

ANNUAL REPORT



2022

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Introduction:

Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) is a regional development commission created as a result of Minnesota's 1969 Regional Development Act. In other words, we are an independent, regional government entity created through state statute. We serve the four Minnesota counties of Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville. This geographic area is also known as Economic Development Region/District 6E. We're governed by a Board of Commissioners, which includes elected officials from our counties, cities, townships, and school districts. Additionally, our Commission includes individuals who represent specific business/employment sectors or groups of people (e.g., aging individuals, people with disabilities, and youth) in the public interest.

MMDC partners with local stakeholders to strengthen communities, improve quality-of-life, and increase opportunities for economic prosperity. We frequently provide technical assistance to communities, businesses, and local organizations who may not have the internal capacity needed to achieve goals related to planning or other improvement-related goals. We also work to help our residents and communities overcome shared barriers to economic success. To that end, we often collaborate to fill workforce, housing, childcare, broadband, and transportation and housing gaps. This while also equipping and empowering those who can positively impact their communities through private business ventures/investment, volunteerism, or other community participation.

Read on to learn about some of our 2022 highlights!



A Message from MMDC Commission Chair, Shawn Mueske:

It continues to be an exciting time of transition for Mid-Minnesota Development Commission. A long-tenured staff and Commission achieved great things across our region over several decades. However, new opportunities and recent retirements have given us occasion to build a new team prepared to continue the tradition of excellence our taxpayers expect. Our new MMDC team has brought us fresh ideas and programs, along with an exciting, can-do culture. Executive Director Eric Day has provided exemplary leadership during this transition, with the support and guidance of outstanding Commissioners who are truly invested in this region. As we continue our MMDC evolution, we enjoy a time of opportunity and excitement.

MMDC's Revolving Loan Funds (RLF) remain a great success. Our Legacy RLF continues its long-standing assistance to businesses throughout our region. In 2020, our CARES RLF expanded our ability to invest in our region's economy. All funds were quickly disbursed and are now being re-lent as payments come in and new applications are approved. So great was MMDC's RLF success that we received a grant from the U.S. EDA for the capitalization of a third fund – the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) RLF. Like the others, this fund will be used to foster business establishment and expansion, creating and preserving jobs throughout our four counties.

The creation of the Mid-Minnesota Community Enhancement Fund has provided MMDC an avenue to provide direct financial assistance to support our communities in unique and impactful ways. The infusion of these small but mighty grants has supported improved emergency response/public safety as well as the addition of public amenities across the region.

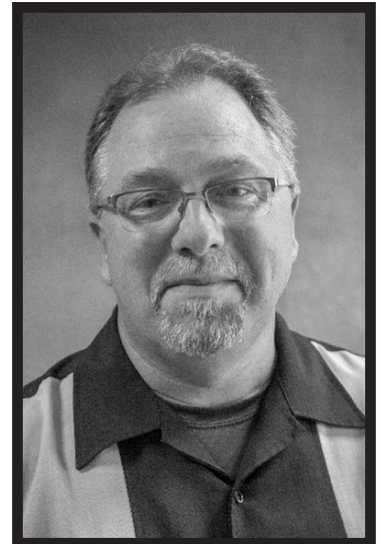
MMDC remains committed to eliminating transportation gaps for all of our residents. While collaboration and the coordination of multiple entities remains a daunting challenge, MMDC is well-positioned to overcome and we've helped our region make significant movement toward this goal.

MMDC has worked hard to improve regional outreach and communication. Our new, multi-faceted approach has put us in view of new audiences while helping us enhance existing stakeholder relationships. Attention to the needs of our older residents continues to be a MMDC priority, across all departments.

Staff are the heart of this organization and our Commission has improved compensation to acknowledge that. We know it is essential to retain our talented staff and understand that the cost of turnover is far greater than the cost of our pay and benefit adjustments. Staff have responded well to these positive changes and there is a renewed synergy between the Commission and our staff.

On a personal note, I've served on the MMDC for many years, including limited time in leadership roles. I have found the renewed excitement of this organization to be too infectious to remain on the side lines. Now I'm proud to step up and to serve in the role of MMDC Chair. I believe MMDC's future is bright and I am glad to be a part of this journey.

*Respectfully,
Shawn Mueske, MMDC Chairperson*



Commission Representation:

The following list includes individuals who served on MMDC's Board of Commissioners for all or part of the 2022 calendar year. We thank them for their regional leadership!

