What drives our resource engine?

What are we deeply passionate about?

What can we be best at?

Helping Communities Prosper

2011 Annual Report
Message from the Chair

It has been a pleasure to serve as chairman these past year. Thank you to the Board and Staff for a successful and exciting year.

During World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt was famous for communicating the state of our country and our progress in the war. It may be that our region has some Franklin Chats. Our UMRDC Region 6W serves 5 counties and 1x communities with the goal to improve the quality of life within our region.

Please take the time to look over our annual report and see the many projects the UM/VRDC is involved in. The Madison Art Council is a good example of how successful a project can be with communities working together, from Chisago to Clear City, Dassel to Springs, and cities in between.

Now for some stunning statistics that have been brought to my attention recently. Our UM/VRDC office opened in Appleton and staff was hired in July 1976 – 35 years ago. Many changes have taken place in the past 37 years, one being the population of the region.

1976 population: 68,009
2010 population: 45,150

Net loss of 22,859, 32.7% of our population!

Fremont is the top fifteen fastest declining counties in the state and in our region. Minnesota gained 385,000 people from 2000-2010. Our five county region lost 9,881. We have two counties that are 6th and 7th in the state with the lowest percentage of households with people under age 18, and 20% of our population is 65 and over (the state is 11.7%).

People are on the move today, according to migration statistics from the RSC, 2005-2008. Our five county region lost 1,025 persons.

Our 5 county region has 3,346 square miles with a population of 43,100.

Cass County has 2,027 square miles with a population of 28,567.

Delano County has 2,501 square miles with a population of 44,442.

St. Louis County, the largest in land area, has 6,225 square miles and a population of 720,226.

The question is, how long can we afford all the duplicated services for an area of our region? Do we need, and can we afford, 35 county commissioners, 1 sheriff, county attorney, engineers, auditors, county secretaries, data processing managers, land and resource managers, human resource directors, engineers, social service directors, veterans service offices, etc.? Maybe it’s time we start to consolidate some of our services.

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) REDISSESSON is about finding better ways to provide many services for all of Minnesota through:

- Bold Local Leadership.
- Increased Collaboration.
- Improved Program Efficiency.
- Structural Changes to the status quo.

Do we want to do something, or do we want the state to do it for us?
Thank you.

Message from the Executive Director

Throughout this report, you will find a “laundry list” of projects we have been working on over the last year. I do not anticipate the process of developing our annual report to laundry (and I do quite a bit of laundry at home with a farmer husband and three kids). Just like at home, we have to sort and organize and get things cleaned up and in order. This process is not easy, but it has to be done. After our laundering process, we end up with a daunting pile of projects scattered throughout the region that all support our mission: “Enable the region to thrive through assisting units of government.”

We see our mission seriously. Regional Development Commissions were created in legislation to serve and assist units of government, and we want to help with their needs. Those needs change and we need to respond to those changes.

You can see, by looking through this report, the diversity of projects we do. The needs we assess with vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In any given day or week, we write grants, provide technical services like mapping, review ordinances, file reports, manage finances for projects and organizations, administer surveys, develop comprehensive plans, we coordinate and facilitate meetings, research programs and funding sources, or find answers to questions from local, state or federal agencies. Depending on what we are working on, our expertise can be a mile wide and an inch deep or a mile deep and an inch wide. This is because we need to be as flexible as possible to respond to the needs of our regions. Often, there are new programs and new projects for us and we need to learn on the job. On other occasions, we have a great deal of confidence and experience to lend to the job.

That is why I love this job – the variety. I never know what kind of “laundry” we will need to sort and organize ever the coming year, but I know it is our job to get it done.

Mission

Enable the region to thrive through assisting local governments
Serving the 5 counties,
37 communities,
1 tribal nation,
94 townships, and
10 school districts
in the Upper Minnesota River Valley

The amount of money invested in our region as a result of the UMVRDC’s work:
$1,588,409
The UMVRDC’s Good to Great Process

The UMVRDC continues to implement our Good to Great strategic planning process that is defining the future for the agency.

