

CHAPTER 3: VITAL, PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY AND ECONOMY

Dakota County seeks to create and support a vital, prosperous community and economy. Such places readily **connect employers with employees** so residents can find and keep living wage jobs. They **build the foundation for sustainable development** by providing affordable housing; effective transportation and transit options; and a well-connected telecommunications network. They are **characterized by community assets** such as libraries, parks, art, and recreation. **Residents are engaged, literate, and well-informed**, so that they are aware of the issues and challenges in their communities and seek to make where they live a better place.

Challenges and Opportunities

Dakota County has grown steadily over the past 30 years. The County is a blend of older cities (e.g., Hastings, South St. Paul, and West St. Paul); suburban communities, some nearly fully developed (e.g., Burnsville) and others with room to grow (e.g., Lakeville); and rural cities and townships, (e.g., Castle Rock and Waterford). Each has its own mix of businesses, single and multi-family homes, rental and

owner-occupied homes, and housing price ranges. As the County has grown, its land use has changed substantially, with the largest growth in residential acres, which grew from 40,508 to 58,455 acres from 1990 to 2005. (Table 3)

Assessing the community and economic challenges and opportunities to the County in 2008 is complex. Without analyzing the causes or best responses to this year's unsettling global economic crisis, what we can say is that the County has not been immune. National trends, such as increases in housing foreclosures, declines in housing values, and increases in unemployment are making their mark here and in the overall Twin Cities metropolitan area. And a quick calculation shows that the Dakota County residents' contribution to the \$700 billion Federal financial bailout/rescue package, based on population, is \$918 million.

This section summarizes some of the key indicators of how Dakota County is faring as part of Twin Cities region by summarizing indicators related to: income and poverty; employment; mobility; housing; and civic engagement.

Table 3

Dakota County Land Use, 1990 to 2005

Land Use in Acres	1990	1997	2000	2005
Residential	40,508	49,555	53,477	58,455
Commercial	3,310	4,663	5,118	5,654
Industrial 6,745	9,745	8,797	10,286	11,689
Institutional + Recreational	17,0589	23,582	26,803	29,252
Major 4-Lane Highways	3,566	3,977	4,664	5,328
Non-Urban	11,866	12,081	13,063	12,851

Source: The Metropolitan Council Regional Statistics and Data

Income and Poverty

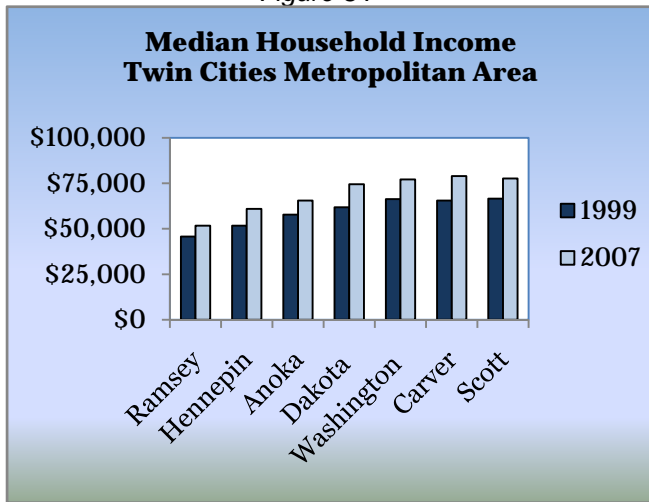
As measured by median household income and poverty rates through 2007, the standard of living for Dakota

County has been consistently high compared to Minnesota and national figures.

Within the Twin Cities metro area in 2007, Dakota County had the fourth highest median household income and the fourth lowest poverty rate. (Figure 34, Figure 35)

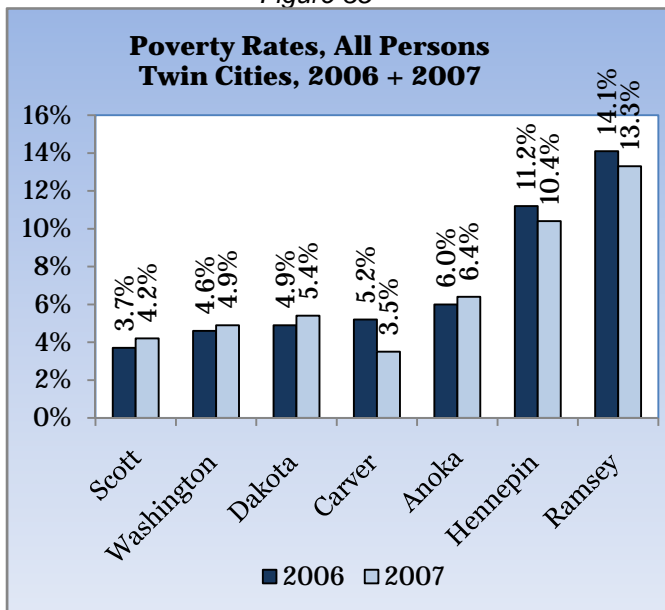
In 2007, the County's median income of \$74,497 was higher than both the Minnesota and United States median incomes, at \$55,802 and \$50,740, respectively. Poverty in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area has shown two trends since 2000. First, a higher percentage of persons in poverty now live outside the two core cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Second, poverty has gradually inched upward. (41) In Dakota County, the number of people in poverty increased from 12,757 persons in 2000 to 21,086 in 2007. (42)

Figure 34



Source: US Census Bureau Decennial Census and American Community Survey

Figure 35



Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey

The rise in the number of families in poverty is echoed in other measures. The Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program, operated by school districts, serves families with incomes that are 185 percent of poverty and lower. Nearly 19 percent of all students were eligible for this program during the 2007-2008 school year, the most recent year for which data is available. (43)

In addition, use of food shelves in Dakota County has also increased sharply - the number of visits grew from 20,499 in 2000 to 38,723 in 2007. (44) However, this number remains lower than all of the other metro area counties except Carver. According to an article the Sun Newspapers, the economic downturn has created a double hit -- hurting those already in a precarious situation, and those who would otherwise donate more to the food shelf organizations. (44)

Employment

Between 2000 and 2007, Dakota County gained 23,552 jobs, the most of any county in the state. (45) However, the number of jobs in the County peaked at 178,622 during the third quarter of 2007. Since then, the number has declined 3.4 percent, to 172,498 jobs in the second quarter of 2008. This reflects the overall pattern in the seven-county Twin Cities area for the same time period, with a decline from 1.64 million to 1.60 million jobs, a 2.5 percent loss. (46)

Unemployment has accompanied the job loss, with a month of December 2008 unadjusted unemployment rate for the County of 6.1 percent. The Minnesota unemployment rate for December was 6.8 percent, while that of the Twin Cities metropolitan area was 6.2 percent.

