



Closer to Home

A newsletter from the Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar Economic Development Commission



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Avoiding the Recession

Each week seemingly brings more economic bad news, with recent headlines covering financial scandals, major layoffs, and foreclosures. However, according to data from the Minnesota Dept. of Employment & Economic Development, **Willmar and Kandiyohi County** have so far **avoided the reaches of the recession**. Instead, Willmar's economy actually added just over **100 net new jobs** from 2007 to 2008! Kandiyohi County saw growth in **health care & social assistance, finance & insurance, education, professional services, and even manufacturing!**

Since 2000, Kandiyohi County has enjoyed a **6.3% employment expansion**, as compared to **2.9% statewide**. Local employers have added nearly **1,400 additional jobs** since the turn of the century! If you're interested in exploring the **exciting job opportunities** in the area, please **contact us** at edp@kandiyohi.com or **320-235-7370** for information on how to get linked with local employers.

We're Going Green!

Although most of our readers already receive the **Closer to Home** newsletter via e-mail or on the www.kandiyohi.com site, we also print several hundred copies and mail them out. In an effort to expand our reach and save paper, we're moving toward online-only distribution. If you want to keep receiving the newsletter, **please send your e-mail address to edp@kandiyohi.com!**

Mitch Schueler: From the Complex to the Simple... *Life*

Most people would consider building and testing a **nuclear submarine** or leading the development and manufacturing process of a **proprietary animal health vaccine** to be extremely difficult tasks. Other people might think it is more difficult to find a **great job back home**, especially if they have a non-traditional set of professional skills. **Mitch Schueler** has tackled all three of those tasks with great success, and feels blessed to share his **Bring Them Back Home** story.

After growing up on a pig farm in **Svea** and graduating from **Willmar High School** in **1995**, Mitch attended the **U.S. Naval Academy** in Annapolis and graduated in 1999 with a degree in political science. From there, he moved to Charleston, SC for nuclear power training on the submarine force. "The nuclear technology program is very intellectually challenging - essentially you're learning a 2-year program in 6 months," said Schueler. "You have to take in and understand huge amounts of information in a short time. Nuclear technology is one of the most difficult programs to get through."

After completing his training with flying colors, Mitch switched coasts. From 2001 to 2004, he was stationed in the Puget Sound on the **USS Ohio**, a submarine with nuclear missiles on board. For the following 2 years, he was on staff in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Then from 2006 to 2008, he moved back across the country to Virginia to work as the **Sea Trials Coordinator** on the **USS North Carolina**. In late 2007 he started looking for civilian jobs, especially related to nuclear technology, on the east coast and in other states. He was surprised to find such a great opportunity at home. "The opportunity at **Epitopix** was the best offer I received," said Schueler, who started as **Director of Manufacturing** at the fast-growing Willmar company in April of 2008. *(continued on page 2.)*



Mitch and Emily Schueler feel blessed to be back in Willmar.



Lance, Tina, Blake, Ari, and Ellary Peterson enjoy living in Kandiyohi County.

Lance Peterson: Keeping it in the Family

In 2007, **Lance Peterson** proudly transitioned into ownership of **Peterson Brothers Funeral Home** in Willmar, the **5th consecutive generation** of funeral directors in the Peterson family. Lance's great great grandfather **Andrew Peterson** founded the family-owned business in **1889**, making it the **oldest continuously family-owned funeral home** in Greater Minnesota, according to Peterson.

Lance was born and raised in Willmar, graduating from **Willmar High School** in 1988 and **Willmar Community College** in 1990 with an associate degree. He then enrolled at the **University of Minnesota** and graduated with a bachelor's degree in **Mortuary Science** in 1992. To gain experience, Peterson moved to Anchorage, Alaska where he completed an internship program in Mortuary Science and became a **licensed mortician**.

While living in Alaska, he was able to really enjoy the **great outdoors**. Lance has always loved hunting, fishing, golfing, playing hockey, swimming, boating, and spending time outdoors with his family. Alaska was a fine place to live, but strong family ties drew him back home in August of 1994 to work with his parents, **Rolf and Caryl**, in the family business. "**I always knew that someday I would return to Willmar** to continue on the family business, Peterson Brothers Funeral Home," said Peterson. *(continued on page 2)*

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"It really says something about our quality of life in Kandiyohi County when people who have their choice of where to live decide they want to come back home to work, live, and play."

Lance Peterson: 'I always knew that someday I'd return'

In 1998, Lance married his wife **Tina**, who has been a teacher at **New London-Spicer** schools since 1994. They live in Willmar and have three children: **Blake, Ari** and **Ellary**. "They keep us quite busy with all of their activities," laughed Peterson.

