

Backgrounder:

The Foundation in Southern Minnesota

Mr. Blandin's Legacy

Because of his interest in supporting the Grand Rapids area and other rural communities around Minnesota, Charles K. Blandin established a private foundation to carry on his vision of strengthened communities. In part driven by his humble, rural Wisconsin roots, Mr. Blandin's direction was that his estate be used for work that led to community self-sufficiency, versus dependency, especially in rural communities. Today, Mr. Blandin's legacy leverages the proceeds of a trust that has grown considerably, especially since the Blandin paper mill was sold in 1977 (from a value of \$60 million in 1977 to more than \$466 million at the end of 2007).

Southern Minnesota

The Foundation long has had a strong relationship with many southern Minnesota communities. For example:

- Throughout 115 southern Minnesota communities, 1,135 leaders have come together through the Blandin Community Leadership Program and Partners in Leadership programs to participate in intensive leadership training in order to strengthen their communities since the programs' inception 23 years ago.
- In 2007 the Foundation's trustees awarded a \$750,000 grant to the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund in response to the floods last year. Additional flood recovery grants included \$50,000 for Childcare Resources and Referral (Rochester).
- The city of Rushford and Home and Community Options of Winona received a total of \$50,000 in community broadband grants. The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation in Owatonna was awarded \$45,000 for the Regional Competitiveness Project. Southern Minnesota Quality Broadcasting (Austin) was awarded \$50,000 to produce and promote the "Cities on the Move" series.
- Albert Lea, New Ulm and the Region 9 Development Commission all received financial support for community planning initiatives.
- Two current Foundation trustees have strong ties to rural Minnesota: George Thomspson of Rochester and Bonnie Besse Rietz of Austin.

Foundation Goals

The Blandin Foundation delivers its mission of healthy rural Minnesota communities in three primary ways: grant-making, leadership training and public policy initiatives. The work of the Foundation is organized around:

- Community Capacity: Supporting the capacity of communities to identify issues and opportunities, and to mobilize resources.
- Community Change: Helping communities value and mobilize diversity of ideas, opportunities, experiences and people.

Areas of Focus

The Foundation focuses on six priority areas:

1. Increased educational attainment for all, especially for disadvantaged populations
2. Development of diverse leaders
3. Fairness and opportunity for disadvantaged populations
4. Community and regional economic initiatives that capitalize on diverse assets
5. Strengthened voice of rural Minnesota
6. Strengthened intercultural competencies within our communities