July 2026

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

HOW FERGUS FALLS RALLIED FOR IDOL STAR CHRIS TUNGSETH

REGISTER FOR THE SEPTEMBER 24 CITY LEADERS NETWORKING LUNCHEON

A MESSAGE FROM LCSC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JEREMY KOVASH

JANE EASTES - LCSC DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RURAL COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

ELM EXPO FOR NORTHERN LIGHTS LIBRARY NETWORK AND AFFILIATES

SOMEPLACE SAFE'S SUMMER SILENT AUCTION RETURNS AUGUST 1–7

ZOE JOHNSON MORRIS'S NEW CITY MANAGER SHARES HER VISION FOR GROWTH, GRANTS, AND GREATER MINNESOTA

MINNESOTA HEALTHCARE CONSORTIUM REQUEST A PROPOSAL TODAY!

NORTH COUNTRY FOOD BANK MOBILE FOOD DROPS IN BRECKENRIDGE AND GLENWOOD

2026 MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

PLEASE VISIT OUR CALENDAR FOR IMPORTANT DATES

LCSC JOB POSTINGS

An equal opportunity employer

PDF



HOW FERGUS FALLS RALLIED FOR IDOL STAR CHRIS TUNGSETH

Source: Fergus Falls City Administrator, Andrew Bremseth; Fergus Falls Assistant to the Administrator, Lynne Olson; AmericanIdol.com; fergusfallsmn.gov
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

One of the standout moments for our region in recent months was witnessing Chris Tungseth, a native of Fergus Falls, reach the Top 5 on American Idol. For a small city in Minnesota, the achievement of a local resident gaining such significant national recognition was incredibly exciting.

Within the Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) office, Tuesday morning discussions often buzzed with excitement after the Monday night American Idol episode, especially as staff members anticipated contestant eliminations. Each week, we eagerly discussed Chris's progress in the voting rounds.



From left: Fergus Falls Assistant to the Administrator, Lynne Olson; Chris Tungseth cardboard cutout; and Fergus Falls City Administrator, Andrew Bremseth

Because the City of Fergus Falls is an LCSC member, Assistant to the City Administrator Lynne Olson reached out to share their behind-the-scenes experience. It is a great story and example of how city staff, local volunteers, and regional neighbors quickly came together to organize a major community celebration.

Early Auditions and the "Golden Ticket"

American Idol, the popular television singing competition now in its 24th year, relies on celebrity judges and public votes to launch aspiring artists toward recording contracts. Knowing how slim the odds are among the thousands who audition, Fergus Falls city leaders were thrilled to find out early on that they had a contestant in the running. Chris Tungseth is the nephew of Len (Guy) Taylor, the city's Public Works Director.

Because of this close-knit connection, the city knew in late November that Tungseth had gone to Nashville, Tennessee, and secured a "Golden Ticket"—meaning he had received a "yes" from at least two of the three celebrity judges and advanced to the Hollywood rounds. Shortly after, American Idol producers contacted city officials to discuss potential filming locations in Fergus Falls.

The Pressure of the "Top Nine": A 48-Hour Race Against the Clock

As Chris survived round after round, advancing from the beaches of Hawaii into the live voting rounds of the Top 20, local chatter turned into a roar. But behind the scenes at City Hall, the excitement was quickly joined by a sudden wave of logistical adrenaline.

On April 15, the phone rang. It was Melissa, a producer from American Idol. The message was clear, exhilarating, and terrifying: If Chris made the Top Three, Hollywood was coming to Fergus Falls. And they weren't just coming to film—the city was obligated to host a massive, nationally televised "Homecoming" production, featuring a full-scale parade and a live concert.

"All of a sudden, it became very real," said Olson. "We had no idea the city would have an obligation of this scale dropped on its lap." Then came the two kickers, the first being the timeline. Because of the nature of live television voting, the producers revealed that the city would not learn whether Chris made the Top Three until Monday night at 9:00 PM.



In the spotlight at the community concert, Mayor Anthony Hicks of Fergus Falls announced, “May 16th is officially Chris Tungseth Day!“ with Chris Tungseth standing proudly by his side.

If he advanced, the production crew would land on Tuesday, and the entire event had to go live on Wednesday. The second jolt was being told to expect an audience of 10,000 people.

