



1st Annual Homer Get-together



The Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission hosted the 1st Annual Homer Get Together at Hodapp Field in Willmar on Thursday, August 25, 2005.

The purpose of the event was to draw together anyone who attended school in Kandiyohi County and then left for college or to pursue other opportunities outside the area, and has since then made a conscious decision to return home.

More than 80 people of all ages showed up for the event, and most participated in the group picture shown above. The Economic Development Commission provided root beer and peanuts for everyone who attended, and many people were able to network with old friends and acquaintances from the area, whatever their age group.

The Bring Them Back Home task force also began compiling a database of returnees so that work can begin on addressing the task force's mission to "facilitate economic growth by coordinating a network where employers and alumni can connect in order to 'Bring Them Back Home.'"

In addition to contacting "homers," the task force is also interested in outreach to two other groups: potential returnees who are still living outside the area but might like to move back if the right opportunity presented itself; and local employers who are looking to attract or recruit qualified workers that have an affinity for the area.

To help the latter, the task force held a focus group with selected area businesses that have workforce needs and would like to hire local graduates. Reception to the idea was very positive – many local businesses understand that people who are from the area are more likely to stay for the long term for the right job, thereby increasing productivity and decreasing turnover and training costs.

To encourage the former, the Bring Them Back Home task force invites you to send this on to any of your friends or classmates who are living outside the area but might like to move back. Local employers are looking for workers in fields from accounting to engineering to manufacturing to teaching. Help us Bring Them Back Home!

Willmar lakes area business is booming!

The last year and a half has seen tremendous development in the Willmar lakes area and Kandiyohi County, with many business expansions and residential growth.

Perhaps most notably, the Willmar Regional Treatment Center has recently been sold to a private company that is utilizing the collegial atmosphere to start the Minnwest Technology Campus, a new technology park and business incubator. From bio-technology to mechanical & software engineering to high precision machining and CAD/CAM systems, the business climate is heating up.

Bushmills Ethanol also chose to locate in the area because of Kandiyohi County's leadership position in renewable energy. The new 40-million gallon ethanol plant will be online in early 2006, creating 35 new high-paying jobs.

Significant retail expansion

Willmar has solidified its position as one of the fastest growing regional centers in greater Minnesota by adding or expanding several major retailers, including Home Depot, Menards, Mills, Hennen's, and more.



The EDC is also leading the way on development of a new Willmar Area Multicultural Marketplace, which would be the first of its kind in greater Minnesota. The WAMM would be a welcoming venue with many different ethnic and cultural restaurants and stores.

Bringing them back home

Excerpts from an article written by Cari Quam, West Central Tribune

Amy Kelleher left Atlanta to work at Rice Memorial Hospital in Willmar. Liz VanDerBill decided to quit her job in Brooklyn Center and moved to Willmar before finding work. Michael Pluimer moved out of the Twin Cities so that his children could attend Central Minnesota Christian School in Prinsburg.

Kelleher, VanDerBill and Pluimer all grew up in the Willmar area, moved away after high school and decided to come back. The Bring Them Back Home task force, a program of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission, wants more people like them. The task force is trying to figure out ways to link area natives who have moved away with local jobs.

When companies consider cities, they look at the workforce, said Kathy Schwantes, Economic Development Commission assistant director. An estimated 3,000 people from nine surrounding counties come into Kandiyohi County to work, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

The task force first began in the late 1990s, but disbanded after a few years. The Economic Development commission has renewed the task force to help make the area more attractive for economic development. Kelleher, VanDerBill, and Pluimer participate on the task force committee. Several other “homers” have also joined to committee to help spread the word about the program and the opportunities in Kandiyohi County.

Potential returnees are encouraged to visit www.kandiyohi.com for more information about the economic development happening in the Willmar lakes area. If there’s a good opportunity, we want you to come back home!



Willmar earns the All-America City award in 2005!

Willmar was among 10 cities in the entire United States that was awarded as an All-American City in 2005, after presenting their case to the National Civic League in Atlanta this June. The presentations outlined projects that addressed the needs of the cities.

Willmar’s three projects were the West Central Integration Collaborative, Rice Memorial Hospital and Ridgewater College’s Model for Workforce Development in Rural Healthcare, and the Willmar Public Schools’ Child Guide Program.

Mayor Les Heitke said “We are one of a very select number of cities in Minnesota that have achieved the All-American status. We just can’t wait to talk about it and let the whole community know.”

“We got to know more about Willmar, and we just grew as a community,” said Megan Fixsen, a Willmar student who attended the presentation. *(Thanks to David Little of the West Central Tribune)*



Season’s Greetings & Happy Holidays!

On behalf of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission and the Bring Them Back Home task force, we’d like to wish you warm holiday greetings this year!

We know many of you will be back in the area over the holidays to see family and friends. While you’re here, we invite you to drive around town and look at all of the new development that is occurring in our area – you might be surprised!

Perhaps you’ve seen enough change that you’re ready to move back as well... If so, please call Kathy Schwantes with the EDC at 320-235-7370 or visit our website @ www.kandiyohi.com for more information on how to get linked up with local employers!

Local Job Postings!

Many local employers, such as Rice Memorial Hospital, Affiliated Community Medical Centers (ACMC), Jennie-O Turkey Store, and Conway, Deuth, & Schmiesing CPAs have their jobs listed on their websites. Other job listings can be found on the Willmar Workforce Center website at www.mnwfc.org/willmar

Holiday Events in the Willmar Area:

Holidaze Electric Light Parade in downtown Willmar

Advent Festival at Calvary Lutheran Church in Willmar

Holiday Express – Santa Claus is coming to town!

www.1025fm.com/calendar.cfm