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LCSC Communicator

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Regional News, Views, and Information

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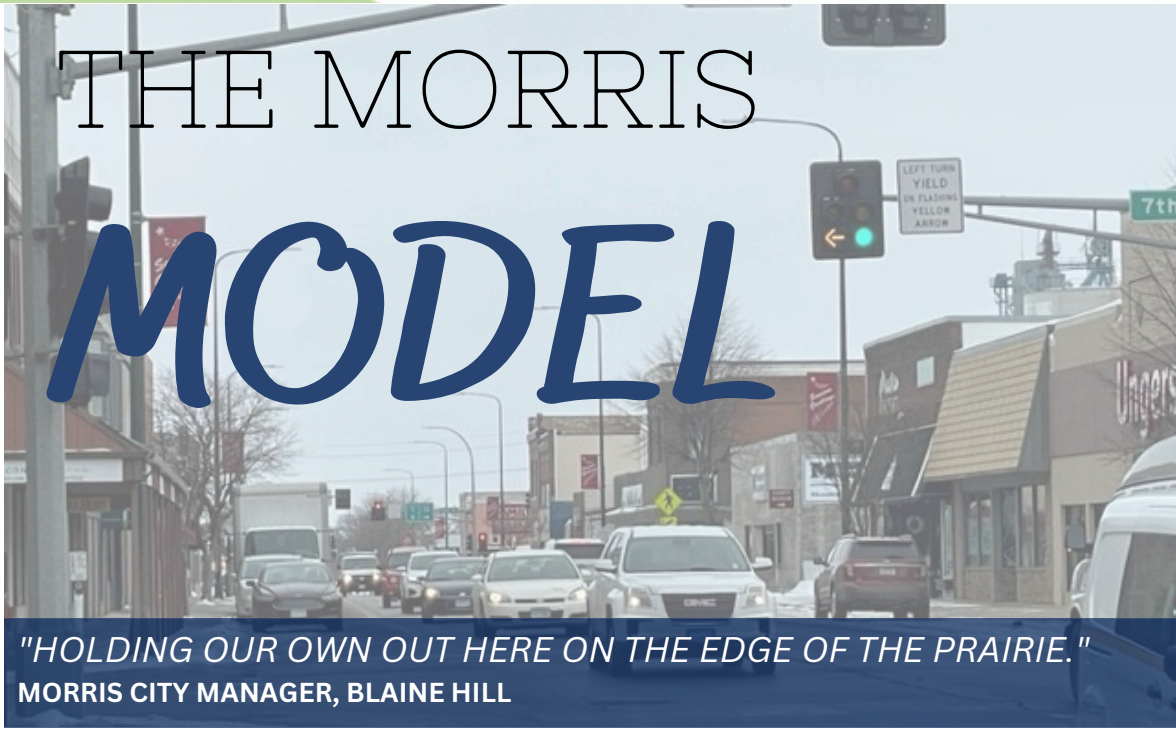
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THE MORRIS MODEL



"HOLDING OUR OWN OUT HERE ON THE EDGE OF THE PRAIRIE."
MORRIS CITY MANAGER, BLAINE HILL

Blaine Hill loves his community of over 5,000 residents. “I grew up here, it’s safe, quiet, and away from everything, but still, we have access to everything. I never wanted to leave the area,” said Hill. A graduate of Morris High School and the University of Minnesota Morris, he found his way back to the community in 2007 after 17 years working for the City of Breckenridge. Today Hill works as the Morris City Manager, overseeing their 41 employees. Now with 42 years of experience in city government, Hill is beginning to think about retirement.

With a smile, he said, “When I retire, I am going to donate a park bench and place it in front of city hall. I plan to sit on that bench daily with my cup of coffee and watch the traffic go by.”

Earning the title of a model city is an honor. However, the City of Morris has been a vibrant community for some time. Morris is well known for its farming industry, research, and recreation outlets, as well as being home to the University of Minnesota Morris, Riverview Dairy operation, and Superior Industries. Hill is incredibly enthusiastic about sharing what the community partners have done to become the “Morris Model.”