A Community Mobilizes

Faced with the daunting task of potentially managing and transporting 10,000 attendees safely from a parade to a concert venue at the Regional Treatment Center, the city split its planning into two groups: a community events group and a safety/security group. A flurry of local promotion began, including cardboard cutouts of Tungseth, t-shirts, heavy social media campaigns, radio spots, and features on Fargo television news.

Nearby communities—including Fargo, North Dakota, along with Perham, Detroit Lakes, and Alexandria, Minnesota—also joined in to promote public voting for Tungseth.

The planning process brought forward incredible community creativity and generosity:

- **The Viking Ship:** American Idol producers mentioned they had eaten at the local Viking Cafe during early filming and envisioned Chris, with his long flowing hair, riding a Viking ship. Olson reached out to Viking Cafe owner Pat Shol to see if he had one.

While he didn't, Shol volunteered to build one from scratch in time for the event. Local artists Blayze Buseth and Desiree Sky Logan designed and sculpted the serpent head and tail for the vessel.

- **The Street Sign Unveiling:** Producers also suggested a ceremonial sign unveiling. The city worked with M-R Sign Co. to create a "Home of American Idol Chris Tungseth" street sign, which was unveiled alongside his family near Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, his former school.



Fergus Falls City Administrator's son, Boyden Bremseth, strikes a pose with Chris Tungseth for the big reveal of the "Home of American Idol Chris Tungseth" street sign surprise!

> *"In the very first episode that Chris was on, they featured more about Fergus Falls than we had ever dreamed of," said Olson.*

- **The Mass Marching Band:** Plans were set for the largest marching band the area had ever assembled, combining students from Fergus Falls Public Schools, Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Underwood, Battle Lake, and Pelican Rapids. Moore Engineering generously stepped forward to cover the cost of t-shirts for all participating students.

Pivoting to a Local Homecoming

"On May 4, the Hollywood dream technically paused when Chris was eliminated in the Top 5. But in Fergus Falls, the momentum was just getting started. Despite missing the Top Three, city leaders refused to let the momentum go to waste. They had already invested three weeks of intense logistical planning, and they wanted to celebrate his success regardless of the television outcome. On May 5, the committees met and officially decided to throw their own community homecoming celebration on Saturday, May 16.

"Lynne called a lot of people with requests for supporting the event, and not one person said no," Bremseth said.

A Day to Remember

The community turned out in droves for the parade and free concert on May 16. Based purely on cell phone tracking data, there were 4,100 people at the parade and 8,400 tracked at the concert venue—numbers that don't even include those without mobile devices.

The event was a massive success, supported by numerous local organizations and volunteers:

- **Honoring Mark Tungseth:** The motorcycle group Dough 4 Joe served as the parade's Grand Marshal. In a touching tribute, all the motorcyclists wore "In Memory of Mark Tungseth" t-shirts to honor Chris's late father.
- **Volunteer Support:** Bethel Church provided a massive wave of volunteers. Nathan Johnson, Executive Director at PioneerCare, rode a bicycle with a walkie-talkie all day to coordinate parking, while also ensuring Chris's mother safely boarded her parade float and arrived securely at the concert venue.
- **Media Blitz:** During the parade, Olson managed media interviews for Chris with major outlets including MPR, WDAY, the Star Tribune, and Valley News Live.

> *When Chris first came through town on his motorcycle, the crowd was on their feet and really excited," Bremseth recalled. "It was electric when he came through on the Viking ship. He interacted with the crowd so well."*

Olson added, "My favorite part of the day was watching Chris step on stage, look over the crowd and see so many familiar faces. He was able to see what a supportive community he had in front of him." Bremseth noted that Chris stated over and over again that it was the best day of his life.

A Lasting Impact

The event was entirely free for community members to attend, with fundraising coordinated through the Fergus Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, which served as the fiscal host. Several weeks after the festivities concluded and all expenses were paid, a $10,985 check was presented to Chris to help cover his costs as he officially launches his professional singing career.





When reflecting on the overall effect of the experience on the City of Fergus Falls, Olson expressed that it brought immense joy to the community. Everyone came together to ensure the event's success, and the incredible spirit of collaboration was truly invigorating!

Bremseth also noted that without the volunteers and the amazing community partners listed below, this day would not have been possible.

