

# CENTER *for* RURAL POLICY and DEVELOPMENT

*Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future*

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## *Geller Leaving Center*

After nearly a decade of serving as president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development, Dr. Jack Geller left his position at the end of August. "Jack has literally helped build the Center brick by brick from an idea brought forth in 1997 to the statewide organizational resource it is today, and we are grateful for the job he has done," noted Dan Reardon, chairman of the CRPD board of directors. "Additionally, Jack has agreed to stay on as a consultant through the end of 2007 to assist us during this transition period."



Created in 1997, the Center for Rural Policy and Development is Minnesota's only statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan rural policy research center. As such it conducts objective research studies on economic and demographic trends in rural Minnesota; consults with policymakers, community and economic development leaders; and publishes a variety of information resources, including the Atlas of Minnesota Online and the Rural Minnesota Journal.

"There is little doubt that this has been the most challenging and rewarding work of my career. I want to thank the board for giving me the opportunity to help build a statewide organization from scratch. It was definitely as exciting and as challenging as I hoped it would be," Geller said. "But now that the Center is an established, integral part of the rural policy landscape and is on a strong financial and programmatic footing, it just seems like the right time for me to leave to pursue some of my other interests."

When asked what lies next for Geller, he responded that after 10 years at the Center, a few months off to relax and recharge was his first priority. He did note that he has been considering for some time a return to a university setting, where he served as a professor, academic researcher and administrator prior to his appointment at the Center.

Dr. Louis Hohlfeld, a founding board member of the Center for Rural Policy and Development, will be serving as interim president of the Center during the transition. Dr. Hohlfeld is recently retired from the McKnight Foundation as Senior Program Officer. A committee headed by a member of the board will begin the search for a new president immediately. In the meantime, the Center's board of directors has recently approved a strategic plan and on developing research and other information tools for rural Minnesota.

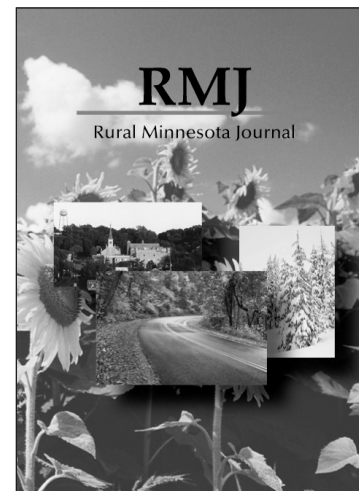
## *New Rural Minnesota Journal is here*

The latest issue of the Rural Minnesota Journal is now available. This issue tackles the topic of institutional change. To cover such a broad topic, we recruited ten authors to discuss four different areas: local governance, health care, education and telecommunications. Each topic will be addressed by at least one, and in some cases two or three authors all discussing alternate views of the issue.

"We're very excited to be putting these authors side by side in one publication," said Marnie Werner, program manager at the Center and editor of the Journal. "They all have thought-provoking takes on their respective issues, and I think people will be very interested in hearing and comparing what they have to say."

The authors include Joe Nathan and Laura Accomando from the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota and Joe Graba of Education | Evolving writing on the future of K-12 education; Terry Hill of the Rural Health Resource Center discussing finance reform that can help keep rural hospitals viable; Anthony Filipovitch of Minnesota State Mankato and Gail Miller, Renville County Recorder, discussing directions for local government; and Katie Johnson of Park Region Telecom, Bernadine Joselyn from the Blandin Foundation and consultant Gary Fields, and Milda Hedblom from Augsburg College with their takes on the future of broadband infrastructure.

As always, the Journal will be available free of charge in print (there is a small charge for postage if it is mailed) and on our web site at [www.ruralmn.org](http://www.ruralmn.org). To order a copy, use the form on page 2 or call the Center at (507) 934-7700.



## *Rural Minnesota Journal wins award*

The Center is pleased to announce that the Rural Minnesota Journal is now the award-winning Rural Minnesota Journal. The Minnesota Magazine and Publications Association recently awarded the Journal the Gold Award for best single-topic issue in a special-interest publication under 60,000 circulation. The MMPA is a non-profit trade association for Minnesota's publishing community, with over 150 member publications, ranging from Northern Gardener and USA Hockey to Minnesota Monthly and the Utne Reader.

