

2012

Know them, understand them, love them

Youth at crossroads turn to Ground Floor for grounding, acceptance

□ Sitting in a booth in a grey sweatshirt and jeans with wisps of light brown hair brushing his forehead, his soulful eyes searched for understanding as he spoke, "I just turned 18 this week. I've got one year left here. Then I don't know what I'm going to do. This place is a home for me and some of the other kids. We can get away from the stresses of our lives for a little while. Kimmy, Roger and Shannon understand us. Here, it is okay for us to be who we are. That kid plays guitar and rides a skateboard, she's in speech and I write poetry. But, here, none of us are judged. Here we feel loved."

"Here" is the Ground Floor, a drop-in youth center operated by Itasca Youth for Christ. "While it is a drop-in center," states Roger Hopperton, manager of the Ground Floor, "our purpose is very much intentional."

The Ground Floor is open to teens ages 13-18. Statistics for those who

are regulars are staggering. One-third don't have a niche with other organized school activities, one-third are looking for a positive influence and caring environment outside their homes, and one-third have made or are making bad choices and are looking for help. "But, on DJ or band nights," said Roger, "the kids in here look like a crowd at the movie theater. There isn't just one type."

Twice each week, a nationally recognized, eight-step, self-help program called "Life Hurts, God Heals" is offered to the teens. Based on Alcoholic Anonymous' 12-step program, it is for more than drug or alcohol addiction. "Some of these kids are just hurting," said Kim Hopperton, Ground Floor staff. "Maybe a parent has died, maybe they are struggling with an eating disorder, maybe they feel unloved or that no one understands them. Sometimes we are able to help before the problem gets worse. Whatever the case, we work hard to

earn the right to have these kids share their lives with us – to get to really know them, understand them and love them."

The staff of the Ground Floor, Roger, Kim and Shannon Tibbetts, run a strict ship. No cursing, bullying or intimidation, and absolutely no drugs, alcohol or weapons are permitted. They have reported offenders both inside and outside the property to the police. The staff stresses the Ground Floor is a safe environment with a welcoming and fun atmosphere.

"By showing care and offering love and encouragement, we are able to help boost [the teens'] self confidence," said Roger.

"With a sense of worth – a sense of being – that they often don't get anywhere else, these kids want to do better. They want to graduate, continue on with school, get a job, have a family and break the cycle. When they see

that the community cares for them, they want to give back," added Kim.

"It is easy for people in the community to make judgments based off of what they hear or see when they drive by," said Shannon. "Don't judge. Open your mind and your heart. Come in anytime and see for yourself what we are all about." □

– Amanda Dosen Windorski

Since 1998, Blandin Foundation has awarded the Ground Floor \$1.175 million for its work with Itasca area youth. The Foundation also partners with groups such as the Itasca Area Initiative for Student Success (www.itascastudentsuccess.org) and Itasca Networks for Youth to support community efforts to engage area youth.

□ The Ground Floor offers many activities for teens in a safe atmosphere free from intimidation or anxiety: a snack bar, homework help, pool, foosball, darts, movies, video games, and DJ and band nights.



On the leading edge of vibrancy

Edge of the Wilderness communities celebrate 20 years of collaboration



■ Leaders and community members in three Itasca County communities – Bigfork, Effie and Marcell – forged the Edge of the Wilderness identity more than 20 years ago. Under a joint powers agreement, the area has accomplished numerous projects, including a golf course, hospital, arts center, community center, and identity signs along highway 38, which links the communities.

■ The communities of Effie, Bigfork and Marcell have called themselves “Edge of the Wilderness” for more than 20 years.

But before that, the communities always seemed to be on the edge of an argument.

“There were some intense rivalries between the towns,” recalled John Nathe of Bigfork. “It felt like the Mason-Dixon line between Bigfork and Effie. There was tension between Bigfork and Marcell because of the hospital district. Bigfork was in the center of the community, but we didn’t act as a community.”

It was during that time that four area residents (Nathe, Jeff Ortman, Chris Johnson, and Liz Latterel) were invited to attend the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP).

During the intense week of leadership training, the group learned to identify what their communities needed, and learned to network and find support.

“We knew if we were going to move forward as a community, we were going to have to do it together,” Nathe said.

Working together

The Blandin Community Leadership Program grads called a series of meetings of the three communities starting in 1986. The goal: Talking about the common issues facing them and how they could work together.

“We had to work through all the myths and rumors that were out there and get everyone calmed down so that we could try to get things done,” Nathe said. “And slowly, it took hold, little by little.”

The communities formed the North Itasca Joint Powers Board, one of the first joint powers agreements in the county.

“We had a town hall that was full of people,” Nathe recalled. “The enthusiasm was all there, and there was a push to create an identity. There were concerns that Grand Rapids seemed to get all the publicity. They weren’t hoggish about it, but we just felt like we needed to be recognized as a destination, too.”

After a community-wide contest was held, the region was named “Edge of the Wilderness.”

“It was a name that we could all identify with,” said Linda Pigman, a 1988 BCLP alum. “People were excited about it. They wanted to use it everywhere. It was an exciting time.”

Over the next 20 years, the community worked to develop the Edge of Wilderness not just as a name, but as a destination, complete with a golf course, the Bigfork Valley Hospital and Clinic campus, the Marcell Family Center, and The Edge Center for the Arts. Three small towns, once struggling, now showed a new vibrancy.

“We really got to know each other. And we learned that if you put someone to work doing something they thoroughly enjoy, they’ll give it their all,” Pigman said. “You just have to find what they can contribute and make them happy and good things happen.”

But keeping momentum going wasn’t always easy. “We got tired, but we still tried to keep our fingers in it. Jeff (Ortman) really kept things going,” Nathe said. “He made sure things kept moving forward. When our successors (new graduates of BCLP) came back, we would try to sit down with them and give them our history and pass the

torch to them. We wanted to capture their enthusiasm and help them learn from our mistakes.”

Nathe said The Edge Center for the Arts, a project led by BCLP alum Patty Feld was really the culmination of more than a decade of working together.

He recalls being at a meeting in Marcell, and a discussion about contributing to The Edge Center for the Arts came up. In years past, any request for money from an organization in Bigfork would have been met with opposition in Marcell. “Suddenly all of these people in the audience stepped forward and said that they supported it,” Nathe said. “They said ‘I depend on the hospital in that community’ or ‘my kids are in dance classes over there.’ These people who used to be so anti-Bigfork saw what these kinds of things were doing for the entire community – what it meant to them. And they wanted to support it.”

“It took 10 to 15 years, but that meeting was like ‘Wow.’ It’s really happening. This is what we were trying to do.”