Event Partners: Fergus Falls Chamber of Commerce, A Center for the Arts, Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Fergus Falls Public Schools, M State, PioneerCare, Uncle Eddie's/Precise Carpentry (Frustols), Ottertail Minn-Dakota Coaches, Visit Fergus Falls, Mary Dolan, The Daily Journal, Otter Tail Lakes Country Association, Good Shepherd Church, Outstate Brewing, Sign Guys, Dough 4 Joe, and Bethel Church.

The collective spirit of the community uniting for a common, uplifting purpose brought immense joy to Fergus Falls—highlighting the resilience and pride of this remarkable Minnesota town. If you're interested in learning how the City of Fergus Falls brought people and groups together to support this community celebration on a tight timeline, please reach out to Lynne Olson at the City of Fergus Falls. For additional contact details, visit their **website.**

CPC Cooperative Purchasing Connection

Cooperative Purchasing Connection offers a range of furniture vendors for government offices and nonprofits, providing solutions for various spaces, such as break rooms and libraries.

Key partners include:

- **Innovative Office Solutions:** Ideal for large and small projects with in-person support.
- **National Business Furniture:** A large vendor with a strong online presence for convenient shopping.
- **Demco:** Specializes in library interior design and furnishings.
- **Mackin:** Supplies high-quality materials for public libraries.

Explore all available vendors for contract pricing and services.

CPC VENDOR LIST

Partner with Trusted Local Vendors

CPC Cooperative Purchasing Connection



Discover Our Vendors

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

five decades of serving our region

Lakes Country Service Cooperative

At LCSC, 2026 marks a momentous milestone: our 50th Anniversary.

For five decades, we have remained steadfast in our mission: "We Advocate for Strong Communities Through Service and Leadership."

To honor this legacy, we are dedicating the entire year to celebrating our region and the people who make our work possible.

Visit our website's **"50th Anniversary"** page to learn more about our celebration and important dates to add to your calendar!



Don't miss LCSC's September Networking Luncheon for City Leaders!

LCSC members are invited to attend a networking luncheon for City Clerks, Deputy Clerks, City Managers, and City Administrators on Thursday, September 24, 2026, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at LCSC.

You can participate in person or via ZOOM.

This event offers a great opportunity to network and discuss pertinent topics with fellow regional members.





Are you being PHISHED?

Educate and engage employees with security awareness training content that empowers



INFOSEC IQ

Security Awareness Training & Phishing Simulations

- Reduce cybersecurity events with simulations and phishing templates.
- Reinforce cyber secure behaviors with industry-and role-based training.
- Strengthen cybersecurity culture while meeting compliance requirements.



Program Cost

- An annual fee of $7.50 per email account covers phishing detection and monthly training.
- An initial setup fee is necessary to activate the service, which varies depending on the size of the organization.



CONTACT

Scott Wendorff
Program Director
of Information Technology
218-737-6538
swendorff@lcsc.org

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

This program is provided by Lakes Country Service Cooperative through a partnership with Southwest West Central Service Cooperative

UNITED WAY Lakes and Prairie

STUFF THE BUS



OVERVIEW
Stuff the Bus is a program of Lakes and Prairie United Way and serves families in **Douglas, Otter Tail, Pope, Todd, and Wadena** counties.

This program is a community-wide effort to collect donations of new school supplies and backpacks to be distributed to registered Pre-K - 12th grade students.

REGISTRATION
July 20th - August 3rd
Preregistration Is Required

Serving Pre-K - 12th grade students whose families are faced with hardship or struggling with financial stability.
Each student registered will receive a backpack with school supplies.

REGISTER HERE

For more information about registration for your student or to be a collection site, visit the United Way website: www.uwlp.org

2-1-1: Your Community's Connection to Help.

211

Get Connected. Get Help.™



When residents face challenges like job loss or need senior support, 2-1-1 is a free, confidential service that provides 24/7 access to essential health and human services programs via phone, text, and online chat.

For schools, 2-1-1 streamlines access to your vital resources, making it easier for you to find the help you need.

By promoting 2-1-1, you empower your community with a single point of contact for food, housing, healthcare, employment, and more. Let's amplify this lifeline together.

UNITED WAY

211
Get Connected. Get Help.™

From the

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

How I view Artificial Intelligence Today

Before we jump into the future, I have to admit something. Growing up, one of my favorite television shows was Knight Rider. Michael Knight was the hero, but he was never alone. His partner was KITT—a remarkable car equipped with artificial intelligence. KITT could analyze information, ask questions, offer ideas, and provide options. But one thing never changed: Michael was always the driver. He made the decisions. He accepted the responsibility. He led.

