February 2025

LCCommunicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

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Building on Wannigan Regional Park



Frazee's Vision for Recreation and Community

Frazee, Minnesota, a town of just over 1,300 residents, exudes a "Norman Rockwellish" charm, especially during the holiday season when its streets twinkle with festive lights. This quaint exterior, however, belies a vibrant spirit and a community deeply invested in its future. Stephanie Poegel, Frazee's city administrator since December 2022, has quickly become enamored with the town's energy.

"The community here is so involved!" she exclaims. "I have never been in a community where you ask for volunteers, and you have too many people show up!"



Stephanie Poegel,
City Administrator, City of Frazee

continued on next page

Source: Stephanie Poegel, City Administrator, City of Frazee
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Coordinator



A prime example of this community spirit is Wannigan Regional Park, which drew over 30,000 visitors between the Fourth of July and Labor Day in 2024. Located near the school complex, just half a mile from downtown, the park offers a wealth of recreational opportunities. Poegel highlights the Frazee Development Corporation's two-decade effort to bring the park to fruition, culminating in funding from the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Further enhancements are on the horizon thanks to two recent grants. A $650,000 Active Transportation grant will fund a walking and biking trail, slated for completion by the end of summer 2025, while a Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) grant will support a primitive campground, green space, and a playground in the campground area, projected to be finished by the end of 2026.

This influx of park visitors presents both opportunities and challenges. While the economic impact is still being measured, Poegel emphasizes the city's goal of encouraging park-goers to explore downtown Frazee. A key attraction in this effort is "Jacob Everear," a colossal troll sculpture by renowned artist Thomas Dambo.

This whimsical figure is part of a larger project featuring six giant trolls and magical mirror portals across the region, commissioned by the Detroit Lakes Project 412. Karen Pifher, the city's Economic Development Administration (EDA) consultant, is working with downtown businesses and the Wannigan Regional Park Group to develop strategies to drive traffic to local downtown establishments.



Residents of Battle Lake, Sheryl Olson and Dave McRoberts, enjoyed a wonderful experience during their first hike to find Jacob Everear at Wannigan Regional Park last fall.



> I have never been in a community where you ask for volunteers, and you have too many people show up to volunteer!
>
> Stephanie Poegel,
> Frazee City Administrator

Frazee's growth is also reflected in its real estate market, where new listings are quickly snatched up. This growth is supported by ongoing infrastructure investments. The Town Lake Beach house is being transformed with a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) grant, gaining a dual-sided facility with restrooms, showers, and a rental area for recreational equipment. A shaded seating area will also be included. Recent improvements also include new roofs and energy-efficient HVAC units for the municipal liquor store and event center, and a new bakery and pizzeria are expected to open by summer 2025. The city is even exploring Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts for developers and has recently seen activity in the Red Willow Circle development.

Looking ahead, Frazee has several exciting projects on the horizon. Local high school students are working to build pickleball courts, hopefully completed by the end of summer 2025. The Heartland Trail will soon connect to Highway 87, affectionately known as "the bridge to nowhere," enabling biking from Frazee to Detroit Lakes. This project is part of a larger effort to expand the Heartland Trail network, with the plan to ultimately stretch from Fargo-Moorhead to Lake Bemidji.

Frazee's commitment to recreation is remarkable for its size. With six parks and two recreational areas, nearly every home is within view of a place for families to enjoy. "To have all that in a town of 1,300 people is a lot of recreational space for family enjoyment," Poegel emphasizes. “Families feel safer when they can see where their children are playing.”

Poegel's priority is ensuring a high quality of life for Frazee residents while maintaining fiscal responsibility. She loves her role, despite the challenges of managing multiple projects with a small team. "Our office only has three people, which isn't sufficient," she notes. Her affection for Frazee is clear. "Many mornings, as I drive from Lake Park and exit off of Highway 10, I encounter a veil of mist and fog," she shares. "But once I pass through it and reach Frazee, everything becomes clear; it feels like stepping into a magical place that unveils a whole new world of opportunities."

Learn more about the City of Frazee and Wannigan Regional Park at frazeecity.com.

From the

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

—Theodore Roosevelt
Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

I thought I would begin 2025 with my favorite quote of all time. Roosevelt shared this speech returning from an African expedition. The larger speech included encouragement for French citizens to increase their birthrate. The French (and European) birthrate had been in decline since the industrial revolution due to a reduction in land availability, economic labor declines, the invention of birth control and other cultural shifts.