Nathe said, “The thing that people have to realize is that it takes a long time to do these things. It’s not a Jaycees or Lions thing, or one event and that’s it. We had a different agenda.”

Pigman agreed. “We really started to look at the big picture,” she said. “Blandin played a huge role in helping us do that. It’s where it all began.”

She said there is a sense of accomplishment and pride in the Edge of the Wilderness.

“We’re a small community,” Pigman said. “We’re a place that doesn’t want to be invaded, but we don’t want people to feel uninvited. I think we’ve learned you really can grow your own metropolis if you want to.” ■

MISSION To strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area.

VISION To be a premier partner for building healthy rural Minnesota communities, grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared.



The “At Home” report to the community is published periodically by the Blandin Foundation and distributed to residents of the Grand Rapids area, its home community.

Contributors include:

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Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

– Christina Brown

Since 1990, Blandin Foundation has awarded more than \$3.1 million in grants to Edge of the Wilderness communities, and held a community listening session in the area earlier this year. In 2013, a team of about two dozen residents will participate in the Blandin Community Leadership Program.



2011 grants infuse community action

Since 1941, Blandin Foundation has been a partner in community-driven activities in the Itasca County area and rural Minnesota. Working with people who share the Foundation's mission of strengthening communities, grantmaking efforts move forward projects and programs of all sizes and scopes, giving people here, and throughout the state, the opportunity to enhance their rural communities.

Grants listed below were awarded between January and December 2011, and were made in the Foundation's three areas of focus. In addition to the grants listed here, the Foundation awarded more than \$978,000 in scholarships to 337 Itasca area students, and 156 grants less than \$1,000. Black type denotes grants made in the Foundation's home giving area, the Itasca County area. □

Commitment to home

Local Grants

- Advocates for Family Peace\$110,000**
Sustaining contribution to promote safety, equity and peace to families experiencing domestic abuse in the Itasca County area
- Arrowhead Regional Dev't Commission\$5,000**
Retain a professional animal shelter consultant and planning/facilitation assistance
- Bigfork Valley Hospital\$30,000**
Sustaining contribution for the Home Visitor Program in the Itasca County area
- Independent School District 32.....\$1,000**
Support for the Bully Prevention Program for grades 7-12
- City of Blackduck.....\$7,500**
Conduct a marketing study to promote economic development for the Blackduck area
- City of Bovey\$2,500**
Capital improvements for the West Range Senior Center in the Itasca County area
- Bovey/Coleraine Youth Center.....\$172,000**
Continuation funding for the Bovey Coleraine Youth Center during 2012 in the Itasca County area
- Bovey/Coleraine Youth Center.....\$5,000**
Itasca County New Year's Eve celebration
- Bridges Kinship Mentoring\$80,000**
Sustaining contribution to provide mentoring opportunities for young people in the Itasca County area
- Centennial Rotary Club of Grand Rapids\$2,000**
2011 annual Thanksgiving dinner for the Grand Rapids area
- Cherish our Children Council.....\$2,500**
Support for the Illuminations workshop "In the Words of the Offender"
- Civil Air Patrol\$1,000**
Donation towards capital upgrades
- Community Cafe\$70,000**
Sustaining contribution to help reduce hunger through the Community Cafe in the Itasca County area
- Cooperative Solutions\$105,000**
Sustaining contribution for mediation services in the Itasca County area
- Independent School District 317\$1,000**
To update instruments and general equipment for the Instrumental Music Dept
- Independent School District 317.....\$3,500**
Children First activities in 2011
- Depot Commons Association.....\$5,000**
Office space for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs in the Chamber Information Center
- ElderCircle.....\$80,000**
Sustaining contribution to offer senior programming to residents in the Itasca County area
- First Call for Help of Itasca Cty.....\$100,000**
Sustaining contribution for emergency, information and referral services in the Itasca County area during 2012 and 2013
- Friendship Ventures\$10,000**
Sustaining contribution for Itasca County area disabled youth to participate in camp activities
- Girl Scouts of MN and WI Lakes and Pines\$20,000**
Sustaining contribution for the Girl Scouts program in the Itasca County area
- GRACE House of Itasca County\$115,000**
Program-related investment for a homeless shelter in the Itasca County area
- GRACE House of Itasca County\$50,000**
Operating support for the homeless shelter in the Itasca County area

- Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation\$4,800**
Publication and distribution of the 2011 *Itasca Area Nonprofit Giving Guide*
- Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation\$4,000**
Publication of the Itasca County area Community Report Card
- Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation\$3,750**
Marketing of First Friday arts events throughout the Grand Rapids area
- Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation..\$200,000**
For continued support for the Itasca County Sharing Fund in the Itasca County area
- Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation\$1,000**
Donation for Nashwauk Veterans Memorial Park
- Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation\$5,000**
Support for the Itasca Area Cancer Crisis Fund
- Grand Rapids Economic Dev. Authority\$5,000**
Partial support for interpretive signage along the Mississippi River in front of the public library
- Independent School District 318.....\$1,000**
2012 Post Prom event for Grand Rapids High School
- Independent School District 318.....\$1,000**
Grand Rapids High School 2011 Post Prom event
- Independent School District 318.....\$3,000**
Planning and implementation of a Frisbee golf course in collaboration with the City of Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids Summer Celebration Inc.....\$7,500**
Tall Timber Days 30th anniversary
- City of Grand Rapids.....\$7,500**
Architectural services to complete the design of a new facility to serve Itasca County area seniors
- City of Grand Rapids.....\$50,000**
Replace the carpet at the Grand Rapids Area Library
- Grand Village Nursing Home\$5,000**
Project support for a therapeutic room for residents with dementia and other disabilities
- Grand Village Nursing Home\$1,000**
Purchase wheelchair packs to increase patient independence, mobility and safety
- Greater Pokegama Lake Association\$1,000**
Donation towards the annual Independence Day fireworks on Pokegama Lake in Grand Rapids
- Habitat for Humanity of Itasca County\$2,000**
Strategic planning process in 2012
- Habitat for Humanity of Itasca County\$100,000**
Sustaining contribution for low-income housing development in the Itasca County area
- Independent School District 2.....\$30,000**
Project support for the Summer Youth Day Camp and Youth Leadership Board as part of the Hill City Kids Plus program
- Itasca Chpt. Let's Go Fishing With Seniors\$1,000**
Donation towards operating expenses in the Itasca County area
- Itasca Community College.....\$1,000**
Donation towards the annual on-campus pow-wow sponsored by the O Gitch I Dah Club
- Itasca Community College Foundation\$2,000**
Creation of an Innovation Fund to be used for innovative and futuristic thinking proposals
- Itasca County Family YMCA\$120,000**
For continued operating support for 2011 and 2012
- Itasca County Historical Society.....\$100,000**
Sustaining contribution to collect, preserve, interpret and disseminate the history of the Itasca County area
- Itasca County Veterans Service Office.....\$1,000**
StandDown event for homeless and low-income veterans in Grand Rapids

