



2004 All-America City Award Application

All communities are encouraged to apply.

Community Information

Community name and state:

Morris, Minnesota

Your community is applying as a:

Neighborhood Town City County Region

If applying as a region, name participating communities:

If applying as a neighborhood, name city:

Contact Information

All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout entire competition and for follow-up):

Name: Ed Larson

Title: City Manager

Organization: City of Morris

Address: 609 Oregon Avenue, PO Box 438

City, State, ZIP: Morris, Minnesota 56267

Phone (business/day): (320) 589-3141

Fax (business/day): (320) 589-3111

Phone (home/evening): (320) 589-4376

Fax (home/evening):

E-mail Address: morrismn@info-link.net

List the 3 individuals who most actively participated in filling out this All-America City Award application (add additional lines if needed): (Provide name and title; organization; phone; e-mail address)

Philip Drown (*Author*)
Consultant,
Philip Drown Companies
(320) 585-5104
philip@pdcos.com

David Fluegel (*Reviewer*)
Program Specialist,
Center for Small Towns
(320) 589-6451
david@centerforsmalltowns.org

Sue Granger (*Reviewer*)
Entrepreneur,
Gemini Research
(320) 589-3846
gemres@info-link.net

The community applying will receive one complimentary membership (or a membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?

Name Carol Wilcox, Mayor
Address 210 Montana Avenue
City, State, Zip Code Morris, Minnesota 56267
Phone Number (320) 589-3945 Fax (320) 589-3111
Email sjwilcox@hometownsolutions.net

If we are designated an All-America City, we agree to follow NCL's rules (available on the Web site) regarding use of the All-America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: Ed Larson Title: City Manager

Community Statistics

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (*source suggestions*: U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics)

POPULATION (in year 2000 or most recent): 5,173

Source/Date: US Census Bureau, Adjusted Census 2000 (www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/notes)

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 1990-2000 (indicate + or -): -7.8 %

Source/Date: US Census Bureau

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN (percentage):

White alone	<u>93.6</u> %
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	<u>1.5</u> %
Black or African American alone	<u>1.8</u> %
Asian alone	<u>1.5</u> %
American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) alone	<u>1.2</u> %
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOP) alone	<u>0.0</u> %

Some other race alone 0.6 %
Two or more races 1.2 %

Source/Date: US Census Bureau

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$ 46,556

Source/Date: US Census Bureau

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: 8.4 %

Source/Date: US Census Bureau

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 2.0 %

Source/Date: Minnesota Workforce Center, November 2003

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (*percentages, if available*):

19 years old and under 29.4 %
20-24 21.5 %
25-44 19.0 %
45-64 13.9 %
65 and over 16.2 %

Source/Date: US Census Bureau

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: 55.7 %

Source/Date: US Census Bureau

WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION -- Name the three largest employment sectors in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

Colleges, Universities and Professional Schools 15.6 %
Community Care Facilities for the Elderly 8.3 %
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals 7.3 %

Source/Date: Department of Employment & Economic Development and US Census Bureau

Part I: Community Background and Community Challenge Section

Add lines as needed for your responses

1 (A). Community Background: *Set the background for your community. Tell its story. Summarize your community's history, successes and struggles. Describe how your community got to where it is today and your community's current state of affairs. (700 word maximum):*

Morris, Minnesota is a community where high school students participate on decision-making bodies, from the School Board to church councils; where older adults enjoy a lifestyle of health, vitality and dignity; where artists create and sell their work in a Main Street cultural center; and where community picnics bind people of all backgrounds, faiths, ethnicities, and lifestyles together.

Morris, Minnesota, a small prairie city in the Minnesota River Valley, is a community where wind and biomass energy systems will soon provide heat and power to public institutions; where events such as Horticultural Night and the Leonard Wulf Limousine Cattle Auction draw international audiences of thousands annually; where homegrown industries carve out niches in international markets; where the new face of Betty Crocker took form; and where a Federal boarding school for Native Americans emerged into one of the top three public liberal arts colleges in the nation (and continues to offer free tuition for Native Americans).

In short, Morris is a place where dynamic things occur amidst the peace of prairie life. It is a community where we value the adventure and possibilities of the 21st Century without neglecting the basic needs of our people or losing touch with our roots. From its earliest days as a frontier village, Morris distinguished itself through people of vision and foresight, adaptability and ingenuity, endurance, hard work, and integrity. These qualities defined and refined this prairie community for over 130 years, enabling us to take what resources we possess, whether small or great, and turn them into much more.

Morris began as little more than a resting stop on the "Wadsworth Trail," the supply route between St. Cloud, Minnesota and Fort Wadsworth – a military outpost on the northeastern edge of South Dakota. By the 1870's, the railroad moved through and the village of Morris, with its design and economy shaped by the demands of that industry, was officially born. Over time, homesteaders settled and broke the rich prairie sod. Soon, this small railroad town and county seat grew into a regional center with retail and service industries fed by the farm economy.

Its people always motivated by vision and foresight, Morris persistently capitalized on trends, whether negative or positive, and used them as opportunities to open new doors and establish new frontiers for accomplishment. In 1905, Morris opened the largest public library of western Minnesota for that time and, in 1914, was one of the first communities in the nation to adopt the Council-Manager form of government. In 1910, Morris converted the Federal Boarding School into the West Central School of Agriculture and experiment station (WCSA). In its 53 years, WCSA conducted groundbreaking scientific research and educated 7000 farm kids from 15 counties. In the 1960's, when the need for ag education was superceded by the need for a liberal arts education, Morris lobbied the legislature and turned the WCSA into a first-rate college as the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM).

