ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA COUNTIES ANNOUNCES 2023 COUNTY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Winners include programs in Anoka, Benton, Carlton, Dakota, Kandiyohi and Rice Counties

(St. Paul, MN)—Six outstanding programs from Anoka, Benton, Carlton, Dakota, Kandiyohi and Rice Counties were recognized with Association of Minnesota Counties’ (AMC) 2023 ‘County Achievement Awards’ for exhibiting excellence and innovation in their counties. 2023 AMC President and Ramsey County Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire presented the County Achievement awards at the association’s annual conference December 5 in Minneapolis. The recipients were nominated by their counties and selected by a committee of county officials.

About the Award Winners:

Augmented Reality Trail Program - Tracks
Anoka County
Anoka County introduced a groundbreaking initiative called “Tracks,” an augmented reality (AR) trail program at Bunker Hills Regional Park. Inspired by an outreach staff member’s graphic design background, the program redefines outdoor experiences through augmented reality (AR) technology. The initiative aims to address the disconnect between young generations and nature, leveraging AR to bridge the gap. The program’s impact is significant, catering to diverse populations with translation services, aiding the hearing-impaired, and engaging tech-curious youth. Positive outcomes have sparked interest from other park agencies. The project’s inclusion and innovation stand out, positioning Anoka County as a leader in advancing outdoor recreational initiatives, paving the way for a new era of park experiences.

Broadband For All
Benton County
A vision of broadband for all in Benton County began in early 2021 because of American Rescue Plan Act funding. The county board and its newly-formed broadband committee made the commitment to put ARPA dollars to work so that every resident would have access to high speed internet because large areas of the county had either no service or very poor service, and the county was determined to change that. The county pledged $3.1 million of its APRA funds for broadband, paired with provider equity to form the local match for $4.5 million in State of Minnesota Border-to-Border grants. Within two years, every Benton County resident will have access to broadband service. Fiber installation started in the Spring of 2023 and will be complete by the end of 2025.

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In 2023, Carlton County, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and Arrowhead Regional Corrections completed a current 12 page Agreement that guides agreed upon best practices, protocols and processes when working collaboratively with children and families. The agreement covers child welfare/child protection, child & adult mental health, adult protection, public health, and emergency preparedness.

### Developing a Robust Mental Health Crisis Continuum
#### Dakota County

In 2020, Dakota County launched an ambitious plan to evaluate and recreate their crisis response model. Using county data from 2018 onward, they identified areas that needed improvement and used national best practices as their guide. The county invested in increasing staffing to meet identified needs and made efforts to break down service silos. Much of the success is built on establishing successful partnerships and having social workers hired as county employees, which gives the county reliable access to pertinent social service information that improves public safety and client care.

### New London-Spicer High School EMT Class
#### Kandiyohi County

The NLS High School EMT class has proven to be a great success. There have been 36 students that have completed the course, with approximately half of these students passing the National Registry Test. Mr Powers stated, "To my knowledge, there are seven former students actively serving in EMS, with another dozen or so pursuing careers in medicine at varying levels." The current EMT class has 21 students enrolled. This creative model for rural sustainability helps maintain rural healthcare access and is critical for healthy communities and keeping the elderly in their homes.

### Behavioral Health Services Unit
#### Rice County

Implemented in mid-2022 to address an increasing need for mental and chemical health support services, the Behavioral Health Services unit consists of a Treatment Court coordinator, chemical health social worker, three community-based coordinators and a supervisor.

Community-based coordinators embed with local law enforcement and correspond as necessary, providing short-term support and offering mental and/or chemical health treatment services as appropriate. From June 2022 to June 2023, 629 residents agreed to be referred for services. Cases were opened for nearly 80%.

"I was a fentanyl addict," one client told the board in September. "Rice County saved my life."

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AMC is a voluntary statewide organization that assists the state’s 87 counties in providing effective county governance to the people of Minnesota. It is the mission of the Association to assist in the provision of effective county governance for the people of Minnesota. The association works closely with the legislative and administrative branches of government in seeing that legislation and policies favorable to counties are enacted. In addition, the Association provides educational programs, training, research and communications for county officials.

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*Caption: County representatives shown with 2023 AMC President Mary Jo McGuire, Ramsey County Commissioner.*