



Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**



2017 Annual Report



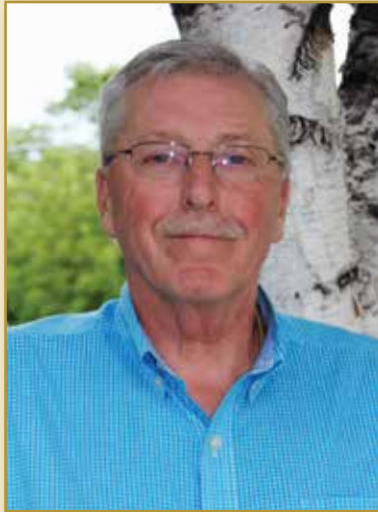
Helping



Communities



Prosper



Message from the Board Chair

My participation in the UMRDC changed dramatically when I became the chair of the board of commissioners last year. My role as board chair gave me additional insight in the UMRDC's work as well as allowed me to have more regular and direct contact with the staff.

Adapting and reacting to change is a big part of the UMRDC; our work and projects are continually responding to the needs and interests of our region. For example, in the last few years we have been working heavily on issues related to broadband access, childcare, and dilapidated buildings in the region. These are issues that were not top priorities five years ago. The responsiveness of the agency would not be possible without the support and vision from the Board of Commissioners, our Executive Director, and the UMRDC staff. I am also thankful that the agency has added key staff positions in the last year that will provide additional capacity to develop and respond to needs. As Chairman, I am proud of the professionalism of the UMRDC staff and appreciate the work they do on behalf our region and I look forward to sharing this year's annual report with you.

Ray L. Johnson

Message from the Executive Director

I am pleased to share with you this year's collection of our work. The UMRDC worked on a growing number of local projects at the request of our local units of government and completed several larger scale regional projects that will direct our work and future opportunities throughout the region. A few of which, I would like to highlight.



- The Local Foods Study identified strategies to create connections with the food that is grown and consumed in our region. This is more than just a trendy topic but a real opportunity to support local growers, business owners and consumers by enhancing an existing supply and demand structure. The full report can be found on our website.
- The Human Service Public Transportation Plan also highlighted existing regional assets. Our region has one main public transit provider that covers the entire region and who provides most of the city public transit service. This plan, however, points out that there continues to be unmet needs and it brought stakeholders together to develop ideas and solutions. Look for more data on the plan in this report. You might be surprised by what you learn!
- The Get Rural project looked at opportunities in our region to attract new residents. Our regional demographics show a need to attract people to fill existing jobs and our schools and communities have room and capacity for additional students, new home buyers and business owners. How do people learn about the opportunities that exist here if they don't have a local connection? It is very difficult. A regional committee is preparing some new strategies to start implementing over the next year. Check out Get Rural MN on social media!
- Finally, the completion of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, really took a more comprehensive dive into needs and opportunities for this region. This project will guide and support our regional work related to talent attraction, business growth, preservation of local assets, and infrastructure development. For more detail search for CEDS on our website.

I also want to point out that we thankfully added some additional staff team members during the last year. Adding three new young professionals to the region allowed our agency to experience first hand the opportunities and challenges of talent attraction in rural Minnesota. It allowed us to brag about what we offer in terms of assets and amenities in the region and why we are a great place to live, work and play. Jason, Kirk and Marcy will also be able to add their expertise and energy to the region and all the work we are planning in the years to come. We are very pleased to call them part of the UMRDC team. Welcome!

Dawn E. Hegane

UMVRDC STAFF



DAWN HEGLAND
Executive Director
dawn.hegland@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 101



MATT MOE
Financial Officer
matt@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 114



JACKIE SIGDAHL
Administrative Assistant
jackie.sigdahl@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 100



KRISTI FERNHOLZ
Community Development
Senior Planner
kristi.fernholz@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 106



KIRK BUSTROM
Community Development
Senior Planner
kirk@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 111



LAURA OSTLIE
Community Development/
RLF Planner
laura@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 102



JASON BRISSON
Transportation Planner
jason@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 107



MELISSA STREICH
Communications/Tourism
Coordinator
melissa@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 105



MARCY PRINCE
Communications Assistant
marcy@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 104



COMMISSION BOARD MEMBERS

Big Stone County



Brent Olson
County Board



Duane Steen
Graceville
City Council



Harold R. Dimberg
Ortonville Township



Jim Dahlvang
County Board



Jim Schmaedeka
Clara City Township



Debra Lee Fader
Montevideo Mayor

Lac qui Parle County



Roy Marihart
County Board



Jeff Olson
Dawson City Council



Mark Bourne
Hamlin Townships



Gary Hendrickx
County Board



Warren Rau
Hegbert Township

Swift County

Yellow Medicine County



Gary L. Johnson
County Board



Gene Bies
Canby City Council



Gene Stengel
Granite Falls Townships

Public Interest



Juanita Lauristen
Private Industry Council
Director



Vicki Oakes
Ortonville EDA
Director



Winthrow Block
Clara City
Administrator



Diane Kepner
Prairie Five CAC, Inc.
Board



Brett Buer
Dawson-Boyd School
Board

School Board

AMOUNT OF MONEY INVESTED IN OUR REGION AS A RESULT OF THE UMRDC'S WORK IN FY17:

\$7,361,190

Contractual services the UMRDC provided to the region (**\$655,227**)

Funds brought to the region as a result of our work (**\$6,705,963**)

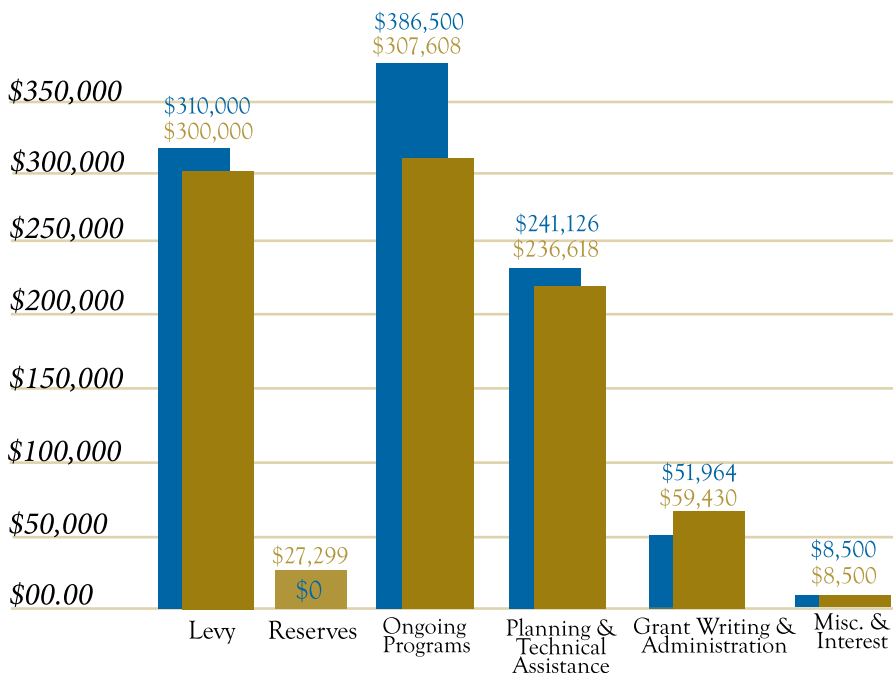
Financial Report

FY17 Ending Account Balances

General Checking	\$200,954
Money Market	\$312,349
CD	\$350,000
Scenic Byway	\$8,516
Auto	\$47,897
Equipment	\$27,693
RLF Available for Lending	\$561,087

Revenue

2018 Revenue = \$998,090
 2017 Revenue = \$939,455



Expenses

	FY17	FY18
Salaries/Fringe	624,745	712,460
Commissioner's Expense	25,000	25,000
Audit	14,000	14,000
Contract for Services	20,000	36,000
Strategic Planning	0	15,000
Computer Technical Assistance	12,000	12,000
Email	2,400	2,400
Virtual Server	5,000	5,000
Copy Charge/xerox lease	4,500	4,500
Depreciation	9,000	7,200
Dues	5,000	3,000
Insurance - Liability	1,300	1,300
Legal Fees	12,000	2,000
Miscellaneous	1,000	1,000
Office Rent	12,210	12,210
Postage	5,000	6,500
Printing/Advertising	6,000	4,500
RDC Marketing	2,000	2,000
Registration - Conference	4,000	4,000
Repairs/Maintenance	1,500	1,500
Software GIS/GIS/General	6,000	7,000
Sub./Publications	2,000	2,000
Supplies	6,500	6,500
Staff Travel	30,000	35,000
Training	10,000	11,000
Morale	2,000	2,000
Wellness	2,000	2,000
Telephone/Internet	6,000	8,500
Web Hosting/Maintenance	3,500	3,500
Pass Thru Activity		
Blandin Contract	42,000	0
Byway	1,800	3,750
Meander	25,000	23,000
Prairie Waters	36,000	21,000
TOTAL EXPENSE	939,455	996,820



A combination of 44 full and part time jobs were created or retained as a result of the four new business loans approved by the UMRVDC during this last year. In total, the RLF lent \$245,250 to businesses in the five-county region. Loans for the businesses listed below were approved for equipment, fixed assets, and real estate.

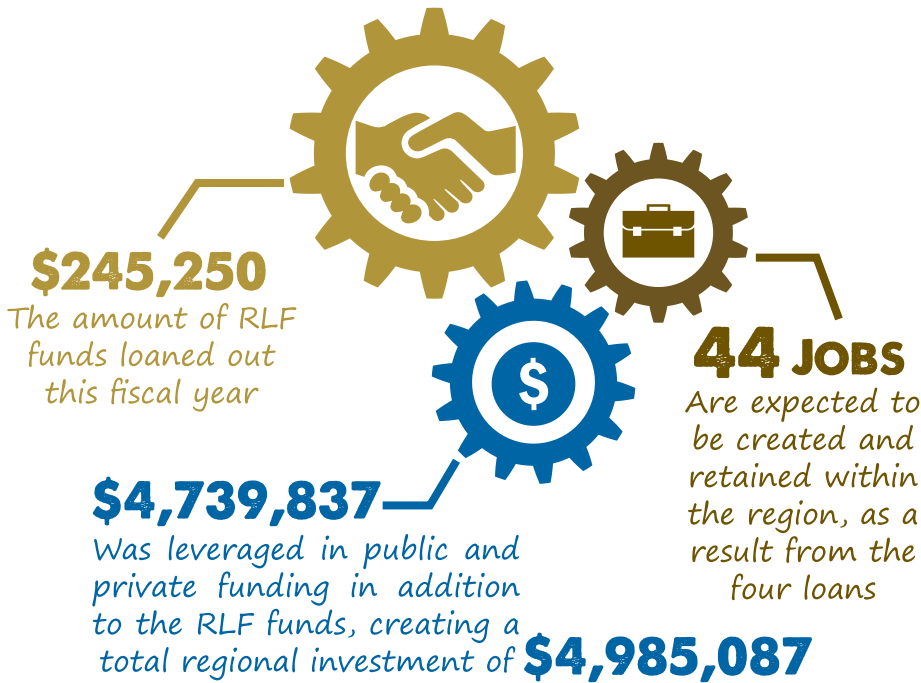
DoMat's Family Foods, Benson - \$100,000
Equipment - Business Expansion