In the 1980's, changes in global agricultural markets weakened small farming operations and forced restructuring of the regional economy. Between 1982 and 1997, 16% of small family farms in Stevens County disappeared and net income from the agricultural sector fell from 28% in 1970 to 4% by 1990.

With less personal investment in the land, young families migrated to larger communities. Those that remained were having fewer children, reducing school enrollments and correlated state funding. Significant numbers of our population were aging, reducing our labor force and increasing demand on and changing the nature of local services. Suddenly, our physically remote location, distant from any metropolitan areas and interstates, became more pronounced as the once thriving retail and service center slowly diminished and fewer jobs existed in traditional sectors. By 1990, most projections showed trends of serious population decline and few voices of hope.

However, consistent with our history, Morris neither gave up in desperation nor settled into complacency. Rather, we strove to understand the trends and took risks, choosing to reinvent ourselves with new economic engines, expanded infrastructure and amenities, unprecedented collaborations, and fresh vigilance. Our meticulous attention to basic human necessities combined with our visionary spirit has laid a foundation for future growth and will spark a new frontier revolution. (700 words)

1 (B). Community Celebration: *Why should your community be selected as an All-America City? Describe what makes your community a great place to live, work, and play. (300 word maximum)*

Morris is 1,500 miles from either coast, yet we have an international flavor. We have five acres of unique public Horticultural Gardens, located at the West Central Research and Outreach Center, and an award winning “Children’s Garden” – the first themed children’s garden in Minnesota dedicated to providing horticulture and agriculture education opportunities to children of all ages. We have a federal research laboratory, excellent educational opportunities from early childhood through University, and our city is clean, well-maintained, and constantly improving. Our many parks are well-groomed, our transit system efficient, and our housing affordable.

Yet, what makes Morris special is beyond all that -- it is the strong heritage of innovation, perseverance, and integrity in our people that makes those things succeed and carries us into the 21st Century. Morris is a repository and incubator of American values that give us the resourcefulness and strength necessary to adapt to an ever-changing world and, like the homesteaders before us, allow us to break new ground, plant new seeds, and nurture the harvest to full maturity.

In times of trouble, we pull together. In recent years as the State of Minnesota implemented massive tax cuts, Morris passed a \$27 million referendum and is now building a new, and needed, elementary school. In 2001, when a local industry hit hard times and faced closure with significant loss of jobs, one citizen purchased the company, the City received a \$500,000 grant and provided a low-interest loan to the new owners, and a three-way partnership provided additional low interest loan funds and saved jobs. In response to healthcare labor shortages, our medical community created a program that is training more than 25 area residents as Registered Nurses and encouraging them to fill local healthcare positions.

In the end, Morris is All-American because here, anyone can succeed. (300 words)

1 (C). Community Challenges: Based upon your community’s current status, describe your community’s two most pressing challenges.

Challenge #1: (200 words maximum)

In the mid 1990’s, Morris identified a significant community-wide facilities void. Family and youth oriented programs lacked adequate space for healthy activities; University students were losing their small PE Annex to new construction; swimming lessons and senior water aerobics borrowed time at hotel pools; athletics groups vied for one gymnasium, leading to scheduling conflicts; healthcare providers had limited space and equipment for physical therapy and awareness programming; and senior

citizens, if exercising at all, walked on cold concrete floors at the hockey arena or outdoors amidst winter elements. Indeed, our harsh and extended winter climate limited outdoor fitness and recreational opportunities, thus placing added demand on already overburdened facilities. Further, extended winters encouraged human isolation within homes and seasonal inactivity, sometimes leading to “winter depression.”

Our population – a mixture of young families, University students, and older adults – needed a place to gather and concentrate on their varied health and recreational needs. However, given economic trends and low population density, we did not, as individual organizations, possess the resources to build multiple, single-function, brick-and-mortar facilities.

Our challenge was providing accessible facilities to meet the increasing health, fitness, and recreational demands of an age-diverse population without dividing precious, and limited, resources. *(199 words)*

Challenge #2: *(200 words maximum)*

In the 1980’s, rural Minnesota experienced economic and policy shifts away from small-scale farming, resulting in weakened rural Main Street economies and population out-migration. To survive, and thrive, our community needed to adapt to these trends and initiate change at a local level.

For decades, change within Morris occurred through a few individuals and organizations making decisions largely in isolation. While this approach reflected the independent and self-sufficient pioneer spirit that helped build our frontier farming community, it ultimately contributed to barriers between community sectors, resulting in overlapping missions, duplicated efforts, and division of resources. It also disenfranchised the interests of some, such as youth or new community members, who felt they had no mechanism through which to participate in community planning. Consequently, Morris lacked consensus on community issues and was not acting collectively toward shared community goals beneath one comprehensive vision.

