



Bluff Country Collaborative

# 2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT



110 East Grove St.  
Caledonia, MN 55921  
[www.bluffcountrycollaborative.org](http://www.bluffcountrycollaborative.org)

Regional Partnerships.  
Local Impact!

# A Message From BCC Leadership

Partnerships Create Value!

The 2022-23 academic year was a year of positive growth for the Bluff Country Collaborative (BCC). Building on established school, community, and business relationships in Southeastern MN, the BCC transitioned from a single grant-funded model to a braided funding model.

A more sustainable, braided funding model allowed the BCC to engage stakeholders in Fillmore and Houston Counties more directly and collaboratively. Coordinating with member school districts and with funding and support from 192 area businesses and industry professionals, our Youth Workforce Navigator worked to facilitate career exploration and skills development opportunities for more than 1,550 area junior high and high school students during the 2022-23 academic year.

We invite you to read our annual report and learn about our work and its positive impact on our area schools, businesses, and communities. Some 2022-23 Bluff Country Collaborative highlights include:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) Exploration event held outdoors during the Fall Semester where employers bring equipment, facilitate fun activities, and allow students to see, touch, and experience CTE Careers in our communities.
- Annual Career Fair and Hiring Event for Employers, Students, and current job seekers held Spring Semester, where employers can meet and engage with our future workforce and line up interviews.
- Contractor Trades Panel Discussion (Spring Semester), where students not planning to attend college can meet, learn about, and ask questions of local trade and Union representatives.
- Employer/Business Tours, where students travel to a place of business and see firsthand the everyday internal operations of local and area businesses
- Mock Interviews for Juniors and Seniors, hosted by area industry and business professionals
- In-Class Speakers where current industry professionals can engage with students and talk about jobs in various career fields

The Bluff Country Collaborative leadership team would like to take this opportunity to thank our BCC schools, businesses, partners, industry professionals, and students who helped make 2022-23 a success. We look forward to continuing to facilitate and develop career pathways, experiential learning, and employer engagement opportunities in Fillmore and Houston Counties.

Gratefully,

Your Bluff Country Collaborative Leadership:



# Our Mission

*The mission of BCC amplifies local and regional experiential learning efforts, ensuring that all students in Southeastern Minnesota receive a combination of education and experience in grades 7-12 needed to pursue a meaningful career and/or education pathway after high school graduation.*

## Sustainable & Collaborative Impact

*“BCC and their sponsored events have been beneficial for us, as they allow us to build relationships with prospective employees over time. Through these relationships, we get a much better understanding of the available employment pool and how to attract and retain quality talent in our area.”*

- Lane Powell, Harmony Enterprise



*“Exploring opportunities in construction with young people at BCC events strengthens our future workforce. We get our name out there so once they turn 18, Wieser Brothers is at the top of their list for career opportunities in the trade industry.”*

- Abby Voss, Wieser Brothers

*“We appreciated the opportunity to educate local high school students on the various career opportunities that Kwik Trip’s vertical integration provides.”*

- Mia Rentmeester, Kwik Trip



*“The BCC has been a great way to connect our future workforce with employers in the area. We want to keep our best and brightest in SE Minnesota, and the BCC helps show our students the great careers and industries that are available in their backyard.”*

- Jake Timm, Principal Rushford-Peterson



# In 2022-23, BCC Students:

## Discovered & Explored Multiple Careers



Bluff Country Collaborative  
CTE Exploration Day  
Dream Job Event  
Industry Tours

**Total Participation**

	Number of Participating:		
	Students	Employers	Schools
CTE Exploration Day	550	24	7
Dream Job Event	354	41	4
Industry Tours	149	6	4
<b>Total Participation</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>71</b>	

## Learned & Engaged with Industry Professionals



Bluff Country Collaborative  
Classroom Speakers  
8th Grade Career Day\*  
Trade Panels/Assemblies  
Mock Interviews

**Total Participation**

\* Houston Public Schools

	Number of Participating:		
	Students	Employers	Schools
Classroom Speakers	48	6	3
8th Grade Career Day*	120	15	4
Trade Panels/Assemblies	80	7	5
Mock Interviews	84	60	3
<b>Total Participation</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>88</b>	

## Experienced Area Businesses - "Tried it Out"



Bluff Country Collaborative  
Career Fair / Hiring Event  
Job Shadows &  
Work Experiences

**Total Participation**

	Number of Participating:		
	Students	Employers	Schools
Career Fair / Hiring Event	200	33	6
Job Shadows & Work Experiences	35	12	3
<b>Total Participation</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>45</b>	

*Although the BCC may not directly coordinate Job Shadows and Work Experiences, it plays a vital role in leveraging its network and professional resources to connect area schools with local employers.*



# About Bluff Country Collaborative

In the summer of 2017, local economic development staff began speaking with businesses about the dire need for employees. These conversations revealed that regional employers wanted to engage with local students to build workforce pipelines but needed more connections to the schools and additional capacity to manage programs. Simultaneously, the SE Perkins Consortium was facilitating conversations with area school districts to discuss experiential learning opportunities. These school districts were eager to provide experiential learning opportunities for their students. Still, they needed more community and business partners to offer programming on a larger scale.