That's how I think about artificial intelligence today.

AI isn't here to replace city and community leaders, or the relationships that define our work. It can't build trust, show empathy, or understand the heart of a community. Those are uniquely human responsibilities. What AI can do is become a trusted thought partner. It can help us brainstorm new ideas, organize complex information, draft communications, analyze data, and challenge our thinking. Sometimes the greatest value isn't that AI gives us an answer—it's that it helps us ask a better question.

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, we believe our role is to be a Learning and Leading Agency. Our mission is to advocate for strong communities through service and leadership, and our vision calls us to keep learning, leading, and innovating to achieve vibrant, inclusive communities. Innovation has always required curiosity, and curiosity begins with a willingness to explore.

Over the coming year, I hope our CCOGA members will explore AI alongside us—not as a replacement for human leadership, but as another tool that helps us think, learn, and grow. Just as KITT helped Michael Knight see possibilities he might have missed, AI can help us discover new ways to serve our communities.

The future will never be built by artificial intelligence alone. It will be built by thoughtful leaders who continue to learn, ask questions, and work together.

Together, we achieve. And together, let's continue learning, leading, and growing—with AI as one more seat at the table.



JANE EASTES
Deputy
Executive Director

Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders

Alexandria Public Schools hosted their annual presentation of middle school students' capstone projects for their introduction into a professional development program in May. It's inspiring to see what these students accomplished and how enthusiastic they are about their projects. This program, like their CAP program for High school students, immerses students in real-world, project-based professional settings in which they collaborate with local community partners to work on solutions to authentic community challenges. Students are able to develop real-world projects in areas they have interest in. One team developed a proposal for adding solar panels to the middle school. Another advocated for updates to the local fire station. We know from listening to students that this type of learning feels relevant and engaging.

Collaborating with community members on real world issues that they care about is not only about learning content, but about growing skills like teamwork, collaboration, and problemsolving all needed to contribute to a healthy workplace and community. Students are building an understanding of community systems as well as networks that will serve them as they enter the workplace and community. Communities are building future citizens who know how to contribute in healthy ways and bring new ideas to the table.

We know the impact that immersive community-based learning has on students, but what about the adults? While the students are learning to actively lead in their own learning, they are taught, guided, and supported by teachers. Teachers and administrators provide the critical environment needed for learning and growth.

Community members, from business, local government, nonprofit, and faith organizations, commit their time, encouragement, and support to the students, acting as role models in building relationships that ultimately power our communities. The benefits are as great for the community as they are for the students. It's healthy, positive communities that will not only attract, but keep population, particularly those in their peak working years. Of the top ten reasons why rural newcomers moved to their current location, the factors that rose to the top are related to quality of life: good environment, perceived safety, work-life balance (University of Minnesota Extension's "Rural Newcomer Survey" of Greater Minnesota).

By developing these intergenerational relationships, everyone takes part in creating a feeling of inclusion, meaning, and purpose, which leads to growth and well-being for each of us and innovative solutions for our communities.

ELM Expo

for Northern Lights Library Network and Affiliates

Join us for the ELM Expo, a dynamic virtual learning event held via Zoom for library staff in the Northern Lights Library Network region. This interactive online experience is designed to help you explore and confidently use eLibrary Minnesota in your daily work.

Through live demonstrations, guided walkthroughs, and practical examples, you'll see how ELM resources can support learners of all ages—from elementary students to adult researchers. Sessions will highlight key databases, search strategies, and instructional approaches that you can immediately apply in your library, classroom, or reference interactions.

Even in a virtual format, the Expo is designed to be hands-on and engaging, with opportunities to follow along, ask questions, and connect with colleagues from across the state. You'll leave with ready-to-use ideas, increased confidence navigating ELM, and new strategies for helping patrons find reliable information quickly and effectively.

Whether you're new to ELM or looking for a refresher, the ELM Expo offers a focused, practical, and welcoming space to build your skills and discover what's possible with Minnesota's statewide library resources.

