

# RMJ

Rural Minnesota Journal



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Rural Minnesota Journal

Taking the Helm:  
How rural Minnesota's next  
generation sees the future

2011



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RURAL POLICY  
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*Seeking solutions for Greater Minnesota's future*

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## Editor's Note

Marnie Werner

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Ever wanted to travel into the future?

Talk to some kids. They're little time machines. How? Look at them. They aren't hauling any baggage behind them in the form of experiences telling them they can't do something or their ideas won't work. For them, every direction they look is forward, and all ideas are possible. What they tell you they are going to do is what they fully intend to do. Listen to them, and you'll get a picture of the future.

It's human nature to look back when we're trying to prepare for the future. After all, as we well know, those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. Our vision of the future is framed in the context of our past, so it's hard not to base our decisions and plans on the changes we have marked over the course of our lives. The last 60 years, from the heyday of agriculture, manufacturing and mining after World War II through the decline and consolidation of all three, to the beginnings of a resurgence, have marked long-term changes in the state and have created a frame of reference for so many of our policy decisions. In recent years, however, our state and our nation have been going through a major transition, driven partly by generation, largely by technology, changing everything we do and how we do it. It's different enough that it's been dubbed "The New Normal."

For the generations coming up, though, the "New Normal" isn't new at all; it's just normal. Those in high school, just entering college or just leaving college — those just



starting their adult lives — this generation is preparing to take the helm on everything from state and local government to business, education and health care. They're at step one in this new reality. But are they ready to go?

That's why for this edition of the Rural Minnesota Journal, we're looking at the issues where young people and rural Minnesota intersect. How do they see life right now, and how do they see the future? What roles will they play? How do older Minnesotans pass the torch on to younger Minnesotans? For this edition of the Rural Minnesota Journal we tried to get authors under the age of 40 and for the most part succeeded. All of the contributors work and live in Greater Minnesota.

Here's what you'll find in this issue:

Ben Winchester and his fellow authors offer up an intriguing look into why the "brain drain" may not be living up to its publicity. But with the potential for families to move back to rural communities, what should those communities be doing to help this trend? With Minnesota's population aging, preparing an adequate health care workforce is a priority. Laurissa Stigen, executive director of the Central Minnesota Area Health Education Center, discusses ways her organization and others are working to introduce kids to health care professions in rural communities. Priscilla Day of the University of Minnesota, Duluth, discusses a troublesome trend in American Indian youth in Minnesota, the prevalence of out-of-home placements and their impact on the children, their families and the tribe itself.

Bryan Joyce, a social studies teacher at Windom Area Schools, goes over the four components necessary in education to create future leaders. For Neil Linscheid of the University of Minnesota Extension in Marshall, attracting people to rural communities begins with the message. Residents need to figure out what their message is, then communicate, communicate, communicate. Young people are the perfect candidates to be entrepreneurs, says Michael Nolan, director of the Small Business Development Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and a serial entrepreneur himself. According to Nolan, kids and young adults are full of ideas, and rural communities would be wise to encourage them.

Tracy Gaalswyk is a young farmer in rural Nicollet County who understands the impact of the changes in technology and society on farming. Gaalswyk comments on the differences between farming in the past and farming today, and what needs to be considered for preserving farming into the future. And Jessica Beyer reflects on issues with today's local government, how government operations and participation are changing, and how the upcoming generations can fit in.

Two themes run through these articles (unplanned and unintentionally). One is the impact of technology: how it has changed everything in our lives and how it is shaping the future. The second is that it is not necessarily a disaster that young people are leaving their hometowns when they finish high school. In leaving, they are generally going someplace to gain an education and skills, and yes, not all of them come back. But some of them do, and many more might. The key is to make sure your hometown is one they want to come back to, because when they do, says Winchester, they're coming back with their own children. Look in those children's faces, and you'll see the future.



## **The Glass Half-Full: A New View of Rural Minnesota**

**Benjamin Winchester, Tobias Spanier and Art Nash**

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Describing rural Minnesota can be a challenge. The structural changes we have witnessed in agriculture and manufacturing have certainly forced residents and decision makers to rethink our future. On top of this, literature is rife with descriptions of the loss of our children, the aging population, and outmigration. We believe this deficit view of our rural communities cannot continue to dominate our thinking about the future of our small towns.

The topic of “brain drain” — the loss of young adults following their high school graduation — leads to much hand wringing. This is nowhere more apparent than in the book, *Hollowing Out the Middle*, by Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas.<sup>1</sup> In it, high school graduates are classified into four groups: “Achievers,” “Stayers,” “Seekers,” and “Returners.” While we will not go into detail regarding these classifications, it is a valuable tool for school administrators and school boards to better understand these dynamics, as there has been little research to document the varying motivations of this age cohort.

It is implied in the book, however, that small towns that do not provide opportunities for these young people to stay in the community may be putting themselves at risk. As the book has become read more widely, media outlets in particular have reported a connection between the brain drain and the apparent demise of our small towns. There is no research base that supports this conclusion, however. Moreover, there is little acknowledgment that the ultimate educational success of rural youth points to a significant asset in rural areas. Rural

educators are succeeding in creating college-ready high school graduates.

The loss of young adults is just one facet in the complex picture of migration within the life cycle of our population, however.<sup>2</sup> People migrate at all ages, and while some rural researchers choose to focus on one specific age demographic, the intention of this article is to put the traditional brain-drain concept in context with other migration patterns we find across our great state of Minnesota.<sup>3</sup>

There is a generally held belief that people want to live in metropolitan areas. However, there is evidence that small towns and rural areas are a residential preference for large parts of the urban population. Research completed by the Pew Research Center shows that 51% of Americans would prefer to live in a small town or rural area.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, research by the Economic Research Service illustrates, in fact, the Baby Boom generation's preference for residing in a variety of places, both urban and rural.<sup>5</sup>

These preferences translate into population growth. Commonly referred to as "the rural rebound,"<sup>6,7</sup> rural populations overall grew in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. Nationally, between 1990 and 1999, over 2.2 million Americans moved from metropolitan counties to non-metropolitan counties. The new 2010 Census has just been released, and soon we will be able to update this statistic with the most recent data.

The focus on migration rather than overall population change allows a picture to emerge of the complex relationship between age and residential preferences.<sup>8</sup> By isolating the dynamics of age-related out-migration and in-migration, we can gain a better understanding of how our small towns play a valuable role in the life-cycle decisions people make across our state. The highly mobile nature of our population, together with the changes in population and demographics of rural areas, are enough to warrant further investigation.

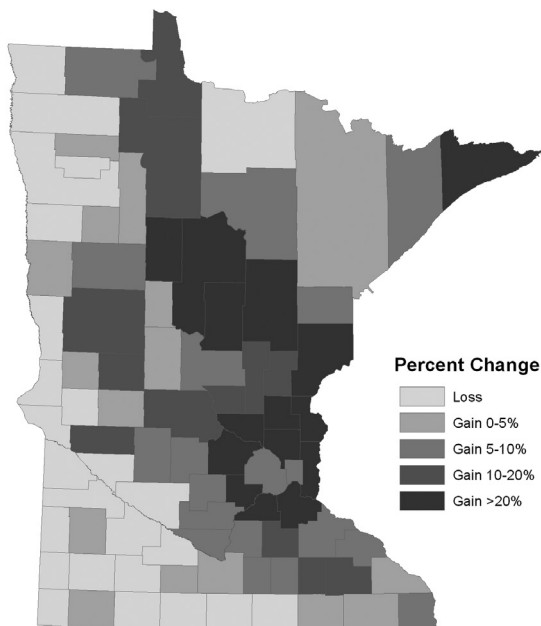
### ***Understanding population change***

Government entities in the United States use total population counts as a measure when determining funding, assistance, and the redrawing of political boundaries. A census

of the population is a constitutional requirement of the U.S. government and is done every ten years. The information gathered by the U.S. Census is often used by local units of government to analyze the trends in population changes and plan accordingly. Frequently, the conventional analysis is done by comparing county population from one decade to the next. It seldom expands to a more detailed understanding of population change in the county. This change in county population, though, has implications for funding and, more importantly, the morale of a county.

The map in Figure 1 relies on data from the 1990-2000 population change data set, as do the data found throughout the remainder of the report. The counties losing population are all in the lightest shade of gray. As the map shows, the southwest and western border counties experienced the greatest loss. Growth occurred in a concentric ring surrounding the core of Hennepin and Ramsey counties, as well as along a corridor connecting the Twin Cities to St.

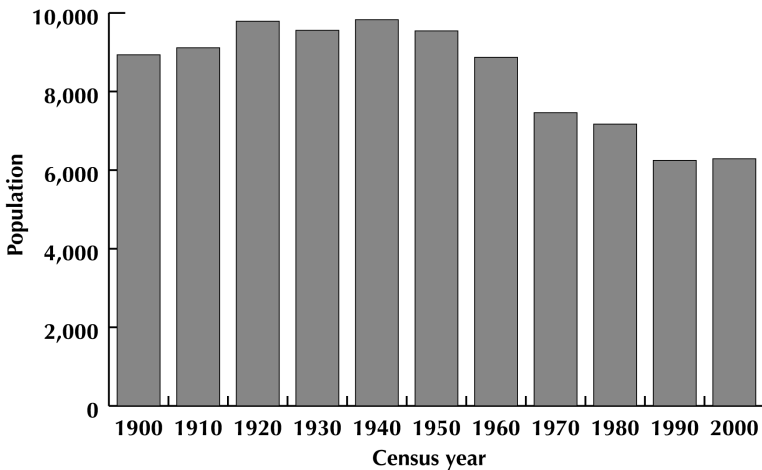
**Figure 1:** Percent population change, 1990-2000.



Cloud and Rochester. The heavily recreational counties also experienced tremendous growth in and around both Brainerd and Bemidji. Retirement and recreational counties accounted for the bulk of population growth in Minnesota between 1990 and 1999.<sup>9</sup>

Grant County, located in west central Minnesota, will be used throughout this article as a way of drawing a more interesting and complex portrait of the changes taking place. This county saw a generally steady and flat total population between 1990 and 2000, which may lead to the perception that nobody has moved to or from the county over the past decade.

*Figure 2: Total population, Grant County, Minnesota, 1900 – 2000.*



However, the story of Minnesota’s rural population change is more interesting and nuanced, especially when we consider that in Minnesota, people move with great frequency. Surely someone moved away from, or moved into, Grant County. Between 1995 and 1999, 43% of all Minnesotans moved to a new residence.<sup>10</sup> We know, however, that the movement of people varies by age, and therefore, we need to fully explore the movement of people by age in greater detail.

This article will also provide a view of population dynamics through an urban-rural lens. The rural-urban continuum code developed by the Economic Research

Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture allows us to separate counties into metropolitan and rural groups by using population statistics and proximity to metropolitan areas. Additionally, the Economic Research Service also classifies certain non-metropolitan counties as recreational.

**Migration profiles**

Researchers generally use two data sources to analyze migration. The first is the long-form data from the decennial Census, which asks respondents to identify where they lived five years ago, along with a plethora of in-depth data about income, housing conditions, and employment. The long form has been a popular method and has proven to be quite useful. However, the last data we have for this is the 2000 Census – and by last, we mean *last*. No longer is the long form used in the decennial Census. The American Community Survey has replaced the long form. Unfortunately, the estimates generated with the methods used for the ACS have significantly high margins of error for small geographies, such as rural counties.

**Table 1:** Counties by Rural, Metropolitan, and Recreational codes, 2003.

Code	Counties
Metropolitan (20)	Anoka, Benton, Carlton, Carver, Chisago, Clay, Dakota, Dodge, Hennepin, Houston, Isanti, Olmsted, Polk, Ramsey, Scott, Sherburne, Stearns, Wabasha, Washington, Wright
Rural Recreation (14)	Aitkin, Becker, Cass, Crow Wing, Douglas, Hubbard, Koochiching, Lake, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen, Mille Lacs, Otter Tail, Pine, St. Louis <sup>11</sup>
Rural Non-Recreation (53)	Beltrami, Big Stone, Blue Earth, Brown, Chippewa, Clearwater, Cook, Cottonwood, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Grant, Itasca, Jackson, Kanabec, Kandiyohi, Kittson, Lac qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Marshall, Martin, Meeker, Morrison, Mower, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles, Norman, Pennington, Pipestone, Pope, Red Lake, Redwood, Renville, Rice, Rock, Roseau, Sibley, Steele, Stevens, Swift, Todd, Traverse, Wadena, Waseca, Watonwan, Wilkin, Winona, Yellow Medicine



The second source is IRS tax returns. This information reports the number of people in a specific county that resided there the year before, moved away since the last year, or moved in. This information can provide year-to-year insights regarding the movement of people within a county. One caution here is that these data are only collected for people who actually file tax returns. Young adults and low-income households that do not file tax forms in any given year are not reported. Additionally, we are unable to break down the data by the age of the individual or household.

So, what can we use to analyze age-specific migration? Generally, when a scientist examines population change from one decade to the next, or one year to the next, the following formula is used:

$$Pop(2000) = Pop(1990) - Out-migrants + In-migrants - Deaths + Births$$

When we try digging deeper into the data, however, we cannot obtain reliable estimates for the migration patterns within specific age cohorts. We need a tool to help us simply and effectively understand population changes within age cohorts.

#### *Simple cohort analysis*

Generating this type of analysis is straightforward. First, we identify the number of people for each age cohort in 1990. From that baseline we expect this same number of people to reside in the county in 2000 – in the age cohort that is 10 years older. For example, if there are 100 people in the 30- to 34-year-old age range in 1990, we would expect 100 people in the 40- to 44-year-old age range in 2000, as they have aged 10 years. This allows a “back-of-the-envelope” type of analysis that any resident can conduct using a single data source.

This technique doesn’t follow each person to see if the same people are in the cohort. Not all of the people who live in a county reside there ten years later, of course. It simply shows the total numbers in each cohort. Using this simple cohort technique, we can examine each five-year age cohort. The size

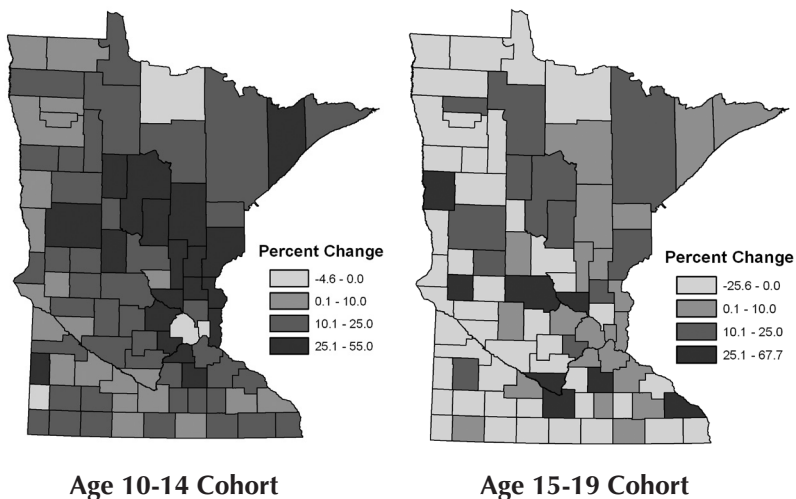
of the *observed* population in an age cohort in 1990 becomes our *expected* 2000 population for the age cohort plus ten years. The difference between these two is calculated to obtain a net gain or loss within each age cohort. (One caution is worth noting here: since this simple model does not incorporate death rates, those age cohorts above the age of 60 should not be analyzed.)

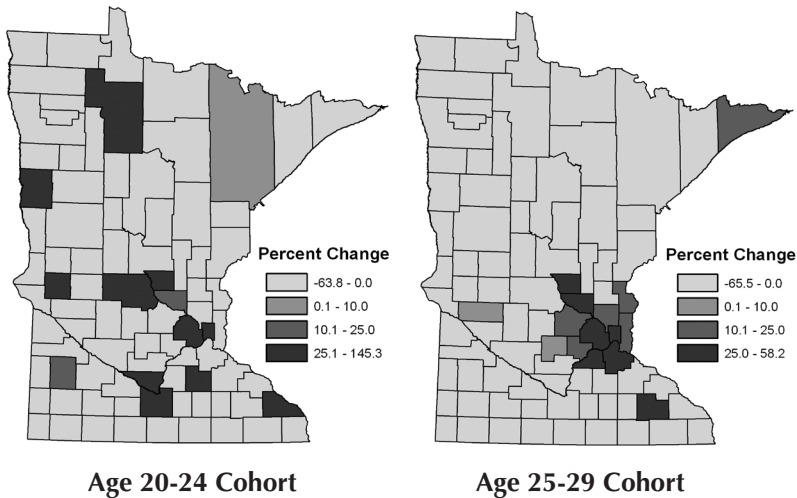
*Statewide findings*

This section will use the simple cohort method to examine the percentage change in age cohorts between 1990 and 2000. The maps below show the geographic variation across the state. Those counties experiencing loss in a specific age cohort are shaded in the lightest color, while the three darker shades of gray display growth at the 0-10%, 10-25%, and >25% levels.

Across the board we find growth in the age 10-14 cohort, with the exception of Hennepin, Koochiching, Pipestone, and Ramsey counties (Figure 3). This is an interesting finding right away since the general belief is that in rural counties family size is decreasing and fertility rates are declining. We will find out more about this later. As we move up to the age 15-19 cohort, there is still growth between 1990 and 2000, but it is

**Figure 3:** Percent change in 10-14 and 15-19 age cohorts, 1990-2000, using the simple cohort method.





**Figure 4:** Percent change in 20-24 and 25-29 age cohorts, 1990-2000.

geographically sporadic. Those counties home to colleges do see growth, including Blue Earth, Clay, Stearns, Stevens, and Winona counties.

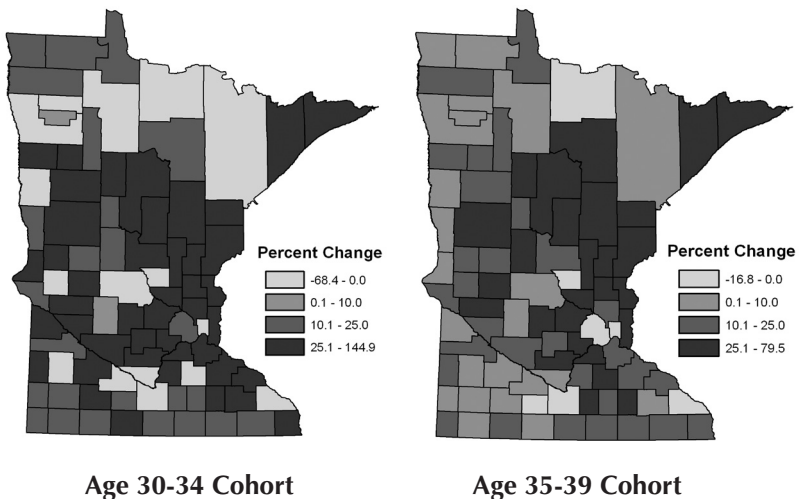
The “brain drain”<sup>12</sup> is a phrase often used to describe the pattern of young adults leaving rural areas to move to metropolitan areas in search of new opportunities such as schooling, jobs, and overall life experience. In Figure 4 we can see that movement: in the age cohort 20-24 there has been a loss in nearly all Minnesota counties. This out-migration appears to be a rule rather than the exception. Lac Qui Parle County saw the most dramatic loss. The county’s 20- to 24-year-old cohort in 2000 was 63.8% smaller than would be expected based on the size of the 10- to 14-year-old group in 1990. This is the brain drain phenomenon. For many good reasons this trend is alarming. Besides Lac qui Parle County, other counties seeing the biggest losses in this age cohort were Traverse (59.5%), Marshall (57.3%), Big Stone (57.1%), and Murray (56.8%). In fact, 62 of the 87 counties (71%) lost 25% or more of youth in this age cohort. The only growth in this cohort can be found in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, along with the college counties mentioned earlier.

Moving up to the 25-29 age cohort the counties experiencing growth are even more geographically concentrated, mostly in the Twin Cities metro area, along with Olmsted (Rochester) and Swift (Appleton prison). So while some individual places may develop strategies to keep kids in the county, the trend is against them.

Figure 5, though, shows a reversal: nearly every rural county in Minnesota experienced a growth in the 30-34 and 35-39 age cohorts, and a majority of them experienced gains of greater than 25%. In other words, a percentage of people who were 20-29 in 1990 were shifting back to rural counties by 2000. Many of the non-metro counties experiencing loss are college towns, presumably because they are losing people following graduation. This is true in Clay, Stearns, Stevens, Blue Earth, and Winona. Those anomalies aside, the positive migration has occurred even in the southwestern portion of the state where, overall, total population has declined. We now see that even in the midst of total population decline, there is growth.

