

**RACHEL REABE:** *MPR's Mainstreet Radio* coverage of rural issues is supported by the Blandin Foundation, committed to strengthening communities through grant-making, leadership training, and convening.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Good afternoon. And welcome to our special *Mainstreet* broadcast from Saint Cloud State University. I'm Rachel Reabe. In the past 20 years, almost 53,000 refugees have settled in Minnesota, the majority live in the Twin Cities, but about 15% of the refugees were placed in rural Minnesota and have slowly expanded the ethnic mix.

Our guests today, Minh Tran, area coordinator for Refugee and Immigration Services for Lutheran Social Services in Moorhead, and Diane Kimm, a Pelican Rapids School board member and volunteer who's worked with refugee families in her community. We also have Bob Hulteen, who supervises refugee services for the Minnesota Council of Churches, and works with communities on racism issues. Our phone lines are open for your questions and comments today at 1-800-537-5252. Again, the number, 1-800-537-5252.

We're going to start our conversation talking about Pelican Rapids. Pelican Rapids is a Norwegian community of about 2,000 people in Otter Tail County, North of Fergus Falls. Now, it's home to a lively mix of Vietnamese, Bosnians, Hispanics, Somalians, among others. Minh Tran, how did that happen?

**MINH TRAN:** Well, first of all, I'd like to thank Minnesota Public Radio for having me here today. And thank you, too. It began when I first started working in December 1979, when our first unaccompanied minors, Asian, Vietnamese, unaccompanied minors, a group of young teenagers begin to arrive. So we needed foster homes for them. We got pretty good response from Pelican Rapids. So we placed a number of kids there.

And then next, we began to resettle a few Laotian families there. A local church sponsored them. And their job right there at the turkey plant. So the family came and a few months later, they got a job at the turkey plant. And then over the years, then we got the-- beginning in 1995, we got our first two families from Bosnia.

**RACHEL REABE:** And so what are you looking for in a community? Is it critical that there are jobs available, that the refugees could fill those jobs? Is that one of the critical points?

**MINH TRAN:** That's one of the critical points, jobs, and then the support from the community, and school, and volunteers, and all those things together.

**RACHEL REABE:** So you want those things in place before the people come. It's not something you think, well, they'll grow to love these people. You want to see some interest upfront.

**MINH TRAN:** Yes, before we bring a family or a person into the community, we do those things. We do some kind of research first. Number one is job, and then volunteer support. The school system for them is an ESL class for them, among other things.

**RACHEL REABE:** Diane Kimm, what happened in Pelican Rapids? You got involved in 1990. How did it happen?

**DIANE KIMM:** The Ministerium, which is an organization of about 14 or 15 different churches of varying denominations, sponsored a family. Prior to that, the unaccompanied minors who came and were part of the school system, I was familiar with them because I was on the board at that time. And I just thought it was something that I ought to be involved in. It's a chance for a person in a small town to make a difference in someone's life.

My involvement with this particular first family that came was because we had an extra bed. The church bulletin asked for donations of household goods. And so we brought a bed into the family and had a chance to meet the family. And they were charming. And the kids obviously needed some help with their homework after school.

So I started stopping over there after work at night. And we'd sit around the table. And I was just awed by their determination to succeed and a little bit overwhelmed by the obstacles in language that were there in front of them. But they were willing. I was willing. They had a good ESL teacher in the school. And the school has been very supportive of all of the families and children that have come through its doors.

So is it a question then that once you see, boy, that worked out well, that family's doing well there. Let's send another family, and another family, another family. So that once the door is open, and people are welcome, and the jobs are still there, that you just keep sending people?

**DIANE KIMM:** That is correct, but we also look at how the local community-- how much the local community is capable of helping refugees. So the number of people that come that we need to take a look at the number too. But at the same time, there are refugees that came to move to Pelican Rapids from other states. They came because there are jobs there. They came because they have friends there. And they heard about the support there.

**RACHEL REABE:** Bob Hulteen, how difficult is it for rural community, a rural white community, a rural, white Norwegian community, who might think that Germans would be some diversity in town? How difficult is it for them to change that mindset and to welcome other people into their community?

**BOB HULTEEN:** I think it's different for each community. And it's hard to identify what the factors are that really will work. But I think once you determine that you want to become involved in something like refugee resettlement, then you need to start to see what assets you have in your community that can be used towards successfully resettling people, who really are coming into a situation having usually just been through trauma, at least in the not too distant past. And so you need to make sure that you have the capacity to do that.

Congregations are good support systems for refugee resettlement because they're voluntary associations of people who already have some sense of mission or ministry in the community, hopefully. And so bringing together several congregations can often open up the kinds of dialogues you need in order to meet the needs of the refugees coming in.

**RACHEL REABE:** Let's go to our phone lines. And again, our number is 1-800-537-5252, if you'd like to join our conversation, by giving us a call today, we would invite you to do that. We go now to John, who is standing by in Wilmer.

Good afternoon, John. Welcome to this *Mainstreet* show.

**AUDIENCE:** Good afternoon. I always enjoy your program. And today, your program is quite fitting in a very timely subject. My question involves-- the question is, because I was listening to the program prior to this one, regarding the Saint Cloud issues. And I think the two really do tie together.

It seems to me so often that the successful programs, where individuals, families come into a community that need the support of a community, come there and are very successfully melded into that community, and then from there on, develop a diverse part of that community, which is really a wonderful asset to any community because the colors on the trees are what makes the trees wonderful, and I think the same thing in a community.

