LCSC Communicator
December 2023
Regional News, Views, and Information
LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

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GOVERNMENT-
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Do you know the Difference?

Food shelves, food pantries, and food banks all provide food to those in need, but there are differences between these programs. Food shelves and pantries directly serve families and individuals. They can feed hundreds of people per week.

The work of a food bank is much broader. Food banks safely store millions of pounds of food delivered to local food programs. In our region, North Country Food Bank (NCFB) provides over 6 million pounds of food, or enough food for 5.2 million meals, which feeds approximately 35,000 residents in Grand Forks County, North Dakota, and 22 counties in northwest and west central Minnesota.

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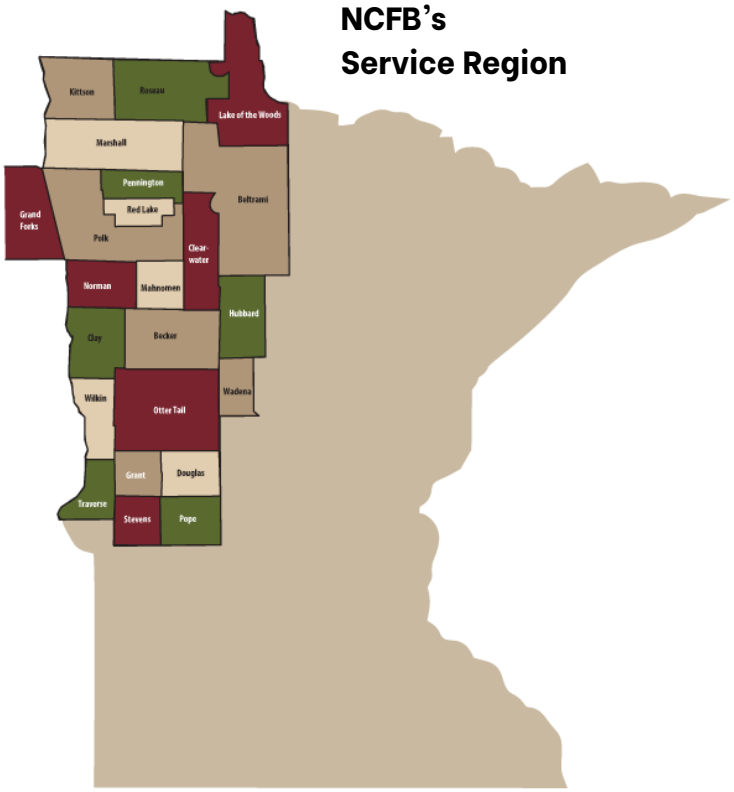
Source: Susie Novak Boelter, Executive Director, North Country Food Bank
Feeding America Website, North Country Food Bank Website
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Generalist



Susie Novak Boelter
North Country Food Bank
Executive Director

In LCSC's region, NCFB delivers food to nearly 30 food shelves/pantries, hundreds of mobile food drops, the children's BackPack provides weekend hunger relief for almost every public school, and the senior's Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) in each community where it is available.

NCFB's Service Region



North Country Food Bank's Executive Director, Susie Boelter, has served the region for over 17 years. Boelter is motivated by helping people. "It feels good to help people. If you are hungry, nothing else matters. We have all missed a meal because we were running late, but not knowing when you will get to eat again is a different thing. This type of need is debilitating and all-consuming. This is NCFB's role, to make sure nobody has to wonder where their next meal is coming from," said Boelter.

North Country Food Bank (NCFB) is currently located in East Grand Forks, Minnesota, and it covers 35,000 square feet. Over a decade ago, Boelter realized that the need to serve the community increased substantially yearly. NCFB also needed more warehouse space and improved storage to meet state and federal food storage regulations. At that time, NCFB was situated in Crookston, Minnesota, with a facility footprint of 10,000 square feet. Boelter actively researched available locations in the surrounding area and found a new location in East Grand Forks.

Today, the NCFB facility has the loading docks, assembly areas, refrigeration, warehousing, volunteer areas, and office space needed to serve this large region. Boelter proudly shared that her dedicated staff of 12 employees has the space they need to work. "In our previous location, I had a folding table in my office to facilitate NCFB Board meetings. In this building, well-designed training and meeting rooms can host large groups of volunteers and meet the operation's needs," said Boelter. Last year, NCFB volunteers provided over 7,600 hours of service. This ample space facilitates and supports their fantastic volunteer work.



