

Hendricks: Community Building on the Prairie

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What can you expect from 700 Norwegians in a small town on the prairie? Quite a bit, it turns out.

Hendricks celebrated its centennial in 2000. The opportunity to mark 100 years of life in Hendricks inspired a flurry of community activities. People spruced up their businesses and homes in anticipation of the festival. Volunteers collected historical information, compiling memories, stories and photos in a book, *Centennial Memories*. A local artist developed a new logo, representing the strengths of the community. The several day long community festival culminated on the 4th of July turning an eye to future generations with a time capsule ceremony.

The many people involved in the Centennial festival, not wanting to lose momentum, focused next on the future of Hendricks. The town is a vital community, with a thriving main street and business community. Main Street has a grocery store, pharmacy, flower shop, cafes, bar, lumber yard, farm implement and auto repair, local newspaper, and a number of churches.

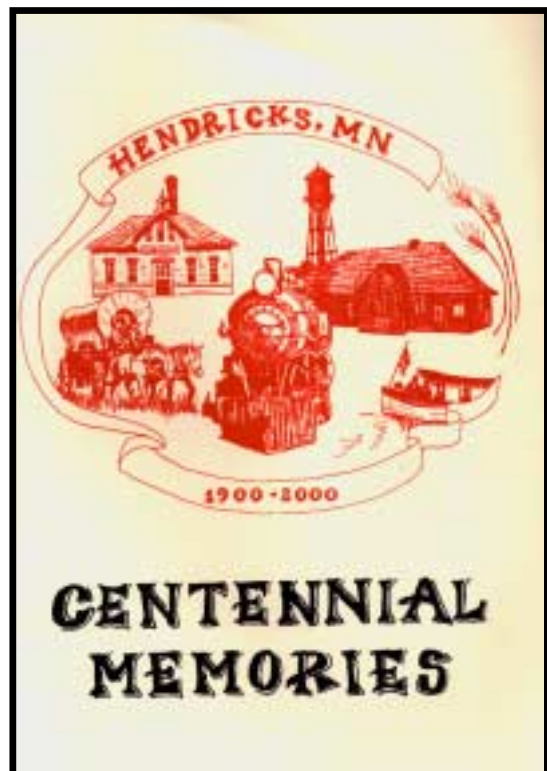
The community is surrounded by rolling prairie, has a beautiful prairie pothole lake, a park with a swimming beach, and nine-hole golf course. There is a hospital and an assisted living facility in town. The Lincoln County Pioneer Museum links the community to the past and the elementary school and high school in nearby Ivanhoe link the community to the future.

The ever-present wind is bringing a new industry to the area as tall, majestic wind turbines sprout across the surrounding prairie. The new

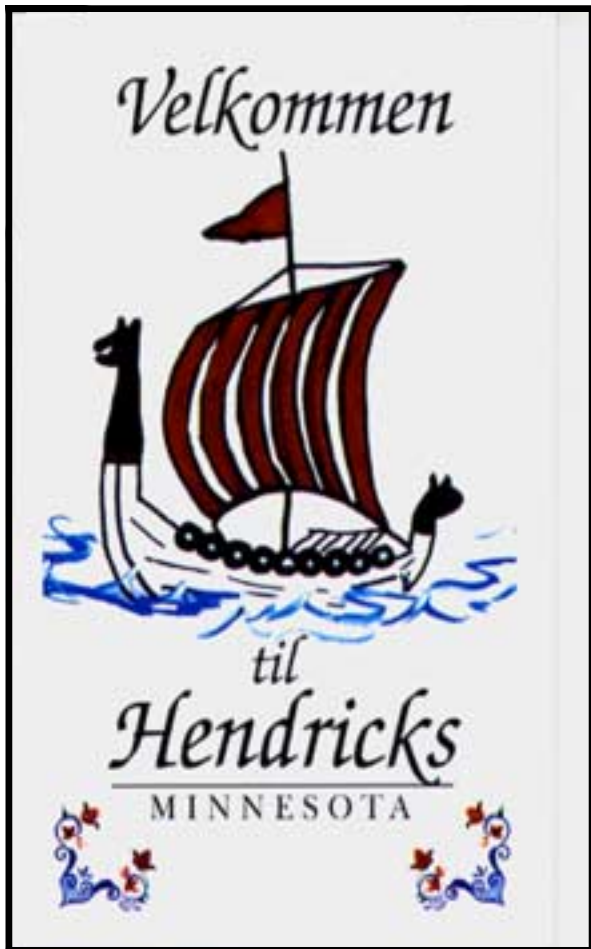
Midwest Center for Wind Energy, three miles south of town provides meeting space, conference and lodging facilities, and more wind development in the area is a certainty.

