

*Welcome to the*

# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY



*August 10-11, 2009*

*Sioux Falls Convention Center*

*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*

# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

*August 10 – 11, 2009   Sioux Falls, South Dakota*

The Midwest Rural Assembly thanks its coordinating organizations!

Rural Learning Center

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Avera Rural Health Institute

Center for Rural Affairs

Center for Rural Strategies

Dakota Rural Action

Heartland Center for Leadership Development

League of Rural Voters

Main Street Project

National Catholic Rural Life Conference

Nebraska Housing Developers Association

North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development

Northern Great Plains Inc

Renewing the Countryside

Rural Policy Research Institute

South Dakota Rural Enterprise, Inc.

The Minnesota Project

West Central Initiative

Cultivating a Stronger Rural America

*Web site: [midwestruralassembly.org](http://midwestruralassembly.org)*

*email: [midwestruralassembly@iatp.org](mailto:midwestruralassembly@iatp.org)*

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# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

August 10 – 11, 2009 Sioux Falls, South Dakota

## Day One

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**8:00 a.m. Breakfast and coffee time**

BALLROOM B

**9:00 a.m. Welcome and Inspiration: Why we assemble today**

BALLROOM A

*Speakers:* Randy Parry, Rural Learning Center, and Elsie Meeks, South Dakota State Director, USDA Rural Development

**10:15 a.m. Assembly Café: A community dialogue**

BALLROOM A

The Assembly will host a World Café dialogue to get to know each other by discussing: “What personal intention brought you to this rural assembly? What will our grandchildren praise us for having dared to start today?”

*Hosted by Northern Great Plains Inc & the Rural Learning Center*

**11:15 a.m. Collective harvesting of group discussions**

BALLROOM A

**NOON Lunch and Speakers**

BALLROOM B

*Keynote Speaker:* Dallas Tonsager, USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development

*Luncheon Speaker:* Maxine Moul, Nebraska State Director, USDA Rural Development

**1:30 p.m. Bringing our voices into policy formation: Rural issue breakout sessions (concurrent)**

- **Stewardship of Natural Resources: *Working Landscapes in the Great Plains and Midwest***

MEETING ROOM 6/7

Our rural natural resources—soils, water, wildlife, and ecosystems—and how we use and steward them are critical to successful, sustainable rural development strategies. Our public and working landscapes provide the opportunity to promote energy independence, grow healthy food in a sustainable manner, mitigate climate change, and develop stronger natural-resource-based economies. This breakout session will feature local leaders sharing their communities’ experiences in promoting sustainable production and use of energy, food, water, and “ecological services” through innovative approaches to natural resource, land, and agricultural systems management. After panel presentations, participants will be able to talk in-depth with individual participants and technical experts.

- **Milan Sustainable Energy Utility:** Cheryl Landgren and Dr. Cecilia Martinez will talk about Milan, Minnesota’s, exploration of a Sustainable Energy Utility, an innovative, community-led initiative that promotes renewable energy, energy efficiency and economic development.
- **Carbon and Agriculture—Climate and Beyond:** Martin Kleinschmit, a “perennial” farmer and carbon educator from Nebraska, will discuss how farming can be a major contributor to combating climate change while helping farmers increase soil health and reduce risk.
- **Madelia Model—Towards a community based energy system:** Linda Meschke of Rural Advantage will share lessons in community energy planning from Madelia, Minnesota, that gets communities to think beyond ethanol and toward an alternative energy solution that provides multiple benefits, including improved economic opportunities, enhanced water quality, and a stable, local energy source.
- **Local Rural Food Systems:** Jacob Limmer, owner of the Cottonwood Bistro in Brookings, SD, and operator of Glacial Till Farm, will discuss the opportunities and challenges of local food planning in rural South Dakota.

*Organized and moderated by Jim Kleinschmit, Director of the Rural Communities program at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy with participation by you.*

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- **Health of Our People**

MEETING ROOM 9/10

Our current health care system is not working for rural America. Too often, farmers and rural small business owners are forced to purchase coverage in the individual market where they pay more and receive less. There aren't enough medical professionals to go around, rural emergency services are not paid, disease prevention is not emphasized ... we could go on. Without adequate health care, rural communities suffer. On the other hand, health care reform that works for all of America will spur entrepreneurial rural development and stimulate our economy. Come to this session to talk about the health care issues faced in your community and discuss ideas to overcome them. We'll also discuss about the current state of reform in Washington, DC, and how you can get engaged in helping make sure health care reform works for rural America.

*Led by Steph Larsen & Virginia Wolking of the Center for Rural Affairs with participation by you.*

- **Quality in Education: Rural Schools—Community Development Partners?**

MEETING ROOM 11

For years, the rural community development mantra was “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs.” We are beginning to understand that it needs to be “People, People, People.” Should “people attraction” become our cornerstone strategy? Can and should school districts become major partners in rural community development and people attraction? The University of South Dakota School of Education in partnership with Mid-Central Education Cooperative is exploring an innovative strategy to place and retain new teachers in rural settings. It is about effectively hosting new people in our communities. Session leaders will outline these emerging roles and strategies and invite session attendees to offer their perspectives and insights. Session leaders will include: Dr. Rick Melmer, Dean of the University of South Dakota School of Education; Dan Guericke, Director of the Mid-Central Education Cooperative; and Dr. Jim Beddow, Rural Learning Center.

*Organized by Dr. Jim Beddow of the Rural Learning Center with participation by you.*

- **Investment in Our Communities**

MEETING ROOM 12/13

What works in rural community development? In Holt County, Nebraska (pop. 10,300), young leaders have been at the center of the county's new investments in community and economic development for the past five years. Young adults who helped start the HomeTown Leadership Institute, the county's leadership development program, were instrumental in creating a countywide economic development agency that represents a partnership among all the municipalities in the county. The county is focusing new energy on entrepreneurship and youth engagement, and young adults who moved away after high school are starting to come back home. Community philanthropy has been reinvigorated, resulting in, among other successes, a recent \$2.3 million estate gift to support entrepreneurship and people attraction.

- Nicole Sedlacek, the Holt County economic development director and coordinator of HomeTown Competitiveness will share how this county is organizing to increase strategic investments in their future.
- David Hengel of the Center for Community Stewardship will discuss how your community can grow and succeed. Great communities aren't born, they are built. The assets that lead to successful community development are not inherited. Rather, they can be created, developed and encouraged to build a successful community. The Center for Community Stewardship focuses on helping communities identify, grow, and support strong leaders. Much like a successful gardener, these community leaders can plant the seeds of success so that everyone can enjoy the fruits of their ideas, innovation, and labor.
- Victor Vasquez, recently appointed Deputy Under Secretary for USDA Rural Development, will provide observations to the group.

