

April 14, 2006
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Preservation Milan's History

"Every community has history that should be preserved and valued by its residents," said Colleen Borgendale, a UMM history major who has been working with one local community that is starting the process of preserving their history through a project with the Center for Small Towns.

Last fall Borgendale assisted the City of Milan in helping to preserve their history by creating a video oral history of their community. Her work built on efforts of other students at the Center for Small Towns who had been working to consolidate and convert old videos onto DVDs for the project since the early part of 2005.

Milan resident Billy Thompson captured all the videos that are being saved. Thompson has been a taking home movies since 1945 and is well known in Milan because, at one time or another, most residents of Milan have been caught on one of Thompson's tapes.

To create the narration for the video, Borgendale has done oral histories with members of the Milan community. She explained, "Oral histories are one to two hour interviews or conversations with people who are featured in the videos." She added that she has worked hard to get a diverse group of people in her interviews to gain different perspectives on these events. Her efforts have focused on getting stories about "growing up in Milan, living in Milan, how Milan has affected their lives and so on. The people who I've interviewed have very strong ties to Milan and really love the community."

After completing the interviews, Borgendale then turned to sorting and editing the audio she has collected. In order to help the project continue past this semester, Milan mayor Ron Anderson has been applying for grants to continue the work. Borgendale has also been outlining the future of the project so that it can continue after she is finished.

One possible future for the project is to start a Rural Media Preservation Center in Milan. Borgendale explained, "This facility would offer rural area residents an opportunity to preserve their media files, whether it's preserving a hundred year old photograph or converting a VHS tape to a DVD." While there are some places that offer these services in larger cities, this service would be a first in western Minnesota. Borgendale added "this idea is just in its infancy though, and if it happens, it would not be available for a few years."

For Borgendale, learning about the history of the Milan community has been a rewarding experience. She explained that working on the project has allowed her to learn more about the place where she grew up -- Montevideo, Minnesota, just 10 miles south of Milan. "I love learning about people, where I grew up, and history," Borgendale explained, "With these ties, my participation and interest with the project won't just end when my contract ends. I'm really happy I've been directly involved with this project."

This project received funds from the Community Assistantship Program (CAP) of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. Ben Winchester, coordinator of Data Analysis and Research, at the Center for Small Towns provides supervision on the project. CAP supports student research assistants to carry out community-initiated and community-guided projects that will impact their community. The students provide information or answers to questions that a group may need to better accomplish their goals or plans. The Community Assistantship Program's goals are to 1) enhance the capacity of community organizations by providing access to research and technical resources available at the University of Minnesota; and 2) provide faculty and students with increased opportunities to complete useful community-driven applied research projects.

The Center for Small Towns is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, non-profit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their Mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students. For more information about these programs, contact the Center for Small Towns at (320) 598-6451 or visit www.centerforsmalltowns.org.

Contributed by Kim Ukura, CST Student Administrative Assistant