



Rewriting the Rural Narrative

Speak softly and carry statistics

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Fighting for an American Countryside

The Decline of Rural Minnesota

THU SEP 20, 2012 AT 09:04 PM PDT

The slow, agonizing death of the small
US town

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

*The Rural Brain Drain and
What It Means for America*

CROSSINGS PRESS

Survival of Rural America

VICTORIES AND BITTER HARVESTS



Richard E. Wood



THE NARRATIVE

- There's a brain drain
 - We live in the middle of nowhere
 - We are a sleepy town
 - Everyone knows one another
 - Nobody lock their doors
-
- What we had
 - What we don't have
 - What we wish we had
 - What we could have had...



Mechanization of agriculture



Roads & transportation



Main street restructuring

School consolidations

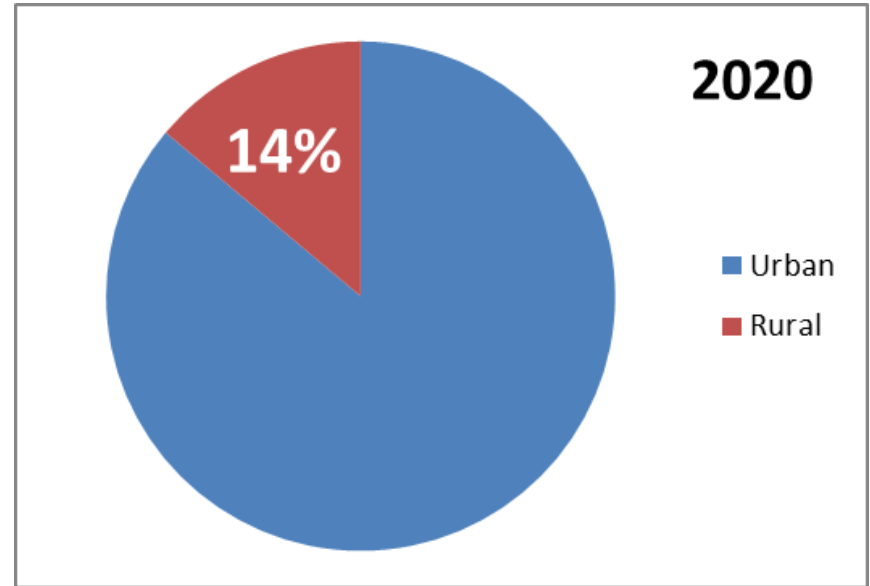
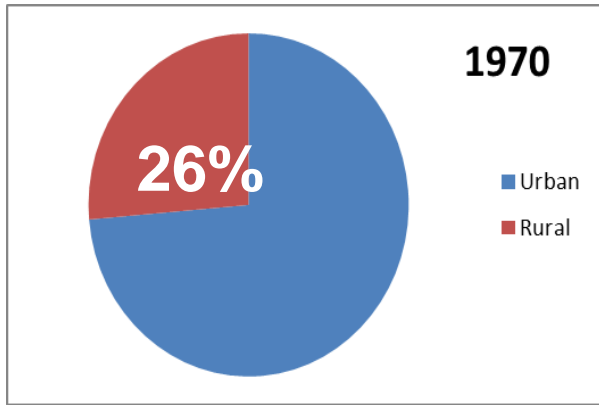
Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated. –Mark Twain



Rural is **changing**,
not dying.



In the U.S. the rural population has **increased by 11%** since 1970.



As rural populations grow, residents get **reclassified.**

The Narrative



County	Pop Change	Housing Change
Big Stone, MN	-9%	-2%
Houston	-4%	+5%
Lake of the Woods	-11%	+13%
Marshall	-7%	+0%
Murray	-5%	+5%
Norman	-8%	-1%
Pope	-2%	+10%
Redwood	-4%	+1%
Roseau	-4%	+5%
Wadena	+1%	+9%

Population loss is demographic destiny!
(and may continue to be so)

59% of all counties
LOSING population
GAINED housing
units.

