

## RRCC

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This semester, Chlebecek’s American history to 1865 course uses the telepresence room. He has nine students at RRCC, and 16 at Itasca, he said, and he goes to ICC once a month to teach there. Once, when he was in Grand Rapids, he said a fellow RRCC faculty member overheard him in International Falls, and went into the telepresence room looking for him. She was surprised to find he wasn’t there, as the real-time technology made it seem like he was in the room.

With any new technology, there’s a learning curve to using it. To make sure he was prepared to teach in the telepresence room, Chlebecek said in August before classes started, he spent time in the room every day pushing buttons, flipping switches, and double checking everything.

“I firmly believe in planned spontaneity, and I didn’t want to look like a fool,” Chlebecek said.

So far, there have only been two technical difficulties during class, Chlebecek said. One involved the computer screens going dark; the students could still see each other, but

they couldn’t see the outline he was using to teach. Both times the problems were quick fixes, he said, and were resolved within minutes.

“It’s not perfect, but brick and mortar classes aren’t always perfect either,” Chlebecek said.

Having cutting-edge technology can improve collaboration and resource sharing. But Chlebecek summed up the goal of using the telepresence room during his Thursday class while walking students through an online aspect of the class.

“Don’t let technology get in the way of learning,” Chlebecek said.

The idea for the telepresence rooms came out of ICC, through the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative, NEHED President Sue Collins said. The high schools there have had HDIV technology for years, she said, and acted as fore-runners for the program.

“Because of that relationship, we started looking into it,” Collins said. “We saw it was next-generation technology for collaboration, and we were interested in it for sharing resources across our wide geography.”

To make the program affordable for the campuses, Collins said they partnered with Cisco and

the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board to keep costs down. The first phase involved building the rooms at ICC, RRCC, and Mesabi Range College, with the second phase finishing up with Hibbing Community College and Vermillion Community College.

“(HCC and VCC) aren’t as far along in terms of sharing,” Collins said. “Itasca and Rainy are really putting it to the test, and it’s delivering in a very big way.”

Not only do the rooms help NEHED schools connect with each other, Collins said they connect the schools to the global economy as a community resource. On the Iron Range, she said, companies are using telepresence to connect with global arms and other locations.

“The high-definition piece makes it so valuable,” Collins said. “The connection is almost as good as being there.”

Right now, they’re developing an academic plan for using the technology throughout the district, Collins said. They’ll be able to program the courses colleges will share, and cut out a lot of the traveling they do.

“We’re thrilled right now to have this technology across the district,” Collins said.

## EDA

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as part of the Community Venture Network. One of the leads involves a company that uses sludge from pulp and paper mills to make organic soil, Mason said. The local paper mill uses their sludge for heating, she said, so “we just don’t have the sludge supply for that.” The other lead has some potential, she said, so she will continue to follow up on that.

Blandin Community Leadership Foundation representatives will meet

with a local steering committee on Sept. 30, Mason said, in order to begin recruiting local candidates to attend a Blandin leadership program in February. The Blandin Foundation covers all expenses for the program, she said, except for travel to and from the program.

“What we’re looking for are 12 women, 12 men, and there’s certain criteria,” Mason said. “They have to be involved with the community somehow or want to become involved in the community.”

EDA President Gail Rognerud said the program

helps attendees evaluate their area and identify the areas in which they can improve.

“It’s intense, it’s all about your community: what are your strengths, what are your weaknesses, where do you think you have opportunities,” Rognerud said. “It’s all about International Falls, it’s concentrated on your own community.”

Paul Eklund said the program also brings together people from different businesses and sectors, which provides a good mix of backgrounds and perspectives.

# DEED grants promote redevelopment projects

### JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development awarded four grants and one loan for redevelopment projects in Minnesota that are expected to create or retain more than 5,700 jobs.

The agency awarded \$1.6 million from its Redevelopment Grant Program for two projects in Minneapolis and two others in Edina and Mankato. In addition, Renville received a \$100,000 loan from DEED’s Demolition Loan Program.

“These funds are being put to good use cleaning up blighted properties, and breathing new life into our communities,” Gov. Mark Dayton said in a release. “Local economies stand to benefit greatly from these efforts. The thousands of jobs these projects will create and support are well worth the investment.”

Dayton worked with the Legislature in 2013 to invest \$9.6 million in DEED’s redevelopment account.

“Redevelopment grants and loans are effective tools for encouraging economic development and new jobs,” DEED Commissioner Katie Clark Sieben said in a release. “A new hotel, commercial buildings, housing and mixed-use development soon will be under way thanks to this round of funding.”

The Redevelopment Grant Program helps cities, counties and other units of government pay for



Gov. Mark Dayton



Katie Clark Sieben

up to 50 percent of the cost of redeveloping blighted industrial, residential or commercial properties. The grants can be used to pay for demolition, infrastructure and other project-related improvements. Recipients must provide matching funds.

The Demolition Loan Program helps communities with the costs of demolishing blighted buildings on sites that have future development potential but where there are no current development plans.

**Redevelopment Grant Program, September 2014**

- City of Edina, Pentagon Park, \$625,000
- Edina received \$625,000 for demolition costs at the 8-acre Pentagon Park redevelopment project. A 200-room hotel and 250,000-square-foot office building are planned at the site. Officials expect the project to create 293 jobs, retain 268 jobs and increase the tax base by \$2.8 million.
- City of Mankato, Bridge Plaza, \$204,175
- Mankato was awarded \$204,175 for abatement, demolition, infrastructure

and geotechnical soil correction on the 1.94-acre site. A seven-story mixed-use building, including 35,000 square feet of office space and 18 residential units, is planned. The project will create 19 jobs and retain 59 jobs.

- City of Minneapolis, Broadway Flats, \$300,000
- Minneapolis received \$300,000 to relocate electrical utilities on the 1.85-acre site. The parcel will be redeveloped into a mixed-use building with 103 affordable apartments and 19,000 square feet of retail space. The project will create nine jobs, retain six jobs and increase the tax base by \$137,031.
- City of Minneapolis, Downtown East, \$500,000
- Minneapolis was awarded \$500,000 for demolition costs on the 8.8-acre Downtown East project. Two 20-story office towers, 193 housing units and 26,400 square feet of retail space are planned. Officials expect the project to create 88 jobs, retain 5,000 jobs and increase the tax base by \$3.9 million.

**Demolition Loan Program, September 2014**

- City of Renville, Downtown Properties, \$100,000
- Renville received a \$100,000 loan for abatement and the demolition of three buildings in the downtown area. Businesses, housing or a startup business incubator are among the projects considered suitable for the site. The project could create up to eight jobs.

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