Northern Geo, Appleton - \$80,000
Business Assets - Business Expansion

SEWearable Designs, Appleton - \$27,250
Equipment - Business Expansion

Trish's Catering, Clara City - \$38,000
Business Assets/Real Estate - Business Expansion

The RLF's funds were combined with funds from local banks, Swift County Rural Development Authority; Rural Electric Economic Development; Inc; Southwest Initiative Foundation; United States Department of Agriculture; and The Appleton Project.



The RLF awarded \$245,250 which leveraged an additional **\$5.7 million**.

We have made **\$6.4 million** in business loans since the loan fund started in 1990.

We have leveraged **\$152.9 million** in other funding for expanding local businesses in the region!

FY17 Revolving Loan Fund

as of 6/30/17

Total Funds	\$1,784,574
Loans Current	26
Loans Deferred	1
Loans Default	3
Total Receivables	\$1,223,486
Total Available for Lending	\$561,087

Hedgehog Grant



The UMRVDC mission statement directs us to "enable the region to thrive by assisting units of government". We know through our recent survey that local governments have a lot of needs but are having a hard time paying for them. Those needs prompted the creation of the Hedgehog Grant to help subsidize the cost of our grant writing and planning services.

In FY17, the UMRVDC has subsidized the following work:

- City of Danvers - Grant writing for Fire Department **\$750**
 - Maccrrey School District- Grant writing for Safe Routes to School **\$550**
 - Yellow Medicine County - Grant writing for MN Bonding funding **\$1,294**
 - Lac qui Parle County - Development of Hazard Mitigation Plan **\$5000**
 - Swift County - Development of Hazard Mitigation Plan **\$5,000**
 - City of Granite Falls - Grant writing for Small Cities Development Program **\$4,000**
 - City of Dawson - Grant writing for library **\$2,000**
- Applications and more program details are available on our website.



Yellow Medicine Housing

Yellow Medicine County identified housing as a priority concern when they were determining economic development needs within the county. Both the cities of Granite Falls and Clarkfield worked with staff from the UMRDC to facilitate a windshield survey of their housing stock.

UMVRDC staff trained volunteers in both cities to establish a baseline of the conditions of the housing throughout the cities. The baseline information gathered consisted of type, condition, status, and occupancy of housing stock. The data collected was entered into the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) which allowed for the cities and county to utilize the information in a variety of ways.

The cities now can use the maps and conclusions for future planning and grant writing.

Transportation

The UMRDC is contracted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to administer a transportation planning program. This partnership between MnDOT and the UMRDC allows for coordinated, long-range, regional transportation planning.

Some of the responsibilities of the UMRDC Transportation Department include developing regional transportation plans for representation on various boards and committees and acting as a local transportation resource for the region.

Regional Planning Highlights:

Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan

The UMRDC contracted with the Kerkhoven Murdock Sunburg (KMS) School District in 2016 to secure MnDOT funding to develop a Safe Routes to School Plan to improve the safety and health of the students in their communities. In 2017, the UMRDC worked with KMS School District over an 11-month period to develop plans for both KMS High School and KMS Elementary School. Recommendations were identified for both cities and potential funding sources for the identified improvements were included in the final plan documents. The plan has been utilized by the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) and the cities of Kerkhoven and Murdock to establish signed walking and biking paths through each city.

2017 Local Human Service – Public Transit Coordination Plan

MnDOT contracted with the UMRDC to complete a plan update to the 2011 Local Human Service - Public Transit Coordination Plan as a component of the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan. The UMRDC engaged a variety of stakeholders throughout the region over a period of six months to provide input and guide the planning process. A steering committee met three times and held a public workshop. On June 27th, 2017 the UMRDC board adopted the final plan. A Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC) will be convened and funded by MnDOT in 2018 and will be tasked with accomplishing goals and projects identified by the plan.

Transportation Alternatives

The UMRDC acted as a voting member of the Transportation Alternatives selection committee for MnDOT District 4 and District 8, who awarded \$1.35 million transportation funding in 2017.

Dawson-Boyd SRTS Plan Implementation Assistance

The UMRDC contracted with the Dawson-Boyd School District in 2017 to give technical assistance in implementing their Safe Routes to School Plan completed in 2013.