- Itasca Orchestra and Strings Program\$80,000**
Sustaining contribution to provide orchestral music opportunities for youth and adults in the Itasca County area
- Itasca Water Legacy Partnership.....\$15,000**
To plan, publicize and implement the Itasca Water Summit event in the Itasca County area
- Jacobson Community Center Foundation\$2,500**
Upgrades to the community center's heating system
- Judy Garland Children's Museum\$1,000**
Support for the 36th annual Judy Garland Festival in Grand Rapids
- KOOTASCA Community Action\$100,000**
Emergency heating assistance funding for the Itasca County area
- Lawrence Lake Township\$3,000**
Upgrades to playground equipment
- Legal Aid Service of Northeastern MN.....\$390,000**
Continuation funding to provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and the Native American Outreach project in the Itasca County area
- MacRostie Art Center.....\$70,000**
Sustaining contribution to provide visual arts and educational programming to residents throughout the Itasca County area
- Marcell Family Center\$65,000**
Sustaining contribution for family center programming in the Itasca County area
- MN Technology of Participation\$4,500**
To provide training to nine Itasca area nonprofits in the Technology of Participation facilitation training
- Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Shelf.....\$1,000**
Create a community garden for food shelf clients to grow their own vegetables
- Northern Community Radio\$100,000**
Sustaining contribution for news programming throughout the Itasca County area
- Northern Lights Community School\$1,000**
To bring in an anti-bullying speaker
- Northland Counseling Center/Itasca Cty.....\$8,700**
Training costs associated with the Certified Peer Specialist program
- Northland Counseling Center/Itasca Cty.....\$10,000**
Capital support for Adult Foster Care services to serve adults with severe and persistent mental illness and physical disability in the Itasca County area
- Reif Arts Council.....\$10,000**
Sponsor two daytime performances of the Peking Acrobats on Sunday, January 1, 2012, to encourage and promote access to persons of all income levels in the Itasca County area.
- Remer Area Chamber of Commerce\$10,000**
Electronic sign to promote community events in the Remer area
- Second Harvest North Central Food Bank....\$100,000**
Sustaining contribution for Food Bank operations in the Itasca County area
- Special Olympics Minnesota\$60,000**
Sustaining contribution for the Special Olympics program in the Itasca County area
- Support Within Reach.....\$70,000**
Sustaining contribution to provide support and advocacy to victims of sexual violence and prevention education in the Itasca County area
- City of Taconite\$5,000**
Upgrades to the Taconite Community Center
- U of MN Extension Itasca County\$1,000**
To bring the film "Greenfire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic For Our Time" to Grand Rapids to be shown to students and the general public
- United Way of 1000 Lakes.....\$44,000**
Sustaining contribution in support of administration during 2012 and 2013
- Voyageurs Area Boy Scouts\$20,000**
Sustaining contribution for the Boy Scouts program in the Itasca County area

- City of Warba\$1,000**
Donation towards the Warba Centennial
- Youth for Christ.....\$60,000**
Sustaining contribution for the Campus Life program in the Itasca County area
- Youth for Christ.....\$85,000**
Continuation funding for the Ground Floor Youth Center in the Itasca County area

Rural Minnesota Grants

- American Red Cross-Northland Chapter\$40,000**
Strategic planning, communications and data sharing technology in rural Minnesota
- Independent School District 94.....\$1,000**
Donation towards the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative's transition conference for high school students with disabilities
- Minnesota D.A.R.E., Inc.\$1,000**
Donation towards safe and healthy lifestyle programming for children
- MN Center for Mineral Resource Education\$1,000**
Donation towards the Minerals Education Workshops for students and teachers
- MN Council of Nonprofits Inc.....\$1,000**
Membership renewal for 2011
- MN Council on Foundations.....\$1,000**
Working Towards Diversity and Inclusion sponsorship
- Southwest Minnesota State University\$1,000**
Support for the Somali Student Interpreter Program to be trained in basic US laws and legal procedures to work with the Fifth District Public Defender's Office

Invest in Leaders

Rural Minnesota Grants

- MN Council of Nonprofits Inc.....\$50,000**
Project support for a Performance Management Institute for small to mid-size nonprofits in central and northern Minnesota
- Preservation Alliance of Minnesota\$15,000**
Support for the Minnesota Main Street project
- Redwood Area Communities Foundation\$100,000**
For expanding opportunity initiatives in the southern part of Minnesota
- Strong Towns\$150,000**
Work plan development to advance concepts of land use change and financial resilience for rural communities in Minnesota
- University of Minnesota.....\$10,000**
Support for the "One Minnesota" legislative policy conference
- United Way Of Greater Duluth\$5,000**
Partial support for two AmeriCorps volunteers for Duluth's Prosperity Index as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- Western Community Action, Inc.\$25,000**
Project support for feasibility and long-range collaboration efforts between agencies serving those in poverty in rural Minnesota
- Women's Leadership Fund\$30,000**
For the White House Project to expand their outreach to American Indian tribal women throughout rural Minnesota



