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**Stevens Forward! continues partnership with Center for Small Towns**

*Summary: Jessica Armstrong '13, St. Paul, and Jolee Henkel '15, Maynard, are working with Stevens FORWARD! to help meet the organization's goals.*

(December 16, 2011)-Stevens FORWARD! has a pretty big goal. In fact, they've got a lot of big goals, which they call "Destiny Drivers," all based on making Stevens County "the model community in rural Minnesota." This academic year, two students from the University of Minnesota, Morris, Jessica Armstrong '13, St. Paul, and Jolee Henkel '15, Maynard, are working with Stevens FORWARD! to help meet these goals.

Henkel is primarily working on Destiny Driver #8, which states, "By 2015, Stevens County will be the first carbon neutral county in the world, demonstrating viable models for green housing, neighborhoods, and public buildings." If Stevens County hopes to be carbon neutral by 2015, they have to figure out where their carbon emissions are coming from, which is where Henkel fits in. She says that they know how to calculate carbon emissions from transportation and housing, so she is currently researching carbon emissions for food production and transportation.

Armstrong is serving as an assistant to the organization as a whole, focusing on research and coordination. Currently she is finding new stewards to help further Stevens FORWARD!'s goals. According to the Stevens FORWARD! website, stewards are "residents of Stevens County and from all walks of life who all care deeply about the community. Stewards are leaders who take an integrated approach and build coalitions for action. They have 360-degree vision, recognizing the interdependencies between the economy, the environment and social equality. Stewards operate at the center of tough issues, not on the edges. They are risk takers. They are passionate and energetic. They are people of vision." If you are interested in becoming a steward, learning more about Stevens FORWARD! or getting involved in any capacity, contact [Armstrong](#). They are always looking for more people to get involved, especially students.

Henkel has enjoyed the learning opportunities this job has provided. When she first took the job, she thought she'd be encouraging people to "change a few light bulbs. I had no idea how in depth this job would be. I'm learning a lot I wouldn't have researched most of this information on my own time."

Armstrong says it can sometimes seem like there's a divide between the students on campus and the members of the community. She wanted to bridge that gap and get out into the community. She is thoroughly impressed with the Stevens FORWARD! members, most of whom are volunteering their time. She says that "everything important in the community, Stevens FORWARD! is striving to make even better" and that any job that helps support the town is pretty cool.

Stevens FORWARD! is an effort to create a brighter future for all residents of the county communities: Alberta, Chokio, Donnelly, Hancock, and Morris. They believe the best days for our community are ahead of us, and the best way to get there is to get on the same page regarding what we want and how to best work together. Funded through a variety of public and private sources including the county, the five cities, the townships, the University of Minnesota, Morris, financial institutions, and other local businesses, this initiative represents a genuine spirit of partnership and

collaboration. Their destiny statement reads: “Stevens County will be the model community in rural Minnesota, recognized for our progressive development and our innovations in renewable energy, agriculture, business, and education. We will achieve this by building upon the intellectual and social capital already present within the county, and by attracting new and diverse talent that will drive our economy and increase our population.”

The University of Minnesota, Morris [Center for Small Towns](#) is a community outreach program that 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 CST’s resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. CST’s mission is to focus the University’s attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota’s small towns with locally identified issues while creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at [morris.umn.edu](http://morris.umn.edu) or call 888-866-3382.