

## *ABC team about to cross the finish line*

The end of March marks the end of the competition phase of the America's Best Communities project. On April 19, Chisago Lakes and the other seven finalists will learn which three communities have been awarded \$1, \$2 or \$3 million for continuing to develop and implement their community revitalization plans.

Chisago Lakes' summary of its successes, failures, challenges and achievements over the past two years were submitted to ABC judges on March 29. Whatever the outcome, ABC team members say that this week's deadline is not the end, but the beginning of a promising future for the Chisago Lakes Area.

"Our groups are functioning well," says ABC Coordinator Tangi Schaapveld. "We are enjoying the fruits of our success and see so many possibilities ahead.

"Our vision has been to have our five small towns work together as one community, and we have begun to see that happen," says Schaapveld. "We have truly learned how much can be accomplished when we all work together."

ABC accomplishments, during the past quarter include:

- Leveraging \$195,150 in additional energy conservation funds with an initial \$12,000 ABC investment.

- Completing 56 solar and energy efficiency projects with a \$453,357 investment that included \$324,742 in outside funding from local utilities and federal and state incentive programs.

- Completing 66 business energy audits and 130 home energy audits with more

than 125 residents signed up for energy audits during the month of March.

- Celebrating Chisago County's new identity as "Solar Capitol of Minnesota" and recipient of the Minnesota Department of Commerce Clean Energy Community Award.

- Launching the Chisago Lakes website [www.chisago-lakes.org](http://www.chisago-lakes.org) and promoting community awareness through a social media contest, 2,000 window clings, community bulletin boards and public and private web pages.

- Creating a concept for a visitor's bureau; gaining approval from all five towns to implement a lodging tax to fund ongoing community tourism/marketing.

- Working with Frontier Communications to create five Wi-Fi hot spots, one in each community, to provide residents and visitors with easy Internet access

- Helping more than 100 business and community assets claim their identities and map their locations on Google, providing business with technology and social media training.

- Collaborating with Chisago Lakes High School and local manufacturers to help prepare the workforce. Soon, high school students will gain hands-on knowledge and experience as they manufacture, market and sell their own products through "Wildcat Industries."

- Partnering with Pine Technical College to offer a 10-course manufacturing program taught locally onsite and online. Nine students from two local employers are the first to enroll with a sec-



ond round of courses starting in June.

- Pursuing a \$200,000 grant from the Bush Foundation Community Innovation program to help connect unemployed and underemployed residents with local career and training opportunities.

- Opting to partner with the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) program, Chisago County Public Health and six Chisago Lakes businesses to implement a local Workplace Wellness Program.

- Completing portage and trailhead kiosks and signs, maps and brochures for the new Chisago Lakes Water Trail and its five new campsites available this summer.

- Fostering a joint powers agreement between Chisago County and the Department of Resources to extend the Swedish Immigrant Regional Trail through Interstate State Park all the way to the Taylors Falls Community Center.

- Completing plans and specifications to pave 2.2 miles of the Swedish Immigrant Trail, and to complete another 1.5 mile trail segment near the City of Shafer.