Presenters



Beth Staats
Outreach & Instruction Librarian,
Ebooks MN Coordinator



Carla Pfahl
Outreach & Instruction
Librarian, AskMN Coordinator



Ann Kaste
Outreach & Instruction Librarian,
K-12 Outreach Coordinator

DATE
TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2026

TIME
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

LOCATION
VIRTUAL

REGISTRATION
FREE

REGISTER NOW!

Someplace Safe's Summer Silent Auction Returns August 1–7

Bid for a Great Cause



Join Someplace Safe for their annual Summer Silent Auction from August 1–7, 2026, on our online bidding platform. Thanks to the generosity of businesses and community members, this year's auction features an exciting variety of items, including:

- **Golf packages**
- **Hotel and casino stays**
- **Restaurant and retail gift certificates**
- **Jewelry**
- **Home décor and kitchen items**
- **Family experiences**
- **Beauty products**

Every bid helps support the mission of Someplace Safe, providing critical services to individuals and families affected by domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, child abuse, and other forms of victimization. Bidding is easy and can be done from any device.

Auction Dates: August 1, 2026 (9:00 a.m.) – August 7, 2026 (8:00 p.m.)

Register to bid at: **https://onecau.se/sps26**. Please share the auction with others; every bid helps make a difference in our community.

PerkSpot

An Employee Discount Solution

EXPLORE SAVINGS ON EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS

Food and Dining

Health and Wellness

Clothing and Shoes

Automotive



Minnesota Healthcare Consortium
Participating Minnesota Service Cooperatives

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

PerkSpot is a program available to those on the MHC/ LCSC Health Insurance.



Zoe Johnson

Morris's New City Manager Shares Her Vision for Growth, Grants, and Greater Minnesota

Source: Morris City Manager, Zoe Johnson; www.ci.morris.mn.us.

Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

“I wanted to have a meaningful career where I am helping people,” Johnson recalled.

For Zoe Johnson, serving as the new City Manager for the City of Morris, Minnesota, feels like a natural homecoming. Raised in the small town of Ada, Minnesota (population 1,700), Johnson always knew she wanted to return to Greater Minnesota to live, build a career, and eventually raise a family. Now four months into her role leading Morris, a community of just over 5,100 residents—she is putting that deep-rooted passion for local public service into practice.

Finding Her Path in Public Service

Johnson’s path to municipal management was not a straight line. She originally attended North Dakota State University (NDSU) to earn a degree in biology, inspired by a long line of women in her family who built careers in healthcare. “I realized very quickly that I wasn’t jiving with chemistry the way I needed to be in order to be a successful biologist.”

Shifting gears, she began exploring Political Science with an interest in campaign management. However, the election landscape of 2020 quickly shifted her perspective.

“It was a very volatile time for elections in 2020,” said Johnson. “The more I had informational interviews with people who had dipped their toes in campaign management, the more I realized how demanding that job can be and how you just never get a break from politics.”

Determining that political campaigns were better kept as a hobby than a full-time career, she considered double-majoring in Emergency Management. But when the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused several professors to leave NDSU to assist with response efforts, her course load lightened, turning Emergency Management into a minor instead. “The pandemic really threw me in a lot of different directions,” Johnson shared. “It tested my willpower and my resiliency.”

Unsure of her next move, Johnson turned to her family and her aunt, Shaunna Johnson, who serves as the City Administrator in Waite Park, Minnesota. Her aunt suggested she shadow her for a day and serve as an election judge during the 2020 general election to experience municipal leadership firsthand. “A one-day job shadow turned into a shadow plus being an election judge,” Johnson said.

During that time, she sat in meetings with department heads, police staff, and the deputy clerk, getting a clear view of the dynamic demands placed on local leaders. “I could see that she needed to be a mini expert in whatever she was talking about, and she didn’t have a ton of time to study up on each topic,” Johnson noted.

Though election judging was fast-paced and demanding, it gave her a profound appreciation for civic engagement. “Helping people at the most basic level where you are closest to them, where you know them best, it just does not get old,” said Johnson.

Gaining Hands-On Experience

Encouraged by her aunt to pursue local government internships, Johnson reached out to Dan Mahli, City Manager of Moorhead, Minnesota, and Assistant City Manager Mike Rietz. Though Moorhead had not hosted an intern since the early 1990s, they created a position for her starting in early 2022.



Her time in Moorhead was a crash course in city operations. She assisted with local option sales tax research, grant writing, sustainability data collection, and community engagement for downtown redevelopment.