Robert Anderson – McLeod County Townships (Hassan Valley)
Jeff Benson – Public Interest (Transportation Sector)
Kevin Crowley (Treasurer) – Kandiyohi County Municipalities (City of Pennock)
Doug Erickson – Renville County Board of Commissioners
Rick Fagerie – Municipality Over 10,000 Residents (City of Willmar)
Kathy Grochow – MMDC Region School Boards (Dassel-Cokato)
Jon Hawkinson – Renville County Municipalities (City of Olivia)
Sue Hilgert (Secretary) – Public Interest (Mental Health & Substance Abuse Recovery Sector)
Jill Hoff – Public Interest (Local Workforce Development Board)
Doug Krueger – McLeod County Board of Commissioners
José Luciano – McLeod County Townships (Winsted Township)
Thomas McDonnell – Public Interest (Information Technology Sector)
Maureen Melgaard-Schneider – Public Interest (Aging Population)
Robert Moller – Public Interest (Agriculture and Aggregate Mining Sectors)
Tracy Montgomery – McLeod County Municipalities (City of Plato)
Shawn Mueske (Chair) – Public Interest (Higher Education/Ridgewater College)
Rollie Nissen – Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners
Kiza Olson – Public Interest (Healthcare Sector)
Chris Rowan – Meeker County Municipalities (City of Watkins)
Lorallen Schmeling – Meeker County Townships (Cedar Mills Township)
Steve Schmitt – Meeker County Board of Commissioners
Dave Sebesta (At-Large) – Municipality Over 10,000 Residents (City of Hutchinson)
Paul Simonsen – Renville County Townships (Brandon Township)
Berit Spors – Public Interest (Youth & People with Disabilities)
Steve Stotko – McLeod County Municipalities (City of Winsted)
DuWayne Underthun – Kandiyohi County Townships (Willmar Township)
Jeff Vetsch – MMDC Region School Boards (New London-Spicer)

From the Desk of Our Executive Director:

Sometimes, I think many of us take in too much news. Out of curiosity, I did a little checking. The local CBS affiliate airs news programming as much as 657 minutes in a 24 hour period. In other words, just under 11 hours in a 24-hour day! Now this does include the re-airing of a couple of programs, in case you miss the 10 p.m. news but happened to be awake during the wee hours, but still.....it's a lot. Especially given much of the content involves the retelling of the same dozen stories, over and over and over again.

I don't mean to knock the good people at WCCO TV. I'm sure if I checked into other local network providers, I'd find similar news emphasis and, if I couldn't get my fill, I could always turn to the endless drone available on any of the cable news networks. If that's not enough, there's always plenty of radio and online news available. Discerning actual news from commentary is another issue but I won't get into that here.

My point is that we're constantly bombarded with all sorts of news, much of it bad. We often hear several reports on the same economic or other situation, magnifying its true significance. This makes it pretty easy to believe the sky is falling, even when we'll likely only see a few drops of rain. Despite the doom and gloom, I have several reasons to believe our region is going to be okay.



1. Inflation has begun to ease, at least slightly, as gas, lumber, used car, and other prices decline. That's probably good news for everyone, or at least everyone who's going to read this note.
2. After a chaotic period of disruption caused by global unrest and the now three-year old COVID-19 Pandemic, supply chains appear to be evening out. Thankfully, it's been a while since I've worried about finding things like bathroom tissue at the local store. It seems most of our manufacturers and builders are having better luck getting what they need as well.
3. Many of our region's farmers have enjoyed a pretty good year. Yields have been high and prices have been strong. As the ag industry provides the foundation of our regional economy, a good year for farmers often means a good year for many.
4. MMDC continues to receive inquiries from those interested in accessing our revolving loan funds to support their business start-up or expansion. I'm encouraged not only by the number of inquiries, but by the variety of businesses inquiring, the number of loans coming to fruition, and the success many of our borrowers are realizing.

While it isn't often covered by the media, the diversity of our region's economy contributes to a certain level of resilience that can help us weather any economic downturn. To maximize this resilience we must pursue both traditional and more creative solutions to our workforce limiters – housing, childcare, broadband, and transportation shortages. Furthermore, we must be intentional to make sure all who arrive to fill our job vacancies are celebrated for their talents and given opportunities to apply them. I look forward to the solutions 2023 will bring to our region and I'm confident MMDC will play a meaningful role.

At Your Service,

Eric Day, MMDC Executive Director

A Fond Good-Bye to Long-Time Finance Director & Office Manager Sue Gimse – a True Professional:

At the end of June, after over 25 years of exemplary service to MMDC and to our region, Finance Director & Office Manager Sue Gimse promoted herself to retiree. Under Sue's careful watch, MMDC enjoyed clean audits and maintained a solid financial position. She was always happy to offer her assistance as well as her counsel to three MMDC executive directors Eugene Hippe, Donn Winckler, and Eric Day.