Cornelia Butler Flora, PhD., Charles F. Curtiss, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University, will moderate the discussion. *Organized by Cornelia Butler Flora of Iowa State University, Milan Wall of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, & Nancy Straw of the West Central Initiative with participation by you.*

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- **Broadband and Rural Communities:**

*Creating a Healthy Digital Ecology and a Community Vision for Federal Funding*

MEETING ROOM 14

Rural America is vast and diverse. Sixty million Americans, about 20 percent of the population, live in the countryside on 80 percent of the nation's land. Of the 250 poorest American counties, 244 are rural. Digital communications technology could be part of the solution for addressing rural economic and social concerns. Broadband access would allow rural America to reap the benefits of telehealth, telecommuting, higher education distance learning, improved emergency communications systems, and greater connection to the global economy. The federal government is spending billions on media education and Internet expansion as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. This session will help us formulate our vision for a healthy digital ecology that makes sure Internet and digital access increases opportunities for work, education, and well-being. Panelists include Edyael Casaperalta, Center for Rural Strategies; Joshua Breitbart, Peoples Production House; Loris Taylor, Native Public Media; Beth McConnell, Media Democracy Coalition; Steven Renderos, Project Coordinator, Minnesotan Media Empowerment Project. *Organized and moderated by Amalia Deloney, Media Action Grassroots Network Coordinator with the Center for Media Justice, with participation by you.*

**3:15 p.m. Break**

**3:30 p.m. Collective harvesting of policy discussion sessions**

BALLROOM A

Moderated by Brian Dabson of the Rural Policy Research Institute

*This dialogue will include comments and feedback from our policymaker panel:*

- Victor Vasquez, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development
  - Colleen Landkamer, Minnesota State Director, USDA Rural Development
  - Toni Merdan, Senior Economic Development Officer for Congressman Collin Peterson, MN
  - Benjamin Ready, Economic Development Advisor for Senator John Thune
- Organized by the National Rural Assembly*

**5:00 p.m. Networking with others from the region**

CONCOURSE

**6:00 p.m. Dinner of local foods**

BALLROOM A

**7:00 p.m. Informal evening activities: Meeting new friends and connecting with each other**

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## Day Two

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**8:00 a.m. Breakfast and coffee time**

BALLROOM A

**9:00 a.m. Morning focus: How to make our ideas happen**

BALLROOM A *Speaker:* Mark Ritchie, Minnesota Secretary of State

**9:45 a.m. Learning from each other: Enhancing our skills (concurrent)**

- **Community Leadership and Change**

MEETING ROOM 6/7

Change is a constant reality, but that doesn't mean that community leaders are always ready to embrace it. In this interactive workshop, participants will consider how today's challenges facing community leaders are fundamentally different from those of the past. Plus, you will learn what new opportunities for community and economic development are suggested by significant changes in demographics, economics, technology and the environment.

*Presented by Milan Wall of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development with participation by you.*

- **Media Basics and Policy Advocacy**

MEETING ROOM 9/10

Calls to Congress, visits to Washington, DC, letters to the editor, opinion editorials, action alerts, oh my! All of these strategies and others are used every day to influence policymakers and shape legislation. Whether you're passionate about agriculture, rural development, health care, education or another rural issue, join us in this session to talk about strategies to win at your statehouse and in Washington, DC. We will talk about strategies that have worked in the past as well as emerging tools to shape public opinion and public policy. We will learn from each other and share ideas for building upon our successes to win more policy victories for rural people and rural communities.

*Led by Steph Larsen & Virginia Wolking of the Center for Rural Affairs with participation by you.*

- **Building an e-Network Using Social Media**

MEETING ROOM 11

The Rural Learning Center is home to a remarkable community and economic development movement that works to restore social capital and build relationships in Miner County, South Dakota. Today, the RLC understands that building genuine relationships is the foundation of creating successful community development initiatives in any rural place. The creation of social networks is one way to build these relationships. Join us for an interactive session to explore how you can use social networks to connect and build relationships in your community and organization. We'll spend time exploring various social media tools, and create a network among conference attendees. You will get the most out of this session if you bring a laptop!

*Led by Mike Knutson and Lindsey Karlson of the Rural Learning Center with participation by you.*

- **Tools for Understanding and Engaging Your Community**

MEETING ROOM 12/13

This session uses "Open Space," a process that allows small groups to convene based on the flow and dynamics of the Assembly. Attendees will create the agenda and learning sessions on the spot based on the interests, knowledge, and questions in the room. For leaders experienced with one or more tools who are willing to share their knowledge and for anyone who wants to learn something new. Tools could include Community Capitals, Asset Based Community Development, the U Process, talking circles, and whatever else shows up in the room. Tool experts: please join this session to share your experiences.

*Hosted by the Meadowlark Institute with leadership and participation by you.*

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- 11:30 a.m.** **The Future of Rural America: The Next Generation**  
BALLROOM A Moderated by Marcie McLaughlin of the Rural Policy Research Institute  
*Panelists:*
- Nick Tilsen, Executive Director, Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, Porcupine, SD
  - Tami Severson, Housing Coordinator, Rural Learning Center, Howard, SD
  - Nick Olson, Program Organizer, Farm Beginnings Program–Land Stewardship Project, and Manager, Earthrise Farm, Madison, MN
- Organized by Christy James of Renewing the Countryside*
- 12:30 p.m.** **Lunch and Speakers: Moving to action**  
BALLROOM A *Luncheon Speaker:* Garat Ibrahim, Minnesota Organizer for the Midwest Immigrant Health Project, Center for New Community  
*Keynote Speaker:* The Honorable Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, U.S. Representative from South Dakota
- 2:00 p.m.** **Afternoon focus: Action steps and commitments**  
BALLROOM A Working together to explicitly fulfill the Midwest Rural Assembly intention: to begin building a regional network to advance policies and initiatives that can help revitalize rural communities.  
*Hosted by the Great Plains Network for Rural Policy and Rural People, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and Renewing the Countryside.*
- 3:00 p.m.** **Report-back of plans and action steps**  
BALLROOM A
- 3:45 p.m.** **Closing commitments**  
BALLROOM A Working together to develop a regional network and advance our collective priorities.  
*Kathy Callies of the Rural Learning Center and Jim Kleinschmit of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy*
- 4:00 p.m.** **Assembly adjourns**

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## FEATURED SPEAKERS, HOSTS AND FACILITATORS

### Joseph Bartmann

Joe is married to his high school sweetheart and Daddy to three amazing little girls. He is still growing up in rural South Dakota, and has been there his whole life. Before joining the RLC in 2006, he lead a number of local community and economic development organizations in southeastern South Dakota. As Community Outreach Consultant, Joe helps the RLC lead the work of co-discovery with communities outside Miner County, and work on the big and small ideas that can systemically shift rural thinking. Much of Joe's RLC time is spent hosting conversations in communities, listening, writing, thinking and learning. He spends plenty of time seeing the beauty of the northern Great Plains from behind a windshield (while working to reduce his travel impact). He is also one of the "green is good" evangelists around the RLC, and is currently working on green projects around Sioux Falls.