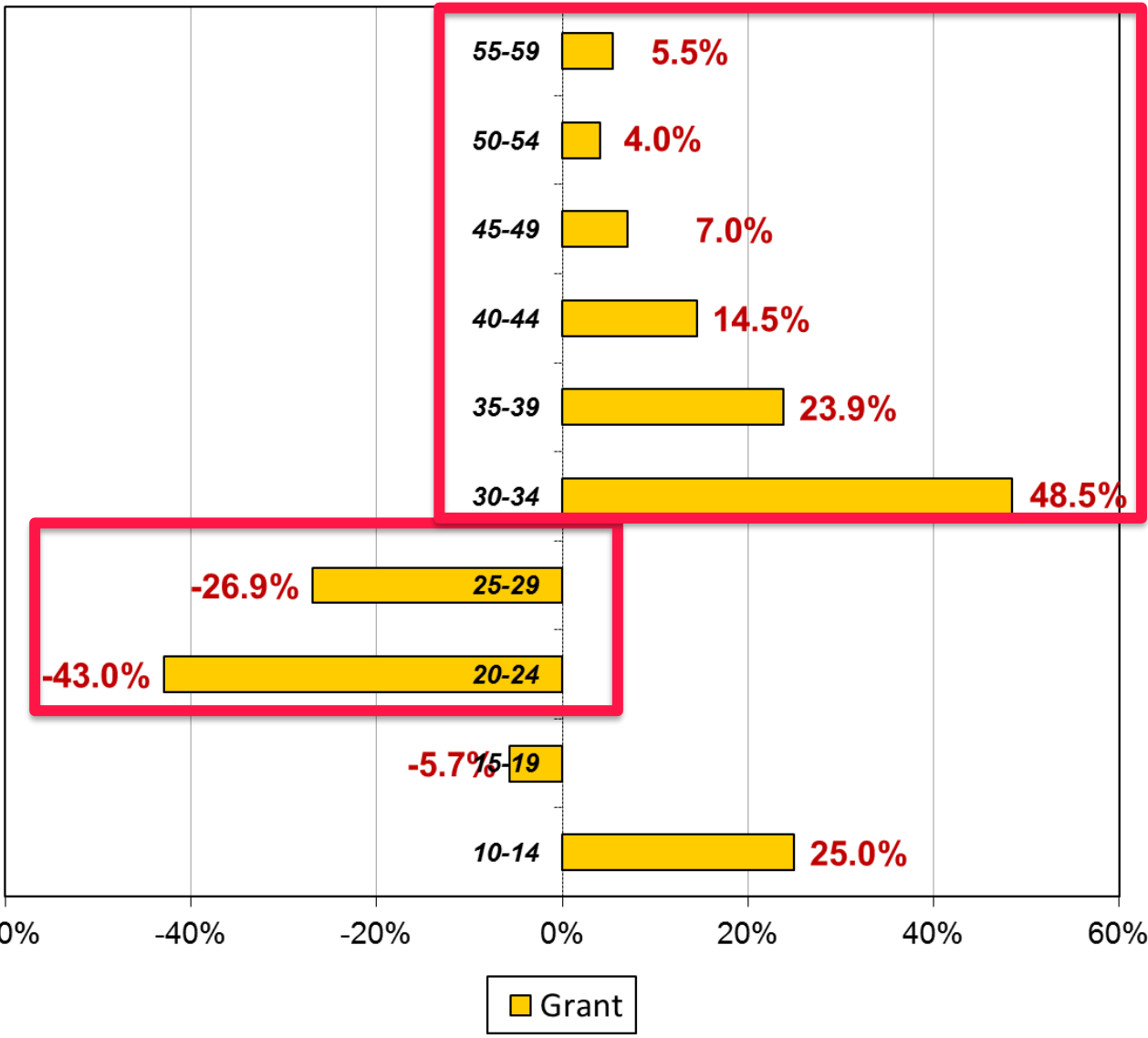
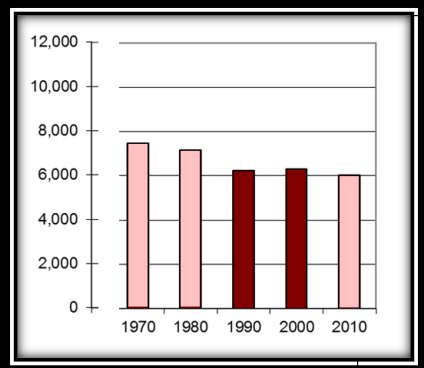


Myth: Only the “lucky few” escape rural America

Roughly 46% of Minnesota residents **move** every 5 years.