Expand Opportunity

Local Grants

Bigfork Valley Foundation.....	\$40,000
Project support for the last phase of planning and research to develop a medical reprocessing manufacturing facility in the Itasca County area	
Boys & Girls Club of Leech Lake Area.....	\$180,000
For continued operating support for the Deer River and Eagleview units in the Itasca County area	
Cass County Economic Development Corp	\$2,500
Membership for 2011 to promote economic development in that segment of the Foundation's service area	
Independent School District 316.....	\$3,500
Children First activities throughout 2011	
Depot Commons Association	\$100,000
For continued support of the Workforce Development Initiative in the Itasca County area	
Edge of the Wilderness Community Center.....	\$1,000
Support for an educational series on women's history	
First Call for Help of Itasca Cty.....	\$5,000
Project support for the Community Connect of Itasca County event	
Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital	\$10,000
For board and governance development	
Grand Itasca Foundation	\$4,285
Support for the Foundation Fever...Catch It! employee campaign in the Grand Rapids/Itasca County area	
Independent School District 318.....	\$16,200
For research and opportunities for after-school bus transportation options for students in the Itasca County area	
Independent School District 318.....	\$36,000
Continuation funding for Children First! activities throughout the Itasca County area	
Growth and Justice	\$3,500
Communications and publications linking the lessons of the Strive Program of the Cincinnati Public Schools to a strategy for student achievement and attainment in the Itasca County area	
Independent School District 2.....	\$150,000
For continued support of the Early Start program in the Hill City School District	
Itasca Area Schools Collaborative.....	\$3,990,000
For continued support of Invest Early in 2011-13 in the Itasca County area	
Itasca Area Schools Collaborative.....	\$50,000
A LightSpeed grant to build two immersive telepresence learning studios	
Itasca Area Schools Collaborative.....	\$14,845
Assist in the completion of a Vision, Strategy and Execution plan to transform and improve sustainable educational outcomes through strengthened partnerships, state-of-the-art architectures, integration of functions and enhanced stakeholder understanding	
Itasca Area Schools Collaborative.....	\$750,000
Project support for infrastructure changes to allow for 21st Century Learning and Education throughout the Itasca County area	
Itasca Area Schools Collaborative.....	\$2,950
Support for a team to learn how Madison Area Technical College is implementing 21st century learning projects utilizing Cisco distant learning options	
Itasca Community College.....	\$1,255
Administration of an education award survey	
Itasca Community College.....	\$375,000
For financial aid assistance for Itasca County high school graduates during the 2012-13 school year	
Itasca Community College.....	\$2,500
Support to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Itasca area schools through a Student Success survey	
Itasca Community College.....	\$27,000
Project support to provide services in preparing students for post-secondary education through the Upward Bound and Talent Search project in the Itasca County area	
Itasca Community College Foundation	\$25,000
For a donor, alumni, accounting and scholarship tracking system in the Itasca County area	
Itasca County.....	\$3,500
Forest Education and Awareness Program (FEAP) 2011 Summer Academy	
Itasca Cty Health & Human Serv	\$15,000
Project support to test an innovative Electronic Document File Management System in Itasca County that will help reform a key system, driving cost savings	
Itasca Economic Dev't Corporation.....	\$500,000
For continued operating assistance to promote economic development opportunities throughout the Itasca County area	
Itasca Ski And Outing Club.....	\$20,000
Capital improvements to the Mt. Itasca ski hill	

Itasca Ski And Outing Club.....	\$10,000
Marketing and promotion of Mt. Itasca	
Itasca Water Legacy Partnership.....	\$155,000
For operations to build local capacity for water quality assessment and encourage personal practices that sustain the Itasca County area's high-quality waters.	
Minnesota Children's Museum.....	\$25,000
Install an early literacy learning environment in the Grand Rapids Area Library	
MN Diversified Industries.....	\$5,000
Facilitated dialogue regarding potential strategic alliance	
Independent School District 319.....	\$2,500
Children First activities in 2011	
NE Entrepreneur Fund, Inc.....	\$120,000
For continued support to grow the skills of entrepreneurs for job creation and economic development in the northeast region of Minnesota	
Northern Lights Community School	\$1,000
Support for Eric Samuel Timm to present his program "Painting Hope" to the students of Northern Lights, Voyageurs Expeditionary and Pillager charter schools	
Northland Area Family Service Center	\$50,000
Capital support to purchase property and move the Family Center to Remer	
Reif Arts Council.....	\$5,600
Kennedy Center workshops in 2011 and 2012 for elementary teachers in the Itasca County area	
Independent School District 118.....	\$160,000
For continued support of the Northland Early Childhood Collaborative in the Remer-Longville area	
ServeMinnesota	\$100,000
Project support for placement of ten AmeriCorps members in the Itasca County area	

Rural Minnesota Grants

Advocates for Human Rights **\$150,000**
Project support for the One Voice Minnesota Anti-Bias Initiative throughout rural Minnesota

City of Aitkin **\$1,100**
Implementation of the Fit City Aitkin project as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Alexandria Technical & Community College .. **\$15,000**
For a documentary to encourage best practices to bridge K-12 and higher education throughout rural Minnesota

Anderson Center, Inc..... **\$30,000**
Expand the Center's capacity building efforts

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency **\$5,000**
Operating support for the Virginia Indian Center as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Bemidji Area Race Relations Task Force..... **\$15,000**
Project support for the Bemidji Area Race Relations Council and Shared Vision initiatives to increase effectiveness and long-term sustainability to improve race relations

BioBusiness Alliance of Minnesota..... **\$180,000**
For continued support to advance the growth of the bioscience industry in rural Minnesota

Central Lakes College- Brainerd..... **\$20,000**
Project support to develop a Race Equity and Excellence in Education Leadership Team at Central Lakes College in Brainerd

Centro Campesino, Inc..... **\$100,000**
Continuation funding for operations to improve the lives of immigrant populations through community organizing, education and advocacy in the southern part of Minnesota

Chippewa Cty Montevideo Hosp Med Clinic...\$39,030
Implementation of a LightSpeed grant which will provide direct access to patients' medical information via high speed internet

Chippewa Cty Montevideo Hosp Med Clinic.... **\$1,000**
To augment the LightSpeed grant to further the e-health efforts of the hospital by creating an online patient portal

Citizens League **\$28,000**
Support for the next phase of the Pathways to Prosperity project

Community Action Duluth **\$5,000**
Implementation of Getting Ahead workshops on the issues of race, systemic oppression and poverty as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Corporation for Supportive Housing..... **\$100,000**
Project support to assist Minnesota tribes in developing sustainable funding streams to finance supportive services for formerly homeless and at-risk tribal members across Minnesota

Duluth Superior Area Comm. Foundation **\$5,000**
To develop a Cook County Community Fund Nonprofit Directory as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Duluth-Superior Educational TV Corp.	\$45,000
Project support for the Lake and Cook County Broadband Documentary project in rural Minnesota	
Duluth-Superior Educational TV Corp.	\$70,000
Sustaining contribution for the production of <i>Native Report</i> throughout rural Minnesota	
East Metro Medical Society Foundation	\$50,000
Project support to initiate community-based conversations regarding end-of-life care planning targeted to the Native American community and in rural settings across Minnesota	

Blandin Foundation Paid Grants/Scholarships

Enterprise Minnesota **\$5,000**
Regional sponsorship for the 4th annual State of Manufacturing poll to be conducted in February 2012

City of Fergus Falls..... **\$5,000**
Support for a community telework initiative through the Rural Quick Start program

Full Circle Community Institute..... **\$8,000**
Statewide Native youth summit in June 2011

Grand Portage Reservation Tribal Council **\$5,000**
Technical assistance to explore the design of a park and cultural center in Grand Portage as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation .. **\$24,000**
For continued support of the Rural Access Leadership Fund throughout rural Minnesota

