



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

For Immediate Release

Blandin Foundation awards \$3.9 million in grants

Invest Early, Deer River Hired Hands and other regional work supported

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. (June 23, 2009) – Blandin Foundation trustees approved \$3,850,000 in grants during their June 11-12 meeting, including continued support for Invest Early™ early childhood programming and further development of Deer River Hired Hands.

Now in its fifth year, the Itasca County area's groundbreaking early childhood initiative, **Invest Early™**, has demonstrated success both in improving educational outcomes for participating at-risk children and families and spurring similar investments throughout Minnesota. Trustees approved support for the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative with a grant of \$3.6 million over two years to continue Invest Early operations.

"The history books will remember the Itasca area for its courageous support of its youngest and most at-risk residents," said Wade Fauth, director of grants for Blandin Foundation. "Whether it's the story of a single family or the detailed research that shows 346 children doing dramatically better, all early signs are that Invest Early is a powerful and visionary collaboration that is helping remove key barriers to school success."

Recently, the Invest Early story has been recounted in Minnesota legislative hearings, in state and national media, and has been developed as a learning case study by the Harvard Business School. To learn more, visit www.investearly.org or <http://www.blandinfoundation.org/policy/policy-detail.php?intResourceID=426>.

In other grant-related action, trustees approved \$175,000 in matching funds to expand the operations and programming of **Deer River Hired Hands**, which provides employment and training services to adults with developmental disabilities and related conditions. Deer River Hired Hands collects, processes and markets a wide range of recyclable materials, as well as serves a critical role as a job skills training center for employees.

Other grants approved by trustees included \$30,000 to the **Grand Rapids Community Foundation**, for the Rural Access Leadership Fund for people to participate in community-based leadership programs throughout rural Minnesota,

and \$35,000 over two years to **Itasca Economic Development Corporation** for continued support of the Greenway Area Business Association.

Trustees also approved a mid-term adjustment in Foundation plans for 2009 due to reductions in revenue. The Foundation is funded primarily by proceeds from the Charles K. Blandin Residuary Trust, and--like nearly every philanthropic organization in the U.S.--has seen dramatic decreases in the value of its assets. Resulting changes include increasingly focused grant-making, reduced expenses (including staff furloughs) and refined programs.

"These are unprecedented financial times for the Grand Rapids area and the nation. As the current stewards of Charles Blandin's resources and legacy, we--like most others--are faced with tough choices," said Jim Hoolihan, president of the Blandin Foundation. "Our reality is that the Foundation's funding has been reduced by about 30 percent over the past year, and we believe it will take several more years to regain that value.

"Like local families and our community partners, we are watching carefully, and making adjustments as we must to both meet urgent needs and opportunities of our local giving area, as well as to remain a partner in rural Minnesota communities for the long run," Hoolihan explained. "We appreciate our partners' continued work in these uncertain times - as well as the opportunity to work with them in accomplishing their goals and mission."

Additional questions always are welcome by calling the foundation at 326-0523 or by writing to 100 N. Pokegama Ave., Grand Rapids, MN 55744 or info@blandinfoundation.org.

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Photo caption: Deer River Hired Hands received a grant award during the Blandin Foundation's most recent round of grantmaking. The nonprofit organization operates a recycling center, and employs more than 30 area residents with developmental disabilities. Photo copyright Jeff Frey.

Blandin Foundation, Minnesota's largest rural-based private foundation is located in Grand Rapids, Minn. Its mission is to strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area, through grants, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives.

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