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11-12-2012

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Student Surveys Four-Township Area Near Ely

Summary: Reid Ronnander '14 works with rural Minnesota area to better understand and map the local economy.

(November 12, 2012)—Reid Ronnander '14, Bemidji, is working with the Center for Small Towns and the four-township area outside of Ely—Eagles Nest, Fall Lake, Stony River, and Morse Township—to create a baseline economic study of the region. There is little, if any, current information regarding the economic profile of this area, and with the possibility of the mining industry moving into the area, local committee members were interested in creating a study to which they could later refer. They approached and contracted the Center for Small Towns in order to accomplish this task.

The project began in May 2012 when Ronnander, a math and statistics major, began collecting data about the community through national survey tools and census data. He finished the first phase of data collection at the end of June and hopes to have a working survey released to the four-township area by the end of November. The final report and economic profile will be submitted in June 2013.

When asked about the Center for Small Towns and what this project means to it as an organization, Ronnander commented that, “it’s a good thing...going out into a rural community and being able to provide this [data].” He was enthusiastic about the possible results as well as the impact this work could have on townships across Minnesota. While the information gathered is specific to this particular area, many of Ronnander’s findings may be applied to townships around the state, enabling a better understanding of small town economics.

Ronnander also values what he has personally gained from his involvement in the project. Working with census and government data has taught him how to independently operate, organize, and understand this kind of information. When asked what he liked about the job, Ronnander noted that it gave him “real, on-the-job, life experience” that he could not find anywhere else.

The Center for Small Towns is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, k-12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center’s resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their mission is to focus the University’s attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota’s small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

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