

Celebrating 40 Years of Community Transformation: Southern Minnesota

– Contributed by Laura Qualey

On a beautiful summer afternoon on August 19th, CEDA's Region 2 gathered at Riverside Park in Mantorville, MN, to celebrate a major milestone: CEDA's 40th anniversary. While Region 2 serves the broad communities within Dodge and Goodhue counties, Mantorville was the natural choice for this celebration. The team selected this historic setting to showcase two community-transforming projects that CEDA helped bring to life; the Riverside Park bandshell and the "Larger Than Life" Art Exhibit which have firmly established the city as a regional destination for music and the arts.

A Taste of the Region

The atmosphere was a sensory celebration of the diverse communities CEDA serves. Guests enjoyed local flavors, including turkey brats from Ferndale Market and artisan cheeses from CannonBelles, both of Cannon Falls. These were perfectly paired with beer samples from Pine Island's South x SouthEast Brewing Company. As attendees networked and shared stories, the air was filled with the melodic sounds of the duo Wren & Wilde, providing a beautiful backdrop to the afternoon's festivities.

Honoring Leadership and Partnership

The event was well-attended by community leaders from across both counties, including distinguished guests Representative Brad Finstad and Senator Carla Nelson. In a moving tribute to CEDA's four decades of service, Representative Finstad presented CEO/President Ron Zeigler with a Certificate of Congressional Recognition. He also presented an American flag that had been flown over the United States Capitol specifically in honor of CEDA's 40th anniversary.

Senator Nelson's presence highlighted the critical legislative support necessary for regional growth. Her advocacy has been instrumental in securing state appropriations for CEDA's Rural Capacity Program (RCP) and supporting vital local projects, such as the Wasioja Seminary Ruins stabilization and the proposed expansion of Restoration Park in Dodge County. Her commitment underscores the powerful impact of public-private partnerships in driving rural development.

Community Impact: Transforming Visions into Reality

The anniversary event served as a living gallery of CEDA's mission to transform communities. Two standout projects at Riverside Park exemplify this impact:

- **The "Larger Than Life" Art Exhibit:** Established in 2020 as a creative response to pandemic closures, this exhibit was envisioned by Mantorville EDA Chair Brian Hindal and his wife, Mary Jo. With CEDA representative Laura Qualey's assistance in securing initial grant funding, the exhibit has grown from eight prints to a vibrant collection of 38 large-scale photographs and permanent sculptures, supported by the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council (SEMAC).
- **The Mantorville Bandshell:** A long-held community dream, the bandshell became a reality in 2025. Through the collaborative efforts of Tom Monson of MBT Bank, CEDA's Laura Qualey and Todd Kieffer, and the Mantorville EDA, the project secured essential modeling and funding. Today, it hosts the "Music in Mantorville" series, literally setting the stage for community connection.

A Heartfelt Thank You

As we look toward the next 40 years, Qualey and the Region 2 team extend their deepest gratitude to the communities of Cannon Falls, Kenyon, Pine Island, Oronoco, West Concord, Mantorville, Hayfield, Zumbrota, Rushford Village, and Goodhue and Dodge Counties. Your partnership is the foundation of our success.

We also wish to thank our event sponsors: Minnesota Energy Resources, WHKS Engineering, MBT Bank, Casey's, Nilssen's, Ferndale Market, CannonBelles, SxSE Brewing Company, and the City of Mantorville and EDA. Thank you to the entire Region 2 Team for making this celebration a wonderful success!

Region 2 Team pictured below L-R: Kurt Meister, Meyer Beckner, Mitch Massman, Laura Qualey, Andrew Hoiness, Blake Arneson, Ron Zeigler, and Todd Kieffer.





Representative Brad Finstad, Ron Zeigler (CEDA CEO/Pres), Laura Qualey (CEDA Region 2 Manager)

Ron Zeigler, Senator Carla Nelson and Laura Qualey

