

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Focus ON THE REGION

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West Central Initiative is an equal opportunity provider, lender and employer.

Live Wide Open Helps Host Welcome Home Events

IF YOU WERE IN BARNESVILLE, BATTLE LAKE, FERGUS FALLS OR PERHAM the morning of Dec. 22, you would have seen more activity than usual at some of the newer buildings in these cities. The four communities participated in "Welcome Home," an event aimed to show off what's new in their city to those who are returning home for the holidays, and for newcomers to their communities. Live Wide Open, a regional marketing campaign of WCI, co-hosted the events.

"Many people think their hometowns haven't changed since they left. We wanted to surprise and delight them," said Rick Schara, Live Wide Open coordinator. "We want to remind them that where they grew up will always be their home and they will always be welcome back to live or visit."

If you want to show off YOUR community and are interested in future Welcome Home events, contact Rick at 800-735-2239 or rick.schara@wci.org.



COMING UP

March 8: Community Change Makers Grant applications due. changemakers.wcif.org

March 14: WCI Pop-Up Office Hours in Starbuck and Glenwood; Get-Together at Minnewaska House, 4-6 p.m. RSVP at <http://event.wcif.org>

March 21: Your Farm Legacy luncheon for area landowners. RSVP by calling 800-735-2239 or email donna@wci.org

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Becoming resilient—one community at a time

THE COMMUNITIES OF GRANT COUNTY want to become healthier, happier places for their kids to grow up. Their first step: gathering together to learn, listen and share through Community Resilience Conversations.

Maybe you've heard about these talks before. The goal is to build awareness around Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how they impact our whole society. Participants also learn how communities can counteract and reduce ACEs by becoming more resilient. The Grant County Child and Youth Council (CYC) is hosting the conversations through a pilot project with Minnesota Communities Caring for Children (MCCC) with funding from the Minnesota Department of Human Services and now also a West Central Initiative Community Change Makers grant.

ACEs? Resilience? What do they mean?

ACEs are significant childhood traumas that can result in changes in brain development. They may affect learning ability and social skills, and can result in long-term health problems into adulthood.

Population Attributable Risk calculations show that people with higher ACEs make up 32.5 percent of alcoholics/binge drinkers, 67 percent of suicides and 40 percent of people diagnosed with recent depression, to name just a few health and social concerns.

Here's the good news. While ACEs are common, they do not determine a life course. Resilience is a natural counter-weight to ACEs. Resilience is the ability to thrive, adapt and cope despite tough and stressful times. Building resilient communities that support families is one bold step toward reducing the devastation of ACEs.

That's exactly what the CYC is doing through the Community Resilience Conversations. CYC Administrator Deb Hengel is coordinating and facilitating the community gatherings along with Anna Johnston, Western Regional ACE Training Coordinator for MCCC, and community leaders from all Grant County communities.

"Conversation takes it to the next level by discussing what can we do individually and as a community," Hengel says.

So far there have been two community conversations in Elbow Lake, one on a weekday for the community and area child care providers, and one on a Saturday for additional community members.



"At the initial Community Resilience Conversations held in November, we heard people identify that the one thing we could do better in our community to help improve the health, safety and productivity of all people, would be to be more welcoming," Hengel says. "They used terms such as 'Be more supportive to members who are new or less known/involved', 'Reach out', 'Welcome the transplants' and 'Start a newcomers' group'."

What does a resilient community look like? For one, it's a community that is welcoming to all and seeks to engage newcomers. A great example is the "Welcome Home" events held throughout the region this past December (story on back page), including Battle Lake (top photo) and Fergus Falls (bottom photo).

The conversations have been beneficial for Hengel in her community roles. She wears many hats as Elbow Lake mayor and coordinator for both the Grant County Early Childhood Initiative and the Grant County CYC. "As a mayor, it's economic development as well as resilience building. I have the opportunity to take these same comments to our city council. We need to discuss what we might do better to welcome our new residents, to find out what they would like to do in our community and to highlight what our city has to offer."

Hengel is currently organizing community task forces to help plan a series of Community Resilience Conversations that will be held in five additional Grant County communities, followed by seven county-wide meetings involving representatives from all of the cities. Individuals interested in helping plan and/or host a Grant County conversation can contact her at dhengel@isd2342.org.

Community Resilience Conversations are occurring all around our nine-county region. Find out more about what's happening in your area, and about community resilience in general, at wci.org/resilience/.

Focus ON THE REGION

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Excellence. Accountability. Impact

our mission
Serving to improve west central Minnesota through funding, programs and technical assistance.

our vision
Uniting ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow.



WCI receives gold-level Bicycle Friendly Business designation

WHEN PLANNING DIRECTOR Wayne Hurley heard the news that West Central Initiative's Bicycle Friendly Business (BFB) designation was renewed for another four years, he was thrilled. When he heard that the organization went from silver level to gold level, he was over the moon.

He and Associate Planner Jill Amundson put together the rigorous application for the designation, a program of The League of American Bicyclists, a national bicycling and advocacy organization of nearly 20,000 members.

BFB requirements identify incentives, programming and amenities proven to enable

and inspire more people to ride bikes. Among those offered by WCI are a shared staff bike, bicycle education for staff and partners, and technical assistance on bicycle issues to communities in our region. In addition, WCI offers secure bicycling parking for both employees and guests.

"Much of the transportation planning that we do in the region focuses on bicycle and pedestrian issues, so we advocate for bicycling best practices all the time," said Hurley. "In addition, we assist communities and businesses in our planning area with their Bicycle Friendly America applications. We hope to

bring more awareness to bicycling and recognize the great things being done for people riding bikes throughout west central Minnesota."