When economic development and education leaders met and realized they were working on the same issue, albeit from different perspectives, it was immediately apparent that an opportunity existed to create a "bridge" between schools and businesses. This new partnership ultimately formed the Bluff Country Collaborative, an innovative effort to connect business, education and local government, and organizations committed to the region's economic sustainability.

Since 2017, the BCC's work has continued to expand, enabling thousands of students in Fillmore County, Houston County, and the surrounding area to actively target and explore numerous career pathways and employment opportunities with local and regional employers, beginning as early as 7th grade.

## The BCC Leadership Partners

### **Allison Wagner (CEDA)**

Director, Houston County, MN  
Economic Development Authority

### **Amy Grover**

Associate Director  
Southeast Service Cooperative

### **Beth Christensen**

Regional Youth Programs Coordinator  
Workforce Development, Inc.

### **Brian Cashman**

Secondary Coordinator  
Southeast Perkins Consortium

### **Chris Hahn (CEDA)**

Director, Fillmore County, MN  
Economic Development Authority

### **Sarah Ness**

Program Manager  
Southeast Service Cooperative

### **MaryAnne Smith**

Youth Workforce Navigator  
Bluff Country Collaborative

*"Ensuring the economic vitality of rural communities in Houston and Fillmore Counties by connecting schools, employers, local government, and community resources in an effort to provide meaningful, hands-on experience to the next generation of workers."*

# The Youth Workforce Navigator Role

The role of Youth Workforce Navigator provides a vital connection between area schools and local employers. Through a visible presence within each of the partner school districts, the Youth Workforce Navigator's primary focus is working with teachers and administrators to help identify and coordinate experiential learning opportunities for area students relevant to community workforce needs.

Since 2020, MaryAnne Smith, has served as the BCC Youth Workforce Navigator. An ag and math educator by profession, MaryAnne is uniquely qualified for this work, and understands first-hand the needs and challenges area students, teachers and administrators encounter related to career exploration, career pathway development, and engagement opportunities.

As the Youth Workforce Navigator, MaryAnne spends approximately 40 percent of her time at partner schools developing close working relationships with teachers and administrators, listening to their needs, and connecting them with area businesses. This physical presence also allows MaryAnne to quickly identify opportunities to collaborate with other schools with similar needs, maximizing participation for events like CTE Exploration Day, Trade and Industry Panel Discussions or Industry Tours.

As a result of her excellent work as the BCC Youth Workforce Navigator, MaryAnne Smith was named a **2022 Rising Star under 40** by the 7 Rivers Alliance, Tri-state Leadership Council.

## BCC Partner School Districts



Caledonia, MN



Houston, MN



La Crescent - Hokah



Lewiston-Altura



Mabel-Canton



Rushford- Peterson



Spring Grove, MN

# 2022-23 Funding Partners

## Platinum Partners



Arlin Falck  
Foundation



## Gold Partners



## Silver Partners

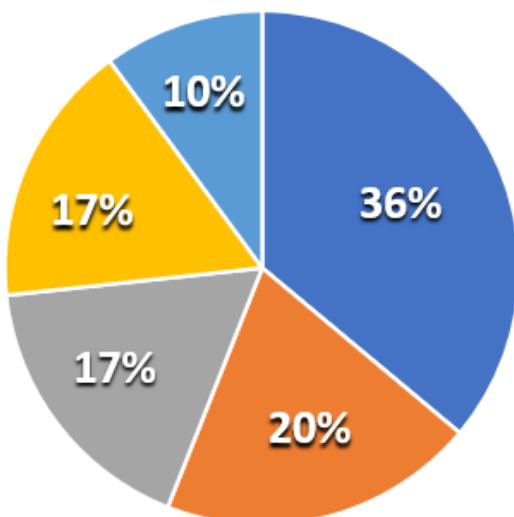


## Bronze Partners

Caledonia Veterinary Clinic  
Consolidated Energy  
Dewey Enterprises

Gunderson Lutheran  
Sleepy Hollow Chevrolet Buick

# 2022-23 Funding Sources



- Southeast Service Cooperative
- Area Business Partners
- Partner School Districts
- Community & Regional Grants
- Perkins Grant Funding

For more information on the Bluff Country Collaborative, Career Engagement Events in your area, or how your business or organization can become involved in preparing Southeastern Minnesota's future workforce, please visit our website at [www.BluffCountryCollaborative.org](http://www.BluffCountryCollaborative.org), or contact MaryAnne Smith, BCC Youth Workforce Navigator at [bccnavigators@gmail.com](mailto:bccnavigators@gmail.com) or 507-251-4388.