1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change



Brain Drain



The Rural Brain Gain

They choose rural age

30-49

And also when they are 50-64
(since the 1970s)





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**Nebraska Buffalo Commons
Research 2012**

**Workforce Movers
University of Minnesota,
2004, 2012, 2019**



EXTENSION



Montana Movers Study, 2021

Newcomers chose rural for:

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost





Newcomers: Who?

- 41% moved primarily for a job
(50% youngest/ 35% oldest)
- 25% lived there previously
- 91% have some college or bachelor's
- 75% household incomes over \$50k
- 47% have children in household
- 14% telecommute!

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Newcomers: Who?



	MN		MT
Moved primarily for a job	41%	→	35%
Lived in the community before	25%	→	34%*
Have children in household	47%	→	39%
Household income >\$50k	75%		78%

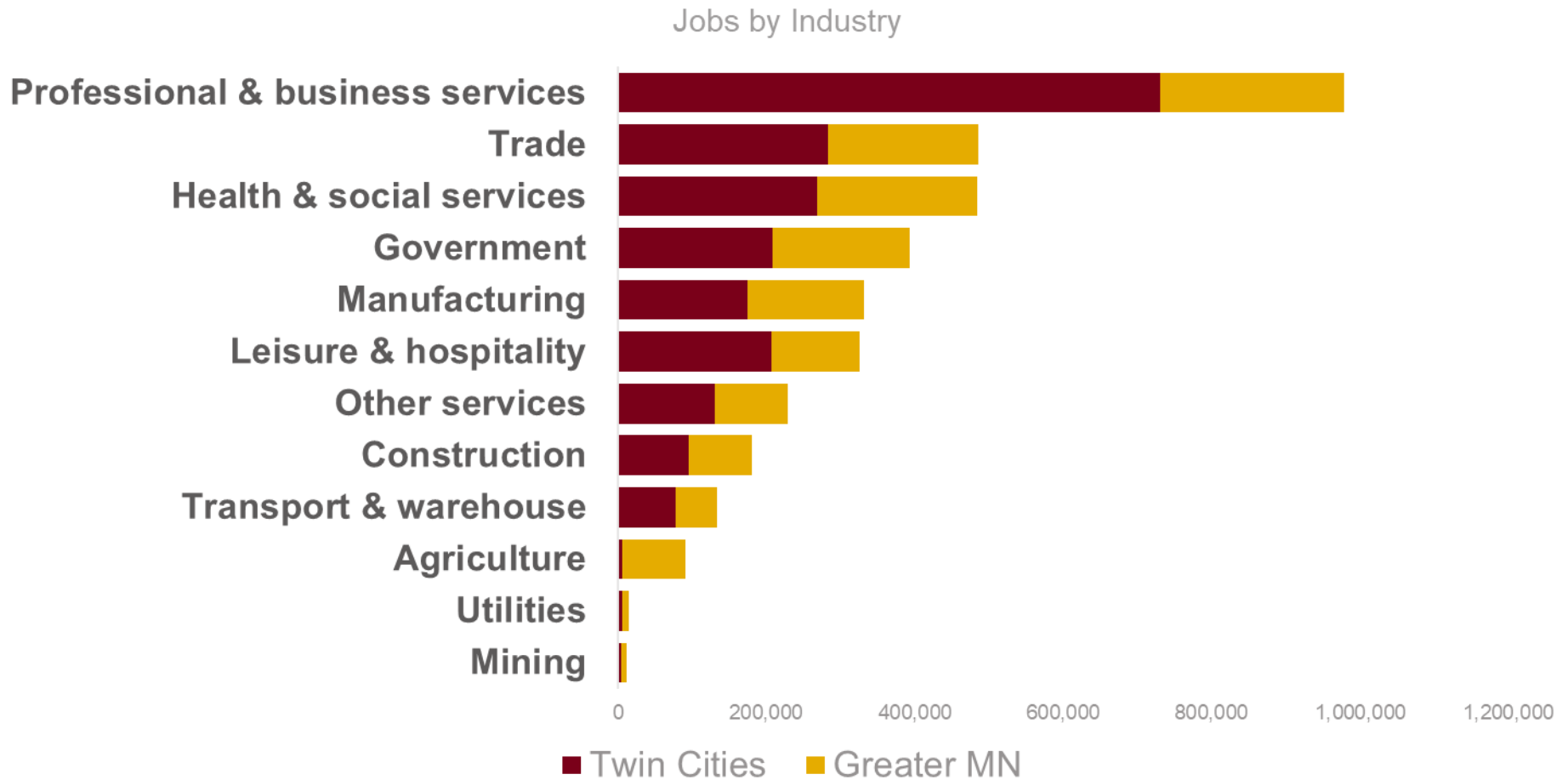
**14% telecommute
(pre-pandemic!)**

*** Social
housing
supply?**

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

2021 Montana State University Extension Movers Study.

Diversifying the rural economy



TELECOMMUTING

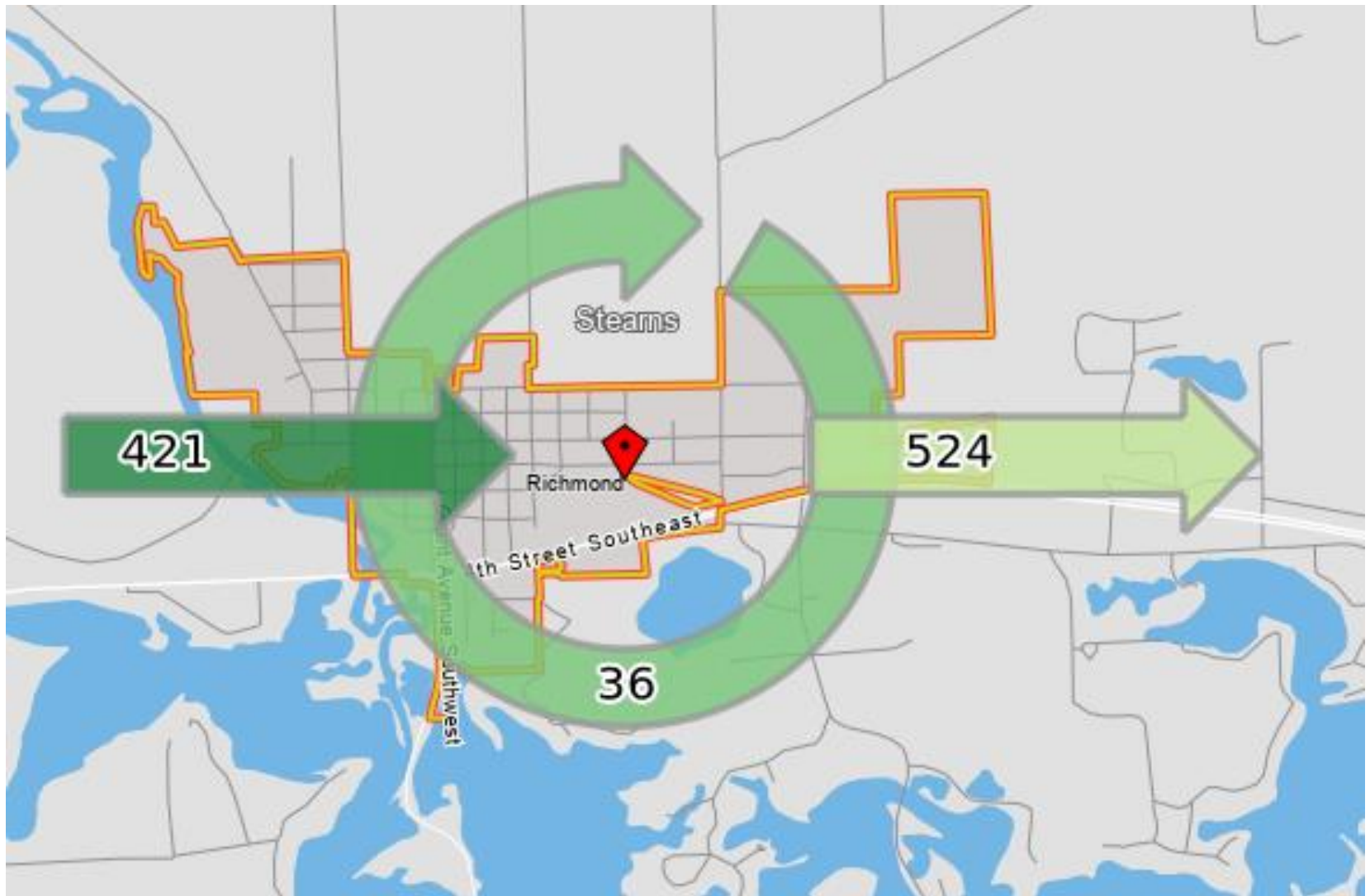
Question: Do you typically telecommute or work remotely for a company not located in your region?
(of those in workforce)