Mobility

Transportation, an important link in an area's economy, can help or hinder fast and effective movement of goods and people. In 2000, about 30 miles of County highway miles were at or close to capacity. The Dakota County Transportation Department estimates that with no highway improvements, that number will jump to 115 miles by 2025. (47)

The *Dakota County 2025 Transportation Policy Plan*, adopted in 2004, estimated an annual transportation funding shortage of \$30 million to maintain the County

transportation system at the current level of service. (47) Additionally, statewide highway construction costs rose 28 percent from 2005 to 2008. (48) Similar increases are expected to continue due to price increases for fuel, bituminous, steel, and right of way acquisition.

In the 2008 Dakota County Residential Survey, more than 55 percent of respondents viewed traffic congestion in Dakota County as at least a moderate problem. (8) As indicated on the 100 point scale shown in Table 4 (used to standardize scores from slightly different questions over time), concern levels about traffic congestion have increased by 10 points.

Table 4

	2004	2006	2008
Traffic Congestion as a Potential Problem	38	41	48

Source: National Research Center, Inc. 2008.

By 2025, the State Demographic Center projects that the Dakota County population will reach nearly 475,000. This projected growth will outpace planned roadway expansion projects. Transportation alternatives, including transit service enhancements, will need to occur. Most recently, ridership on Minnesota Valley Transit Authority buses increased to nearly 2.5 million rides in 2007. However, carpooling to work, another means to reduce traffic congestion, has remained at the same level between 2000 (17,555) and 2007 (15,560). (49) (50)

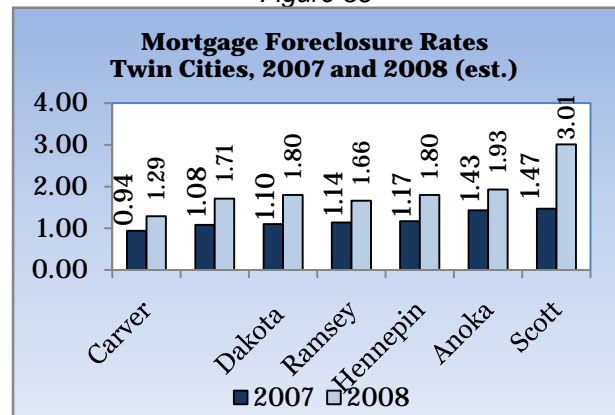
Future growth needs may be moderated if a recent trend of reduced driving holds. In Dakota County, the number of vehicle miles travelled declined unexpectedly in 2007, and according to a recent Star Tribune article, Minnesotans drove 1.6 billion fewer miles in the first 10 months of 2008 than they did in 2007 (-3.3 percent). Accompanying the decline in driving was a decline in traffic deaths: fewer people died on Minnesota roads in 2008 than any year since 1944. (51)

Housing

The housing situation in Dakota County mirrors national trends- increasing foreclosures and declining housing values. Increases in foreclosures can negatively local communities in many ways. Foreclosed and abandoned properties may become crime targets; lower neighborhood property values; decrease the overall taxable market value of residences; lead to severe family financial stresses and

requests for public assistance; and potentially drive up rental prices as households re-enter the rental market. Though still accounting for only about 1-2 percent of all mortgages, foreclosures in Dakota County increased ten-fold between 2000 and 2007, rising from 159 homes in 2000 to 1,581 homes in 2007. In 2008, foreclosures reached 2,064 homes. Each city in the County has at least one dense area of foreclosed properties, according to the Dakota County Office of Geographic Information Systems. The Wilder Foundation reports that the foreclosure rate (number of foreclosed mortgages as a percent of households in 2005) places Dakota County as third lowest in 2007 and as fourth lowest in 2008 among the seven metro counties. (52) (Figure 36 and Figure 37)