Our challenge was to find new ways to advocate and act as a change agent within the community without being bound by jurisdiction or affiliation. We needed to implement a participatory process that envisioned a healthy and prosperous community across dimensions, provided an inclusive approach to the community decision-making process, and capitalized on assets already within our community. *(200 words)*

Part II: Community-Driven Projects

Part II requires descriptions of three collaborative community projects that have significantly affected the community. The first two projects should be drawn directly from the two community challenges stated above. The third project should be reflective of what your community is doing for children and youth.

PROJECT ONE (Challenge #1)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

The Regional Fitness Center (RFC) is a 37,000 sq/ft, multi-functional facility delivering premium health, fitness, and recreational space and programming to the public at reasonable cost. Established through a precedent setting collaboration between Morris' public institutions and citizen donors, this \$5 million undertaking broke open new doors for Community / University collaboration and raised a new standard for partnerships community-wide.

The RFC features an air conditioned strength training and cardio fitness room, warm water recreational / therapy pool with waterslide, eight lane competition pool, two multi-purpose courts, an indoor walking / jogging track, outdoor volleyball, and multi-purpose rooms for classes, parties, and events. With this arsenal of resources, the RFC's dedicated and enthusiastic staff of community members, volunteers and University students manage and create programs that serve the diverse health, recreational, and social needs of senior citizens, youth, families, and college students throughout the county. (145 words)

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your first challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

The University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) planned construction of a new science building on the site of a much utilized, but deteriorating, PE Annex. Losing the annex created a void for students and faculty but opened a door to bring the community together to meet everyone's needs.

Morris needed space to offer programs and activities in fitness, family-based recreation, youth and senior athletics, health awareness, and physical therapy. Our age-diverse population had equally diverse needs but existing facilities were inaccessible to the general public, ill-equipped, and overburdened. Our low population base and physical isolation precluded commercial gyms or even a YMCA. Further, such facilities would be too limited in scope, market, and function to serve our needs. We needed multi-functional space that would be accessible and affordable to everyone, plus be intergenerational.

Conversation between Morris' City Manager and UMM's Director of Facilities led to a \$300,000 request to the Minnesota legislature to plan a community recreational facility. A committee of City, County, UMM, business, and school district volunteers planned and designed the facility. With designs in hand, this committee campaigned to raise local support and capital funding. Through much effort, this visionary group educated the community, convinced the Minnesota legislature and U of M Board of Regents of the project's value, and in the end, our community of just over 5,000 people acquired the necessary finances and the RFC opened its doors in the Fall of 1999.

A joint powers agreement, unique in the State, between the City of Morris, Stevens County, UMM, and School District #769 formed the legal structure for the facility. The RFC operations, programming and

staff are sustained entirely through membership dues, tuition fees from UMM students, modest special programming fees, facility / equipment rentals, ticket sales for athletics events, an on-going partnership fund, and grants. (300 words)

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

The RFC is a monument to collaboration and increased trust between our private and public sectors. Prior to the RFC, no collaborations of this magnitude occurred. Our institutions were often cautious of sharing already limited resources or engaging in partnerships that could risk loss of resources. But the planning, financing, and building of this facility required tremendous levels of trust and the combined willing efforts of the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM), the University of Minnesota (U of M) Board of Regents, City of Morris, School District #769, Stevens County, an area bank consortium, area businesses, the Minnesota State Legislature, UMM students, and Morris citizens.

Everyone pulled together. Our public institutions formed an historic joint powers agreement that led to legal adjustments by the U of M Board of Regents; the School District successfully passed a \$1 million referendum which laid the groundwork to again approach the State legislature – this time for \$2.5 million allocation in capital funds.

To raise the remaining \$1.5 million, the community truly demonstrated their support. Three homegrown businesses were first out of the starting gate, contributing \$100,000 each; banks offered their support through low interest loans, before all funds were raised; UMM students voted “Yes” to increase their student fees to pay for RFC operations; and nearly 80 volunteers engaged in fundraising activities from phone-athons to live radio broadcasts at the local mall asking listeners for financial pledges.

On-going collaboration remains the backbone of the RFC. Current partners include Community Education, Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth, Senior Citizens Center, physical therapy and healthcare providers, service providers for developmentally disabled, athletic associations, the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance, and the Morris Area Child Care Center. These collaborations allow the RFC to offer a full-range of programming and outreach to the community while maintaining a commitment to low cost access. (300 words)

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

The RFC is self-sustaining, affordable, and accessible to a broad representation of our population. The following is a membership cost comparison between the RFC and seven comparable facilities (averaged) within 150 miles.

	RFC	Other Facilities
Individual	\$ 180.00	\$ 304.00
Family	\$ 395.00	\$ 450.00

In 2003, records showed a 27.8% usage increase since the first year of operations. Currently, individuals with paid memberships equal 30% of the total county population. (*Figures do NOT include non-members using the RFC for special classes / events.*)

The Hospital Physical Therapy Department brings patients to use the therapy pool, walking / jogging track, and fitness room for rehabilitative regimens. Physical Therapy usage increased 52.5% (183 visits in 2001 to 279 by 2003). The “Arthritis Aquatic Program,” recommended by area physicians, offers participants (98% Senior Citizens) training from instructors certified by the National Arthritis Foundation.

Athletics groups such as Basketball, Volleyball, and Baseball, representing an average of 342 kids, utilize the RFC for conditioning, clinics, practices, summer leagues, and tournaments.