"As a result of these efforts, WCI showcases social responsibility, a commitment to sustainability and reducing the environmental footprint, and supports long-term health benefits, both physical and mental," said WCI President Anna Wasescha. "Leading by example is a great way to encourage others to become more bike friendly, which is why being recognized as a Gold-Level Bicycle Friendly Business is such a great honor for WCI."

WCI is in good company in west central Minnesota. Ringdahl Ambulance of Fergus Falls also received the gold-level designation. The City of Frazee and Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area's bronze-level designations were renewed, and the City of Battle Lake became a brand-new bronze-level Bike Friendly Community.

WCI and other businesses have access to a variety of tools and technical assistance from the League to become even more bicycle friendly. To apply or learn more about the BFB program, visit the League online at www.bikeleague.org/business.



Welcome, Marie!

MARIE SHORES joined West Central Initiative this past December as part-time accounting assistant. She assists Accounting Manager Kathy Nordick to serve WCI's donors, loan recipients, grantees and component funds.

Originally from Morris, Marie has lived and worked in and around Alexandria and Fergus Falls for the past 20 years. She is also a realtor with Century 21 Vista.

"I have a passion for helping others. Throughout the years as a realtor I have realized how much helping others is a huge part of me. Part of what encouraged me to apply for a position at West Central Initiative is the knowledge that they are constantly working to help the people in our area," Marie said.

She is an active member of Lakes Area Professional Women (LAPW).

"As a Leadership Team member with LAPW, I get to work to promote women in the workplace and provide much needed scholarships to the youth in our area," Marie said.

Marie and her husband, Bill, can often be found enjoying the outdoors with their three children and two dogs.

How the gift of farmland benefits your community for years to come

FOR GENERATIONS, farming families have been at the heart of rural communities. It's where they do their shopping, banking and socializing. They bring their grain to the local elevator and worship at the local churches. They send their kids to the local schools and cheer on the home team. They serve on boards and attend fundraisers and festivals. So, when a member of these community-minded families moves or dies, his or her loss is keenly felt.

West Central Initiative developed the Heart-Land Giving farmland retention program for families that are thinking ahead about how the loss of their local support could impact their communities and the causes that are important to them.

By setting up a donor advised fund with a gift of tillable land to West Central Initiative, the donor is given the opportunity to keep the asset of that land in production and under local ownership. It also allows the donor to leave a legacy to benefit local charities that make the community stronger and a better place to live. The landowner can receive a tax deduction for the charitable portion of the gift, bypass capital gains tax, and reduce potential estate tax liability. WCI will continue to pay property taxes on the land so the county maintains its tax base. WCI will also make every effort to rent the land to producers from the area.

Former WCI board member and area farmer Dan

Ellison was on the committee to establish the Heart-Land Giving program. Similar farmland donation programs have been successful with other community foundations in Greater Minnesota. Dan has been eager to see the same success in west central Minnesota.

"In my community of Herman, I can think of two or three different times there has been an elderly widow, widower or bachelor who passed on and they could have done something with just one quarter of a section. The rent from that would have made a huge difference to our community to have that available every year to support youth organizations and community organizations," Dan said.

Set up as a donor advised fund through West Central Initiative, the donor has a say in where contributions are made.

"They can decide what they want the money used for—if, like, the county fair is really important to them, they can say 'I want money



Rick Schara and Rebecca Petersen invite area landowners to our March 21 Your Farm Legacy luncheon to learn about WCI's Heart-Land Giving land donation program. Contact Rebecca to learn more at 800-735-2239 or rebecca@wcif.org.

to go to the fair each year.' Or they can decide to rent to a young farmer to help them get started in farming. You get to decide," Dan said.

"West Central Initiative honors the wishes of the donor. I think it's just a great thing. Somebody does this and a part of them lives on. Fifty years from now they'll remember your name, they'll remember who you are and what was important to you."

Is Heart-Land Giving a viable giving option for you or your client? Contact Rebecca Lynn Petersen to learn more at 800-735-2239 or rebecca@wcif.org. WCI encourages individuals consult their tax- and estate-planning professionals before entering any planned gift.

WE'D LIKE TO FUND many more change-making ideas in our nine-county region. Look around your community, get together with residents, your nonprofits, your schools, your city or county government, and do some brainstorming. Then give Wendy Merrick a call at 800-735-2239 to talk about your idea.

More information and application at changemakers.wcif.org.

Deadline for applications is Friday, March 8.

The latest change-making ideas in west central Minnesota!

WCI AWARDED A TOTAL OF \$51,400 for 11 projects through its Community Change Makers grant program. Read more about the projects at blog.wcif.org.

- Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County's Aging in Place program.
- The Bridge Community Pantry to help expand its current space.
- The Otter Tail County Historical Society for planning a new museum.
- Pelican Rapids Public Schools in collaboration with Trinity Lutheran Church to help individuals complete an online Child Development Associate program.
- The City of Donnelly to help meet building ADA requirements.
- United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties to help fund the Douglas County Early Childhood Initiative's Child Care Story Hour.
- West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc. to support its Launch Pad Homelessness Pilot Program.
- Essentia Health St. Mary's to help fund The Hornets Hive listening sessions in Frazee, Vergas and Wolf Lake.
- Springboard for the Arts for its Hinge Homecoming Residency, which is based in Fergus Falls.
- RUSC (Raising Up Stevens County) Kinship's for its Lunch Buddies mentoring program.
- West Central Area Schools to host "Community Resilience Conversations" throughout Grant County.



Hinge Homecoming resident Katelyn Haugdahl, originally from Henning, held film-making workshops for youth.