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Source: *Blaine Hill, Morris City Manager; The City of Morris Website, the University of Minnesota Morris Website, Bolton and Menk Website, Clean Energy Resource Teams Website, Minnesota GreenStep Program Website*
Author: *Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Generalist*

The Morris Model was formed around the relationship between the University of Minnesota Morris and the broader Morris community. In 2018, The Morris Model Strategic Plan was developed at the Climate Smart Municipality Strategic Planning Retreat. Over 30 community leaders and representatives from city and county governments were brought together, and three main goals came out of the planning session.

1. Produce 80% of the energy consumed in the county by 2030
2. Reduce energy consumption by 30% by 2030
3. No landfilling of waste generated within Stevens County by 2025



Before developing the Strategic Sustainability Plan, Hill and a cohort from the Morris community traveled to Saerbeck, Germany, to study a sister city's model and learn more about a "Climate Community of the Future" where they produce 400% of their energy. Hill pointed out a map of the German community on his wall and shared how they have successfully implemented mechanisms to be a climate-friendly energy economy. "It is rare that you see a personally owned pickup truck in Saerbeck. The residents of this community use public transit and bike or walk to where they need to be. Everyone is required to recycle, and you will incur fines if you do not follow the recycling laws," said Hill about the clean environment policies this community has adopted.

Saerbeck, Germany



Following the development of the Strategic Sustainability Plan, one of the first city projects completed was the new water treatment plant. In 2019 the city built a state-of-the-art water treatment plant to replace its 40-year-old facility. Morris has extremely hard water and built the plant to reduce chloride pollution from homes with soft water systems. The chloride from the soft water systems was making its way into the Pomme De Terre River. Michael Abbing, from the University of Minnesota Morris Office of Sustainability, published a report in 2022 that shows the implementation of the new water treatment plant decreased chloride pollution by over 60%, which indicates that people stopped or reduced their use of water softeners. This underscores that the $19M project was a success.

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Morris is also a GreenStep City. The Minnesota GreenSteps program learns best practices from Minnesota cities and assistance providers and continually refines the best practices and the resources for taking action to become sustainable. Today Morris is meeting their sustainability goals. Now in operation in the Morris community are two wind turbines and solar ray panels installed on the municipal roofs of the community center, library, municipal liquor store, and city hall. The city has electric car charging stations, and Otter Tail Power Company will soon install the first fast-charging station.



SOLAR RAY PANELS ON THE MUNICIPAL LIQUOR STORE

The public school provides student transportation with two electric school buses, and public transport will soon utilize one electric bus. This list of energy efficiencies is what you can see with your eye, but there is so much more going on behind the scenes with the work done in the city of Morris policy and infrastructure.



MORRIS IS A FARMING COMMUNITY

You can also find more information on the City of Morris Website.

Do you want to learn more about the "Morris Model" and how to become a "Climate Community of the Future?" Click on the links below to read about the Morris Strategic Sustainability Plan, the Morris Model website, and the University of Minnesota Morris Water Treatment Plant report.

STRATEGIC PLAN LINK

MORRIS MODEL

MORRIS WATER TREATMENT PLANT REPORT



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

Greetings to all our City, County, Other Government, and Non-profit members.

I hope you are all enjoying 2023. As the Legislative Chairperson for The Minnesota Service Cooperatives, I have been presented with opportunities to work with our legislative delegation and advocates on key issues in Minnesota. One of 2023's huge discussions is happening around Paid Family and Medical Leave.

The legislative proposal would create a new, mandatory 24-week paid leave program for all Minnesota employers and employees. The bills are Senate File 2 and House File 2 at the Minnesota State Capitol. Eleven states (and several other countries) have some version of paid leave. These bills would include paid medical leave of up to 12 weeks for serious health conditions or pregnancy, as well as paid family leave of up to 12 weeks to care for a newborn, adopted or foster child, or family member with a serious health condition. Additionally, as proposed, the leave can be stacked for a total of 24 weeks. Employers would be charged a .7% payroll tax to fund the program. Family members are relatively broadly defined. The program would have some implementation this year and be fully operational by 2025.

