December 2024

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

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An equal opportunity employer

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Affordable Housing Takes Root in Alexandria

Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County envisions a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Since 1997, they have united families, volunteers, and financial supporters to enhance affordable housing by constructing or renovating homes.

Across Minnesota, it's clear that affordable housing is vital for community growth. Under the guidance of Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County (HHDC) Executive Director Lori Anderson, HHDC is committed to assisting seniors to remain in their homes longer and providing affordable housing options for families through the Summer Meadows development project.

continued on next page

Source: Lori Anderson, Executive Director Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Coordinator



"We have a five-year strategic plan with specific goals, one of which is to build and preserve affordable housing for seniors. This year, we will serve our 100th senior through our Aging in Place project."

Lori Anderson
Executive Director
Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County

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Summer Meadows will mark the first affordable housing initiative in Alexandria since 2002, catering to homeowners earning 80% or less of the median income for Douglas County. The development will feature 42 homes built over a span of 8-10 years on 25 acres, with four to five homes constructed each year. The roads and sidewalks are already in place, and trees have been planted. Additionally, HHDC has acquired two adjacent parcels, with two homes currently under construction.

The Summer Meadows development will offer:

- **42 single-family affordable homes**
- **Sidewalks on both sides of the streets**
- **Easy access to bike trails**
- **A buffer of native plantings**
- **Connectivity to the neighborhood**

> *"The Summer Meadows development is what cities across Minnesota dream about and pray will happen in their community. This undertaking is truly unique in the United States. The Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County development will provide single-family homes that are truly affordable and at a quantity that will make a difference. The partnerships that were established between individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies are important to making it happen. It's happening here, in Alexandria. Truly a dream come true."*

Bobbie Osterberg,
Mayor, City of Alexandria

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The 2023 Alexandria Housing Study Update highlights the need for eight to ten affordable homes to be constructed annually; the Summer Meadows development will fulfill up to 50% of this requirement annually. By increasing the availability of affordable housing, HHDC will continue to foster growth in the Alexandria area, creating stable conditions for working families to thrive for generations to come.

"We have a five-year strategic plan with specific goals, one of which focuses on building and preserving affordable housing for seniors. This year, we will assist our 100th senior through our Aging in Place project," Anderson explained. Launched in 2017, this initiative aims to improve accessibility and safety for seniors in their homes, addressing the heightened risk of falls within this group. Efforts include installing wheelchair ramps, widening doorways, relocating bedrooms or laundry facilities to the main floor, implementing tub shower cutouts, and adding grab bars, among other enhancements.

For the Aging in Place project, HHDC collaborates with an occupational therapist to provide a comprehensive approach. The therapist works with the Aging in Place team to assess daily living activities, identify safety improvements, and conduct pre- and post-assessments of the upgrades.

HHDC understands that affordable housing has a positive impact on the local economy. It fosters job creation and retention, drives economic development, enhances tax revenue, and increases access to affordable living options. Through their dedicated efforts, innovative partnerships, and community collaborations, HHDC continues to fulfill its mission of uniting people to build homes, create communities, and inspire hope.

Interested in learning more about the Summer Meadows Project, the Aging in Place program, or how you can support HHDC affordable housing projects? Visit their website.



From the

Executive Director

"We Advocate for Strong Communities through Service and Leadership."



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

Embracing the Future:
AI and Collaboration for Vibrant Communities

As we close out a successful 2024, I want to express my gratitude for your continued partnership and support of Lakes Country Service Cooperative. This year has been a period of significant growth and innovation. We've embraced new technologies, explored innovative solutions, and strengthened our collaborative efforts to address the evolving needs of our region.

One key area of focus has been the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI). We've been exploring how AI can be leveraged to enhance our services, improve efficiency, and ultimately better serve our members.

At our National Conference this month, I had the opportunity to introduce and meet Aiden Maldonado, a leading expert in AI and community development. He shared some insightful perspectives:

"AI has the power to revolutionize how we deliver services to our communities. By harnessing the capabilities of AI, we can streamline processes, improve data analysis, and make more informed decisions that lead to better outcomes for our residents."

"AI should be seen as a tool to empower our communities, not replace human interaction. It can help us to better understand the needs of our residents, personalize services, and create more vibrant and inclusive communities."

I am also delighted to welcome two new members to our Board of Directors: Maureen Eigen from Alexandria, and Scott Steffes of Moorhead. Their expertise and insights will be invaluable as we navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

As we look toward 2025, I am excited about the opportunities that await us. Together, we can build upon our successes, embrace innovation, and continue to strive for a brighter future for all the communities we serve.