The only counties that witnessed losses in the 35-39 age cohort are Benton, Blue Earth, Hennepin, Koochiching, Ramsey, Watonwan, and Winona. It is interesting that while people appear to move away from metropolitan areas in these

**Figure 5:** Percent change in 30-34 and 35-39 age cohorts, 1990-2000.



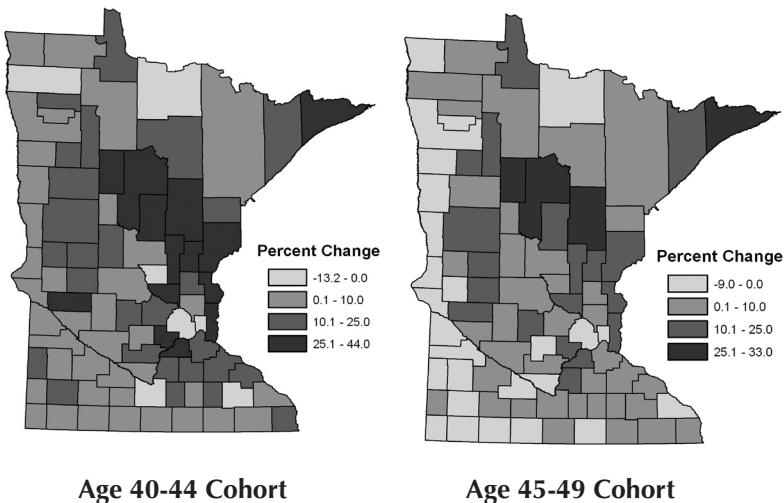
age categories, there is little research documenting this “brain drain” and the implications this may have for the vitality of those areas.

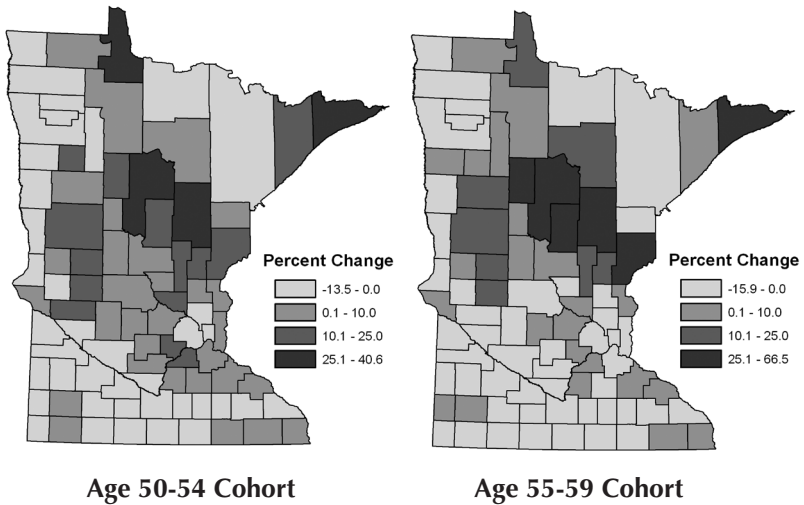
When we see growth in these age cohorts, it begins to make sense that we also see a rise in the 10-14 age cohort. People moving out to rural Minnesota are bringing their kids along. So while it can be easy for the reality of the “brain drain” to dominate how we think about population changes in rural areas, it must be tempered with an overall view of total migratory patterns. Outside of the brain drain age cohorts, we also see some positive news in age cohorts that are larger than expected.

In the 40-44 age cohort (Figure 6) we again see widespread rural growth. Only seven of the 87 counties experienced a loss and they were primarily metropolitan counties, with the exception of Koochiching in the far north. However, once we venture into the 45-49 age cohort, it is not nearly as widespread. The southwest portion of the state, along with the western border counties, appeared to have difficulty retaining members of this age cohort.

As the age of the cohorts increases, the concentration of those counties that have experienced gains shrinks (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Percent change in 40-44 and 45-49 age cohorts, 1990-2000.





**Figure 7:** Percent change in 50-54 and 55-59 age cohorts, 1990-2000.

Geographically, this growth is found in the central part of the state, especially in the Hubbard, Cass, Crow Wing, and Aitkin region. There are few counties in the southern third of the state that are able to hold onto residents in these age cohorts. This becomes an area of concern as residents don't "stick around" as they approach retirement.

It is helpful to examine the statistical variations within each of the age cohorts for the entire state, as we see in Table 2 (next page). On average, Minnesota counties lose people in the 20 to 29 age cohort: it is not an exception to lose young people after they graduate from high school, it is the rule. The minimum percent change column shows that some counties have lost as much as 60 percent of people in the 20- to 34-year-old age cohorts. At the same time, the maximum percent change column shows that other counties have experienced significant gains.

To better understand migration profiles, let's look at the counties grouped by classification. Table 3 (next page) indicates the percentage of counties in each classification group experiencing growth by age cohort.

The 20-24 and 25-29 age cohort gains were concentrated in core metropolitan counties, most specifically Hennepin and

**Table 2:** Percent change statistics by age cohort for Minnesota, 1990-2000.

Age Range	Mean %	Minimum %	Maximum %
10 to 14	17.1	-4.6	55.0
15 to 19	4.7	-25.6	67.7
20 to 24	-23.1	-63.8	145.3
25 to 29	-18.4	-65.5	58.2
30 to 34	25.4	-68.4	144.9
35 to 39	20.2	-16.8	79.5
40 to 44	11.4	-13.2	44.0
45 to 49	5.6	-9.0	33.0
50 to 54	3.8	-13.5	40.6
55 to 59	2.9	-15.9	66.5

**Table 3:** Percentage of counties increasing cohorts size, 1990-2000.

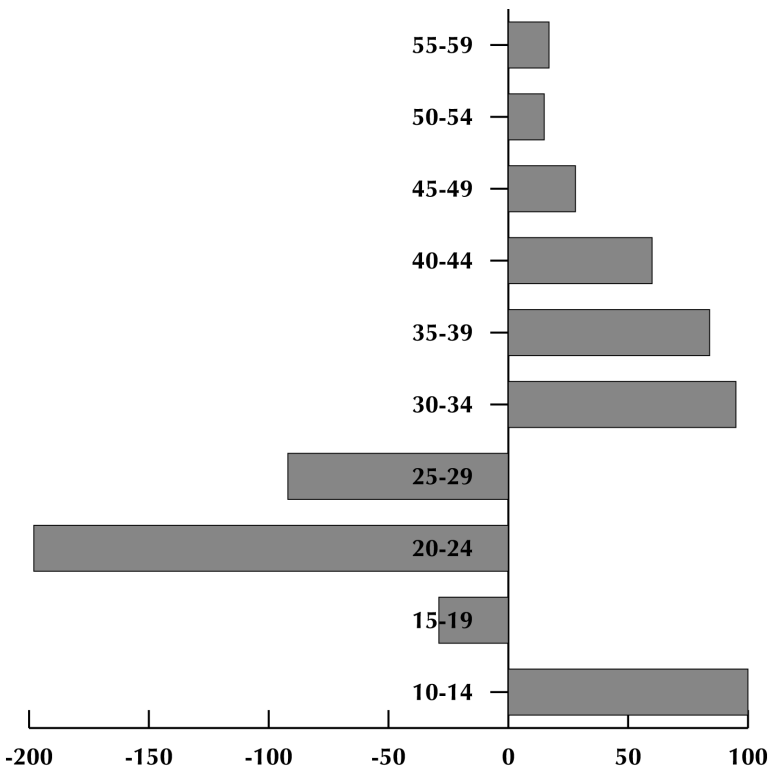
	Metro	Rural Recre- ational	Rural Non- recreational
10-14	90%	93%	98%
15-19	70%	71%	34%
20-24	30%	7%	13%
25-29	60%	0%	6%
30-34	75%	86%	83%
35-39	85%	93%	94%
40-44	80%	93%	96%
45-49	80%	93%	60%
50-54	65%	86%	43%
55-59	35%	86%	36%

Ramsey. These two counties, however, experienced growth in only the younger age cohorts and then began losing residents at a regular rate. At the same time, rural counties experienced growth in nearly all age cohorts except for those ages 20-24 and 25-29. This apparent interchange between rural and urban counties is especially interesting.

*The county level*

What does the migration profile show for an individual county? As we look more closely at the data, we discover *both* decline and growth within various age categories. To examine these changes more closely, we'll examine Grant County (Figure 8), which we saw earlier had experienced flat total population change between 1990 and 2000.

**Figure 8:** Difference between observed and expected population, Grant County, 1990-2000.



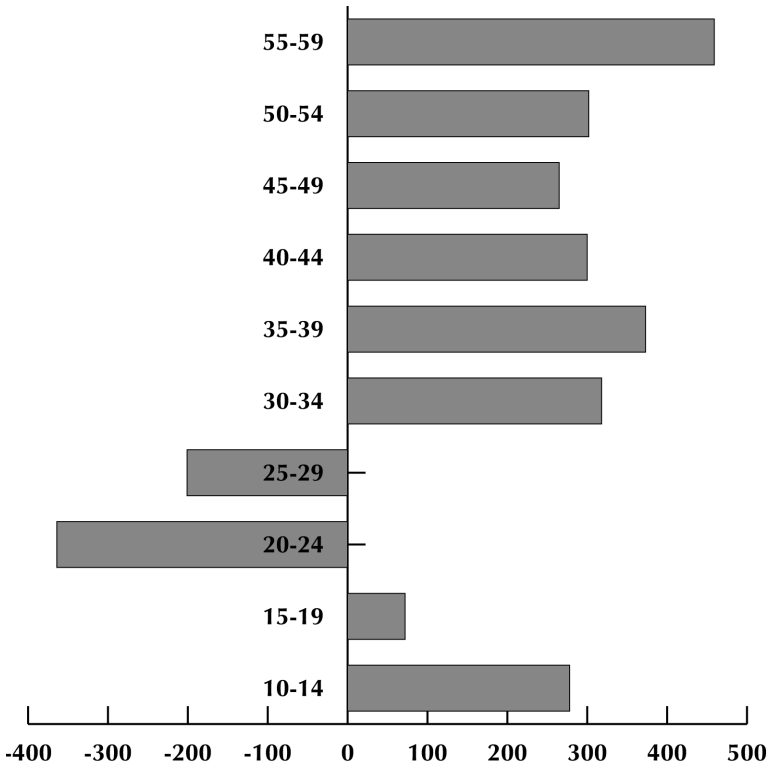
Source: U.S. Census Bureau



The loss of nearly 198 young adults in the 20-24 age cohort represents a decline of 43% in that group. The 25-29 age cohort experienced a loss of 92 people (27%). These numbers are significant and should not be understated. The net gain of 95 people age 30-34 into Grant County represents an increase of 33% in that age cohort. The gain of 84 people age 35-39 makes up 19% of that age cohort, and the gain of 100 people age 10-14 makes up 20% of that age cohort. This demonstrates the significance of this in-migration. The total county population would be much lower had newcomers not arrived in the county.

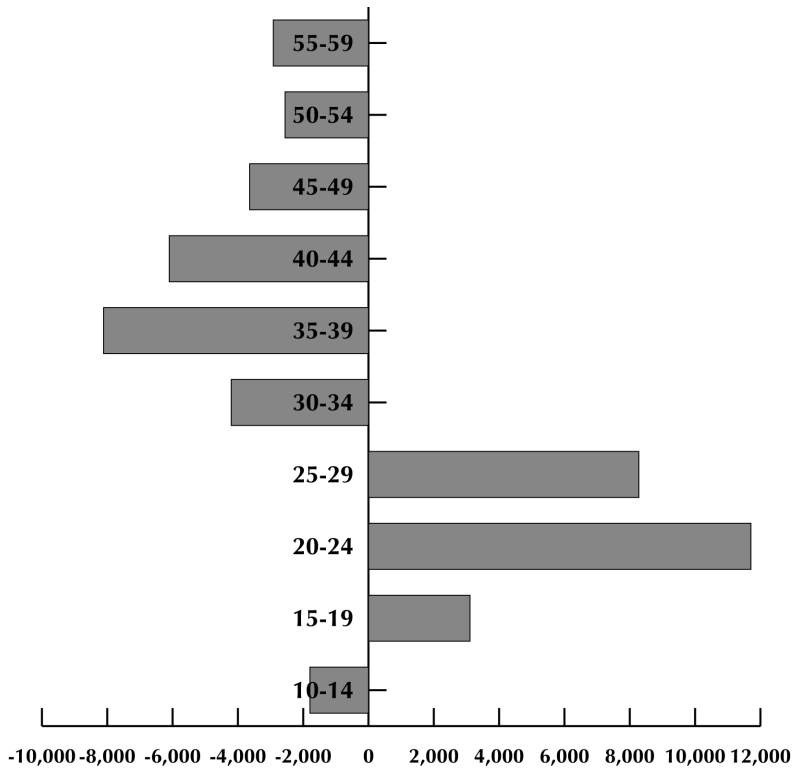
Aitkin County is a rural recreational county located in the north central part of Minnesota (Figure 9). While there is decline in the brain-drain age cohorts (20-29 years old), there

**Figure 9:** Difference between observed and expected population, Aitkin County, 1990-2000.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Figure 10:** Difference between observed and expected population, Ramsey County, 1990-2000.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

are significant gains in all the other groups. The county is highly attractive to not just those in mid-life, but also those who are approaching, and enjoying, their retirement years.

It appears there is an inverse relationship between rural and core metropolitan Minnesota. Ramsey County, in the heart of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, sees significant gains in the rural brain-drain age cohorts. At the same time, there is movement out of these counties after the age of 30.

### ***Newcomers bring children***

We have witnessed a relationship between growth in the 30- to 49-year-old cohort and in the 10- to 14-year-old cohort. This implies that many of the newcomers are bringing along children who are in fourth through eighth grade. If this is true,

we should also see gains through school enrollment data. Do we see a corresponding increase in school enrollments?

School enrollment data can be a useful proxy to show population growth. While we have to wait 10 years in between decennial U.S. Census data, we can obtain school enrollment trends every year. In 2007, Ben Winchester completed an unpublished analysis of class cohorts using data obtained from the Minnesota Department of Education for a collaborative of 19 school districts<sup>13</sup> in west central Minnesota. School superintendents typically use class sizes of the previous year to estimate class sizes of the upcoming year. To analyze this data we examine individual class cohorts in much the same way we analyzed Census data earlier, using a simplified cohort technique. For example, if 100 children began first

**Table 4:** Class size by year in collaborative region, West Central Minnesota.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>1997-98</b>	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2003-04</b>
KG	1,043	958	980
01	1,087	962	924
02	<b>1,168</b>	1,070	937
03	1,170	1,072	989
04	1,207	1,109	1,006
05	1,241	<b>1,230</b>	1,123
06	1,319	1,215	1,121
07	1,475	1,330	1,215
08	1,477	1,335	<b>1,335</b>
09	1,555	1,407	1,309
10	1,654	1,503	1,338
11	1,509	1,453	1,344
12	1,504	1,496	1,355
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,409</b>	<b>16,140</b>	<b>14,976</b>

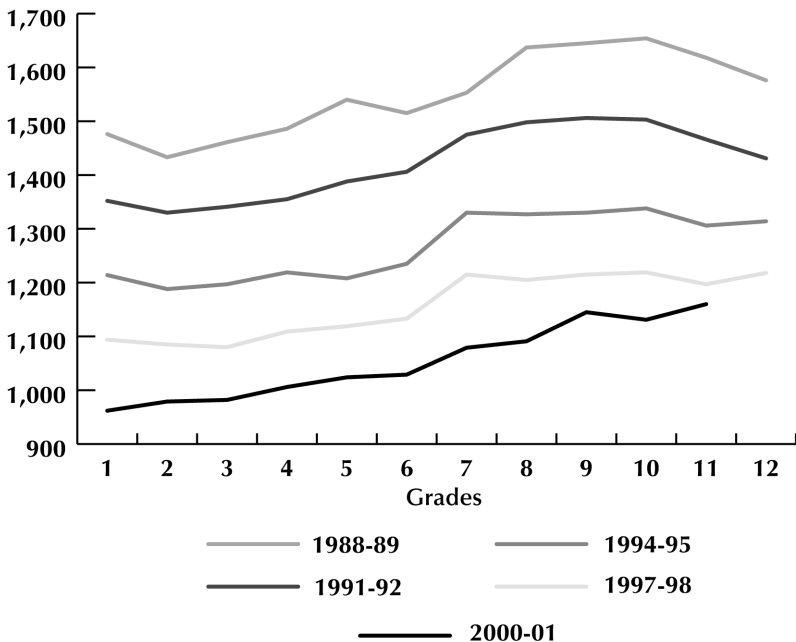
Source: Minnesota Department of Education

grade this year, we then expect those 100 children to be in second grade next year.

The first item of note is related to the conventional analysis of using total enrollment to describe the changes to our school enrollments. We see a dramatic decline in the total enrollment, from 17,409 to 14,976 (Table 4), due primarily to lower fertility rates of the resident population and smaller family sizes. However, in the midst of this overall decline there is also growth. The second-grade class in 1997-1998 (highlighted in gray) enrolled 1,168 students. Three years later, when this class cohort was in fifth grade, their size grew to 1,230. Three years after that, when they were in eighth grade, it grew again to 1,335. This class cohort gained 168 students (14%) during this time period. So, yes, there is growth here as well, and we see that the newcomer cohort has a positive effect on school enrollments.

There are two trends at work here. Visually, we see the

*Figure 11: School cohort size by year of entry in collaborative region.*



Source: Minnesota Department of Education

dramatic decreases in the *starting class sizes* in this region. What were once nearly 1,500 students beginning first grade in 1988 has declined to just over 950 in 2000. This is the product of people not having children with the same frequency as in the past. The second trend is the increase in the cohort size between third and sixth grade. This can be attributed to newcomers who are bringing their children to rural areas.

*Who are these newcomers?*

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has recognized this trend and conducted research<sup>14</sup> to explore the qualities of these newcomers to the western panhandle of Nebraska.<sup>15</sup> This area of the state has witnessed significant overall population loss but does have growth of newcomers in the 30-44 year age cohort — similar to that in Minnesota. Their research indicates that newcomers moved to rural Nebraska because they wanted: 1) a simpler pace of life, 2) safety and security, and 3) low housing costs. Nebraska researchers summarized the opportunities this way:

*New residents bring many assets to the Panhandle region. On average, they are younger and better educated than current Panhandle residents. They also are more likely than current residents to have children in their household. Thus, they are contributing to stabilize, and in some cases increase, the population of the area. In addition, the majority of the newcomers are in their prime earning years, so they are increasing the labor force in the region. Many new residents possess professional occupation skills and business, management and financial operations skills. Many were also involved in their previous community, thus bringing volunteer and leadership experience to their new location. Some new residents have entrepreneurial backgrounds and have an interest in starting a business in their current community. It is important that communities and the region as a whole tap into these assets that newcomers are bringing.*<sup>16</sup>

Given this refreshed view of changing demographics, rural America needs to rethink its description of gains and losses.

If rural America is losing high school-educated youth (the brain drain) and replacing them with those that are college-educated, skilled, and experienced, isn't this a *rural brain gain*? There is a tremendous market opportunity here to capitalize on the skills and knowledge of these newcomers, and it should be of specific interest to decision makers and researchers in and around our rural areas.

The data above showed that a similar trend is occurring in rural Minnesota, and without any intervention by the rural development industry. If that's the case, what could happen if we were actually proactive in attracting newcomers?

In early 2010, the EDA Center in Crookston provided technical assistance to a coalition of economic and community development agencies to 1) better understand the decision-making tools used by newcomers, and 2) identify strategies that can be utilized by the agencies in the region to make the move to western Minnesota more effective and efficient. What motivates 30- to 45-year-old newcomers to relocate to less populated and rural communities in southwestern Minnesota? This question was posed to new residents of western Minnesota communities during seven focus groups held in the summer of 2010. What we learned was that time told the story. We heard stories reflecting a time during their own childhood, a time when memories were created about where they lived or visited.

The stories they shared with us were filled with memories of eating together at the kitchen table with family, friends and neighbors. They shared memories of hunting, fishing and playing outdoors in nature. There were memories and stories about the glory days of the high school championship games or when the large manufacturer closed its doors. They talked about how you knew everybody in your school and your mom let you play outside with your friends until dark. Then there were stories about how your family did fun things together, and it was free! How they cared for a sick aunt or provided a meal to an injured neighbor in times of need. They recounted feelings of great respect and admiration for their parents, how their parents were farmers or owned and operated a local business. Generally, their stories and childhood memories

were happy and filled with much hope and anticipation for the future.