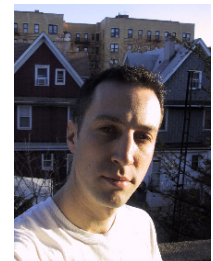
### Dr. Jim Beddow



Jim Beddow is a native of Woonsocket, South Dakota, where he first learned about small town (1,048) community engagement watching his father as mayor. After graduating from the University of South Dakota, he studied agricultural and rural history at the University of Oklahoma where he received a Ph.D. He worked extensively with small communities in his roles of President of Dakota Wesleyan University and President of the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society Foundation. He was founding member of The Rural Learning Center Board of Directors in 2002 and currently serves as a Senior Consultant for the Rural Learning Center.

### Joshua Breitbart

Joshua Breitbart is the Policy Director for People's Production House and an adjunct Policy Analyst with the Open Technology Initiative of New America Foundation. He is on the board of Allied Media Projects, which hosts the annual Allied Media Conference in Detroit, Michigan.



### Kathy Callies



Kathy Callies was raised on a farm in south of Howard, SD. Following graduation from Howard High Kathy attended Dakota State University and completed her bachelor's degree in 1983. While pursuing her degree she worked at Dakota State University in the areas of admissions, financial aid and records for a total of 21 years. Kathy has also completed work toward an MBA at the University of South Dakota/Vermillion. In 1998 Kathy came home to work as human resources manager at PBM Packaging, Inc. During that time Kathy volunteered as a member of the Miner County Strategic Planning Committee and served on the charter board of directors for MCCR. In 2001 I joined the MCCR staff as the development director. Since that time we have created 13 new organizations - 11 not for profit organizations and 2 for profit organizations. One of these is Children's Care Corner, licensed day care center located in Howard. I serve on their board of directors. Today I work with the Rural Learning Center as the VP for Advancement.

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## Edyael Casaperalta



Edyael worked with Rural Strategies in its efforts in the Gulf Coast in the fall and winter of 2006-2007 as a consultant and has recently joined the full-time staff. She has worked with the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educational pursuits and community youth leadership, beginning when she was a sophomore at Edcouch-Elsa High School in Elsa, Texas. She was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States when she was 12, graduated from E-E HS in 2001. Edyael is one of four founders of the Llano Grande Center's Spanish Language Immersion Institute, and she led several community based research initiatives in her rural South Texas home town. She received her BA from Occidental College in Los Angeles and has just completed a master's program in Latin American Studies at Ohio

University in Athens.

## Brian Dabson

Brian Dabson is the President and CEO of the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) and Board Chair of the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. He is Research Professor at the Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, Columbia where, among other things, he teaches a graduate course in regional development policy. Dabson has over 30 years of experience in public, private, and nonprofit sectors on both sides of the Atlantic dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for low-income people and distressed communities. Recognized nationally and internationally for his work on entrepreneurship development, particularly in a rural context, he has given many keynote presentations and consultations across the United States, Europe, Australia, and India. He is also a frequent speaker and writer on rural policy and the implications of global forces on rural America. He is a member of the Community Development Advisory Council of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Prior to his current appointment, Dabson was President of CFED (formerly Corporation for Enterprise Development), a Washington DC-based national nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding economic opportunity through asset-building, entrepreneurship, and economic development. He held that position for 13 years. At the same time, he served two terms as President of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Forum on Social Innovations.



## Amalia Deloney



Amalia Deloney is the Media Action Grassroots Network Coordinator with the Center for Media Justice. Formerly a Senior Fellow at the Main Street Project--she has over 14 years of community and cultural organizing, and community education experience with a specific focus on human rights and anti-racism education, cultural rights and the production of knowledge, as well as movement building and anti-racism work. Deloney is a member of the Social Change Grant Committee of the Headwaters Foundation, and a board member of the Headwaters Foundation for Justice. Nationally, she serves on the boards of the Indigenous Women's Network and the Media Democracy Coalition. She is also a community editor for Twin Cities Indy Media focusing on Media Justice. She has a B.A. degree in urban studies and history from Macalester.

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## Kerstin Gorham



Kerstin Gorham joined IATP as a Senior Program Associate in June 2009. For the past 16 years she worked on poverty alleviation and sustainable economic development in the rural Upper Midwest and Pacific Northwest through various positions at the Northwest Area Foundation. Kerstin managed a successful 10-year partnership with Miner County, South Dakota, which turned around 70 years of population decline and revived its economy through new renewable energy industries and organic agriculture. She also assisted nonprofit organizations in strategic planning, leadership development, community engagement, collaboration, communications and evaluation. In 2008 she helped develop and wrote the foundation's new strategic plan. Kerstin has also worked as a writer, researcher and editor in Boston and Minneapolis. She is a coach to the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's Neighborhood Leadership Program and a graduate of their James P. Shannon Leadership Institute. Kerstin holds a B.A. in history and science from Harvard University and an M.A. in American social and ecological history from Brandeis University.

## Dan Guericke

Dan Guericke holds a Master's degree in school administration and has over 28 years of experience as a teacher and administrator in K-12 education. He is currently Director of the Mid-Central Education Cooperative and several related organizations that serve more than 20 school districts across South Dakota. Known as a creative and visionary leader, he created the DIAL Virtual School that provides middle school and high school distance classes using live, two-way, interactive video technology. DIAL also provides a unique ACT Prep Program for high schools students. He has been an active community leader in rural South Dakota.