The goal of this plan is to ensure the UMVRDC is best able to serve the needs of the local units of government it was created to serve.

Our strategic plan is based on Jim Collins’ book Good to Great. We have spent the last five years focusing on moving our organization from good to great by examining our organizational values, what we are passionate about, what we can be best at, and what drives our resource engine.

In 2010 the UMVRDC reviewed our strategic plan using Good to Great as a framework. Based on these ideas, we developed the three Hedgehog Concepts and our BHAGs (Big Hug Audacious Goals) shown on these pages.

What Can We Be Best At?

Matching local needs with information and funding to accomplish projects.

- Responding to community/regional needs
- Connecting communities with technical and financial resources
- Subject matter experts on planning, economic development, tourism, hazard mitigation, etc.
- Management of grants/programs
- Navigating state and federal regulations by calling in Stakeholders
- Using our wide range of experience and resources to find solutions

Finding funds for projects
- Blending local and technical knowledge
- Knowing our region and having a vested interest in it
- Working with multiple jurisdictions
- Managing time consuming projects that require good planning and budgeting resources
- Creating a written, budgeted, sustainable solution

What Are We Deeply Passionate About?

Solutions consistent with the values in Region 6W.

- The rural quality of life
- Helping communities not only survive, but prosper
- Making the region a great place to live, work and play
- Assisting local units of government to address issues such as planning, zoning, technology, transportation, development, and tourism
- Acting as liaisons with local state/related agencies
- Implementing completed projects
- Learning from the past and applying in the present to prepare for the future
- Driving to produce quality products
- Solutions that fit region’s real needs and serve of life
- Ongoing results
- Superior service

What Drives Our Resource Engine?

Excellent results at a reasonable price.

- Providing excellent service at reasonable cost
- Successfully completing projects with tangible results
- Responsive, knowledgeable service
- Treated staff with a wide range of expertise
- Local contacts
- Mastery

Enabling the region to thrive through assisting local units of government.

UMVRDC Mission

Enabling the region to thrive through assisting local units of government.

Big Huge Audacious Goals

“Big Huge Audacious Goals (BHAG) is action-oriented, clear (who, what, where, when), compelling and gripping—people “get it” right away, hold, bordering on heroic and the unattainable. It is a 10- to 30-year objective—like a big mountain to climb—that serves as a unifying focal point of effort, galvanizing people and creating a team spirit. It is crisp, compelling and easy to understand.”

(Good to Great, Collins, 2001)

BHAG Accomplishments in 2011

- Community Development BHAG: Be the premier agency for community development in Region 6W.
  - The UMVRDC had a total of 21 contracts for service with 7 different cities and 1 county covering five different types of planning, technical assistance, and grant writing.
  - 5 cities and 1 county entered into more than 1 contract with the UMVRDC.
  - 2 cities entered into 3 or more contracts with the UMVRDC for service during FY11.
  - The UMVRDC assisted in the coordination of 10 workshops/training in the region. (Broadband Class, BD Pro’s)
  - Prairie Waters Tourism Program was honored with a Collaboration Award from the Southeast Initiative Foundation.
  - Continue to implement activities for Prairie Waters Tourism Program.
  - Provided staff for the Mesabi Upper Minnesota River Art Crawl.
  - Provided staff for the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway.

- Marketing BHAG: All local units of government (LUoG) in Region 6W will know who we are and what we do.
  - Introduced new RDC website that reflects our current branding. Site is continually being updated and used as a tool for consistent, timely communication with LUoGs.
  - Continued to make all marketing efforts consistent with RDC branding.
  - Created new marketing packets that highlight various programs and services area while featuring specific project examples.
  - Sent at least 40 email blasts and at least 15 press releases.

