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STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Resilient Region Five 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 Region Five (north central Minnesota) leaders were successful in their application to become a Blandin Broadband Community, one of only 10 selected in the state. The announcement was made yesterday 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.

Region Five 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 the Central Woodlands (east central Minnesota), Martin County, Sherburne County, Chisago County, Redwood County, Renville/Sibley Counties, 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 Region Five 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.

Region Five has been doing this for a number of years through their Resilient Region Plan, a development strategy that resulted from input by more than 600 Central Minnesotans. One of the Plan’s goals centers on using broadband technologies to improve bottom lines as well as quality of life.

“We are excited to be chosen to participate as a Blandin Broadband Community. Our “community” is the entire five-county region of Cass, Crow Wing, Todd, Morrison, and

Wadena,” said Cheryal Hills, executive director of Region Five Development Corporation. “We have already been successful on a number of fronts because of the dedication of our Connectivity Champions:

Pam Mahling (Information Research Specialist, West Central Telephone Association)

Kevin Larson (CEO) and Kristi Westbrook (COO), Consolidated Telephone Company

Janelle Riley (CEO, Syvantis Technologies)

Stacey Stockdill (CEO, EnSearch, Inc.)

Sally Fineday (Wireless Telecommunications Business Manager, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)

Paul Drange (Director of Regional Programs, National Joint Powers Board)

Janet Johnson (Instructor, Minnesota State Community & Technical College)

Rick Utech (Executive Director, Todd County Economic Development Corporation)

Michael Amick (Dean of Computer Technology and Online Learning, Central Lakes College)

We are looking forward to moving our work to the speed of light with the tools and resources now available to us because of Blandin Foundation!”

Leading their work is the Resilient Region Virtual Highway Connectivity Committee, one of several committees working on advancing the Resilient Region Plan. Together, with education, nonprofit and business partners throughout the county, this committee will rally local leaders to develop a sustainable model for broadband access and use in the Resilient Region.

“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 Resilient Region 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: URL

Region Five Development Commission: The Region Five Development Commission works to enhance the vitality and quality of life in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena Counties, with a focus in economic development, transportation, community development, energy, local foods and “The Resilient Region Plan.” More at <http://www.regionfive.org/>

Resilient Region: The Resilient Region Plan seeks to create a sustainable region that integrates the disciplines of housing, transportation, natural environment, and economic development; encompasses in-reach strategies through HIGHLY involved civic engagement; builds an inclusive region – that will provide opportunities, be free from discrimination and improve the quality of life of ALL area residents. More at <http://www.resilientregion.org/plan/>

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Resilient Region

Stacey Stockdill, Resilient Region Connectivity/Volunteer Virtual Highway Champion/Project Director and Partner/Consultant

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