Figure 36



Source: Twin Cities Compass Website

Figure 37

Foreclosures by Homestead Status

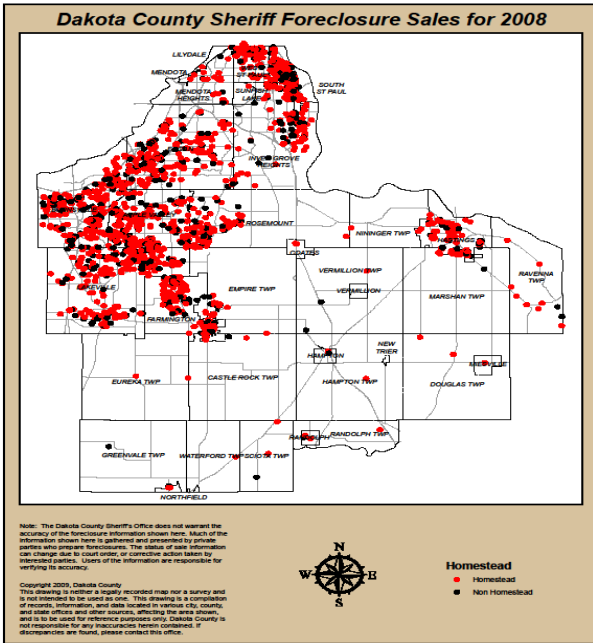


Figure 38

Foreclosures by Property Type

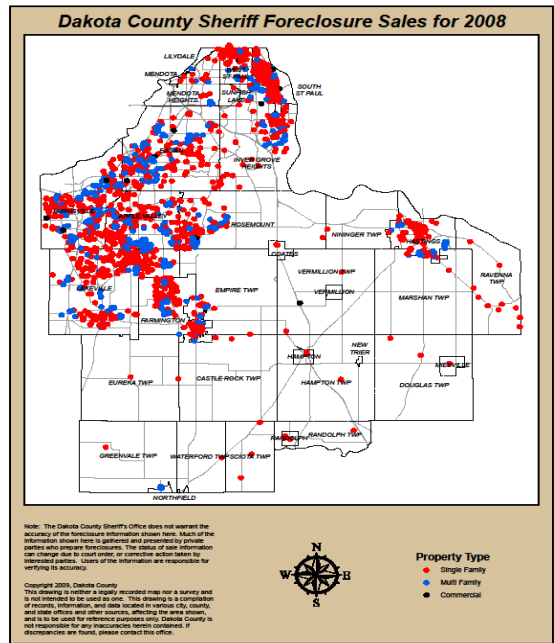
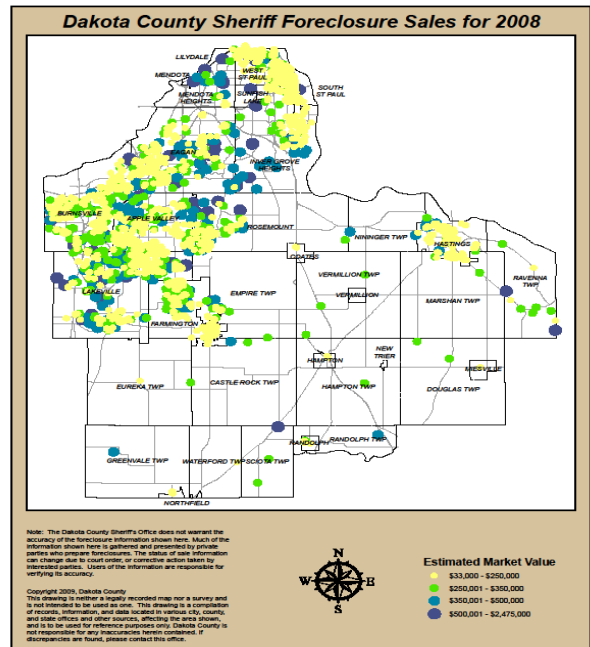


Figure 38 and Figure 39 provide a sense of the location and characteristics of 2008 foreclosures in the County. Nearly three-fourths (73 percent, or 1502) of the foreclosures were on homesteaded properties. Sixty-two percent (1277) involved single family homes; 37 percent (763) multi-family homes; and 1 percent (13) commercial properties.

Figure 39

Foreclosures by Estimated Market Value



Dakota County Assessing Services data confirm that a decline in the average market value of homesteaded property values has accompanied the increase in foreclosures. These values fell for the first time- from \$246,900 in 2007 to \$240,500 in 2008 (-2.6%) and fell below the 2006 level. (53) While the Assessing Services values reflect the overall status of home values, sales prices for that segment of homes sold in 2008, as reported by the Metro Area Realtor associations (which is based on Multiple Listing Service data), were down 15.0 percent from 2007, with a median price of \$185,000. (54) Rental costs in the County, however, have not responded markedly to the dramatic growth seen in mortgage foreclosures. They have risen only slightly from 2002 to 2008, from \$1,148 to \$1,231 for a three bedroom apartment. (55)

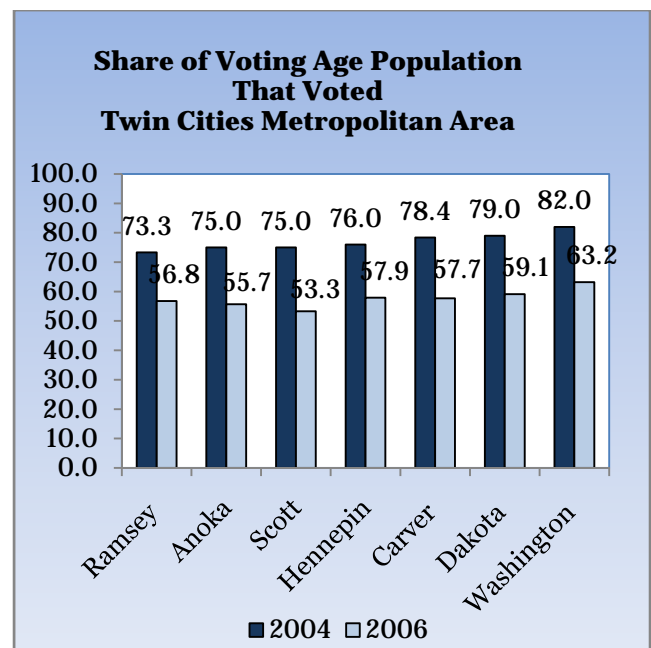
There is some potential for a bright spot. Drops in housing prices, in combination with reduced mortgage rates and possible federal aid, may make homes affordable to a broader swath of residents in 2009. However, if credit markets remain tight, these changes might not result in any new movement into homeownership.

A housing “burden” is defined as a household paying more than 30 percent of income for housing, and is a simple way to gauge affordability. The 2007 data from American Community Survey showed that 32 percent of all Dakota County households with a mortgage are cost-burdened, up from 17 percent in 2000. (56) As adjustable rate mortgage payments continued to go up, some of these cost-burdened residents likely ended up in foreclosure. The burden figure is 10 percent higher for renters than those with mortgages.

Civic Engagement

By looking at civic engagement whether and how people join together in various ways to improve the quality of life for communities in which they live, we gain another perspective on challenges and opportunities in the County. We find that people donate to food shelf, coach youth sports, promote arts and culture, or lend a hand to a neighbor in need. These activities give us a lens to see not what is problematic in the community, but how people voluntarily connect with others for a healthier future. A common measure of civic engagement is voter turnout. Within the seven-county metropolitan region Dakota County had the second highest percentage in 2004 and 2006. (Figure 40)

Figure 40



Source: Twin Cities Compass Website

TAKING ACTION AND GETTING RESULTS: PERFORMANCE PROFILES

Dakota County is...

Connecting Employers and Employees

2008 County Actions

The Dakota-Scott WorkForce Centers, with Dakota County locations in West St. Paul and Burnsville, serve many persons looking for work, including adults, veterans, youth, seniors, dislocated workers, and persons with disabilities. The Workforce Centers have many programs and services that provide information and training to people looking for a job or a career change. The goal is to make it easier for those seeking employment and those seeking workers to find a good match.

The **Resource Rooms** have job listings, computer access, resume writing, career planning, and education resources and library with reference books, newspapers, and videos.

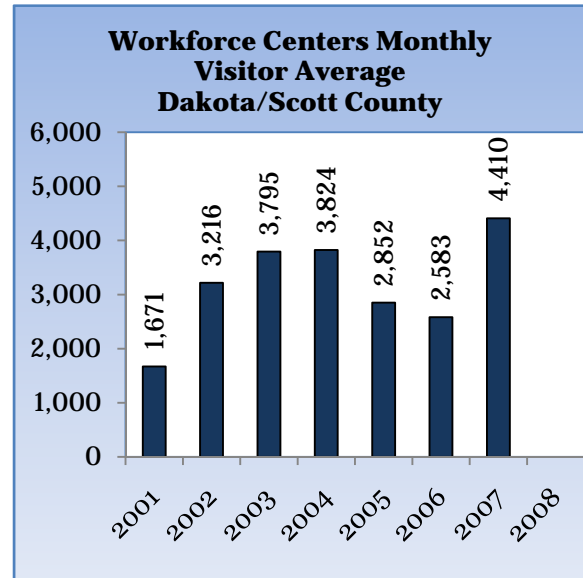
The centers also have **workshops** on topics such as effective job search, interviewing skills, resume writing, career planning, and helpful software.