- Board Stewardship BHAG: Have 100% active participation of the UMVRDC Board.
  - Presented board member orientation in 2011. Completed orientation with 2 other members are scheduled for orientation.
  - UMVRDC staff coordinated 4 speaker engagements for UMVRDC Commissions and other interested parties.
    - Cameron Macht, DQED Data Analyst, shared regional self employment data August 2011.
    - Bill Coleman, Blainline Foundation Consultant, gave a presentation on broadband in Minnesota, October 2010.
    - France Weisparm & Shaila Wahl, MnDOT Databases 8 4 Planners, discussed the Draft Area Transportation Improvement Program, March 2011.
  - Utilized the round robin at Commission meetings to share information and current issues with other jurisdictions.
  - Continued to utilize the Planner Update to inform and educate board members about the services and projects of the UMVRDC. Revised the planner update into a monthly email blast to elected officials and government staff in the region.
  - Surveyed board members to determine priorities for an annual board event. Determined a board tour was the priority for 2012. The tour will occur on the July 2013 board meeting day and will feature projects the RDC has worked on in the region.
  - Surveyed Commission members quarterly about the process, content and functions of the board meetings.
  - Featured 9 Commission members in quarterly newsletters.

UMVRDC’s Core Values

- Strong board stewardship
  - Staff is accountable to and driven by the Board and the units of government in this region
  - Integrity
  - Respectful, open and transparent
  - Agency’s role is to assist, guide and facilitate programs for units of government in this region
  - Excellent customer service
  - Progressive thought and action
  - Value all of our communities
  - Strive for excellence in work and products
  - Collaboration and cooperation
  - Value the region’s lifestyle and all it has to offer
  - Pride in the agency’s abilities and capabilities
Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) Grant Writing
Jodi and Michelle authored a short-form application for the City of Benson to rehabilitate eight homes, converting the work from a price grant to rehabilitation of 12 homes. The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) approved the grant application in June for additional homes and work will begin late summer 2011 on the rehabilitation projects.

Forecast Grant
The UMVRDC received $2,000 to create a public art plan for Region SW. Kiisti will gather a team of people who have an interest in public art in our region. Forecast will assist by researching other regional public art plans in areas similar to ours. This research will also outline the benefits for our communities and the economic impact of public art. Two planning meetings will be held with the local team to help complete a regional public art plan.

Shared Services Grant
Michelle authored a Shared Services Grant Application on behalf of Benno, Cleanen, Dienben, and Degeoff. They were awarded $25,000 from the State Fire Marshal’s Office to complete a shared fire and rescue services study for the four cities. A local taskforce will be used to assist with the following elements of the study:
- Benchmarking existing fire services by examining staffing, budget, technology, public safety, and facilities.
- Determining if shared services make sense from service level, political, technological, and financial perspectives.
- Making recommendations for shared operational models, governance, funding, staffing, technology and facilities.
The study is expected to be complete by the end of 2011.

Grant Management
Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) Grant Management
UMVRDC staff are experts in the fiscal administration and technical reporting obligations of grantees like the Small Cities Development Program. Below is a list of communities we are assisting in the fiscal administration of their grants:
- Benno - $127,400 for the rehabilitation of 8 homes.
- Benson - $487,324 for rehabilitation of 17 homes and 2 commercial properties.
- Appleton - $475,500 for rehabilitation of 15 homes and 10 commercial properties.
- Glendale/Granite Falls - $573,288 for rehabilitation of 22 homes, 4 rental properties, and 1 commercial property.

Browns Valley Flood Recovery
Barb continues to provide technical support and as the fiscal agent to the City of Browns Valley in their flood recovery efforts. Browns Valley has utilized over $1.9 million from local, state and federal funding sources for housing assistance, city repairs, and a diversion project.

Granite Falls Flood Recovery
During this fiscal year the City of Granite Falls received an additional $1,440,445.00 from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The Loree Improvement and Dike Road Repair Projects were completed this year. In all, over 200 residential and commercial properties will be protected by the levee that was raised. More repairs are being made on the dike road will provide additional erosion control during flood events. Work continues on the Pent三种 Street Project that provides flood protection for the residences on this street.
Since the flood of 1997 and 2001, UMVRDC staff have worked with the City of Granite Falls in their flood recovery efforts utilizing over $15.8 million from state and federal funding sources.

UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund
The UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) assists with financing for business start-ups, expansions, and renovation projects that increase working capital, fixed assets and real estate. A total of $110,000 in revolving loan funds were lent to three businesses.

Madison Metals received $37,200 for equipment and working capital to assist in the reopening of the local zinc mill.

All’s Mercantile in DeForest received $50,000 to assist with the purchase of the hardware store.

Hendel’s Chiropractic in Clearfield received $53,000 for equipment and working capital to help establish a new chiropractic office.

As a result of these three loans, 15 jobs are expected to be created and retained within the first 24 months.

In addition to RLF Funds, another $547,700 was leveraged in public and private funding creating a total of $607,300 of investment for these three projects.

Special Regional Project: Broadband
At the end of 2010, UMVRDC staff began work on a part of a successful 2 year $4.7 million federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTO) grant awarded to the Blandin Foundation. The UMVRDC region was selected as one of 19 communities in the state to develop projects and strategies to increase broadband utilization in the region. The project — called Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities (MIRC) — emphasizes broadband education, training, technical assistance and barrier removal. The project has numerous components that began implementing in the central year.

Broadband Classes for Businesses
The University of Minnesota Extension is encouraging local businesses to use the Internet to reach new customers, sell more goods and services, and stay connected with their existing customers. They are hosting 21 free classes to reach interested technology people connected with their customers. They are hosting 21 free classes to reach interested business owners.

PCs for People & Atomic Learning
The UMVRDC worked with county Human Service agencies to distribute 25 refurbished computers from the non-profit PCs for People to low income individuals in the region. These recipients also receive a free one year subscription to Atomic Learning that provides an endless array of training modules and internet literacy.

Digital Literacy Classes
The Southeast Minnesota Workforce Center and Basic Education (ASED) received $45,300 for Digital Literacy online curriculum instruction. Training courses will teach the following skills:
- Using a computer, mouse, keyboard, and internet.
- Develop a resume, do an online job search, apply for jobs online.
- Prepare for employment (career goals, interests and abilities, possible jobs, etc.).
- Prepare basic computer tasks on the job.
- Understand basic online searches and internet research.

Knowledge Worker Classes
Working with Minnesota Learning Communities, the Knowledge Worker course will provide online instruction for knowledge-based occupations. The class will teach career pathways, technology in the workplace, and innovation, as well as problem solving, critical thinking, importance of networking relationships, and entrepreneurship.

Local Demonstration Projects Funded Through MIRC
Dawson School District, $25,000. Creation of a Minnesota Learning Community, a Digital Literacy Tech Team, and a hybrid (online and classroom) Teacher Certification Training Academy.

Lac qui Parle County Economic Development Authority, $25,000. Funding for the Loi Center Committee.

Big Stone County Public Internet Office, $6,514. Provide more convenient public access to government information.

Orono Public Library & Orono Economic Development Authority, $30,000. Assist businesses in developing websites and online information.

Johnson Memorial Health Services, $12,500. Using computerized technology to track and monitoring of patients.

Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission, $4,600. Create website for the cities of Bellingham and Echo.

MIRC peer region’s personnel status update to the MIRC Steering Committee in May 2011.
Best at... Helping Communities Prosper

Technical Assistance

Clara City Comprehensive Plan

Kris Kier is working with Clara City to create their first comprehensive plan so the city can make informed decisions to guide the future. Kris and Jacki are working with the Clara City planning commission to research, gather public input and write the plan.

The plan will include several community projects, chapters on land use, zoning, parks and recreation, economic development, transportation and public utilities/infrastructure, and a section on implementation with goals and action plans. In order to gather information from the public, Clara City has developed a city-wide survey to be distributed this summer and will incorporate the results into the plan.