"A lot of it was trial by fire," Johnson said. "They would throw me into office specialist positions where I answered the hotline, connected frustrated folks with the prosecutor's office, scheduled building and rental inspections, and helped set up parks and recreation programming. They set me up for great success, and I decided this was something I could see myself doing long term."

With a clear vision for her future, Johnson applied to the accelerated Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at the University of Kansas, graduating in 2025. During her first year, she served as a Budget and Performance Management Intern for the City of Olathe's infrastructure department, gaining technical skills and assisting with their strategic plan update implementation.

"It wasn't really the place where I wanted to settle and raise a family, or where I saw myself doing the most good for the people I felt most connected to," Johnson explained.

Working with an organization of over 1,500 employees reaffirmed her preference for smaller communities.

She then completed a two-year fellowship with the City of Edina. While colleagues encouraged her to stay in the Twin Cities metro area, Johnson's heart remained set on Greater Minnesota.

Leading the City of Morris

When the City Manager position opened in Morris, Johnson initially hesitated to apply, knowing she was only in her fifth year of working in local government. "I thought, 'I've got a lot to learn, and I don't have a lot of experience under my belt,'" Johnson admitted. "But what I lack in experience, I make up for with a deep passion for learning and a drive to get the best outcomes for residents. I think the council really saw that in me during the interview."

Taking on the leadership role in a smaller city means balancing a wide array of duties—ranging from planning, zoning, and code enforcement to serving as city clerk, liaison to municipal boards, and manager of state and federal legislative matters.

"In a small town, you wear a lot of different hats," Johnson said. "During my internships in larger cities, responsibilities were more specified. Part of the fun of working in a small town is that you get to experience a lot of different responsibilities."

Despite initial nerves about being a younger manager, Johnson felt immediately welcomed by city staff, the city council, and community members.

"I have had a ton of success initially because I have been so supported by staff, the community, and the council," she shared.

Priorities and Future Outlook

Johnson is already tackling several major initiatives for Morris:

- **Utility Infrastructure & Flood Mitigation:** Following a severe July 2025 flash flood that impacted streets and basements across Morris, Johnson worked with Moore Engineering and city staff to apply for a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant. The funding will support a comprehensive inventory and review of the city's stormwater infrastructure; if received, it will help open doors for future grant funding and allow the city to execute long-term utility improvements in manageable phases without burdening local taxpayers.
- **Updating the Comprehensive Plan:** Johnson's major post-year-one goal is updating the city's comprehensive plan, which sets the 20-year vision for land use, transportation, and infrastructure development. The city's current plan was last updated in 1999, the year Johnson was born. "These vision documents should be updated every ten to fifteen years to help cities stay ahead of land-use strategies and remain a choice community," she noted.
- **Community Partnerships:** Johnson is collaborating with University of Minnesota Morris Chancellor Rodriguez to promote tourism, attract new residents, and highlight the area's quality of life.



She is also working with the Stevens County Times and the Morris Chamber of Commerce to advance these shared goals.

- **Youth Involvement:** Building on past city efforts, Johnson is working alongside Morris Public School Superintendent Shane Monson to reactivate a student non-voting seat on the Morris City Council to encourage youth civic engagement.

Looking Ahead

When she isn't at City Hall, Johnson enjoys spending time at the lake, going for walks, and gardening. As she looks to the future of Morris, she remains energized by the region's strong spirit of collaboration among municipal leaders, residents, and local employers like Superior, Westmor, and Riverview.

"There is always more work to be done, always more people to serve, and always more smiles you can put on people's faces," said Johnson. "My goal is to go about that while retaining the integrity, quality, and service that make great outcomes possible."

To learn more about the City of Morris and current municipal initiatives, visit their official website at www.ci.morris.mn.us.





Dates & Locations

- **Breckenridge** – August 26, 11:00 am
- **Glenwood** – September 28, 11:00 am

Mobile Food Drops

North Country Food Bank

Working Together to End Hunger

NORTH COUNTRY FOOD BANK, INC.

What is a mobile food drop?

The North Country Food Bank's Mobile Food Drop Program supplies supplemental food to individuals, families, children, and seniors in rural areas where access to nutritious food can be limited. Upon arrival, volunteers distribute food directly into participants' vehicles. The program has significantly impacted local communities, providing over 450,000 meals annually to those facing hunger.