Warehouse in East Grand Forks, ND

The food they store is donated from local neighbors, retailers, grocery stores, and restaurants. Feeding America also helps connect NCFB to additional resources, including food. To get the food into the hands of the community, food banks hire drivers to make the deliveries. Every food bank serves a specific area that varies in size. Because of increased demand for food, NCFB has had to outsource deliveries to local delivery companies. “The amount of people we are serving currently is unprecedented and has been increasing by 35-40% each month,” said Boelter.
Boelter explained that the rising cost of food and other everyday expenses, along with the decrease in SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), have contributed to the increase in need. “I believe this may be creating more demand as this reduction in SNAP benefits has a big impact on families trying to make ends meet,” added Boelter.
Of the increases, Boelter said the children’s BackPack Program continues to grow, and she worries about how the middle and high school students who are in need are being served. This program provides hundreds of children in NCFB’s region with food to sustain them through the weekend. Why is this program so important to our children? Imagine that you are a seven-year-old student sitting at your desk in school, feeling hungry. You haven't had anything to eat since you left school at 3:00 pm yesterday, and your stomach is growling. You ask the teacher for permission to go outside the classroom to get a drink of water, hoping it will alleviate the emptiness in your stomach. However, when you return to the classroom, you find it challenging to concentrate on the teacher's lesson as your mind is preoccupied with the thought of lunch, which is still hours away. When children are hungry, they cannot learn, and health and behaviors are also affected by lack of nutrition. NCFB understands that for many children, the federally subsidized school breakfast and lunch are essential to their well-being. NCFB wants to ensure children have access to adequate nutrition throughout the weekend. The BackPack Program is a vital resource that helps bridge the gap and provides enough food to sustain them during these critical times.



When asked what challenges NCFB faces, Boelter said, “Financial resources! North Country Food Bank needs the support to continue serving these communities. COVID funding has run out, and we have a substantial increase in need.” NCFB recently redesigned its website to help users understand the mission and needs of NCFB and easily donate to the mission. “There is no benefit to letting people struggle with hunger. Every successful community has support in place to help those in need,” said Boelter.
Boelter shared that people in the northern parts of her service area have limited resources and less grocery stores which makes it difficult to purchase food. However, mobile food pantries can be a tremendous resource for these remote communities. During a mobile food pantry event, NCFB brings a truckload of food to a designated location in a community and distributes it on-site to individuals and families in need. Participants often line up over an hour before the event, worried they may run out or not receive food. "For volunteers, it really opens their eyes to the critical need in their community," added Boelter.
During a time when food expenses are rising and obtaining food is becoming more challenging, NCFB is preparing to meet the growing demand. Susie Boelter, the Executive Director of NCFB, is passionate about her work and the communities she serves. She plans to continue serving alongside her dedicated team at NCFB for many more years.

Do you want to learn more about NCFB's programs and services? Visit their website at northcountryfoodbank.org.

From the

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

"May today there be peace within. May you trust that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith in yourself and others. May you use the gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content with yourself just the way you are. Let this knowledge settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.' ..."
— Saint Terese of Liseaux

This quote is displayed in our living room. Recently, when visiting a dear friend battling cancer and winning, I noticed the same poster adorning her living room. I felt it was a wonderful way to ponder the blessings of 2023 and ring in the opportunities for contentment and the freedom to "sing, dance, praise, and love" in 2024. We hope you appreciate this issue of the Communicator and that all our cities, counties, government agencies, and nonprofits enjoy a blessed holiday season.



Kaddatz Galleries

showcases surreal works of local beloved artist



Artworks by the late
Kirk Williams featured

The Kaddatz Galleries announces the opening of their next exhibition in their Main Gallery: **Kirk Williams: Reflections**

Reflections is an exhibition of selected works that features a variety of Willams' pastels, assemblages, and ink drawings, which exemplify the surreal and whimsical nature of his work. Williams' boundless creativity and passion for art-making are evident in his work, which he used to explore themes of beauty, love, fear and obsessions.

Williams was born in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Studying Graphics at Tacoma, WA, and Fine Arts at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design in 1970 contributed to his foundation as an artist. Deciding to continue his education outside of the classroom and in what we call the "real world," Kirk learned the hard way, through trial and error, to perfect his art.

Often feeling as if he were a fish out of water, Williams employed imagery of fish and water throughout his career. Bubbles are another common presence in his work, inspiring playfulness and joy. His unique way of seeing the world shines through in his assemblages, in which he carefully selected various antiques, reimagining them into exuberant new works of art.

Appearing in many shows across the Midwest and displaying his art in galleries in the Metro area gave Williams the ability to reach a wide and diverse audience. Kirk Williams had an incredible impact on so many in his community and beyond, and his legacy lives on as his dreamy and enchanting work invites the viewer to explore their own imaginations.

Kirk Williams: Reflections will be on display in our Main Gallery from November 14, 2023 - January 6, 2024. Kaddatz Galleries is open to the public Tuesdays - Saturdays from 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm and Thursdays from 12:00 pm – 7:00 pm.

Visit the Kaddatz Galleries Website for more Information at kaddatzgalleries.org

Source/Author: Nancy Valentine, Executive Director
Kaddatz Galleries



FOR THE LOVE OF ALEXANDRIA

ARE YOU EMOTIONALLY ENGAGED WITH YOUR CITY?