Many will recall that Sue also served a term as MMDC's interim director for several months at the start of 2020. During this time she kept things moving forward and worked to prepare the MMDC team for the major leadership transition. It's safe to say that MMDC's recent transformation is in large part due to Sue's hard work. Eric would often seek guidance from Sue when considering a new direction or opportunity. Again and again, Sue would consider Eric's ideas, often strengthening them by offering her own suggestions. Just as important, Sue would gently nudge him away from potential snarls, at times with just a look that was somehow both discerning and merciful. Beyond this, Sue was an invaluable source of organizational knowledge and history, and her leadership stretched well-beyond her position. MMDC was lucky to benefit, both from Sue's talent and from her dedication, for many years. Now, we wish her a long, healthy, fun-filled retirement adventure. Thank you, Sue, for all you did to make MMDC what it is today!



2022 Brought New Talent to MMDC:

MMDC Finance & Office Manager, Darla Bajari



At the conclusion of 2021, in anticipation of Sue Gimse's retirement, MMDC's Board of Commissioners had the foresight to hire a new Finance & Office Manager. Darla Bajari joined MMDC in January 2022, bringing a wealth of finance experience from her time both from several electrical co-ops and from the private sector. From January through June, Darla focused on learning MMDC's finance operations so she could take over after Sue's departure. This was no small undertaking, as MMDC's finances are quite unique. Darla must handle financial administration for our tax levy as well as for several major state and federal grants and a variety of local contracts. This on top of the financial management of three revolving loan funds, accounts payable, accounts receivable, and other responsibilities.

Darla has risen to the occasion and has proven herself to be the professional MMDC needs to keep moving forward. With help from Sue, she has been diligent and has provided a seamless finance transition. Recently, Darla worked with our contracted CPA firm to complete her first audit of MMDC's finances. While a stressful time for any finance professional, Darla did an outstanding job of providing everything requested and, once again, MMDC enjoyed a good outcome.

In her free time, Darla enjoys travel, spending time with her family, and finding ways to give back to her community. Thank goodness we found you Darla! We hope you'll stay with us for many years to come!

2022 Brought New Talent to MMDC:

MMDC Regional Planner, Ben Dolan



Also in January 2022, Regional Planner Ben Dolan joined MMDC's team of dedicated professionals. Since day one, Ben has been busy with various contract projects related to community development. These include comprehensive plans for both Spicer and Eden Valley, as well as the City of Renville's ordinance codification project. These are relatively new activities for Ben, who comes to us with a law degree and related experience, as well as experience gained from more economic development-focused work. However, he's shown that he's willing to dig in, learn, and do whatever it takes to become a planning expert.

Ben has a number of professional passions. One toward the top of his list include ensuring quality access to mental health providers and services, throughout rural Minnesota. Ben is also dedicated to improving the availability of quality, affordable housing for all. Born and raised in Appleton, MN, Ben is keenly aware both of the benefits and of the limitations of rural life. MMDC looks forward to giving Ben plenty of opportunity to strengthen our region through his work!

In his free time, Ben enjoys spending time with his family and enduring the pain associated with Minnesota professional sports fandom.