## Cornelia Butler Flora



Cornelia Butler Flora is the Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Sociology at Iowa State University. She served for 15 years as the Director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, covering the 12 Midwestern States. She has been working with and studying community-based natural resource management since the 1970s in collaboration with Extension, USDA Forest Service, NRCS, USAID and the World Bank. In the 21st century, her research, writing, and teaching increasingly address community organization for sustainable development. She is part of the evaluation team for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Food and Fitness Initiative in Northeast Iowa, a participatory native food research program on the Hopi/Tewa reservation, and a research/outreach team developing immigrants as sustainable farmers to contribute to sustainable local food systems in rural Iowa. Internationally, her efforts have focused on Latin America and the importance of community natural resource management in adapting to climate change. She is a past president of the Rural Sociological Society, the Society for Food and Human Values, and the Community Development Society. She serves on a number of governing boards, including that of Winrock, International and CONDESAN (Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Andean Region). She consults with the World Bank, USAID, and UNIFEM on issues of sustainability and food. Her recent books include *Communities and Agroecosystems* and *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, 3rd edition. She is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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## David Hengel



Dave is the Director of the Center for Community Stewardship in Bemidji MN. The Center's goal is to build successful communities by empowering their greatest asset: their leaders. Dave works to build coalitions among the region's key industries and public and non-profit leaders. He is a leader in the areas of community leadership, the innovation economy and how to competitively position regions and communities to thrive in the changing economy. He is a strong advocate for a new vision for economic development, one that focuses on building talent and innovation, as well as for the need for the re-emergence of civic stewardship/leadership. Dave is a founder and director of Bemidji Leads!, which recently was honored by the US Chamber of Commerce's Alliance for Regional Stewardship with their highest award for its work in reinventing the Bemidji community. He has also started stewardship efforts throughout the Midwest to replicate the Bemidji experience. In addition to community building and civic leadership development, Dave has focused his efforts on organizational training and development, and community and business strategic planning. Dave was a recent recipient of the State of Minnesota's Vision Award and has been selected as one of Minnesota's "Ten Outstanding Young Minnesotans". Overall, Dave has worked for twenty one years to build successful communities.

## Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

The Honorable Stephanie Herseth Sandlin is South Dakota's at-large Member of Congress. She is the Co-Chair for Administration of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate Democrats committed to fiscal discipline and strong national security. She also serves on three committees vital to South Dakota's interests: Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs and Natural Resources. She is the Chairwoman of the Veterans' Affairs subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. Additionally, Representative Herseth Sandlin was chosen to serve on the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming in order to represent the views and strengths of rural America in our national energy policy. Representative Herseth Sandlin currently lives in Brookings and is married to former U.S. Representative Max Sandlin who served the First District of Texas from 1997-2005. In December of 2008, Stephanie and Max announced the birth of their first child, Zachary Lars Sandlin. In 2008, Rep. Herseth Sandlin was re-elected to her third full term in the U.S. House of Representatives. She received more than 250,000 votes, over 67% of votes cast.



## Danielle Hill



Hired as the executive director of the Nebraska Housing Developers Association in September, 1997. The Association works to champion affordable housing by providing training and technical assistance; managing statewide collaborative housing initiatives and influencing policy through advocacy and awareness. Prior to working for the Association, Danielle served as a development consultant for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. Her areas of focus were affordable housing, tribal development, fair housing, and micro-enterprise.

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## Garat Ibrahim



Garat Ibrahim joined the Center for New Community in 2008 as the Minnesota Organizer for the Midwest Immigrant Health Project. He works with Somali refugees and Hispanic immigrants on health and safety issues at their workplaces and in their communities in primarily in Willmar, Minnesota. Prior to starting at the Center, Garat was the Rural Community Organizer for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. He has also worked as a community organizer for the Lexington Hamline Community Council in Saint Paul for four years. At the Council, Garat worked with neighborhood residents on education, immigration and bridging the gap between law enforcement and the Somali community. Prior to that, Garat worked with

Lutheran Social Services for five years to develop partnerships with ethnic groups, employers and service providers to secure affordable housing and employment for refugees. Garat was born in Somalia and has spent nine years in Minnesota. Garat received his B.A. in anthropology from Nairobi University.

## Christy James



Christy James is Director of Community Initiatives for Renewing the Countryside. She has over 17 years of experience conducting workshops, trainings, and facilitating meetings and strategy sessions. Having previously worked with RTC on various projects, including sowing the seeds for and helping to launch Green Routes, Christy brings a depth of experience and enthusiasm for rural revitalization, entrepreneur development and microenterprise business issues to Renewing the Countryside. Previously, she has worked with Minnesota Rural Partners, the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and as the interim director of the Alliance for Minnesota Microenterprise. Currently she serves on the rural committee of the Association for

Enterprise Opportunity and is active in the Minnesota Facilitators Network. In addition to her professional work, Christy is an active volunteer in her community and serves on the board of a high adventure camp that works with at risk youth. She has a passion for traveling off the beaten track and finding unique, quaint and quirky locations. Christy is a silent sports enthusiast and lives in St. Paul, MN with her husband Randy, three canoes and a kayak. Rural Learning Center Biographies and Photos

## Lindsey Karlson

Lindsey Karlson is a native South Dakotan, born and raised in Madison, South Dakota. She graduated from Augustana College in 2006 with B.A.'s in Economics and Sociology. Shortly after graduation, she began working with the Rural Learning Center. Currently, Lindsey's work involves leading the community outreach and education areas of the organization's work—including development of programs that will be used in the Rural Learning Center's new Conference and Training Center that will be completed in Fall of 2010.



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## Jim Kleinschmit



Jim Kleinschmit directs IATP's Rural Communities program, which focuses on strengthening the link between rural economic policy and local, democratic decision-making in order to aid communities in creating and retaining the wealth that comes from their natural and human resources. Jim grew up milking cows and learning about sustainable agriculture on his family's farm in Nebraska. Before joining IATP in 1995, he worked in the Baltic States and Russia, where he promoted sustainable rural development. At IATP, Jim has worked on a wide array of issues, including sustainable agriculture; water quality and quantity; biofuels, bioenergy and bioplastics; climate change; and rural development strategies. He has an M.A. from the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington-Seattle, and a B.A. from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. In addition to his work at IATP, Jim is a member of

several organizational boards and steering committees, including Rural Advantage, the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative and the Sustainable Biodiesel Alliance.

