

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

# FOCUS

on the region

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

FOCUS on the region is published quarterly by West Central Initiative

1000 Western Ave  
PO Box 318  
Fergus Falls, MN 56538  
218.739.2239  
800.735.2239  
wci@wci.org

wcif.org | blog.wcif.org

facebook.com/westcentralinitiative

twitter.com/wciminn



**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.

## Vision in Action



Minnewaska Schools' first-ever Maker Camp. Funded in part by a Grants in Place award from the Rural Schools Collaborative and West Central Initiative. *More of the story inside!*

### Vision in Action

## Maker Camp Inspires Local Students to Create

West Central Initiative's vision is "uniting ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow." This story is a great example of how WCI partnered with the Rural Schools Collaborative to provide funding for its Grants in Place program.

Young children with power tools are not everyone's idea of a fun time, but for Jodee Lund, technology integration specialist at Minnewaska Area Schools, it was a dream come true with the school's first-ever Maker Camp. Jodee and colleagues had a vision of creating a makerspace in the school that would inspire their students to design, innovate and create using technology, machinery, tools and critical thinking skills.

During Maker Camp, held the week of July 31-Aug. 4, more than 50 local elementary children worked together to design and build free little libraries that will be placed throughout the community.

"[In the Makerspace] we can give students real world problems, with real technology," said Lund.

The week started with learning design basics then dividing into groups and developing prototypes for the little libraries. The children then voted on their three favorites. The top vote-getters included a structure with a built-in bench and roof, a gingerbread house and a vending machine design.

Hilltop Lumber provided the lumber free of charge, and a grant from the Rural Schools Collaborative and West Central Initiative helped with funding the week-long camp.

"Maker Camp was a hit," said Lund. "Our students loved the project."

WCI is pleased to partner with the Rural Schools Collaborative to help fund its Grants in Place program that encourages teachers to develop place-based projects that connect students with community. You can learn more at <http://ruralschoolscollaborative.org/>.



Technology Integration Specialist Jodee Lund (left) lent advice to campers designing a "little library" prototype.



Students broke into teams to design and construct "little library" prototypes. This design with a built-in bench was one of three chosen by the students to be built.

## WCI Welcomes New Board Members



John Dahlseng



Mark Helland



Steve Kent

The West Central Initiative Board and staff welcome three new board members: John Dahlseng, Mark Helland and Steve Kent.

John Dahlseng is from Lowry and will be the board's Pope County representative. The former owner of LMC Enterprises, Inc., also known as Lowry Manufacturing Company, he still helps with product design. He is active in the Lowry Lions Club and serves on the BenWade Township Board. He and his wife, Judi, have four children and seven grandchildren.

Mark Helland will represent Otter Tail County on the board. He is the vice president of customer

service at Otter Tail Power Company. Mark joined the utilities company in 1998 as director of marketing and development. He has also served as director and later vice president of marketing and South Dakota and Minnesota customer service. Before joining Otter Tail Power Company, Mark was an economic development consultant, worked for the City of Fergus Falls, was a building contractor, and farmed.

He is a native of North Dakota. He attended Minnesota State

Community and Technical College, Fergus Falls, and the University of Minnesota.

Steve Kent is from Breckenridge and represents Wilkin County. He has a 39-year career in the seed business, primarily involving sunflowers. Most recently, he was the past president of Seeds 2000, Inc. based out of Breckenridge. Now semi-retired, he works part-time as a sunflower product specialist for Nuseed.

Steve served as volunteer chair of the National Sunflower Association research committee for eight years.

Active in the community, Steve has coached several youth sports, has served as president of local sports booster clubs, and has been a Sunday school teacher for more than 20 years.

Steve and his wife Nancy have four children and nine grandchildren. They enjoy spending time with grandchildren and fishing and hunting.