Greater Twin Cities United Way..... **\$20,000**
For Phase 3 of the School Readiness Funders Coalition throughout rural Minnesota

Hermantown Economic Dev't Authority **\$10,000**
Support for the Advance Hermantown project which will help the community agree on a desired future and align behind key strategies to act on that desired future

Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce..... **\$5,000**
Third annual Global Understanding Conference at Hibbing Community College

Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empower..... **\$10,000**
Minnesota Latino 2010 Census Data Project

Independent School District 659..... **\$60,000**
Project support for the Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes (TORCH) community initiative to increase graduation and post-secondary attendance rates of minorities in the Northfield area

Indian Land Tenure Foundation **\$5,000**
Support for an intern to research the economic impact of land tenure in reservation communities in Minnesota

Initiative Foundation **\$10,000**
Project support for financial consulting services to continue working with leaders to revive businesses and retain livable wage jobs in central Minnesota

Ironworld Development Corporation..... **\$10,000**
2011 Iron Range Women's Expo

Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC **\$28,000**
Implementation of the Light Speed program

Kenwood Therapy Center **\$5,000**
Exploration and development of new community-based programming with Native communities in rural Minnesota as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Lakes and Prairies Community Action Part **\$5,000**
Bright Spots mapping project as part of the Rural Quick Start program

Leech Lake Tribal College	\$160,000
Capital support for a library to house its Learning Center/Peer Tutoring program and provide community members with access to the college's collection and free internet connection throughout rural Minnesota	
Main Street Project	\$2,000
For the 2011 National Rural Assembly in Minnesota "Building an Inclusive Nation"	
Main Street Project	\$80,000
Project support for the Agripreneur Training Program and capacity building for Latino families in southern Minnesota	
Minneapolis Foundation	\$10,000
Support to update and redesign Minnesota's Bottom Line report to inform elected officials on how best to address the state's budget deficit	
Minneapolis Foundation	\$50,000
Project support to capitalize on human capital performance bonds to address social issues throughout rural Minnesota	
Minneapolis Foundation	\$4,000
To engage communities across Minnesota in identifying key features of natural learning systems	
Minnesota 2020.....	\$10,000
Program support for "Building on Success: Connecting Small Growers and Consumers Throughout Rural Minnesota"	
Minnesota News Media Institute	\$126,000
For continued support of the Editors and Publishers Community Leadership Program throughout rural Minnesota	
Minnesota Wood Education Project	\$9,820
Support for the Minnesota Wood Species Education Program throughout rural Minnesota	
Minnesota Wood Education Project	\$10,000
Support for Goods from the Woods 2012, an annual event to showcase specialty forest products held in the Grand Rapids area	
MinnPost.....	\$80,000
Continued support for its online media outlet to bolster reporting capacity throughout rural Minnesota	
MinnWest Technology Foundation.....	\$38,000
Implementation of the LightSpeed grant program	
MinnWest Technology Foundation.....	\$1,000
Planning grant to create a remote learning center at the MinnWest Technology campus in Willmar	
MN Chippewa Tribe	\$80,000
Project support for a business development center to strengthen the economy in rural and reservation communities within the MN Chippewa Tribe reservations in rural Minnesota	
MN Civil Liberties Union Foundation	\$5,000
Project support for the Greater Minnesota Racial Justice program as part of the Rural Quick Start program	
MN Council on Foundations.....	\$3,510
Subscriptions to the Minnesota Grantmakers Online Service for Itasca County area nonprofits	
Native Americans in Philanthropy	\$3,068
Establish a statewide online directory of American Indian owned businesses as part of the Rural Quick Start program	
Native Vote Alliance of Minnesota.....	\$5,000
Support for Native American communities to engage in civic participation and get out the vote efforts as part of the Rural Quick Start program	
Northern Minnesota Public Television.....	\$50,000
Sustaining contribution for programming and services in the northern region of Minnesota	
Northland Foundation	\$5,000
Support for the 2011 Northeastern Minnesota Early Childhood Summit	
Northland Foundation	\$5,000
To develop a collaborative strategy for advancing the economic health of northeast Minnesota	
Northland Foundation	\$16,200
Continued support of the Regional Economic Development group in 2011	
The Northspan Group, Inc.	\$15,000
Sponsorship of the Minnesota Cup entrepreneurial contest in 2011 in northeast Minnesota	
Northwest Minnesota Foundation	\$60,000
Project support for the IDEA Competition to grow the economy and promote innovation in northwest Minnesota	
Project FINE.....	\$25,000
Digital Inclusion for Immigrants and Refugees Program in Winona County	
Rainy River Community College	\$15,000
To conduct a comprehensive study of collaboration opportunities between Rainy River Community College and Independent School District 361	
Red Lake Nation College	\$45,500
Project support to subsidize a portion of an environmental science instructor position at the Red Lake Nation College in rural Minnesota	

- Redwood Area Communities Foundation\$5,000**
Research for a local foods initiative as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- Redwood County\$40,000**
Implementation of the Robust Broadband Networks Feasibility Fund grant program
- Redwood County\$1,000**
Planning grant to augment the Robust Broadband Networks Feasibility fund grant to study the development of a communications network within Redwood County
- Region Five Regional Dev Commission\$12,000**
A Digital Inclusion Community Partnership grant to establish a PCs for People affiliate in the Brainerd area
- Region Five Regional Dev Commission\$22,000**
Start-up support of a microenterprise program for low-income entrepreneurs in central Minnesota
- Region Nine Regional Dev Commission\$5,000**
Support for the Community Alliance to Create Health initiative as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- Servant Hearts.....\$5,000**
For the Respect Awareness Project which is a community education and awareness project to inform, educate and increase LGBT cultural competency in this rural region as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- City of Staples\$25,000**
Conduct a feasibility study for a fiber-to-the-premise broadband network to all residents and businesses within the City of Staples
- SW MN Adult Mental Health Consortium.....\$29,275**
To link together at least 150 mental health service providers in southwestern Minnesota
- City of Thief River Falls.....\$25,000**
A Digital Inclusion Community Partnership grant for the Computers for Our Community project
- Todd County\$40,000**
Study the development of a 50 megabit symmetrical fiber-to-the-premise network to every home and business within Todd County
- United Way of Faribault\$4,975**
Formulate a comprehensive plan for the Faribault area as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- United Way of Northeastern Minnesota.....\$5,000**
Development of a three-year strategic plan as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- Upper Minnesota Valley RDC.....\$65,000**
Implementation of the LightSpeed program
- White Earth Band of Ojibwe\$2,500**
Support for the 2011 Northern Minnesota Tribal Economic Development Summit
- White Earth Land Recovery Project\$20,000**
Develop long-term solutions for its agricultural and food system infrastructure to promote local education and economic development on the White Earth Reservation
- White Earth Land Recovery Project\$5,000**
Support for the Health Prevention Initiative for Women and Girls on the White Earth Indian Reservation as part of the Rural Quick Start program
- City of Winthrop\$1,000**
Planning money to augment the Robust Broadband Networks Feasibility grant for a Fiber to the Home network for up to eight communities in Sibley and Renville counties
- Women's Foundation of Minnesota\$25,000**
For statewide initiative to end commercial sexual exploitation of girls in Minnesota
- Women's Foundation of Minnesota\$100,000**
Project support for the Building Economic Success Together (girlsBEST) convening, grant making and technical assistance programming throughout rural Minnesota
- Worthington Regional Economic Dev Corp ...\$39,500**
Facilitation of broadband deployment in rural areas as part of the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities program
- Worthington Regional Economic Dev Corp....\$60,500**
Support for three LightSpeed projects