## Martin Kleinschmit

Martin Kleinschmit is a Nebraska farmer with 35 years experience as a sustainable farmer (13 as an organic farmer). To effect more change in the sustainable agriculture community, Martin accepted a position with the Center for Rural Affairs Beginning Farmer/Sustainable Agriculture Project in 1993. He designed and managed a three-year Carbon Management Project to learn what factors affect farmers' decision to sequester soil carbon. He is currently involved in a 3-year organic education project to provide NRCS and Extension staff a basic understanding of organic rules and regulations, and to assist farmers/ranchers wanting to transition to organic production. In addition to the carbon sequestration and organic training courses, Martin also has a 3-year history with the National Assessment of Climate Change, Great Plains Region. The climate change training, supported by Martin's involvement with the Center's, Small Farm Energy Project, gives him the background to speak on renewable energy systems at the farm scale and the importance of addressing carbon sequestration to enhance soil quality to provide soil resilience to future weather extremes. Martin's goal is to make farming more profitable, which leads directly to raising the quality of life of the community, while enhancing the soil quality and environment. He continues to operate his farm and often uses it as a demonstration farm for trying new ideas and techniques for others to observe.



## Mike Knutson



Mike Knutson grew up outside of Hartford, SD and graduated from Dakota Wesleyan University. Mike currently heads up the efforts of Rural Transformations, Inc, (RTI) a for-profit venture owned by the Rural Learning Center (RLC) and As It Is, Inc, a technology company in Buffalo, NY. RTI is dedicated to developing ways for rural communities and organizations to access and use technology more effectively. Prior to his work with RTI, Mike served as the Economic Development and Housing Coordinator for Miner County Community Revitalization (now the Rural Learning Center) where he helped lead a

grassroots effort to strengthen the local economy. He has also taught in rural SD high schools and managed a tourism business in South Carolina.

Cultivating a Stronger Rural America

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# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

August 10 – 11, 2009 Sioux Falls, South Dakota

## Cheryl Landgren



Cheryl Landgren moved to the countryside of western Minnesota in 2004 after living in Minneapolis and Albuquerque for 20 years. She served as executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater Minneapolis from 1984 - 2001. She keeps bees and grows garlic on a 15 acre homestead near Milan Minnesota and serves on the board of directors of the Greater Milan Initiative.

## Colleen Landkamer

Colleen Landkamer was appointed Minnesota State Director for USDA Rural Development by President Obama on June 29, 2009. She was elected to the Blue Earth County Board of Commissioners in 1988 and has worked tirelessly for the past twenty years representing residents at the local, state, national and international level. Landkamer most recently served as President of the National Association of Counties (NACo) throughout 2006 and 2007 and also served as an executive board member since 2002. Her passion for local government has brought the concerns of counties to the national stage since her involvement in forming the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus (RAC) in 1998. Landkamer's enthusiasm for RAC helped take it from an organization of 20 members to several hundred. Landkamer currently chairs the Campaign for Renewed Rural Development made up of 30 public and private entities that are working together to keep rural America strong. She also is a past president of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC). Landkamer has been a Humphrey Institute Policy Fellow, completed the Senior Executive Program in State and Local Government at Harvard University and was in the 2005 NACo/NYU class. In 2000, American City and County Magazine named Landkamer, "County Leader of the Year." Colleen and her husband Jack Landkamer reside in Mankato and have three sons, John, Michael and Patrick.



## Steph Larsen



Steph Larsen is currently a Rural Policy Organizer for the Center for Rural Affairs in northeast Nebraska and works on issues related to health care reform in rural areas. Previously she spent three years in Washington, D.C. working on food security and nutrition issues with the Community Food Security Coalition. She holds an MS in geography from her home state of Wisconsin. Steph brings experience in environmental and labor organizing to her work. During the 2008 Farm Bill negotiations, Steph worked to educate both legislators and grassroots constituents about food access and community food security issues. Her work falls at the intersection of policy, grassroots organizing and on-the-ground practice. Steph was born and raised in northwest Wisconsin.

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## Jacob Limmer

Jacob Limmer is current chair of Dakota Rural Action, a grassroots family agriculture and conservation group in South Dakota. Limmer grew up in Central South Dakota, and attended Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota. He graduated with a degree in biology, with a concentration in environmental science. He returned to South Dakota and worked with his father in a land management business working on prairie restoration and began an organic farm and CSA. After two years as an organizer with Dakota Rural Action, Jacob left to start Cottonwood Coffee in Brookings, SD. He has since, with his partner Sarah Trone, started Cottonwood Bistro, a restaurant that specializes in serving local, high-quality foods. Jacob still operates Glacial Till Farm, which now produces exclusively for the restaurant.



## Dr. Cecilia Martinez



Dr. Cecilia Martinez is currently the Director of the Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy at IATP. She is also a Senior Policy Fellow at the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy, University of Delaware. Her other positions include Associate Professor at Metropolitan State University and Research Director at the American Indian Policy Center. Cecilia has led a variety of projects to address sustainable development at the local and international levels. Her research is focused on the development of energy and environmental strategies that promote equitable and sustainable policies. Cecilia has worked with a range of organizations from local grassroots groups to international organizations engaging in the promotion of sound environmental policy and environmental justice. Among her publications is the co-edited volume *Environmental Justice: Discourses in International Political Economy* which includes some of her work on North American Indigenous peoples and the challenge of forging a common agenda of indigenous rights, justice and sustainability. She received her B.A. from Stanford University and her Ph.D. from the University of Delaware, where she received the Ryden Prize for Best Dissertation in the Social Sciences.

## Beth McConnell

Beth McConnell is Executive Director of the Media and Democracy Coalition. She joined the Coalition staff in May 2007, and works to link together local, state and national organizations around media policy initiatives and provides strategic back-up support to those efforts. Ms. McConnell was the Director of the Pennsylvania Public Interest Research Group (PennPIRG) from 2002 through 2007, where she led the organization to victories including winning the release of patient safety data from hospitals that can save lives, giving consumers tools to protect their personal information from would-be identity thieves, defeating a plan by the IRS that would have allowed the sale of consumers' tax returns, and expanding health care access to tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians. Ms. McConnell began her public interest career in 1993 as a Citizen Outreach Director with the Fund for Public Interest Research, and has extensive experience working with the media, developing strategic campaign plans, training emerging leaders, policy development and analysis, fundraising, crafting effective messages and coalition building.



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## Marcie McLaughlin

Marcie McLaughlin is the Director of Constituent Services at the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI). Marcie McLaughlin has represented RUPRI in Washington DC since 2004. RUPRI conducts policy-relevant research and facilitates public dialogue to assist policymakers in understanding the rural impacts of public policies and programs. For ten years prior to this position, McLaughlin served as the founding Executive Director of Minnesota Rural Partners, Minnesota's state rural development council. Minnesota Rural Partners is a network of federal, state, local and tribal governments, and the private, non-profit and educational sectors. MRP is involved in several projects including entrepreneurship, telecommunications and new agriculture. MRP also hosts the annual Minnesota Rural Summit. Prior to her tenure as director of MRP, Ms. McLaughlin served as a Renville County Commissioner. Marcie is a board member of the Northern Great Plains, Inc, Heartland Center for Leadership Development, Renewing the Countryside and a former trustee of the Blandin Foundation. She holds a master in public administration degree from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, has an elementary education degree from Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota and advanced studies in adult education from Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. Ms. McLaughlin's move to Washington DC continues the experiment in the similarities and differences of rural and urban life.