The vitality of the community is of course the people. Main Street is busy. The tables in the bakery always seem to have people sitting and exchanging news. The café bustles with conversations over good food and coffee. The business club is active, church groups thrive, the schoolyard rings with the sound of children playing, the park is full of neighbors enjoying an evening concert, the lake association is active in keeping the lake clean, and the volunteer fire department is at the ready. Community celebrations, Syttende Mai, Summerfest, and the Buffalo Ridge Two-Cylinder Club tractor show, bring in friends and neighbors from all around and draw community alumni back home.

Still, people in Hendricks know that there is no guarantee the community will continue to thrive. Almost half of the population is over 65. School consolidation talks are underway and Hendricks could lose its elementary school. The



economy is largely dependent on the surrounding agriculture, but farms are getting larger and bring a little less business to town every year. Lincoln County lost population over the past ten years, and the trend may very well continue as farmers age and move off the land.



Bringing the Design Team to Town

Hendricks business owners heard about the Minnesota Design Team at a presentation to the Business Club on developing a business retention and expansion program, and worked with the Mayor and City Council to request a Design Team visit in 2001. Community leaders know that they need to attract new residents to Hendricks if the community is to remain vital, and had been looking for ways to build on the excitement generated by the Centennial celebration.

Looking back, the Design Team planning committee members say that they hoped the Minnesota Design Team would get community members excited about and involved in improving the community, build community pride, provide some specific ideas for improvement, and help build greater cooperation between different community efforts.

Design Team Recommendations

1. Economic renewal, suggesting ways to build a sustainable economy – plug the leaks, support local business, encourage new enterprise, recruit compatible new businesses, including wind development, wind related tourism, regional trails, agriculture and agriculture service industry, and ecotourism.
2. Community assets, suggesting that the town build on area assets like wind energy, agriculture, recreation, the lake, youth, and retirees.
3. Lake clean up and protection
4. Wind tourism
5. Connections and gateways, suggesting ways to connect community amenities, lead people from the highway to the downtown, and define community gateways
6. Downtown streetscape
7. Historic buildings

The Design Team Visit

After about six months of intensive community planning, the Design Team came to town in September of 2001. Fifteen volunteers, including architects, landscape designers, planners, a hydrologist, and community development specialists spent four days listening to as many people as possible and developing recommendations for Hendricks.

The Design Team heard that people in Hendricks value the small-town community, they like easy access to shopping and services, and they value the lake, prairie and other aspects of the natural environment. Town folks, farmers, and others living in the surrounding rural countryside hoped that Hendricks would stay much as it is, or grow modestly to accommodate a few more stores and services. Many feared that if nothing was done Hendricks would fade away as the population aged.





HIT team at work

Implementation Assistance

The Minnesota Design Team, Minnesota Project, and Tree Trust worked together after the Design Team visit, through a grant from the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance, to help the community turn their energy and enthusiasm into realistic plans and implement the new vision.

One of the recommendations was that the community form a coordinating committee with representatives of the various community organizations and city government. Taking this idea to heart, the Hendricks Improvement Team began meeting for breakfast every Wednesday soon after the Design Team visit.

At an initial return visit in November 2001 the Design Team leader, Arthur Mehrhoff, a professor at St. Cloud State University, and Lola Schoenrich, the Minnesota Project, helped the newly formed Hendricks Improvement Team review the recommendations and prioritize activities. The HIT team members wanted to do something visible right away to keep up the momentum generated by the Design Team visit. The group quickly prioritized highway entrance signs and landscaping, downtown landscaping, and education.

Minnesota Project and Tree Trust returned and met with the HIT committee several times over the next year and a half and remained in touch by phone on a regular basis, helping the HIT team develop a plan and identify opportunities, such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) Partners Program that could get started right away working on highway landscaping and gateway design.

Minnesota Project helped the community better understand the concepts of Economic Renewal with a workshop that led the group through an

exercise that matched community needs with opportunity and practiced ways to turn weaknesses into strengths.