Center **staff assistance** is available for resume writing, interview skills, effective job search, and career planning. This past November, the Dakota County Jail hosted an all-day “resource fair” that attracted almost 125 inmates. Nineteen schools, churches, transitional houses, and state and county work force programs provided information and referrals to help inmates make a successful transition.

Key Measure of Results: Visitors Served

The Workforce Centers serve thousands of people each month. After declining for a couple of years, the average number of visitors rose to an average of 4,410 visitors per month during 2007. (Figure 41) September 2008 was the busiest month *ever* in the West St. Paul WorkForce Center resource room, which had 3,593 visits. During the same month, the Burnsville WorkForce Center had 2,146 visits. The increase in visits is correlated with rising unemployment rates.

Figure 41



Source: Dakota County Employment and Economic Assistance Budget Summary

Key Measure of Results: Job Placements

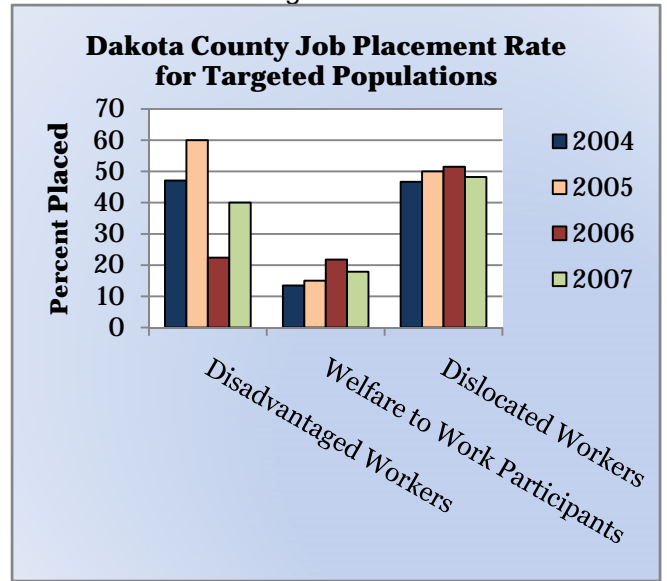
The County tracks the success of its employment efforts for those participating in three programs:

- Disadvantaged Workers
- Welfare to Work
- Dislocated Workers

Participants in the Disadvantaged Worker program are persons who low education and job-related skills, and possibly criminal histories. Welfare to Work participants are persons currently on the MFIP financial assistance program. Participants in the Dislocated Workers program are those who lost their jobs due to mass layoff or business closings.

Between 2004 and 2007, nearly 4,000 adults from these three groups participated in employment services. Those from the Disadvantaged and Dislocated Worker groups were more successful than Welfare to Work persons in obtaining jobs. (Figure 42) This is not unexpected since Welfare to Work participants tend to have less employment experience, less training, and fewer job-seeking skills.

Figure 42



Source: Dakota County Employment and Economic Assistance Department Budget Summary

Dakota County is...

Creating Affordable Housing Options

2008 County Actions

The Dakota County Community Development Agency (CDA) mission is to improve the lives of Dakota County residents through affordable housing and community development. The CDA administers over 30 different programs, geared toward low-income and moderate income residents, those who are disabled, and senior residents. The CDA housing programs have three main functions:

1. Increase the supply of affordable rental units
2. Enhance access to homeownership
3. Help maintain home values

Some of the key actions the CDA took in 2008 to **increase the supply of affordable rental units** were to develop CDA-owned workforce and senior housing, as well as administer a wide variety of housing programs, including Section 8. Just a few examples of progress include:

- In cooperation with the Social Services Department, CDA anticipates that in 2009, 24 new supportive housing units will be available for homeless youth or youth at risk of becoming homeless. Dakota County would become the first suburban county in the state to provide supportive housing of this scale for youth.
- At the other end of the age spectrum, the CDA also began construction of new senior housing in Lakeville.
- An additional workforce housing development, the first in Rosemount, was completed to provide affordable housing for 32 families with children under age 18.

The CDA also took steps **to enhance access to homeownership and help prevent foreclosures**. For instance, through its First Time Homebuyer Program, eligible persons accessed 30-year fixed rate mortgages. In addition to mortgage financing, some applicants also received help with the initial costs of purchasing a home through the Down Payment and Closing Cost Assistance Program. The CDA provided a total of 108 down payment loans between 2002 and 2007.

Key Measure of Results: Availability of CDA-owned Housing Units

One way the CDA increases the supply of affordable rental units it to own and manage them. In 2008, the CDA had available more than 2,000 units of affordable rental housing for working families and seniors. (Table 5) These units are located throughout the County. The CDA is on-target with respect to the number of units it wants to develop.

Table 5

CDA Low and Moderate Income Rental Housing 2008	
Type	Number of Units
Family Townhome	487
Senior Housing	1,190
Scattered Site	224
Colleen Loney Manor	80
Total	2,001

Source: Dakota Community Development Agency

Key Measure of Results: Home Improvement Assistance

For those already in a home, CDA programs can help to maintain its value with Home Improvement Loans. These loans assist low and moderate income homeowners with making repairs and improvements. Since 2003, this program has served an average of 85 households annually (Table 6)

The Weatherization Program, a joint effort with the Scott-Carver-Dakota CAP Agency, provides grant funds to make homes more energy efficient. An average of 81 homeowners a year completed weatherization projects that averaged nearly \$4,500 each. (Table 7)

Table 6

Home Improvement Loans Provided

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008*
Number of Loans	98	94	89	91	69	65

Source: Dakota County Community Development Agency
*Through November 2008

Table 7

Weatherization Program Assistance Levels

	April '05	May '06	June '07	July '08
Completed	63	89	104	69
Average Cost	\$3,554	\$3,825	\$4,740	\$5,690

Source: Dakota County Community Development Agency

Dakota County is...

Enhancing Mobility

2008 County Actions

Dakota County's actions in 2008 to enhance mobility centered on assuring appropriate development and maintenance of roads; expanding mass transit options; and encouraging and creating more walkable, connected places.