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



At the end of 2015, Regional Development Commissions across Minnesota completed DevelopMN, a comprehensive statewide plan that addressed the following:

- Created a common framework for regional plans
- Developed regional strategies that address each part of the state
- Identified a common set of issues for statewide action
- Developed an approach to engage state partners

With the completion of DevelopMN the UMRDC used that framework to begin the process of developing our local regional comprehensive economic development strategy or “CEDS”. This document will guide the economic development work we do under our U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration Planning Grant over the next 5 years.

The CEDS uses four cornerstones identified in DevelopMN. These cornerstones will help create prosperity in the UMRDC region and throughout Greater Minnesota. A summary of the four cornerstones for our region are:

Human Capital

Developing, retaining, and attracting talent are critical for Greater Minnesota to sustain and grow rural businesses and communities.

Economic Competitiveness

Making the region an attractive environment for growth requires communities to develop and link all available assets to support innovation and encourage business growth.

Community Resources

Communities seek to maintain rural values, their heritage through the preservation and improvement of local social, cultural, and natural assets.

Foundational Assets

Proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner by managing the access to, maintenance, replacement and growth of assets like transportation, utilities, and water.

The CEDS will become the playbook for our upcoming work and the goals listed in the plan reflect the desires of regional stakeholders and are limited to a manageable number that can be executed with a thoughtful and intentional approach. In each cornerstone we have identified a limited number of key projects with the highest priority and potential for regional impact. The collective results of the implementation plan are expected to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region.

To review DevelopMN visit www.mnado.org. To review the CEDS search for “CEDS” at www.umvrdc.org.

Clean Energy Resource Teams

CERTs is a statewide partnership with a shared mission to connect individuals and their communities to the resources they need to identify and implement community - based clean energy projects.

CERTs utilizes UMRDC staff to serve as their West Central Region CERTs Coordinator. Kristi Fernholz serves at the coordinator.

Highlights of the West Central Region:

- Hutchinson tour showcasing sustainable practices by the city.
- Outreach for Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program.
- Educating on solar, LED, wind, and biomass and their implementation, connecting individuals and organizations to clean energy financing tools.
- Providing limited financial assistance to projects through Seed Grants.



Hazard Mitigation

The UMRDC has been working with the MN Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) to secure funding to complete County All-Hazard Mitigation Plans for Lac qui Parle and Swift Counties in the coming year. RDC staff will work closely with emergency managers and a local taskforce to update their existing Hazard Mitigation Plans. These plans allow local jurisdictions to receive funding from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) to implement hazard mitigation strategies that address or mitigate the impact of a variety of natural disasters.



Appleton Comprehensive Planning

The UMRDC staff have been working with the City of Appleton on a new comprehensive plan. Appleton saw the need to update their plan so the city could make informed decisions to guide the future of the city. Appleton’s plan will include a community profile, chapters on land use, housing, parks and recreation, economic development, transportation, public infrastructure and more. The working document will also include goals and action plans, and the entire document will go through a public review process during the fall of 2017.



Danvers Assistance to Firefighters Grant

The UMRDC assisted the City of Danvers with grant writing for new equipment and personal protective gear through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) administered by FEMA. The primary goal of the AFG is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire-related hazards.

The grant request was for \$156,627 with a total project cost of just under \$165,000. Grant awards will be announced in late 2017 and if awarded, the Danvers Fire Department will be able to update their current inventory and best equip the firefighters.



Maynard Area History Museum

Maynard continues to work on developing their Historic Maynard State Bank Building into their city museum. This past year, the UMRDC continued to work with the city to help identify next steps for the museum, and successfully received \$6,000 through a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to complete a National Register Nomination for the bank building. Registering the building on the National Register will enable the Maynard History Museum to take advantage of other grants and resources from the Minnesota Historical Society.



Collaboration with the Center for Small Towns

The UMRDC utilized two students last year from the Center for Small Towns (CST), a community outreach program that connects students with local units of government, schools, and nonprofit organizations to complete projects, which is connected to the University of Minnesota Morris. The students assisted the UMRDC by collecting photos and videos around the region, writing about communities and events, and creating social media content for the Get Rural campaign.



Small Cities Development Program Grant Management

UMVRDC staff continue to author grant applications and provide the general administration of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) which helps communities with funding for housing, public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects.

The Clara City SCDP grant was awarded in spring of 2014 and completed December 31, 2016. A total of \$533,300 in SCDP grant funds were provided to refurbish nine owner-occupied homes, 14 multi-family rental units, six single-family rental homes, and five commercial businesses. UMVRDC staff and Prairie Five Community Action provided the administration of the grant.

The Swift County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Prairie Five Community Action, and the UMVRDC currently administers the City of Appleton's SCDP grant. \$515,000 of this grant will be utilized to rehabilitate commercial business and owner-occupied housing by December of 2017.

In the Summer of 2016, the communities of Clinton, Graceville, and Beardsley received notification that their joint SCDP application, authored by UMVRDC staff, had been awarded. They will have until December of 2018 to utilize the \$637,500 in SCDP grant funds and aim to rehab 26 owner-occupied homes and six commercial businesses. Prairie Five Community Action and UMVRDC staff are busy working with the communities to reach those goals.

