

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

Campus News Archive

Campus News, Newsletters, and Events

4-4-2006

Small Towns Symposium, Rural Summit

University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news

Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Small Towns Symposium, Rural Summit" (2006). *Campus News Archive*. 1775.
https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/1775

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus News, Newsletters, and Events at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus News Archive by an authorized administrator of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.

Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Small Towns Symposium, Rural Summit

Summary: Minnesota's small towns and rural areas will take center stage to show how they are "Working Better Together for the Common Good" - the theme for the combined Symposium on Small Towns and Minnesota Rural Summit, June 6-7 at UMM.

(April 4, 2006)-Minnesota's small towns and rural areas will take center stage early this June to show how they are "Working Better Together for the Common Good" – the theme for the combined Symposium on Small Towns and Minnesota Rural Summit, June 6 - 7 at the University of Minnesota, Morris.

It's an opportune event as budget deficits and changing priorities pull more and more federal and state resources out of rural areas and leave growing responsibilities for all kinds of community and economic issues to local leadership. Relative to a metropolitan area, the per-capita leadership requirements of small towns are staggering. How are our small towns and rural areas innovating to overcome this challenge?

This question will be the focus of combined Symposium & Rural Summit, which itself is a model of the cooperation happening across rural areas. This will be the fourth annual Symposium sponsored and held at UMM, and the 9th annual Summit held in a different location each year. It is the first time these events have combined. The event will showcase actions underway by people who recognize the changing demographics and landscape of rural Minnesota, the evolving economic opportunities, and who work together to sustain their communities. Organizers are also planning a legislative forum and are inviting the gubernatorial candidates to share their ideas.

"It was time to bring all the voices together," said Jane Leonard, president of Minnesota Rural Partners and a co-host of the combined Symposium-Summit. "It's clear that rural America is getting shut out of most policy decisions, unless there is a compelling economic interest, such as renewable energy, especially within the federal arena. It's now visibly apparent how much of the human infrastructure of state and federal government has disappeared and how adversely this can affect small towns. For example, state and federal staff that provided technical assistance and coordinated funding help to small businesses used to be much more widely available. Now they are highly centralized in regional centers or worse yet on the federal level, outside of Minnesota and the Midwest altogether. We are dis-investing in people, places and good ideas at exactly the wrong time. The most vulnerable parts of rural America are paying the price."

Sharing resources to reduce costs is not new, especially in rural communities. Counties have worked on joint-powers agreements, higher education facilities have partnered with cities, and community groups have worked together with state agencies. But often the sharing is within distinct sectors: housing, health care, education, business. There's a compelling need to work together across sectors, to renew the underlying social contracts of a healthy democracy, those that set aside more narrow self-interest and look at the big picture, the common good. And common good investments can also be cost-effective and cost-efficient.

Despite federal and state cutbacks, Minnesota is still resource-rich compared to other states. It's not always a lack of resources but a lack of coordination across sectors. "Coordination was something the federal and state governments used

to support, with very little monetary investment and a lot of return,” said Leonard, whose non-profit group, Minnesota Rural Partners, used to be funded by federal dollars to do just that. “The coordinating money no longer exists. But we continue to do what we can, because we believe in the ideals of common good.”

Common good has been an admired value in Minnesota’s small towns, but small towns are far from “common.” Despite the traditional stereotypes, “there are many ‘rurals’ in Minnesota,” said Ben Winchester, data analysis coordinator for the Center for Small Towns and the Symposium coordinator. “There are rural metropolitan, recreational and the remaining manufacturing/agricultural-dependent areas of the state.” In this diverse landscape, people and groups are witnessing shared planning requirements, growth patterns and decision-making needs. Today, some Minnesota small towns are challenged by the increasing complexities of growth—housing and development, tourism and environmental protections, and the influx of immigrant populations. Others need “smart decline” strategies as the population leaves.

Co-hosting the Rural Summit with the Symposium brings the annual summit for the first time ever to western Minnesota, said Leonard, who has worked in rural development for more than 20 years. “The Morris area is a model.” She noted. “It’s demonstrating the promise of 21st-century rural life: renewable energy value-added agriculture small, diverse business development higher education and creativity through arts and culture. It’s building a rural vision of Richard Florida’s (author of Rise of the Creative Class) new economic development maxim: technology, tolerance and talent.”

The symposium and summit will identify programs and services that can help communities work better together. Among the sessions will be one which Winchester has dubbed, “speed dating”—an opportunity to provide participants with quick one-on-one networking with resource providers. The Summit’s second annual Storytelling Contest will also be held, preceded by regional contests across the state in advance of the June meeting.

Partners in the combined event this year include Minnesota Public Radio and the University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. Minnesota Power and the West Central Initiative have signed on as sponsors thus far and organizers are looking for additional sponsors. The registration fee is \$60 Minnesota Public Radio members receive a 10 percent discount. Registration is up and running and open to anyone. Children’s activities are planned and housing is available on or off-campus. For more program information and to register visit www.centerforsmalltowns.org or www.minnesotaruralpartners.org, or call (320) 589-6451. For sponsorship information, call Jane Leonard at 651-645-9403 or email at jleonard@minnesotaruralpartners.org.

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.