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Center for Small Towns, City of Morris win Carter Award

Summary: The Center for Small Towns at the University of Minnesota, Morris and the City of Morris together have won the Carter Partnership Award for Campus-Community Collaboration. The award was presented by Minnesota Campus Compact during ceremonies held October 30 at the St. Paul RiverCentre. Former astronaut and senator John Glenn was the keynote speaker.

(October 31, 2006)-The Center for Small Towns at the University of Minnesota, Morris and the City of Morris together have won the Carter Partnership Award for Campus-Community Collaboration. The award was presented by Minnesota Campus Compact during ceremonies held October 30 at the St. Paul RiverCentre. Former astronaut and senator John Glenn was the keynote speaker.

Tom McRoberts, director of the Center for Small Towns at UMM, said that, while all of the finalists were “very, very good,” the UMM/City of Morris nomination was distinctive.

“What was unique about the nomination of the Center for Small Towns was the sustained cooperation of a host of community projects over an extended period of time,” said McRoberts. McRoberts and Morris Mayor Carol Wilcox accepted the award on behalf of the Center and Morris.

“This award is a tribute to former UMM chancellor David Johnson and former CST director Roger McCannon who established the Center for Small Towns,” added McRoberts, “and all of the CST staff who work day-to-day.”

In addition to McRoberts and Mayor Wilcox, those who attended the ceremony from Morris included UMM Chancellor Jacqueline Johnson, Ed Larson, Morris city manager Carol McCannon, Student Activities program coordinator, Roger McCannon, first director of the Center for Small Towns, Sue Dieter, general manager, Morris Sun Tribune, David Fluegel, Jessica Beyer, Ben Winchester, Curt Bredeson, Barb Hesse, all of the Center for Small Towns, and former UMM chancellor David Johnson.

The award is a national award presented by Minnesota Campus Compact to recognize and mobilize Minnesota campus-community collaborations. The award, named for the former president and Mrs. Carter as a tribute to their lifelong efforts to develop and support safe, healthy, and caring communities throughout the world, is presented to one recipient in every state where there is a program that addresses critical areas of public need undertaken by a college or university in partnership with a community group.

The partnership between the Center for Small Towns at UMM and the city of Morris has had many chapters. Community revitalization has been the underlying mission of the partners since inception, with notable success in addressing issues of community leadership, visioning, planning and dynamic action toward a stronger future. Today, the partnership has evolved into a purposeful and organized effort.

Success over the years has been measured by concrete outcomes such as the establishment of the Prairie Renaissance

Project that led to the formation of the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance (PRCA), which opened a cultural center and art gallery in Morris to serve the surrounding area.

With the support of the Center, the Prairie Renaissance Project also created partnerships with UMM and the Morris schools to enhance service learning as a community development tool by engaging students with community projects. Dozens of UMM students participated in a variety of roles to carry out activities including assisting with feasibility studies and survey tools about area parks and local foods projects, planning for a local business incubator, construction of a skate park, and mentorship programs.

The Center also partnered with Morris Area Schools to complete a strategic plan for the school, using the expertise of the UMM faculty and students. A similar approach was used to complete the comprehensive plan for the City of Morris. As a whole, these projects have contributed to the sky rocketing of civic engagement activities by UMM students.

Less tangible but just as important, the Center and the Morris partnership resulted in a clearly changed community sense of its ability to effect change and seize opportunity.

Today, the Center for Small Towns/City of Morris partnership has become a process with which to affect change in Morris, through shared decision-making and continual examination of opportunities. University faculty, staff, and students work mutually with hired and elected city and county officials, staff from non-profit organizations and grassroots initiatives to co-investigate issues and plan activities.

"I'm really proud to be a mayor of Morris because people just get excited about things," said Wilcox. "The City is vital – and that doesn't mean we don't have problems and we don't have challenges – but we work on them, we get them done and we work together."

The current initiative of the Center/Morris partnership features a three-year project focusing on housing, economics, and community organizing and neighborhood revitalization which is funded in part by a \$400,000 grant from Housing and Urban Development through the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) program. Challenges for small cities, like Morris, are different from those faced by metropolitan areas, and the solutions need to fit the local situation. A part of the project includes the development of a model for other small, rurally situated cities.

The COPC partnership features a participatory, grassroots approach to community improvement activities by creating new or strengthening existing partnerships between U of M departments and programs with private sector business interests, public sector housing agencies, City of Morris staff and elected officials, economic development representatives, social and cultural institutions, public school personnel, along with interested community residents. The broad range of participation reflects deep roots of support in the community and on campus.

Photo by Sue Dieter, Morris Sun Tribune: l-r Mayor Carol Wilcox, John Glenn, Tom McRoberts

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 or call 888-866-3382.