Respondent	14%
Spouse	16%

21% of Households have a member that telecommutes!



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

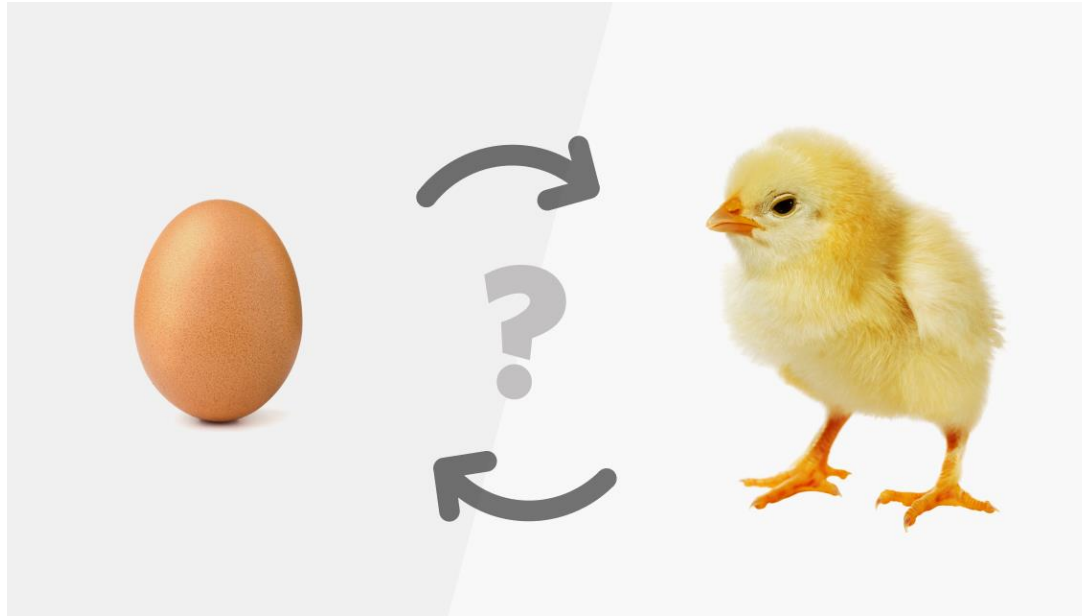


Across Minnesota, just 51% work in the county they live.

<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>



Traditional: Employer-based Community Resident Recruitment



Jobs are the attraction for new residents.
Without a job why would anyone move here?
What we've found...

Work and Home continue to decouple

Living in the Middle of Everywhere



MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

How can we make local decisions while at the same time respect the reality of lives?