*Participant characteristics*

Focus group participants provided information to the research team that allowed us to frame and place the narrative in context. Key findings from the information include:

- 51% moved to the area with children.
- 43% lived in or near their community before they returned to it.
- There were a number of factors that were important in the newcomer's decision to move.
  - Finding a less congested place to live (77%)
  - A better environment for raising children (75%)
  - Better quality local schools (69%)
  - A safer place to live (69%)
  - Lower cost of housing (66%)
  - A simpler pace of life (66%)
  - More outdoor recreational activities (63%)
  - To be closer to relatives (62%)
  - To live in a desirable natural environment (60%)
  - Lower cost of living (53%)

The sections that follow provide a reflective analysis of what the survey results indicated and what we heard during the focus groups.

*Pull/push factors*

Stories and memories motivated the vast majority of the 30- to 45-year-olds to return to less populated, rural communities in southwestern Minnesota. They were "pulled" back to their childhood community or a similar community in an effort to recreate these memories for their children and themselves. The current local home values provided them with an opportunity to have what they had as children. The small schools would give their children the opportunities to participate in sports and academics as they once did. The pull of their extended families provided an instinctive bond they

had come to appreciate and enjoy. They were pulled back by the opportunity to take over the family farm or start a new business as their parents once had done.

Newcomers were also “pushed” away from their previous communities for reasons such as traffic and long commute times, crime, and the high cost of housing. One focus group participant recounted of their previous community, “The congestion and traffic was about enough to drive you crazy.” Another participant added, “I guess it was just kind of an escalation that the city wore me down, so I was just kind of drawn to the country area, I guess because of the quiet, a different pace of life, too.”

### *Community expectations*

Sometimes our memories can build up larger-than-life expectations that are difficult to fulfill, and it can leave us unsatisfied. We wanted to know if these new residents found that their expectations of their community were met. Generally, the new residents were pleased by what they found when they relocated. “There was nothing different when I moved back, but I’d say it was probably better than I expected when I moved back.” We heard stories of how now they would stand in awe of the wide open spaces they had come to really appreciate. We heard how they had come to understand the benefit and the importance of caring for their neighbors. They also shared that for some a move to a rural community has forced them to accept certain lifestyle changes, such as stores closing early, limited shopping, and traveling greater distances for household items. Some new residents expected to be more engaged in community life, and found that some communities hesitate to welcome newcomers.

### *Community involvement and social contributions*

When looking at how newcomers applied their skills to civic or community participation, about a third of the newcomers (36%) stated they had held leadership roles in community organizations in their previous communities; now 60% held similar posts in their new communities. Likewise, only 9% had previously held public office, but now 23% held a



public office in their new communities. Even charitable giving increased. Whereas 62% gave in previous communities, now 81% engaged in charitable giving in their new host community. Finally, newcomers generally came in couples, with only a quarter being single. A number of couples had chosen to have one spouse stay home with kids, a shift from their previous household arrangement whereby both parents held full-time jobs.

New residents also recalled a number of kinds of networks that research now would describe as indicators of strong social capital. Social capital is the glue that holds a community together—the connections and relationships among people, both formal and informal. They include strong bonds among family and friends, bridges from group to group in a community, and linking networks with outside resources that can bring new opportunities to communities.<sup>17,18</sup> Most new residents recalled their families having many close connections with family and friends. They also shared stories of community rallying to help a sick child or an injured farmer. The residents remembered how the community got things done together (bridging networks) and didn't wait for some outside agency or institution to tell them what to do (linking networks). Further research would need to be conducted to determine the depth and breadth of these networks and their utilization within their community. The new residents had families with strong social capital networks. During the focus groups, the new residents told us that there are lots of opportunities for community members to build their level of community involvement or social capital. "There is no lack of people wanting you to do things."

There appears to be one critical variable for greater community inclusion and to increase all the social capital networks, however: *children!* Those who had children had almost immediate acceptance and opportunities for bonding, bridging and linking networks. Those without children, or those whose children had left home, found themselves having to work harder to be invited to join networks. "My husband works in town, he can say hi to people with little kids, but you aren't in that inner circle until you have kids."

What we learned from new residents 30 to 45 years old about what motivated them to relocate to less populated and rural southwestern Minnesota communities should not surprise us. Their motivations were inspired by their past memories and dreams, which is familiar to us all. What is more interesting is the fact that those who choose to return or relocate generally had very positive childhood experiences and have created for themselves a life that reflects many of the memories of their own childhood. Those from the same community whose childhood experiences were not so positive may be less motivated to return. Also, what happens when the community undergoes major changes, either demographically or economically, that alter the image returning residents have so much wanted to recreate? Do these new residents resist that change, or will they ultimately change the features of their own lives to weave them together with the new community? In our focus groups, “time did tell,” while in the future only “time will tell.”

#### *Newcomer economics*

The 30- to 45-year-old new residents, in their quest for a better quality of life, bring education, economic skills and wealth with them into the small towns of west central Minnesota. From the survey, it is obvious that they were primarily concerned about their quality of life: they were looking for less congestion and safer places for their children, better quality schools, and better recreational activities among a more desirable natural environment. But what specific education and skill assets did newly introduced residents bring into the new hosting communities?

The basis for the rural economy has shifted significantly in the past 25 years, reducing the share of employment in natural resource and manufacturing areas, while gaining share in the service industries.<sup>19</sup> How do the skills of these newcomers fit into the existing rural economy? In terms of imported post-secondary education levels, over two-thirds (68%) of the newcomers in the focus groups had a bachelor’s degree or higher, whereas the resident population in 2010 had an estimated rate of only 16.7%. It was found that almost half

of the newcomers had business/ financial/ management skills (45%), yet only half of those individuals use them in their new communities. And one third of the newcomers had office and administrative support skills, yet again, only about half noted using these skills in their new location. Thus, newcomers are not using these particular skills in their new communities, possibly because the higher-level service jobs that require them are not available there. This may just be the climate that begs for entrepreneurship from newcomers, who as a class of workers not only expect decent wages and benefits for themselves but also provide the same standard for any local workers they may hire in newly created businesses.

In comparing the marginal percentages between the skills possessed and the actual occupation which newcomers take up in their new communities, healthcare support workers

**Table 5:** *Self-reported skills of newcomers.*

	<b>Skills possessed (n=53)</b>	<b>Current primary occupation (n=45)</b>
Management, business and financial operations	24 (45%)	10 (22%)
Professional and related occupations	24 (45%)	11 (24%)
Healthcare support	6 (11%)	6 (13%)
Protective services	3 (6%)	--
Food preparation and serving	8 (15%)	1 (2%)
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Personal care and services	5 (9%)	
Sales and related	10 (19%)	1 (2%)
Office and administrative support	18 (34%)	4 (9%)
Installation, maintenance and repair	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
Production	2 (4%)	
Agriculture	7 (13%)	1 (2%)
Other	15 (28%)	8 (18%)

had the tightest match (when looking at skills with at least a 10% presence rate). High demand for health care workers is good news for newcomer workers in this occupation as they can find immediate jobs. The table below examines the skills of the newcomers involved in the focus groups reported for themselves. (Respondents could choose more than one category, and thus totals can exceed 100%.)

These individual-level skills aside, as we reflect on this information, it may be wise to take advantage of existing connections to urban businesses that allow skilled employees to telecommute from rural Minnesota (such as computer programmers, writers, editors, and others). In a report written for Minnesota's EDA Center, Ben Winchester notes that "these niche occupations provide an opportunity to build knowledge clusters in the prairie, serving both business needs and employee quality of life requirements."<sup>20</sup> Because newcomers have untapped skills, communities can try to drive future economic growth by leveraging their primary and auxiliary skills. Making accommodations to use the human capital (education, skills and training) of the newcomers with their diversified strengths may assist the overall economy of the region, and not merely the community they move to.

About 75% of couple respondents noted that they would like to have only one wage earner in the household (and the resulting savings in daycare costs): "We didn't have kids yet, but we knew that we wanted to be out here when we did have kids and eventually wanted to be a stay-at-home mom, and that wasn't going to happen in the Twin Cities. I knew we wouldn't be able to afford that."

A surprisingly high number of newcomers became self-employed or small businesses owners after their move to the new community. One particular respondent newcomer looked forward to self employment, but needed a secondary income.<sup>21</sup>

*Newcomer:* "That was my focus, that was my reason to come back, to have that self employment farming. But we did want supplementary income, so we looked around to see what businesses were for sale and stuff like that.

The flower shop happened to be for sale. That's the only

reason. It just happened to be for sale at the time. And we just looked at the numbers and it looked OK. And at the time my wife didn't really have anything to do, so she was able to really concentrate on the flower shop."

*Facilitator:* "But in your case it could have been the local hardware store that could have been for sale and you might have bought that?"

*Newcomer:* "Exactly."

Newcomers with high skills who are willing to seize opportunities offer great potential for local business succession planning efforts. Often, aging owners of established businesses don't put their small town businesses on the market, making it difficult for people to be aware of available businesses (or housing, for that matter) without first living in the community. In one small city of the upper Red River Valley, the city council took upon itself the task of brokering the sale of a fully endowed hardware store to a young newcomer couple when the lifelong owners retired. This bedroom community's council — within half-an-hour driving distance from two employment hubs with a housing shortage — also built a senior residential facility and assisted the transition of the elders' former houses to newcomers. Comprehensive strategies to bring newcomers to a community can be complex with many moving parts but effective if community leaders are willing to take on the challenge.

#### *Economic impact of newcomers*

The University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality completed a preliminary Economic Impact Analysis in 2010, and a full analysis is available now. Noting that residents who move to a smaller community may have wealth-creating skill sets, researchers asked what type of impact these newcomers have on the communities in the study area. An economic analysis using IMPLAN, a computer software Social Accounting Matrix model, estimated that newcomers introduced \$3,722,500 into the west central Minnesota study region. Note that this does not represent the net or overall gain, as out-migrators such as those in the "brain

drain” ages of 18-25 reflect a loss in household income when leaving the community. Still, these “brain drain” age cohorts are at their lowest earning potential in their young careers.

The survey found that almost half of the newcomers in the five-county area in the study reported a household income of \$75,000 or more, whereas only 9.9% of the resident households in these counties were above \$75,000 (2008 ESRI estimate). Obviously, this financial capital is a benefit to rural communities, and newcomers bring other fiscal impacts as well. Since income changes also affect the communities via tax collections, it is estimated these same households generated \$132,406 in state and local taxes, with \$55,000 in sales tax and \$37,000 in property tax paid by businesses. In the context of losing young adults age 18-25, it is probably a net gain as few of these young people contribute to the property tax base. For those newcomers bringing children, there is also the impact of increased school per-pupil funding. Moreover, spending generated from fresh businesses created by newcomers would not be included in this estimate. Thus the aggregate summation of this study should be viewed as conservative.

Just under 25% of respondents stated that they are operating farms or businesses, possibly emphasizing all the more the need for smart business succession planning as existing business owners explore retirement options. The entrepreneurial nature of these newcomers is becoming more apparent and is an opportunity for economic development agents in the region to engage in strategies that support entrepreneurs.

Further questioning would be useful to quantify the cause and effect of the labor factor. For instance, it may be useful to discern whether newcomers tend to bring jobs with them (or the potential for entrepreneurship) regardless of existing job opportunities in the area, or whether a majority arrive expecting jobs to be available in the new host community and/or region. While this study looked at 30- to 45-year-olds, it would be interesting to investigate whether there is typically a different “chicken or egg” labor force and employment outcome for those newcomers. The main point of this section of analysis is to show that there may be opportunity to help

build the rural economy around some of these imported skill sets, especially around those that are not currently being used.

### ***Conclusion***

There is rural population growth in the 30- to 45-year age cohort. In many rural counties, this in-migration is just about equal to the out-migration of the 18- to 25-year age cohort. This in-migration is composed of adults in their prime earning years. These findings remind us that the changes we witness across rural Minnesota are complex and reflect not just challenges, but significant opportunities. A profile is emerging in the dynamics between rural and urban areas.

- Age 18-25: Individuals leave their homes to attend higher education and begin their careers in urban places and selected college counties across the state.
- Age 30-44: A percentage of these individuals move out of core metro areas as they approach 30 years of age and when their children are in third grade and up. There is significant growth in rural communities because of this migration.
- Age 45-54: There is movement out of core metro areas and some rural counties in this age cohort. The reasons why some counties do not retain newcomers is not well known and further research is encouraged to examine the “stickiness factor.” The factors related to staying in these new communities include job opportunities and security, feelings of belonging, suitable housing, and opportunities to join local organizations. What can our communities do to build on this trend?

The 2010 Census data will be released about the time this article is published, and this trend will continue to be explored through publications and papers at [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu). Using school enrollment figures as a proxy for this newcomer growth, we do know this trend continued in southwest Minnesota.<sup>22</sup> In the coming years, the University of Minnesota Extension will continue to explore rural demographics and trends related to these newcomer populations. If you would like to find out more about this trend in your part of the state,

or wish to build on this opportunity for your community, please contact your local Extension Educator. Visit [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu) for more information.

### **Endnotes**

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- 11 St. Louis County is both a recreational and metropolitan county. For the purposes of this article it will be classified as a recreational county only due to the large geographic area and shoreline.
- 12 Internationally, the term "brain drain" is used to describe the loss of the top educated and skilled people in a country as they move from their home to another country. In the United States, and specifically in rural development literature, the definition is generally the loss of high-school graduates to metropolitan areas. The appropriateness of using this term as we do in the rural development field shall be the topic of another discussion.
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## **Today's Youth, Tomorrow's Rural Health Care Workforce**

**Laurissa Stigen**

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Many changes are being seen in our population as advances in medicine and technology are resulting in longer life spans. However, at the same time, families are smaller so there are fewer young people to make up the health care workforce to care for an increasing elderly population. Currently, the job market is made up of a large number of baby boomers, those ages 40 to 70, and as they retire, numerous job openings will remain. Recruiting into health care positions is a challenge that many health care employers are currently facing, and this is especially true in rural and underserved areas. Because demographers are saying that in ten to fifteen years there will be an even bigger need for health care workers, health care employers as well as consumers are only seeing the beginning of what could become a much larger issue in the years to come. This is even more significant when one considers the competition that will occur for health care providers across the nation as the shortages become more profound.

In central Minnesota where I work and live, health care and social assistance is currently the largest employing industry at 18.3 percent. Despite a statewide and national recession that led to a loss of nearly 15,000 jobs in Central Minnesota from 2008 to 2010, the health care and social assistance sector is still seeing employment growth, with an increase of over 1,400 jobs. Employment predictions show that health care is expected to have the largest job growth in the next decade as a result of a growing and aging population. According to the Department of Employment and Economic

Development's (DEED) 2006 to 2016 Employment outlook for Northwest Minnesota, "the health care and social assistance sector will grow by 35.5 percent or 11,388 jobs. ... The main source of growth will occur in hospitals, followed by ambulatory health care services, and nursing and residential care facilities."

Anticipating the need for a skilled workforce and the decreasing numbers of potential employees, many communities and health care employers are recognizing that their future workforce lies in their youth and are investing in them using a "grow-your-own" approach. The ultimate goal of this concept is that the youth will return when they are trained and prepared to enter the workforce. Research has found that youth who grow up in rural communities are more likely than their peers who spend their developing years in metro areas to work in rural and underserved areas as adults. Therefore, for rural communities, it makes perfect sense to start locally with interest and skill development in health care, forming strong relationships with their youth. I must caution that the "grow-your-own" approach is a long-term investment that could take 10 to 15 years to see results. For many, this takes too long and does involve significant risk, but if you consider the fact that your next health care provider may be a junior sitting down to start his or her school day, it is well worth it.

As a child, I grew up in a town of about 13,000 people in central Minnesota and was fortunate to have an experience as a middle school student volunteering at my local hospital. I am quite certain that this opportunity was what originally sparked my interest in health care. Neither of my parents and none of my close relatives or family friends worked in the health care field, so I did not have a natural mentor to support me along my educational journey. I was fortunate that I had a number of excellent teachers during my K-12 education who encouraged me to stay active in math and science courses; however, I must be honest and say that no one from my school was prepared or even tried to help me further explore my interest in health care. Instead it was left up to me, and unfortunately, I think this is the same scenario that many of today's youth are facing twenty years later.

Whether it is due to a television show or a personal experience, many youth have an interest in health care, but if left uncultivated it will be easy for it to become a passing interest. Therefore, I find my work as the Director of the Central Minnesota Area Health Education Center (AHEC) to be so vital today as well as into the future. Central Minnesota AHEC, which covers fifteen counties, is part of the Minnesota AHEC Network. This network is a community-university partnership that includes six regional centers across Minnesota and the program office at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Our partnership brings together the expertise of educational institutions, health care organizations and community groups, all working toward improving health and access to quality primary care.

We have to see youth as a significant factor if we are going to improve health and access to care. To put it bluntly, youth are the future of health care, and we fully realize the importance of there being a comprehensive distribution of quality health care providers across Minnesota. Therefore, we are very supportive of the “grow your own” approach referred to earlier. In doing so, we collaborate with many other entities to introduce youth to health careers. Often times our role in collaborations is to help facilitate the connection between local education institutions, including K-12 schools and higher education, and health care, all of which are necessary partners to ensure that youth are able to explore health careers.

When asked to name careers in the health care sector, most individuals would say a doctor or nurse and possibly a dentist or pharmacist. Unless youth have a parent or family friend who works in health care or have experienced a significant medical procedure, these are typically the only health care careers that youth would encounter. However, there are well over one hundred careers in health care. It is important that youth are not only learning about the variety of the careers, but that they are also able to explore them in order to pique and further develop their interests. Just as an example, I recently encountered a youth who was quite certain that she wasn't interested in health care careers because she thought they all involved blood, which made her queasy. However,

when she had the opportunity to meet a sonographer and got to participate in an ultrasound, she quickly changed her mind.

Introducing students to the wide variety of career possibilities in an attempt to entice them to pursue health care careers is spurring new programming with a variety of partners across the state. It is recognized that school districts are facing tighter and tighter budgets, making it difficult to maintain elective courses or to add easily new health career exploration programming for a variety of reasons. This is especially true in rural areas, where small student populations make health care career programming nearly impossible. Therefore, programs new in 2011, such as Scrubs and Scopes and Camps to Careers in Health Care, are a result of collaborative efforts and are being offered outside of the school day to help immerse students in health care.

Scrubs and Scopes is offered by Lake Region Healthcare in collaboration with Central Minnesota AHEC and Lakes Country Services Cooperative. The program provides health care career exploration for seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students on a monthly basis. A key to the success of this program is that the students get to see the excitement that current health care professionals have for their careers. Camps to Careers in Health Care will be offered for the first time in June 2011 at the University of Minnesota, Morris campus, and is the result of planning by Stevens Community Medical Center, Essentia Health in Graceville, Lakes Country Service Cooperative, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and Central Minnesota AHEC. Here, high school students will have a college immersion experience over three days and will participate in hands-on learning about specific health careers and career development skills.

Employment during high school is also important to aid youth in obtaining a job after college. However, right now the youth unemployment rate at age 24 is 30 percent, the highest it has ever been. Researchers indicate how crucial it is to have a job in high school to prepare youth for the job market after they graduate. In some of the rural areas, and especially in the recent economy, a youth's potential to gain employment is limited because their community is so small. This means

they haven't had the opportunity to learn basic job skills, such as arriving to work on time and working as a team member. Employers say that youth who haven't learned those soft skills will have a more difficult time landing a job after high school. Being able to participate in career exploration and development programs such as Camps to Careers helps youths focus on what they have learned from the experience and what they will do next in step-by-step career development.

Job shadowing and working in internships in health care facilities are extremely beneficial for youth who are interested in working in health care. Not only does it enhance one's resume and help build career development skills, but shadowing and internships also allow youth to learn first-hand how health care facilities operate and immerse them in the care of patients. The Minnesota Hospital Association manages a summer internship program that pays a portion of the wages of high school and college students who are working in a participating health care facility during the summer months.

Over time, Lakewood Health System in Staples has seen a definite increase in interest in the summer health internship program. This is evident by the fact that they started with three students and last year had nineteen students participate. Even more astounding is the fact that Staples is a community of just under 3,000 people. To accommodate the increasing numbers of youth participating, Lakewood has invested additional dollars into the program and has already seen the investment pay off, as they have been able to use this program as a recruitment tool. Several of the past program participants have returned after college to pursue a career at Lakewood, and additional participants are also planning on returning once their education is complete.