County Hazard Mitigation Plans

Katie and Jacki completed All-Hazard Mitigation Plan updates for Big Stone, Chippewa, and Yellow Medicine Counties and the Upper Sioux Community Tribal Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) to update the plans for the fall of 2011. The All-Hazard Mitigation Plan challenges our counties and cities to determine the likelihood of disasters, refine strategies to mitigate potential damages, and look at the costs of disasters. These plans are now ready to be used as resources to support recovery to the Minnesota Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) and FEMA for mitigation planning and assistance. All plans completed can be found on the UMRVDC website at www.umrvdc.org.

Transportation

UMRVC Transportation Planning

The UMRVDC continues to provide local transportation planning assistance to the region through a contract with the MnDOT Department of Transportation. Transportation issues continue to be a special issue for our region. We rely heavily on the existing transportation system to get to work, school, medical appointments, tourism, and to get commodities in and out of the region. The UMRVDC would like to ensure the local units of government to ensure people and businesses of this region are adequately served by all modes of transportation.

Michelle participated in 4T and 4T meetings to review and rank applications for 2015 federal funds for roads, bridges, trails, public transit, and railroads. The total investment in Region 19 for 2012-2015 is $52,020,756 in federal funds.

Swift County Zoning Update

Swift County contracted with the UMRVDC to update their current Zoning Ordinance and additional annexation and rezoning work to be included in a Code of Ordinances. This project included review of Rural Planning Management, Shoreline Management and Protection, and five special land use regulation ordinances, which now make up a comprehensive Zoning and Land Regulation Ordinance. Additional ordinances include an updated Park Ordinance and Mini-Trail Ordinance. Katie also updated their Zoning Map to complement the new Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Map will be available to the general public on the Swift County website in HTML format, as well as township-specific zoning maps to show increased detail of zoning districts.

This project is an extension of Swift County’s Comprehensive Plan, which was created in collaboration with the UMRVDC in 2007.

Upper Sioux Community Energy Plan

The Upper Sioux Community has contracted with the UMRVDC to complete a long range energy plan that is expected to be finished this fall. The energy plan involved a panel discussion on renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, biomas, and geothermal. The project also incorporates energy audits and data collected by the Upper Sioux Community staff about existing energy usage on the reservation. This fall, as part of the long range plan development processes and strategies for energy vehicles, the community will be identified and considered for implementation. This energy plan will be the first of its kind in our region and we look forward to continuing to work with the Upper Sioux Community and completing their long range energy plan.

Gracerville Website

The city of Gracerville has a new presence on the internet! They contracted with the UMRVDC to set up a OneVoice website for their community, and it went live in November 2010. Kris worked with the Gracerville city clerk to determine what should be included, gather content, take additional photos, and create a custom design. The website features many photos from in and around the community.

Gelatex Regional Recruitment

Key Economic Findings of Newcomers in Region 6W:

- 66% reported household incomes of $52,000 or greater in 2009.
- Total household incomes of $3,7 million in 2009.
- Due to the spending of this income, an additional $17.1 million in economic output was created in the five-county region in 2009.
- This included 10 additional jobs and $433,000 in labor income. In other words, for every 3 “newcomer” households in this region, on average, received $57,000 in new income.
- Creation of $153,000 in state and local tax collections in 2009.

For the last 2 years, Jacki and Kris have facilitated a group of regional economic development professionals looking for strategies to attract and retain higher, higher wage demographics to the region. Research has shown that those in the age range of 35 to 45 years are seeking out rural lifestyles.

The topic of their meetings has been coined “Regional Recruitment” and the project includes three phases: education and research, mobilization of resources, and implementation and marketing. Work completed to date includes:

- Focus groups with new residents in the region to understand influential factors in their decision to move to our region.
- A mail survey was done to ask additional new residents about their influential factors.
- An economic impact analysis of newcomers based on data collected from surveys and focus groups.
- An analysis of where the highest concentration of potential new residents resides in Minnesota.
- An analysis of the online presence of businesses in all 57 cities in the region.
- A report called “Regional Recruitment: Strategies to Attract and Retain Newcomers” can be found on the UMRVDC website.

Our regional team has been fortunate to receive support and assistance from the University of Minnesota including Extension, Crookston BDA Center, Morris Center for Small Towns Students in Service Intern, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Community Assistance Program Intern.
**Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway**

"The purpose of the Alliance is to encourage economic development through the promotion, preservation, and protection of the intrinsic qualities of the Minnesota River Valley."