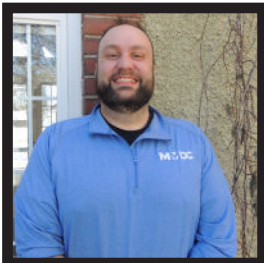
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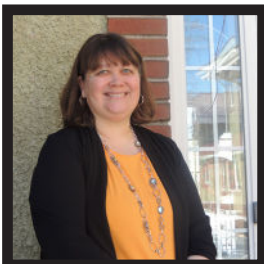
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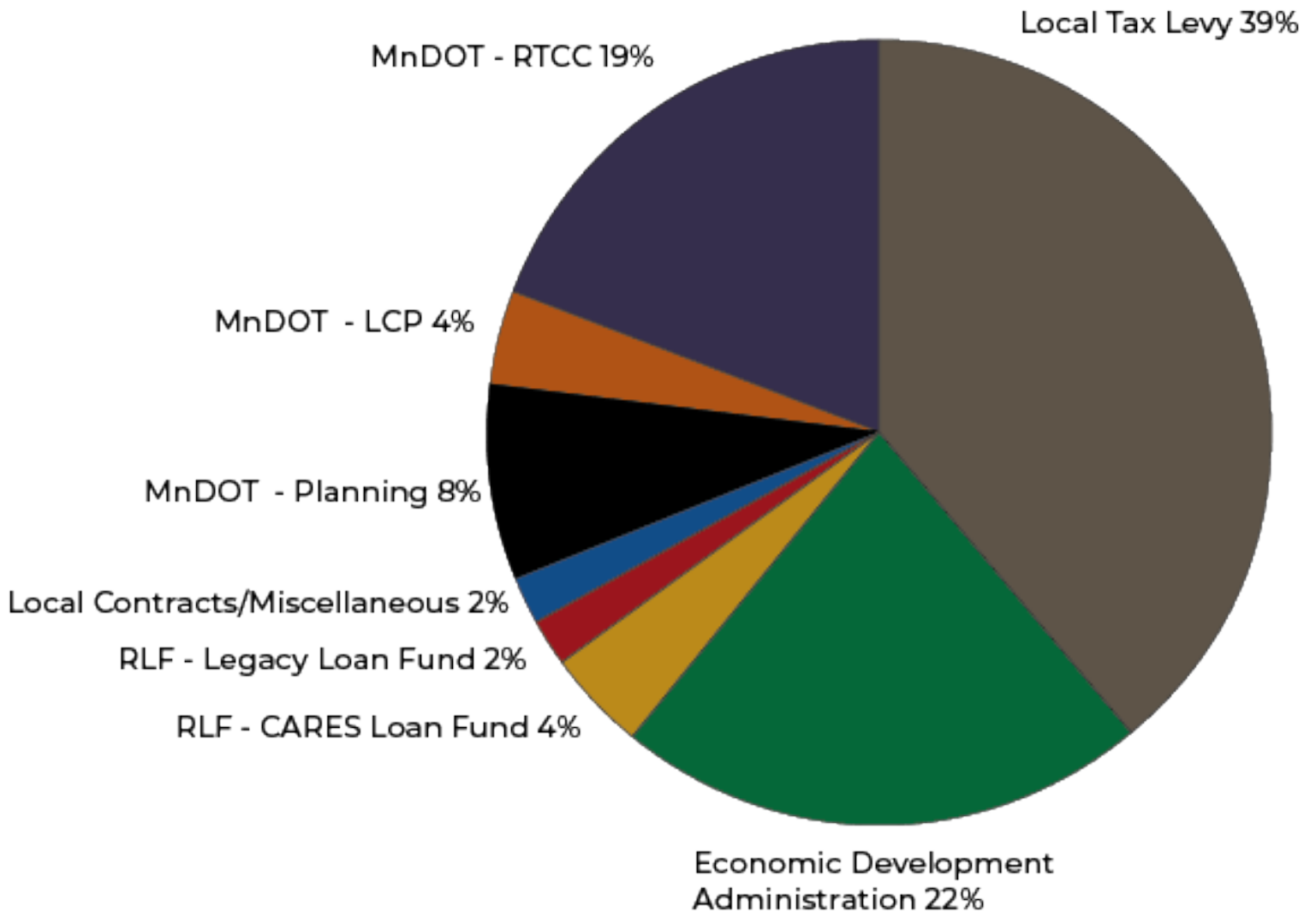


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Financials and 2021 Budget:

REVENUES	FY 2022 Actuals
Local Tax Levy	\$366,805
Economic Development Administration	\$206,151
RLF - Legacy Loan Fund	\$32,444
RLF - CARES Loan Fund	\$22,345
RLF - ARPA Loan Fund	-
AARP Grant	-
Local Contracts/Miscellaneous	\$15,495
MnDOT - Planning	\$75,000
MnDOT - Local Coord Plan	\$35,000
MnDOT - RTCC	\$178,200
Total Revenues	\$931,440

EXPENDITURES	FY 2022 Actuals
Salaries & Fringe	\$736,966
Supplies & Printing	\$10,236
Communications	\$37,409
Services	\$63,633
Capital Outlay	\$3,742
Volunteer Services	-
Travel & Training	\$22,231
Commissioner Travel/ Expenses	\$11,186
Total Expenditures	\$885,403



Economic Development:

MMDC partners with cities, counties, and other economic development professionals from across our region to accomplish common goals. Ultimately, we seek opportunity and prosperity for all. Our work is guided by our five-year regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which was approved by the U.S. EDA in May after roughly a year of development.

Other noteworthy economic development-related projects and developments in 2022 included an award-winning Multilingual Journalism pilot project (read on to learn more), the conclusion of a supply chain effort to ensure access to fresh, Halal-compliant goat meat, multiple efforts aimed at improving childcare access throughout our region, and success in rural broadband initiatives.

MMDC's Michelle Marotzke and Nate Reuss provided technical assistance and participated in Rural Child Care Innovation Program cohorts across our region to better support existing providers and attract others to the child-care profession. In late November, MMDC learned that Kandiyohi County will receive a \$200,000 grant to increase the availability of the quality childcare needed to support economic development. This would not have happened without good partnership between MMDC and our Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar EDC partners.