Early exploration of health careers is also important to help students prepare themselves for a rigorous academic journey ahead. They now see the purpose for taking science and math courses, which is especially important because health professions programs are extremely competitive. It is vital that students start preparing early so they can open doors for themselves, and therefore, it's important that students look

beyond the core courses that are required in high school and choose additional math and science courses that will allow them to improve their ACT scores and better prepare them for success in post secondary course work. For some students with limited school district offerings, this may mean looking into Post Secondary Enrollment Options in college courses, many of which are offered online.

Obviously, high school students are a component in the health care career pipeline, but moving further upstream and closer to tangible outcomes are college students enrolled in health care career programs. These students are the second component to the “grow-your-own” approach and are a significant focus of the Minnesota AHEC Network. It is vital that rural communities stay connected to their youth who have left to further their education. The reality is that youth typically need to move to larger communities for training and when they do, they need to know that they are valued back in their home community. Some are willing to return right away, but others choose to stay in larger communities for a number of reasons. However, after ten years or so, those who stay in the larger communities may also want to return home to familiar settings to raise their families. Provided their spouse can find work, they often do return home.

It is also important that rural health care facilities are willing to provide clinical rotations and experiential education for health professions students from a variety of higher education institutions. This is true not only for the youth who grew up in the community or the surrounding area, but also for others who did not. Since it is not easy for students to travel to locations away from their educational institutions, the Minnesota AHEC Network provides student support by assisting with rotation placements, community connections and housing assistance. Educational opportunities that enhance academic learning provide students with the opportunity to get comfortable in a health care setting and also to have a better understanding of the breadth and depth of care that is provided in rural communities. This in itself can be a turning point for students, no matter where they are from, to narrow down and ultimately choose the community

they want to work and live in. As the demand for health care workers increases, the competition to recruit is going to be very strong, which makes early, positive connections with students pivotal for successful recruitment.

Not having ample health care professionals will hinder health care, creating a challenge for access to care. Thus, it is vital that rural communities start preparing now and consider youth to be a part of the solution. Communities and organizations seeking health care workers may need to become more creative on programming to entice workers to rural areas which will include “growing their own.” Obviously, it is necessary for youth to leave rural areas for training, but it is important that they have a connection that brings them back. I am optimistic about the work that is currently taking place to ensure that today’s youth have the opportunities to explore and prepare for careers in health care. To keep the momentum going, it is imperative that we have a coordinated statewide approach to ensure that youth from all areas of Minnesota are able to explore health care careers and remain engaged in rural and underserved communities until they enter the workforce. Therefore, I challenge you to be an active part of the solution to rural health care workforce needs: invest in Minnesota’s youth, stay connected with them on their educational paths and embrace the changes necessary to make rural communities desirable places to call home. After all, the replacement when your current health care provider retires may very well be the high school student living down the road from you.





## **The Seventh Generation: The Future of Minnesota's American Indian Youth**

**Priscilla A. Day**

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American Indian cultural beliefs hold that our children are sacred. Traditionally, we believe our children enter this world as precious spirits to be taken care of and nurtured through life's changes from an infant to a child, a child to an adolescent, from adolescence to adult and then into another sacred role, that of elder. Unfortunately, policies designed to destroy this way of life have had their impact. Couple that with systemic racism in policy and practice, and you can see why Minnesota's American Indian youth are struggling. Today, one of Minnesota's most forgotten populations are American Indian children. Policy makers and those who lead Minnesota's Human Service, Juvenile Justice, and other organizations can play a critical role in turning this situation around.

This article asks the reader to consider the role policy can play in addressing what is happening with American Indian youth. While money cannot solve all problems, money along with strong policy and practices can intervene in the lives of families and children. Research has shown that strategic changes in policy and practice can help these children grow up to be productive, contributing citizens.

### ***American Indian youth***

American Indian youth want what all youth want: a chance to live a life in which they have choices about their future. Some want to finish high school and go on to college. They might have plans to be a doctor, a tribal attorney, a teacher, or a social worker. Some want to stay in their

community, perhaps attend a tribal college, while others want to move across the country. Some youth are unsure of what they want to do and don't have any particular plans except to get a job. Unfortunately for some American Indian youth, their main concern is how to get through the week or even the day. They don't have the luxury of planning for the future.

Historically, American Indian peoples believed in planning for the seventh generation. The concept of planning for the seventh generation comes from the Great Law of Peace from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) culture. It refers to a worldview that considers the long-term impact of decisions made today on the health and wellbeing of those who will follow us into the future. This concept of considering the impact of the decisions we make today on our relatives seven generations from now is a wise way of governing. This kind of reflection should give pause to policy makers who are initiating important decisions that do exactly that: impact the futures of our children and their children.

As parents, we all want our children to lead a better life than we did. A life full of opportunity for better education, expanded job choices, and of course, a life in a family system that can care for and offer safety and security for that child, to pass on family stories, norms, values and beliefs. In Minnesota, that opportunity is not shared equally. One group more than all others is losing their children through out-of-home placement in the child welfare system at unacceptable rates. This loss has the devastating effect of rippling into all aspects of life for American Indians.

According to Census data, American Indians represent about 1% of Minnesota's population. This population, who once lived mostly on reservations, is now about equally divided between rural reservations (in the counties with the highest poverty rates) and in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. This population shift was due to a policy of removal that occurred in the 1950s in which American Indian people were encouraged to move from reservations to cities across the United States. My parents, in fact, participated in this "relocation" by moving to Minneapolis during the school year for work and then returning to northern Minnesota in the

summer to help my grandparents run our family resort. Most American Indian families were not able to return home, and now we have several generations of “urban” Indian families who have never lived on a reservation, though most have visited relatives or participated in ceremonial events on their home reservation.

One of the many decisions that policy makers have to consider is what is happening to some of the most vulnerable Minnesotans — American Indian youth. Minnesota’s American Indian youth are in peril. Look at any statistic and it tells a grim story. According the Annie E. Casey Foundation, American Indian youth live in poverty at rates much higher than white youth: 35% vs. 5.9% respectively. They continue to have unacceptably high dropout rates from school, at 18% vs. 4.5%. Rates of youth ages 16-19 who aren’t in school or working are much higher for American Indian youth — 17.9% vs. 3.5% — than for white youth (Annie E. Casey, April 2002).

The Casey Foundation found that in Minnesota, 13.9% of all children live in poverty. However, in four counties the child poverty rate is incredibly high. These counties all have high percentages of American Indians: Mahnommen, 35%; Beltrami, 29.9%; Clearwater, 25.5%; and Cass, 24%. Research shows that poverty greatly increases negative outcomes for children, indicating that the children in these counties are very vulnerable. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, the percentage of American Indian children in Minnesota living in poverty during 2006-2008 was 38.8%, compared to 8.3% of white children (American Community Survey, 2006-2008). Poverty impacts children in numerous harmful ways and has been shown to be a contributing factor to high out-of-home placement, low educational attainment, homelessness, increased contact with child welfare, juvenile justice and other institutions where they experience harsher outcomes than white youth.

### ***American Indian youth: Out-of-home placement rates***

There are many issues this article could have focused on, but I chose to look at one issue that underlies so many of these negative statistics involving American Indian youth:

out-of-home placement rates. To grasp this issue, there are several key concepts you need to understand. The first is tribal sovereignty.

*What is tribal sovereignty?*

Sovereignty means that tribes have retained through treaties the legal right to determine their own future. They practice this right through self-governing nations run by officials who are elected by tribal membership.

“This inherent political right sets ... Indian nations apart from all other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Sovereignty is the internationally recognized power of a nation to manage its own affairs and govern itself. Tribes are sovereign because they were independent nations when Europeans came to North America. This sovereignty is codified within the United States Constitution, which recognizes tribes as distinct governments. The many treaties that the U.S. government made with tribes further legalized the independent nation status of tribes” (Day & Tellett, 2004, p. 12).

The Supreme Court has repeatedly reaffirmed the sovereignty of tribes.

Being a sovereign nation provides tribes with a unique political status that other groups of color do not possess.

“As sovereign nations-within-a-nation, American Indian tribes have the power to establish a form of government, determine membership, make and enforce laws, tax, police, administer justice, license and regulate activities, zone, exclude people from the reservation, and charter business organizations. Limitations on tribal powers are few and include the same limitations applicable to states: neither states nor tribes can make war, engage in foreign relations, or make coin money” (Day & Tellett, 2004, p. 12).

This sovereignty is what gives tribes the right to establish their own tribal courts and manage their own child welfare programs. Tribal membership is determined by “blood quantum” with most tribes, requiring tribal members to document that they have tribal ancestry in their tribe of one-fourth or more heritage to be eligible for enrollment. Being enrolled allows members to participate in tribal government and tribal programs. Membership or being eligible for membership is important in child welfare because that is what determines whether a child is eligible to be included under the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Felix Cohen, an attorney who wrote about tribal sovereignty says:

Perhaps the most basic principle of all Indian law, supported by a host of decisions ... is the principle that those powers lawfully vested in an Indian tribe are not, in general, delegated powers granted by express acts of Congress, but rather *inherent powers* of a limited sovereignty which has never been extinguished. Each tribe begins its relationship with the federal government as a sovereign power, recognized as such in treaty and legislation (Cohen, 1942, p. 31; emphasis added).

What he is saying is that tribes *retained* many of their original rights through treaty and legislation. These rights have been upheld in courts throughout the years. When the state deals with a tribe, it is dealing with a sovereign power, not an interest group. As a tribal member, I am a citizen of the United States, of Minnesota, and of my tribe, with rights and responsibilities to each. This unique political status is misunderstood by most Minnesotans and often leads to ongoing misunderstandings and poor policy decisions.

*What is the relationship between tribes and states?*

The relationship between tribes and states is largely misunderstood.

“The Supreme Court clearly defined the relationship between States and American Indian Nations in 1932. It said that states are largely excluded from the nation-to-nation relationship between the U.S. government and American Indian Nations, and that tribal governments are not subordinate to state governments. Furthermore, although reservation or trust lands lie within state boundaries, they are not part of state lands, and, as such, state laws do not apply on these lands” (Day & Tellett, 2004, p. 12).

Minnesota, however, is a Public Law 280 state, which means that the state does exercise some jurisdiction within tribal boundaries with the exception of the Red Lake Nation and Bois Forte. Because of the complexity of jurisdictional issues, most tribes have memorandums of agreement with the counties that border their reservation boundaries, including agreements about child welfare.

Tribes have been fighting to maintain their sovereign rights from the beginning of European contact. Child welfare has often been used as a tool of forced assimilation. “Historically, the attempts to undermine tribal sovereignty, destroy tribal cultures, and forced the assimilation of American Indian people through their children were often masked in the language and practice of child welfare” (Geary & Day, 2010, p. 3). Unfortunately, while awareness seems to have improved, the practice of child removal from tribal communities continues to be problematic. Because Minnesota is a Public Law 280 state, with a state-administered, county-run system of child welfare, the state can have significant influence intervening in child welfare with American Indian children by partnering with tribes to remediate the situation.

### *The Indian Child Welfare Act*

The second important point is that because of sovereignty, in 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed in response to exceedingly high rates of removal of American Indian children by the child welfare system. The intent of Congress under ICWA was to “protect the best interests of

Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families” (25 U.S.C. § 1902). “ICWA sets federal requirements that apply to state child custody proceedings involving an Indian child who is a member of or eligible for membership in a federally recognized tribe” (National Indian Child Welfare Association website). This is significant because it provided Indian parents and tribes with the “jurisdictional authority to intervene in child custody proceedings held in state courts when American Indian children were involved.” It also provided criteria “that state courts must adhere to when rendering decisions in child custody cases involving American Indian children. The criteria gave preference in adoption proceedings to members of the child’s extended family, other members of the child’s tribe, and other American Indian families. The law strives to keep American Indian children in cultural environments similar to, if not the same as, those into which they were born” (Snipp, April 2002). “Active efforts” need to be exhausted to keep that child with their family and tribe. Only after all efforts have been made to stabilize the family have failed should the placement preferences be followed. Then the county should look to place an Indian child with extended family, in a home of another tribal member, in another tribe’s family, and only as a last resort in a non-native home.

It is clear, however, that ICWA is not being followed as it was intended. American Indian youth continue to be taken from their families, communities and tribes at rates far greater than other youth. The long-term impact of this has been devastating to Indian youth, their families, and tribes. These children often feel disconnected not only from their families, but also from their cultural identity. This disconnection often lasts a lifetime and can lead to depression, substance abuse, and long-term grief. Families whose children are removed also experience grief and may find that they are not ever able to fully recover. Tribal sovereignty depends on healthy tribal members. When a child is taken from their family, they are also taken from their tribe and therefore are not able to make important contributions to the health and wellbeing of the tribal community. These losses are compounded with each



child that is removed, and continue to reverberate throughout Indian country.

In 1999, Minnesota passed the Tribal State Agreement (TSA), which was updated in 2007. TSA was developed to assist counties and tribes in providing child welfare services that are consistent with the intent and purpose of the ICWA and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA). It is designed to maintain “the integrity of the tribal family, extended family, and the child’s tribal relationship” by recognizing that the child’s best interests are “inherently tied to the concept of belonging” (TSA, Minnesota Department of Human Services website). It clearly states that “family preservation” is the “intended purpose and outcome” of the agreement. The TSA provides clear and concise guidance for dealing with American Indian youth who come in contact with the child welfare system. It provides clarification on seven areas:

- Jurisdiction
- Notice to tribes
- Transfer to tribal courts
- Full faith and credit for public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of tribes
- Intervention
- Adoption and safe families act
- Inter-ethnic adoption procedure

In addition, it defines many terms used in ICWA such as active efforts, permanency planning, placement preferences, best interests of an Indian child and many other terms (Amendment to the 1998 Tribal/State Indian Child Welfare Agreement).

The TSA was designed to strengthen the ICWA and provides specific guidance to social workers and judges in how Indian children should be dealt with in the child welfare system. While the TSA provides guidance, many people who work in child welfare are unaware of it, unfortunately, and therefore don’t use it. Like many policies, there are no rewards or punishments attached to the ICWA legislation. Without incentive to follow ICWA and by not having a consequence

attached, either positive or negative, this policy does not have the power to affect practices. The Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act of 1985 was intended to strengthen ICWA in Minnesota and to support tribal sovereignty in tribal dealings with the child welfare system. Because these policies are not followed, Indian youth continue to end up out of their homes and communities at much greater numbers than other youth. The impact of this affects the individual youth, their families and communities not only now, but ripples into the future for many generations. Consider the long-term and collective result of this repeated trauma for Minnesota's American Indian children, families, and tribes.

### *The current state*

In February 2010, the Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services published the *Minnesota Child Welfare Disparities Report*. In the introduction they write:

“The presence of disparities is in all systems, health care, corrections, education and child welfare. Disparities within the child welfare system are therefore disappointingly consistent with the experiences of other service systems. Several components influence disparities externally from the child welfare system: potential bias in identification and reporting; the impact of historical trauma thrust upon American Indian ... families; socioeconomic factors, including inequitable outcomes in education, health and corrections; the impact of poverty; institutional racism and discriminatory practices; and the everyday stress related to experiencing prejudicial micro-aggressive behaviors in interactions with others” (p. 5).

This report goes on to describe the ongoing “concern for disproportional representation of children by race and ethnicity in the public child welfare system and the resulting child outcomes.” The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) acknowledges that even though

many changes have been made that have resulted in better outcomes for white children and families, the outcomes for minority children, especially American Indian children, have been wanting. They write, “Despite these multiple efforts, disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity continues.” This disparity gap has not changed over the past four years. “American Indian children experience the greatest disproportionately along the continuum, and the rates of over-representation are expanding” (Executive Summary, *The Minnesota Child Welfare Disparities Report*, February 2010).

The report details the various areas of contact American Indian youth have with the child welfare system. As you can see, American Indian youth fare poorly across the continuum of care, compared to white children. American Indian youth are overrepresented in rates of:

- **Contact with the child protection system:** American Indian children were as high as six times more likely to be subjects of child protection assessments and investigations.
- **Experiencing neglect:** American Indian children were more than eight times more likely to be a subject of a neglect report.
- **Recurrence of child maltreatment:** American Indian children have consistently higher rates of repeat child maltreatment. This has grown or remained constant while the rates for white children appear to be declining.
- **Out-of-home care:** American Indian children were placed in out-of-home care for one or more days in 2008 at a rate more than twice that of any other group and were 12 times more likely than a white child to spend time in placement.
- **Placement stability:** the longer American Indian children remained in out-of-home care, the more they experienced multiple moves in placement settings.
- **Aging out of care:** American Indian youth have high rates of reaching the age of majority when in placement for long periods of time (Executive Summary).

These statistics are appalling. An American Indian child in Minnesota is more than eight times more likely than a white

child to be the subject of a neglect report. Studies have found a high correlation between poverty and reports of neglect. American Indian children are the least likely to be reunified with their family, with “15.3 percent of children remaining in out-of-home care after a year.” American Indian kids also lag behind children of other races who are in care for a year or more in the lack of access to “stable care.” American Indian youth who age out of foster care (turn age 18) are more likely than other youth to have been in care for at least three continuous years. So, not only do American Indian children enter out-of-home care at the highest rates, once in care they are least likely to be returned home to their families, and they are more likely to remain in care until they turn 18. At that point, they stop receiving services, making them vulnerable to crime, homelessness, and other negative outcomes.

You are probably asking yourself, “Why is this happening? Why are out-of-home placement rates for American Indian children so high?” No one has the data to fully answer these questions. However, one of the answers is because ICWA is not followed. Often “active efforts” to place a child with extended family were not tried. Many times the tribe was not notified in a timely and or appropriate manner. Sometimes the tribe makes recommendations that are not followed by the court because the county makes a recommendation that is different.

When removal is necessary, why aren’t Indian children placed in Indian homes? Again, no one has answers based on data. Most often when these placements occur, it is because ICWA was not followed. The placement preference spelled out in ICWA is very clear. If this placement were followed, Indian children would seldom end up in non-Indian homes. County workers often don’t know how to find extended family members and have limited professional and personal relationships with Indian social workers, so they lack the ability to find Indian foster homes. Worker bias must also be considered as a contributing factor; whether this bias is based on a lack of good training or personal beliefs that contradict best practices is unknown.

Because this is such a complex issue, there are likely many reasons that American Indian children are at greater risk of out-of-home placement. Research has shown that there is an association between child poverty and out-of-home placements. Whether this is because the adults in these families are unable to provide for the basic needs of their children, are under more stress and therefore more likely to be abusive, or some combination of these is less clear. Social workers may also look at poor families as “less deserving” of keeping their children and may either consciously or unconsciously hold these parents to different standards, be more likely to intervene earlier and more likely to provide more immediate and harsher interventions, thus leading to longer stays in out-of-home placement.

The National Center for Children in Poverty has developed a “Young Child Risk Calculator.” The more of these risk factors a child has, the more likely he or she is to have a chance of “poor health, school, and developmental outcomes” than other children. They go on to say, “economic hardship paired with any of the listed risk factors may indicate a greater chance of poor outcomes. Children with three or more risks are exceptionally vulnerable.” The risk factors are:

- Households without English speakers
- Coming from a large family
- Low parental education
- Residential mobility
- Single parent
- Teen mother
- Unemployed parent

([www.nccp.org/tools/risk/](http://www.nccp.org/tools/risk/))

As already stated, 35% of all American Indian youth live in poverty. While in Minnesota you are unlikely to find many American Indian youth who don’t speak English, you will find that many of these youth have three or more of the risk factors listed above, making them especially vulnerable to poor outcomes, including out-of-home placement.

When you factor in a lack of knowledge by county workers about the provisions of ICWA and the TSA, social worker and

judicial bias, and the lack of incentive or punishment for not complying with ICWA, it starts to provide a picture of why these numbers are so high. By no means am I saying that these are the only reasons that American Indian youth are in out-of-home placement at such high rates, but these are at least some of the contributing factors.

When taking a broad view, Minnesota has one of the worst track records in dealing with American Indian youth (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2008). Suicide rates for American Indian youth remain high, at least twice the rate for white youth (Wagner & Wonacott, 2006). Minnesota, along with four other states, has one of the highest incarceration rates for Indian youth (Bigfoot, 2008). While addressing child welfare disparities is complicated because of all the variables from the initial report and response to the assessment used and ultimately the social workers' recommendations and the judge's decision, there is no doubt that Minnesota needs to do better. So what are the answers? Recognition is a necessary first step, but it is not enough.

