

NEWS RELEASE

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Minnesota Initiative Foundations Celebrating 25 Years of Making Minnesota Greater

Governor Mark Dayton to Proclaim June 10, 2011 as Minnesota Initiative Foundations Day

Little Falls, MN – 23,000 nonprofit grants totaling \$140 million. 3,600 business loans totaling \$193 million. 40,000 quality jobs secured. The past 25 years have proven that Minnesota’s homegrown experiment in philanthropy actually worked.

The six Minnesota Initiative Foundations are celebrating a quarter century of partnerships and service to help Greater Minnesota communities thrive. The Minnesota Initiative Foundations were created as a philanthropic experiment by The McKnight Foundation in response to the drastic declines of the farming, logging, and mining industries in the late 1980s. The idea was to launch six independent “funds” directed by local leaders, who would direct a unique combination of grants, business loans, and staff assistance to projects that could stimulate and diversify the struggling rural economy.

“The Minnesota Initiative Foundations hit the ground running in 1986, and they haven’t slowed down. Every year, they forge dynamic new collaborations and help define the spirits of giving, of innovation, and of engagement that are hallmarks of our state. They stand collectively among The McKnight Foundation’s proudest and farthest reaching legacies — both for the progress they have made and for the promises they hold,” stated Kate Wolford, President of The McKnight Foundation.

Today, these six temporary funds have evolved into permanent foundations, with collective endowments of \$191million and business financing assets of \$55 million. They work in Minnesota's 80 Greater Minnesota counties to make each of their regions stronger and more prosperous. Each foundation's priorities are decided by people in its own region, with grants and loans supporting economic development; leadership development; community building; children, youth, families, and older adults; environmental issues; workforce development, and more.

The Minnesota Initiative Foundations promote economic and community development; build the leadership and planning capacity of local communities; coordinate and leverage resources; and stimulate local giving throughout Greater Minnesota. Today, these organizations are recognized not only in Minnesota, but also across the nation for their significant accomplishments in building strong and sustainable rural communities.

Two founding Presidents continue to lead their respective organizations today: Kathy Gaalswyk of the Initiative Foundation, and Tom Renier of the Northland Foundation. The two leaders have witnessed many changes in their regions and Minnesota during their tenures.

“Looking back at the process we underwent to form the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, I'm confident that none of us then could have predicted this unique combination of traditional grantmaking, business lending, and program delivery would grow to have such incredible impact statewide,” said Renier. “It has been a privilege to witness not only the development of all six foundations as they have become strong regional resources which are well-positioned to serve Greater Minnesota for decades to come.”

“We have essentially come full-circle,” Gaalswyk added. “We were forged in the fire of an economic crisis, and today, we're fighting the same battle again. The difference this time is that we have more experience and more resources, and I strongly believe we've helped Minnesota to recover more quickly than some other states.”

On June 9th and 10th, 2011, senior staff and Boards of Trustees representing all six Minnesota Initiative Foundations will gather at Grand View Lodge in Nisswa, Minnesota, for a retreat and silver anniversary celebration. The session is entitled, “Celebrating Our Collective Impact...Pursuing Future Opportunities”. Governor Mark Dayton will also proclaim Friday, June 10, 2011 as Minnesota Initiative Foundations Day.

ABOUT THE MINNESOTA INITIATIVE FOUNDATIONS

The Minnesota Initiative Foundations were created in 1986 as a partnership between The McKnight Foundation and the citizens of Greater Minnesota. Set up as independent nonprofit philanthropic organizations with local boards of trustees, the six foundations are: the **Northland Foundation** in Duluth; the **Northwest Minnesota Foundation** located in Bemidji; **West Central Initiative** based in Fergus Falls; the **Southwest Initiative Foundation** in Hutchinson, the **Initiative Foundation** in Little Falls; and the **Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation** based in Owatonna.

ABOUT THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

The McKnight Foundation seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations through grantmaking, coalition-building, and encouragement of strategic policy reform. Founded in 1953 and independently endowed by William and Maude McKnight, the Minnesota-based Foundation had assets of approximately \$1.9 billion and granted about \$96 million in 2010. For more information about The McKnight Foundation, please visit www.mcknight.org.

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