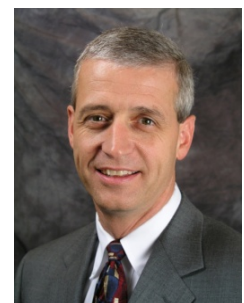
## Elsie Meeks



Elsie Meeks was appointed by President Barack Obama as South Dakota State Director of USDA—Rural Development on July 17, 2009. She is an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Tribe, and was recently the CEO/President of First Nations Oweesta Corporation (OWEESTA) a subsidiary of First Nations Development Institute. OWEESTA provides investment capital, technical assistance and training to help Native communities develop community development financial institutions. Meeks has over 20 years experience working for Native community economic development. Prior to her leadership and work at OWEESTA, she was active for 15 years in the development and management of The Lakota Fund, a small business and microenterprise development loan fund on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Meeks has served on and chaired numerous boards, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights where she was the first Native American to serve on the Commission. Meeks attended Oglala Lakota College for General Studies.

## Dr. Rick Melmer

Rick Melmer is the Dean of the School of Education at the University of South Dakota. Melmer began his duties in November of 2008. Prior to his work as an Education Dean, Melmer served as the Secretary of Education for the State of South Dakota from 2003 – 2008. Dr. Melmer has worked at various levels in the K – 12 educational system. He was a classroom teacher for five years, an elementary principal for seven years and worked as a School Superintendent for 12 years. He has taught in the graduate programs at several colleges and universities. Melmer, a South Dakota native, holds a B.A. in Elementary Education and Psychology from Dakota Wesleyan University, an M.A. in Elementary Administration from South Dakota State University, and an Ed.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Wyoming.



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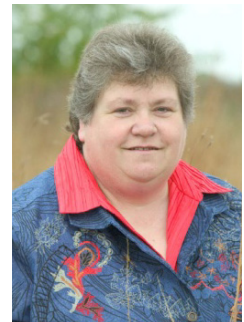
## Toni Merdan



Toni Merdan is the Sr. Economic Development Officer for Congressman Collin C. Peterson. For the past 17 years, Toni has worked to facilitate community and economic development in the 35 counties of the 7th District by making sure communities, businesses and individuals are aware of the many resources and tools available to them on behalf of Congressman Peterson. Prior experience includes directing the City of Fergus Falls, Minnesota economic development activities, business consulting providing technical assistance to small businesses with the Ottertail County Business Assistance Center and commercial real estate development and finance.

## Linda Meschke

Linda Meschke has over 20 years of experience in developing, leading and managing innovative water quality improvement projects that result in changes on the land. Working with multiple partners, Ms. Meschke has developed, secured funding for and implemented over \$9 million of projects in south central Minnesota. Ms. Meschke's current responsibilities include managing all of Rural Advantage's organizational operations, developing new and innovative projects, securing of all grant funds and coordinating and implementing all funded projects. She developed the concept for the Madelia Model and is leading the effort to bring it to fruition. Coordination with local, state and federal agencies, University of Minnesota, non-profits, and private partners has been an important component of Rural Advantage's success. The rapport developed with a wide variety of groups, along with the ability to be resourceful, innovative and "one idea ahead" illustrates her ability to be an effective leader, communicator, and change agent.



## Maxine Moul



Maxine Moul was appointed by President Barack Obama as Nebraska State Director of USDA—Rural Development on June 29, 2009. She previously was Coordinator of EndowNebraska, a coalition of nonprofits, professional advisors and donors seeking to insure the sustainability of Nebraska's charitable organizations by building permanent endowments. Mrs. Moul began her journalism career at the *Sioux City (Iowa) Journal* in 1969. In 1971, she and her husband, Francis, founded Maverick Media, Inc., and purchased the *Syracuse (Nebraska) Journal-Democrat*. Mrs. Moul served as President and Chief Executive Officer from 1983 to 1990, when she was elected Lieutenant Governor of Nebraska with Governor Ben Nelson. She led the administration's rural development efforts and Governor Nelson named her Chairperson of the Nebraska Rural Development Commission. In 1993, Governor Nelson appointed her Director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. In 1995, she helped form the Partnership for Rural Nebraska and was a member of the Governance Board, representing the State of Nebraska. She served on the Northern Great Plains Rural Development Commission from 1977-1994 and on the Board of Northern Great Plains Inc., working to implement the recommendations of the Commission, from 1997 to 2006. Mrs. Moul left state government in January 1999. She served as the first Chair and then President of the Nebraska Community Foundation, a statewide 501(c)(3) foundation formed in 1993 that includes nearly 200 affiliated community and program funds. The Foundation has helped its affiliated funds distribute more than \$76 million for community and economic development in Nebraska and has assets of \$46 million. She was elected President Emeritus of the Nebraska Community Foundation in August 2003. Mrs. Moul and her husband, Francis, live in Lincoln. Their daughter, Jennifer, died at age 19 in 1985. Their son, Jeff, and his wife, Diane Becket of Rapid City, South Dakota, are the parents of Adia and Annalise.

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# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

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## Jerry Nagel



Jerry Nagel is a fourth generation North Dakotan. He spent his winters attending school in Bismarck, North Dakota and his summers on his grandparent's farm on the edge of Millerton, ND (pop. 15). These days played a big role in Jerry's lifelong commitment to rural advocacy. Jerry attended primary and secondary school in Bismarck. He attended Bismarck High School where he assumed that the team name, the Demons, was also a descriptor for how students should behave. Jerry graduated from high school in 1969 and then began a rather long college career adhering to the perspective that schooling should never interfere with his education. Jerry finally received an MA in economics from the University of North Dakota in 1984. Currently Jerry serves as the President of the Northern Great Plains Inc. a non-profit applied research, demonstration and convening organization.

NGP Inc. focuses its work on futures study, creating economic opportunity, and supporting a healthy environment and vital communities. Jerry provides leadership, strategic direction and management to this a five-state collaborative rural development initiative. He works closely with an 18 member Board of Directors representing 5 states and two Canadian provinces and maintains productive communications with local, state and federal officials, rural development organizations and public leaders.