The County wants to assure that people and goods can move safely, efficiently, and quickly to points within and outside the County via **safe, efficient roads**. County roads – those owned and maintained by the County - play an important role in the overall transportation system in assuring this occurs. During 2008, the Transportation Department delivered on major projects in its Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Major accomplishments included:

- The start of improvements projects, including County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 56, CSAH/CSAH 47, and CSAH 70/I-35.
- Continued construction on CSAH 42 and completed CSAH 56.
- Continued project development and right-of-way acquisition on CSAH 96, CSAH 73, and CSAH 56.
-

In addition to building and maintaining roads for the travel of individual vehicles such as cars, the County has an interest in supporting **transit options** to help assure residents of efficient and uncongested travel to their destinations. In 2008, the County made major progress in planning for mass transit improvements. More specifically, the County advanced Phase I implementation plan activities for the Cedar Avenue Bus Rapid Transit plan, in partnership with the Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Valley Transit, and local communities. The County also completed the Robert Street Corridor Transit Feasibility Study, which identified transit alternatives along a 14-mile stretch from downtown St. Paul to County Road 42 in Rosemount.

Dakota County is encouraging, and providing ways for, residents to be more physically active, in part by supporting the development of **walkable, connected places**. Regular physical activity is known to help

maintain good weight and to lower risk of serious disease. Further, when residents take advantage of options for walking or biking to get from place to place, they decrease their environmental impact by decreasing the use of their motorized vehicles.

To build options that provide for physical activity, the County is using a multi-faceted approach. The first is by building trails and bikeways. In 2008, the County built an additional 14 miles of multi-use trails within parks. The intent is to build a system of regional trails that serves both recreational and transportation needs.

The second is by increasing public awareness and improving public policies affecting the built environment. The goal is to encourage development and use of trails and paths for walking, biking, and other physical activities. With an Active Living grant from Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Minnesota, the County is working with Apple Valley, Eagan, Lakeville, Rosemount, and School District 196 to achieve these ends. In 2008, County staff facilitated training and education sessions, and conducted “walkability assessments,” to determine strengths and weaknesses within each city.

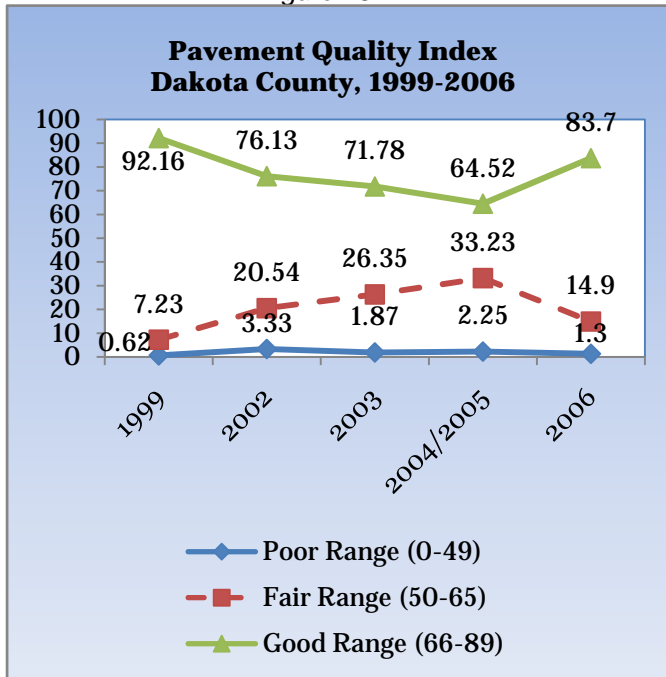
Key Measure of Results: Road Condition

After dropping in 2004-05, the percent of County State Aid Highways with a good quality rating increased to more than 80 percent in 2006. (Figure 43) In 2008, increases in oil prices substantially increased the cost for bituminous materials, increasing the need for preservation of existing road surfaces. New techniques such as pavement recycling, higher quality bituminous mixes, and crack sealing have been used to maximize pavement life.

Based on pavement management recommendations and the Dakota County 2025 Transportation Plan, average annual investment in pavement preservation more than doubled from \$1.5 million in 2003 to an average of over \$3.4 million in 2006 and 2007. This increased investment has resulted in the highest pavement condition index since the late 1990s, as rated in 2007. The proposed 2009–2013 Transportation CIP proposes an average annual investment of \$3.68 million. It is anticipated that the next

residential survey results will reflect a higher level of satisfaction due to this increased pavement quality index.

Figure 43



Source: Dakota County Transportation Department

Key Measure of Results: Road Congestion

In the 2008 Dakota County Residential Survey, more than 55 percent of respondents viewed traffic congestion in Dakota County as at least a moderate problem. (8) As indicated on the 100 point scale shown in Table 8 (a conversion that standardizes scores from slightly different questions over time), concern levels about traffic congestion has increased by 10 points.

Table 8

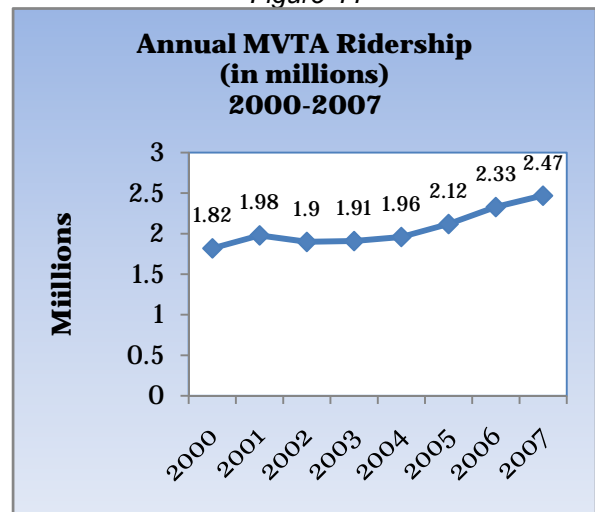
	2004	2006	2008
Traffic Congestion as a Potential Problem	38	41	48

Source: National Research Center, Inc. 2008.

Key Measure of Results: Transit Ridership

Transit ridership with the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), which provides bus services in the County, increased by 36 percent between 2000 and 2007. (Figure 44) In June 2008, MVTA reached a major milestone, providing an average of more than 10,000 rides each weekday during the month. By fall 2008, ridership was up by 5 percent over the same period last year. The MVTA operates the largest existing “park-and-ride” facility in the metro area (at the Burnsville Transit Station, which has 1,300 parking spaces) and continues work on construction of transit stations at Cedar Grove and a new station in Apple Valley. It also began new express service between Rosemount and downtown Minneapolis in September 2008, and completed installation of bicycle racks on all buses in July 2008. Dakota County is making major progress in moving transit initiatives forward further, and expects those efforts to dramatically increase transit ridership in the future.