### *Current efforts*

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and others recognize that they need to do a better job in serving American Indian youth. According to the DHS website, there have been recommendations in the past such as the American Indian Disparities Initiative Advisory Committee Meeting recommendations from 2003. This group spelled out eight steps DHS should take to address disparities. It is unclear how many of these recommendations have been acted on. What is clear is that child welfare disparities persist for American Indian youth in Minnesota.

Several groups continue to engage in dialogue both internally and externally with DHS about how to address child welfare disparities.

- Tribes are stepping up in an effort to address the issue. In response to data that while American Indian children represent only 1.8% percent of general child population, they represent 13.1%

of the children in state-ordered out-of-home placement, the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council\* got involved. In January of 2007, staff from the University of Minnesota Duluth, Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies were asked by the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council to work with tribes in conjunction with DHS to develop a curriculum for county and tribal workers to address the disparity of American Indian children in out-of-home placement in Minnesota. The result was “Bridging Our Understanding: American Indian Family Preservation.” Social workers who attend the training gain knowledge about American Indian families and about specific resources that have been identified by tribes as fundamental to improving service development and delivery to American Indian families and children. Each two-day course is offered at different tribal locations and is taught by tribal professionals, including a presentation by local tribal representatives. DHS began to offer this training in the fall of 2010, and it has received positive feedback.

- A recent bill in the legislature asking for a Disparities Commission did not pass, in part because it lacked consultation with tribes, which is unfortunately a common occurrence. Perhaps this Commission can be revisited with meaningful inclusion of tribal governments and their staff.
- In 2005, the Leech Lake and White Earth Reservations entered into an agreement with DHS

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\* The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) was established in 1963 (Minnesota Statutes Chapter 888, Sec. 2 (3:922)). MIAC is the official liaison between the state of Minnesota and the 11 tribal governments within the state. The Council provides a forum for and advises state government on issues of concern to urban Indian communities. The Council administers three programs designed to enhance economic opportunities and protect cultural resources for the state’s American Indian constituencies. (Retrieved from: <http://www.indianaffairs.state.mn.us/aboutus.html>).

to begin to receive IV-E dollars to provide child welfare services to their tribal members. Red Lake and Mille Lacs have also signed agreements. While this initiative does not have a long track record, it has afforded the tribes greater say in the disposition of their children, which is what ICWA was designed to do. Even with this greater say, these tribes still have to interact with counties that often don't support their tribe's child welfare recommendations

- Tribal models are emerging and deserve to be critically studied to find what works. "Throughout the long and complicated relationship of tribal governments to the U.S. federal government, the provision of culturally appropriate services and the collection of accurate data in tribal communities has been an ongoing issue. Because of this, the development of child welfare systems in which tribes provide their own services and collect and report their own data directly to the federal government is critical to the reassertion of tribal self-determination and the preservation of tribal cultures" (Geary & Day, 2010, p. 4). While there aren't one-size-fits-all models, tribes who successfully assist families with child welfare issues take an approach of "serving our relations" and tend to provide multiple levels of support to families. Because they often know families and continue to interact with them in the community, they are able to find extended family and use cultural supports to help families through difficult times. These tribes report that families seek out assistance rather than just coming in when they have had someone refer them. All of these tribal models use their cultural teachings and resources as the basis for their programs building on cultural strengths.
- In response to tribal social workers' feedback about the need for training specific to tribal needs and targeted specifically for tribal social workers, the University of Minnesota Duluth, Center for



Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies, began the Summer Institute in American Indian Child Welfare in the summer of 2006. It has been offered every year since on the Leech Lake Reservation with about 100 participants from three states and Canada attending each year.

These and other efforts continue to take place, but perhaps it is time for policy makers to weigh in as well.

### ***Recommendations***

As stated, many good people are working on these issues from various perspectives — legislative, training, research, and practice — but there is no comprehensive approach that brings all these entities together. While many changes have occurred and continue to evolve, there remains an urgency to address this issue. What will it take to change these outcomes? How many children and families need to suffer? What are you willing to do? How can you use your voice to make a difference? Here are some needs recently identified by Tribal Social Work Directors:

- Identify what's working to decrease disparities from existing data and reports done by various organizations that work with tribal youth, including child welfare, juvenile justice, substance abuse, mental health and other groups.
- Develop legislation with tribal input to increase ICWA compliance. Engage in other discussions with tribes about what would be helpful to reduce disparities. Provide sanctions for lack of compliance and rewards for those counties who work well with their tribal counterparts.
- Require judges and guardians ad litem to understand ICWA from a tribal perspective through training and evaluation of practices.
- Provide supports to the existing ICWA Council so they can play a central role in addressing disparities.

- Document tribal models that are working across professions and provide demonstrations and training based on them to county and tribal workers.
- Provide assistance to DHS to develop a better system to use data they collect so that it can be of greater benefit to tribes.
- Promote collaborative relationships: DHS and counties with tribes, child welfare with other professional groups such as juvenile justice, substance abuse, mental health and other groups, so they can learn from each other.
- Provide funds to tribes for long-term services to promote stability in families to prevent removals and recidivism.
- Provide legislative consequences for lack of ICWA compliance by county workers; require counties to show improvement or have additional consequences; consider a penalty for placing children in more than three placements.
- DHS should be able to require counties to understand and comply with ICWA and the Tribal State Agreement.
- Support tribes in providing culturally consistent child welfare services to tribal members.
- The State of Minnesota should partner with tribes to address the economic disparities present on and around reservations.

Recently at a meeting where I was present with tribal social service directors, several questions were asked that have been ringing in Indian country for years: *“Why is it acceptable for so many of our kids to be in out-of-home placement? Before ICWA, we used to hear grandparents asking, ‘Where are our grandchildren going?’ We are still hearing that question.”* To me, these are haunting questions. Minnesota can do much better in

working with American Indian youth.

We all know the difference public policies can make in the lives of children. Money spent on improving the lives of children has been shown to be productive in changing conditions that interfere with children reaching their full potential. Policy that assists children and families in real time improves outcomes and reduces negative outcomes such as homelessness, crime, drug use, and poverty. Money spent to assist families up front generates significant rates of return in lower long-term costs and more productive citizens. It, of course, also results in a higher quality of life for those families and children, which benefits us all. Relatively small amounts of resources can yield huge returns in fewer out-of-home placements and better all-around outcomes for Indian youth. This not only benefits those children and families, but all Minnesotans by creating a strong and vital future for the next seven generations.

*“The kinship unit is very powerful. I want my descendants to have a strong sense of who their ancestors were and to understand that they have a responsibility to be a conduit for our culture. That is the only hope we have of ensuring the essence of our culture will continue...”* (Medicine, B., p. 41, 2004).

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## **You Can Be a Leader One Day**

**Bryan Joyce**

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“You can be a leader one day.” Seven simple words spoken by then-Janesville Waldorf Pemberton Middle School Principal Shelly Schultz have had profound meaning for me growing up. They were spoken to me as she handed me a certificate indicating I could start high school the following year. As a middle school student who liked to challenge authority, my run-ins with my principal were not always friendly times; despite this, Mrs. Schultz saw something in me. Since then, I have graduated from high school and college, there have been more graduation ceremonies, but none have left me with such a challenging statement. You can be a leader one day. What do you do with a statement like that? Do you forget about it and move on, or let it guide you in your career? I chose the latter.

The story of my eighth-grade graduation is not meant to show my leadership capabilities, but to show the importance of educators in shaping the leaders of tomorrow. I am a high school social studies teacher at Windom Area Schools in southwest Minnesota. I was born rural, raised rural, educated rural, I sought higher education at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and I finally settled down to teach in a rural Minnesota school. There are so many high quality initiatives happening in Minnesota, especially in the education field. On a daily basis, I encounter so many students with leadership potential. How does a rural education foster and help the leaders of tomorrow grow? First, the experiences and learning must be engaging. Second, the learning must be meaningful. Third, the student must be challenged. Finally, the experiences

created for students must be somewhat innovative. Here are some examples of how I see these in practical terms.

### ***Engaging education***

Engaging students is the goal of any effective educator. Some students are naturally engaged in the subject material, but educators are trying to engage all. Anyone who has spoken to a room of sophomores knows the enormity of this task. A student must first be engaged in order to find meaning. The experience and climate created by the teacher make all the difference in engaging learners.

I believe the best way to engage the 21st century learner is by providing experiences for students to apply learning beyond the classroom. Students, especially those with great leadership potential, need access to educational trips and experiences. Having a shared educational experience in a field setting instantly engages students, regardless of their prior interest level. From my experiences leading student trips, I have found that the best leaders always seem to jump at the chance to apply their education beyond the classroom.

In 2008, the United States was in the midst of an extremely engaging presidential race with dynamic candidates on both sides of the aisle. Students in Windom seemed interested, primarily because the only president most could remember was President George W. Bush. The fact that a new person would become president was very exciting to them. I had an opportunity to travel on an educational trip in college, and I had been looking for an opportunity to do so as a teacher. I decided to organize a student trip to witness the inauguration of the new president on January 20, 2009. Joining me were fellow social studies teachers Sheryl Hanefeld and Steve Kuntz, as well as twenty-five students. We spent about nine hours on the Washington Mall that cold January morning and witnessed the swearing-in of President Barack Obama. While the world watched on TV, we were part of the crowd on the Mall. These students witnessed what is so great about our republic — the peaceful transition of power from one political entity to another. This is a uniquely American moment that has endured through times of peace and war for over 200

years, and Windom students were engaged in this historic event. When their children ask them about that inauguration, I can imagine there will be a great level of excitement when they tell the story of being there and soaking it all in.

While I believe the best way to engage is to have experiences, the classroom can be a magical place where greatly engaged civic discussion can unfold. Finding passion in what I do keeps me engaged. I love teaching, and I love a great discussion. When students feel that passion for a topic, they tend to let their guard down and let their minds be led down the road toward a great experience. I really stress to my students that I value their well thought-out opinions on topics. They are young, but they are forming their views on how much sovereignty they truly have. If they feel they have power, they engage. Empower the student-leaders to have learning experiences, and engage them during the process.

### *Meaningful education*

Students want to know that what they are doing will have meaning in their adult lives. The day when the horrible nightmare involving U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords unfolded in Tucson, Arizona, I was at home spending time with my family and preparing for an evening basketball game. It was a Saturday in January, so I was not glued to my television, as my two young children kept me plenty busy. All of my basketball players have my phone number, and I received a text from one of them informing me that the representative she had role-played in class had been shot. This was a uniquely 21st-century moment, having a current events story broken to me via a text from a student. Events unfold all over the world, as they have for millennia; what's changed is the break-neck pace at which the world finds out. How does the world find out? Twitter, Facebook, blogs, you name the medium. The point here is that information is everywhere. A social studies teacher could go crazy trying to stay on top of all this.

This story is unique, though, on another level, which I think is worth explaining.

Every fall my sophomores participate in a U.S.



Government legislative simulation in which they role-play a member of Congress in a particular committee that is dealing with a certain piece of legislation. I am sure many government teachers run a similar simulation. All students learn that a bill becomes a law by passing through committees and making its way to the President. Knowing the process is beneficial, but I argue it lacks meaning. How can Congressional work become meaningful? Put the student to work in passing the bill.

Every student, not just the leaders, becomes involved in the legislative process. All students have to work on a particular chunk of the legislation. What really becomes meaningful is to see the true leaders step up. Every committee must have a chair and ranking member. Students who are truly engaged in the process are provided a great opportunity to lead their classmates in the committee work process. What they really find out is that democracy is muddy. It is not neat, it is not quick, and it is hard work. Only the most worthy bills pass, and this is usually true in the class simulation as well. Every student hems and haws about doing a project and being involved in their learning, but none would have it any other way after the simulation. Playing a member of Congress makes the person real and makes the legislation hit home. That was the most intriguing part of that awful January day for me. I learned about the event from a student, via a text, because she felt a personal connection to the news of the day. This simulation allowed a sophomore in high school to get interested in the House Science and Technology Committee and know who Rep. Gabrielle Giffords was prior to her name being in every headline.

Meaningful learning puts the student to work. Why do students enjoy making things in shop classes, testing something in a science experiment, cooking in an FACS class, making art projects? They are all hands-on and meaningful, and they produce tangible results. We as educators must allow students the opportunity to get a meaningful education and make the connections to the "real world." Failure to do so will lead us down a path of irrelevancy that will have disastrous results for our education system, and ultimately, our republic.

### *Challenging education*

Collaboration is often talked about in education, but usually never followed up on. In a school the size of Windom Area, and in addition to teaching full-time, most teachers are also helping with any number of extra-curricular activities, from fine arts to athletics. Can teachers collaborate for a yearlong project challenging seniors to go beyond the classroom? Eagle Achievement has been our way to try just that.

Eagle Achievement started as two separate ideas in our English and Social Studies departments. As seniors, the English students always had to write a problem/solution paper. In social studies, I always assigned the seniors a project challenging them to “Change the World.” After the first year of these two assignments running independently, it seemed to English teacher Laura Alvstad and me that these two projects should work together. We spent a year planning, including a trip to St. Peter to view some finished senior project presentations. We launched our version of the senior project, called Eagle Achievement, in the 2009-2010 school year.

The project works this way: Students in their senior year at Windom Area Schools identify a problem in society that they want to learn more about. Some topic examples include blood shortages; hunger; poverty; second language acquisition; technology availability in schools; and alternative energy. After selecting their topic, students research and write a documented paper explaining the problem and offering solutions to the topic, based on their research. After the paper has been written and approved, the student must choose one way to help solve the problem and act on it. This is where the social studies “Change the World” part comes in. The paper is written during first semester and the project acted upon in second semester, with a few exceptions based on the project. About two weeks prior to graduation, students make a formal presentation of their Eagle Achievement project to a panel of community judges. An Eagle Achievement Excellence Award is given to the student, or students, who best exemplify what it means to show leadership and go beyond the basics of the project.

After two years of this large collaborative project, we have learned quite a bit. I have learned that students who have leadership capabilities truly challenge themselves with a project of this magnitude. During the 2009-2010 school year, Windom Graduates Mike Farrell and Mason Voehl decided to research two different areas of alternative energy and write very different papers. After researching, they realized that our school was lacking a strong alternative energy curriculum. They, along with science teacher Jonathan Smith, started the Youth Energy Summit group at Windom Area Schools. This group continues today and tries to find innovative ways to teach about alternative energy in our school. All this was made possible because of the initiative of two willing senior leaders and a helpful teacher.

Sunny Patel, a 2011 graduate of Windom Area Schools, decided to research the topic of blood shortages for his Eagle Achievement project. He was hoping to have a blood drive and be done with the project. What he found through his research, though, was a real need to educate the public on what happens when blood is donated. This led Sunny to create a 15-minute video detailing exactly what happens to blood once the actual donation has occurred. The video picks up where most people stop — at the donation table. Now the public can be informed through the Sioux Falls Blood Bank website and the Windom Hospital website as to how a blood donation actually makes a difference in someone's life. Sunny assisted on two to three blood drives, but he found that after the initial research, he needed to do more.

Sunny, Mike, and Mason embody what Eagle Achievement is all about. This project allows the leader inside to come out and be challenged like never before. Students should be better prepared for whatever the "real world" has in store as a result of this project. I must give some credit here where it is due. Minnesota State University, Mankato, is involved in a program called Public Achievement headed by Professors Joe Kunkel and Tony Filipovitch. Much of my preparation to lead Eagle Achievement comes from my involvement in the Public Achievement program. Public Achievement does a tremendous job of developing leadership skills in future teachers and the students involved.

### *Innovative education*

The last 20-30 years have been difficult for rural communities. Family farms that were once the mainstay of the community have shrunk in size due to technological innovations. What has been beneficial for the global food supply isn't always beneficial for the rural community. Gone are the small family farms scattered throughout the countryside with eight to ten kids per family. In their place, we find much larger farms, while the need for labor is far less. Many more families are living in the city and looking to the larger metropolitan areas for opportunity during and after high school. Lost in all this is the true measure of the value of the rural community. The Internet allows us to harness this value, while accessing the best of the rest of the world.

The Internet has become a way that we access information on a global scale. Education has been slow to change to meet this new and exciting shift, but in some cases the school is not to blame as high-speed Internet is not readily available in all rural communities. We are fortunate in Windom as government and grant funding have allowed access to fiber-optic cable and high-speed Internet at a very reasonable price. Windom Area Schools is in the process of making the entire school a Wi-Fi hotspot for students to access using personal computers. Many of our departments are starting to offer online options, including physics and economics. Students at Windom Area Schools have the opportunity to learn how to take an online course while still in high school, where they know the teacher is just down the hall if they have issues. The flexibility that an online class option has given some of our students allows the leaders of tomorrow time in their day to work with younger students and take on more of a leadership role. But while online learning is exciting, it has its drawbacks. It forces the student to learn very independently. Taking an online course is a great way for college-ready students to practice their time management skills to prepare for college life, which is great for students who are ready, but should be approached cautiously for students still needing much guidance.

Can online learning work for everyone? This question is something that schools will have to grapple with in the next

ten years as costs of operation rise and Internet access is more readily available. I do not see a future where the traditional school is replaced. I envision an environment in which every student has a way to access the Internet for basic research in the palm of his or her hand. Students in Minnesota, especially rural Minnesota, need a one-one technology initiative. A device that allows students to access the Internet, process documents and presentations, and communicate with other students needs to be in all students' hands by fifth grade. We have the infrastructure in place; the students just need the tools to use it. How we access information is changing. Need to know the date of the Battle of Antietam? Google it. The Blackberry in my pocket takes care of that in about eight seconds. This allows me to spend my time and energy really learning the causes and effects of the battle and place it in the grand picture that is the Civil War, instead of spending the time memorizing an easily retrievable date. A one-one initiative will allow educators to help students learn how to best utilize the technology available. Let's start putting the money to work to get students and schools into the 21st century.

The Internet has allowed students in rural communities to access a world's worth of knowledge, but it also allows us to show what is great about our community. A rural community has so much value. The parks are clean. My kids are safe walking around town. I know most community leaders, police officers, fire fighters, and city workers by name. The store clerks in town know you by name and treat you well when you shop there. We have a community, and the Internet allows us to embrace this community and still have access to the best the world has to offer. Nobody tells this story better than 2001 Windom graduate Mari Harries.

Mari graduated high school in 2001 and left for the big city, hoping never to return to little Windom. She was seeking opportunity and needed to leave the small town behind. Now, ten years later, Mari is back and opening a café called the River City Eatery with 2007 Windom graduate Sarah Cartwright. What changed? The short answer is Mari. After seeing the world and experiencing college, Mari moved home to be close

to family and find a job. While living back in Windom, she got married and started a family. Having a family started to open Mari's eyes to what is great about her hometown. She started a group called Finding Windom. The goal of Finding Windom is to highlight just what is so special about this small town so it doesn't take ten years for others to realize what Mari did. Mari's mission led her to organize cleaning up the city square in Windom that surrounds the Cottonwood County Courthouse. Like many small towns, the buildings in the town square are starting to empty, and businesses continue to come and go. Mari realized that what is missing is the third place — the place where the community comes to have a bite to eat and some conversation. The River City Eatery is set to open in July, thanks to Mari's vision of what her town can be. I encourage you to check out Mari's blog at [mari2cents.blogspot.com](http://mari2cents.blogspot.com). Mari Harries, Windom graduate, college graduate, restaurateur, mother, wife, daughter, sister, and friend, is using the Internet to help others find what it took her so long to. Mari is exactly the type of leader that students in Windom can look up to, and we are lucky to have her.

"You can be a leader one day." The words still echo for me. As a social studies teacher, I am constantly learning about history. If we fail to look to our past, we cannot understand what awaits us in the future. We can learn so much by looking around at family and community. All of my experiences have shaped the way I approach what I do. The future leaders in our rural communities are the same: the experiences they have today shape the leaders they become tomorrow. An engaging, meaningful, challenging, and innovative education will lay a foundation for these future leaders. As educators, our job is to make sure that when that future comes, we have helped our leaders find the tools they will need to lead. The students of the 21st century are waiting to have their worlds awakened and for that one person to tell them: "You can be a leader one day."



## **In Other Words: Sending the Right Rural Message**

**Neil Linscheid**

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I was a born-and-raised city kid, but now I live and work in southwestern rural Minnesota because it's a place full of opportunity for a young professional, and because the value of rural Minnesota was communicated to me by caring people. I want my community and other rural communities to be successful for the foreseeable future. In this article, I challenge leaders in rural areas to recognize the importance of strategically communicating the opportunities of their community to potential residents, current residents, talented people, business owners, and entrepreneurs well beyond their borders. I believe that our ability to communicate the value of rural places will create success and sustain other hard work that is being done to stimulate rural vitality. There are many working on this already, making great efforts to change the communication related to their community externally and internally.

