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**Bridget Billo '12 assists nonprofit Resource Connections**

*Summary: The goal is to set up hotspots in various locations and provide computers for the public's free use.*

(June 7, 2011)-For the past five months, University of Minnesota, Morris student Bridget Billo '12, Eden Valley, has been working through the Students in Service program with Resource Connections to increase broadband usage in Stevens County. The project's goal is to set up hotspots in various locations and provide computers at these locations for the public's free use. The purpose of Resource Connections is to strengthen the Stevens County Community through nonprofit cooperation.

Billo and Resource Connections have chosen pre-existing locations, ranging from restaurants to gas stations to grocery stores, whose owners are willing to allow computers to be set up in their establishments. Community members can use the computers provided or bring their own laptops. Another facet of the project is to help nonprofit organizations in Stevens County put their information online.

Providing training for community members who need to learn how to use the computers will be the next step. Billo says this has been "an awesome project" adding that it's important "to be able to get on the Internet and see what's going on in the world, especially in a rural situation," where access is sometimes more difficult to find. She hopes that the project has a positive effect on the county and helps people.

Resource Connections received funds for this project through its fiscal agent, the Stevens County Economic Improvement Commission, Inc. (SCEIC). The funds were provided by a Broadband Technical Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant from the United States Department of Commerce, under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, to the Blandin Foundation and SCEIC.

Students In Service is an AmeriCorps program that encourages college students to enroll as part-time AmeriCorps members. Coordinated by Minnesota Campus Compact, an organization that promotes civic engagement on college campuses in Minnesota, the program allows interested college students to work in a variety of positions to help better their communities. Qualifying activities include academic and co-curricular service learning, internships with nonprofit organizations, certain kinds of practicum hours, federal- or state-funded community service work study, and most kinds of volunteer work. Students commit to 300 hours of service throughout the year.

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. 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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