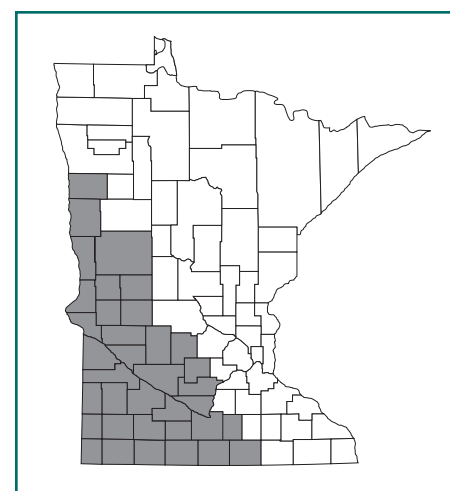
## *New federal grant funds major regional economic development initiative*

The U.S. Department of Labor has announced a \$5 million grant to the state intended to benefit a large part of rural Minnesota. Government agencies, nonprofits, educational institutions and businesses in a 36-county region of southwestern and western Minnesota banded together to apply for the grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration WIRED program, a major federal program for workforce development.

WIRED grants have been awarded all over the country in the last few years. Minnesota's effort is called the Ag-Innovation Triangle, and the project will be concentrating on the region's two main assets: alternative and renewable fuels development

and supporting manufacturing, said Connie Ireland, Regional Administrator for the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development in Mankato. While the grant itself is aimed specifically at workforce development, those involved in applying for and now administering the grant hope it can become a major catalyst for economic development in an area that is experiencing some of the state's most difficult demographic and economic changes.

"The ultimate goal is regional transformation, prosperity, entrepreneurship, healthy communities, and skilled and empowered workers," said Ireland. The population of southwestern and western Minnesota



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**New federal grant funds**  
CONTINUED FROM 1

has been decreasing and aging faster than in any other region of the state for the past 20 years at least. The area has also been experiencing a rapid growth in its immigrant population. “The region’s population tends to have lower educational attainment and lower-paying jobs than the state average. We’re planning for this to change that,” Ireland said.

This program, however, is not intended to be an effort where the government is expected to do everything, said Ireland. The Ag-Innovation Triangle sponsors are a consortium of government agencies, nonprofits, schools and institutions of higher education, regional foundations and businesses. Cooperation between the public sector, private businesses and nonprofits and educational institutions is the key to the program’s success, she said. A large part of the program, workforce development, will involve improving workforce skills through coordinated and innovative educational opportunities. Key participants will be the region’s 16 colleges and universities, plus the K-12 school system, and will concentrate not only on students but people already employed, dislocated workers and immigrants. K-12 and higher education institutions will be working together with businesses to understand better the skills that are needed in today’s high-tech manufacturing and research. They will also be working with kids and parents to inform them about emerging industries in the region.

Business development will involve improved opportunities for small businesses and startups to connect with established and experienced business owners and investors. An important part of the program overall will be research and technology transfer. The program will encourage academic and industry partnerships that will conduct applied research, then transfer technology from the campus to small businesses and entrepreneurs.

This business and workforce development together will help improve wages, keeping workers and their families in the region and increasing wealth in their communities. “By raising the skill level of the workers and at the same time developing the businesses that would employ them, we’re not only improving the economy of the region, but we’re giving our kids an economic reason to stay, to say, ‘Living here doesn’t mean a low-paying job.’”

The region has already in the last few years become a center for renewable and alternative fuels research and development, so the Ag-Innovation Triangle will focus on this area to begin with, said Ireland. While the initial grant is for \$5 million, organizers hope the funds available for the program will become much bigger. A leadership board has been assembled and soon they will begin forming action teams to take on four main areas of the grant: regional leadership and identity, talent development, entrepreneurial business/growth, and breakthrough research. “This starts as a workforce development program, but we believe that given the potential in the area for innovation, we can turn this into much more. We’re looking at regional transformation that brings with it prosperity, innovation, entrepreneurship, healthy communities and skilled and empowered workers,” said Ireland.