Family / youth programs and events increased from 14 in 2001 to 48 in 2003. The New Years Eve Family Alternative event has annually sustained 500+ participants since 2001. An annual Health Fair, averaging 398 participants, provides interactive education from health care providers and other organizations on subjects from general health to teen pregnancy prevention.

Wellness Programs such as the “Fitness Challenge” provide instruction in personal nutrition, goal setting, and exercise in tandem group activities to encourage overall health. Coaches do pre-assessment health checks of participants (weight, body fat, blood pressure) then help them create and monitor a health program over a period of months. The success of “Fitness Challenges” spawned an adaptation of the program that will soon educate girls in upper elementary, high school and college in health and fitness, while emphasizing the importance of a healthy body image. *(300 words)*

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. *(This person may be contacted to verify information.)*

Cindy Perkins
Director,
Community Education
600 Columbia Avenue
Morris, MN 56267
(320) 589-4394 (daytime)
cperkins@maes.morris.k12.mn.us

PROJECT TWO (Challenge #2)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. *(150 word maximum)*

The Prairie Renaissance Project (PRP) is a Morris Area based, community development initiative started in 1999 through a series of open public meetings. These meetings established a comprehensive community vision and launched a three-year partnership with the Blandin Foundation of Grand Rapids, Minnesota. Throughout the partnership period, Blandin offered potential access of up to \$1 million in grants to leverage additional resources. These resources, combined with citizen and institutional action, strengthened the Morris Area through citizen-driven projects that advanced the community vision.

The PRP facilitated new partnerships, leveraged diverse resources for community projects, mobilized new citizen leaders, and became an agent of change through broad-based collaborations. Today, the PRP is an on-going network builder and banner over diverse community stakeholders and interests. The PRP is neutral territory where anyone from youth to senior citizens, new community members to long term leaders, can contribute to the community development process. *(148 words)*

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your second challenge, the project’s history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

“The Prairie Renaissance allowed the average citizen to feel they have a stake in their community”
-- Jim Beauregard, Chief-of-Police, Morris

The decline of the farm economy and population out-migration affected all dimensions of Morris, diminishing opportunities and weakening our ability to deliver a well-rounded quality of life. Morris needed to adapt to these trends, but people often relied too heavily on government bodies or institutional leaders to carry the burden of community development. We needed to empower our citizenry to become the agents of change in collaboration with institutional and traditional leadership.

To that end, Morris sent 24 citizens representing a diverse cross-section of our population to a nationally recognized five-day Community Leadership Program developed by the Blandin Foundation. This program inspired participants who returned to Morris and gathered more than 150 citizens from all sectors to publicly discuss community challenges and facilitate a process to address those challenges.

Between 1999 and 2000, volunteers assessed the community and authored reports identifying community assets, community perceptions, future trends, and needs for action. Participants drafted a community vision, gathered around action areas, and planned projects that would advance the vision. An Administrative Board governed the process and served as a bridge to maintain consistency between all the partners.

Since 1999, the PRP has maintained a completely volunteer administrative board utilizing rotating leadership and staggered individual commitments. Though the initial projects have been completed, the board continues to meet monthly, seeking new collaborations and new avenues of change. The board recently linked with the Chamber of Commerce “Leadership Morris” program to channel newly trained leaders into a collaborative outlet that initiates change. Partners are currently developing a new process to identify mission overlap among area organizations and institutions and create a plan to share resources toward implementing mutual goals. (297 words)

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

The PRP began as a joint application by the City of Morris, Center for Small Towns, and Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture to enter Blandin’s leadership program. More than 30 area public, private, and non-profit agencies along with nearly 300 citizens created the community vision, identified needs, and planned and implemented more than a dozen community projects.

Community Sectors Represented

Artists / Artisans	Churches / Faith Community
Citizens at large	Diverse Ethnicities
Economic Development	Environmental Groups
Farming / Agricultural Community	Government: City, County & Federal
University	Historical Societies
School District	Law Enforcement
Non-Profits	Private Entrepreneurs
Retired Persons / Senior Citizens	Science and Research Community
Young People (22 and under)	Youth Advocacy Organizations

Organizations that collaborated on various Prairie Renaissance Projects include, but are not limited to, the following:

Partnering Organizations

Agricultural Utilization Research Institute	Arts Council of Stevens County
Community Education	Friends of the Morris Wetland Management District
Glacial Ridge Artists	Grandview Assisted Living
Healthy Communities / Healthy Youth	John's Total Entertainment
Land Stewardship Project	Morris Area Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture
City of Morris	Morris Parks Board
Morris Law Enforcement	Morris Senior Center
Regional Fitness Center	Salvation Army
School District #769	Stevens County Extension
Stevens County Historical Museum	University of Minnesota, Morris
US Fish and Wildlife Service	West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership

Both City of Morris and the Stevens County Historical Museum served as fiscal agents to the Prairie Renaissance Project. An administrative board utilizing staggered memberships to help avoid volunteer burn-out, governed the process and maintained consistency between the partners and projects. This Board has had the following representative members: City of Morris, UMM, University and High School Students, entrepreneurs, citizens at large, diverse ethnicities, gay community, retired persons, youth advocates, environmental groups, and cultural stakeholders. (289 words)

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

Between 2001-2004, Prairie Renaissance partners:

- Leveraged more than \$3 million in grants, in kind, and additional resources for community projects
- Mobilized nearly 300 volunteers from all community sectors
- Networked people of diverse interests and “turfs” to work together toward common goals
- Created the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance (PRCA) the historic union of cultural stakeholders (arts, heritage, horticulture, multi-culturalism, etc.) beneath one 501(c)3 organization.
 - PRCA established a Main Street Cultural Center / Gallery that facilitates on-going collaborations, cultural events, youth mentorships, classes / workshops, and sells the work of 60 area artists. PRCA also distributes weekly e-mail bulletins and quarterly newsletters throughout a 30-mile radius.
- Created a 3-day “Annual Birding Event” that established Morris’ Wetland District on the Minnesota Ornithologist Union’s (MOU) Tourism Map and gave Morris access to a \$400 million eco-tourism industry. 75% of 2003 attendees were from out-of-town.
- Expanded City walking / biking trails by 1.25 miles and linked them with a “Terraced Garden project” planned by a local research facility
- A local foods initiative placed regionally produced ag products in area grocers and brokered a purchasing agreement between Sodexo (UMM’s food service provider) and regional producers wherein UMM purchases a percentage of their food products locally.
- Established a community-wide service-learning network between School district #769, UMM, and community agencies and established service-learning as a teaching pedagogy in the schools

- Created a “Mini Grant Program” where students, supervised by adult mentors, distribute small grants to faculty in school district #769.
- Mobilized 40 youth to design, fundraise, and oversee construction of the \$40,000 “Prairie Renaissance Skateboard Park”
- Placed over 20 youth on community boards
- Installed computers w/ high speed Internet into the Senior Citizens Center and coordinated student volunteers to mentor seniors in computer technology. (300 words)

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Philip Drown (former coordinator of the Prairie Renaissance Project)
 Consultant,
 Philip Drown Companies
 7 Brook Street
 Morris, Minnesota 56267
 (320) 585-5104 (daytime)
 (320) 589-3264 (evening)
philip@pdcos.com

PROJECT THREE

As a commitment to America’s Promise, the National Civic League has issued the Youth Initiative Challenge. We ask that at least one project from each All-America City applicant document ways in which the lives of children and youth have been tangibly improved.

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

TREC (Tutoring, Reading, Enabling Children) is a collaborative program between the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM), Morris Area School District #769, and Morris Area Community Education with the following goals:

- To promote literacy in school age children and throughout the community of Morris
- To provide UMM students with service and learning opportunities
- To provide Morris Area school children with meaningful tutoring and mentoring experiences

Through TREC, adult volunteers, high school students, and UMM students tutor and mentor school children in multiple academic disciplines. TREC emphasizes a balanced approach to meeting learners' needs by providing assistance to both low achieving and gifted students while encouraging parental involvement.

TREC has eight key program areas: In-Class Tutoring, Elementary Homework Helping Center, K-3 Reading Corner, High School Homework Helping Center, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Morris Area Child Care Center (MACCC), Head Start, and Story Time at the Public Library. (149 words)

2. Describe the relationship between this project and the challenge it is addressing, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

In 1997, President Clinton issued a directive that all children in America should read at grade level. Community organizations, schools, and colleges and universities around the country got involved in the America Reads Challenge.

At that time, Morris School District's Youth Development Coordinator managed a small tutoring program that utilized UMM students as tutors and targeted high risk / low achieving children. While the project was able to help approximately 30 kids annually, the Coordinator knew there was potential for much greater impact. Further, parents of higher achieving students, frustrated at the lack of accelerated programs in any school district within 50 miles, requested "gifted student" programs to complement classroom work. However, the School District alone lacked resources and had no consistent mechanism in place to recruit, train, and retain tutors for on-going programs.

Conversation between the Youth Development Coordinator and UMM's Student Activities Volunteer Coordinator led to TREC: a program that brought public educational institutions, UMM students, community-based organizations, and parents together to deliver consistent and high quality tutoring to Morris area youth. A grant through Minnesota Campus Compact enabled the partners to hire a Program Coordinator and build TREC's framework. This framework involved campus-wide recruiting, federal work-study funds for eligible UMM students, on-going training and orientation for tutors, and academic credit for high school students engaged in tutoring.

TREC is sustained through proven commitments by all partners. The funding stream includes the UMM Chancellor's discretionary budget, UMM's Center for Small Towns (a community outreach organization that serves as a conduit to University of Minnesota resources), Morris Area Schools' general fund, and a Title 1 grant to the school district. (267 words)

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

To successfully achieve the national and local academic goals for school children in a town with declining state funding and fewer tax payers carrying larger burdens, collaboration was essential. TREC is fortunate that a partnership strategy was developed before the program started. A vision and set of goals were defined early and a list of skills and resources needed to accomplish them were identified. Shared input from both partners meant that tasks were assigned to the most appropriate staff. Because nearly all of the tutors would be working in the Morris Area Elementary School, it made sense that the program Coordinator be housed within that building. Community Education, located in the Elementary School, provides office space and administrative support. However, it would be impossible to recruit tutors without UMM's infrastructure and access to UMM e-mail lists, web sites, and other campus communication resources.