## Putting the Heart in "Heart-Land" Giving

There's a reason we named our farmland donation program "Heart-Land Giving." First of all, farmland is at the heart of our region's commerce. Some of the most fertile land in the Midwest is right here in west central Minnesota. The towns we serve sprouted up to provide support for farm families—grain elevators, banks, grocery and drug stores, implement dealers, schools, clinics and more. In

return, these families have provided a lot of support to their hometowns. They are the heart of their communities, making sure these rural cities continue to prosper for their children and their children's children. But times change, and fewer children want to take over the farm. The decision to sell can impact not just the family but the community as well. That's where Heart-Land Giving comes in. West Central Initiative designed

Heart-Land Giving as a way for people to donate tillable land, keep it locally farmed AND provide income for charitable giving to the communities they love.

Are you trying to decide what to do with your farmland? We invite you to learn more about Heart-Land Giving. Contact Tom McSparron or Sandy King at 800-735-2239, or visit [heartlandgiving.wcif.org](http://heartlandgiving.wcif.org). As always, we recommend you consult with your financial advisor about your estate plans.



The West Central Early Childhood Initiative coordinators honored WCI's early childhood coordinator Nancy Jost with an "Our Nancy" award for her tireless dedication to our youngest children. From left to right are Diane Strobel, Jena Burt, Fran Rethwisch, Nancy Jost, Julie Smith, Carolyn Strnad, Marsha Erickson, Kristi Maas and Connie Fields. Not pictured: Deb Hengel, Jeannie Pederson.

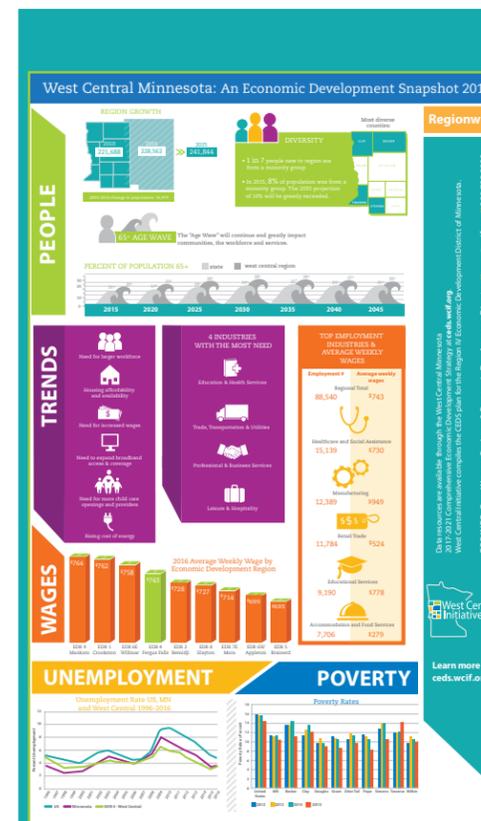
### Thank You, Early Childhood Funders!

A \$120,000, two-year **Otto Bremer Trust** grant to WCI will help more children in Greater Minnesota receive dental care and educate families and child care providers on the importance of good oral health. The grant will support and expand the reach of the Early Childhood Dental Network throughout rural communities in southern, central and southwest Minnesota.

A \$60,000 grant to WCI from the **Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation** will help fund a two-year pilot project to provide culturally relevant child care for

Somali-American children in Moorhead. The grant funds will help provide coaching to Somali women to become legal non-licensed or licensed child care providers, and learn the skills needed to operate a child care business.

The **McKnight Foundation** recently renewed its commitment to the statewide PreK to Grade 3 Design Team by awarding WCI \$90,000 to support the group's next phase, ensuring Minnesota has a stellar early childhood workforce to educate and care for its young children.



### An Economic Snapshot of West Central Minnesota

Every year, Business and Economic Development Director Greg Wagner and Donor Services Officer Tom McSparron take the "Tom and Greg Show" on the road to share information about West Central Initiative and our region with county commissioners and city council members.

As part of WCI's work as the Economic District Designee, Greg pulls together an economic snapshot of our region and each of the nine counties we serve.

Interested in learning how west central Minnesota is doing? An infographic for the region and each county is available for you to view at [ceds.wcif.org](http://ceds.wcif.org).



### What's Your Workforce Solution?

Building a strong workforce is vital to the success of our businesses and our region.

WCI encourages nonprofits and governmental entities in the nine counties we serve to develop solutions to help develop projects through our Workforce Solutions grant program.

Learn more at [workforcesolutions.wcif.org](http://workforcesolutions.wcif.org).