The City of Alexandria has proven resilient in the face of economic fluctuations. “Alexandria is situated between the Twin Cities and Fargo, ND, with Interstate 94 running through the town, making it an ideal location,” said Marty Schultz, Alexandria’s city administrator. Schultz recognizes the significance of location due to his educational background in geography. According to Schultz, the diversity of its economy is what makes Alexandria exceptionally resilient. “The Alexandria economy does not depend on one thing,” said Schultz. With sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, healthcare, retail, and a solid educational system, Alexandria possesses all the necessary components for resilience.

Marty Schultz was born and raised in Alexandria. He completed his high school education at Alexandria High School in 1993 before moving away. He returned to his hometown in 2004 and started working for the city. Working there has given him a new perspective on his hometown. This interest in how cities functioned was sparked during his geography major at the University of Minnesota. It was only natural for him to transition into city government and administration.

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Source: Marty Schultz, City Administrator, City of Alexandria, MN
City of Alexandria Website, 2023 City of Alexandria Housing Study Update, www.sunopta.com,
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Generalist



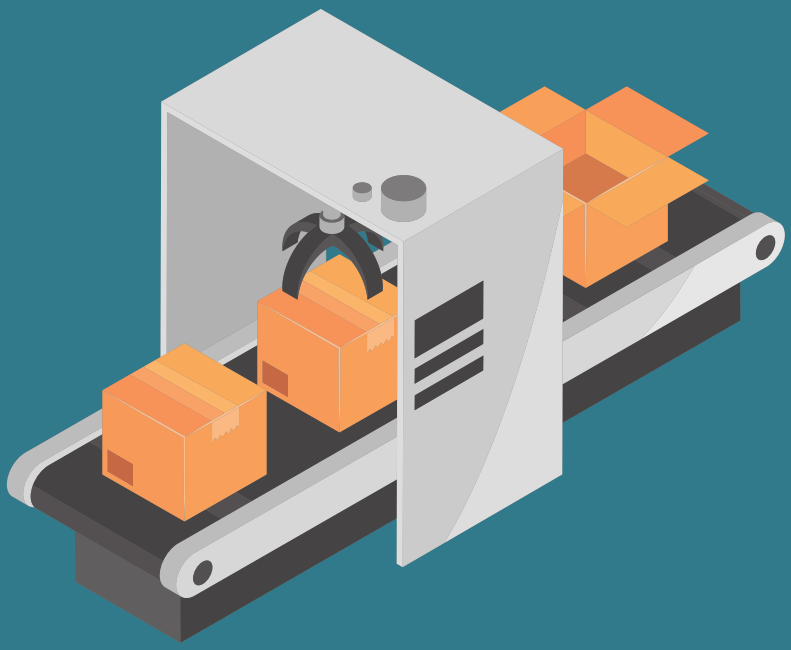
> **I love what I am doing. Our kids have so much to do, and it's a great place to live.**
> **-Marty Schultz**

Before returning to Alexandria, Marty worked in city planning in the Florida Keys, Duluth, MN, and Wabasha, MN. He took on the role of Assistant City Planner upon his return to Alexandria. He was then promoted to the position of Assistant City Administrator in 2008. Finally, in 2013, he was appointed as the City Administrator following the retirement of his predecessor. Marty has been in this position for ten years and remarked that time had flown quickly. Schultz has a deep affection for the Alexandria community. He often references the book "For the Love of Cities" by Peter Kageyama when he speaks to groups. The book explores what makes cities likable and what motivates ordinary citizens to do extraordinary things for their cities.

There are many reasons why young people may consider moving to Alexandria, Minnesota. This city features a high quality of life, with a wide range of cultural and recreational activities, such as hiking, fishing, and water sports on the nearby lakes. Additionally, Alexandria has a thriving job market with healthcare, manufacturing, and education opportunities. Schultz remarks, "I run into people from all over the state who come to Alexandria, and many of them have fond memories of visiting lake cabins in the area during their childhood."

Alexandria has a strong job market in the manufacturing sector, which creates a significant demand for housing and childcare. Recently, the city conducted a housing study that provided data on the population statistics. It was found that many people are moving to the area to retire. However, the average cost of a home in Alexandria is higher than in other locations. So far this decade, the City has been averaging more than 40 single-family housing builds yearly. In Greater Alexandria combined, the average annual single-family production has been above 110 units per year, including the new units in Alexandria. One of the concerns citizens continue to bring to the city has been childcare availability and quality. Schultz shared they are exploring ways the city, county, and school districts can increase childcare slots. "Everyone realizes we must think outside the box. We must look at different ways to solve this. It's an economic issue and a housing issue. It touches lots of things."