2011 Total\$12,198,613



Dear neighbors,

Over the past year, I have been honored to hear directly from Itasca area residents about what makes their communities great and what their hopes are for the future.

Deep sense of community and shared challenges of youth development, economic vitality, and limited transportation options were among the themes I heard most during listening meetings in nine Itasca area communities. I learned about the assets and challenges of Grand Rapids as a county hub, heard how the school is the heartbeat of Hill City, explored with S. Lake what economic opportunities they have, witnessed the wealth of leadership available in Bigfork, and much more.

Thank you for helping me to see and know what matters most to you! You have been extremely generous, sharing your knowledge, concerns, hopes for the future, potential solutions, and philosophies. You have shown me how you care – for each other, for your community, for the work of the Foundation.

Since Charles Blandin created this foundation in 1941, we have seen in project after project, place after place, that vibrant communities are built through hard work – the hard work of leadership, of genuine inclusion, of reaching across boundaries and building lasting connections.

That's the fertile soil we see healthy communities growing from. And that's what Blandin Foundation is about – resilient, vibrant communities, especially in Grand Rapids and the Itasca area.

On behalf of my very committed and passionate colleagues on the staff of the Foundation, thank you for your partnership. We look forward to the work ahead, and as always, to exploring possibilities with you.

Kathy

Dr. Kathleen Annette
President and CEO

Staying connected

Blandin Foundation's board of trustees are community leaders who provide strategic leadership, stewardship and governance for the organization. Central to their role are trustees' connections with communities across Itasca County and throughout Minnesota. The board is chaired by Dr. Mike Johnson, of Grand Rapids, and currently includes: Marian Barcus, Dr. Tim Bonner, Dr. Yvonne Cheek, Kris Ferraro, Jim Hoolihan, Martin Jennings, Dr. Heidi Korstad, Brian Nicklason and Bonnie Rietz.



More to the story

Itasca County, like much of rural Minnesota, sees “brain gain”

■ For some, the perception of rural Minnesota – indeed of rural America – is of decline and stagnation: abandoned farmsteads, boarded storefronts, shuttered schoolhouses. Books proclaim a “brain drain” and the demise of rural America when young adults leave.

But Ben Winchester, University of Minnesota Extension rural sociologist and author of a recent study, has noticed another chapter to this story: mid-career professionals who move to rural places, bringing with them educational achievements, established earning power, and creating a “brain gain” for rural areas. In his latest report, “Continuing the Trend: The Brain Gain of the Newcomers,” Winchester updates population shifts using 2010 Census data, and examines the trend at the national level. The study also shows the brain gain continued across the rural Midwest, but at a slower pace than from 1990 to 2000.

Itasca area – strong growth, young families

In Itasca County, the “brain gain” trend is evident across different ages between 2000 and 2010.

The data compares age groups with the size of that same group 10 years ago (when they were ten years younger). There is a “brain drain” when young adults (20-24 and 25-29) migrate away

after high school graduation. However, there are increases in all other age cohorts during the last decade.

Of particular note was a 22 percent increase in the cohort of middle-school age children, indicating that young families are moving to the area.

“It’s the rule that young people move to pursue educational and career goals, not the exception,” said Winchester. “Instead of labeling that loss as ‘doom and gloom’ for rural, I’ve examined the population trends more deeply. Acknowledging the brain gain allows rural places to focus on strengths and opportunities, which is the work of any community striving for a brighter future.”

Rural rejuvenation

Other University of Minnesota Extension research on those in mid-career shows they choose rural areas for a higher quality of life, specifically citing a slower pace, the low cost of housing, and safety and security. These factors appeal not just to those who were raised in rural communities and want to return – they also attract folks who haven’t lived in small communities before.

These newcomers, according to Winchester, infuse richness and diversity into rural communities – and provide an important economic boost.

“In rural areas, little changes make a big difference,” Winchester said. “And these numbers certainly change the story.”

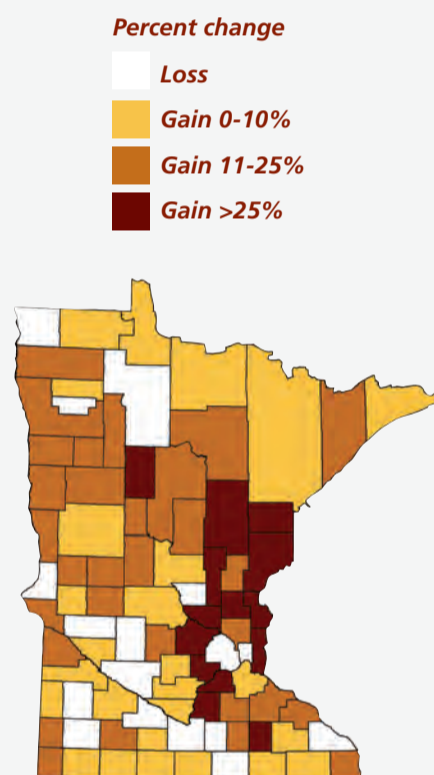
To access the study (in PDF format), visit www.extension.umn.edu/go/1107. To learn more about the brain gain in rural Minnesota, visit www.extension.umn.edu/community/brain-gain. ■