## Nick Olson

Nick Olson is the Program Organizer for the Farm Beginnings Program at Land Stewardship Project in Montevideo, MN. Farm Beginnings is a Land Stewardship Project initiative that provides opportunities for beginning and transitioning farmers to learn firsthand about values clarification and goal setting, whole farm planning, business plan development, and low-cost, sustainable farming methods. Nick comes to LSP with a background in education receiving his BA from St. John's University and his MEd from the University of Minnesota Duluth. Nick and his wife, Joan are co-managers of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture on Earthrise Farm in Madison, MN.



## Randy Parry



Randy Parry is President of the Rural Learning Center in Howard, SD. He says: "Rural has always been a guiding part of my life. I grew up on a farm near Canistota, South Dakota, where my father taught me the virtues of hard work and responsibility through our family feed business. I earned degrees in education and economics from the University of Sioux Falls, and began teaching in the Howard Public Schools after graduating in 1970. From 1970 to 1995 I taught business and computers in Howard, and also coached boys and girls basketball. From 1995-1999, my work in the schools shifted while I served as the Rural Resource Director and Technology Coordinator. In 1999 I retired from teaching to follow my passion for community development work, taking on the position of Executive Director of Miner County Community Revitalization. I have a wonderful, understanding wife, Linda, two children, and five grandchildren. Both of my children are educators in South Dakota, one in Arlington and one in Sioux Falls."

# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

August 10 – 11, 2009 Sioux Falls, South Dakota

## Benjamin J. Ready

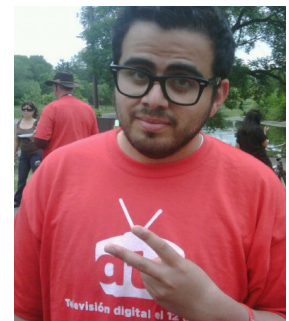


Benjamin J. Ready is the Economic Development Advisor to Senator John Thune. He also serves as one of the Senator's Field Representatives, covering 30 counties in central and eastern South Dakota. Prior to joining Senator Thune's state staff, Ben served as West River Director for the South Dakota Republican Party during the 2004 election cycle. Before returning to South Dakota, he acted as White House Appointee to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as Special Assistant to the Deputy Administrator in Washington D.C. Preceding his appointment to the SBA, Ben worked on then Congressman John Thune's legislative staff in Washington, D.C. While on Thune's staff, he advised the Congressman on small business, homeland security, resources, emergency response, Native American, science and technology issues. Ben is a native of

Martin, SD. He received his B.A. in Political Science with a minor in Communication at Luther College in Decorah, IA. His wife Laura, is a registered nurse at Sanford Hospital/USD Medical Center, specializing in labor and delivery. Ben and Laura reside in Sioux Falls with their daughters Ella (3) and Ingrid (11 months).

## Steven Renderos

Steven Renderos leads Main Street Project's media justice and community building efforts, including the Justice 2.0 training project and our collaborative work with the nationwide Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net). He brings more than five years of community organizing and training experience, and more than eight years of filmmaking and media production experience to our organization. Prior to joining Main Street Project, Renderos served as Project Coordinator of the Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project, an initiative of the Department of Chicano Studies at the University of Minnesota focused on improving the quality and quantity of media coverage and representation of Latinos in Minnesota. He currently serves on the boards of Headwaters Foundation for Justice, Organizing Apprenticeship Project, Alliance for Metropolitan Stability and La Asamblea de Derechos Civiles.



## Mark Ritchie

Mark Ritchie serves as Minnesota's 21st Secretary of State. As Secretary of State, Mark Ritchie partners with township, city, and county officials to organize elections on behalf of Minnesota's nearly 4 million eligible voters. Ritchie also oversees a wide range of services provided by the Office of Secretary of State including business filings, the archiving of official documents, administering the appointments process for state-level commissions, and operating Minnesota's address confidentiality program. As an elected Constitutional Officer he sits on the state Executive Council, the State Board of Investment, and on the board of the Minnesota Historical Society. In the 1980s, Ritchie worked for Governor Rudy Perpich in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, addressing the economic crisis threatening family farmers and rural communities. From 1988 to 2006, he served as president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. In 2008 Secretary Ritchie was named the Most Valuable State Official in the United States by *The Nation* magazine and Politician of the Year by *Politics in Minnesota*, the state's leading non-partisan public affairs news service. In 2009, he received the Election Verification Network's national recognition award for his non-partisan leadership throughout the 2008 US Senate race recount.



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# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

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## Maggie Schmaltz

Maggie Schmaltz was raised in Velva, North Dakota. In April 2007, she graduated from Concordia College with a B.A. in Political Science and a double minor in History and Scandinavian Studies. During her senior year of college, Maggie had the opportunity to do an internship in Senator Dorgan's Washington, D.C. office. One of her greatest experiences while interning was being able to go down to the Senate floor for four hours and watch the Senators debate and vote on the Farm Bill. After graduating, Maggie continued her internship for the Senator in his Bismarck office. Both experiences, allowed Maggie to work with people on a variety of issues that people of North Dakota were facing. Maggie currently works for Northern Great Plains Inc. as a research associate. NGP Inc. focuses its work on futures study, creating economic opportunity, and supporting a healthy environment and vital communities. Working at NGP, has let Maggie to continue to work with people who feel just as strongly as her about rural issues in the northern Great Plains.



## Nicole Sedlacek



Nicole Sedlacek is Director for the Holt County Economic Development Agency. HCEDEA was established in 2007 when neighboring communities in the county chose to work together on community and economic projects. Nicole's passion for community development began in high school when she was asked to serve on her community's Community Foundation board as a youth. Nicole serves locally on the board of directors for the O'Neill Community Foundation, O'Neill Rotary Club and Friends of the Library Foundation. She is a member of the Nebraska Economic Developers Association and the Business Retention and Expansion International. She also enjoys spending hours of volunteering in the community through the Lion's Club and O'Neill Chamber of Commerce. Nicole is a graduate of Northeast Community College and is working on her CECD certification through the University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute. Nicole and her husband Brian have two daughters, Ally (5) and Emma (3).