**Notes from Health Forum**  
*now available*

Earlier in the summer, the Center for Rural Policy held a Rural Minnesota Forum on health care in conjunction with the Minnesota Rural Health Conference. During the Forum, attendees got together with state legislators and other state officials to discuss the most pressing issues in health care in rural Minnesota. The topic of the discussion was “What every legislator should know about rural health care.” The notes from those discussions have been summarized and are now available from the Center in print form and on our web site. “The notes don’t serve as actual recommendations by the Center, but they do demonstrate a lot of the frustration and concern among people involved in health care in rural Minnesota,” said Center program manager Marnie Werner. “People were very pleased to be able to have an open forum like this with policy makers and to be able to voice their concerns.” To receive a copy of the health forum notes, contact the Center at (507) 934-7700 or crpd@ruralmn.org, or download them from our web site at www.ruralmn.org.

**Center staff participate in**  
*second national networking*  
*conference*

The Center for Rural Policy and Development was once again pleased to be part of the Kellogg Foundation’s “Rural People, Rural Policy” training session. Program manager Marnie Werner attended the one-week learning session in Phoenix early in October.

“Rural People, Rural Policy” is a five-year initiative of the Kellogg Foundation that brings together individuals from all over the United States representing a variety of organizations and issues. Earlier this year, the Center was awarded a five-year grant to participate in the three learning sessions this year and further work sessions in subsequent years.

The purpose of the initiative is to build networks among organizations across the country representing rural interests. During the learning sessions, attendees gain knowledge in the principles of networking, framing issues effectively and communicating needs and goals.

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**Institutional Change:** Fall 2007  
*Possibilities for the Future*

Yes, I would like to order the Center for Rural Policy & Development’s **Rural Minnesota Journal: Institutional Change: Possibilities for the Future.**

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All CRPD publications, including RMJ, can be downloaded for free at [www.ruralmn.org](http://www.ruralmn.org).



Two significant developments occurred at the Center for Rural Policy and Development during the last quarter. The first and the most significant was Jack Geller's departure from the Center after almost 10 years of building the Center to what it is today. Jack, along with some founding board members, has been with the Center from the beginning, during trying times and challenges, as well as the celebrations and growth. Jack was a stabilizing factor over the years and helped the Center mature. I know I can speak for the board of directors, and I hope much of Greater Minnesota, when I offer Jack our deepest gratitude and wish him the best of fortunes.

But now let me introduce myself. My name is Louis Hohlfeld. I am serving as the interim president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development until the board of directors is able to select a new and permanent leader. I am no stranger to the niches and crannies outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Last month I retired from the McKnight Foundation after 15 years as the senior program officer for Greater Minnesota. During those years I had the honor and pleasure to serve as McKnight's liaison and shepherd of the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (for more information, go to [www.mcknight.org/InitiativeFoundations](http://www.mcknight.org/InitiativeFoundations)), one in each of the six regions of Greater Minnesota. Like the Center for Rural Policy and Development, the Initiative Foundations grew to maturity over the last ten years and were on similar trajectories. My background also includes 10 years with the United Way of the Minneapolis Area, where I served as director of community resources and spent my final two years there as director of allocations and community resources. I have a master's degree in Sociology from the New School for Social Research and a Ph.D. from The Union Institute in Social and Political Analysis.

Besides Jack's departure and my arrival, the other development and equally as important is the completion of the first half of a new strategic plan for the Center. The entire board is involved in its development, but the lion's share of the work is being carried by Sandy Layman, a new board member and president of Iron Range Resources. She chairs a task force that includes Dan Readon, board chair; Lois Mack, vice-chair; Neil Eckles, treasurer; and Jim Houle, another new board member who

## Changing Times at the Center

Louis G. Hohlfeld, Ph.D.  
Interim President

brings fresh insights. The strategic plan is still in its development phase, so I am unable to provide any details at this time. However, I believe I can take the liberty of outlining in general terms some of the new directions the Board of Directors is considering.

