

Kim continued from front page

sharing WCI's resources to help raise the funds to make grants that inspire teachers to go that extra mile. And then to see students respond to those inspired teachers has been very gratifying," Kim said.

Just like 13 years ago, Kim has personal goals for his retirement. "Along with the standard lines of 'hang out with grandkids and travel more,' I want to become physically stronger, grow spiritually and do creative activities," he said. He already volunteers as a board member of the Kaddatz Galleries in Fergus Falls, where he also takes drawing classes. He plans to further spark his creativity by making videos for families to help share their stories and photographs.



*Kim's former careers as a teacher and a camp director were often in evidence at WCI. The lawn and halls became putt-putt courses, an overflowing gully held boat races and a flower bed was turned into a community garden—and all funds and produce raised went to charity.*

**A note of thanks to Dixie Johnson — and to all the "Dixies" in our region!**

In November the Northern Plains Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals recognized individuals for their contributions to philanthropy. Former board member Dixie Johnson (third from left) was one of the honorees. We are thankful for Dixie's leadership and support in the Detroit Lakes area.



Are you a "Dixie"—passionate about helping your community thrive now and into the future? There are many ways WCI can help with your philanthropic dreams. Contact Tom McSparron or Sandy King at 800 735-2239 or visit [giving.wcif.org](http://giving.wcif.org).

FOCUS on the region is published quarterly by West Central Initiative

PO Box 318 // 1000 Western Ave // Fergus Falls, MN 56538  
218.739.2239 // 800.735.2239 // [wci@wcif.org](mailto:wci@wcif.org)

[wcif.org](http://wcif.org) | [blog.wcif.org](http://blog.wcif.org)  
[facebook.com/westcentralinitiative](https://www.facebook.com/westcentralinitiative)  
[twitter.com/wciminn](https://twitter.com/wciminn)



**our mission**

Serving to improve west central Minnesota through funding, programs and technical assistance.

**our vision**

Uniting ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow.

West Central Initiative is an equal opportunity provider, lender and employer.

Excellence. Accountability. Impact

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT No. 234  
Fergus, ND

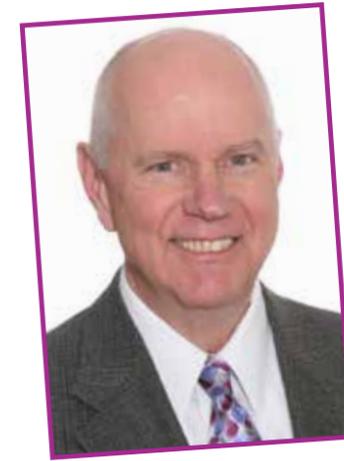


PO Box 318  
Fergus Falls, MN 56538

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

**FOCUS**  
on the region

# Kim Embretson to retire Jan. 1



When Kim Embretson was interviewed in 2002 for donor services officer at West Central Initiative, he was asked, "If we hired you, what would be a personal goal for your work?"

"To be here when WCI receives a million-dollar gift," Kim replied.

When Kim retires from WCI as of Jan. 1, he'll be able to say that he helped shepherd not one but two \$1 million gifts

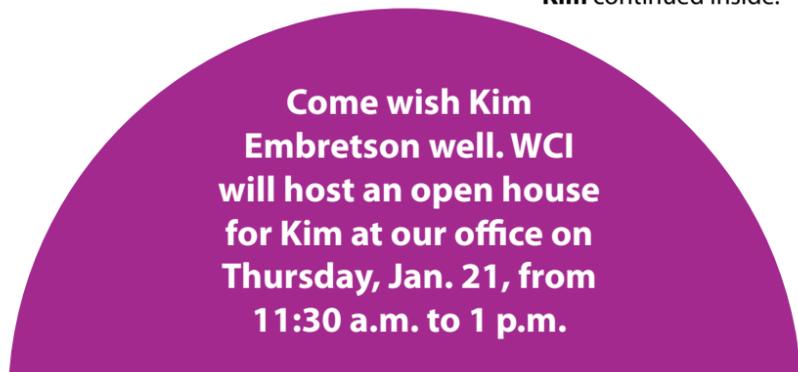
to establish donor advised funds. That's not the only impressive figure during Kim's tenure as a member of WCI's development team. The WCI Endowment Fund doubled from \$15 million to \$30 million, and component fund giving increased from \$400,000 in annual grants to a high of \$3.7 million—dollars that have made a substantial impact to the communities and organizations in our region.