On June 30th, the UMVRDC was notified that the application our staff authored for the City of Benson was awarded \$638,250 in SCDP grant funds. Between now and September of 2020, an estimated 20 owner-occupied homes and six commercial properties will benefit from the estimated \$854,000 project. The UMVRDC staff will continue to work with the City of Benson and Swift County HRA to administer the program.



Memorial Park Master Plan

Granite Falls has asked the UMVRDC to help identify the future use and improvements for Memorial Park. RDC staff helped with grant writing and development of a Master Plan for Memorial Park through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPT), which recently designated Memorial Park as one of their Regional Parks.

In the summer of 2016, Granite Falls and the UMVRDC worked with Damon Farber, Landscape Architects, who completed a detailed plan that will guide the park in future years. Once the plan was complete in the fall of 2016, the UMVRDC submitted a grant to the GMRPTC to build a new shower house, make improvements on the main park shelter, and rework the entrance to the park to make safety improvements. The request of \$595,613 was funded in the spring of 2017 and this project will be implemented in the fall of 2017. A grant for the next phase, which includes a new campground, playground, trail, and ecological restoration, will be submitted in the summer of 2017.

The GMRPTC, created by the Minnesota Legislature in 2013, undertakes system planning and provides recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the parks and trails fund, to counties and cities outside of the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance.

Chippewa & Yellow Medicine Broadband Exploration

Chippewa and Yellow Medicine counties are making a joint effort to ensure fast, reliable broadband internet in their areas. UMVRDC staff worked with the two counties to help determine what their residents and business' wanted and needed in broadband internet services. Wired Wednesdays took place throughout the winter of 2017 to inform and gather information from six communities across the two counties. Meetings with city officials and a broadband provider panel discussion offered county commissioners a rich dialog to consider when making plans on how to address broadband.

Regional Public Sector Feasibility Study



The UMVRDC is finalizing a regional public sector broadband feasibility study this summer as the result of a regional brainstorming session with elected officials and staff from around the region. The UMVRDC received funding from the Blandin Foundation and area counties to identify the potential for connecting public institutions throughout the region with a connected fiber network. The study will also identify services or other efficiencies that could be developed through the utilization of such a network. A regional taskforce has been working with Elert and Associates to complete the study.



Lac qui Parle Master Park Plan

The Lac qui Parle County Park is starting a master plan in the summer of 2017. With assistance from the UMRDC, the plan will emphasize public participation to give the park board direction on how the park should be developed and what future projects could look like. The final plan will outline projects, create maps and concept drawings, and provide a list of priority projects for the next several years for the park.

This master plan completes the process to allow the park to be considered for regional designation by the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). If the park is designated, it will be eligible for funds through the GMRPTC.

Lac qui Parle EDA USDA Grant Application

The UMRDC assisted the Lac qui Parle County Economic Development Authority in writing a United States Department of Agriculture grant. The Rural Business Development grant through USDA is designed to support development or expansion of small, emerging businesses in rural areas. The EDA leveraged \$25,000 of their own dollars in the application for the \$99,999 grant.

The grant application was due in May and the Lac qui Parle County EDA will receive notification of grant awards later in 2017. The EDA hopes to establish a revolving loan fund for small business' if they receive the grant.



Charting the Future of Local Foods

The Local Foods Study, led by UMRDC staff, aimed to answer questions about the potential, availability, and next steps for local foods in the region. "Charting the Future of Local Foods" is the final document of this project completed in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension, the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (RSDP) and Countryside Public Health - Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP).

The planning process started in the spring of 2016, and worked with stakeholders, growers and places that buy or sell local foods. The RSDP also conducted a local food market analysis to explore the market potential. Currently, local foods account for a very small percentage of food bought in our region. If this percentage were to increase by a small amount, it could result in substantial economic opportunities for local farmers.

The study outlines a list of 58 action steps that address what we can do next to improve the local foods system. From that list, here are a few of the identified priorities:

- Find ways that get growers and institutions, restaurants and others together on a recurring basis.
- Host workshops within communities to figure out how to be more welcoming, supportive, and connected with newcomers, farmers, and others.
- Explore who is growing food for human consumption in the region. Identify different kinds and scales of growers and identify those who want to scale up and use different marketing mechanisms.
- Utilize the Buy Fresh Buy Local logo in food campaigns in grocery stores and restaurants.



Large photo: Painted Railroad Car - Montevideo, MN
Small photo: Arts & Culture - Milan, MN

ArtPlace Initiatives in Milan

Milan is one of three focus communities where the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership (SWMHP) is working to incorporate arts and cultural strategies into their ongoing work of community development such as affordable housing, redevelopment, public safety, and health and wellness. In September 2015, the SWMHP was the recipient of a three-year award from ArtPlace America's Community Development Investments (CDI) program. The focus of the CDI is to engage arts and cultural strategies in comprehensive community planning and development to help strengthen the social, physical and economic fabric of communities.

The UMVRDC assisted the SWMHP in Milan to complete asset mapping and general technical assistance and acted as a connector between various Milan community members. The aim of this process is to increase collaboration between artists and the community on projects such as housing, healthy home initiatives, and other projects like those typically completed by the SWMHP. The first funded project in Milan will be PlaceBase Productions who will organize a production focused on the process of connecting the community to their shared history and activating the town around its potential future. This production will take place over the summer of 2017.