First, as many of you know, the cornerstone of the Center for Rural Policy and Development has been research and its dissemination. Through the years the directors have been quite pleased with the Center's research products. In the future the board is considering expanding the volume of its research and broadening its scope. It is also considering directing more of its energies and resources to disseminating the strategies and solutions the research suggests, and in appropriate situations making recommendations the research strongly points to.

The second direction the board is considering is the development of key strategic partnerships that will leverage the Center's capabilities, expertise, credibility, and knowledge. By aggressively prospecting and developing key partnerships, the Center can more effectively leverage existing strengths, positioning itself to broaden its reach, impact, and contribution to the well being and vitality of rural areas. Since the board remains committed to an organization that is lean and nimble, it is essential that the Center develop partnerships to expand its activities.

Third, the strategic planning committee wants to implement a sophisticated set of performance indicators, benchmarks, and measurements to accurately and continually monitor the quality and effectiveness of the Center's research products, communication tools, and networks. The evaluation system, the committee believes, should not only look for areas for improvement, but it should also point to excellence and how to capitalize on the Center's strengths. The process of measuring the Center's work should build its capacity by documenting its challenges, missed opportunities, and stellar performance. I appreciate the time and attention you give to the Center and its products. The Center is here to serve the people of Minnesota, particularly those communities and individuals outside the Twin Cities metro area. You are our constituents. Please feel free to e-mail us at [crpd@ruralmn.org](mailto:crpd@ruralmn.org) with your comments or suggestions to improve the vitality of rural communities.



## DNR devoting comprehensive plan to addressing decline in outdoor recreation

Studies by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources over the last few years are finding that the percentage of people participating in outdoor recreation is going down. Everything from hiking and biking to hunting and fishing is affected. And not just in Minnesota. Nationwide studies have shown the same trends, according to the DNR. While population growth in some regions of the state makes it look like rates are actually increasing a little in some activities, overall the percentage is moving downward.

The DNR hopes to address these trends with its State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2008-2012, a comprehensive plan the DNR puts together on a regular basis to guide decision makers and outdoors managers in dealing with outdoor issues in the state. According to the DNR, increasing participation in outdoor recreation will be the priority of this year's plan.

According to the DNR surveys, Minnesotans still consider outdoor activity important, but they are finding it more and more difficult to make time for it. When asked their most important reasons for participating in outdoor activities, people said most frequently to enjoy the natural scenery (71%), to get or keep physically fit (59%), and to spend leisure time with family (57%). But time, or the lack of it, was cited as the number one reason for not engaging in outdoor activities (61%), followed by outdoor pests such as mosquitoes (59%). Other factors included not enough money to participate more (39%), not having a companion to go with to outdoor recreation areas (27%), and outdoor recreation areas being too crowded (26%). But while these percentages apply to the population as a whole, the largest declines were seen in the 16- to 44-year-old age group.

There are a couple different implications for the state if outdoor recreation is truly on the decline. For one, the DNR links the decrease with health. Statistically, Minnesota is a very healthy state, DNR officials point out, but its residents have not been immune to the obesity epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 20% to 24% of Minnesota's population is obese. Obesity has been linked to many illnesses, including diabetes and, just recently, cancer. But there are also economic implications, particularly for

businesses dependent on outdoor tourism: not just bait shops, but sporting goods stores, outfitters and motels and hotels.

Economy-wise, these changes may not have such an impact in the Twin Cities area, where continued population growth actually creates a small forecasted increase in some outdoor activities. Here, if the forecasts are right, there will still be demand for and pressure on parks and other outdoor facilities. The same is expected in the lakes region, from St. Cloud up to Brainerd and northwards, where the population is also growing fast. In the rest of Minnesota, however, such a decline could have different impacts, especially in regions that are losing population. Fewer people coming in from elsewhere to hunt, fish and hike would mean trouble for those local businesses dependent on them. The DNR hopes their comprehensive plan can reverse some of these trends through various targeted programs that get people back outside again.

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FALL 2007

# NEWS letter

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