Thank you again for your membership and support. Together We Achieve…

LEGAL SERVICES OF NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

LSNM LEGAL SERVICES

VIRTUAL LEGAL CLINIC

EVERY THIRD TUESDAY
12-2PM

LEGAL DOCUMENTS

- Divorce
- Child Support
- Landlord / Tenant
- Name change
- Expungement
- Custody
- Protection Orders
- Eviction
- Debt collection
- Conciliation court
- Garnishments
- Parenting time

HOW IT WORKS

Self-Help Clinics provide free help in completing pro se (for yourself) forms. LSNM provides people who represent themselves help completing court forms. This only applies to civil cases (family, housing, etc.) and is not for criminal cases. Anyone can use this service. There are no asset or income eligibility requirements and no appointments are necessary.

STEP 1: Go to https://lsnmlaw.org/legal-clinics/

STEP 2: Register for the virtual clinic

STEP 3: Join the Zoom meeting

United Way

1-800-450-8585

LSC America's Partner for Equal Justice
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Self Help Clinics



Offered Through Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota

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Jake Andrist
507-363-0656
jandrist@retrofitcompanies.com

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Clean Lighting legislation aims to eliminate the sale of fluorescent bulbs, reducing risks for maintenance staff, waste workers, and others. Starting January 1, 2025, the sale and distribution of screw/bayonet-based compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) will be prohibited. Have your lighting audited and updated now, CPC can help!

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www.purchasingconnection.org
info@purchasingconnection.org

COOPERATIVE Purchasing CONNECTION









December's

Nonprofit Leadership Luncheon

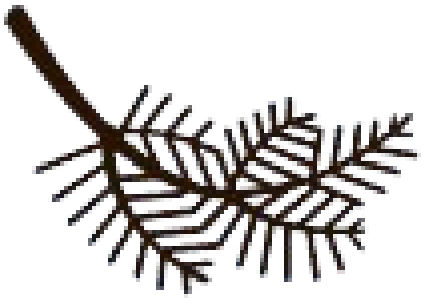
Source: Jenna Ray, Deputy Executive Director, GiveMN
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Coordinator

On December 13, 2024, Lakes Country Service Cooperative hosted another successful Nonprofit Leaders Networking Luncheon, where regional leaders convened to connect, exchange insights, and listen to a presentation by Jenna Ray, Deputy Executive Director of GiveMN.

Jenna announced that record-breaking donations were achieved during the annual giving day. Tens of thousands of donors from all 87 Minnesota counties, all 50 states, and 36 countries celebrated the 16th anniversary of Give to the Max. The result: more than $37 million donated to 6,556 causes across the state.

She also shared how the GiveMN platform as a valuable resource for running campaigns across rural Minnesota and discovering effective fundraising solutions.

For more information, please visit GiveMN.org.



BLANDIN FOUNDATION GOES BIG ON SMALL COMMUNITIES

Grants to Minnesota's smallest towns highlight needs, dreams and innovation in rural areas

Source: Jennifer Bevis, Blandin Foundation Senior Rural Advocacy Manager

The Blandin Foundation recently announced a new round of Small Community and Rural Placemaking (SC/RPM) grants aimed at empowering Minnesota's smallest communities. The $4 million in grants to 73 grantees are designed to support community-driven solutions and foster resilience in communities where resources are often limited.

In 2022, Blandin opened a round of pandemic-era grants emphasizing Minnesota's smallest communities, drawing an overwhelming response from applicants and offering a glimpse into the needs and dreams of small-town Minnesota. Informed by this response and armed with new research into dramatic disparities in rural philanthropy, the Foundation created the SC/RPM grants in 2024 to bring about positive, noticeable changes in Minnesota's tiniest communities.

Rural areas in Minnesota receive only eight percent of philanthropic funding, despite hosting 23 percent of the population, leaving fewer local resources for vital rural projects.

By increasing the visibility of culture and arts, nurturing local pride and revitalization, and effectively engaging residents on the unique issues affecting towns with populations under 5,000, funding to support these community-identified priorities can spark lasting and meaningful impact.

"We learned that with a modest amount of money and a little support, small towns do incredible things," said Tuleah Palmer, CEO and President of the Blandin Foundation. "That means respecting the unique development of rural place and identity, and meeting communities where they are at, rather than imposing someone else's ideas and structures on them."