He also espoused love for neighbors stating "… the best test of true love of liberty in any country is the way in which minorities are treated in that country. Not only should there be complete liberty in matters of religion and opinion, but complete liberty for each man to lead his life as he desires, provided only that in so doing he does not wrong his neighbor." He received a Nobel Prize for this speech at the Sorbonne.
In today's context, I think Roosevelt was talking about humility. Social media and other outlets make it more challenging to fail. We "see" mostly successes and happy times on social media… weddings, births, and big wins. I think we need to fail more often, to work together to solve problems, to dare to do great things. Thank you for taking the time to read this edition of The Communicator. Together We Achieve…



Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy Executive Director

What do you think of when you hear the word civics? Government, elections, bills, laws, and the drama of the legislature? Government is what I first think of and it is no small part of civic life, but that's not all that's included in the definition. Participating in civic life means contributing to the betterment of your community, on any level. Last week, a number of civic organizations in Minnesota hosted a "Civics Summit" in which they asked the question, "What has Minnesota done and is doing to prepare a new generations of citizens." The Summit is a timely response to a 2023 law passed by the MN Legislature requiring students complete a for-credit civics class in 11th or 12th grade. What are we teaching when we teach civics? How will this and the next generation view themselves in civic life?

The Summit webpage has a simple quote by former Senator and Astronaut John Glenn: "By its very definition, civic responsibility means taking a healthy role in the life of one's community."

While schools can lead the way for the next generation, preparing and supporting new community leaders never stops. It's clear that we need more people to become involved in civic life in rural Minnesota. And there is more than one way to become a leader in your community. If we teach and model for students and adults the broader definition of civic responsibility, more people will be able to see themselves in leadership roles that comfortably fit. Joining a nonprofit board, or government advisory board, for example, is an easy way to contribute to healthy community life. In our region alone, organizations and individuals are modeling leadership and supporting new leadership growth in their communities:

- After hearing about the difficulty many organizations are having finding board members, Fergus Falls Resident Miranda Lape took the initiative to build a webpage where local organizations can advertise board openings, https://www.fergusfallsboards.com/.
- The Bridge Center in Pelican Rapids hosts twice a month learning for youth focused on building civic leadership skills and completed a Bridge to Leadership series for adults last year.
- West Central Initiative's Rural Advocacy and Public Leadership Program is a free six-month leadership and advocacy program designed for people interested in strengthening our democracy and supporting the development of good governance in their local rural community.
- The Chambers of Commerce in several regional cities host leadership cohort programs open to all.

These are just a few examples from the region. Lakes Country Service Cooperative is looking forward to assisting our schools and communities in bridging the gap between civics class and civic life for youth. If you have ideas, we'd love to hear them!

Reach me, Jane Eastes, at jeastes@lcsc.org.



Lakes Country Service Cooperative Members

vsp vision care

Join the Minnesota Healthcare Consortium (MHC) on March 27, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. for an informative session on Vision coverage with VSP.

We will provide an overview of VSP and the various programs available to Service Cooperative and MHC members. Alongside discussing the plan options, we'll emphasize the significance of regular eye exams and overall eye care. Information about our network, other offerings from VSP, and tips for successfully implementing a new plan will also be included.

The presentation will last 20 minutes, followed by a 10-minute Q&A session.

Want to learn more and attend? Please RSVP to Melissa Walvatne at mwalvatne@lcsc.org.

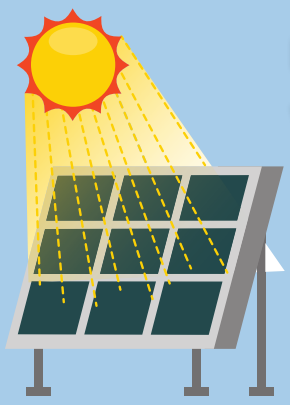
LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative Together we achieve

Minnesota Healthcare Consortium

Medica

West Central Initiative

Want to go solar on your home, farm, or small business



but don't know where to start?

Cedar Walters, Climate Officer of West Central Initiative, and Griffin Peck, Climate Resilience Officer, delivered a presentation at the City Leader Networking Luncheon in February, hosted by the City of Morris.