Alongside other local broadband committee members, MMDC played a major role in bringing significant broadband-focused dollars to our region. In December, after many months of work and waiting, it was announced that nearly \$5 million in Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant funds were awarded by the State of Minnesota to support the installation of the infrastructure needed to bring high-speed, "fiber to the premises", internet to western Kandiyohi County residents and businesses. MMDC was also thrilled to see other regional internet providers receive Border-to-Border funds to support essential high-speed internet service expansion in both McLeod and Meeker Counties.

Award-Winning Success!

In 2022 MMDC was proud to receive an Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for work accomplished through our Multilingual Journalism Project. This pilot gave several of Willmar's bilingual residents the skills needed to convey important local information in languages beyond English, in a spoken/video format. MMDC has already begun tapping into these individuals when sharing important messages with our English language learners. While we were thrilled to help with project coordination, this pilot wouldn't have been possible without significant funding (\$20,000) from the Willmar Area Community foundation, course delivery from Ridgewater College's Customized Training and Continuing Education Department, and valuable technical assistance from the University of Minnesota Extension. MMDC values these partnerships and we look forward to working with the next Multilingual cohort in 2023.



Economic Development:



34 Active Loans



\$1,671,626.00
Active Loan Balance



5 New Loans
(\$ 361,000.00)

Business Support:

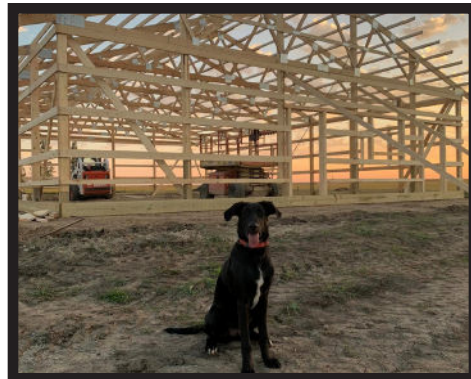
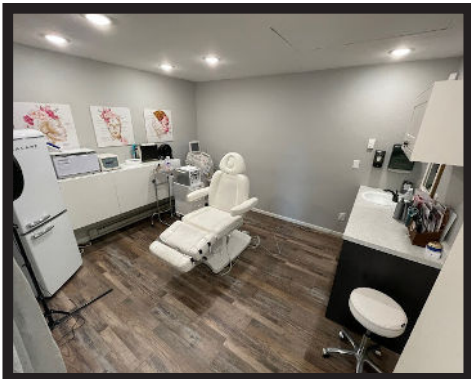
While MMDC staff enjoy collaborating with other area experts to tackle foundational issues (e.g., housing, broadband, childcare, and transportation), providing individualized support to our region's business community is where our Economic Development Team truly shines. Michelle and Nate often provide technical assistance to those interested in opening businesses or expanding operations. At times, our economic developers may be approached by individuals who have good ideas but aren't exactly sure how to make them come to fruition. Our team is able to provide them with MMDC resources and expertise, while also connecting them to other business-helping agencies to make their dream a reality. This is just one way in which MMDC helps to nurture a vibrant, resilient economy, with opportunities for all throughout our region.

Revolving Loan Funds:

Along with ensuring entrepreneurs have access to the technical expertise needed to bring their business to the next level, MMDC enjoys the opportunity to assist them with their financing needs. Demand for financing, especially gap financing, has remained strong as our region's residents seek to establish or expand their businesses. That's why MMDC leveraged \$100,000 from our reserves to receive a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. EDA for the capitalization of a third revolving loan fund. While all entrepreneurs are encouraged to apply, marketing and outreach activities associated with this new, \$500,000 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) RLF is directed toward less traditional business borrowers, including people of color, people with disabilities, veterans, and women.

MMDC used our three funds to close another five business loans in 2022, adding and/or retaining a growing number of jobs. At the time of this report, several more loans are in MMDC's RLF pipeline and approaching closure. MMDC's loan portfolio includes businesses from a wide variety of industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, food production, and more. As of December 2022, our total portfolio balance (amount lent + amount available for lending) is \$1,678,013, with 34 loans active.

In 2022, both Nate and Michelle had the privilege of being selected as participants in the U.S. EDA's Equitable Lending Leaders Cohort. They received training tailored to help RLF operators understand how to implement equitable lending practices for their RLF portfolios. Both came away from the no-cost (beyond time), 12-session virtual training series with new ideas on business outreach, especially outreach to entrepreneurs with less access to traditional financing.