Run4Rural®

WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA

Run4Rural is West Central Initiative's **free** public leadership training program designed for people interested in growing and strengthening their local communities through elected office and other forms of public leadership. This nonpartisan training will be useful for existing and emerging rural leaders and people active in their community, whether or not they have decided to run for office.

Lunch is included.

Join them in Fergus Falls on August 5 at the Fergus Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.



Details

Date: August 5

Time: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Venue

Fergus Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
202 S Court St
Fergus Falls, MN 56537

REGISTER

West Central Initiative

Introducing the West Central Minnesota Weaver Awards

West Central Initiative is partnering with the Aspen Institute's Weave: The Social Fabric Project to recognize 20 individuals and groups in west central Minnesota and White Earth Nation who are building trust, belonging, and connection.
The Weaver Awards are designed to celebrate and support weavers—everyday neighbors who are building relationships, strengthening belonging, and weaving trust into the social fabric of their communities.

CLICK HERE

What will you get if you become a Weaver Awardee?

Each Weaver Awardee will receive a financial award of $2,500-$5,000 to celebrate and recognize their contributions to their community.



JOIN US

Guest Speaker: Jenna Ray
Executive Director & CEO
giveMN

Join us on Thursday, October 1, 2026, for a networking luncheon designed specifically for leaders like you. This is a space to step back from the daily grind, share insights on the topics that matter most to our communities, and build the cross-sector relationships that drive real change.
Attend virtually or in person.

Event Details

- When: Thursday, October 1, 2026
- Time: 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM
- Cost: Free (Lunch is on us!)



THE SMART WAY TO SELL VEHICLES

AMERICA'S AUTO AUCTION

For over 39 years, America's Auto Auction, located in New York Mills, MN, has held a weekly auction, providing a live and online experience to a huge network of buyers. Due to a shortage of vehicles in the market and high demand, we are achieving above-average market values for CPC members.

MEMBER BENEFITS

- Prime sale placement during our busiest lane to help maximize bids and sale prices.
- Dedicated representation for your vehicles, clear sale communication, and optional reserve pricing.
- Discounted seller fees exclusively for CPC members.
- Fast, efficient sales for retired, unwanted, or aging fleet inventory.

CONTACT

DEE SULLIVAN | 800-458-5506 | DEE.SULLIVAN@AMERICASAA.COM

2026 MCN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Truth be told

MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS

OCT. 29-30 | ST. PAUL

Registration is now open for MCN's 2026 Annual Conference, Minnesota's largest gathering of nonprofits, October 29-30 in St. Paul!

We're gathering around the theme – **Truth Be Told: Stories, Power, and the Future We Build.**

MCN's Annual Conference provides a unique opportunity for team members across your organization to learn, connect, and explore strategies to support sustainable, thriving nonprofits.

With topics covering leadership, communications, fundraising, technology, policy, finance, and more, there's something for everyone on your team.



Together with 1,000+ nonprofit peers, over two days, we'll tackle questions big and small and celebrate the amazing work being done throughout the state by organizations like yours.

Thursday, October 29
Noon – 4:30 p.m.

Friday, October 30
7:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Saint Paul RiverCentre
175 Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55102

REGISTER NOW

MCN Members – register by 9/1 to secure your Early Bird Rate and save $30!

MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS

OTTER TAIL COUNTY LEADER'S TOUR SPOTLIGHTS LOCAL SUCCESSES

Submitted by: Shannon Terry
Otter Tail County Public Information Officer

Otter Tail County commissioners and leadership staff traveled the western side of the county on a recent tour designed to connect county leadership with the communities, projects, and people they serve. The group made many stops across the county, with a dedicated stop in Vergas to hear directly from city leaders.

The tour, organized to highlight the county's Economic Growth and Community Investment (EGCI) team's work, covered ground from Fergus Falls to Pelican Rapids and into the Vergas and Dent areas. County commissioners Bob Lahman (District 4), Dan Bucholz (District 1), Wayne Johnson (District 2), Kurt Mortenson (District 3), and Sean Sullivan (District 5) joined staff from across county departments for the tour.

The group's first stops included the Fergus Falls Transfer Station, where leaders got an update on construction and demolition planning, followed by a tour of the County Highway 1 Garage in Fergus Falls.