Figure 44



Source: Dakota County 2008 Community Indicator Report

2008 Board goals complete:

- The feasibility study to identify preliminary transit options in the Robert Street Corridor is complete. The Dakota County Regional Rail Authority adopted the final report and recommendations in June 2008.
- An estimated 75 percent of planned Transportation capital projects will be completed by the end of 2008.
- The Dakota County 2030 Comprehensive Land Use Plan was adopted on-schedule, establishing a vision, goals, and policies for land use for the next 10 years.

2008 Board goals underway:

- Dakota County traffic forecasts will be completed by July 2009, consistent with the goal to complete the transportation model in conjunction with the Transportation Plan Update.
- Cedar Avenue Bus/Rapid Transit (BRT) 2008 Phase I implementation plan activities are on-schedule.

Dakota County is...

Establishing Telecommunications Networks

2008 County Actions

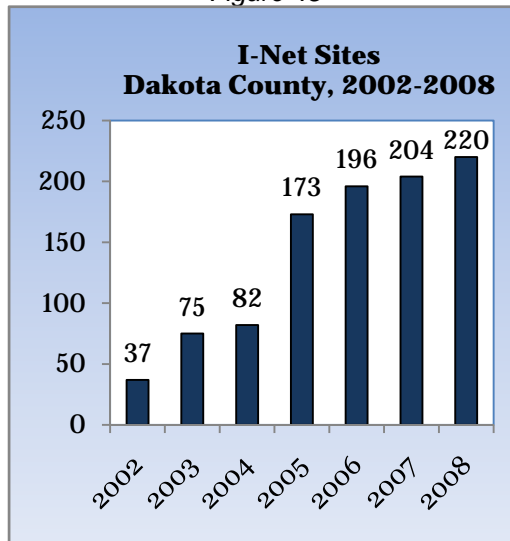
Telecommunications technology is critical component of community vitality. Telecommunications networks provide a mechanism across which to conduct business, learn, and connect easily with others.

Dakota County has demonstrated leadership by working to link public sector entities in the area via fiber optic cable through the I-Net initiative. This network enhances the ability to move information quickly between sites, and builds in redundancy to prevent system failures. This initiative includes the County, city governments, and school districts.

Key Measure of Results: I-Net Connections

After beginning with just three sites in early 2002, the number of sites connected grew to 220 in August 2008. (Figure 45) The most recent addition is the new Lakeville Police Department facility. Also in 2008, the Dakota County Information Technology Department brought on board the new Farmington City Hall, Rosemount City Hall and Police Department, and 10 sites in Hastings, including the City Hall and School District 200.

Figure 45



Source: Information Technology Department
Navigation Balanced Scorecard

Dakota County is...

Creating Community Assets

2008 County Actions

In the Safe and Healthy Residents section, we emphasized the County role in supporting a high quality of life for people by advancing public safety, protecting vulnerable residents, and promoting economic self-sufficiency. Dakota County also serves residents by creating and maintaining physical community assets for personal enjoyment and development. Among the community assets Dakota County is building for the enjoyment of all residents are:

- Libraries
- Parks
- Art

In 2008, the County took **steps increase park use**. One important part of this effort was increasing awareness of the County parks and the opportunities available within them. To this end, the County developed a “brand” for Dakota County parks - *Dakota County Parks – Forever Wild*. Officially launched at an event in Lebanon Hills Regional Park that attracted more than 500 visitors, the branding process includes standardizing all park communication to include the brand. It is too early to gauge the success of the branding effort in increasing park awareness and visitation, but initial data should be available after the next year of park operations. As part of the new *Forever Wild Parks* branding process, the Parks and Open Space Department has begun to upgrade its website with improved graphics and links to information. In 2009, the department will offer an online campground reservation system designed to be more user-friendly, with interactive maps and graphics.

To build opportunities for recreation while protecting key natural resources, the Parks and Open Space Department acquired 456 acres for a new regional park and 118 acres of private property within established park boundaries in 2008. Other key developments include adding 14 miles of new trail in Lebanon Hills Regional Park, restoring 120 acres in Miesville Ravine Park Reserve to native prairie

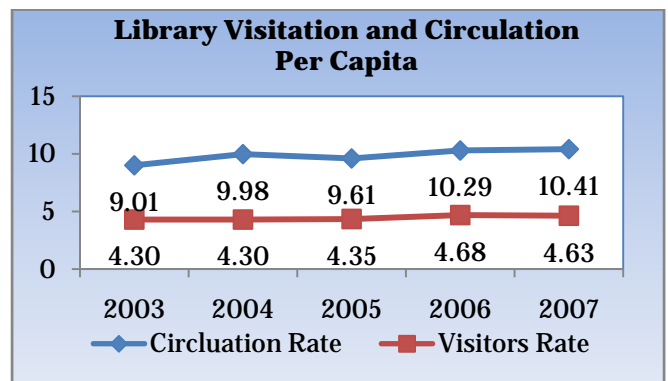
vegetation, and opening the new Schaar’s Bluff Gathering Center at Spring Lake Park Reserve.

Similarly, the County took **steps to build the value of the library system**. Planning for a branding initiative similar to that developed for the parks began. In addition, the County broke ground on the Robert Trail Library and License Center, which will open in 2009 and provide more convenient library and license services to residents in the Rosemount area. Renovations to existing libraries, including the Wescott Library in Eagan and the Wentworth Library in West St. Paul, created facilities that have an enhanced ability to meet residents’ needs.

Key Measures of Results: System Use

Complementing the Residential Survey findings, residents have also “voted with their feet” - by increasing use of County assets. For instance, the number of visits to all library branches increased from 1.6 million in 2002 to 1.8 million visits in 2007, an increase of 14 percent. In 2007, more than 10 items were checked out for every resident of Dakota County and, on average, there were more than 4 visits per resident. (Figure 46)

Figure 46

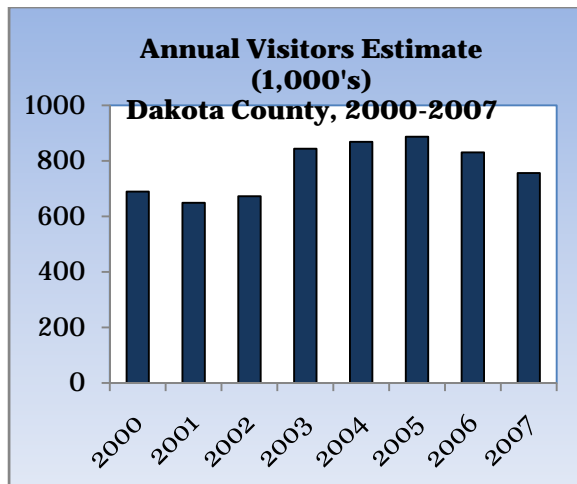


Source: Dakota County Libraries

In 2006, the circulation rate was above the national average of 8.7 loans per capita, and was above the Washington County figure of 8.3 loans. Additionally, the visitor rate was just below the national average of 4.8 visits per capita and just above the Washington County rate of 4.7.