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Alexandria is home to Douglas Machine, the largest private employer in Alexandria, and Massman Companies. Massman Automated Designs broke ground this last year to build another packaging facility. They are building a 75,000-square-foot facility with the capacity to expand by another 150,000 square feet. The Alexandria facility will focus on new machine sales and be used for machine design, assembly, testing, customer demonstrations, product development, engineering, and logistics. The facility will support over 100 employees.

SunOpta is a company that produces a variety of plant-based beverages such as oat milk, soy milk, almond milk, coconut milk, hemp milk, and other drinks made from nuts, grains, seeds, and legumes. They have recently expanded their production by adding a 252,000-square-foot building near the interstate, which will support manufacturing plant-based milk and creamers. This expansion is also creating new job opportunities.

The downtown area of Alexandria is thriving with beautiful storefronts and a vibrant atmosphere that draws shoppers from over 30 miles away.

According to a retail trade analysis conducted by the University of Minnesota, Alexandria's retail activity surpasses what one would expect for a city its size.

This is a testament to the city's ability to attract and serve a diverse range of customers, making it a truly special destination for anyone looking to shop or explore. The development of the Rune, a $25 million project, involves the construction of a new four-story building covering an area of 214,185 square feet. The building will have underground parking, retail, professional spaces, and 72 luxury apartments. This is the most significant private investment ever made in a single project. The property is located near Big Ole and CopperTrail Brewing. Schultz said, "It is going to be exciting to see this new building take shape and see what this will bring to the downtown area."

The property is located near Big Ole and CopperTrail Brewing. Schultz said, "It is going to be exciting to see this new building take shape and see what this will bring to the downtown area."



The Runestone Community Center has been a cornerstone of the community for years, providing a bustling hub for ice and dry floor events all year round. The facility is now set to expand, with exciting plans in the works to add a third floor that will be versatile enough to accommodate both dry floor activities and ice sports.

In addition to expanding the lobby and support spaces, the facility will be made more accessible to everyone in the community, ensuring that it remains a welcoming space for all. Thanks to the 2020 bonding bill, the project is now well-funded, with a capital campaign underway to ensure the building is a success.

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Although the project has been in the works for over 15 years, it is now in the design stage with a goal to break ground in the spring of 2024. This project promises to provide much better support space for everyone who uses the facility.

KOHL'S retail store is in the process of moving into the former Herberger's portion of the mall in Alexandria. Schultz was pleased to share that this development prompted the resurfacing of the parking lot on the mall's west side, which was long overdue for repairs. The addition of KOHL'S as an anchor store is sure to bring in more retailers to the mall, providing an excellent opportunity for growth and development.

When asked how the City of Alexandria supports individuals and families struggling to make ends meet, Schultz replied. "There is a strong collaborative spirit between nonprofits, governmental agencies, and for-profit businesses. We all work collaboratively to get things done." Schultz was proud to share that Alexandria has a strong network of human services, in addition to an incredible food shelf, a strong United Way, and Habitat for Humanity to help with basic needs.

Schultz emphasized the importance of looking toward the future and addressing the community's evolving needs. He stated that the city must prioritize offering the amenities, recreational activities, and transportation modes that residents prefer. Schultz acknowledges that people are free to choose where they live, and providing the right amenities can be a decisive factor. Recently, Alexandria completed a comprehensive parks and trails plan outlining a $50 million investment in community amenities. The plan identified specific amenities as a priority for the city based on community survey results, including a nature trail from near Walmart to Lake Le Homme Dieu. Schultz recognizes that balancing the tax levy while providing the desired amenities is challenging, but the city is committed to meeting this challenge.

According to Schultz, everyone collaborates well with each other. "There is a roll-your-sleeves-up attitude toward solving problems from both the nonprofit and nongovernment sectors," said Schultz. Alexandria strives to be a welcoming community and has established a Cultural Inclusiveness committee that meets regularly. Alexandria Mayor Bobbie Osterberg aims to encourage engagement from all residents in the community.

There is no denying this dynamic lake community is thriving with resilience and rapid growth. When asked about his future plans, Schultz enthusiastically responded, "I love what I am doing. Our kids have so much to do, and it's a great place to live." With so much happening in Alexandria, it's hard not to be persuaded to be part of this vibrant community.

Do you want to learn more about the City of Alexandria and what it takes to be resilient? Visit their website at Alexandriamn.city for more information.



Source/Author: Katie Ganoe, Executive Director
Otter Cove Children's Museum

OFFERS JOYFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES THROUGH PHYSICAL PLAY, ARTISTIC EXPLORATION AND IMAGINATION IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN FERGUS FALLS.

The Museum features immersive and hands-on exhibits (both permanent and rotating), activities, and spaces to engage children ages birth to 10, as well as the adults who care for them.

BECAUSE PLAY MATTERS

Otter Cove opened in late 2020 with the mission to support the optimal development of our region's children by providing abundant play opportunities in an enriching environment that launches imaginations, stimulates skill development, and fosters a growing sense of place and purpose.