At Lakes Country, we have implemented steps to benefit our employees and their families in this area and hope they can help our transition upon legislative passage. Just last year, our Board of Directors implemented a parental leave bank. We feel this is an innovative approach to care for our employees and their families. The voluntary parental leave bank aims to provide additional paid parental leave days for employees of LCSC who have exhausted their earned compensatory time, floating holidays, vacation leave, and sick leave up to the allowed amount. It is meant to be a safety net against salary interruption upon the birth or adoption of a child by providing up to 20 additional days of paid leave after application request approval. The Parental Leave Bank is built with sick leave hours contributed by full-time and part-time employees wishing to participate. We have had a heartwarming response of donated days for our bank.

I hope that you enjoy this edition of The Communicator. If there is anything that we can do for you as your Service Cooperative, please do not hesitate to reach out.





Source/Author: *Jean Bowman, City of Fergus Falls Communications Manager*

Fergus Falls Mayor

Ben Schierer

Named 2023 Presidential Leadership Scholar

Ben Schierer, Mayor of Fergus Falls, MN, has been named one of 60 Scholars and the only person from Minnesota who will form the Presidential Leadership Scholars' (PLS) eighth annual class.

PLS serves as a catalyst for a diverse network of leaders brought together to collaborate and create meaningful change in the United States and around the world as they learn about leadership through the lens of the presidential experiences of George W. Bush, William J. Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Lyndon B. Johnson and their administrations.

Schierer is serving his second term as mayor of Fergus Falls, MN, having served two terms as a city council member before that. He was selected as a 2020-2021 Bush Fellow, a 2021 NewDEAL Leader, and received his Masters of Public Affairs (MPA) from the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute in May 2022.

In 2017, Schierer joined a handful of outstate and metro mayors throughout Minnesota to discuss how rural-urban divisions were limiting Minnesota's potential. There were no policy aims or partisan affiliations, only an attempt to build relationships and bridge divides. "I have always had a deep passion and interest in history, especially related to politics," said Schierer. "The opportunity to learn from former presidents and those who advise them is an honor and a privilege as I continue my leadership journey. I am committed to sharing what I learn with the people I serve, live, and work with in west central Minnesota."

During the six-month program, Schierer will focus on strengthening rural democracy in partnership with West Central Initiative. This work includes recruiting, training, and supporting candidates for non-partisan local offices in west central Minnesota. The project is grounded in the belief that effective government requires an informed and engaged citizenry, that civic life is an honorable calling, and that compromise, civility, and decency demonstrate strength, not weakness.

The class was selected after a rigorous application and review process. Scholars were chosen based on their leadership growth potential and the strength of their leadership projects aimed at improving the civic or social good by addressing a critical challenge or need in a community, profession, or organization.



Over the course of the program, Scholars will travel to each participating presidential center to learn from former presidents, key former administration officials, business and civic leaders, and leading academics. They will study and practice varying leadership approaches and exchange ideas to help strengthen their impact.

The 2023 program began on Jan. 24 in Washington, D.C.

OTTER TAIL COUNTY



HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN APPROVED BY FEMA

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced that it has approved the countywide Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, making the county, cities, and other organizations eligible to leverage state and federal resources and expertise to implement actions and projects that will eliminate or greatly reduce the impact of natural hazards on our communities.

Otter Tail County is vulnerable to a variety of potential natural disasters that threaten the county's loss of life and property. The plan addresses how the county and communities intend to continue to mitigate against hazards such as tornadoes, flooding, wildland fires, blizzards, straight-line winds, ice storms, and drought, which have the potential to inflict vast economic loss and personal hardship.

The county and every city have identified a series of efforts they want to pursue through 2027, ranging from education and awareness programs to local plans and regulations, natural systems protection, and structure and infrastructure projects. The construction of community storm shelters/safe rooms and placement of additional outdoor warning sirens and generators at critical community facilities are included on many community lists, as are projects designed to help stabilize soils/shoreland and reduce localized flooding and erosion.

All Otter Tail County cities were included in the development of the plan and incorporated the concerns and needs of townships, school districts, and other stakeholders, as well as comments received by the public.

Over the next five years, Otter Tail County's Emergency Management program will work with county and city officials and stakeholders to implement the plan, bring awareness to hazard migration opportunities, and help navigate funding and other processes to ensure projects can be realized and measurable reductions in natural hazard impacts can be achieved.

