

Kristy Maloney, Oakport Township, Clay County

Township Pride – Fostering the Township Community

The Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT) Mission statement's purpose is to strive to provide a local government run by the local people with an interest in meeting the needs of the residents in the community. (<http://www.mntownships.org>). In other words, a township is run by local leaders who have a personal interest in seeing their community prosper.

My township is a small community in Minnesota that has many oak trees along the narrow rim of timber along the Red River. I have been a resident of this township since 2001 and I'm proud to call it my home. Although our township is small, we consider ourselves to be a close knit community with many opportunities. During the "Flood of 2009," we came together as a team to save many of the houses in our development. Many other areas might not be as lucky, so that is one of the many reasons I'm thankful to be part of our township.

As of 2012, our township's population was 1,797 people. Since 2000, it has had a population growth of -14.83 percent. The median home cost is \$167,500 and home appreciation the last year was 3.54 percent. Compared to the rest of the country, our township's cost of living is 1.00 percent lower than the US average. Our township's public schools spend \$5,061 per student with a ratio of 15.3 students per teacher, while the average school expenditure in the US is \$5,691. The unemployment rate is 3.90 percent (US average is 8.60%) and recent job growth is positive as our township jobs have increased by 2.81 percent. These are impressive statistics for a small community such as ours.

I believe a sense of community means having an emotional connection to a place and the residents. The people of a community care and are interested in the past, present and future of the residents and the area. Another aspect of a community is when people pull together to help others, like the flood of 2009. If a community wants it's young people to feel connected, it's important that they have events and places where they can hang out and interact. For example, a township picnic or barbeque with music or a well maintained, park. Another big part of being a community is keeping things clean, so in the spring when there is litter everywhere, the community could come together to clean up and celebrate with a potluck afterwards.

These are just a few ideas on why community is important to me and how a township can make its young people feel a part of things. When a township works hard to build a community feel, it will give residents wonderful memories to take with them wherever they go. For this and many other reasons, I'm proud to call this particular township my home.