision making, and even better is a discussion of that information and how it can be put to the best use.

When we started the *Journal* in 2006, we did so hoping that it would contribute to the conversation on public policy issues affecting rural life, and so far it has. This issue should be no exception.