Details on the Otter Tail County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, including profiles on Otter Tail County's natural hazards and a complete list of identified mitigation actions, can be found by contacting the Emergency Management Program or visiting a dedicated page on the county website.

ottertailcountymn.us/mitigation

You can also reach out to:

Patrick Waletzko
Otter Tail County
Emergency Management Director
218-998-8067
pwaletzk@co.ottertail.mn.us



VALUING HOLISTICALLY



UNDERSTANDING THE GENUINE PROGRESS INDICATOR

with Ken Pentel,

Director of the Ecology Democracy Network

Ken Pentel is the Director of the Ecology Democracy Network and has been working for years to pass legislation that would allow Minnesota to calculate the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). Deeply passionate about this issue for the countless ways that such macroeconomic figures have real impacts on people's everyday budgets, Pentel helps break down what the GPI is and how it differs from the dominant Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measurement of economic well-being.

The Valuing Holistically author Benjamin Velani has a conversation with Ken Pentel, Director of the Ecology Democracy Network.

Velani: Can you briefly explain what the GPI is?

Pental: The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) is an alternative composite number of an economy's well-being for use instead of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The GPI meets the scale and takes into account far more indicators of true economic and social well-being than the GDP does.

Velani: What are your indicators of true economic well-being?

Pental: One is the health of your habitat. That's one thing the GPI takes into account that's so important. The GPD only sees value in a forest when it's cut and turned into timber or chip wood. In the GPI, forests are valuable in and of themselves, fixing carbon, fixing soil, filtering water, filtering air, habitat for birds. So, where the GDP doesn't care about what's known as ecological services, the GPI does.

GPI 2.0 categories of credits and costs.

Velani: What kinds of considerations does the GPI include that are taken for granted in our current economy?

Pental: The GDP is calculated from local to the state to the national to the global level, and GDP is considered the most powerful economic signal on Earth. It's what everyone's chasing, and it sets pricing, interest rates, and budgeting. If we have two negative quarters of GDP, it's a benchmark for a recession. GDP is designed around a growth imperative based on single-entry bookeeping. So, it basically just shows addition – an aggregate number of credits in the economy, or where, when, and how much money gets spent in a quarter. The GPI, on the other hand, shows credits and costs on the spreadsheet.

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Economic Categories	Environmental Categories	Social Categories
Household Budget Expenditures	Services from natural capital	Services from human capital
Defensive Expenditures	Depletion of natural capital	Services from social capital
Household Investments	Costs of pollution	Social costs of economic activity
Income Inequality		
Public Provisioning		
Services from built capital		

The GPI recognizes pollution as a cost to economy, whereas the GDP generally sees it as a credit, or it's not calculated at all. The GPI, unlike the GDP, recognizes a variety of non-monetized activity, like housework, volunteerism, and the health of habitats. The GPI also cares about the equitable allocation of resources and sees economic inequalities as a cost for society.

Velani: Why should we consider those non-monetized costs?

Pental: The reason I think people should care is with the GPI you get a more accurate accounting of the overall well-being of our society. For example, in the GDP, whatever money is spent to pollute a water system shows up as a credit, and then whatever money is spent on clean-up and resource management also shows up as a credit. Policy makers need an accurate picture of the economy, so you'd want an economic measurement that considers pollution clean-up a cost and not a credit for society. The GPI provides this more accurate picture of credits and costs to society from all sources of activity.

Velani: How would changing one of our society's greatest measurements of value directly affect the people of west central Minnesota?

Pental: The way the GDP works now, it undervalues rural economies and overvalues urban and suburban economies. Over the last 80 years, we've seen it here in Minnesota, but it's also endemic all over the planet – populations migrate from rural to urban, leading to ballooning central cities and incredible stress in rural economies. The GPI would reverse this, and there's several moving parts as to why this would happen.