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SINCE OPENING, OTTER COVE HAS WELCOMED OVER 75,000 VISITORS FROM MORE THAN 800 ZIP CODES.



Children's museums around the world positively impact the lives of children and families and increase the livability of the communities they serve. Hands-on exhibits and programming target the vital development of 21st century skills, helping children grow up equipped to navigate a rapidly changing world. Children's museums are viewed as safe places where families can de-stress and connect with each other, and other families, while developing socially and emotionally through the power of play. Otter Cove views play as freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. While interactive learning, facilitated programming, and instruction are sometimes part of the visitor's experience, learning through play and exploration is the essence of Otter Cove's approach.

Locally, a recent economic impact study conducted by Greater Fergus Falls estimated that Otter Cove Children's Museum in Fergus Falls contributed $2,551,924.59 in unique economic value to Fergus Falls and Otter Tail County in 2021. This impact was felt across a wide range of impact points: revenues collected, spending of visitors to Fergus Falls and Otter Tail County, salaries paid to employees, and impact on the local tax bases. Otter Cove's presence in downtown Fergus Falls provides tangible spillover effects related to local business growth and sustainability, the contribution to the attractiveness of Fergus Falls for new business locations, real estate sales, property values, and related tax revenues.

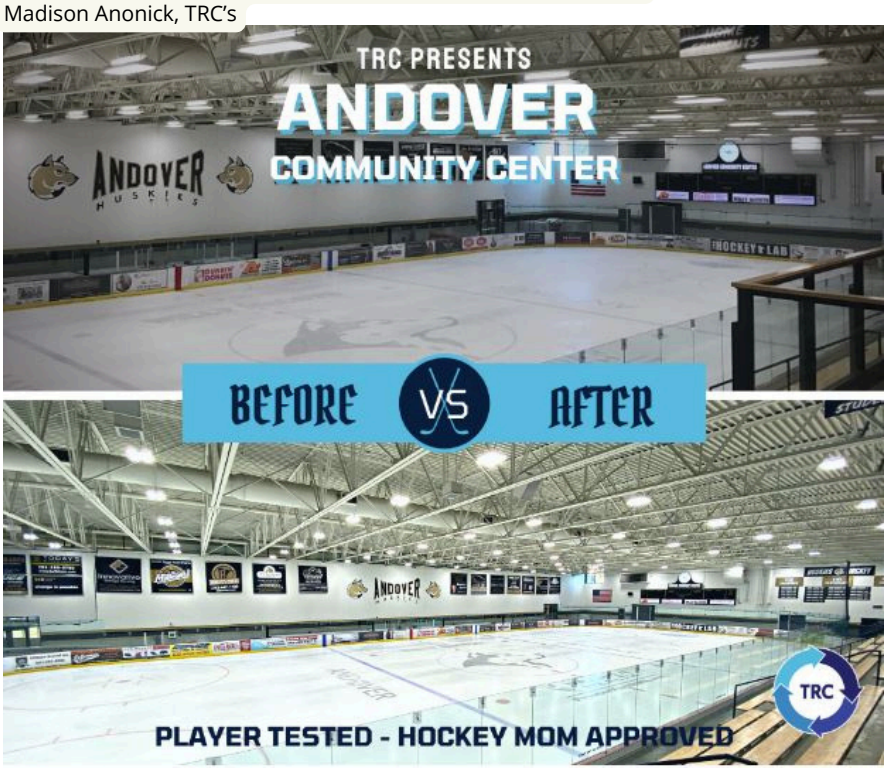


As Otter Cove celebrates its third anniversary, we are prioritizing increasing our long-term sustainability by increasing our offerings, expanding reach to more families and communities, and enhancing our visitor experience. Otter Cove is open for play six days a week and offers a variety of programming with more in development. Daily passes are available for purchase, in addition to several membership options.

Want to learn more about Otter Cove Children's Museum?
Visit their website at ottercoveff.org

Player Tested, Hockey Mom Approved!

Source/Author: Jerome Evans, CPC Program Representative and Madison Anonick, TRC's



COOPERATIVE Purchasing CONNECTION

Andover Community Center Lighting Upgrade - The Retrofit Companies

Andover Community Center had a problem. Their facility contained an ice area and an additional rink, but the lights in the ice arena had different light levels from those in the additional rink. Community center staff also lacked the ability to adjust the lighting for different events.

That's where The Retrofit Companies (TRC) came in. They listened to the outcomes and improved functions the community center staff wanted and then submitted a project proposal to meet those needs. The proposal included updating the ice arena to new LED fixtures, updating the existing LED lights to match the light levels in the adjacent rink, and implementing lighting controls to set scenes for different activities at the rink.