Economic Development:

MMDC's 2022 RLF Borrowers:

Glacial Lakes Aesthetics is a medical spa, owned by Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist Alexandra Malkuch. Located in downtown Spicer, the business provides high-quality, clinically effective aesthetic treatments including anti-wrinkle injections, dermal fillers, microneedling, chemical peels, platelet-rich plasma injections and DiamondGlow facials. They also offer customers medical-grade skincare products. MMDC was the sole lender for this project and funds were used to purchase a Rohrer Spectrum Laser System. You can learn more about Glacial Lakes Aesthetics at: glaciallakesaesthetics.com

Minnesota Beer Company, which will open in early 2023, will be a family-oriented and pet-friendly venue for social interaction at Grove City's western edge. Owned by Roxanne Landers and Christopher Daniels, the establishment will feature a self-pour tap wall, unique to the area, as well as both indoor and outdoor stages for entertainment. Minnesota Beer Company will also feature play areas with board games, yard games, and more, for both kids and adults. In addition to Chris's signature beers and non-alcoholic root beer, hot and cold snack food, procured through local vendors, will be served. This exciting new venue will replace a former convenience store, which sat vacant for many years and had become a bit of an eyesore. MMDC partnered with Home State Bank and the Southwest Initiative Foundation to move this project forward. Funds were used to pay for extensive building renovations. Learn more about Minnesota Beer Company at: minnesotabeercompany.com



Beaver Creek Boarding is a new business owned by Katy Holland and Joshua Honzay. Located south of Olivia, this countryside enterprise fills a local gap by providing needed day and extended-stay boarding services for canine friends of area residents and visitors. This loan was supported through a lender partnership that, along with MMDC, included Franklin State Bank and the Southwest Initiative Foundation. Funds were used to assist with the construction of a new 40' x 60' building, which features over 20 separate kennels. The property also provides space to expand services to include pet grooming and training in the future. To learn more about Beaver Creek Boarding, visit: linktr.ee/beavercreekboarding.



Firelake Manufacturing LLC is a Hutchinson-based manufacturer of incinerators and cremators. Since the 1950's the company has worked to find innovative solutions for niche industries. Owner Kent Wischmann contacted regional partner Miles Seppelt, director of Hutchinson's EDA, when he learned that he would be losing his facility lease. While Seppelt was able to connect Kent with another location, additional funds were needed for upgrades, including essential improvements to the spaces plumbing and electrical service. MMDC was thrilled to partner both with the Hutchinson EDA and the Southwest Initiative Foundation to ensure Firelake Manufacturing had the resources they need to transition to their new space. The success of this loan kept five full time and between five and 10 part-time employees, including highly skilled workers working in the Hutchinson community. You can learn more about Firelake Manufacturing at: firelakeincinerators.com.

Prairie PROducers works with local growers to produce industrial hemp, which is then processed to their customers unique specifications. Brothers Paul and Tim Seehusen, owners of the Olivia-based company, hope to revitalize the local economy first by adding industrial hemp back into the local crop rotation and then by supplying a national market with hemp fiber. While Prairie Producers was sitting on a supply of over 300 tons of industrial hemp, they needed financing to purchase the equipment needed for processing. As with many of MMDC's revolving loans, this one included partnership with several financiers including the Southwest Initiative Foundation, Olivia EDA, and Renville County EDA. Visit www.prairieproco.com to learn more about Prairie PROducers and their vision for industrial hemp in Renville County.



Mid-Minnesota Community Enhancement Fund:

In 2021, as part of MMDC's effort to support local communities and ensure high quality of life throughout our region, MMDC launched a new funding opportunity – the Mid-Minnesota Community Enhancement fund. This fund provides our region's 501(c)3 nonprofits, school districts, and local government units opportunity to apply for up to \$3,000 to:

- Provide health, safety, or other wellness-focused training for community members and/or specific professional or volunteer groups,
- Purchase supplies and/or equipment needed for improved emergency response,
- Procure items to enhance law enforcement organizations' ability to develop positive relationships with youth, people of color, and other groups,
- Add public amenities that will promote physical and/or mental well-being or increased opportunities for positive community interaction, or
- Support workforce training opportunities for youth and other populations.



2022 recipients of Mid-Minnesota Community Enhancement Grants include:



Sunburg Ambulance, who received \$3,000 toward the purchase of handheld radios needed to improve communication during emergency calls.



The City of Willmar, who received \$3,000 toward the installation of a fountain for placement in a storm water pond adjacent to Bill Taunton/Baker Field Stadium. The goal of this project was to create a pleasant space for positive community interaction while also reducing larvae for disease-carrying mosquitos.