Parks and Trails Director Kevin Fellbaum briefed commissioners on the future of the Glacial Edge Trail and the plans to extend the trail network into Maplewood State Park, which would connect the city of Fergus Falls to a broader regional trail system.

"These tours give us a real look at what's working and what still needs attention," said Commissioner Sullivan. "Our job is to make sure every dollar the county invests is a dollar that works for our residents."

County Investment in Community Growth

Nick Leonard, deputy county administrator and leader of Otter Tail County's Economic Growth and Community Investment team, said the tour format is intentional. Getting commissioners and staff into communities and viewing firsthand ongoing projects and future needs helps shape how the county approaches regional solutions.

In Pelican Rapids, the group viewed the Colony Apartments and Pinewood Estates from two Community Development Authority housing projects that have added new residential options in a city with a proven housing need.

"Otter Tail County covers over 2,000 square miles," shared Commissioner Bucholz. "Tours like this are how we stay connected to what's happening all over the county."

Vergas: A Small City with Big Momentum

The tour's highlight stop was in the City of Vergas, where the group gathered at Long Lake City Beach for a working lunch with city leadership. City leaders shared updates on housing development projects that have added units to a tight local market, progress from downtown businesses that have opened or expanded in recent years, and a community-led effort to identify sustainable child care solutions for area families and employers.

"What's happening in Vergas is an example of what's possible when a small community decides to invest in itself -- it all points to a city that is building for the long term," commented Commissioner Johnson. "Otter Tail County wants to be a partner in that work."



From left: front row, Vergas City Clerk and Treasurer Julie Lammers, Assistant Land and Resource Director Kyle Westergard, Vergas Mayor Julie Bruhn, County Community Development Director Amy Baldwin, County Administrator Nicole Hansen, Deputy Administrator Liz Mickelson, Deputy Administrator Lynne Penke Valdes, County Engineer Jodi Teich, and CDA intern Ava Hastings; back row, County Commissioner Johnson, Vergas Council Member Bruce Albright, Vergas Council Member James Stenger, County Public Information Officer (PIO) Shannon Terry, Commissioner Bucholz, Engineering Supervisor Bob Ehlert, Maintenance Superintendent Colby Palmersheim, Land and Resource Director Chris LeClair, Parks and Trails Director Kevin Fellbaum, Deputy Administrator Nick Leonard, Commissioner Sullivan, and Commissioner Mortenson. Not pictured but attending was Solid Waste Director Chris McConn.

LCSC COMMUNICATOR

COMMUNICATOR STAFF
Editors: Jane Eastes: jeastes@lcsc.org
Mary Phillipe: mphillipe@lcsc.org
Address:
Lakes Country Service Cooperative
1001 E. Mount Faith
Fergus Falls, MN 56537
An equal opportunity employer

CONTACT US
Executive Director: Jeremy Kovash
Phone: (218) 739-3273
Email: communicator@lcsc.org

Follow Us For More

The LCSC Communicator is a publication of Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

Views and ideas expressed in the LCSC Communicator by its contributors or advertisers do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Lakes Country Service Cooperative and should not be considered an endorsement thereof.

Lakes Country Service Cooperative retains the right to accept, reject, or edit any submitted material and requires all submissions to be signed and dated.



2026 LCSC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair	Jon Karger	Board Member - Pelican Rapids Public Schools
Vice Chair	Suzanne Wing	Board Member - Ashby Public Schools
Clerk	Paul Ness	Board Member - Battle Lake Public Schools
Treasurer	Marc Hasbargen	Board Member - Breckenridge Public Schools
Director	David Meyer	Board Member - Becker County
Director	Maureen Eigen	Board Member - Alexandria Public Schools
Director	Kevin Campbell	Board Member - Clay County
Director	Kurt Mortenson	Board Member - Otter Tail County
Director	Judith Moeller	Board Member - Parkers Prairie Public Schools
Director	Scott Steffes	Board Member - Moorhead Public Schools
Director	Melissa Burgard	Board Member - Moorhead Public Schools
Ex-Officio	Supt. Phil Jensen	Hawley Public Schools
Ex-Officio	Todd Travis	Midwest Special Education Cooperative

CONNECT WITH PROGRAMS & SERVICES AT LCSC!

- Communications & Professional Development
- Cooperative Purchasing
- Education
- Finance
- Health & Safety
- Insurance & Wellness
- Lakes Country Academy
- Special Education
- Information Technology