The 287-mile Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance is a group of committed individuals representing a variety of interests including Chambers of Commerce, various attractions and historic sites, State Parks, local and state governmental bodies, private businesses, and concerned individuals. UMVRDCA has been providing funding and facial services to the Byway since 1996.

Projects include:

- Distributed Byway Guides to Byway businesses and attractions, at the Mall of America, Travel Information Centers on the state’s northern border, as well as fulfilling visitor requests.

  ![Image of Byway Guide]

- Received funding from the Minnesota Historical Society’s Historical and Cultural Grant Funds made possible through the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment for 10 interpretive signs about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 along the Minnesota River Valley.

- Received a Schmidt Foundation grant to create the U.S.-Dakota War interpretive project and additional interpretation along the Minnesota River.

- Submitted one application for federal Byway funding to update and enhance the corridor management plan.

- Updated aging byway road signs along the byway.

- Hosted two familiarization tours. In September 2010, over 20 people toured in and around the town of Redwood Falls, including Alexander Ramsey Park and Chief Dan George site.

- The other tour was held in June 2011 and started at the New Ulm library and toured Fort Ridgely, the Lower Sioux Agency, Redwood Falls, and Morgan.

**Meander Art Crawl**

Krisi and Jennifer helped coordinate planning, manage finances, and develop and implement marketing for the 7th annual Meander in October 2010. Ninety-five local artists participated.

**2010 Meander Economic Impacts**

- $69,305.00 in Meander art sales was reported by artists during the Meander weekend, an increase of 4% from the previous year.

- The average art sale per artist was $1,652.

- 83% of the money raised to organize the Meander through sponsors and artists was spent on products or services (printing, paper, advertising, graphic design, staffing) in the five-county area.

- Customers visited an average of 11 studios over the weekend.

- 70% of customers said the quality of the art was excellent.

- 70% of customers said their overall experience was excellent.

- 80% of customers said they plan to attend the next Meander.

**Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Regional Tourism**

The mission of Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is to promote our area as a great place to visit, live and work, and staff has continued to seek out projects that accomplish that mission.

In May 2010, Prairie Waters received the SouthWest Initiative Foundation’s (SWIF) Collaboration Award. The award was a great honor, and included invitations to the SWIF East of Southwest Minnesota 25th Anniversary Banquet, a handcrafted vase by potter Bill Coxman, and a grant of $1,000. Krisi and Jennifer accepted the award on behalf of Prairie Waters.

Other highlights from the past year include:

- Continued to promote the area and highlight events on our Facebook Fan page. We currently have over 600 fans that we interact with weekly updates.

- Redesigned the Prairie Waters Regional Visitors Guide. This full color, glossy publication is the premier visitors guide for our region with 25,000 copies printed and distributed throughout the state and mailed to those who request information.

- Wrote a successful grant to Explore Minnesota Tourism procuring more than $10,000 for advertising in our region.

- Hosted a free wine tasting at Hoffman Vineyards near Clara City for our Annual Gathering. The event was a great success with approximately 80 people in attendance.

- Maintained and updated the Prairie Waters website.

- Received over 3,000 requests for information in 2010 and 1,400 in the first half of 2011.

- Created and placed numerous ads in our regional papers, statewide, and in national publications such as Midwest Living, AAA, and South Dakota Magazine.

**Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Regional Tourism**

**www.prairiewaters.com**

866.866.5432

**Where Attendees Came From**

- 42% from within five-county area
- 13% out of state
- 15% metro area
- 7% greater Twin Cities area

**Average Expenditures Per Customer: $106.47**

- $39.76 lodging
- $51.00 Meander art
- $7.22 other shopping
- $95.65 food

**Meander 2011 is September 30, October 1 & 2!**
Fact

The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Lesson

In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement — to stand by one’s heart or core values and encourage the heart and core of others — is the quality of “honking” we seek.