Walters and Peck shared details regarding the Prairies Solar Co-op and its available resources.

Please refer to the attached flyer and the link for the signup form and Co-op information.

Lakes and Prairies Solar Co-op



LIFETIME®
Digital Fitness



Nutrition
Find recipes along with stories on food addiction, mindful eating, nutrition tips, vitamins/minerals and food culture.

Weight Loss & Training Programs
Choose from a range of app-based plans designed to address our members' most common health and fitness challenges.

Classes On Demand
Studio, cycle, yoga, family and more. Stream your favorite classes to your phone, computer or smart TV.

Livestreaming Classes
Get the live class experience with hundreds of classes per week brought to you in real time by our expert instructors.

Life Time Talks Podcast
From getting more out of your workouts and nutrition to living a purposeful, authentic life, Life Time Talks dives deep into different topics to give you the information you need to achieve your health, fitness, and life goals.

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Whether you are looking to relieve stress, improve your focus, or open yourself up to gratitude, our meditations will fit your schedule and compliment your fitness and nutrition goals to live a healthy way of life.

HOW TO *Sign Up*

Take a simplified approach to your health and wellness with the complimentary Life Time app, completely **FREE** to download. You **do not** need to be on the SCSC/MHC Health Insurance Plan to get the app for free.

Download the app from the App Store or Google Play to begin your journey.

Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google Play

For more information: **lifetime.life/digital.html**

LC WELLNESS



Emily Steinmetz represents the central Minnesota office for the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, supporting more than 200 nonprofits across the central/west central region of the state. In this role, she fields questions, offers resources, and provides connections while working to bring the mission of MCN to central Minnesota nonprofits. Emily's career in nonprofits has spanned over 20 years.

Her background is in organizational development, fundraising, strategic planning and stakeholder relationships. She holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Minnesota State University Moorhead, and an M.B.A. from the University of Lynchburg in Lynchburg, VA. She has volunteered on nonprofit boards and served in volunteer leadership roles at multiple organizations.

Emily feels that a healthy and vibrant nonprofit sector directly impacts the health and vibrancy of the communities they serve.

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

LCSC members are invited to join a networking luncheon specifically for nonprofit and government agency leaders on Friday, March 14, 2025, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Lakes Country Service Cooperative

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

Guest Speaker: Emily Steinmetz, Central Minnesota Regional Representative, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

Emily will provide an overview on the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits report "The State of Minnesota Nonprofits."

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

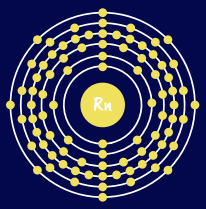
REGISTER NOW

Otter Tail County Public Health

Urges Residents to Test Their Homes for

RADON

Author: Shannon Terry, Public Information Officer
Communications/Public Relations



Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas, is the leading environmental cause of cancer deaths in the United States and the primary cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Each year, more than 21,000 lung cancer deaths in the U.S. are attributed to radon exposure. Alarmingly, about 2 in 5 homes in Minnesota have elevated radon levels. Otter Tail County Public Health urges residents to test their homes for radon to ensure their families' safety.

Testing

Easy, Affordable, and Essential
Testing for radon is simple, inexpensive, and can be done in just a few minutes. Winter is the ideal time for testing, as doors and windows are typically closed, creating the most accurate conditions.

Radon test kits are available at the Otter Tail County Public Health offices in Fergus Falls and New York Mills during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., the city offices in Battle Lake and Parkers Prairie, and the Pelican Rapids Public Library. Residents are encouraged to call ahead for availability.

Homeowners can order test kits directly from the Minnesota Department of Health at mn.gov/radon. These kits come with easy-to-follow instructions.

Once the test is completed, it is mailed to Air Check, a certified radon testing company, in a postage-paid envelope. Results are sent to the homeowner via email at no additional cost.

Understanding Test Results and Next Steps

Radon levels are measured in picocuries per liter (pCi/L). If your home's radon level is 4 pCi/L or higher, the Minnesota Department of Health recommends verification testing and considering installing a radon mitigation system. A list of certified radon mitigation professionals is available at health.state.mn.us/radon.

Learn More

For additional information on radon testing and mitigation, visit ottertailcounty.gov/radon or health.state.mn.us/radon.