The second funded project is a team initiative that the UMVRDC is involved in called "The Listening House". The Listening House is a community-generated art exhibit which will explore the many meanings of home to the people of Milan. The temporary exhibit will be held inside a dilapidated house in which a variety of newcomers have lived. The goal of the Listening House is to identify shared community housing values in Milan through art, play, and conversation. After the exhibit closes, the information gathered will be shared with the city council and used to envision an affordable housing plan that works for Milan's diverse community. This project will take place over the summer of 2017.

Montevideo Arts Projects



The UMVRDC has been working with the Montevideo Public Art Project (MAP) to provide grant writing and project implementation for several public art projects in Montevideo.

Stained Glass Tractor Sculpture

MAP's next project will involve Chatfield, MN artist, Karl Unnasch, and a donated antique tractor from the Minnesota Valley Antique Farm Power & Machinery Association. Unnasch, who visited Montevideo to collect stories from residents and history books, will make the tractor into a community sculpture by incorporating these stories into the stained glass, which will be backlit with LED lights and embedded into the tractor. This project is on track to be completed in the summer of 2017.

Painted Railroad Car

A historic railroad car was painted and placed in a permanent location as MAP's second major public art project. Artist, Liliana Payne, originally from Morris, Minnesota and current resident of Minneapolis, was hired to paint murals on the railroad car. This art not only received a grant from the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council, but also received significant public support. The railroad car is located near the Milwaukee Road Heritage Center.



Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway

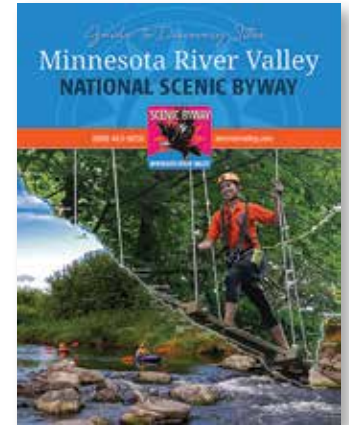
The Mission of the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance is to cooperatively enhance the Minnesota River Valley as a travel destination and raise awareness of its nationally important stories in order to provide economic benefits and preserve the intrinsic qualities of the byway.

The Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance (MRVSBA) is a partnership of committed individuals from the 287-mile byway corridor representing a variety of interests including chamber of commerce, various attractions and historic sites, state parks, local and state governmental bodies, private businesses, and concerned individuals. The UMRDC has been providing staffing and fiscal services to the byway since 1996.

The Byway Alliance remains the only organization working to promote the length of the Minnesota River Valley on a regional scale. The byway plays an important role in linking and promoting historical sites and stories to better tell the history of the Minnesota River Valley through a variety of efforts, including its programs, website, calendar, roadside signs, brochures, and other marketing materials.

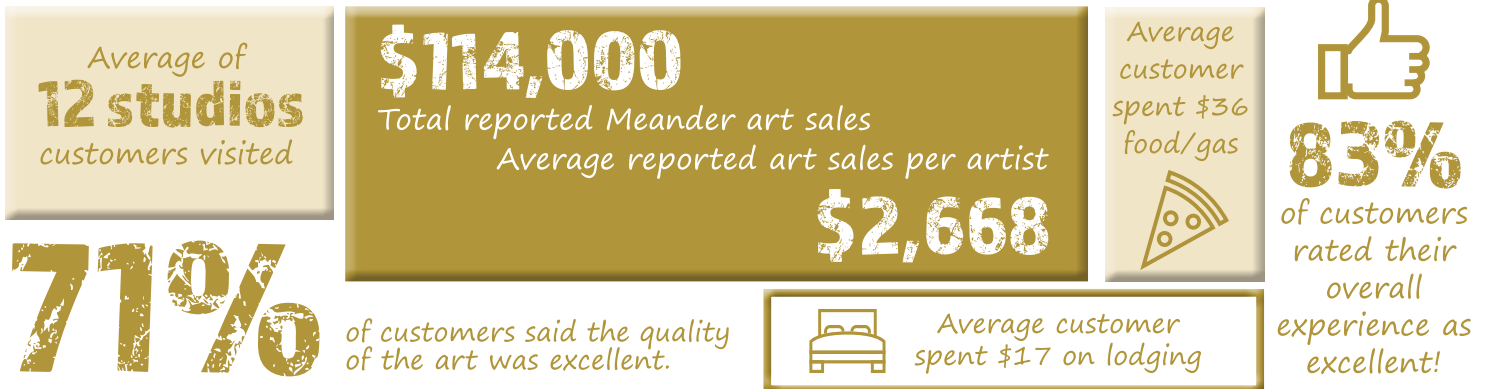
The Byway received a Heritage Partnership Grant from the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants Program. The grant enables the byway to coordinate work with cultural experts to include Dakota language and cultural content on our website and in our discovery site descriptions. The project represents an exciting opportunity to include more perspectives in our marketing and interpreting of Minnesota River Valley history. The partnership was extremely successful in building relationships through which multiple future projects were identified. The new content will be added to the Byway website over the summer of 2017.

Six Byway videos were also completed in the summer of 2016 that highlight the beauty of the Minnesota River Valley, showcasing Byway partners and recreation opportunities. Advertising campaigns have focused on getting these videos out, and were successful in getting over 123,000 views!