From ducks and doors to tech hubs and repurposed jails, funded projects in the SC/RPM portfolio provide insight into the needs and dreams of small town Minnesota. Examples include:

- Restoring Blackduck's signature duck statue
- Installing an interior door on a community building to create the first-ever city office in Richville
- Creating a digital literacy tech hub in Deer River
- Constructing a trail head in Cass Lake
- Repairing the roof of the Calumet community building
- Updating the Marble community center and including a food pantry
- Repurposing the jail in Carlton as a community center for the town and Fond du Lac Reservation
- Planting an intergenerational garden in Grove City

continued on next page

“Minnesota’s smallest towns are expected to do more with less,” said Leslie Lee, City Treasurer of Richville, Minnesota. Lee successfully applied for a $10,000 grant to install an interior door and create a small city office for her tiny community of 78 people. “This was the first grant we have ever applied for, so we really appreciate how accessible and easy Blandin made it. This grant has built our confidence to explore other community projects.”







“The City of Richville made a very simple grant request: they wanted a few thousand dollars for a door so they could create a city office in a community building and get some basic office furniture,” said Valerie Martin, Blandin Foundation Advocacy Consultant.
“This small grant is already making a big difference. Not only do they have a professional place to do business, but this community of only 78 people is now confident enough to explore other grants for a pickleball court, trees for a park and is dreaming about how to emulate the community development programs of some of their larger neighbors.”

The recent grant rounds to small communities have expanded the pool of Blandin Foundation grantees to more than 100 new communities or organizations.

Listen, Learn, Respond

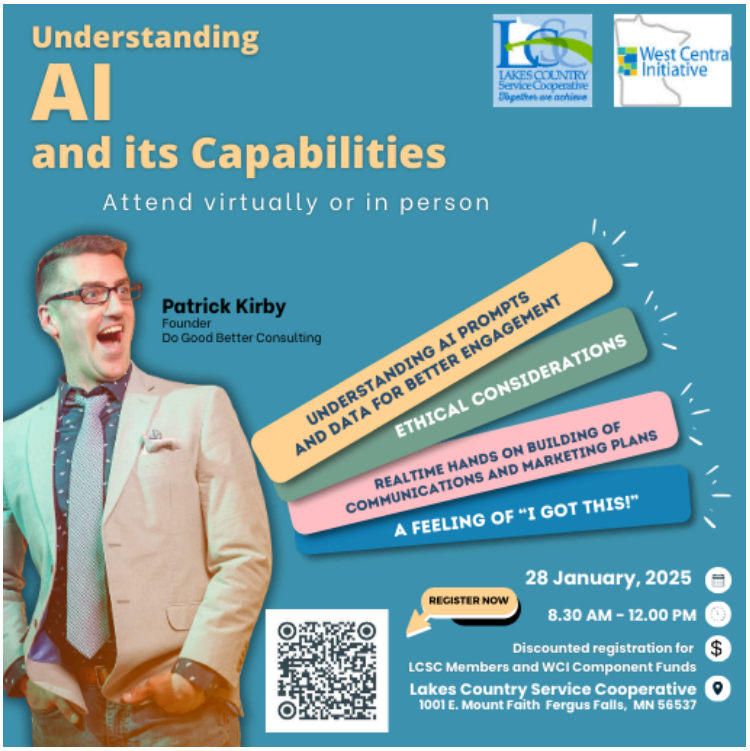
The SC/RPM grants represent a new and vital component of Blandin Foundation’s strategic plan. The initiative aligns with the Foundation’s broader mission of moving rural places forward, empowering local decision-making and reinforcing the social infrastructure that sustains rural pride and identity.

“Rural Minnesota is often portrayed as a monolith, yet each town has its own unique culture and challenges,” noted Linda Gibeau, Blandin’s Small Communities Grants Program Officer. “Our approach respects this diversity, allowing grantees to champion their community’s specific needs while creating shared pride and belonging. We do this through a process we call ‘listen, learn and respond.’”

"More than just financial support, these grants are a catalyst for small communities to fight the narrative of ‘rural decline’ by reimagining their future, elevating underrepresented voices, and creating spaces that foster pride, unity and long-term resilience,” said Kyle Erickson, Blandin Foundation Director of Rural Grantmaking. “By funding projects that bring visible change and enhance community engagement, we are investing in the heart of rural Minnesota’s cultural and civic identity."

Would you like to learn more about Blandin Foundation and the many initiatives they support in Minnesota? Visit their website at blandinfoundation.org.

Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA



USING AI CAN BE DOWNRIGHT SCARY, OVERWHELMING, AND COMPLICATED!