A truly collaborative piece is the TREC Coordinator position. Because the program is co-funded, the Coordinator is employed by both partners. This creates a seamless interaction between the University and the School District and allows the program to build on the separate strengths of each partner. Co-funding has been a very beneficial and responsive system, allowing staff to function within both partners' internal structures and focus on developing a quality program rather than fundraising. Parents are also a dynamic element in the collaboration.

Because sharing information is power, regular program updates and a yearly review covering all program aspects are completed by the Program Coordinator and distributed to all partners. Additionally, all partners passionately employ an open door policy, allowing for an ongoing and informal flow of information in both directions. (227 words)

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

Annually, an average of 70 tutors working 6-8 hours per week deliver high quality tutoring to an average of 400 students per month. One UMM Honors student performed an independent statistical analysis of standardized test scores comparing classrooms both with and without TREC tutors. The review included scores from the Iowa Test of Basic skills and Minnesota's Basic Standards tests for third and fifth grades. Her analysis showed that the average score on reading and math tests was a statistically significant two to three points higher in classrooms with TREC tutors.

For school children, the experience of befriending and learning from UMM students is invaluable. For UMM, the TREC program creates better student retention and solidifies a spirit of cooperation between the college, the school district, and the community. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that student involvement and college success are interrelated. Comments from student journals, such as the following, indicate that their experience with TREC has been beneficial.

"I dealt with a wide range of kids with a wide range of capabilities and personalities. I learned so much about myself through working with these kids. As my experience continued, I developed a profound appreciation for the value that each of them brings to the world. Of course, some days I didn't feel like spending my afternoon at the elementary school. But after each day, I left with the incredible feeling of having made a difference in the lives of some kids. Perhaps the most humbling experience was my last visit to a 3rd grade class. I was attacked with papers and pencils - 18 kids begged me for my autograph before I left."

-- Matt Hardy, UMM Student Tutor

TREC's success inspired new plans that include outreach to "underserved" populations in rural west central Minnesota, specifically Hispanic and American Indian students. (300 words)

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Sue Dieter (*former TREC Coordinator*)
General Manager / Publisher,
Morris Sun / Tribune
PO Box 470
(320) 589-2525 (daytime)
(320) 589-1159 (evening)
sdieter@info-link.net

Part III

Civic Infrastructure

Describe your community. Using the four major sections of the National Civic League's *The Civic Index, Second Edition* (see www.ncl.org for more information), examine your community's civic infrastructure and civic capacity and describe how your community *lives* each of the answers to each of the following questions. Please include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths and faced its challenges. The roman numerals correspond to parts of *The Civic Index, Second Edition*. Also see the application instructions for this section.

I. What is our community vision for its future? (300 word maximum)

This abbreviated "Community Vision 2010" was created by consensus of 150+ citizens during a series of open public meetings. Morris has already successfully implemented many elements, as detailed in this application.

Community Leadership

Morris utilizes innovative and diverse leadership tools such as rotating leadership positions, small problem-solving task groups, and horizontal decision-making processes. We mentor youth in leadership and give them greater voice in the community. We have an integrated vision and shared leadership between the campus and community in the cooperative pursuit of mutual goals.

Economic Opportunities

Morris is a community with locally-owned businesses paying wages that meet or exceed state averages. We are a regional center with a focus on services, especially in education, health, and agriculture. We attract people of diverse backgrounds to live and work and provide economic opportunities for youth.

Recreational and Cultural Opportunities

Numerous recreational facilities house multi-generational activities under one roof, cultural events are abundant and accessible, outdoor activities plentiful, and a Community / University collaboration exhibits both world-wide and local talent.

Valuing Diversity

We acknowledge Morris' economic, social, cultural, and spiritual development is enhanced by our commitment to celebrate and protect diversity in all forms. Morris is composed of an ecumenical faith community and intergenerational / multi-racial people who enjoy quality employment, cultural, and recreational opportunities.

Environmental Stewardship

Morris is set in a clear, clean, pristine, natural environment, surrounded by a beautiful and protected wetland.

Infrastructure and Services

Morris is well maintained and aesthetically pleasing with many trees, clean rivers, parks and trails that are accessible, safe, and welcoming. We have expanded medical and educational systems, affordable housing, and public transportation accessible to all citizens.

Life-Long Learning

Educational opportunities that maximize existing resources and incorporate new technology are available to all people, taking into account their lifestyles, interests, and desired skill development. (300 words)

II. How are we fulfilling the new roles for community governance?

II. (a). What is the extent and nature of community member participation in community improvement efforts? (300 word maximum)

From large-scale events to small projects that make a difference, Morris citizens roll up their sleeves and go to work. Participation on boards, commissions, and issue-specific task forces is in the hundreds, demonstrating citizen willingness to tackle challenging issues and augment city efforts. Community members are the backbone of events such as the annual “Prairie Pioneer Days” festival and “Welcome Back UMM” picnic, which require support from several dozen volunteers.

The Prairie Renaissance Project (PRP) gathered more than 150 people for the visioning and planning process. Over four years, the PRP leveraged more than 300 community participants who worked on projects. The Prairie Renaissance Cultural Center, located on Main Street, was the result of more than 20 volunteers who transformed an empty shell into a beautiful cultural center and art gallery. Further, the building owner donated a portion of the rent to the cultural center.