In 2007, Kim was promoted to vice president of development. For the past six months, he has been in "worktirement," as he calls it, testing out the retirement waters while still working for WCI as a part-time development officer.

What are some of the highlights from his 13 years? "A bright spot for me has been working with quality community leaders who love and have dreams for their communities and are eager to partner with WCI to fulfill those dreams," Kim said. "Another joy has been working with the high-quality staff at WCI who made the work fun, challenging and worthwhile."

Kim also enjoyed seeing the growth and success of WCI's school foundation component funds. "I taught third grade for six years, so I know it takes special effort to motivate and support teachers to go above and beyond their already substantial workload. I've enjoyed working with people who are united for the advancement of education, and

Kim continued inside.



**Come wish Kim Embretson well. WCI will host an open house for Kim at our office on Thursday, Jan. 21, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

FOCUS on the region

West Central Initiative's Quarterly Report  
FALL REVIEW 2015

## Nancy Jost learns about Early Childhood the Swedish Way

In September, WCI Early Childhood Coordinator Nancy Jost joined a Minnesota delegation to Sweden to explore the country's early childhood development system.

Coordinated by the Minnesota Council on Foundations and funded by the Start Early Funders Coalition, the group included Minnesota Initiative Foundation staff—like Nancy—researchers, early childhood professionals, consultants, legislators and representatives from the United Way, Gov. Dayton's office, the Blandin Foundation and the University of Minnesota.

The delegation had five specific reasons to study the Swedish Early Childhood model:

- Sweden ranks highly in quality early childhood education and care.
- The country staunchly enforces children's rights. It was one of the first nations to sign the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- There are cultural similarities between Minnesota and Scandinavian countries.
- The two are also similar in welcoming a high percentage of immigrants, given the population size.
- The group hopes to establish a long-term learning cohort.

### A culture of care and nurturing

The delegation met with university academics, early childhood professionals and government officials, and visited preschools. Along the way, they learned about Sweden's culture of valuing its



youngest children and providing them and their families with the best environment in which to thrive. This includes generous parental leave policies, funding for child care and preschool, and a national early childhood curriculum that provides a framework with overarching goals and requirements without dictating how these are met.

"What impressed me most was the culture of care and nurturing for young children that is built into the Swedish way of life," Nancy said of her visit.

### Translating Swedish into Minnesotan

As part of the delegation, Nancy was particularly interested in how aspects of Sweden's early childhood curriculum could be replicated here in west central Minnesota.

"One thing we can do is help make children's learning more play based," Nancy said. In Sweden, children are given the time and space to explore and use their imagination, she explained. "While it looks unstructured, it's still intentional learning. Adults set up the environment for what they want children to learn as they play."

The goal in play-based learning is to teach more than just academics. "We need to structure the early childhood environment for the whole child's development—social, emotional and physical—and not just for academic learning," Nancy said. "For the Swedish, childhood has its own value. There's no push to 'get ready' for school or a career. Each child has potential. That's a beautiful value for an entire nation to have."

Read more about Nancy's trip and see photos at [blog.wcif.org](http://blog.wcif.org).

## Partner in Business and Workforce Development

### Tri-State Manufacturing Association celebrates 25 years

In the late 1980s, a group of manufacturers along the border of west central Minnesota and eastern North Dakota and South Dakota wondered, what if we collaborated more? From this thought, Tri-State Manufacturing Association (TSMA) was born, 25 years ago.

"The idea was, let's talk to one another. Let's increase our understanding of manufacturing capabilities in our own backyard," said Sandy Kashmark, TSMA's executive director. Sandy has been with the organization since its roots.