Newcomers enrich rural Minnesota

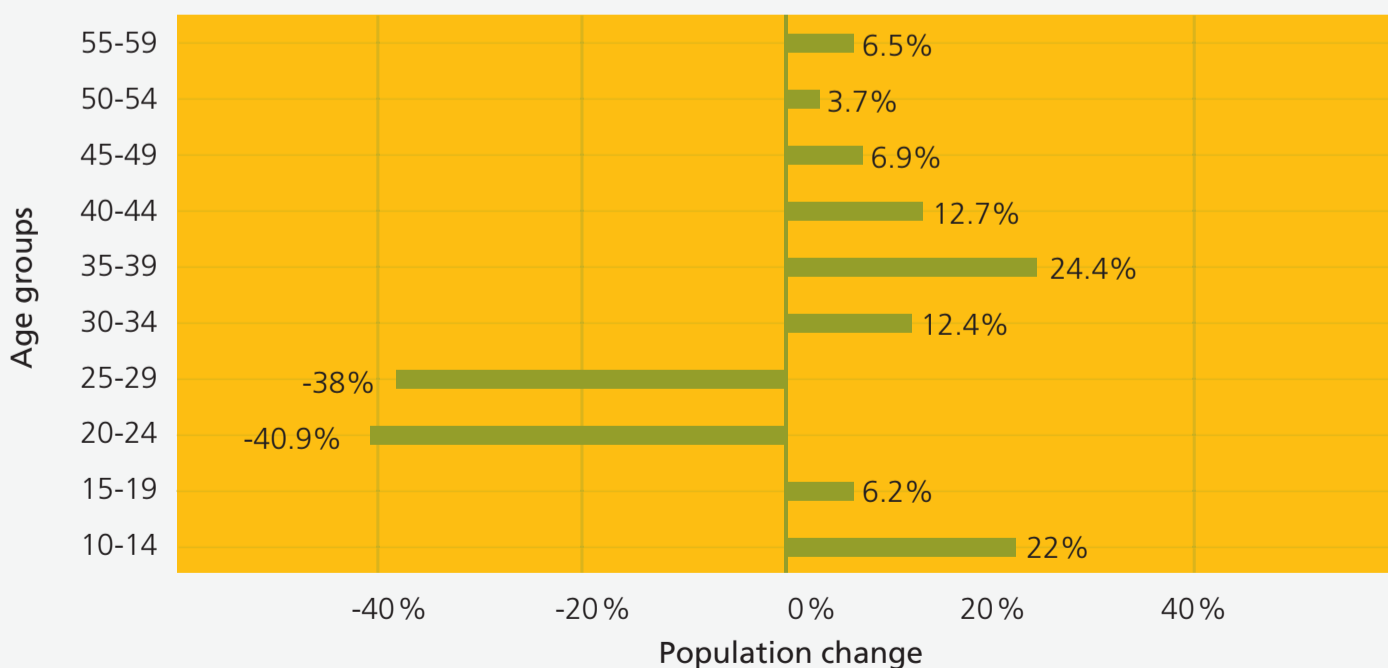
Ben Winchester, rural sociologist at the University of Minnesota Extension service, conducted an economic impact study of 99 newcomer households in west-central Minnesota. He found that these households contributed \$92,000 (average per household) in economic activity to the region in 2009 and 2010. Other highlights of the study:

- > 75 percent of respondents moved with their spouse/partner, and 25 percent moved alone.
- > 51 percent moved with children.
- > 43 percent of respondents lived in or near their community before returning; 30 percent of their spouses lived in or near the community.
- > In their previous community, 36 percent held a leadership role in a community, church, school, civic, or other type of group or organization. This rose to 60 percent in their new community.
- > In their previous community, 62 percent donated money to local community organizations, charities or causes. This rose to 81 percent in their new community.
- > 68 percent of respondents had a bachelor’s degree or higher; 19 percent had an associate’s degree.

Change in percentage of 35-39 year olds 2000-2010



Itasca County Brain Gain – 2000-2010



High school graduates might leave rural areas for college and jobs in the big city, but more are coming back with college degrees, careers, professional contacts, and young families. Still others with these credentials are moving to rural communities for the first time. These “newcomers” repopulating small towns increase diversity and ensure the sustainability of a future for rural America, says researcher Ben Winchester.

Quality of life – and other factors – drew Grand Rapids High School graduate Lea Friesen back to the area, with her husband, Tony Gutoski, and their two children. Now an art instructor at Itasca Community College, Friesen sees the community with fresh eyes, and has discovered benefits beyond her childhood recollections. >>>>



□ **Lea Friesen and her family find many kinds of opportunities to connect with the Grand Rapids community.**

Reconnecting with community

An interview with Lea Friesen, who has returned to Itasca County

□ ***You are a Grand Rapids High School graduate, and have returned. How long were you gone, how long have you been back, and what drew you back?***

My family moved back to Grand Rapids about three years ago. It had been ten years away; my husband and I were living in Chicago when we had our first child. Living in a fourth-floor walk-up apartment on a busy corner was not working with our new infant, and we were given an opportunity to come up north.

□ ***What opportunities do you and your family have to participate in community activities? What makes these opportunities the same or different from opportunities you've had elsewhere?***

We loved living in Chicago because of the variety of food and entertainment constantly available, also the anonymity was a plus. However, there was almost no sense of community and travel was always complicated. We initially moved back here because my family offered support while our children were babies.

I discovered a network of young mothers who had also come from other places and settled here. Through Early Childhood Family Education classes I met a few other families and then became involved at the YMCA.

I have found an incredible professional support system through the MacRostie Art Center. The arts organization gave me my first taste of working again after having children. I was pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm here for

the arts. I love that in the dead of winter there still is a lively First Friday following. I am concerned about the lack of art classes in the elementary school system, but we'll just have to work on that.

□ ***University of Minnesota Extension Service researcher Ben Winchester has called the return of residents like you part of rural Minnesota's "brain gain." Does this phenomenon ring true for you?***

I never thought I would consider living in Grand Rapids after I graduated from high school, but if it had been everything I thought I knew as young person, we never would have stayed and committed to the area. There are many positive aspects of living here that

were unpredictable from afar. I would say that Ben's ideas are right on, based on my experience.

□ ***What has surprised you about living here again?***

The thing that has most surprised me about coming here has been the variety of ideas I have encountered. I had pictured a community of a certain type of people with certain beliefs. I did not realize that what I experienced in middle and high school was a very limited view of the variety of people who exist here.

□ ***What would you tell others considering moving to, or returning to, rural?***

It is possible to have a sort of ownership over a small community that is not possible in large cities. Logistically it is easier to find ways to get involved and learn about the area. I feel like I could predict most of the negatives about living here, but there have been many pleasant surprises as well. Due to technological development, living here does not necessarily isolate people like it used to.