Tree Trust assisted the community with highway plantings. Tree Trust is also working with a community task force to identify several open space planting opportunities and has looked at connecting them with a circular trail that starts at the City Hall information center and continues past the school, hospital and one of the four Lutheran churches to a potential 12 acre arboretum site, meanders down main street, past the area for a sculpture garden, on to the history center and into Lake Hendricks park. The trail would

return from the park to the City Hall. The trail would weave together the community history, culture, environment, and economic possibilities. Creating a design for all the open space areas is the first plan of action. This will enable the community and its partners to identify opportunities for funding and other partnerships to make the dream a reality.

Community Involvement

The Hendricks Improvement Team, made up of representatives of the Business Club, county and city government, and other city service clubs has been coordinating community improvement



Design Team action plan

projects growing from the Minnesota Design Team visit and recommendations. Other groups in town have been actively involved in specific projects. The City Council and Mayor, the Economic Development Authority, Hendricks Business Club, and Kiwanis have all participated. As a result, HIT team members say, the various community institutions are working more closely together and people have a better sense that their volunteer effort is contributing to a bigger vision, shared by all.



A Community Coordinator, Marlene Thelen, assisted the HIT team and Business Club. Thelen worked one day per week for two years with funding from the Southwest Minnesota Foundation under contract from R and H Management Services, a local community and economic development firm.

Broad community involvement has been sought all along the way. The HIT team reports its progress in a weekly column in the Hendricks newspaper. Over the course of the Design Team visit many community members volunteered to help out with various projects. Letters have been sent to all to invite them to join HIT. In addition, people have been contacted to encourage participation in specific community events, like the planting days.

Community Accomplishments

This small Norwegian community has accomplished a great deal in the year and a half since the Minnesota Design Team visit. All involved would agree that it hasn't been a straight line to success. Progress has come in spurts and in bursts of energy and excitement. There have been arguments along the way and times when it seemed that nothing was happening. Still, HIT team members can point to many visible improvements in town. Here is a sampling:

- Crosswalk painted across the highway 271 in town (May 2002)
- Main Street planters purchased by the Business Club (May 2002)
- Gateway plantings and new signage on highway 29's south entrance into Hendricks. Coordinated by the HIT team and funded by the Minnesota Department of Transportation Partnership Program. 50 volunteers turned out on a sunny fall day in 2002 to help with planting, ages 8 to 80.
- New signs on south and north entrances. Designed by Dan Lawburgh, a local resident who owns a sign company.
- MNDOT recommendation for curb and gutter on highway through town. Installation planned for 2004. New lighting will also be installed as a part of that project.
- A new Hendricks Foundation is being formed so that the community can raise money for community projects (Legal work not yet complete as of May 2003).



- Sculpture project underway. A \$5000 grant from the Southwest Arts Board is funding a sculpture by a local metal works artist. HIT team is working with the artist and Tree Trust to design a sculpture garden surrounding the installation. (Installation planned for summer, 2003.)
- New bike path completed from the campground to the golf course (July 2002)

- New walking bridge between the campground and Hendricks Lake Park designed and built by Kiwanis based on Design Team recommendation. (summer 2002)
- County-wide and county funded snowmobile trail with 40 –50 miles of trail installed. (fall 2002)
- Interest in expanding and enhancing community celebrations resulted in a new community festival called “Santa Comes to Town” on November 29. The planning committee asked people to decorate their homes, decorated downtown, held tractor pulled hayrides, and hosted a party at the senior center
- Regional driving trail through wind turbines has been discussed by county tourism group
Suggestion boxes placed around town, to allow everyone to suggest community improvement projects.
- School board and City Council plan to meet together at least twice a year
- Marketing of the community – the community has identified the need for a message and a number of ways to deliver the message to targeted audience (both retirees and younger families.) Acknowledgement that the most important thing is that people who already live there like it.



Arboretum could be adjacent to the school

Future Plans

The HIT team continues to meet weekly and has a number of projects planned. Several build on projects already completed, the gateway and adding landscaping to the new bike path. In addition, the group hopes to find funding for the trails and landscape design developed with Tree Trust over the course of the last year.

Hendricks is facing cuts in local government aid in the 2003 and 2004 fiscal years, like all Minnesota cities, and it has become more difficult to find the foundation funding for special projects. As a result, the Community Coordinator position has been cut to 20 hours per month, and more cuts may be needed. It remains to be seen how budget tightening will affect community-building efforts in Hendricks in the next few years. Perhaps things will take a little longer or perhaps the community will rally as they have in the past. The following projects are planned:

- Gateway planting on the north highway entrance and tree planting in the park and on boulevards (May 31, 2003)
- Landscaping around the new sculpture
- Natural resource or tree inventory in part to identify storm damaged and hazardous trees
- Arboretum on 12 acres of land adjacent to the elementary school and owned by the school board. Design work might be done in part by students.