Because I am now a small-town, rural citizen raising rural kids, I think this is worth doing.

### ***My story***

I was born and raised in St. Paul and moved to rural Minnesota to attend the University of Minnesota in Morris. My only early rural memories are of a lake 60 minutes from St. Paul and a few trips to Butterfield to see something called a "Thrashing Bee." So fishing and farming dominated my understanding of rural Minnesota.

At the University of Minnesota-Morris, however, I found the Center for Small Towns (CST) and my future path. As a research assistant at CST, I learned about health



care challenges rural businesses face (Thorson, Linscheid, Schmidt, 2004) and how metro media portray rural Minnesota communities (Winchester et al., 2004). Most importantly, I started to see opportunities in rural Minnesota. I worked with a few community groups and saw that even as a student, young and inexperienced, my skills were useful. Working with local civic leaders in that capacity also showed me how easily being accepted into rural civic life could be. I set out to develop the additional experience and education I thought I'd need to be successful in rural Minnesota. I attended the Humphrey Institute to learn more about economic development, leadership, and policy. I knew that economic development is a key challenge in rural communities. I also knew that economic development doesn't occur easily, especially in rural areas.

I've lived in several rural Minnesota communities: Wadena, Fawn Lake Township, Morris, Marshall, and now Clarkfield, in central Yellow Medicine County. I've seen great things in each of these rural places and consider myself an advocate for the well-being of each of those communities. And I'm getting the chance to stimulate economic development as a Community Economics Educator for the U of M Extension Center for Community Vitality.

Three years ago, my wife and I chose Clarkfield to be our home. Our choice wasn't dumb luck. Dave and Roselyn, Clarkfield residents, took notice of the potential for our young family and made the case for their community by telling us that "there is a great, growing school" and "there are great affordable homes for a young family to get started with." They invited us to supper, promised to connect us and told us they'd stick with us. They followed through on their promises almost immediately. Before we had made our final decisions to move, we had already been connected to a daycare provider.

Clarkfield is a great fit for us. With a population of 900, it's not too big or too small. The community really is supporting its school. It's a safe and friendly place. Most importantly, true to Dave and Roselyn's word, it is a welcoming place. I quickly got adopted into civic life and was chosen to sit on the city council and economic development authority. I volunteer with

the Clarkfield Community Foundation and the local Lions when I get a chance. Thanks to that sales pitch Dave and Roselyn gave me, my connection to rural Minnesota exceeds the dreams that were seeded in Morris.

And my family is not alone. As described elsewhere in this journal (see Ben Winchester, et al.), we're part of a trend of newcomers who are choosing to make a home in rural communities.

I view my story as an example of the impact that communicating the value of rural communities can have, yet I wonder who's going to make the pitch to all of the potential newcomers who are considering making a jump? Not just the newcomers as future residents, but also entrepreneurs as our future business leaders. I struggle with the question, and I have seen many other community leaders struggle with it as well. How are we going to find our voice and stay on the map? What can we do to make the ad hoc communication success exhibited in my story more coordinated? How can we make my story the norm for rural residents and not the anomaly?

### ***Where we're headed: Forgotten places or land of opportunity?***

Minnesota State Economist Tom Stinson and State Demographer Tom Gillaspy have consistently presented a clear and sobering view of rural Minnesota's economic and demographic changes in the past several years. Stinson and Gillaspy argue that our success will be tied to strengths in productivity and innovation. We must provide productive and innovative people in an incredibly competitive world market to keep our businesses and communities successful.

Recently, Stinson and Gillaspy examined the impact the recession has had on Minnesota (Stinson and Gillaspy, 2011). I'm struck by how much we have lost economically and how long it will take to regain our previous trajectory. But I also think the conclusions about our future needs remain the same. Productivity and talent will drive our future. We can't avoid the trends, but we can decide on a course of action. Stinson's summary of the situation five years ago may ring even truer today:

We cannot rest on past accomplishments. Extending the

state's record of strong economic growth over the next decade or more will be a real challenge, particularly in Minnesota's ruralplexes. Choosing appropriate statewide and local strategies for dealing with the pressures of globalization, demographic shifts, and rapid technological change will be crucial, and workforce development efforts will become even more important as the structure of the Minnesota economy continues to evolve. The task ahead will be substantial for rural Minnesota, but rural Minnesota has shown that it is capable of meeting the challenges that lie ahead (Stinson, 2006).

As I consider where rural Minnesota can be in the future, I've synthesized much research and many stories. I've concluded that regardless of which economic development policies we choose, our final success will correlate with our ability to communicate strategically as individual rural communities and as a state. Every dream we have, every wild idea, every policy change — and especially every effort we make to recruit productive and innovative people — will at some point be impacted by the quality of our efforts to communicate for a sustained period of time.

### ***Strategic communication from rural Minnesota***

The term "strategic communication" has been used in the context of international rural development: "Strategic communication is a comprehensive and holistic concept. It includes all the activities needed for identifying and assessing critical issues, designing and implementing appropriate strategies, and monitoring and evaluating the results" (Santucci, 2005). Writing about the importance of strategic communications, Santucci notes that "Strategic communication should not be considered a cost, but rather a resource saving device which reduces the risk of less than optimal design, wrong measures, poor implementation, poor results, and even social unrest in the countryside or towns." Social unrest in the countryside may not be a fear for leaders in rural Minnesota, but the need to have the correct measures, implementation and results is something all leaders strive to achieve.

Translating a broad concept to practical terms can be challenging. To overcome this challenge, the World Bank provides a valuable programmatic resource to its program officers and teams in the form of a guide titled *Strategic Communications for Community Driven Development: A practical guide for project managers and communication practitioners* (Mozammel and Schechter, 2005). The guide is written to assist staff working with specific World Bank programs, but I think the methodology it suggests is easily translated to rural Minnesota communities, especially if you substitute "community" for "programs" and "local leaders" for "project managers." The guide gives the following five steps to strategic communications worth repeating here:

1. Establish a communication management function.
2. Conduct an analysis/assessment.
3. Develop a communication strategy and action plan.
4. Implement communication activities.
5. Conduct monitoring and feedback activities.

Community leaders have taken many of these steps already. Finding examples of coordinated community communication efforts, however, is challenging. Marketing and advertising for industrial development projects is the most effective activity I've seen in many communities. Those efforts are most often, in my experience, targeted and well planned. Other efforts I've witnessed work to brand the community to encompass its unique features. Many of our regional centers do an excellent job in providing well-designed printed materials and online resources, as well as integrating the physical aspects of the community into those campaigns. One example is [Discovermarshall.com](http://Discovermarshall.com), which integrates community signage, online branding, and several other media efforts to be a resource for residents and visitors. Efforts like [Discovermarshall.com](http://Discovermarshall.com) are an excellent start toward the communications I think we need to be successful.

As I visit with leaders in rural communities, however, it's clear to me there is an understanding that we'll need to go beyond branding efforts to be successful. We may be

facing a more challenging issue, namely a fight to keep our communities from being forgotten. Ann Markusen describes the phenomenon in her work about forgetting places and place-making. To avoid becoming a forgotten place, she argues, we can build networks of promoters to strengthen our sense of place and to help others remember why our place is worth keeping around. She reveals the factors that help us forget places, such as chain restaurants, stores, and media. She also notes a key to remembering places is building bridges to other places. She defines forgotten places as:

...communities and ecologies that are deprived of leadership and stewardship by the actions and attitudes of people both present in and absent from these environments. Such deprivation implies the wasting of human and natural resources, a form of destruction of community, and a sense of place and individual potential. Ideologies of efficient resource allocation deny this waste, hypothesizing that valuable resources, whether human or physical, will be absorbed elsewhere in the global economy. But in reality, substantial wastage occurs, much of it irreversible. And the cost of migration, financial and physical devaluation is borne by many (Markusen, 2003).

As rural leaders make a play for the productive and talented community members of the future, we owe it to ourselves to recognize and promote the many valuable resources and opportunities that rural places offer. Indeed, there is even a silver lining in the demographic and economic changes that Stinson and Gillaspay herald. Demographic changes will mean increased bargaining ability for talented, productive people. Rural youth should consider what this trend means for them. I see it as an opportunity for young workers to gain valuable experience more quickly than might be the case elsewhere. I also see it as an opportunity for young professionals to shape their work and family lives on their terms. Even when rural communities are used as a stepping stone for ambitious workers who have their sights set elsewhere, the community still has a chance to get great

people, if just for a while. And then, with the right sales pitch — with the right communicated value — maybe they'll stay. Will we be able to connect the right messages to the people we want to stay and recruit, i.e., entrepreneurs, talented workers, emerging leaders?

I think we're up to the challenge. For the remainder of this paper, I'll work to share pieces of this type of complex and interrelated communication effort. I believe these examples represent the types of activities needed to be the new cornerstones for creating a new narrative that shows the world what we have to offer.

### ***Communicating with the world***

*Through the media:* Understanding and articulating the value of a lifestyle that many of us take for granted can be difficult, especially because sometimes the value is not at the surface. The classic narrative of the value of rural Minnesota touts good schools, good work ethic, and good communities. I don't dispute any of these factors. The problem is that every other community on the planet is using the same narrative. But several media resources are revealing the more nuanced story — and it's more interesting and appealing.

The Rural Learning Center in Howard, South Dakota, has a blog called Reimagine Rural ([reimaginerural.com](http://reimaginerural.com)). Visit Reimagine Rural, and you'll find Mike Knutson and guest authors leading an ongoing and rich discussion about the future of rural South Dakota. They take on pressing issues similar to many faced by Minnesota communities: the needs of youth, economic development, and the rural pathos. The stories I find most compelling are the ones about real people changing their community both socially and economically.

Reimagine Rural proves that we don't need to accept others' narrative of rural. By gathering just as active people, we can shape the story about the direction of rural places. The leadership lesson Reimagine Rural provides is that there are good things happening. With some effort those can be shared with everyone using online media, in this case a blog.

No rural doom-and-gloom narrative is as prolific as the exodus of young people. But the experience of rural youth is

actually complex and nuanced. Recently, an effort has been under way by the news web site MinnPost to document and communicate the complex story of rural youth. The series, called "Rural Minnesota: A Generation at a Cross Roads," is a collection of stories from across that state that show the varied problems of rural Minnesota, as well as the varied opportunities. This series is a wonderful example of honest communication and good reporting about the real rural Minnesota. It's something that changes perspectives and breaks down misconceptions.

*Person to person:* Each and every rural citizen has multiple opportunities to share the good and bad of their community. The good stories about a community can travel miles, and we hope they do. The bad stories also travel, so our diligence needs to include ways to bring the good things forward. Translating a community narrative is done by all citizens, but a few have taken additional efforts worth learning from.

Duluth has an active group of young professionals doing their part to communicate the importance of their community. This group has been working for the past several years to find ways their community can be competitive in the next decades. In the group's recently released report, *Attracting & Retaining Young Adults Taskforce* (2006), they offer several fantastic suggestions suitable for most communities:

1. Give young adults a chance to lead.
2. Create a better way to share information.
3. Raise awareness of career and economic opportunities.
4. Increase connections between college and university students and the community.
5. "We love this place. Now admit it. In public."
6. Support projects that help Duluth-Superior be a more vibrant place to work and live.

The report this group of young leaders created is inspirational and powerful. By taking a stand and outlining their interests, they are showing off their leadership skills. They're also providing advice that all of our rural communities can take to heart. The point they make that

most resonates with the theme I wish to advance is “We love this place. Now admit it. In public.” I’m struck by the simple way that statement says so much about our needs and solutions. I believe this should be every rural citizen’s mantra and responsibility. I can only imagine the economic effects it would have if every rural citizen admitted the value of their community in public. Raising awareness about the economic and career opportunities and being willing to admit in public they love their community are excellent examples of working toward a more strategic way of communicating.

Another example of a citizen taking responsibility for communicating the importance of her community is in Windom. Mari Harries is the founder of the Finding Windom blog. On Finding Windom ([mari2cents.blogspot.com](http://mari2cents.blogspot.com)), you’ll see that it’s not just blatant boosterism that matters. Mari gives us something more powerful. She gives us caring truth. I believe it’s important to care about your community before you can communicate its potential and its challenges. Mari cares about Windom. She cares enough to share her personal frustrations and, more importantly, her aspirations. She’s also a new business owner. I’m confident that it’s the efforts of people like Mari that will make the most difference in the economic vitality of rural Minnesota.

### *Practical ideas*

The examples I provided above are just a start to a new way in which we can strategically communicate the value of rural Minnesota communities. I see a few simple steps we all can take to bring us one step closer to this approach.

1. Support efforts by community groups, businesses, and citizens to create a positive image of your community. Give more than passive support for these activities by encouraging communication efforts that go beyond local and regional audiences. Practically, this might mean financially supporting Internet activities, branding efforts, and planning activities.
2. Provide resources to help rural Minnesota communities discover and articulate their unique value to the



global marketplace. This might mean supporting self-evaluation efforts and research.

3. Encourage citizens to acknowledge particular aspects of their community that they love. As the group of young professionals from Duluth notes, “You love it here. Now say it. In public.” This can be done through deliberate campaigns and through leaders encouraging others to speak up.
4. Ask the following questions about communications in your community, taken from the World Bank:
  - What types of stakeholders should be involved?
  - What is the desired change in behavior?
  - What messages would be appropriate?
  - What method or medium of communication would be most effective?
  - How will the communication process be monitored and evaluated?(Santucci, 2005. p.77)
5. Build capacity at all levels through education and financial support to ensure that every stakeholder has the ability to effectively communicate. In short, don’t sell short the importance effective communication will have on all efforts.

### ***Conclusion***

My most basic argument here is that no matter which outcome we hope to achieve, our road will lead through our ability to communicate. Therefore, it’s important to ensure that communication efforts at the state, regional, and local level are strategic and participatory. This means we’ll need to dedicate a portion of our efforts to creating effective comprehensive plans. I believe even small efforts to become more strategic in our communication will provide measurable results.

I don’t wish to diminish the many great efforts of Minnesota organizations to communicate the value of rural Minnesota. Instead, I hope to highlight the importance of this work and advocate for increased support.

I don't believe my choice to live and work in rural Minnesota happened by luck. I was deliberately shown the value of rural Minnesota by many people who cared ardently about me and their community. The people in Morris, Minnesota, showed me that a small town can hold opportunities. Dave and Roselyn in Clarkfield made a pitch, which resonated, for their community and its specific opportunities. I'm struck by the gift that the personal pitch for Clarkfield has been. It's been a case of the right message, using the right medium. I believe our aim as rural leaders should be to get to these types of personal appeals out for our communities as quickly as possible.

As an elected leader from a small rural community and as a person who often works with small rural communities, I know that the money to invest in a communication strategy is tight. Time is even tighter. Yet, I believe that even small steps in this effort will make a difference. I'll admit that I have work to do, and I for one am willing to take responsibility for communicating the opportunities of rural Minnesota to friends, family, and outsiders.

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## **“I Want to Own My Own Business When I Grow Up”: Encouraging Entrepreneurship at a Young Age**

**Michael Nolan**

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*“In truth, it seems that entrepreneurs exist only in retrospect.  
In the early days they are labeled crackpots, dreamers,  
and unhirables. Only later do they earn the title  
— and the respect.”*

*Jeffrey P. Sudikoff  
Founder of IDB Communications Group*

Somewhere in our state is a high school student who will grow up to build a company that employs hundreds of people.

It may be your son or daughter...

This article will look at some of the ways our Minnesota communities are helping our youth think about starting and growing their own companies.

What started me thinking about this was a phone call I received a few weeks ago at 11 p.m.

A tired voice said: “Marketing people are noisy.” It was my son, Charlie, calling home from his third day at entrepreneurship camp.

I heard the budding businessman in his voice. It had a tone of desperation.

Charlie was at St. John’s in Collegeville at Minnesota Business Venture, a weeklong residential summer enrichment program that brings together high school students and business professionals from across the state to learn and teach about business and financial literacy.

“Dad, I only volunteered to be finance ‘cause no one else wanted to. Now the marketing people are driving me crazy.

“They want the moon and stars and unicorns and fairy dust and fireworks. Finance people have to tell them ‘no’ all the time.”

I laughed. I tried to help.

“Do you need help with anything? P&L, balance sheet?”

“No, I just need to vent.”

And so there was the lesson. Starting a business requires:

1. Working with people who sometimes drive you crazy.
2. Doing jobs you don’t like.
3. Periods of intense frustration.
4. All the other stuff. Marketing, operations, finance. Business plans, sales. Innovation. Human resources.
5. And a community to support your dreams.

I’m Mike Nolan, the director of Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Small Business Development Center. We are one of nine centers in Minnesota, part of a nationwide network of organizations funded through local contribution dollars matched by grants from the Small Business Administration.

Together with a nine-person group of experienced, motivated consultants, we serve a nine-county region in south central Minnesota, providing advice, information and education to small-business owners in our mission to support and develop our local economies.

I grew up in the broadcasting industry, watching my dad run a corporate radio station in Chicago. I always knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up. As a teenager I watched my dad buy his own radio station in Austin, Minnesota, build a fantastic staff and become a key figure in our community. I knew that someday I would own my own radio station.

By age 35 I had done just that. I purchased my own station in Mankato, ran it and sold it. I had accomplished my lifelong dream before my hair started to turn gray.

But my lessons in entrepreneurship had just begun.

Along the way, I'd decided the Internet might amount to something — a crazy idea in 1995. Together with a talented staff, I built a vehicle web site that eventually grew into MinnesotaCars.com, a software company and magazine publishing group.

I've since sold that company, yet I continue to help form companies and invest in them. I have traveled, studied and taught about business and business development around the world.

And now I'm back in rural Minnesota, running a non-profit organization concentrating on business development in our communities. This year our SBDC will meet with around 350 clients, all people who have or are trying to start their own businesses. They start small and hope to grow: many of them are starting out in small towns around southern Minnesota.

"Job creation" is the buzz word today, and we know from the Census data that half of the people who work in the United States — and more than half in rural parts of the country — work at small businesses.

The traditional model of a small town — where we're born, grow up, get a job, get married and raise a family, retire and die all in the same place — doesn't look too viable anymore. But does that have to be the case? Are we all doomed to watch our children leave their hometowns for life in a big city?

What if we could get our young people to come back home and create their chosen career by starting their own business? What if we raised entrepreneurial kids who grew into entrepreneurial adults?

Many great entrepreneurs have found new ways to start companies built on manufacturing and agriculture — the cornerstones of Minnesota's economy. We have the infrastructure in place to assist and grow jobs in these areas.

But are we doing as good a job helping companies create new jobs based on services, information and knowledge? Technology is making rural America more and more competitive in these areas — and we can help build the infrastructure needed for these jobs, too.

## ***Starting up***

Never has it been easier to start and grow a business in a small town. Small businesses today have gone global, competing with firms in China and India. Going global means businesses can operate from rural towns as long as they have good communications, access to transportation and workers with the right skills. With the proper resources and infrastructure, a person has every bit as good a chance of starting a successful business in a small town as they do in a big city.

Business development in rural communities isn't only about chasing the big employer anymore (smokestack chasing, as it's called). Yes, larger employers are a necessary, vital part of our rural economy. But with changing demographics and the changing economy in our state, we need a diversified economy, a local economy made up of a healthy mix of small, medium and large businesses. A community with a balanced combination of businesses can withstand the fluctuations of the global economy and can be a point of pride that keeps a community vital and active.

The key to creating this mix is entrepreneurship, bringing risk takers together with a community that's entrepreneur-ready. Entrepreneurial communities are welcoming to people who want to start their own businesses and are willing to assist in the possibilities and opportunities. The well-planned entrepreneurial endeavor — one that is carefully thought out and informed from the start — has a good chance of producing a successful small business.

Why small businesses? They only produce a couple of new jobs when they start. That's true, but consider this: small businesses play an important role in managing economic risk. When a town plays host to many small businesses, if one goes under, only a few jobs are lost. The rest of these small, tax-paying entities carry on. But it gets better: the magic of small businesses is that if they are properly planned and tended from the start, some small businesses grow into medium-size businesses, and some of those grow into large businesses.

Here's a real-world example: Doug Fahrforth is the founder and owner of Blue Star Power Systems in the city

of Lake Crystal, about 20 miles southwest of Mankato. Doug came to city leaders with an idea to build specialized generators. The city leaders could have said, no, we're trying to attract a large business, a "major employer." And if they had kept praying and waiting for a large business to come to town, they would still be waiting. Instead, the city helped Doug obtain \$200,000 in financing from the state to assist him in purchasing an under-utilized building close to town. Doug started out with a handful of employees. Today, he employs 20 people and the demand for his generators is growing all over the world. His employees live and shop close to home, and Doug does business with local suppliers and other members of the community's economy. That's what entrepreneurs do.

