

**Letter from Jane Leonard for reading on June 3 at the Small Town Symposium – Jane is the executive director of the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission, and a big fan of UM-Morris and the Center.**

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Welcome and Congratulations to all who have come to the Sixth Annual Symposium on Small Towns. This will be the first one I miss, and I know I will be missing one of the best conferences in the state. The Center for Small Towns' staff and students are incredible gems and you won't find a richer, more comprehensive program than you will experience here.

When I was working with Minnesota Rural Partners, we co-hosted the 2006 Rural Summit with the Small Town Symposium in Morris. Professionally and personally, it was one of the most moving and illuminating meetings I have experienced – so thank you again for all of your contributions to Minnesota's communities and citizens, and to our increased understanding of all the forces that bring opportunities and challenges to Minnesota's Small Towns.

I wish I could be there with you tonight but I am at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute this evening, honoring former First Lady Jane Freeman and former Governor Al Quie, for their leadership across seven decades of public service to Minnesota, the country, and our world.

Mrs. Freeman, who was First Lady during Minnesota's Centennial in 1958, has been to the Small Town Symposium in previous years, and she joins with me in congratulating all of the Small Towns being recognized here this evening.

When we created the Honorary Capitals for a Day program for the Sesquicentennial, we did so to help Minnesotans everywhere realize what a diverse and complex state we live in – that everything does not start and stop in St. Paul, or the Twin Cities metro area. Or maybe that people in Northwestern & Northeastern Minnesota might want to learn more about Southeastern & Southwestern Minnesota and vice versa.

That is the blessing of living in Minnesota during our Sesquicentennial year – to use this special year as a platform that unites us all as members of the Minnesota community – no matter what part of Minnesota we hail from, or if we arrived yesterday or have been here for many generations. The Sesquicentennial year gives us room to learn about every aspect of our state so we can move forward into the next 150 years more fully aware of how we each shape the future.

It's one of the reasons why we developed the Sesquicentennial Pledge, which we hope you will take:

“During the Sesquicentennial year, I will endeavor to learn from the state’s past, reflect on lessons from both its successes and failings and get engaged in planning for Minnesota’s future well-being.”

To help you meet the pledge, there are many resources. Check out the Sesquicentennial Plan for Our Future information at [www.mn150years.org](http://www.mn150years.org) listed under Community Programs. Take advantage of the state’s existing resources, such as the local museums and libraries and historical societies, the Minnesota Historical Society and its many historic sites and history center exhibits and research facilities, and the Minnesota State Parks and the 150 new programs they have developed for the Sesquicentennial. There are also over 400 local and statewide events and programs that have been organized or coordinated by the Sesquicentennial Commission at local and statewide levels to commemorate the 150th anniversary of statehood, listed at the Events link on the Sesquicentennial website noted above.

And, bring everyone to the 2008 Minnesota State Fair Sesquicentennial Chautauqua Tent, August 21 – September 1, so you can engage in entertaining and thoughtful programs each day on Minnesota’s past, present, and future.

Again, congratulations to all the Small Towns nominated for Capital for a Day. And many thanks to the Center for Small Towns and the University of Minnesota - Morris for hosting this recognition event on behalf of the Sesquicentennial. Thank you for being a place and time where people who believe in a bright, prosperous future for small communities can exchange ideas and strengthen mutual support to build that future.