## Tami Severson

Tami Severson was born and raised in rural Howard, South Dakota, on a generations-old family farm. While still in high school, she participated in Miner County's community-based grassroots meetings where she provided support with organizing and recording the meetings as well as providing a voice for the younger population of Miner County. In 2002, Miner County Community Revitalization was expanding, so she joined a team of people working for the future of the very place she treasured growing up. In 2007/2008 she began her current occupation as Housing Coordinator with the Rural Learning Center. Tami and her husband, Brent, are raising their two young children Breanna and Austin on their 40 acre farm near Howard. In October, they will add another young rural citizen to their family. She earned a BS degree at Dakota State University majoring in Business Management and Office Management/Administration.



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## Loris Ann Taylor



Loris Ann Taylor (Hopi Tribe) is Executive Director of Native Public Media representing the media interests of Native America through radio, journalism, alternate technologies and platforms, and public policy. Taylor was formerly the General Manager of KUYI-FM –AZ, and co-founded with KNAU public radio the “*Indian Country News Bureau*,” (winner of the UNITY Journalist of Color Award) and produced the children’s program “*Shooting Stars*” and weekly talk show “*House Calls*” (winner of the Indian Health Service Award). She also instituted the first radio class/curriculum at the Hopi Junior Senior High School. She also served as Associate Director of the Hopi Foundation, the largest 501(c)(3) organization on the Hopi Reservation, and worked to advance the foundation’s mission to continually improve the living condition of families on the Reservation. Prior to that she was Director of the Arizona Indian Gaming Association, representing the interests of Arizona Indian Tribes. She also served as Special Assistant for the Hopi Tribe’s Office of General Counsel in the areas of land, water, and energy matters. Taylor currently serves on the boards for the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA, and the Martin Springer Institute. Taylor represented Native American telecommunications priorities and policy interests before the Obama Biden FCC Transition Team in December 2008. Taylor is a recipient of the 2006 *Louis T. Delgado Distinguished Grantmaker Award* from Native Americans in Philanthropy and 2005 *Leadership for a Changing World Award* from the Ford Foundation.

## Nick Tilsen

Nick is a fourth generation organizer who has been active in many organizing efforts—from human rights to environmental justice and community economic development. He is a founding member of the Coalition of Young Social Innovators. Nick founded and served as the Executive Director of the Lakota Action Network, a youth organization working to protect sacred sites while promoting sustainable alternatives in renewable energy. Tilsen has been a national correspondent for the Odyssey, an online nonprofit producing original alternative content and interactive events on culture and politics aimed at educators and youth, and serves over 78,000 people worldwide. Tilsen has also served as the youth coordinator for the Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council, working to get Lakota Treaty and human rights issues heard at the United Nations. He was also the director of LakotaMall.com for three years, working to create economic opportunities through the use of the internet. In 2002-2003, Tilsen served as the goodwill ambassador for the American Indian Higher Education Consortium promoting the Tribal college system. Nick has the ability to live in two worlds and balance the world of non-profit business and live the cultural role in the community. He is currently the Executive Director of the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation.



# MIDWEST RURAL ASSEMBLY

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## Dallas Tonsager



On May 18, 2009 Dallas Tonsager took the Oath of Office as Under Secretary for Rural Development. Prior to re-joining USDA, Tonsager served on the board of directors for the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation and the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), which is responsible for regulating and examining the Farm Credit System. In 1993, then-President Bill Clinton selected Tonsager to serve as USDA South Dakota's state director for Rural Development. Tonsager oversaw a diversified portfolio of housing, business, and infrastructure loans in South Dakota totaling more than \$100 million. In 1999, he was recognized as one of two outstanding state directors. His term concluded in February 2001.

After his tenure as state director, Tonsager served as executive director of the South Dakota Value-Added Agriculture Development Center in Huron. He coordinated initiatives to increase the economic value and consumer appeal of agricultural products. From 1988 to 1993, Tonsager served two terms as president of the South Dakota Farmers Union. He also served on the board of National Farmers Union Insurance from 1989 to 1993, and was a member of the advisory board of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission from 1990 to 1993. Tonsager grew up on a dairy farm near Oldham, S.D. He graduated from South Dakota State University with a Bachelor of Science in agriculture in 1976. Tonsager and his wife, Sharon, have two sons.

## Victor Vasquez

Victor Vasquez was appointed by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack as Deputy Under Secretary for USDA Rural Development on May 13, 2009. Vasquez has had more than two decades of experience in government and private sector in community and economic development at the local, state, federal and international levels. His special interest is local decision making and leadership development. Most recently, Vasquez served as Deputy Assistant Commissioner for the Department of Transitional Assistance for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. His responsibilities included policy and program management for TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance and the Housing and Homeless Services programs. In addition to Massachusetts, he has worked in state governments in New York, Oregon and Washington.



Previously, Vasquez worked in Washington as the Director for both economic development and Workfirst programs, and he also served with the Department of Defense as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Military Community and Family Policy Office in the Office of the Secretary. Victor spent more than five years working in Rural Development, serving as USDA Assistant Administrator in the Office of Community Development with responsibility for launching the Rural Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community program. Vasquez received his Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Oregon and holds an MPA from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. He has also pursued coursework toward a PhD in Community and Economic Development from Southern New Hampshire University.

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## Milan Wall

Milan Wall, Co-Director of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, is a management and communications expert with more than 30 years experience in dealing with the critical issues facing American society and culture. Mr. Wall has been a newspaper reporter and editorial columnist, a university lecturer and a speaker at regional and national conferences on such topics as educational leadership, economic development, and uses of technology in education. Before he helped found the Heartland Center, he was Executive Vice President of the University of Mid-America, a multi-state consortium that was recognized internationally for its imaginative approaches to adult education. With Dr. Vicki Luther, he is co-author of a number of publications on leadership and community development, including *The Entrepreneurial Community: A Strategic Leadership Approach to Community Survival*, *Clues to Rural Community Survival*, and *Schools as Entrepreneurs: Helping Small Towns Survive*. Previously, he served as editor of the *Nebraska School Leader*, which won three national awards for excellence among state publications on education during his tenure. In 1993, Mr. Wall was honored with the Award of Excellence, the distinguished alumni recognition of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Teachers College.



## Virginia Wolking



Virginia Wolking is a rural policy organizer at the Center for Rural Affairs in Lyons, Nebraska (population 963) where she works primarily on issues related to health care reform in rural areas. She holds a BA in Environmental Science and Sustainable Agriculture from Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina and supervised the draft horse program at the college.

Virginia Wolking served as an intern at the White Earth Land Recovery Project, worked on a diversified family farm in northwest Minnesota and researched management of Conservation Reserve Program land in West Polk County, Minnesota. Prior to coming to the Center for Rural Affairs, Virginia worked on a cattle ranch in northern Wyoming.

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