



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Renville and Sibley Counties 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 Renville and Sibley County leaders 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.

Together, Renville and Sibley Counties are 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 the Central Woodlands (east central Minnesota), Resilient Region 5 (north central Minnesota), Sherburne County, Chisago County, Redwood County, Martin County, Red Wing, Nobles County, and Carlton 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 Renville and Sibley County 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.

“We’re very excited about the opportunity to be a Blandin Broadband Community,” said Mark Erickson, Director of the Winthrop Economic Development Authority. “In the coming weeks we will be working with a variety of stakeholders to determine how to make best use of the opportunity.”

Leading their work is the RS Fiber Cooperative, a community-driven effort to bring a high speed fiber optic connection to everyone in the project area. Together, with educational, nonprofit and business partners throughout the county, the RS Fiber Cooperative will rally local leaders to develop a sustainable model for broadband access and use in Renville and Sibley Counties.

“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 Renville and Sibley Counties 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 public planning 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: <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org/>

About RS Fiber: RS Fiber is a community driven effort to bring a high speed fiber optic connection to everyone in the project area and provide low-cost, reliable high speed Internet, crystal clear cable television, and phone services. Fiber to the Home (FTTH) has become the leading technology for next-generation communications worldwide.

The RS Fiber Cooperative will be owned and democratically controlled by its members. By becoming an RS Fiber customer you will be a part owner of the network.

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