ProWorks, Inc., who received \$2,802 for the purchase an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED), 10 first aid kits for their locations and vehicles, a medication administration testing kit, and CPR/First Aid/AED training services.



Eden Valley Fire & Rescue, who received \$3,000 to replace old turnout gear for their volunteer department members so they could improve safety and meet the standards of the National Fire Protection Association.



Renville County Human Services, who received \$2,000 to fund in-person training, peer support, and networking for their foster care providers.



Grove City Area Care Program, who received \$3,000 to purchase and install fixed location adult outdoor exercise equipment next to a local senior living facility














MNYou, Inc., who received \$2,000 to support their existing small-scale agriculture and entrepreneurship training program for Willmar-area youth, including youth of color and youth with disabilities. The program teaches young people to run a small farm and incorporates training in sales, marketing, growing techniques and farm management.

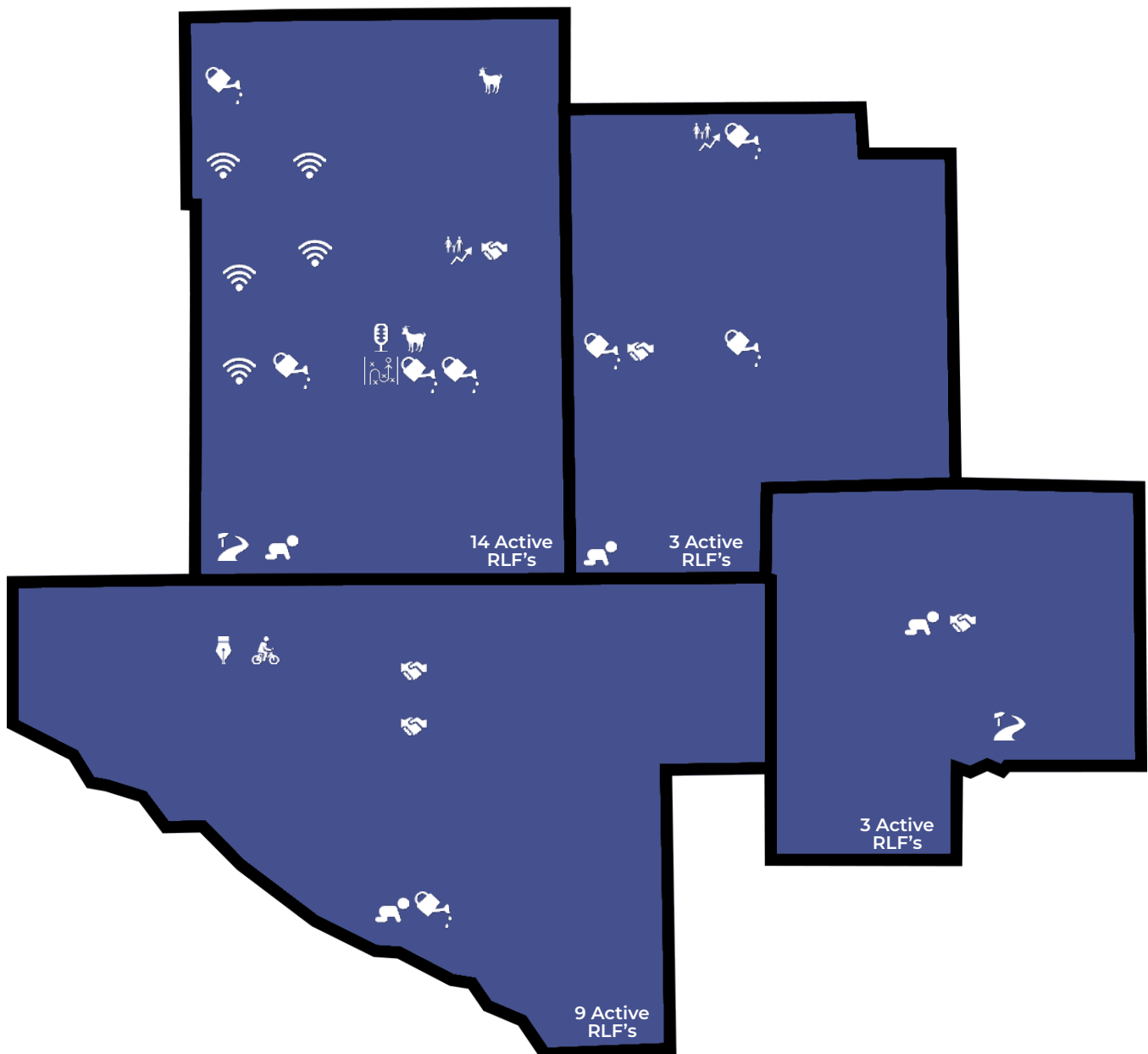


The Pennock Lions Club, who received \$1,080 for the purchase of an Automatic Electronic Defibrillator for installation in the City of Pennock's Community Center.