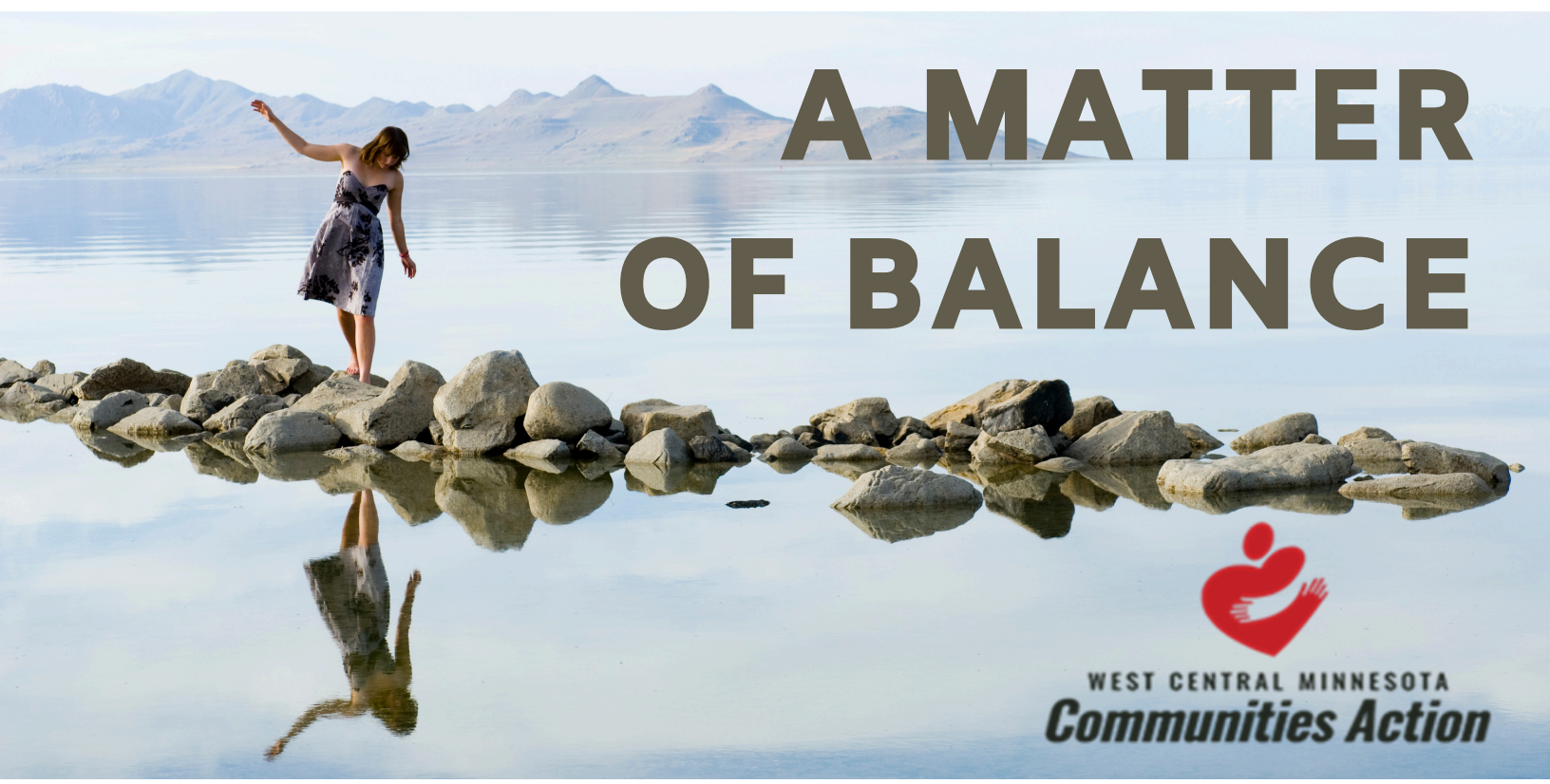
For example, Minnesota spends anywhere between $15 and $18 billion out of state, on coal, oil, uranium, gas, and big hydro, and we bring those fuels into the state. Once we do that, we have to manage those fuels. Currently, the state uses the GDP to calculate its forecast and budget that affect rural economies. All the money spent doing remediation for the social and environmental costs of fossil fuels shows up as a credit, when in fact that's money we spend to protect ourselves and save lives, and they should be considered a cost.

Let's imagine a case where what's coming out of tailpipes in the Twin Cities metro is causing acute asthma, and a young child ends up in an emergency room. Money's being spent on dealing with this asthma in a variety of ways, and all that money shows up as credit on the GDP spreadsheet, when in fact it should and would be a cost on the GPI spreadsheet.