Dakota County parks are popular destinations as well, with more than 756,400 visitors in 2007. Between 2003 and 2007, the parks averaged 837,000 visits annually - or about 2,300 daily. (Figure 47)

Figure 47



Source: Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department

The Metropolitan Council estimates annual visitation to the Metropolitan Regional Parks System; the Dakota County parks are a part of this larger system. While the entire system experienced a slight decline from 2006 to 2007, Dakota County had a decline of nearly nine percent. (57) The Metropolitan Council attributed part of the decline during 2007 to the wettest August – October period on record. Dakota County staff also cited the onset of rising gas prices in reducing trips to regional parks compared to local city parks for outdoor activities.

Key Measure of Success: Satisfaction

Residents have consistently rated the **County Library and Parks** systems favorably. In 2008, libraries (rated 81 on a 100-point scale) were rated the highest among County services, followed closely by Parks. (8) In the case of the County Library system, these ratings are similar to other local government entities across the nation. For the Parks system, ratings are also high. More than 90 percent of users indicate at least “Above Average” overall satisfaction with their visit. (Table 9) These results, from surveys conducted by the Parks and Open Space Department, are consistent with findings from the County’s 2008 Residential Survey. In the Residential Survey, 93 percent of the respondents rated the quality

parks and recreation as Good to Excellent, which is above the national norm. (8)

Table 9

Park Customer Satisfaction Survey	2007-2008
	Percent Above Average to Excellent
Overall satisfaction with visit	94%
Appearance and cleanliness	91%
Reservations staff	89%
Website ease of use	64%

Source: Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department

In addition to collecting customer feedback through residential and park visitor surveys, the Parks and Open Space Department has collected customer satisfaction since May 2007 from people who rented the “big four” park rental facilities- Dakota Lodge, Camp Sacajawea Retreat Center, Spring Lake Park Retreat Center, and Lebanon Hills Visitor Center. Results show high levels of satisfaction with overall quality, appearance/cleanliness, and staff, but less satisfaction with website ease of use.

Key Measure of Success: Access to Art in the Community

Art is another asset that can improve and differentiate the quality of life in a community. Led by staff from the Public Service and Revenue Division, and advised by the Public Arts Citizen Advisory Committee, two public art projects have been approved by the County Board in recent years:

- The Western Service Center in Apple Valley now houses a 15-photograph display of historic photographs provided by the Dakota County Historical Society. The display was erected in 2007.
- In August 2008, the County Board approved recommendations for a second project- art work by cultural artists and fiber art to be displayed in the rotunda and east hallway of the Northern Service Center. Work has begun on this project.

2008 Board goals completed:

- Eighty-five percent of County building projects on-schedule. Projects included renovations at Wescott and Wentworth Library, and construction of the new Robert Trail Library and License Center.

Dakota County is...

Engaging the Community

2008 County Actions

For a community to be vital, residents need to be engaged and connected with those around them. To do its part to encourage and maintain connections with the community, Dakota County provided opportunities to learn and volunteer.

Key Measure of Results: Program Participation

Among the many opportunities the County provides for residents to get involved are *classes* for all residents—adults, children, and families. The Parks and Open Space Department, for instance, offers classes to learn new recreational or outdoors skills, such as kayaking or snowshoeing, and are publicized in the County newsletter, the *Update*, and on-line at the County’s website. They may be geared toward all residents, or specialized to fit the needs of particular groups, such as families, women, or scouts.

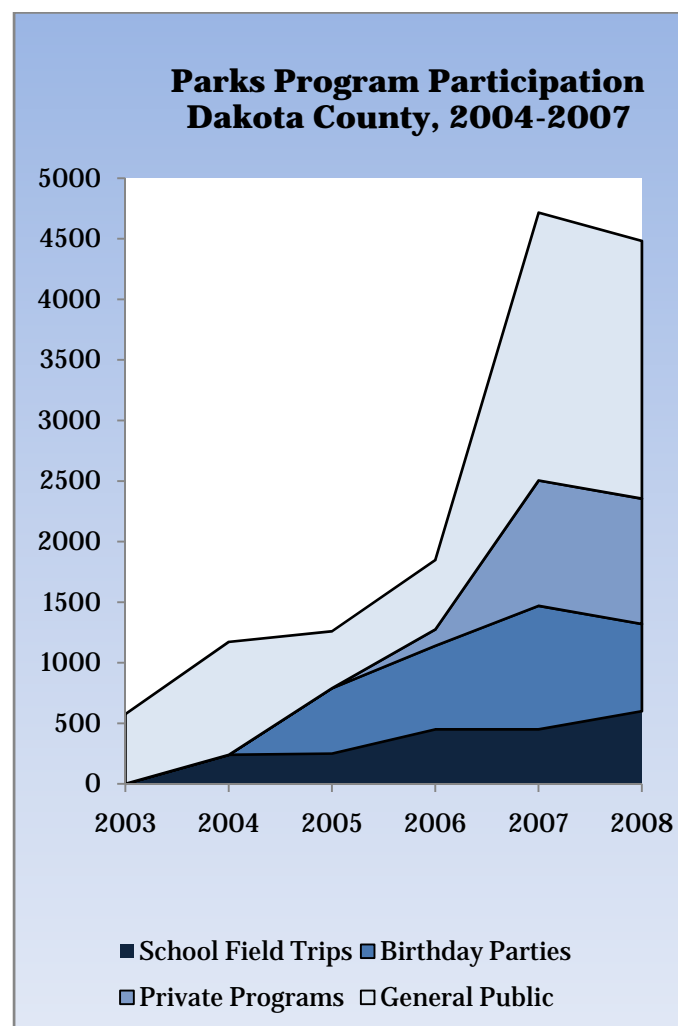
Attendance at these outdoor classes has been growing, along with the number and type of classes offered. *Most notably, between 2003 and 2007, attendance at classes for the general public increased by 284 percent (Figure 50).* Feedback is used to improve existing classes and to determine what new or revised classes to offer in the future.