Morris’ Main Street “Pocket Garden” was the idea of one citizen responding to a previously identified community beautification need. In 2001, one citizen approached Morris’ Mayor about planting a garden in an empty lot on Main Street that had become an “eyesore.” Together, they acquired permission from the property owner, sought donations of flowers and materials from local businesses, recruited volunteers, and planted a beautiful garden. Each year, volunteers plant, weed, and water the garden with flowers and materials donated by local businesses. In subsequent years, citizens added a sandbox for kids, benches, and a picket fence set-up by UMM students.

The “All-America City” process itself drew more than 30 citizens from City and County government, University of Minnesota, Morris, business, non-profits, youth advocates, retired persons, and more between January 7, 2004 and March 8, 2004. These volunteers gathered weekly to contribute to the AAC application through large group work sessions and task forces. (299 words)

II. (b). What role does government play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

The City of Morris makes tremendous effort to keep the constituency informed through quarterly newsletters and bi-weekly radio spots, actively seeks citizen input, and takes pro-active steps toward strengthening and improving the community.

For example, 47% of Morris housing units are rental, occupied by UMM students, young families with small children and senior citizens. In 2001, the Mayor expressed her intentions to ensure that every rental unit be safe, sanitary, and completely up-to-code as a pre-emptive measure to protect both landlord and tenant. The Council held community meetings to open public dialogue and established an on-going inspection program. When the first conflicts arose, the City established a grievance committee comprised of landlords, City officials, and tenants to be an on-going mechanism for dispute resolution. As a result, protective measures are now in place for both landlord and tenant, and prospective tenants can view a list of inspected units on the City Housing and Redevelopment Authority web site.

The City collaborated with a UMM professor and her mathematics class in a service-learning project to maximize efficiency of City snow removal. The City gave the class information such as plowing routes, the order in which streets are plowed vs. avenues, time consumed, and how equipment and manpower are deployed. The professor and her students analyzed the data, prepared written suggestions for cost-saving, and mapped an optimal route plan that is now employed by City work crews.

The City, in collaboration with citizens, continually engage in projects to enhance Morris' amenities and aesthetics, including building five miles of new walking / biking trails and commissioning a citizen task force to study the feasibility of an outdoor aquatic center. City crews, with citizen volunteers and members of UMM's Arbor Club, plant or replace thousands of trees through Morris' tree planting program. (297 words)

II. (c). What role does the non-profit sector play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

Morris is greatly improved by the initiative of non-profits. Their willingness to develop strong working relationships with local government and other non-profits while mobilizing citizens and giving them "permission" to try new things makes a tangible community impact.

The "Common Cup" coffeehouse is the collaborative effort of two churches and one campus ministry who decided to fill a community need when a previous coffeehouse went out of business. Common Cup provides an open atmosphere that welcomes everyone and has become a gathering place for the entire community. Through collaboration with numerous other non-profits, Common Cup hosts live entertainment such as music and literary readings, promotes diversity through monthly "Ethnic Night" dinners, displays the work of local artists, and donates restaurant proceeds to local and world wide charities.

Civic Organizations such as the Lions, Eagles, Kiwanis, and American Legion, whose diverse members touch every community sector, make significant contributions to community improvement. Kiwanis built a \$70,000 band shell in one City park and contributes thousands of dollars annually to youth needs such as scholarships and playground equipment. In 2003, the Eagles Club invested more than \$30,000 toward local programs and activities that improved the lives of senior citizens and youth.

The upcoming "Word Parade", a month of events and activities celebrating reading and writing, is the combined effort of the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance (PRCA), Learning Unlimited, TREC Program, Friends of the Morris Library, UMM, and the local newspaper. The PRCA itself collaborates with dozens of organizations throughout a 30-mile radius to provide diverse cultural programming and fun new activities that enhance the community. PRCA recently organized a project that created 10 community banners, hung by City crews, on light posts along Main Street. These banners were designed by a local artist and painted by more than 30 children and adults. (300 words)

II. (d). What role does business play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

Morris businesses are willing to get involved in "out-of-the-box" partnerships that address community needs. In 2002, when Healthy Communities / Healthy Youth (HC/HY) needed to meet community identified needs for "healthy youth spaces," they approached the owner of John's Total Entertainment, a Main Street business that draws a heavily weighted youth clientele. HC/HY wanted to go where the kids already congregated, rather than pursue building a Youth Center -- a project that was not financially

feasible. This partnership created a youth center alternative which now provides space and healthy activities for more than 200 kids, brings added revenue to the business by increasing traffic and gives HC/HY effective avenues through which to reach kids with quality programming.

The Downtown Development Committee, coordinated through the Chamber of Commerce, was established in 1996 during the City of Morris' Comprehensive Planning process. This committee, comprised of local businesses, landlords, realtors, bankers, City Council members and University representatives, meets monthly to plan and implement community improvement projects. Recent projects included an eight page, full color community marketing brochure, and a "buy local" campaign that encouraged people to do Holiday shopping in town. Current projects in planning include:

- Transforming a large parking lot into an attractive amenity with added green space and trees.
- Collaborating with local artists to paint murals on downtown buildings.