MMDC Impact:

MMDC helps communities ensure a high standard of living for their residents, both now and for generations to come. In 2022, we've partnered with stakeholders to launch or complete a variety of projects.

-  Ordinance Assistance
-  County Parks & Trail Planning
-  Comprehensive Planning
-  Strategic Planning
-  Active Living Plan
-  Regional Halal Certified Goat Supply Chain
-  Multilingual Journalism Pilot Project
-  Participation in and/or Leadership or Support of Childcare Initiatives
-  Broadband Grant Success
-  Community Enhancement Grants
-  New Revolving Loan Customers



Transportation Planning:

MMDC works with our communities to address multiple facets of transportation planning. Our goal is to support commerce while also improving safety, reducing transportation barriers, and promoting healthy, active lifestyles. These transportation planning efforts are led by MMDC Community Planner Kyle Ten Napel.

MnDOT Transportation Planning Grant

MMDC leverages our own reserves to access a Minnesota Department of Transportation Planning Grant. One of the MMDC responsibilities associated with this grant is to serve the District 8 Area Transportation Partnership (ATP). This group guides the prioritization of highway, bridge, trail, and other construction projects that require state and federal funding throughout Southwest Minnesota. Our District 8 ATP informs the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, which outlines Minnesota's transportation improvement plans for the coming four years. Our MnDOT Transportation Planning Grant also gives MMDC opportunity to provide low-cost and even no-cost technical assistance to communities who require guidance or direction on their transportation-related efforts.



Local Human Service – Public Transit Coordination Plan

In 2022, MMDC completed a major overhaul of the Local Human Service – Public Transit Coordination Plan for Region 6E. The purpose of this plan is to, through public engagement, identify our region's transportation gaps as well as strategies to reduce them. The plan, commonly referred to as the "LCP" is especially sensitive to the needs and barriers of people with disabilities, older individuals, and those of low income. To review the Region 6E Local Human Services – Public Transit Coordination Plan, visit: mmrdc.org/publications.



Mid-Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

With funding and guidance from MnDOT and the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA), MMDC operates the Mid-Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (MMRTCC). The goal of the MMRTCC is to improve coordination throughout the region and provide other support to reduce transportation gaps for nondrivers. These include many of our older residents, those with disabilities, and people of low income. We know that transportation is essential for community participation. We need every person in our region to have reliable access to work, school, health-related appointments, worship services, places of commerce, community events, and/or other social engagements. If people do not have access to participate in our community, then they are limited in their ability to contribute to it. We all suffer that loss. Unfortunately, our family, friends, and neighbors without transportation suffer far more. Without transportation solutions they risk isolation. Left unchecked this can lead to adverse health effects and put their very independence at risk.

Mobility Manager Terry Smith leads our MMRTCC work. In 2022, this has included assisting with outreach and other support for our region's public and private transportation providers. As the current workforce shortage, specifically the shortage of professional and volunteer drivers, is our transportation providers' biggest hurdle, Terry devotes considerable time to driver recruitment. You'll often find him presenting driving opportunities to various groups around our region. Terry was also a great contributor to the Local Human Service – Public Transit Coordination Plan and has worked in countless other ways to improve access for those with transportation barriers.

Farmers Market Transportation Pilot

In 2022, with funding from the Willmar Lakes Area VISION 2040 group, Mobility Manager Terry Smith collaborated with CCT and CentraCare Health to pilot a no-cost Farmers Market Transportation route. The goal was to help those of low income and other transportation-challenged individuals get to and from these events so they could purchase and benefit from the fresh produce found there. This pilot has led to additional conversations and a goal to pilot a fare-free bus stop-to-bus stop route that will serve the entire Willmar Community in 2023.



AARP Community Challenge Grant

MMDC was honored to be the recipient of a 2022 AARP Community Challenge Grant. Our organization received \$12,800 to help seniors afford and access public transit services. Among other things, funds provided opportunity to purchase ride tokens for the public transit bus. These tokens were distributed to people living in residential facilities (e.g., assisted living facilities, group homes) and to other seniors and individuals with disabilities. One of the best aspects of this grant was that it gave Mobility Manager Terry Smith additional opportunity to connect with individuals who struggle with transportation barriers. He was given chance to learn about their unique struggles and offer guidance on how they might be able to achieve their transportation-related goals. This project, which will conclude in 2023, would not have been possible without the generous support of AARP.



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