The County integrated educational classes into many other programs in 2008 as well:

- Libraries regularly offered short courses on how to use the library, Internet, and commonly used software.
- The Public Health Department offered nutrition classes to its WIC clients (typically young, at-risk mothers and their small children).
- Public Health Department events attracted residents in three areas— Health Promotion (3,800 participants), Family Health (1,740 participants), and Disease Prevention and Control (1,050 participants).

- The Workforce Centers conducted workshops on effective job search, interviewing skills, resume writing, career planning.

Figure 48



Source: Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department

Key Measure of Results: County Volunteers

To encourage the active participation of residents in government, and to leverage its own resources with a broader group of interested people, the County offers a myriad of ways to *volunteer* in County government.

Hundreds of residents demonstrate their strong support of County services by volunteering in programs sponsored and/or organized by the County. A few of the many notable examples of volunteering in 2008 include:

- 114 residents, appointed by the County Commissioners, served on 13 advisory committees, reviewing issues and providing information and recommendations to the Board
- 150 students from 2 local high schools tested water quality (and the 60 students who also collected bugs) for use in water quality evaluation as a part of the Vermillion River Watch Program, operated by the Soil and Water Conservation District.
- Library volunteers provided nearly 10,000 hours of service for each of the past 2 years, much of it in the Adopt-a-Shelf program that helps to keep library shelves in order.
- 89 groups that cleaned up stretches of County highways at least twice a year provided an estimated 7,900 hours of service in 2007.
- 140 volunteers provided 21,470 hours of services to repair harm caused by crime by helping juveniles in community projects, assisting probation officers, participating in victim-offender conferences, or other activities.

- 104 volunteers monitored collected valuable wetland data through the Wetland Health Evaluation Project (WHEP).
- 447 persons served on community organizations to promote health in Dakota County.
- Approximately 60 residents have begun attending regular sub-committee meetings of the Living Longer and Stronger in Dakota County" campaign - an aging initiative partnership between Dakota County and DARTS.

Dakota County also engages its residents in government by seeking their input through public meetings and residential surveys. The County periodically hires a professional survey research firm to conduct a phone survey of a representative sample of residents. In 2008, 706 households completed the survey. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan process included focus group meeting and open houses in order to gather feedback on drafts of the plan- approximately 190 residents attended these sessions during 2008.

Figure 49

Dakota County Volunteers: A Sample



Dakota County is...

Promoting a Literate and Informed Community

2008 County Actions

Literate and informed residents are better able to access information of interest, understand ideas, and communicate effectively with each other. To encourage literacy and to keep the community informed about services and decisions, the County uses many approaches and settings.

Through our **library system**, special programs promote reading and literacy, plus broader understanding of the world around us. These programs are geared toward three general groups:

- *Children.* These programs include story time hours, student tours, summer reading programs, performances, and classroom visits.
- *Teens.* These include performances and other programs.
- *Adults.* These offerings include book groups, computer classes, Minnesota Mosaic events, and performances.

In addition, the library provides meeting rooms for public use, providing yet another way for residents to access educational or community-oriented events and information.

The library also has 140 computers with Internet access available to the public. The number of hours visitors have used these computers has increased sharply, from 176,409 in 2006 to 199,413 in 2007.

To inform residents about the work of the County, a readily available resource is the **County website**. On the Dakota County website, the most frequent destination pages are related to searching for jobs with Dakota County; inquiring about real estate values and taxes; and getting information about Library and Park resources. Finally, through **presentations and distribution of information** to the community, the County informs and educates residents about important issues and resources.

Key Measure of Results: Library Program Attendance

According to the Dakota County Libraries Statistical Report, since 2003 total attendance at library events has increased by 28 percent, reflecting the growing number of programs offered and their popularity with residents. (Figure 50) elaborates on program use.

Figure 50

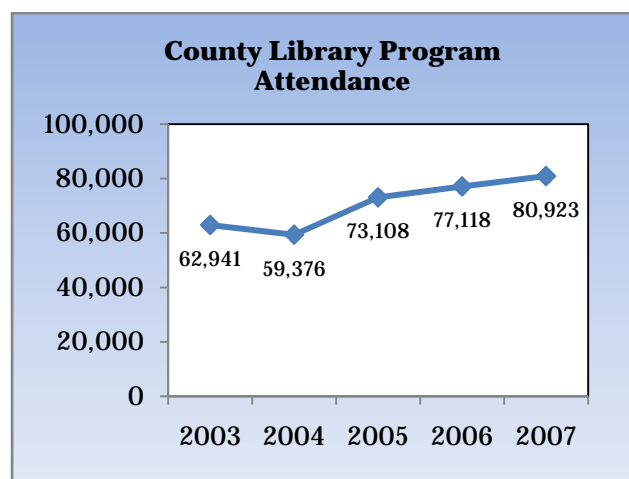


Table 10

Library Programs and Attendance: January – September 2008		
Type of Activity	Number	Participants
Meeting Room Use by Public	1,919	29,949
Children’s Story Time	527	12,907
Children’s Performances	96	12,786
Adult Book Groups	67	473
Adult Computer Classes	146	1,196
Minnesota Mosaic@	11	395
Performances	12	588
Teen Performances + Other	156	1,986

Key Measure of Results: Education in the Community

Dakota County staff and officials appear before a wide variety of groups to discuss County services and issues, and distribute information. For instance, the Public Health Department staff reaches out through community presentations on topics in three major areas- health promotion, family health, and disease prevention and control. *Thus far for 2008, they have reached nearly 7,000 residents:*

- Health Promotion: 3,800
- Family Health: 1,740
- Disease Prevention and Control: 1,050

One innovative approach to promote a safe community is used by the Dakota County Traffic Safety Project, which aims to reduce traffic fatalities and driving-while-intoxicated (DWI) events. Project staff has produced a handout to distribute to each vehicle they stop (nearly 400 a month), explaining the program and its goals. Funding

for this program is provided by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

The Dakota County Attorney and County Attorney Office staff conduct community presentations, legal education training sessions to targeted audiences, and programs for students. *Through 2008, they completed:*

- High school mock trials for 475 students.
- Bullying workshops for 285 students.
- Peer Court with 195 students.
- Meth community education for 325 participants.
- Mock car crashes viewed by 2,300 students.
- General prevention and outreach with 650 adults.
- Celebrate Safe Communities events with 2,400 attendees

Dakota County residents are also interested in learning about County growth, population changes, and challenges. In response to requests, staff presented information to a group of about 30 non-profit leaders in the spring of 2008 and to a non-partisan, candidates' forum with about 75 attendees in the fall.