Once you shift from a credit to a cost on the spreadsheet, which the GPI does, you change incentives, and you change behavior. Now it becomes less attractive to send millions of dollars out of Otter Tail County to meet energy demands, and far more attractive to localize those dollars in efficiency and renewability by building self-sustaining grids. This will stabilize struggling rural economies because dollars will be staying in those communities, reinvesting in themselves and creating the types of jobs that we need to flourish.

About the Author

Benjamin Velani is the Lead for America Climate Fellow and serving AmeriCorps member at West Central Initiative. He recently graduated Summa Cum Laude from Cornell University, majoring in Religious Studies and Government and writing an undergraduate thesis on the human and ecological effects of light pollution and dark night skies. He was formerly the Dining Editor at The Cornell Daily Sun, and he's now taking the lead on West Central Initiative's Climate Action Newsletter.



DO YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT FALLING?

If so, the upcoming A Matter of Balance training workshop might be for you. West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc. (WCMCA), with funding through the Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging, will be presenting the A Matter of Balance workshop.

This workshop emphasizes practical strategies to manage falls and is an award-winning program designed to manage falls and increase activity levels. Many older adults experience concerns about falling and therefore restrict their activities.

A Matter of Balance is an eight-week evidence-based course. **You will learn to:** view falls as controllable, set goals for increasing activity, make changes to reduce fall risks at home, and exercise to increase strength and balance.

Who should attend this workshop: anyone who has fallen in the past and is concerned about falling again, anyone interested in improving balance, flexibility, and strength, and anyone who has restricted their activities because of falling concerns. The class size is small and limited.

There is no charge for this class. All participants will receive a workbook that will be used each week of the course and is theirs to keep once completed.

The class will meet for two hours a week for eight weeks, beginning on Tuesday, February 7, with the last class being on Tuesday, March 28, from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm. The last class will be on Tuesday, March 28. We will meet every Tuesday at the Alexandria Area YMCA at 110 Karl Drive, Alexandria, MN.

For more information and to register for this workshop, please get in touch with John at West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc. (WCMCA) at 218-685-7038. We hope to see you there!

DATES: Tuesday, February 7 – Tuesday, March 28 - 8 Weeks Total

TIME: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm – 2-hour sessions

LOCATION: Alexandria Area YMCA, 110 Karl Drive, Alexandria, MN 56308

COST: There is no a charge for this workshop, but registration is required

TO REGISTER or for **QUESTIONS:** Call John at West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc. at 218-685-7038

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A Sustainable FUTURE for A CENTER FOR THE ARTS



Source: Michael Burgraff, A Center for the Arts Executive Director; A Center for the Arts Website
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Generalist

Located in downtown Fergus Falls is the beautiful and historical, A Center for the Arts building. Initially built in 1921 as the Orpheum, this gem has weathered time, a pandemic, and the changing interests of the entertainment industry. Today A Center for the Arts is thriving. It welcomes various artists from all over the world to appeal to the many interests of Fergus Falls residents and the surrounding communities.

I first met A Center for the Arts Executive Director Michael Burgraff in 2011 in the northern Minnesota town of Grand Rapids. Burgraff was recently selected as the new Executive Director, and we were both attending the Blandin Community Leadership program. Not only would this program be ideal for an emerging leader, but this was also the perfect opportunity for Burgraff to build relationships with many Fergus Falls community leaders. Twelve years later, with multitudes of curtain calls, navigating a pandemic, and mustering through many building renovations, Burgraff is still leading performances in Fergus Falls. Burgraff laughed as he shared, “As a new director for a performing arts center if you are there less than three years, they wonder why you had to leave. However, they wonder why you couldn't get out if you are there longer than five years.”



Michael Burgraff
Executive Director

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Throughout the years, Burgraff has impacted many lives. With tears in his eyes, he shared a life-changing event he will never forget. Early in his career at the Opera House in Fairmont, he brought in a performance group called Chum Chum Bay. Burgraff's belief that youth are the future of community arts has led him to involve local schools and their students. "It's here where students can learn about performing arts from various cultures," said Burgraff. He invited a group of students for a "meet and greet" with the performers and allowed them to ask questions. To his surprise, the performers only spoke Spanish, and he desperately needed a translator. Burgraff looked around the room and asked if any students could speak Spanish. One lone student shyly raised his hand. The young man quickly translated questions and answers for English-speaking students and the Spanish-speaking Chum Chum Bay performers. His fellow students were in awe of his ability to translate and applauded and high-fived him following the group meeting. Later in the afternoon, several of the student's teachers approached Burgraff and shared, with tears in their eyes, that this young man is a student who lives in the shadows and is overlooked and ignored by the student population. They told him, "Today, you made him a superstar, and he can't go back." Burgraff looked at me and humbly said, "I changed that young man's life that day."