TRC got right to work after their proposal was accepted, handling every aspect of the project from start to finish. And because Cooperative Purchasing Connection (CPC) had already gone out to bid for lighting solutions and already awarded a contract to TRC - administrative staff did not have to secure multiple quotes or run a bid themselves.

They just put the project on the CPC Contract and, assured of competitive pricing, got right to work!

The result? The arena manager "absolutely loved" the transformation! The rink now has a noticeable improvement in light levels, staff now has the ability to control the lighting as needed in an efficient manner, and pricing was not an issue. Staff can even preset scenes to easily switch over lighting for all the different community center events and activities.

Reach out to CPC and The Retrofit Companies when you're ready to update or upgrade your LED lighting! And to learn more about all of the ways that CPC vendors can help you upgrade your facilities, just go to PurchasingConnection.org and click on Meet Our Vendors.



MINNESOTA CHANGEMAKER

LCSC'S STACI ALLMARAS HAS BEEN SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 2024-25 INITIATORS FELLOWSHIP COHORT

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Initiators Fellowship
Enterprise for Good in Greater Minnesota

Staci Allmaras loves to quote Paul Wellstone: "We all do better when we all do better." To advance her community unity mindset, Allmaras wants to use her experience working in schools to build up The Youths, a Pelican Rapids youth organization, to offer communal space and income-generating opportunities. Allmaras is supported by West Central Initiative and will use her Fellowship time to pursue nonprofit status and expand the organization's work to connect and open up opportunities for young people in her region.

"The Youths" is a group of adolescent and teen students from Pelican Rapids, consisting of individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds. The Youths was established during the summer of 2022 as a response to the Minnesota Student Survey results that revealed a need for a sense of belonging among students who were not involved in sports or school activities. Nearly half of the student enrollment in Pelican Rapids comprises students of color. This group meets once a week, uses their voices in decision-making spaces, arranges activities, and is learning civic leadership skills.

The nine Fellows selected for the 2024-2025 cohort represent 53 counties and six Native nations in Central, Northwest, Southwest and West Central Minnesota. They will experience comprehensive programming, executive-level mentoring and leadership training, ongoing education, and support from dedicated staff members to advance their mission-driven business or nonprofit endeavors. Each Fellow also will receive a $30,000 stipend for each year of the two-year program.



Do you want to know more about The Youths of Pelican Rapids? Contact Staci Allmaras at sallmaras@lcsc.org Staci Allmaras, serves as the Regional Center of Excellence Director for Educational Programs at Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

OTTER TAIL
COUNTY - MINNESOTA



Source/Author: Shannon Terry, Otter Tail County Public Information Officer

HOUSING SUMMIT

ACTIVATES PARTNERS

Otter Tail County hosted a countywide Housing Summit on Thursday, November 16. The summit brought nearly 100 housing partners together at Thumper Pond Resort to learn about housing successes, engage with each other, and activate continued housing growth for the county.

The Housing Summit included presentations from builders, city representatives, the Otter Tail County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), and the Community Development Agency (CDA). Guest speakers from Minnesota Housing, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and the Center for Rural Policy and Development joined presentations about a variety of financial resources and partnership opportunities. Otter Tail County's housing finance programs were also a highlight of the presentations. These programs align with the County's Big Build Initiative to build, rehabilitate, or preserve 5,000 housing units by 2025. Minnesota Housing Deputy Commissioner Rachel Robinson was thrilled to attend the Housing Summit and commended the housing partners in attendance. "Minnesota Housing brings resources to communities, but it's up to communities to activate the resources. It takes energy, coordination, and collaboration at the local level, and it is really exciting to see the progress of The Big Build in the region," shared Robinson.

Otter Tail County Commissioner and CDA Board Member Kurt Mortenson said of the summit, "It was encouraging to hear about the many opportunities for partnerships. Partners that are developing housing, those involved in the financing of housing, county and city government all came together today to share information and make connections to move the needle on housing growth."

The Housing Summit was an excellent event to share resources and activate nearly 100 partners to continue The Big Build's progress.

Contact housing@ottertailcounty.gov for more information about the Housing Summit and other housing resources in Otter Tail County.

MEET THE CHAIR
OF THE EARLY CARE & DEVELOPMENT
Foundation of Becker County

Source/Author: Rick Schara, Community Engagement Specialist
West Central Initiative



Kelsey Varty
Chair
Early Care & Development
Foundation of Becker County

Kelsey Varty chairs the new Early Care & Development Foundation of Becker County, a role she truly embraces. But if you imagine she brings nonprofit work experience and has familiarity with child care through her own children, well, you would be wrong.

Wrong on both counts. Yet enthusiasm and relishing the role go a long way.

"I have zero experience working in this scope of community efforts," Kelsey admits. "I've never been a part of an organization, and really, I have no business being chair," she humbly says, "but I'm learning new things and it's been really, really great."

So how did Kelsey get there?