Act today to protect your family from the dangers of radon. Testing is the first step to ensuring a safer, healthier home.

COOPERATIVE Purchasing CONNECTION





Source: Nancy XiáoRong Valentine, Executive Director, Kaddatz Galleries
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Coordinator

The Power of Imperfect Questions

Nancy XiáoRong Valentine's Artistry of Connection

Kaddatz Galleries Executive Director Nancy XiáoRong Valentine's passion lies in using art to ignite positive change within her community. "Through an institution," she explains, "I can have a more significant impact than I can on my own." This philosophy has driven her work, most notably an impactful exhibit exploring her family's immigration story from China to Fergus Falls, which garnered national recognition.

Valentine, a Chinese American born and raised in Fergus Falls, recently traveled to Washington, D.C., as one of 14 Rural Innovators recognized from across the United States. The nomination came as a complete surprise. "When I first received the email, I thought it was a scam," she admits. After verifying its legitimacy, the reality began to sink in. A whirlwind of events followed: an email announcing her nomination, a Friday morning phone interview, and, by Friday afternoon, an invitation to the White House.

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This prestigious award acknowledged Valentine's profound impact over the past few years, particularly through her deeply personal art, which narrates her family's journey. "They really expanded the definition of what it means to make an impact on your community," she reflected. At the White House ceremony, surrounded by hospital CEOs and program directors, Valentine felt humbled and a bit bewildered. As part of the nomination process, she was unable to learn the identity of the person who nominated her. She later discovered that someone who had encountered her exhibit during its tour across Minnesota from 2021 to 2023 was so profoundly moved that they decided to nominate her.

During a rising anti-Asian sentiment, Valentine chose to share her family's story not through protests but through art. Her traveling exhibit became an invitation to dialogue. "People won't attend an art show unless they're interested," she explains, emphasizing that meaningful conversations cannot be forced. Her artist talks fostered open and honest dialogue, including space for "imperfect" questions. "Political correctness...can be a barrier for communication," she notes. “I have experienced people in rural communities afraid of being labeled a bigot if they say the wrong thing. I knew I needed to create a safe space for people to ask questions, without feeling any type of judgment.”



Valentine’s exhibit titled “The Audacity to be Asian in Rural America: we owe you no apologies.”

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"Political correctness...can be a barrier for communication."

Nancy XiáoRong Valentine

Valentine’s exhibit titled "The Audacity to be Asian in Rural America: we owe you no apologies" began at the Otter Tail County Historical Society and visited ten locations across Minnesota, including Winona, Duluth, and St. Cloud. While Valentine faced the common challenge of unanswered calls for artists, her persistence paid off with a handful of enthusiastic partners.

The exhibit stemmed from Valentine's desire to address the sadness around how her mother, Jiying Valentine had been so misunderstood, especially in the first three years of her being in the United States. “This woman crossed the ocean for her children, sacrificed her entire life as she knew it, learned a completely foreign language, and navigated an unfamiliar economic system. Yet, people treated her as if she were dumb,” Valentine said sadly. “People treated her like she was “less than” or didn’t give her the time of day that she was dignified of, and deserved,” Valentine recounts.

Valentine’s exhibit aimed to prevent similar experiences for other immigrants and refugees, emphasizing their potential contributions to the community. "If we do not give them the time of day or patience with this second or third language they are speaking, I think we are the ones who are missing out." Valentine's mother, Jiying, still resides in Fergus Falls caring for her aging parents and has a hobby farm near Dalton, Minnesota.

Valentine's leadership at Kaddatz Galleries as co-director (along with Artistic Director Stacy Wendt) leverages her strengths in grant writing, marketing, and community partnerships. This co-director model arose organically. Initially, both Valentine and Wendt applied for the single executive director position. The board, recognizing their complementary skills, created a dual leadership structure. Valentine's deep roots in the community and existing relationships have proven invaluable.

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Returning to the Kaddatz feels like a full-circle moment for Valentine, whose arts journey began in the gallery's Artists Loft. Having benefited from community support that enabled her access to art, theater, and music, she is committed to providing similar opportunities for local children. She is particularly passionate about ArtREACH, a program connecting professional artists with underserved communities, impacting approximately 50 youth and 20-30 adults annually through partnerships with organizations like Matthew House and the Salvation Army.