But what if there was a simple way to learn and know enough to feel confident in leveraging this incredible technology to help you brainstorm ideas, lessen your workload, and allow you to spend more time building and maintaining workflow?

Well, you're in luck – because Patrick Kirby, Founder of Do Good Better Consulting is going to walk you through some of the best ways to use AI to free up your calendar, speed up some of your processes at your organization, and make you feel comfortable (dare we say, even confident!?) about using this rapidly changing and increasingly important technology to benefit your mission and work.

And sure, all this AI talk sounds great. But how on earth do you actually do it!?

This half-day training will walk you through some of the more accessible programs, develop (in real time!) plans, and answer questions without you having to dedicate your precious time to navigating this potentially complicated new way of communicating, creating, and interacting.



We'll walk together through done-with-you communications, fundraising, and marketing plans to use AI in a way that doesn't overwhelm but ensures that you know enough to be dangerous while maintaining and doubling down on your soft skills that will be even more important in the future.

Registration is available to attend in person and stream via Zoom for individuals who want to participate virtually.

This will be a hands-on workshop, so we encourage you to bring a laptop.



Follow-up Webinar to ask Patrick anything in March 2025

Oh? Is that not enough!? Do you have follow-up questions on how things go as you begin to execute this plan we have created? Do you have a problem or issue that is blocking your organization from moving forward quickly? You are in luck. Patrick will be scheduling a webinar to answer all your questions in March 2025. All included in your registration.

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COUNTY COMMISSIONER LEE ROGNESS HAS BEEN HONORED

2024 Outstanding Service Award by the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)

Source: Shannon Terry, Otter Tail County Public Information Officer

County Commissioner Lee Rogness has been honored with the 2024 Outstanding Service Award by the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC). This prestigious award recognizes individuals who demonstrate exceptional leadership, innovation, and dedication to county government and the Association.

Commissioner Rogness's career has been defined by a strong focus on the agribusiness community, where he previously served as a board member and president of the Minnesota and South Dakota Equipment Dealer Association. His tenure as a county commissioner has been equally impactful, as he has served on numerous community boards and AMC committees. In addition to his commissioner duties, Rogness is a Lake Region Community Partners Board member and serves on the Board of Directors for LB Homes.

The award was presented to Commissioner Rogness on December 10 at the AMC Annual Awards Luncheon during the organization's annual conference.

"Commissioner Leland Rogness is a dedicated Otter Tail County Commissioner," said his award nominator. "Throughout his tenure, he worked diligently to meet the needs of his constituents with an approachable personality and calm disposition. His leadership contributed to the county's statewide recognition of effectively addressing local needs. His collaborative nature seeks to build consensus to find solutions that benefit all. Commissioner Rogness relates with compassion to the needs of county residents and strives to improve access to programs and services that benefit individuals and families.



He has always appreciated and acknowledged the expertise and dedication of County employees." Commissioner Rogness will retire at the end of his term and pass the torch to Commissioner-Elect Sean Sullivan, who will represent District 5.

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

will be hosting the Brownfields and Beyond

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) will be hosting the Brownfields and Beyond: 2025 Minnesota Redevelopment Conference on Thursday, April 24 and Friday, and Friday, April 25, 2025, at the St. Cloud River's Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

This conference will convene 100+ of Minnesota's leading professionals from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors engaged in all facets of brownfield and redevelopment, including economic development, local and state government, environmental science, finance, law, engineering, development, real estate, advocacy and education, planning, and consulting.

Our audience will range from seasoned veterans to those new to the field. Attendees will be from all corners of Minnesota, including metropolitan areas, regional centers, and rural communities.
DEED is seeking proposals for conference sessions that will be relevant to our diverse audience and that will advance the conference's goals of professional development, sharing best practices, sparking curiosity, fostering innovation, and catalyzing new opportunities for attendees. Conference sessions will be approximately 60-75 minutes in length, including Q&A, and will be a blend of plenary and breakout sessions.

Please visit our webpage for more information about conference programming.

If you're interested in sponsoring this event, please visit our webpage for more details. Registration for attendees will open on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, on our webpage: mn.gov/deed/events/brownfields.