It begins with a real passion for her community. Even without children of her own, she knows that having access to child care is part of the economic engine that drives businesses. "The work we're doing with this foundation is going to be helpful in supporting business right here in our communities," she says.

"Through this foundation, if we can successfully grow and retain child care providers, it will also support working families. By creating more choice in child care, we'll eliminate a lot of stress and anxiety for these families," she adds.

West Central Initiative (WCI) has worked to advance child care issues for more than three decades.

WCI's Director of Early Childhood Nancy Jost says, "Early childhood professionals are partners with families in raising the next generation of parents, workers, and citizens—our society depends on us, our children depend on us, and our future depends on us. We must do better."

They believe the same in Becker County, a sentiment that spurred action. The Early Care & Development Foundation (ECDF) was formed in 2022 by a group of community leaders who wanted to create long-term child care solutions in the region.

As a Financial Advisor at Carrier & Varty – Ameriprise Financial in Detroit Lakes, Kelsey has seen how the workforce can struggle with finding affordable, quality child care. "A long-time coworker had her child care provider change operating hours. Which is fair, right? The provider is a small business owner and has a say in that," Kelsey said. "But it didn't align with our business hours or that of other area businesses. So my coworker had to make a choice: find another provider, or change employment. With the shortage of child care, she chose the latter."

> ***"The support WCI has given to us has taken the guesswork out of knowing if we're doing the big, important stuff correctly."***
>
> **Kelsey Varty**

WCI's Community Philanthropy Officer Samantha VanWechel-Meyer helped get the project off and running. "This project is a great example of how we can respond to community needs," she said. "Bring your idea to us, gather your crowd, and together we can explore ways to make that dream a reality. WCI brings flexibility and experience to the table," Samantha said.

Kelsey can't say enough about Samantha and how that partnership is working. "The support WCI has given to us has taken the guesswork out of knowing if we're doing the big, important stuff correctly," Kelsey said. "We're able to focus on our mission and spread our message because we have a safe and secure place that's keeping track of donations, monitoring the funds, and sending out important tax documents."

"Small communities and their leaders don't always have the right tools at their fingertips," Kelsey said. "West Central Initiative provides the systems and resources we need."

Samantha describes the ECDF of Becker County as a public-private relationship. "Often, our funds receive private donations for public projects. The mission of this fund is to support early childhood and child care providers, so this fund brings government, business, and the general public together to work on solutions."

Kelsey relishes her role as chair. "To go from knowing nothing to learning so much from our WCI partnership is incredible. For any community group with a cause, I feel your first call should be West Central Initiative—they'll take care of you."

"I would absolutely recommend WCI's services to others," she adds.

Gap-filling Weather Radar Installation Nearing Completion in

Grant County

Grant County, MN, together with the City of Wendell, MN, announced that its partner, Climavision, a climate-tech data pioneer, is nearing the completion of installing a new weather radar system in Wendell.

This X-band radar will supplement weather coverage in between neighboring NEXRAD S-Band radars. On October 18th, there will be a radar viewing opportunity at 1:00 PM before it is lifted to its host site, the Wendell water tower.