> **The youth need to be participating in the arts.**
>
> -Michael Burgraff

The early 1990s brought plans of change to the Fergus Theatre. Renovation began and more than $1 million was raised to make the theater a year-round facility. The fall of 1995 marked the reopening of the Fergus Theatre with a building that was up to code and handicapped accessible. The remodeled auditorium had seating for 446 along with accessible seating for several persons. The renovated Fergus Theatre was now open year-round and became the home of A Center for the Arts.



Burgraff began his career as Executive Director at the Fairmont Opera House twenty years ago. Through his experience, he knows that involving youth in the arts is critical for the center's future. A piece of the sustainability plan is to create an annual youth event or festival at the Kirkbride, bringing performers, games, crafts, and fun physical activities as part of the event. "We need to get the community involved in this event," said Burgraff. "What we need from the community to survive is participation in volunteering, attending the performances, sponsorships of events, and memberships."

The last big community production at A Center for the Arts was CLUE in the fall of 2022. Burgraff said, "Productions can only continue when there are more resources to fill roles in director, stage production, lights, sound, costume, props, and backstage management. There are not enough volunteers to manage a sizeable production. This again beckons the belief and understanding that youth need to be involved at a young age to create a passion for wanting to be part of the theater as an adult. "It's involvement as a youth where careers in the arts, volunteerism, and philanthropy begins," said Burgraff.

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Burgraff is now thinking about how he will exit the stage and leave his career as Executive Director at A Center for the Arts. He has plans to ensure that A Center for the Arts is in a better place than he found it and to provide a method for long-term sustainability. Part of that plan is to continue to grow the summer concert series in the ample lawn space behind the Kirkbride, formerly the State Hospital. The summer concert series has been a big success. Now in its second year, the series has experienced significant growth bringing in over 1,800 attendees at one of the concerts in August of 2022.

As part of the succession plan for Burgraff's departure, a consultant was hired from Propel for Nonprofits to summarize what the board will need to begin the search for a new director when Burgraff retires in a little over two years. Burgraff shared that Fergus Falls is now his home, and he plans to enjoy family, traveling, and creating pottery following his retirement.



A Center for the Arts aims to connect artists, patrons, and community by providing the best possible arts experiences that inspire creativity, curiosity, imagination, and learning. "We have something for everyone," said Burgraff.

Do you want to learn more about the schedule of performances or programming at A Center for the Arts? Visit their website at fergusarts.org

TECHNOLOGY Solutions

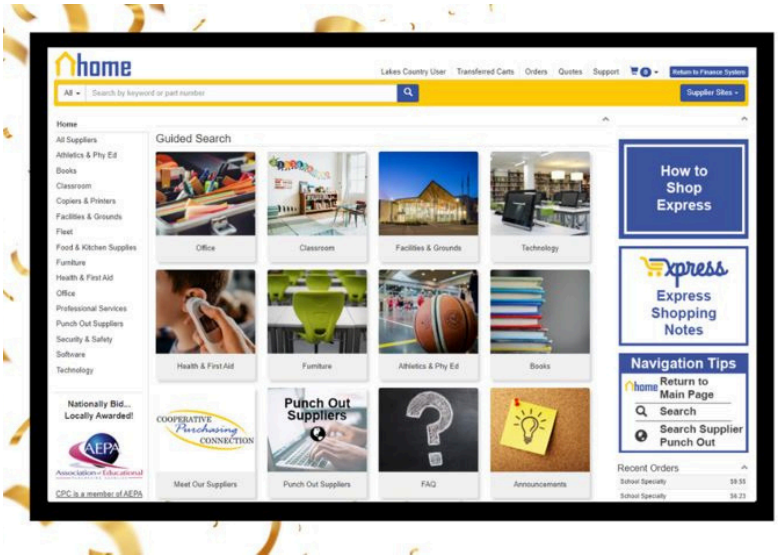
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