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Professor Bart Finzel to speak at healthcare forums

Summary: Finzel will present a survey completed by the West Central Healthcare Purchasing Alliance through the Small Towns Faculty and Student Fellows program.

(March 16, 2010)-The West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership will sponsor four public forums at the end of March to engage citizens, including small businesses and farmers, in a dialogue on healthcare coverage in rural west central Minnesota. The forums provide an opportunity to share information about healthcare conditions, both data and personal experiences to see presentations on local data gathered from a recent survey and to hear a synopsis of the national healthcare debate. The goal of the forums is to formulate strategies that could result in the development of appropriate health insurance options for rural west central Minnesota.

Employers of all sizes, including large and small employers, farmers, nonprofits, and local governments, healthcare providers, the self-employed, insurance agents, as well as citizens who have experienced a lack of available health care insurance options and increasing healthcare costs are all invited to attend.

To encourage attendance at the forums, four locations are available on two different days.

- March 30 in Alexandria at the Alexandria Holiday Inn, 5637 Highway 29 South, from 8 until 10 a.m.
- March 30 in Willmar at Ridgewater College, 2101 15th Avenue Northwest, from 2 until 4 p.m.
- March 31 in Morris at the Old No. 1 Southside, 412 Atlantic Avenue, from 9 until 11 a.m.
- March 31 in Montevideo at the Montevideo Community Center, 550 South First Street South, Town Plaza, from 2 until 4 p.m.

Bart Finzel, University of Minnesota, Morris professor of economics and Center for Small Towns interim director, will present a survey completed by the West Central Healthcare Purchasing Alliance through the University of Minnesota, Morris Small Towns Faculty and Student Fellows program. Virginia Wolking, representing the Center for Rural Affairs, Lyon, Nebraska, a group advocating for health reform addressing rural residents' needs, will speak on the national healthcare debate and facilitate a discussion of healthcare coverage and issues in the context of state and federal initiatives.

Recent statistics suggest that the number and percentage of rural Americans without health insurance continues to increase, while the number of rural employers offering healthcare benefits continues to decrease. As one employer said, "Competition for employees is based on healthcare coverage, not wages."

The West Central Healthcare Purchasing Alliance, a nonprofit group working to create new, more affordable, accessible options for healthcare designed to meet the needs of all people in West Central Minnesota, will coordinate the forums.

The West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, a University of Minnesota program working towards regional sustainability and active citizenship goals, will sponsor the meetings with local chambers of commerce in Morris, Willmar, and Alexandria, and the Montevideo Community Development.

For more information about the forums, contact Kristi Fernholz, West Central Healthcare Purchasing Alliance, at 320-226-5720, or Bart Finzel, University of Minnesota, Morris Center for Small Towns, at 320-589-6451.

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