Lance is excited for the **future** of Kandiyohi County, which is experiencing continued population and job growth. "We have excellent health care providers, great schools from elementary to college levels with many athletic and music programs, parks and recreation systems, clean lakes and beaches,



Peterson Brothers Funeral Home is proud to be family owned and operated. www.petersonbrothers.com

diversified houses of worship, fine arts and cultural opportunities,"

added Peterson. He noted that the

Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar Economic Development Commission is always working hard to bring new industries into the area and help existing firms grow and succeed. "The industrial and technology growth is second to none in a community of our size." With all the transportation links, Lance added that "There isn't any reason that Kandiyohi County shouldn't see a boom in the future."

As a 5th generation owner, Peterson is proud to provide funeral care services to his community, helping people **celebrate the lives** of loved ones. Speaking of celebrating life, Lance remarked "**I couldn't think of any place better to live!**"



The Peterson family enjoys sporting events and spending time together.

Mitch Schueler: "It's Like Everything Old is New Again"

The biggest reason Mitch and his wife, **Emily**, decided to move back home was **family**. With three children, they wanted their kids to be close to their grandparents. Mitch's parents, **Sherman** and **Karen Schueler**, run a successful dairy operation in Svea, while Emily's parents, **Doug** and **Marion Reese**, live in Willmar – and Doug is on the Willmar City Council. "Having 3 kids, it's nice to have the support of family," said Schueler. "We went from only seeing people at Christmas, and now see them day-to-day."

Seeing and reconnecting with old friends has been another pleasant surprise for the Schuelers. "It's like **everything old is new again**," added Schueler. "It's been fun seeing people again who left and came back, or maybe stayed and got good jobs." In fact, he heard about the **Epitopix** opening from his wife, who is best friends with **Christina Huisinga**. And Mitch went to high school, played football, and sang in the choir with **Jonathan Huisinga**, who is the **Director of Human Resources** for **Life-Science Innovations** at the **MinnWest Technology Campus**.

"**Epitopix** is really growing," said Schueler, who noted that they've **hired 10 people** since he started in April 2008 – going from about 20 employees to 30 employees in less than a year – "There has been a lot of growth, and with that, a lot of challenges." He really enjoys the environment and the people. Schueler also noted there are a lot of opportunities at **Life-Science Innovations**, with a broad range of jobs. The openings include some manufacturing, engineering, bio-science, and they are always looking for people on the turkey farms. Schueler said "If you're from the area, this really gets you back to your **agricultural roots**."

Another positive change that Mitch can't get enough of: "It's a real change to go from a **45-minute commute** to a **7-minute commute**," said Schueler. "It's a huge difference – I can work a 10-hour day as opposed to an 8-hour day, and still be home sooner." In Schueler's case; it's **the sooner, the better**.



Pictures from Epitopix www.epitopix.com

Exciting Career Opportunities

Compensation & Benefits Specialist
Life-Science Innovations - Willmar
Life-Science Innovations seeks an HR Specialist to implement and maintain a new corporate compensation system. If this fits your talents, career goals, & experience; please submit a cover letter, résumé, & wage requirements to: Jonathan Huisinga
1800 Technology Drive - PO Box 753
careers@life-scienceinnovations.com

Administrative Coordinator
Willmar Poultry Company - Willmar
Prepare weekly payroll process, prof. customer service, implement & admin. large-scale software systems; MSExcel
Contact: Michelle Lippert
careers@life-scienceinnovations.com

Director of Nursing
GlenOaks Care Ctr. - New London
Two years of RN Supervisor exper. with 1 year long term care experience
Paul Gaebe – 320-354-6057
paul.gaebe@bhshealth.org

Licensed Plumber
Trace Plumbing & Heating - Spicer
Terri Swart – tswart@tds.net

Ready to move back?

Send us your résumé!

Despite the national economic slow down, there are still many **job opportunities** in the area. Through March 1, 2009, there were about **340 jobs** listed as available on <http://www.MinnesotaWorks.net> within 50 miles of Willmar!

The goal of the **Bring Them Back Home** effort is to encourage and help former residents to move back to the area for **job openings** with local employers.

Through our **partners**, we have an extensive **network of businesses** in the region that are looking for **skilled employees**, all of whom would love to hire people with familiarity and affinity for the area.

If you're in a position where you're ready to move back home, please take the time to **send us your résumé**, and we will get you in contact with local companies that need your skills and abilities.

If you want to be the next **Bring Them Back Home** success story, call: 320-235-7370 or e-mail: edp@kandiyohi.com
www.kandiyohi.com