□ ***In your eyes, is Grand Rapids a vibrant community?***

I see Grand Rapids as a community with fantastic potential. It has citizens who are interested in what is happening in the rest of the world. I think the best thing that can happen for Grand Rapids is that its population keeps an eye on the positive and diverse ideas that are gaining steam in community development elsewhere. I hope the community continues to look for more ways to expose all youth of this area to the diversity of the world. I think Grand Rapids also needs to be careful of something I hear about many small towns; that they can be too internally networked and cold to outsiders. □

Through its "Commitment to Home" strategic priority area, Blandin Foundation partners with residents in their work to build vibrant, resilient rural communities in the Itasca area. This includes leadership training, grants, and work on topics of importance to communities, such as student success and broadband (Grand Rapids was recently named a Blandin Broadband Community). For more on the kinds of Foundation resources specifically available to Itasca area communities, visit <http://itasca.blandinfoundation.org>

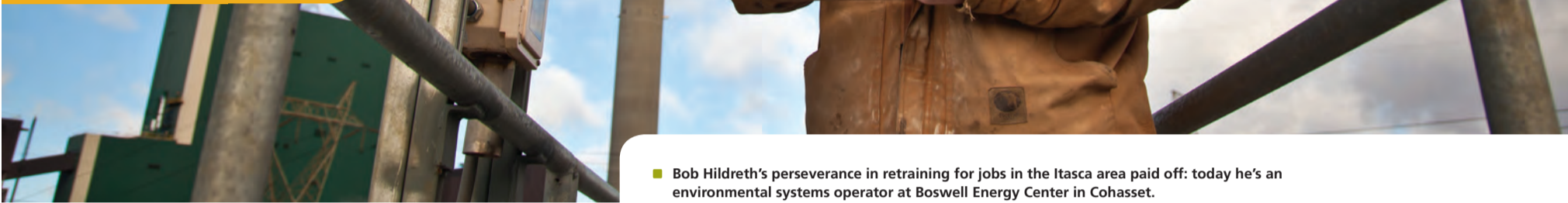
Changing gears

Scholarships support adults seeking new skills and careers

Adult scholarships make a difference

Since 2003, approximately 150 Itasca area adults have received AEOA Adult Scholarships.

- 80 of them already have found jobs in their respective fields.
- Roughly 60 percent of those people were unemployed when they started the program.
- Others have increased their wages between \$5 to \$10 more an hour.



■ Bob Hildreth's perseverance in retraining for jobs in the Itasca area paid off: today he's an environmental systems operator at Boswell Energy Center in Cohasset.

■ "How am I going to pay the bills?" thought Bob Hildreth, the day in 2007 when he was laid off from Ainsworth in Grand Rapids, where he had worked as a millwright for 10 years.

Hildreth filed for unemployment and headed back to school on the federal dislocated worker program. When he graduated from Mesabi Range College in 2009, though, the job market was even worse. With few prospects and no more resources to fund additional education, Hildreth wasn't sure what to do. Then a relative told him about the Adult Scholarship program administered by the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA).

The Adult Scholarship program doesn't just give local adults money to go back to college, it helps them find a career path. A career counselor works with each participant to determine what education they need to pursue a career that fits not only the student specifically, but also the Itasca County area as a whole.

Hildreth applied to AEOA at the same time a new Industrial Technology and Power Generation program was starting at Itasca Community College (ICC) to build an employee pool for Minnesota Power. It seemed like a perfect fit. Wanting to stay in the area, Hildreth, who lives in Coleraine, considered Minnesota Power one of the key employers in Itasca County and became a member of the first "Power Gen" class.

Support translates to success

The biggest challenge of being a full-time student wasn't the countless hours of studying. It was the economic impact

the choice would have on his family, particularly during a recession. "Being a student doesn't pay very well," he said. "I have a family, I had heating bills and a mortgage to pay. There just wasn't a lot of flexibility."

The Adult Scholarship program provides up to \$4,000 to each participant, of which up to \$2,000 can be used for living expenses, daycare and even mileage. Traditional scholarships and Pell grants will only help pay for books and tuition costs.

"Getting this scholarship lifted a huge weight off my shoulders," Hildreth said. In fact, he says that taking away some of that worry was part of the reason for his success. Hildreth also credits the career counseling part of the AEOA adult education program in his success. "Tawnya was very helpful and clear on what goals I needed to achieve," he said.

Tawnya Maras, case manager for the program since its inception in 2003, assists participants like Hildreth in developing education and employment plans. Working with Hildreth was a real joy, she said.

"It's so nice to see people succeed," said Maras. "Some people don't know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but then they complete the program, find a job and they become self-sufficient. It is very rewarding."

The Adult Scholarship program was designed to benefit what Maras refers to as "the gray area": adults in lower middle-income and working poor households who do not qualify for full federal or state post-secondary grants,

but need financial assistance to earn a degree or certification.

Economic transformation

Gwen Grell has been the director of the Adult Scholarship program since 2003. "An educational foundation is essential for economic vitality, and people lacking education have trouble competing in the workforce," she said. "This program is set up to assist Itasca County adults who want to stay in Itasca County with moving up the economic ladder. With the current economic downturn, it is more important than ever to assist this population with attaining the education and skills that they need to be competitive in this difficult job market."

Approximately 60 Itasca County adults are enrolled currently in the program. Most attend ICC (47 percent) or Hibbing Community College (22 percent); 15 percent have attended Bemidji State. Additional partnerships have been made with Northwest Technical College in Bemidji and St. Scholastica and

Lake Superior College in Duluth. Fields of study vary: dental hygiene, law enforcement and nursing, business, diesel mechanics, electricians or power generation like Bob Hildreth.

Today Hildreth is an environmental system operator at Minnesota Power's Boswell Energy Center in Cohasset. He was hired two weeks before graduating in May 2011. He hopes to land other employment opportunities at Minnesota Power as they arise, and retire from there. ■

– Willow Loney

The Adult Scholarship program has distributed \$1.292 million in Blandin Foundation grant funds since 2003. The Foundation also provides scholarships for high school seniors and young adults directly through its Education Awards Program, and through a grant to Itasca Community College. For more information, visit the "Apply for a Scholarship" page of the Foundation's Itasca area website: <http://itasca.blandinfoundation.org>.

Want to apply?

You may qualify for an AEOA scholarship if:

- > You are 25 years of age or older
- > Live in Itasca County
- > Plan to live and work in Itasca County upon completion of schooling
- > Meet income guidelines that are 275% of federal poverty guidelines or below (adult supporting a family of 4 can earn \$6,192 a month or less)
- > Maintain at least a "C" (2.0) grade-point average during the program



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