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2010 Small Town Symposium: Helping Minnesota's Small Towns Thrive

Summary: The June 9 and 10 event provides tools for communities to innovatively and successfully address small-town challenges.

(May 24, 2010)-Small towns across the country face tough challenges, from dwindling populations, decreased state and federal aid, smaller tax base, school closings, and barriers to adequate health care. Minnesotans from across the state will share innovative strategies to address small-town challenges at the [2010 Symposium on Small Towns and Rural-Urban Gathering](#) on Wednesday and Thursday, June 9 and 10, on the University of Minnesota, Morris campus.

“We realize that in tough economic times, it’s even more important to connect with people and ideas outside of our local situations,” says Bart Finzel, director, [Center for Small Towns](#) at the University of Minnesota, Morris, which co-hosts the event. “This symposium, ‘Finding Solutions and Redefining Communities,’ highlights our shared ingenuity and optimism, along with tools for how small towns can adapt and thrive.”

Rural-urban connections

The symposium, co-hosted with [Minnesota Rural Partners, Inc.](#), will also focus on strengthening rural-urban connections to foster innovation.

“Rural and urban areas have always been interdependent, and that’s becoming clearer to community members from small towns and larger cities across the state,” states Jane Leonard, Minnesota Rural Partners, Inc. president. “That interdependence includes everything from local sources of healthy foods, developing green energy, and caring for our water resources to spurring other innovations that can lead to business growth for the entire state. We’ve been hosting a series of discussions across the state to get Minnesotans talking and thinking about the future opportunities arising from stronger rural-urban connections it’s clear that there is so much to talk about here, and we’ve barely scratched the surface.”

To continue the statewide dialogue, Minnesota Rural Partners, Inc. will host a Rural-Urban Gathering at the Best Northland Prairie Inn in Morris on Wednesday, June 9, from 6:30 until 8:30 p.m. A goal of the evening gathering is to help establish a new Minnesota Rural-Urban Partnering Council. “Through the process, we hope to renew the framework for ongoing rural-urban dialogue and build new partnerships,” says Leonard. The Small Town Symposium opening reception follows the Rural-Urban Gathering.

Symposium highlights

On Thursday, June 10, the Small Town Symposium runs from 8 a.m. until 4:15 p.m. on campus. Symposium highlights include:

- gubernatorial candidates discussing “How Public Policies are Improving Rural Small Town Viability”.

- featured speaker Colleen Landkamer, Minnesota state director for USDA Rural Development and former president of the National Association of Counties.
- a panel of “real people doing real stuff,” emphasizing small communities with big success stories and breakout sessions on leadership, capacity building, and practical improvements for small communities.
- a Showcase Fair.

Please call 320-589-6451, or e-mail fluegel@morris.umn.edu to learn more about Showcase Fair opportunities for your community or organization.

A follow-up meeting of the Rural-Urban Gathering concludes the event on campus from 4:30 until 6 p.m.

A special invitation to attend is extended to young people. Contributions from generous sponsors are making scholarships available for youth and adult attendees. Cost to attend the event is \$65 per person. Low-cost lodging is available on campus or at area motels listed on the Web site.

For more information, including scholarship and registration details, visit the [Web site](#) or call 320-589-6451.

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