Valentine emphasizes that the Kaddatz Galleries is more than just a space for exhibitions. "We are much more than just a gallery," she states, aiming to dispel the notion of galleries as stuffy and pretentious. They offer classes for all skill levels and maintain free admission to ensure everyone feels welcome and a sense of ownership. She also stresses the gallery's grassroots origins, highlighting the dedication of local volunteers who envisioned art's importance for future generations. "This isn't a corporate venture; it's a collaboration between you and me."

Looking to the future, Valentine expresses concern about the continuation of the Minnesota Legacy Amendment, emphasizing the need to advocate for arts funding. She engages students in discussions about the Legacy Amendment, highlighting its impact on state parks, clean water, and the arts.

Valentine's approach to her art and her role as executive director are intertwined. "I constantly ask how we can enhance the impact of our programs," she says. "I see the connection of my work to the Rural Innovator nomination because the root of all of it is the deep care for people and a deep care for life."

Want to learn more about the National Rural Innovators Initiative? Visit their website at https://www.rural.gov/rural-innovators-initiative. Discover artist classes and exhibits at Kaddatz Galleries at kaddatzgalleries.org.

Kaffeeklatsch

Thank you to everyone who could attend the January 2025 Legislative Kaffeeklatsch!

We are so glad you could join us in hearing from our region's legislators, and we hope you enjoyed it as much as we did!



West Central Initiative - Brought to you by - LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

At LCSC, we value the opportunity to host and facilitate events that foster meaningful conversations within our community.

We invite you to view the event recording from the most recent January 2025 Legislative Kaffeeklatsch. CLICK HERE

Many thanks to our community partner, West Central Initiative, for working together to host a successful event.

Participating Legislators:

- Senator Jordan Rasmusson
- Senator Robert Kupec
- Representative Jim Joy
- Representative Paul Anderson
- Representative Heather Keeler
- Representative Tom Murphy



Details for Registration:
April 25, 2025
Legislative
Kaffeeklatsch



Simple, Low-Cost Ways to Protect Your Organization from Cyber Attacks

Authors: Scott Wendorff, LCSC Program Director of Information Technology & Matt Holtberg, LCSC Assistant Program Director of Information Technology

Cybersecurity isn't just a concern for big corporations—it's a real threat to local governments and nonprofits, too. A single cyber-attack can compromise sensitive data, disrupt services, and lead to costly consequences. The good news? You don't need a big budget or an IT department to improve your organization's security. Here are some simple, low-cost steps you can take today:

1. Use Strong, Unique Passwords
One of the easiest ways hackers get in is through weak or reused passwords. Use long, unique passwords for each account and consider a password manager to keep them secure. If remembering complex passwords is difficult, try using a passphrase, like "FergusFallsWinter2024!", or something with spaces such as "My Dog Abby Is 7 Years Old".

2. Enable Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)
MFA adds an extra layer of security by requiring a second form of verification, such as a code sent to your phone, or more modern methods such as a rolling code on an app or a hardware key. This simple step can prevent most hacking attempts, even if your password gets stolen.

3. Keep Software and Devices Updated
Hackers exploit outdated software to access systems. Regularly update your operating system, antivirus software, applications, and network devices to stay protected. Most devices offer automatic updates—turn this feature on to stay ahead.

4. Beware of Phishing Emails
Phishing emails are designed to trick you into clicking malicious links or giving away sensitive information. Think before you click—verify unexpected emails, check for spelling errors, and be cautious of urgent requests for personal or financial information. When in doubt, check with the sender through different method of communication, such as a phone call or in person if you can.

5. Limit Access to Sensitive Data
Not everyone in your organization needs access to everything. Restrict access to sensitive information based on job roles. This reduces the chances of accidental leaks or intentional breaches.

6. Back Up Your Data Regularly
Ransomware attacks can lock you out of important files. Keep secure backups of your data on an external hard drive or cloud service. Test your backups occasionally to make sure they work.

7. Train Your Team
Cybersecurity isn't just an IT issue—it's a people issue. A quick training session on recognizing threats and following best practices can go a long way. Encourage staff to report anything suspicious right away.

Stay Vigilant, Stay Secure
You don't need a big budget to protect your organization from cyber threats. Implementing these simple, cost-effective measures can significantly reduce your risk. Start today—because a little prevention now can save a lot of trouble later.

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

2025 LCSC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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