*Five reasons why kids make great entrepreneurs, plus one more*

There are lots of reasons why young people are well suited for entrepreneurship. Here are five reasons from an article by Dharmesh Shah at Bookwheelz.com<sup>1</sup> and my take on them:

*The optimism of youth:* Starting a company is scary. You need to be more than a "half-full" kind of person — you need to be a "half full, getting fuller — I need a bigger glass!" kind of person. Young people have this kind of optimism, generally more so than the average adult: they have the whole world in front of them. If they can unleash their potential, they can tackle any problem that comes their way.

Young people, especially kids, possess the ability to "suspend disbelief" long enough to see an idea through. How many times have you seen a group of grown-ups try to one-up each other by thinking of reasons why something won't work? Adults tend to need to have everything ready before they can start a project, and how many projects have we seen that couldn't even get started because the adults in charge couldn't get everything perfect at the outset? Adults tend to be *ready*, aim, fire, whereas kids are *fire*, aim – and they're never quite ready. Young people have the ability to dismiss pessimism and just go for it.

<sup>1</sup> Dharmesh Shah, "Why Students Make Good Entrepreneurs," <http://bookwheelz.com/news-detail.php?page=3>, November 2004.



*Trusted peer network:* One never has the kind of friends they have when they are young. Growing up together is a powerful bond, and the shared experiences of youth form tight teams. I firmly believe that the “solo entrepreneur” is a myth. One of the most powerful things an entrepreneur can have is a network of trusted friends and advisors to go to for advice and moral support. Young people have a strong network — and a wide network — of similar-minded friends around them.

*Higher risk tolerance:* No mortgage, no kids, no job — hey, what do you have to lose? It’s easier to start a business when you literally have nothing but time to invest, and when you’re young, it sure seems like you will live forever. Contrast this to us grown-up entrepreneurs: quitting a secure job, paying for college for our kids, and all the other reasons not to start a business.

*Abstract thinking:* Students spend their days moving between abstract concepts, every day! They are challenged with biology, economics, math, physics, art, literature. Is it any wonder that great new business ideas erupt from young minds?

*Applied learning:* And of course, all these concepts are fresh in their minds. Young people can start a business from scratch and apply all their learning from day one. Grown-ups starting a business are bringing with them experience, and a lot of that is valuable, but with it also comes experience built while they were in companies that have evolved over time to become bulky, bureaucratic and inefficient. Young people start fresh and apply their learning right the first time.

And my own addition to the list:

*It’s easier at a young age:* Let’s face it: 70-hour weeks are tough, physically and mentally, and that’s what it often takes when you’re starting your own business. Young people have the energy to do it.

So, how do we build on that optimism and energy and encourage entrepreneurship in our children? How do we provide them with the skills and resources they need to grow their own businesses?

And if we can, should we? Can we afford it? Does it work?

Of course we can. Of course we could. Not only can we afford it, we cannot afford to do anything else. Here's what we need to do:

***First, show them they can.*** Fill their life with examples of people who did. Introduce them to successful business leaders, in your town and elsewhere. The importance of role models can't be overstated. Show them that these people did it, and that they can, too. Kids need to meet people who have created businesses, hired people and made a difference.

***Nurture their natural anything-is-possible attitude.*** Before 1954, hardly anyone believed that a human being could run a mile in less than four minutes. It was thought to be physically impossible. Then along came Roger Bannister of Great Britain, who broke that barrier. Since then, many runners have broken that four-minute mile, and now it's the standard to be achieved by runners everywhere. We see the pattern all the time in sports: someone works hard and achieves something no one thought could be done. Then a younger person sets his or her mind to matching that goal and exceeding it. Our kids need to be able to imagine that not only is their business idea possible, it is possible to build it better than ever before!

***Provide educational opportunities.*** Teach them how to run a business. They don't need to be CPAs, but they do need to understand the key drivers of a business. There are basic fundamentals that all business owners need to know to be able to keep their businesses alive and still sleep at night. The sooner kids understand this basic language of business, the better.

***Make sure they know that if they want to start a business in their community, the community will be behind them.*** Too

many bureaucrats seem to focus on why something *can't* be done. Young entrepreneurs hear, "You can't, you can't, you can't." Instead, they need to hear, "You can, and we're going to help you get started. Let's figure out how to make this work." Young entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs in general, need an advocate to help them work through problems. Not every idea is a good one at first, and even when the idea is a good one, there's still *a lot* of work to be done.

***Surround them with mentors.*** Seasoned business people have experienced challenges that have given them a wealth of knowledge they can share. The right mentor can warn new entrepreneurs about dangers ahead, dangers that an inexperienced business person may not see or even know to look for. This kind of knowledge, combined with a willingness to help, is probably the most important key to the long-term success of a growing business.

### ***What works***

There are many programs aimed at introducing young people to entrepreneurship, showing them it can be done and teaching the basics of small business. Here are just a few that are available in and around Minnesota that I've been involved in.

#### **• Junior Achievement**

I've had the great pleasure to volunteer for Junior Achievement by teaching eighth-grade classes. As always, I seem to learn more than the students. It's amazing what a little bit of encouragement can accomplish. By the end of the semester, these students have a vision of what it is like to run a business, and the seeds of entrepreneurship take root.

Junior Achievement has been introducing business skills to children since 1919. In fact, it is the world's largest organization dedicated to providing students with business skills. Over 93 million students have learned financial literacy, workforce readiness, and entrepreneurship. In our area, Junior Achievement of the Upper Midwest helped teach over 122,000 K-12 students during the 2010-11 school year; 7,000+ business volunteers gave nearly one million hours of volunteer time to

provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in today's world.

In Mankato there is an excellent event called the JA Business Challenge: student teams compete using computer simulations to run their own companies. They make decisions on marketing, product, pricing, research and development, and more.

- **Local communities**

Some communities choose a more grass-roots approach to encourage students to learn about business.

Molly Westman, Economic Development Director and Community Development Director at the City of St. James, recently reached out to the Small Business Development Center to be a part of the city's "Education Connection." Together with local schools, the EDA connects with various organizations, including the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, the Riverbend Center for Entrepreneurial Facilitation, and the SBDC to bring in guest speakers and deliver business curriculum within the schools. The goal is to get young people thinking entrepreneurially and to think of business ownership as a real option.

- **Lemonade Day**

This past June Greater Mankato Growth hosted Lemonade Day as part of a nationwide initiative to give kids experience as entrepreneurs. Lemonade Day is a nationwide program that introduces kids to the notion that they can start a business. Participants raise investment money from relatives and friends, build and decorate their lemonade stands, purchase supplies and advertise. Kids use the revenues raised to pay back investors and donate a portion to charity, besides getting to keep some of the profit, of course.

More than 500 kids with 200 stands participated in the event in our area. Awards were given for best stand and best tasting lemonade. These kids learned first hand the importance of marketing, sales, cost of goods and having a great product.

• **Minnesota Business Venture**

Instead of sending our high school son to regular summer camp, we gave Minnesota Business Venture by Best Prep a try. A great value, the camp proved a great experience for Charlie. The weeklong program at St. John's University brings high school students and business professionals together from across the state to spend a week learning about business, financial literacy, and career information. Even Famous Dave Anderson stopped by and shared his entrepreneurial wisdom.

***Take action***

Making kids ready to be entrepreneurs helps the community just as much as it helps our children. That same snowball effect that seems to be drawing population away from a town could work in reverse and bring people back.

To make it work, we need improvements in financing, permits and regulation, and Internet availability and reliability. The Small Business Development Center is proud to be a partner in those efforts.

Contact the Small Business Development Center in your area. Encourage partnerships that help encourage people of all ages to start and grow their own Minnesota-based business. Together, we can help develop the next generation of entrepreneurs.

## Reflections of a Young Farmer

Tracy Gaalswyk

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You could say farming is in my blood. I grew up on a farm and knew this was the lifestyle I wanted. My father-in-law grew up on a farm in Europe that is still being run by family members. He emigrated from Europe in the early 1950s; four brothers rode on a boat for two weeks seeking a better life. By staying and working for a relative, they were given the resources to start farming.

My husband and I both grew up learning the business, knowing this is what we wanted to do, which makes us a great team. We believe in what we do and are there to give each other support when there is a breakdown or weather is bad. We pick each other up. I know everything that happens day to day. While I get out in a tractor once in a while, I am usually busy making meals and keeping up with bookwork.

This profession is so rewarding: all summer you can watch the corn grow — it's amazing how fast it happens — and harvest is such a wonderful time of year. You get to see all your hard work paying off. We're both fortunate to be doing what we love.

### *Technology*

It is amazing how far technology has come in the last four decades. I remember the excitement of going from a party to a private phone line. I thought life couldn't get any better than this, talking to my friends without having the whole neighborhood knowing our business. Now the landline is almost extinct and the mobile phone is what the next generation has grown up with.

I am always excited when there are new improvements with technology. On our farm we are taking advantage of the new and improved technologies. Farming is not the same as it was 20 years ago: today, having computer knowledge is crucial. To be a farmer of today, you must keep accurate books and data so everything runs as efficiently and precisely as possible.

Since we started farming ourselves, we have made several changes using technology to make our farm more efficient. I work with our GPS programs and mapping, *plus* I do all of the accounting, which includes: payroll, tax planning, and invoicing on the computer.

Every year is different for planting conditions and proper germination. This year started out one of the wettest and coldest. With the rising cost of seed, crop protection products and fertilizer, an accurate GPS system is necessary to be efficient. On our farm we do prescription planting, which is prescribing what the soil needs. Like a doctor writing you a prescription, we incorporate our data system into our management to get the right combination to keep the soil healthy. To do this we use GPS maps from prior harvests, which tell us exactly what the soil is lacking and where we need to improve the land. We then select the variety and population of seed we will need for each soil type. Our planter has a device on each row to make sure each plant is spaced equally and the depth of the plant stays the same as the elevation of the field varies.

We're also adapting old technology by using new technology. To alleviate crop fertilizer costs, we have diversified by raising poultry. We are able to use the organic manure to nurture our crops. We use GPS here, too, to monitor the insertion of these nutrients, resulting in a variable rate application. By first doing soil and grid sampling, we are able to apply the right amount of nutrients needed per acre. Then we are not wasting any of these valuable nutrients, but instead are feeding the land what it needs.

We are fortunate to work with a neighboring dairy, so we can also apply dairy manure on our fields. The soil needs all types of nutrients to stay healthy, just as we humans need

many types of vitamins to stay healthy.

Crops also need proper protection. Crop protection products are needed to fight off disease and insects, just as we humans use sunscreen and mosquito spray to protect us from harmful UV rays and pesky mosquitoes. Here GPS is also used for proper application.

### ***Food production and food misinformation***

The benefits of modern agriculture are outstanding, and I look forward to seeing what the future holds. Some farmers and consumers, though, want to produce and consume food without these new technologies. We are all striving for the same goal, to feed the world by producing a safe, affordable, abundant product.

Consumers are very fortunate to have several types of food to choose from. It is estimated that farmers will have to produce more food in the next 40 years than all of the food produced in the last 10,000 years. We are already producing a tremendous amount of food on a lot less land. With crop technology we are able to grow crops that need less rain and are able to withstand hotter and colder temperatures. The hope is to have enough research on many of these products so we can teach people in Third World countries to grow their own commodities, helping them conquer the world hunger epidemic.

There is a lot of concern with air quality, but with the use of modern tillage tools we are able to take fewer passes on the field, the result of which is like taking 40,000 cars off the road. Then there are animal activist groups who are experts at persuading the urban consumer with misinformation. Our animals are well taken care of; they have a very nutritious diet, are protected from the heat, cold and predators. We give them the best life possible and make sure they are as comfortable as possible. Our livestock need to have boundaries, just as your kids do. It would be unheard of to leave a three-year-old outside alone all day. This is why it is best for our animals to be guided and protected as well. We monitor our livestock all day every day. We keep them in a controlled environment just as you protect your child from many things in your home that may harm them.



The fact is people are living a lot longer due to better nutrition and medical advances. Some people would like to blame obesity on today's food technology, but in fact our food portions have gotten out of control. Also, with modern electronics, we do not get the exercise we once did. Now almost everything is done with a click of a button. Growing up we had to get up and change the channels on the television, just as one example. Although I reap the benefits of these conveniences, I also believe it is very important to stay active. It's easy to spend endless hours playing games on the computer, so I think it's great that video games are now more centered on getting up and moving.

Some groups are also blaming food technologies for early puberty in girls. The fact is that being overweight produces estrogen, which triggers early development, not hormones in dairy cows. In fact, kids these days are eating and drinking a lot less dairy products than the generation before.

Many today are scared of the word GMO (genetically modified organism) and do not know the truth about them. We, as producers, are eating the same food we produce, as well as feeding it to our families. While it seems everything else is taking strides forward such as medical, automobiles, computers, etc., agriculture is being asked to take ten steps back. Farmers should not have to defend themselves as much as they do. With fewer and fewer farmers, though, people are getting removed from the production side of the food chain. Many adults believe their food is grown in the grocery store. How does that affect how our youth think about food production? People think nothing of eating in a Third World country where you can't drink the water, but will not trust the USDA to bring them safe, nutritious food. As advances in medical technology save lives, advances in agricultural technology provide us with more safe, healthy, abundant foods. These advances in technology also increase the sustainability of our food production system and natural resources.

***Passing on the legacy: The importance of starting young***

Today, young farmers are in short supply. The average age of a farmer is 58, and more than a quarter of farmers are over 65. A mere 5.8% of farmers are now under the age of 35, compared to 16% in 1982. Farmers in America are getting to be rare, a scant 1% of the U.S. population, compared to 40% in 1900.

A lot of farms that were transferred in the last generation were also debt-free when they were transferred, but this is not the case for the next generation. Land is very expensive for the sibling who wants to carry on the family farm. A lot of times they can't afford to assume the farm expenses or don't want to get any further into debt, so the family farm goes to auction.

The main reason why young people are not taking the leap to keep their family legacy going is because the preceding generation did not have a proper succession plan in place. Unfortunately, there is a lot of risk and debt involved in taking over a farm, the worst of which can be the risk of splitting up a family. The siblings who are not involved with the day-to-day of farm life would a lot of times rather have their inheritance in the form of money and not land — not to have any risk — just the cash when the parents are deceased. When the farm falls to the children, some siblings may agree to rent land to the sibling that has been farming, while the other siblings would rather sell the property outright — thus causing dissent that can break a family apart. Many families will sell the family farm rather than risk that.

The parents usually have their whole life invested in the farm. They may try to “gift” some of it to their children while they are still living, but often the taxes are so much, it makes more sense to keep a claim and do some detailed estate planning to try to keep the family farm together.

Farm kids are getting to be very rare; 90% of them are not going to work on the farm after school and/or college. Instead, many of them will pursue a career in a field related to agriculture, such as agronomy, animal science, communications, and marketing computer programming. By early adolescence kids' feelings are formed about farming. Due to the large amount of capital needed (unless you inherit,

marry into it or win the lottery), it is extremely difficult to start farming. To get young people started in farming, parental help is a must. It helps if fathers are full-time farmers. It is easier for them to take the time to teach and groom their children, to encourage them to come back to farming. If the father has to juggle an off-farm job along with running the farm, it is far less likely this will occur. If one generation turns off the next generation, their family farm will not survive.

Everyone has a unique personality, formed not only by genetics, but also by life experiences. When I was growing up, I was involved with 4-H and FFA, and I was able to experience so many things in these groups. We had a great agriculture program for our high school that taught us leadership, booking skills, communication and more.

Now these classes are being cut from many school districts, and it just sickens me. I think that some of those classes should be required, as well as home economics classes. Fortunately, classes are being offered online, and students can join an FFA group in other districts. The lessons you learn from these classes will be useful throughout your life. You'll learn to dig in the dirt, plant seeds and watch your work grow, then harvest what you've grown and cook the end product. This kind of experience gives you a satisfaction and a new way of thinking about your surroundings. 4-H and the fair have changed in the last decade, but the organizations are still prospering. Now more urban children are getting involved, broadening their perspective as to where their food comes from.

My summers were always filled with preparing my projects to take to the county fair. Those memories and friendships have been forever cherished. Learning to communicate with your peers and superiors is another skill you can use for the rest of your life.

### ***Be willing to fail if you want to succeed***

The kids in today's generation are techno-geniuses. They will have no problem keeping up with new technologies in agriculture. I am very confident that the next generation will be great stewards of the land, while using more and more

improvements in agriculture every day. But there is much more to being successful in farming than keeping up on the latest new things.

To be successful, you have to be willing to take risks, make a decision, and be confident in what you do. You need to use your mistakes as stepping stones while surrounding yourself with positive people.

My husband and I did not start out with much, and it has taken a lot of hard work to get to where we have gotten so far. Without taking risks, we would not be where we are today. Not all of our decisions have worked the way we planned, but we kept moving forward. If you keep moving forward, you will grow and learn.

When you are doing something you love, you put your heart and soul into it. We live and breathe the land; we nurture it to the best of our ability. You know from the time you're little if you want to be a part of the family legacy — whether it's "in your blood." As the next generation of farmers, we face the task of preserving the honor of one of the oldest professions on earth. Being active in promoting agriculture is a necessity. Every day there are opportunities to make a difference. We just need to be willing to take advantage of them.



## Shaping the Future of Local Government:

### How I See It

Jessica A. Beyer

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My story began in rural America growing up seven miles outside of a small northeastern Iowa town. As with many families, my ancestors pursued a better life by establishing farms in northern Iowa and southern Minnesota. Rural life is something I have been a part of and surrounded by my entire life. Today, my mom and step-dad operate a small family farm near Hanska, Minnesota, and many of my family and friends make a living through agriculture or reside in rural communities.

When I was ten, my parents relocated to Mankato from Iowa, and even though by most urban standards Mankato is considered a smaller community in itself, it felt like I was moving to a metropolis. To me, any town that had a McDonald's was surely a big city. It took me a long time to adjust, and even then, throughout the years I felt that my heart still belonged in the country and in particular rural northeastern Iowa, where my roots run deep. However, as life ventured on, I realized that Mankato wasn't such a big place after all.

I ended up staying in Mankato and pursued a B.A. in communications and a B.S. in business management at Minnesota State University, Mankato. After college, my journey took me to the suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul to work for a publishing company. I traveled across the country to numerous cities and enjoyed my position, the experiences that came with travel and my time in the Twin Cities. In the end, though, I longed to eventually get my master's degree, be

part of a smaller community and have the opportunity to live closer to family.

I had hoped and thought that my path might lead me back to rural Iowa, but a job came about unexpectedly with Blue Earth County. I applied, and found myself planted back in my second home, southern Minnesota, which brought me closer to rural issues through my career. I was fortunate enough to be able to accomplish my short-term goal of obtaining my master's degree along with the long-term goal of establishing a life with a career, home and involvement within a smaller community.

Based on my experiences, I believe that rural America has a lot to offer younger generations, especially when it comes to certain quality-of-life aspects. These might include simple things like smaller class sizes in schools and a significantly shorter or less stressful commute, but working in rural America also provides young people opportunities in terms of access to career moves and experience much earlier than they might in a larger urban scene.

### ***Opportunities***

When I look back, I would never in my wildest dreams have thought I would be working in county government. It has been an eye-opening experience that has helped shape my interests, skill goals, and leadership skills. It has transformed me from thinking about rural issues in personal terms to thinking about them in a much different and larger context within the realm of public policy.

As Public Information Director at Blue Earth County, my main focus is to manage all internal and external communications for the organization. I oversee and develop newsletter publications, web sites, media and public relations, event planning and all other functions related to communications. Part of my role allows me to work closely with the County Administrator, commissioners, department heads and other staff on legislative issues and various projects. Each day is a learning experience and keeps me busy juggling many responsibilities and projects at once.

The largest project I have been involved in during my

time with Blue Earth County is the construction of the Blue Earth County Justice Center, the first public facility in south central Minnesota to receive the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green certification.

The Blue Earth County Justice Center is just an example of a project I might not have been able to be involved in if I had been working in a larger population center or bigger organization where my duties may have been much more limited. It might have taken me years longer to have a chance at these kinds of roles. Smaller organizations and jurisdictions often allow people to gain experience and additional skill sets beyond the more narrowly focused types of positions often found at larger agencies. From this specific experience, I was able to interact with a variety of people within my organization and with a number of outside agencies assisting with the project, including community members, contractors, vendors, LEED consultants, officials from the state court system and representatives from the National Institute of Corrections. Expanding networks is vital toward relationship building and the success of individuals and organizations.

