

Elise Courtemanche, Aitkin Township, Aitkin County

### **Township Pride – Fostering the Township Community**

In the early moments of our country's manifest destiny expansion, the founders of early America envisioned the provision of opportunity to the early settlers. The rapid survey of the country, the sale of lands to homesteading families, and the provision of public lands held in trust for schools all provide for an opportunity to develop communities of self reliance and of self governance. These principles of democracy and the pattern of development are the backbone of the government that is in place today in Townships.

All too often, we ask more from our government than it can provide locally, so we seek a larger partner to assist us with our various needs. As a society we are reaching beyond our communities to our counties, our state and even our national government. This is not the pattern of self reliance originally envisioned; the original focus was to develop locally.

It is important therefore to identify one's citizenship in a community realizing that the opportunity to live and prosper comes from the activities and efforts closer to home: within our homes, our churches and our communities. Recognizing and finding our citizenship locally provides the human interactions and the support structures that flavor our communities. It is these relationships that lift one another up to do good works and provide for one another's prosperity and wellness.

Therefore, it is imperative that we recognize our roles in townships as citizens to a community form of government. Participation in "Town" government should not just be the asking for roads to be graded more or less often. The true smoother road would come from active participation in the solutions, not the demand for services. Because the reasons that townships were established as vital components to our communities are just as pertinent today as they were at their inceptions, townships should focus on the roots when looking how to foster a feeling of community in today's youth.

Townships should be more engaged in teaching youth in civics and government classes. County seats shouldn't be the local example of governance, nor are townships represented by an old building where people vote. This may take an active campaign, but townships outnumber secondary schools.

Townships were envisioned as community centers, places to meet, to engage in discussions, places to hash out issues and come to consensus. They should be places that invite new residences in as neighbors despite varying accents or national origin, and not a place where only long established local families gather or are welcomed. New residents within a township should be reached out to and welcomed. This effort would foster inclusion.

In a world where people drive an hour to shop and are able to vacation in tropical locations, the concept of looking locally actually becomes a stretch for some. However, the concepts of inclusion, of community and of local development are just as important today as when Minnesota became a territory.