

# Mankato/North Mankato in top 100 for youth

## Group gives area high marks for making young people a priority

By Robb Murray

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In an announcement in Washington D.C. Tuesday, the Mankato and North Mankato area was named one of the nation's 100 Best Communities for Young People.

The designation, bestowed by America's Promise Alliance and ING, was the result of efforts by Mankato and North Mankato civic and community leaders. This is the fourth time the awards have been given out, and the fourth time the Mankato-North Mankato area has received it.

The 100 Best committee evaluates communities on how well they make youth a priority. They look at how well communities do in implementing programs that help keep children in school and prepare them for college and the workforce.

And in Mankato, their pitch to the 100 Best committee was heavy on filling unfunded needs in a tight economy, and utilizing existing resources to create the best possible experience for young people.

"I think this is a story of nonprofits really stepping into a huge funding gap and being really innovative with being able to use fewer resources," said Anne Ganey, executive director of the Mankato YWCA.

Also key to Mankato's application was emphasizing how important the Greater Mankato United Way is to the vitality of the community.

"The United Way stepped up in a big way," Ganey said. "And there are organizations that are gone now that had figured prominently in previous years."

The competition, open to all communities, had been on hold for a few years, but returned in 2010 and culminated with a major event on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

"We are all very proud of this community and the commitments to youth that we have made together over the last fifteen plus years," said State Rep. Kathy Brynaert, D-Mankato, a founding member of Mankato Area Healthy Youth. "We are among the 100 Best not because we have arrived but because we remain committed to the journey."

Added Ganey: "It's great that we got this. It's a real acknowledgment of the fact that we continue to address the challenges that we see."

Other cities in Minnesota that received the 100 Best recognition were St. Louis

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Park, Northfield, Edina and Landfall.

A big part of the application submitted by the Mankato-North Mankato area had to do with the willingness of college students to volunteer with organizations that serve youth.

One of them is right at Ganey's own YWCA, which operates a program called Girls On the Run.

Girls on the Run combines training for a noncompetitive 5k walk/run event with healthy living education. It instills self esteem through health education, life skills development, mentoring relationships and physical training.

Some of the volunteers are Minnesota State University students.

Getting the 100 Best designation doesn't equate to funding, and the goal wasn't necessarily to make Mankato more attractive to families.

"I think we all know this is a great place to raise a family," she said.

" This is more about the process of raising healthy youth."

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