Another example of where I've been able to have a larger role is in developing the Blue Earth County Citizens Academy. One of my greatest interests since joining Blue Earth County has been to create more effective public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about government, county operations and the many services provided to citizens. Often, citizens have a hard time distinguishing the differences between various local governments and how their roles differ from one jurisdiction to the next. Counties outside of metropolitan areas work to serve rural populations with services such as law enforcement, road maintenance, ditch management, planning and zoning permits, and environmental protection. They also provide different services outside of what cities do for their residents, such as social services, prosecution of felonies, elections, licenses and vital statistics, jails and probation, recording of legal documents, storage of property documents, property assessments and veterans' programs.

Three years ago, I was able to initiate a highly successful program known as the Citizens Academy to engage county



residents and give them a hands-on approach to learning about county government while providing them with a better understanding of what services and programs are provided for their tax dollar. The Citizens Academy approach has mainly been used by cities to focus on learning about law enforcement. At the time I was establishing the program, there were only a handful of counties throughout the country with such a program. It has been a rewarding experience to facilitate the program, and I hope it creates more opportunities to showcase the issues rural counties and all counties in general face.

Since I started working with Blue Earth County, I have learned a great deal about government through experiences working with individuals and agencies at the local, state, and national levels. I was fortunate to take part in learning about a variety of issues at the international level as a Marshall Memorial Fellow in June 2010 through the German Marshall Fund. My journeys to Berlin and Frankfurt, Germany; Bilbao, Spain; Skopje, Macedonia; and Brussels, Belgium, allowed me to learn about policy in European countries on a variety of issues that included sustainable technologies, transportation infrastructure, and economic development. Building relationships and networks as a way to share information and learn from best practices in other places has been invaluable. The experience from this program and the ongoing forums afterward have given me a broader perspective on government outside of local issues and caused me to become more informed and engaged outside of my daily work.

### *The coming change in local government*

All too recently, citizens and local jurisdictions throughout Minnesota have dealt with and are continuing to deal with the repercussions of a state government shutdown that has left a bitter taste for many. Moving forward from this experience, I think young people can lead the charge for us all to have greater impacts on decision-making by becoming more aware and actively involved in what's happening in government. By utilizing technology, people can choose to be informed and go on to voice their opinions and be heard by elected officials.

Involvement is key to getting the attention of elected officials and holding people accountable for their actions.

It is no secret that currently all levels of government are facing budget shortfalls, but in particular local governments are experiencing a stream of significant reductions in funding from federal and state sources. Even though the majority of the services that counties provide are mandated, inevitable shortcomings in funding have and will continue to extend the burden of tough decisions on local policy makers. These shortfalls will increasingly cause jurisdictions to change the way they do business. On the forefront of these changes will be a new generation of citizens who carry diverse expectations for government and a workforce of government employees who will need to find innovative solutions outside the traditional scope of what government has looked like.

In my experience as a local government employee, I have seen Blue Earth County use a combination of strategies to cope with a loss of state funding that started back in 2003 and is still deepening with additional actual and anticipated cuts from the current state budget crisis. Some of those strategies include a reduction in workforce through early retirement incentives, hiring freezes and voluntary furlough programs. Other jurisdictions are implementing these same strategies, along with reduced hours of operations. Another way our organization was able to keep property tax levies relatively steady this past year was by tapping into reserves, but this is only a short-term strategy that cannot sustain a long-term solution for keeping services at the level citizens expect. In any case, most jurisdictions do not have the luxury of avoiding layoffs or further cuts to service by dipping into reserve funding. This is where more traditional leaders and agencies may need to look at organizational structure and think in a completely different mindset. Rather than some leaders being hesitant about change and seeing collaboration and the sharing of services as a threat to job security and organizational structure, in the appropriate situations it should foster the ability to streamline systems and save resources.

When I think about the future of local government, it is scary to think about how jurisdictions (in particular smaller

population bases) are left to deal with program aid cuts when they are already working on shoestring budgets in trying to provide quality services for their citizens. I especially worry about smaller communities and how they will be able to retain, let alone attract, people when basic services and needs may have to be compromised due to funding cuts. It is easy to feel discouraged and think that the economy will never recover, that budget deficits will continue, and that all the important issues will never get solved.

Despite the doom and gloom, though, there are opportunities for local governments to look at ways to partner with other jurisdictions, non-profits and private organizations whenever possible. I get discouraged when people assume that local government is bureaucratic, collaboration is an unfamiliar term, and that there is an abundance of “wasteful spending” to be eliminated. I’m convinced that if critics take a closer look at most jurisdictions, they will find that local governments have been running lean operations for quite some time and are often held more accountable because taxpayers live, work and associate with local government leaders on a daily basis.

There is always room for improvement, however, and for thoughtful approaches in researching ways to achieve greater effectiveness that break with tradition. Younger generations, for example, may have an easier time with implementing collaborative strategies among government agencies because they may not have a traditional outlook on department organizational structure. Times like these offer a great opportunity for the next generation of citizens to step in and shape the future of their communities. New strategies may be as simple as enhanced communication among departments, eliminating silos of services and information. The increased number of ways that citizens can provide public input without physically coming to board meetings or other public events can help allow people to participate whether they watch a streamed video of a public hearing from home, receive automatic e-mail notices with meeting agenda items, attend in person, or post public comment on a social media site. People now have options and can choose the form of involvement

they prefer and take part based on the mechanism that works best for them.

The challenge will be in coordinating all of this. With new technology come different challenges, particularly with social media, blogs, and the abundance of information sharing as a whole. There is a risk associated with people being able to decipher multiple sources of information, but they can also become well educated on the issues and filter facts from fiction.

Government is at an interesting juncture, and I expect there to be a paradigm shift on many levels. From my experience, local government is definitely shrinking, and with that there will come a variety of challenges, including the expectation to meet and exceed constituent needs with fewer resources and staff. A new transformation in government is going to call for new ways of looking at issues and flexibility in finding innovative solutions, rather than using strategies that don't get to the core of the issues but simply rob Peter to pay Paul.

Younger generations have the power to get engaged and have an impact on how local government redefines itself moving forward, whether it means getting involved on citizen committees, staying informed via web technologies, running for office, or considering a career path in government. There are many career options in local government beyond the typical roles of social workers or snow plow drivers. Careers include areas like information technology, nursing, finance, geographic information systems, engineering and much more. Despite budget shortfalls, local government, in particular county government is an area that will continue to have many people retiring with key positions to fill. As demographics continue to change across Minnesota, younger and more diverse populations are needed to serve and will have opportunities to make real impacts. I strongly believe that generations younger than my own will continue to transform the way we communicate and will take government interaction and service delivery outcomes to a new level.

As we move forward, current and future generations will be forced to look at local government services from a different perspective and determine what the value of those

services are to them. In the fall 2010 edition of the *Blue Earth County Communicator*, the county's semi-annual publication for residents, we provided an article to residents on this very topic. The idea was sparked by a recent *Rochester Post Bulletin* opinion piece by Olmsted County Chief Finance Officer Robert Bendzick. He states, "People join together and form a co-op to obtain some goods or services that they can't as effectively do on their own." In our publication, examples were given on what the county does to provide value to its residents based on the property tax levy divided by the population of Blue Earth County. The total cost of the service, often reduced by the presence of other revenue streams, was also presented. One example was the breakdown in cost of law enforcement, which was valued at \$113.56 per resident per year at the time of the article, which in comparison is far less than what many people pay for home security systems.

The idea behind this theory is that when people choose to live in a state or community, they are choosing to join a co-op based on the community's quality-of-life ideals and priorities. Reasons vary and can include types of jobs, quality of schools and recreational opportunities, but the question will really come down to what core areas people want to make investments in. Current and future generations will need to take into consideration topics such as how important it is to have safe roads to travel on each day or the prioritization of clean drinking water compared to other essential services.

With the responsibility of becoming more actively involved in the process, people's attitudes toward government will need to shift as part of this transformation. It is easy to lay blame on others and to overlook problems associated with policy. I'm hopeful that as we progress, young people and people in general will take more ownership of government and not only look at the value of services from a different perspective, but take ownership and pride in local government systems. I'm not saying this isn't happening now. In recent years, however, I have noticed a trend in media stories and public perceptions toward being very critical of public servants and government agencies in general. I realize that systems aren't perfect and that some of that distrust was earned. I am hopeful, though,

that as future generations take the helm, there will be a realization that government is a system that was created “by the people, for the people,” and that we all have ownership and can make positive contributions.

### ***How technology shapes the future of service delivery***

Technology is already changing government and the ability for a variety of different segments of the population to obtain information. More than fifteen years ago, the Internet revolutionized how information was shared and the way people conduct research. Today, Facebook and other social media technologies allow information to be pushed to people and keep subscribers connected automatically. Many local government agencies are still apprehensive about the use of social media and are only slowly signing on. However, social media tools have proven themselves (in particular Facebook) to be effective information-sharing sources that are here to stay. They have the power to deliver information to segments of the population that may not use traditional media outlets to get their news. Social media adds another dimension to public awareness, and in my mind is another tool that in conjunction with all other mechanisms allows local governments to attempt to reach as many people as possible. Technology will certainly be at the forefront for whatever development is next and guide how government can stay connected to the public and keep citizens engaged. The more local governments can utilize technology, the more successful they will be in reaching out to those who cannot attend public meetings and foster inclusion among diverse populations and non-traditional audiences.

Since I first began working in local government I have seen a number of indicators that there is a paradigm shift happening with citizens and their expectations of government agencies and the services provided by those agencies. Governments have already started emulating how companies use websites to conduct business, and as the pressure mounts to do more with less, technology will certainly play a big role in assisting with serving customers. Many counties are already using technology to process forms, reserve campsite

reservations in parks, and make payments for various services with credit cards.

People have theories about how government organizations should function, and I often hear comments about how government should operate more like a business. Government is not meant to run like a business, though; it needs to operate differently because of all the obligations to citizens. However, that doesn't mean that government can't take a few pointers from highly effective business strategies and practices. A favorite that comes to my mind is customer service. As a person who used to work in customer service, I believe that government should practice strategies (if they don't already) that implement the best customer service possible to constituents. In my mind, this is the biggest difference between private and public sectors and will increasingly be important for constituents. In general, people just want an answer to their question or help getting the service they need. They aren't interested in being transferred from department to department or from organization to organization to find what they are looking for. Information needs to be accessible and easy to obtain.

The future could bring changes like complete virtual centers for some government operations, which would eliminate the overhead costs of maintaining brick and mortar facilities that have high operational costs. The ability to work from home using new technology could also alleviate high transportation costs and reduce the number of staff commuting each day to an onsite office.

Technology will be the biggest asset, especially in helping smaller communities and rural areas be connected and part of a global marketplace. Rural communities need to be at the forefront to ensure they are included and have the same abilities as urban areas. In the multitude of issues that will have an impact on younger generations in either how solutions are sought or how they will be funded, it is apparent that we will need to reinvent ourselves, support innovation, and foster open-minded development.

Another important factor in determining how local governments will operate in the future lies in the workforce

itself. Different generational expectations can change the way an organization operates. Younger generations may implement the change for more flexible schedules, seek options to work off site and have new expectations from the government as an employer, as opposed to traditional seniority-based systems. New expectations may include merit-based pay, which focuses more on the quality of work rather than years of service. Workforce demographics are changing, and with that comes a number of other issues, including succession planning and the transfer of information as people change jobs more often than in the past. If government wants to retain the best employees, they, too, will need to adapt to social pressures and look to the private sector to evaluate how organizations have evolved since the time when the majority of employees worked for the same company in the same department for 30 years. The new workforce will most likely work much longer due to issues like increasing Social Security age requirements, high insurance premiums and rising life expectancies.

### *Nothing is certain but change*

From my perspective, younger generations will have the burden of dealing with a wide range of issues that won't see much progress in the near future due to budget deficits, but will extend out the burden of the situation.

As we look ahead, it is uncertain what local governments will look like in the coming decades. Each community, area and region is different, and while many jurisdictions share similar issues, a cookie-cutter approach will not yield the greatest outcomes in delivery of effective and efficient services. Flexibility will be essential for local communities to solve problems and create mechanisms that work best for their needs. I believe local governments will continue to downsize and that pressure from tighter budgets will cause jurisdictions not only to share services, but consider consolidation of some areas and rely more heavily on technology to connect jurisdictions, especially in rural areas. In some cases, regionalization of services may occur. The important caveat is that decisions cannot be based solely on immediate needs driven by line items on a budget — policy makers must look at



the entire picture, trying to be strategic and future-oriented.

One thing is certain – change is inevitable. My hope is that current and future generations will be able to reside in the communities of their choice and be able to obtain jobs, opportunities and services without having to relocate to more densely populated areas. Younger generations and all generations working together have the power to shape change utilizing new strategies and become engaged with local government, non-profits and businesses to keep rural (and all) communities strong and connected while providing services that align with citizen needs and values.

## About the Authors

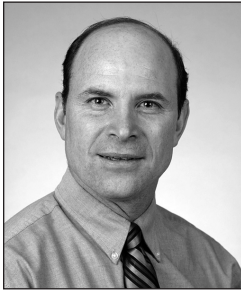
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**BEN WINCHESTER** has been blessed with opportunities to work in and for small towns across the Midwest for the past 15 years, with a focus on his home state of Minnesota. He is currently a Research Fellow for the University of Minnesota Extension, Center for Community Vitality, where he concentrates his research efforts on two topics that are

vital to rural Minnesota: documenting “newcomers” – the influx of 30-49 year old people – to identify the social and economic opportunities of this migration; and analyzing rural community leadership, specifically examining the communitywide requirements to “keep the town running” through the public sector. Overall, he works on cultivating connections between institutions of higher education and rural places by involving university faculty, staff, students, and programs in everyday community life.

Before joining Extension, he worked at the Center for Small Towns at the University of Minnesota, Morris. Ben’s work included building a “consumable” infrastructure of rural data sources to be utilized by local decision makers, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) visualization of data, conducting and reporting surveys, providing research resources to small towns, implementing community development initiatives, and evaluating community-based programming.



**ART NASH** began his career in the late 1980s as a junior/senior high school social studies teacher. He has since written educational materials and taught various levels of learners (elementary to adult) during the past two decades in rural schools, community settings and overseas. Various professional presentations have been delivered at conferences, trainings, and American Indian/Alaskan Native tribal venues. Art has extensively used Geographic Information Systems and databases for various economic analysis and research projects. Art is currently a steering committee member with the Northwest Minnesota Clean Energy Resource Team and a member of the American Indian Task Force.

**TOBY SPANIER** is an Associate Extension Professor and Educator at the University of Minnesota Extension's Center for Community Vitality in Marshall, Minnesota. He has spent the last 20 years working to make improvements in communities through educational experiences. Toby began his educational career in the non-profit sector and the Peace Corps. Toby worked internationally as an educational development specialist in Central and South America and in the Maryland and Minnesota public school systems before beginning work with the University of Minnesota Extension. Within Extension, Toby has worked in the Community Youth Development Area and Leadership and Civic Engagement Area of Expertise using his skills and knowledge to build leadership capacity, communication, facilitation and a common vision for organizations, agencies and community groups. He possesses extensive experience in program design, curriculum development, teacher professional development and evaluation. He is a trained administrator in several assessment instruments, including Intercultural Development Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Toby holds



an M.A. in teaching from Towson State University in Maryland.

**LAURISSA STIGEN** is the Executive Director of Central Minnesota Area Health Education Center (AHEC), where she enjoys bringing together the worlds of healthcare and education and fulfilling her passion for improving rural places. She is President-Elect of the Minnesota Rural Health Association and has been a Fellow for the Minnesota Area Geriatric Education Center and the National Rural Health Association.



Laurissa graduated from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis where she designed her own degree, Rural Health and Wellness. Upon graduation she, moved to Montana where she learned first-hand the challenges of living and thriving in a frontier community. While in Montana she also completed her master's degree in community health at Montana State University, Bozeman. After spending ten amazing years in Montana, Laurissa returned to her hometown, Fergus Falls, Minnesota, where she is happy to be reliving some of her childhood memories with her two young boys.



**PRISCILLA A. DAY**, MSW, Ed.D., is a tenured full professor at the Department of Social Work at the University of Minnesota Duluth, where she has taught since 1993. She is the Director for the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies whose mission is “to advance the well-being of children by strengthening families and communities through social work education, research, and outreach in the region.” The Center offers scholarships to MSW students interested in providing social work practice at county and tribal child welfare programs. Dr. Day’s areas of research are American Indian family preservation and cultural competence. She

is a curriculum developer and trainer for the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the author of many published scholarly articles, and she has made numerous presentations regionally and nationally on working with American Indian communities. Dr. Day is an Anishinaabe and an enrolled tribal member of the Leech Lake Reservation. She has lived and worked her entire life in northern Minnesota.



**BRYAN JOYCE** calls Janesville, Minnesota, home. Bryan graduated from Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton High School in 2001 and from Minnesota State University, Mankato, in 2005 with a degree in secondary education with an emphasis social studies. He has taught at Windom Area Schools in Windom, Minnesota, for five years and is currently finishing

a master's degree in educational leadership through the University of Sioux Falls. Bryan and his wife, Amy, live in Windom with their two children, Jackson and Olivia. In addition to teaching, Bryan is an assistant boy's basketball coach and the seventh-grade baseball coach.

**NEIL LINSCHIED** is an extension educator, specializing in community economics, in the University of Minnesota Extension's Center for Community Vitality. As an extension educator, his work focuses on applying research-based concepts to real-world situations. His primary area of research and teaching interest is in creating tools to assist local economic development groups make more informed decisions. He received a master's in public policy with an emphasis on community and economic development from the University of Minnesota, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and a B.A. in political science from the University of Minnesota, Morris. He currently lives in Clarkfield, Minnesota, where he also serves on the Clarkfield City Council.



**MICHAEL NOLAN** is a serial entrepreneur with a long history of successes, instructive failures and adventures in the broadcast industry, e-commerce, consulting, angel investing, world travel, local community leadership, fundraising, nonprofit management, continuing education, adjunct instruction, SCUBA diving, and parenting three children with his wife, Julene. He has an MBA from the Melbourne Business School, and he is currently the director of the Small Business Development Center, a grant-funded non-profit housed at Minnesota State University, Mankato.



**TRACY GAALSWYK** has been involved in agriculture her entire life. She grew up on a farm and now farms with her husband, Richard, where they raise mainly corn, along with some soybeans. They also operate a custom silage and trucking business and are contract growers of approximately 1 million laying chickens a year. Before she and her husband were married, Tracy was a hairstylist for 15 years. Her experience owning and managing salons served her well when she took over management of the farm office. Besides managing the operation, she also drives the tractor and the semi-truck, and during their busy season pulls double duty and long hours cooking for all the help.

When she is not busy with her farm duties, she stays busy rounding out her agricultural knowledge with agribusiness classes in Farm Works Software, Apex Mapping and prescription planting. She also stays active in industry-related organizations.

**JESSICA BEYER** currently serves as public information director for Blue Earth County, Minnesota, where she manages all public relations and marketing initiatives. She also works directly with the board of commissioners and county departments to



execute special projects and bring forward legislative issues. Her previous career experience includes time in the private sector within the publishing industry. Part of her service includes representing Blue Earth County at the national, state, and local levels on several committees and boards. Most recently she was selected as a 2011-2012 Humphrey Policy Fellow.

Jessica holds bachelor's degrees in communications and business administration. She has a master's degree in business with an emphasis in organizational leadership from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Jessica enjoys outdoor activities, traveling and volunteering for several community organizations. She resides in Mankato with her husband and immediate family.

## About the Center for Rural Policy & Development

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In 1997, a group of rural Minnesota advocates came together around a bold idea: to create a rural policy think tank that would provide policy makers, rural advocates and concerned citizens with an objective, unbiased and politically “unspun” examination of contemporary rural issues.

Funded through a public-private partnership, the Center for Rural Policy and Development today is an independent non-profit research organization dedicated to the objective study of the economic, social and cultural forces that are impacting rural Minnesotans and the communities they reside in. Over the years, our audience has grown to include state legislators, city and county officials, community leaders, business executives, college presidents, school superintendents and everyday citizens concerned about rural Minnesota and its future.

Hopefully, you will agree that RMJ is one of those resources worth having. To that end, we invite you to visit our web site at [www.ruralmn.org](http://www.ruralmn.org) to learn more about the Center for Rural Policy and Development, our resources and programs, and ways you can support RMJ.







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