



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Central Woodlands selected as a Blandin Broadband Community

Two-year partnership provides planning, technical and financial support to help county meet its digital technology goals

Brainerd, Minn. (November 20, 2014) – Blandin Foundation announced today that leaders in Central Woodlands, which includes parts of Mille Lacs, Kanabec, Pine, and Aitkin Counties, were successful in their application to become a Blandin Broadband Community, one of only 10 selected in the state. The announcement was made today in Brainerd, before more than 160 participants in the *Border to Border Broadband: No Community Left Behind* conference, co-sponsored by Blandin and Connect Minnesota.

The Blandin Broadband Communities program is an intensive, two-year partnership between Blandin Foundation and selected rural Minnesota communities. The program provides planning, technical and financial support to communities that demonstrate the determination to bring the benefits of a broadband-enabled economy to their communities.

Central Woodlands is one of ten new rural Minnesota communities that will join nine previously-named Blandin Broadband Communities in the state. Other Blandin Broadband Communities announced today are Carlton County, Resilient Region 5 (north central Minnesota), Sherburne County, Chisago County, Redwood County, Renville/Sibley Counties, Red Wing, Nobles County, and Martin County.

“At Blandin Foundation we recognize that broadband access – and the skills to use it -- are essential to expanding opportunity for all. Thanks to community leaders in the Central Woodlands and in the other communities with whom we partner, Minnesota is making important strides toward ensuring that rural places and the economically and socially disadvantaged are not left behind,” said Bernadine Joselyn, Director of Public Policy and Engagement.

Communities were selected based on demonstrated commitment to work together across sectors to set and meet information technology goals and bridge digital divides.

The Central Woodlands plans to strengthen existing broadband-related work happening in Kanabec and Mille Lacs counties, both past Blandin Broadband communities, and advance the work to un- and under- served areas of the region. This includes a special focus on older adults, whose population will grow to almost 50,000 by 2020.

“The Central Woodlands area remains very rural in economy and lifestyle. We expect to bring more broadband options to the region; with the intention of attracting consumers, employees and entrepreneurs to access and engage in highly skilled, connected endeavors,” says Penny Simonsen, ECRDC Community Development Director.

Leading the Blandin Broadband Community work is the East Central Regional Development Commission. Together, with educational, nonprofit and business partners throughout the county, ECRDC will rally local leaders to develop a sustainable model for broadband access and use in the Central Woodlands.

“It takes strong local leadership and commitment from whole communities to tackle the tough issues related to Internet access and use,” said Dr. Kathy Annette, Blandin Foundation CEO. “We’re honored to stand with the communities in the Central Woodlands as they design and claim a vibrant, connected future.”

Next steps in the Blandin Broadband Community partnership include assessing the community’s current broadband access and adoption and, in early 2015, a series of planning public meetings.

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PHOTO CAPTION: Leaders from 10 rural Minnesota communities gather to accept the invitation to become a Blandin Broadband Community.

Pictured

Front row (L to R): Anna Gruber, Stacey Stockdill, Melissa Radermacher, Eva Wilson (all representing Region 5), Nancy Hoffman (Chisago County), Connie Christenson, and Brenda Nyberg (both representing Carlton County)

Middle row (L to R): Steven Pierce (Martin County), Jennifer Russell (Central Woodlands), Pam Mahling (Region 5), Julie Rath, Jim Salfer (both representing Redwood County), Sally Fineday, Tony Mayer, and Sandy Voigt (all representing Region 5)

Back row (L to R): Mark Erickson, Jacob Rieke (both representing RS Fiber Cooperative), Dan Weber (Sherburne County), Tom Johnson, Rod Sankey (both representing Nobles County), and Scott Adkisson (Red Wing)

About Blandin Foundation: Blandin Foundation works for vibrant rural Minnesota communities by investing in community leaders and working with partners to expand opportunity for all residents. Located in Grand Rapids, Minn., it is one of only a handful of foundations in the U.S. focused exclusively on rural communities and the largest rural-based private foundation in Minnesota. Information on Blandin Foundation grant-making, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives: www.blandinfoundation.org. Information about the Blandin Broadband Communities Program: URL

About East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC): The East Central Regional Development Commission provides leadership and direction through problem-solving. We do this by initiating projects and programs that lead to create solutions to regional problems, by providing technical assistance and by identifying and developing available resources. For more information about EDRDC: <http://www.region7erdc.org/>

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