Meander Arts Crawl

The 2016 Meander was another success! After tallying reports from Meander artists, the UMRDC found that Meander attendees purchased more than \$114,000 of art over the course of the three days of the art crawl. The estimated 1500 Meander attendees did not just buy art, they also spent \$36 on food and gas, \$17 on lodging, and \$12 on shopping (other than art) per person. If totaled up, this amounts to a total of \$98,000 dollars entering the cities across the five-county region of Big Stone, Swift, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, and Yellow Medicine counties. The Meander Art Crawl highlights the region's artists and their studios while also introducing people to the region and giving a huge economic boost to the small businesses too.



In addition to the money brought in by the actual event, preparing for the Meander puts money back into the local economy. "Money raised to organize the Meander through both sponsors and artists was spent on products or services (printing, paper, advertising, graphic design, staffing) within the five county area," said Kristi Fernholz who oversees the Meander for the UMRDC. The UMRDC has been a founding organizer of the Meander since it started in 2004 and each year is responsible for organizing the planning, artists selection, fundraising, marketing and financial management of the event.

Visit the Meander website at artsmeander.com or find and "like" it on Facebook!



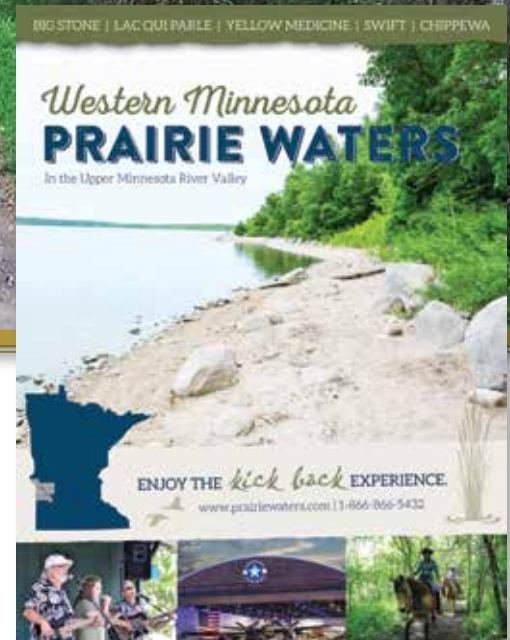
2017 Meander
September 29 - October 1

2017 Prairie Waters Members

- Big Stone County
Graceville
- Chippewa County
Clara City
Milan
Montevideo
- Lac qui Parle County
Dawson
Madison
- Swift County
Appleton
- Yellow Medicine County
Canby
Granite Falls



Hot off the press!



Western Minnesota PRAIRIE WATERS

The purpose of Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is to promote the area as a great place to visit, live, and work by highlighting and showcasing our natural, cultural, scenic, and historical assets. Prairie Waters Regional Tourism is supported by the region's counties, cities, chambers, economic development authorities and the UMRDC. This year was the first year since 2008 that all five counties have been contributing members, resulting in strong regional presence. 2016-2017 highlights:

- Wrote a successful grant to Explore Minnesota Tourism procuring \$8,000 for advertising the region.
- Created and placed numerous ads in the region's newspapers, statewide and out-of-state publications such as Midwest Living, AAA Home & Away, Pioneer Public Television, Western Peach, Pheasants Forever, Explore Southern Minnesota, Outdoor News, Valley Shopper, and Facebook.
- Partnered with the local county fairs in placing cooperative ads in the Western Peach, Valley Shopper, and Facebook.
- Convened the Prairie Waters board members and the existing regional recruitment committee on furthering the UMRDC's regional recruitment efforts and developing the Get Rural Brand.
- Promoted the area and highlighted events on the Facebook fan page. There are currently over 4,546 followers that Prairie Waters markets to with weekly updates, photos and links to stories about the region.
- Created tourism and lifestyle slide shows for each Prairie Waters member. These slideshows are a great visual way to showcase a community through videos, new photos and creative writing. The slide shows can be shared on any social media platform and embedded directly into any website.
- Maintained the Prairie Waters website. Added information and photos from new members of Big Stone County and Graceville. Updated new content, photos, videos, and maintained the region's calendar of events, along with updating the mapping system that includes places to eat, shop, and stay in the region.
- Created and distributed the NEW 2017-2018 Prairie Waters Visitor's Guide. These guides are distributed to chambers, cities, and businesses throughout the region; travel information centers across the state and at the Mall of America; and are sent out upon requests through the toll free number and website. The guide is also available as a digital copy and displayed on the Prairie Waters and Explore Minnesota Tourism website. All ads are hyperlinked on the digital copy allowing viewers to have easy access to their interests.

Get Rural {Regional Recruitment}



acting and retaining residents is a key component or the sustainability of the region. Newcomers will fill jobs, start new businesses, populate the schools, become home owners, taxpayers, and new community leaders. Stemming from the “Brain Gain” research and efforts over the past year that convened local chambers, economic development professionals, and local stakeholders, the UMRDC is preparing an implementation plan to move his effort forward.