The REGION is the primary unit of interest

Mayor, how do you market your town if you don't know what's going on around you?

THE COMMUNITY IS WELCOMING OF NEW RESIDENTS BY THOSE LIKELY TO STILL LIVE IN COMMUNITY IN 5 YEARS

The Community is Welcoming	Likely to Live Here in 5 Years
Strongly agree	86%
Agree	77%
Disagree	68%
Strongly Disagree	44%



resident recruitment

Community Development

Economic Development

Tourism

On the Map – Over the Edge – Welcome Home



resident recruitment

Invitations

- Graduates / class reunions
- Tourism locations - narrative
- Media / Facebook / Google Ads

- Existing resident networks – lift up voices of newcomers

- Narrative matters here!



resident recruitment

Incentives

The logo for 'tulsa remote' is located in the top right corner. It consists of the word 'tulsa' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font above the word 'remote' in the same font, all contained within a dark blue rectangular background.

- Land, utility waiver, tax credits
- Cash, moving costs, down payment
- **Bicycles / park / trail passes**
- Co-working spaces

- Community incentives can stack here with occupational incentives (lawyers, doctors, public service workers)



resident recruitment

economic supports

- Broadband
- Remote workers training
- Co-work space
- Self-employed
- **Business Succession programs**
- Spousal employment
- **Regional housing inventory**

There is a tension here with housing



resident recruitment

Welcoming

Front lines: Real estate agents, property managers, city clerks

- Front line narrative training program
- Concierge service
- Welcoming Communities program
- Grab-a-bite (Otter Tail county)
- Newcomer supper



resident recruitment

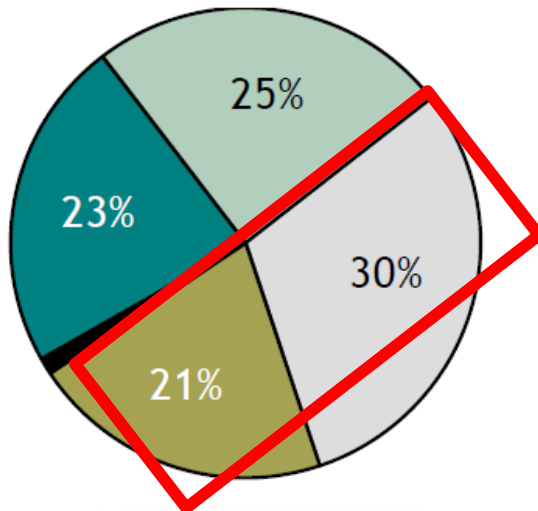
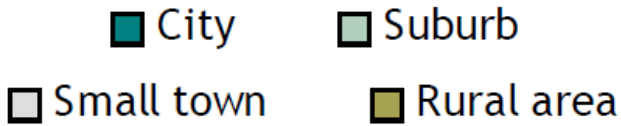
Involving

- Making it Home program
- Civic communication and collaboration
- Involvement starts with a small request
- Make room for newcomers to “leave their mark” for themselves



Where We Live and Where We'd Like to Live

by community type



PewResearchCenter

20% live rural/small town

51% would PREFER to

MOVING IN : Demand for rural and small town living!

Source: "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else". Pew Research Center, 2009.

The Rural Narrative

- National **societal preferences** to live in small towns and rural places (low-density)
- People are **moving to** small towns (since 1970s)
- **Not everyone** is flocking to the city
- A new **urbanity** is found in formerly rural places



Narrative Matters



*Start a conversation about the future of your
small towns!*

Bridge to People and the Community

Be a **stable connection** between the old and new populations.

Need to **welcome in** as much as **reaching out**.

Newcomers **will come to appreciate** the historical time and place as they learn – but also **add their flavor** to the community.



Change is coming

30% of rural homeowners are 70+!

Include baby boomers
and it's up to 75%!