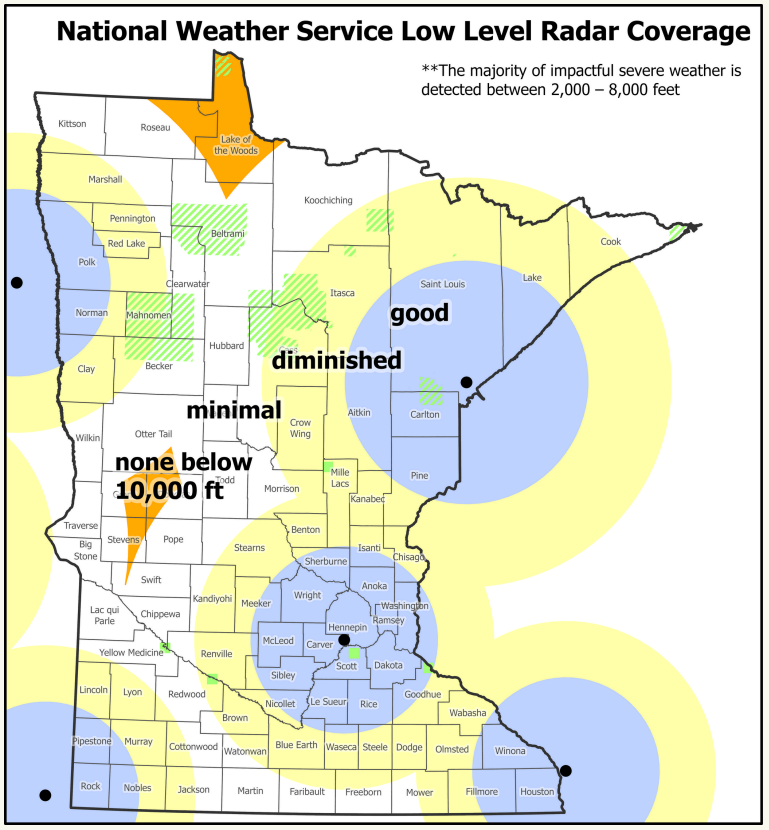


Because of regional topography and the nature of weather radar technology, gaps can exist between systems as the radar beam moves higher in the atmosphere the further it gets from the radar location. This leaves some areas, such as Grant County, and our neighboring counties, exposed to weather phenomena that often happens in the lower atmosphere such as flash flooding, high winds, ice, snow, and tornadoes. The dual-polarization X-Band weather radar is designed to fill these small gaps and provide the highest resolution of what's happening nearest to the ground. While all warnings and notices will continue to come through official National Weather Service channels, and the public should always follow the instructions from the NWS, this new radar will provide critical visibility, enabling forecasters and emergency responders to better plan, prepare, and respond to volatile weather situations.

> Responder safety is always a priority.
>
> **Tina Lindquist, Grant County Emergency Management Director**

"The real-time data provided by this radar will help keep responders safe and help Grant County be better informed of severe weather systems."
"Whether it is your safety or you are responsible for alerting your community, everyone needs data to make good decisions. This radar provides the first-ever opportunity for Grant County responders to have access to low-level radar coverage, where many storm systems develop."
Climavision's X-Band weather radar is a proprietary high-resolution, solid-state system manufactured in the United States. It is safe and licensed by the FCC. As the first system to go live in a regional pilot project, Grant County expects the system to be operational within 4-6 weeks, with responders, Emergency Management, and government officials receiving access to the real-time data.

Headquartered in Louisville, KY, Climavision installs weather infrastructure across the United States to fill gaps in information so that communities, governments, and businesses can better respond to increasingly volatile weather.
In addition to installing physical hardware for real-time weather observation, Climavision also collects proprietary satellite data to produce high-performing numerical weather predictions and models. The company provides weather information to various industries, including aviation, media, agriculture, energy, and government.



Source/Author: Tara Leigh Goode, VP, Strategic Partnerships
Climavision Partner Contact

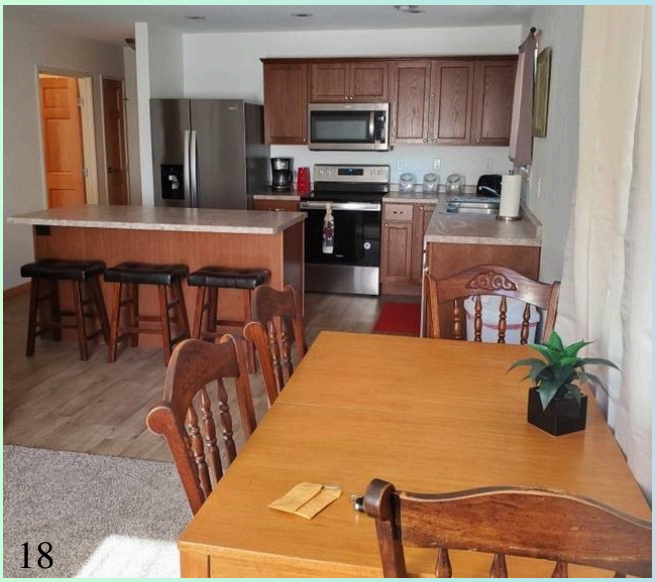
WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA
Communities Action

INNOVATIVE SHELTER MODELS

in Rural Minnesota







West Central Minnesota is beautiful with its many lakes, friendly people, and small communities.

But being in rural Minnesota also has its many challenges, and we lack many resources that the metro areas have, such as shelters. Housing and shelters have been a common topic for many years. West Central Minnesota Communities Action (WCMCA) took the ideas shared by community members, partnering agencies, and other Community Action agencies and put them into action.

From this, we created an innovative shelter program called Launch Pad. Launch Pad began through a partnership with Alexandria Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), in which they initially built a two-unit duplex for us to rent. We provided shelter to our first household in June of 2020. In June of 2023, we were allowed to add a small house as a third unit, and that week, the ground was broken on another duplex to utilize as our fourth and fifth units.

Since Launch Pad began, we have served over 40 households and have never had a unit sit empty. Each Launch Pad unit is fully furnished, primarily with donations from community members and all cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items. A partnership with the local food shelf provides food for the households, and our staff provides intensive case management and housing navigation services. There is no set amount of time a household can remain in Launch Pad as long as they maintain contact with their case manager and follow their goal plan. The average stay is 45 days.

Launch Pad has been one of our most successful programs, and we are so thankful for the support of our community to make it work.

Source/Author: Heather Molesworth, Director of Family and Community Services and Operations, West Central Minnesota Communities Action

FOR LCSC HEALTH INSURANCE POOL PARTICIPANTS

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