Numerous businesses sponsor events such as "Daycare in the Park," an annual event that draws hundreds of parents, children and their day-care providers for a fun filled day of activities, games, and prizes. The "Parade of Lights," sponsored by local businesses and organizations, is an annual after-dark event in which elaborate floats decorated with lights parade down Main Street. One of Morris' most beloved events, the "Parade of Lights" gathers hundreds to Main Street to kick off the holiday season. (300 words)

III. How do we work together as a community?

III. (a). How does our community recognize and celebrate its diversity? (300 word maximum)

Since 2001, our faith community has organized an annual "Picnic in the Park". This event, open to all, is the combined effort of 14 churches / UMM campus ministries and draws 600 – 700 people. Churches also host an annual Thanksgiving dinner in collaboration with UMM's Black Student Union and organize an ecumenical service at the county fair, attended by of 200 – 300 people. UMM's "Spiritual Pathways" program has, for 25 years, featured "less practiced" faiths such as Quaker, Buddhist, Wicca, and Native American practices through group discussions led by local practitioners.

University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) actively pursues diversity through its recruiting and hiring practices and is a catalyst to promoting diversity. Fifteen percent of the student population are people of color (the highest percentage of any University of Minnesota campus) and one-quarter of UMM's faculty are of international origin. The Ambassadors for Cultural Exchange (ACE) program brings people of diverse ethnic backgrounds into elementary classrooms to introduce themselves and their culture to community children. "World Touch Cultural Heritage Week" celebrates four ethnic minority groups. Each year's theme is based on various United Nations' themes. Circle of Nations Indian Association sponsors an Annual Pow Wow and Peace Run, while the Asian Student Association coordinates a Dance Mixer.

In 1999, the City Council established a Human Rights Commission (HRC) to promote diversity awareness and education and protect civil rights. The HRC initiated intensive teacher in-service trainings in diversity; purchases books, videos, and teaching materials for schools and libraries; and has an acclaimed Web Site. In collaboration with the National Honors Society, HRC sponsors the Martin Luther King Challenge (MLKC) where high school students spend a week visiting civil rights exhibits located throughout the school, consider their meaning, and respond to thought provoking questions. (292 words)

III. (b). How does our community work with neighboring communities to address shared challenges? Is there a shared regional vision? (300 word maximum)

Through the Western Area City County Cooperative (WACCCO), Morris purchases and shares equipment with 10 counties in western Minnesota and shares training opportunities for police, public works, and fire departments. When several nearby communities experienced severe flooding, Morris sent City and volunteer crews and equipment to assist in the clean-up. When Morris experienced tremendous damage from downed trees and power lines after a July 4, 2003 storm, surrounding counties immediately dispatched crews and equipment to help.

Stevens County Ambulance Service (SCAS), based in Morris, has established a regional presence as a healthcare resource and partner with surrounding counties. In the past three years, SCAS provided training and education to more than 6000 EMTs, citizens, businesses and organizations throughout an eight county area.

SCAS recently formed a partnership with regional law enforcement agencies, fire and first responder teams, hospitals, other ambulance services, and public health agencies to purchase, distribute, and train communities in the use of Automatic External Defibrillators (AED). Cardiovascular diseases claim more lives each year than the next five leading causes of death combined. Prevention, recognizing signs and symptoms, and quick action are the keys to survival. Placing AEDs in strategic locations increases chances of survival and saves lives. In 2003, the first five public access defibrillators were placed in four area high schools the Regional Fitness Center in Morris, and an additional 25 throughout a six county area. 40 additional AEDs will be placed throughout the region in 2004. Partners have conveyed appreciation for Morris' leadership and acknowledged that without Morris' pro-active efforts the enhancements would not have occurred in surrounding counties.

Morris shares an economic development office with five communities. In the past 10 years, this office provided \$120 million in loan packaging to area manufacturing and value-added businesses and helped area businesses provide 325 new jobs. (300 words)

IV. How does our community strengthen its ability to solve problems? (300 word maximum)

Morris has developed a culture where problems and issues are not swept under the carpet, but are brought out into the public sphere and addressed with thoughtfulness and action. By equipping our people with leadership skills, facilitating open dialogues, and commissioning action-oriented task forces, we are able to deal with community issues *and opportunities* as they arise.

The Chamber of Commerce "Leadership Morris" program has graduated 175 people since it began in 1994. Through this program, community members attend monthly day-long sessions over the course of one year. Participants learn collaborative decision-making and leadership skills, become better acquainted with local and state leaders, network with other citizens, and get involved in projects. In addition, Morris sent 24 citizens to a nationally recognized 5-day Community Leadership Program and is currently planning to send another 24 in September 2004.

We are also developing the infrastructure for youth involvement by engaging youth at all levels of community work and decision-making. More than 20 youth have been placed on community boards; "Listening Lunches" place high school students in discussions with law enforcement and City Council officials on community issues; and the community-wide service-learning network has engaged more than 1000 UMM students (roughly 50% of the student population) and 750+ K-12 students to work on community service projects.

To better understand community issues and give all citizens opportunity to take action, Morris opens up public dialogue in numerous ways. Every City Council agenda reserves time for any community member to voice concerns or raise new issues; a “National Issues Forum” gathers 20 – 40 people monthly to explore national issues affecting us at a local level; and a newly forming “Rural Outreach Network” is gathering area non-profits together to better understand mutual missions, explore a broader regional network, and share resources toward mission implementation. (298 words)

End of Application

See www.ncl.org/aac/ or the application instructions for detailed application instructions and sample applications from previous All-America City Winners.