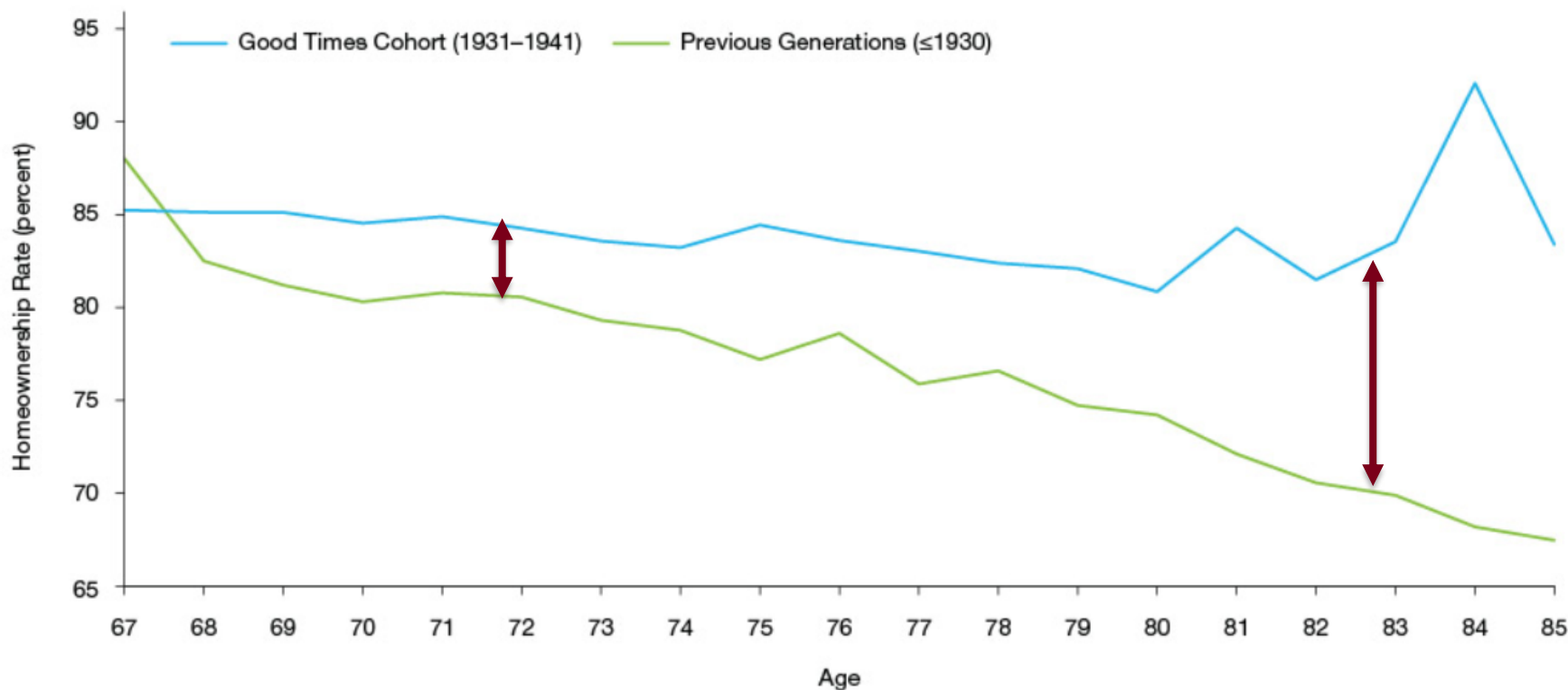


58% of older adults have not changed residences in more than 20 years

Exhibit 1

Historical homeownership rates for household heads aged 67–85

Current generations of older homeowners are holding onto their homes for longer than previous generations



<https://familymattershc.com/the-united-states-of-aging-survey/>

http://www.freddiemac.com/research/insight/20190206_seniors_age_millennials_wait.page?

The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- **Creating groups**, building their community
- **Diversifying** the economy
- **Buying/starting businesses**, working from home
- Living in a **region**
- **More** than warm bodies



The Rural Choice

The bottom line is people want to live and move
to your towns for

**what you are today and
will be tomorrow,**

not what may have been!





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Driven to DiscoverSM



Thank you.

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