A \$30,000 grant from West Central Initiative in 1990 helped leverage a \$300,000 Northwest Area Foundation grant, which lay the foundation for TSMA and allowed the association to hire professional staff and open an office in Elbow Lake.

In the early '90s, TSMA staff assisted with volume purchasing, marketing and information sharing. Members still gather monthly at a different location throughout the area for networking, a keynote speaker and to tour a local manufacturer.

Today, TSMA also provides benefits, peer groups, advocacy and training.

### Training makes the difference

Early on, it was obvious that not all of the manufacturers were running at the same speed or efficiency.

So TSMA facilitated the introduction of ISO-9000 quality training. "ISO

training helped create a level playing field. Joint training also gave companies the chance to get to know each other's business better," Sandy said.

Training is now an integral part of what TSMA offers its membership.

### Growing to meet manufacturers' needs throughout Minnesota and the Midwest

Back in 1991, TSMA was featured in WCI's annual report. At that time, they were 100 members strong. Today, there are nearly twice as many at 180 members. WCI is a charter member.

TSMA is now an affiliate of the Midwest Manufacturers' Association. Other affiliates include the Arrowhead Manufacturers & Fabricators Association, Central Minnesota

Manufacturers' Association, and Lakes Area Manufacturing Alliance. The Elbow Lake office serves all of these associations.

"By joining forces under one central office, rural manufacturing industry in the Midwest has access to shared resources, economies of scale, and a way to express its collective voice to government, to suppliers of common goods and services, and to each other," Sandy said.

### The future of manufacturing

TSMA has always provided marketing assistance to its members, but today's marketing efforts have grown to include the promotion of manufacturing careers in general.



Networking for TSMA includes tours of members' facilities and the camaraderie of the annual golf tournament.



WCI is a partner with TSMA in sponsoring Dream It. Do It. ([www.dreamitdoitmn.com/](http://www.dreamitdoitmn.com/)). West central Minnesota was the first region in the state to endorse the program, which is run by 360, a consortium of institutions led by Bemidji State University. "We recently hired Minnesota's first-ever Dream It. Do It. outreach coordinator to focus on promoting Dream It. Do It. resources and manufacturing careers to high school teachers, students, and parents," Sandy said.

In 2013, TSMA and its fiscal agent, Alexandria Technical and Community College, were awarded a \$15,000 Competitive Workforce Grant from WCI to help fund the Robotics Gear Up program in west central Minnesota. Robotics Gear Up brings secondary schools and manufacturers together to increase student participation in robotics programs. Students learn skills that can be used in actual manufacturing jobs in the region.

Each year, TSMA collaborates with a community in the region to host a Tour of Manufacturing ([www.tourofmanufacturingmn.com](http://www.tourofmanufacturingmn.com)). Companies invite the public to tour their plants and learn more about manufacturing and available jobs. The tour rotates between Alexandria, Fergus Falls and Detroit Lakes.

"The future of manufacturing relies on letting today's and tomorrow's generation know there are great opportunities in industry," Sandy said. "If they can see firsthand what it's like and actually test their skills in a manufacturing setting—like designing and building a robot to complete a task—it opens their eyes to all the possibilities of a rewarding career in manufacturing."

WCI congratulates TSMA on 25 great years. We look forward to the next 25 as partners in business and workforce development for manufacturers in the region.



## Annual Report is now online

If you want to know what West Central Initiative does, just take a look under our logo. We are "investing resources in our communities for regional success." But we aren't able to do this without the partnerships of individuals, communities, organizations and businesses that believe in our work and share our desire to make west central Minnesota the best place in which to live, work and raise one's family. That's what our fiscal year 2015 annual report celebrates: the power of partnerships.

Take a look at our financial sheets and "2015 by the numbers," and read how WCI partnered with a business, a community and a group dedicated to the raising of our young children.

We also want to make sure we thank all our donors and partners: You are the power behind our success. Thank you for your faith in us, for your collaboration and for your support.

Visit [annualreport.wcif.org](http://annualreport.wcif.org) to view our fiscal year 2015 annual report.