Based on a survey to local units of government within the region, the top issue identified was marketing the area to attract new residents, workers, and families. Prairie Waters is a well-developed and supported regional brand and marketing system that is ready to work on this issue. The overall vision is to create a system that makes it easy for someone to get the information they need to make a move to the region, along with helpful tips and tools for locals.

A regional committee of local chambers, economic development professionals, city representatives and others helped identify four buckets to highlight – employment opportunities, housing, family essentials, and things to do. The Prairie Waters website covers ‘things to do’ already; now the goal is to incorporate the other three areas into the Prairie Waters website. The website will be a one stop-shop for anyone looking to visit or potentially move to the region and give them helpful information to guide them through their process. UMRDC staff have been working closely with web developers on redeveloping the website to include the Get Rural work from the past several years. Over the next year, UMRDC staff plans to incorporate new content and develop relationships with local entities to feed information into the new web pages.

In addition to the website expansion, the UMRDC has worked with students from the University of Minnesota Morris, Center for Small Towns, to collect new imagery of the region in hopes of changing the negative rural narrative. Students collected an inventory of new imagery by attending community events and sharing their experiences on social media and on the Prairie Waters website. All of this new content is available for governments, organizations and businesses in the region to access and download through an online sharing platform, Dropbox.

Students also collected interviews of newcomers, locals, entrepreneurs, and folks with unique stories that can relate to potential new residents looking to move to the region. Four regional promotional videos were conducted from the collected interviews and are also available for marketing purposes.

 **10** high quality videos were conducted utilizing interviews and aerial footage

The students have been using the new imagery and running a social media campaign on Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram where they highlight a different city/county each week. The posts (examples shown on right) vary from job listings, to throw backs of historic photos, quick facts and showcasing the new photos that have been collected. This social media campaign has been a huge success thus far engaging with not only potential newcomers but also the locals.

The UMRDC plans to work with students again over the course of the next year to collect more imagery of the region. Follow the project on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest by searching Get Rural MN, or visit the UMRDC website.



www.prairiewaters.com





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COMMISSION**

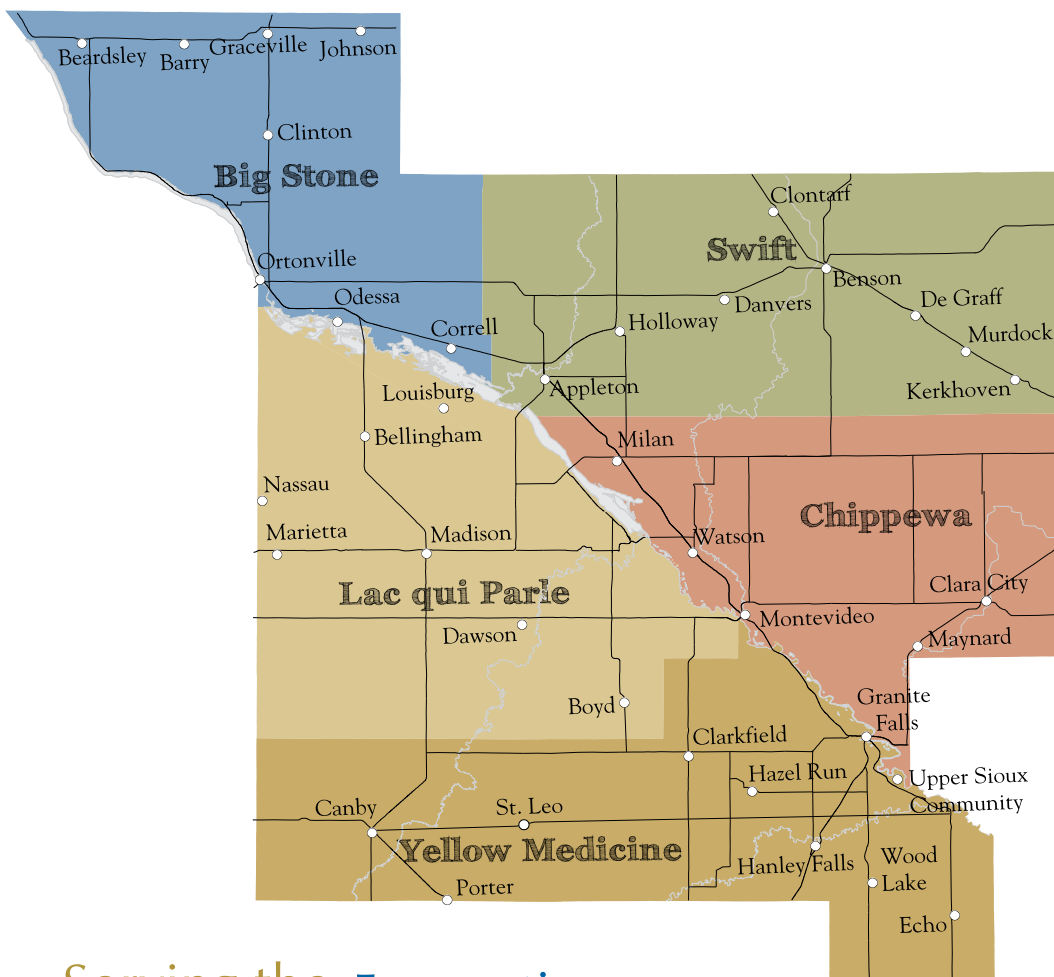
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