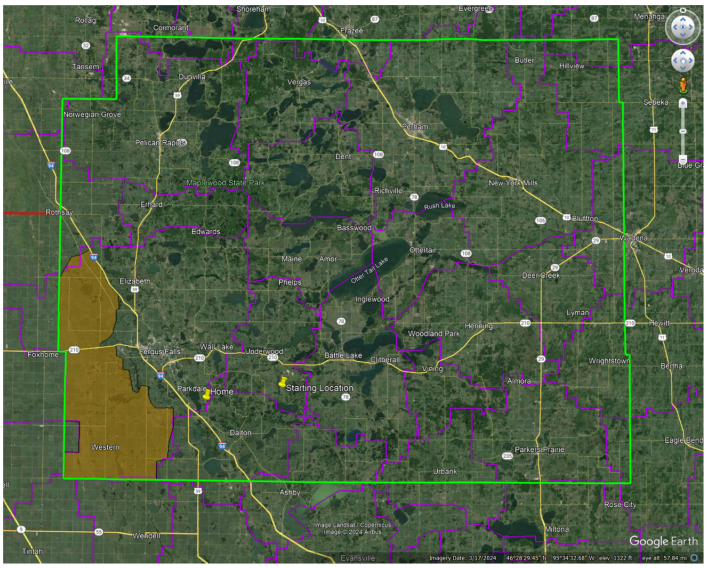
Otter Tail Telcom (Park Region) Expands Broadband Network in Otter Tail County

Source: Shannon Terry, Otter Tail County Public Information Officer

Otter Tail County and Otter Tail Telcom (dba Park Region) are thrilled to announce the internet fiber services network expansion in several townships near Fergus Falls. This MN DEED low-density program project will construct a fiber-to the-home network for 286 unserved residents and businesses.

Expanding broadband internet highlights the local commitment to ensuring that rural areas can access high-speed, reliable internet services. "Broadband is crucial infrastructure that gives Otter Tail County a competitive advantage economically and expands options for work and living," said Kurt Mortenson, Chair of the Otter Tail County Board of Commissioners. "This grant will expand high-speed internet to over 280 homes and businesses across six different townships, providing business competitiveness, improved education and health care access, social connectivity, and enhanced quality of life for Otter Tail County residents."

Extending broadband internet to rural townships presents challenges that require partnerships and collaboration. Park Region and Otter Tail County are grateful for the support from townships, residents, elected officials and the Office of Broadband Development/MN DEED. Without their support, this expansion of broadband infrastructure would not be possible. The following townships are partners in the expansion: Aastad, Buse, Carlisle, Orwell, Oscar and Western. "We are excited to expand this vital service to the townships near the Fergus Falls area," said Park Region GM/CEO Dave Bickett. "Our mission has always been 'Keeping you connected to the things that matter most,' and with this expansion, we look forward to extending that mission to even more residents and businesses in our community."



Park Region is dedicated to creating opportunities for growth and innovation through this investment in the area's communities. The expanded network will provide residents and businesses in the rural townships with access to high-speed internet, empowering them with the resources they need for education, telehealth, remote work, and overall connectedness.

"Otter Tail County's progress in broadband infrastructure and continued efforts are largely the result of strong partnerships. As we celebrate this grant, I want to thank our county and township leaders for recognizing the importance of broadband and contributing the matching funds needed to qualify for these state grants," said Senator Jordan Rasmusson. "I also want to commend Park Region for stepping up to take on one of the most challenging projects in the state."

Improving broadband services will benefit farmers, ranchers, business owners and telecommuters. Expanding broadband will also create an opportunity for new businesses to relocate to Otter Tail County's rural area, increase job and population growth, and significantly impact the county's economy.

About MN DEED Broadband Grant Funding

The Low-Density Program is a competitive grant program that provides financial resources for new and existing providers to invest in building broadband infrastructure in low-density areas of the state



Don't miss out on the LCSC's February Networking Luncheon

LCSC members are invited to join a networking luncheon specifically for City Clerks, Deputy Clerks, City Administrators, and City Managers on Friday, February 14, 2025, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the City of Morris.

Attendees will have the chance to connect and engage in discussions on relevant topics with regional members.

REGISTER NOW

Guest Speaker: Cedar Walters, Climate Officer at West Central Initiative

Cedar Walters has been with West Central Initiative since January 2024 as their Climate Officer, having previously served for five years as the Public Information & Education Officer for the Otter Tail County Solid Waste Department. In her role, she works closely with counties, communities, schools, and regional stakeholders to implement energy solutions, starting with a focus on municipal and public buildings.

This event is sponsored by Lakes Country Service Cooperative and will feature a light lunch.



From left: Jim Fish, Kurt Mortenson, Paul Ness, David Meyer, Kevin Campbell, Judith Moeller, Andy Siira, Reed Reinbold, Jon Karger, Jeremy Kovash, Suzanne Wing, Marc Hasbargen, Dan Posthumus, and Phil Jensen

2024 LCSC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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