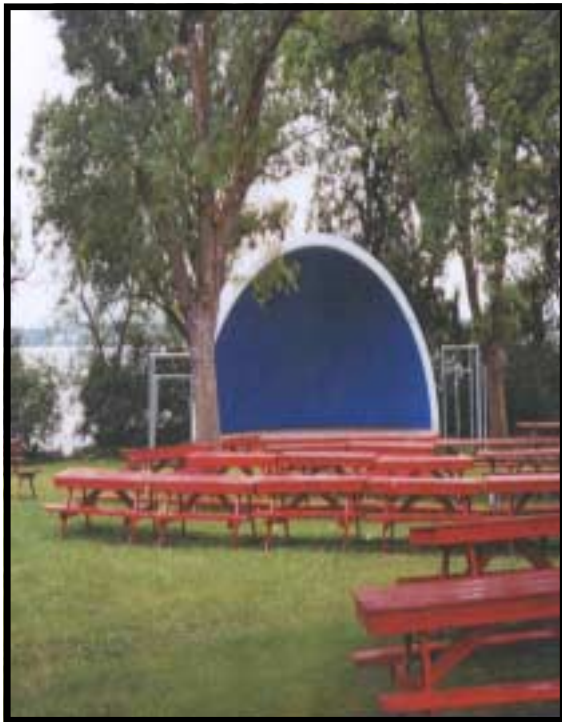
Elements of Success

When evaluating their accomplishments since the Design Team visit, HIT team members pointed to a number of things that contributed to their success and will help in the future.

- Tying the Design Team into the Centennial celebration was helpful. Many homes and businesses were already spruced up for the occasion and it was natural to extend the thinking from celebrating the past to looking forward to the next 100 years.
- The Minnesota Design Team catalyzed change. HIT members all agreed that the Design Team saw the community with a new eye and brought a different and invigorating perspective. Design Team members also brought connections to new resources. One of the team members, for example, was a landscape designer with MNDOT and provided

easy access to the highway enhancement Partnership Program that helped with the highway gateways.

- Using local resources as much as possible was critical. HIT looked first to Hendricks area residents for the expertise and volunteer energy for the community projects. There was local expertise on forming the foundation, the sign designer is a city resident, the sculptor is local, and HIT fostered partnerships with many other existing organizations. Kiwanis, for example, built the bridge at the park.
- Financial support for projects has come from many local institutions. The Economic Development Authority, the City of Hendricks, and Hendricks Business Club have all contributed to HIT projects.
- The group kept track of people who volunteered for anything. They tried to keep them informed and involve them again.



- Outside resources were used when needed. Lincoln County Extension, a South Dakota State University landscape design professor and his classes, MNDOT landscape designer and engineers, and Tree Trust planting and design assistance have all been invaluable resources.
- Projects were visible and communication has been good. HIT has made good use of the local access cable channel, weekly newspaper articles, door to door visits with business owners, and coffee shop conversation.

Lessons Learned

Looking back over the past several years – the Centennial, requesting the Design Team visit, preparing for the visit, and working to make improvements to the community -- HIT team members reflected on what they had learned about community change.

The Minnesota Design Team provided a long-term vision, they said, but lasting change is incremental. People are resistant to change and it takes time for ideas to gel. Some things can be done right away, but others take longer. The best strategy is to always have something visible and positive going on. Involve new people all of the time. Broad involvement allows concerns to be raised and resolved early.

Actively seek resources and funds from outside sources, including community alumni, but also raise funds from within the community. The local appeal, expressed by local volunteer time and dollars, is the best test of whether or not something is a good idea.

Hendricks is small, but by their involvement and success, the people of Hendricks have shown that they are ready to change what needs changing and committed to keeping and strengthening the things that make their community a special place to live.

For More Information

- City of Hendricks, www.hendricksmn.com
- City Clerk, c/o City Hall; Hendricks, Minn. 56136, 507-275-3192
- Marlene Thelen, Hendricks Community Coordinator, manage@frontiernet.net, 507-694-1552.
- Minnesota Design Team, www.minnesotadesignteam.org
- Minnesota Project, www.mnproject.org
- Tree Trust, www.treetrust.org