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Outreach units at the University of Minnesota Morris have been named the Clifford J. Benson Center for Community Partnerships. This naming honors a leader in campus history and strengthens the University’s work in engagement, sustainability, and rural vitality.

“Senator Clifford J. Benson was dedicated to developing leaders who could ensure that rural communities can continue to thrive,” says Administrative Director of Civic Learning and Engagement Argie Manolis. “For more than 25 years the University of Minnesota Morris has been dedicated to campus-community partnerships that address community needs in small towns and ensure that our students can learn from—and become—the leaders rural communities need. Coordinating our engagement work under one umbrella will strengthen our ability to do both, and to honor Senator Benson’s life and legacy.”

Clifford J. Benson
Cliff (C.J.) Benson (1906–92) was an attorney and Minnesota State Senator from Ortonville from District 48 from 1959–62 and from District 24 from 1963–72. Those districts represented Morris and a large section of west central Minnesota. Senator Benson was a key figure in obtaining and locating the University of Minnesota campus in Morris.

Senator Benson often said that UMN Morris was his greatest achievement. His family still keeps the golden shovel he utilized at groundbreakings. And they are proud of his legacy on campus.

“This is a fitting recognition of his efforts,” says Benson’s son Steve. “My dad was a driving force behind UMM. He wanted to make things better for young people in western Minnesota. He was always for small Midwestern communities.”

Center for Community Partnerships
The Center for Small Towns (CST), Office of Community Engagement, and Office of Sustainability comprise the Clifford J. Benson Center for Community Partnerships, as approved by the campus community in spring 2020. A dedication celebration is planned for fall 2021.