The question I have, though, is relating to so much of what was spoken about in the previous hour or half hour, talked about, for example, the Saint Cloud community needing to change to meet the needs of these new people coming in. And I think it's so tragic that so many times, new people to a community or guest to a community that are initially coming into a community, require the whole community to change, rather than the individuals that come into the community trying to find their place in that community and meld into that community.

And I'm just wondering if there's a real correlation with the successes in the programs that other communities in Minnesota and other parts of the country have had, where communities are welcomed individuals and welcomed families and other groups in the community were-- the question is, well, how do we, as a community, have to change to meet your needs rather than how do these individuals, what do they have to do to meet the standards that are in the community and to--

**RACHEL REABE:** How would you address that? Who needs to change? Is it the people coming in or the people that are there?

**BOB HULTEEN:** Well, I suspect that it's probably a balance. But I guess, I would want to say that it is important for a community that wants to call itself welcoming to reevaluate its own way of being. In the church, we talk about providing hospitality to the stranger. And part of that is not just to force-- to ask of someone when they come, to change and abide by our rules, but it's to reevaluate how we can actually become more hospitable. And that often requires change in us.

**RACHEL REABE:** Diane, did you see this in working with the families that you did in Pelican Rapids? Was there a sense, sometimes, on their part that they had to assimilate as quickly as possible and be as American or as Minnesotan as possible, that's the only way they would get along?

**DIANE KIMM:** I think that was the desire of the family that came first. They wanted their children to learn English and to be part of the community as fast as possible. But I think the community had to make some adaptations too.

A lot of it, on the part of the first Vietnamese family that I worked with was a wanting to know what the community expected of them. And one just silly example is the father asked me, how much snow do we have to shovel? I said, you shovel enough so that you can get a car in and out, and you can get to your house. He thought you had to shovel all the snow off of all of your sidewalks and your yard. And they didn't know what snow meant. And one of the questions that he looked at me and he said, no plant? Wanting to know, you don't grow a garden in the winter time?

So they came with lots and lots of questions, but they were very eager to please and very eager to do what the community expected them to do. So it really wasn't a problem.

And then one of the things that I wanted to go back a little bit, when one family comes and then another family comes, that first family is so helpful in helping them to understand what the community expects. The community doesn't have to do it all over again every time. The ethnic community that is there is ready to help them.

**RACHEL REABE:** They form their own support system.

**DIANE KIMM:** They do. They still need support from community people, but by and large, they do an awful lot for themselves.

**RACHEL REABE:** We have a young woman from one of those first Vietnamese families that arrived in Pelican Rapids with us here in Saint Cloud today. John Kimm came from a refugee camp in the Philippines in 1990 when she was 16 years old, with her parents, her two sisters, and her brother with no relatives in America. And suddenly, you're living in rural Minnesota, in Pelican Rapids. How difficult was that, John, to begin with? You spoke no English.

**JOHN KIMM:** No, not at all. At first, we were really scared and lonely, miss home a lot. But later on, we learned to speak English. And we just get along with the community just fine.

**RACHEL REABE:** What would you say were some of the biggest challenges?

**JOHN KIMM:** I was scared, the language is--

**RACHEL REABE:** Language was tremendous then. Big problem--

**JOHN KIMM:** It is.

**RACHEL REABE:** --to learn English.

**JOHN KIMM:** Yeah.

**RACHEL REABE:** How about feeling comfortable in the community? Did you feel like it took years and years before-- I mean, this is nine years ago now. Did it take years for people to accept you and your family? Or did you feel like they were welcoming to you?

**JOHN KIMM:** Because our community is really small. And I mean, at first, we feel lonely. But then later on, when we start speaking English and people know that we can talk English, so they come and talk to us. And I mean, everybody is really nice. If they know you speak English and they just be friend with you. I guess, it's really hard if they don't know you speak English or not, and that's one of the problem that they afraid to come up and talk to you because they don't know what-- if you know or not. And--

**RACHEL REABE:** So it's not that you saw them be mean, it's just that they were maybe standoffish because they didn't know what to do?

**JOHN KIMM:** That's true.

**RACHEL REABE:** And have you seen it change tremendously? Your parents have settled there now.

**JOHN KIMM:** Yeah.

**RACHEL REABE:** Has it gotten easier now? Is more refugees have come behind you now? Is there other Vietnamese families in town and other families of other ethnic backgrounds?

**JOHN KIMM:** I guess we got more background on Vietnamese, but I think it's much easier for us now and the later family come, it's easier too because they got us there and we help them out a little bit, and the community help out too. So it's easier for the later family.

**RACHEL REABE:** Well, I understand that your house is quite a center for people of all nationalities coming.

**JOHN KIMM:** Yeah.

**RACHEL REABE:** So there's always somebody coming in, coming out, different people.

**JOHN KIMM:** That's true.

**RACHEL REABE:** Right. Minh Tran, the situation in Pelican Rapids, is it typical or is it atypical?

**MINH TRAN:** Well, Pelican Rapids is a very special community to me in terms of-- we were talking about changes earlier. Refugees who are victims of violence, victims of persecution, victims of war, victims of violence, they are survivors. And they knew, when they came here, they would face a lot of changes.

They came here with a lot of questions. They said, would the new community accept me as a person? What should I do? Would I be able to get a job? Would I be able to learn the language? Would my kids be enrolled in school and be accepted in school? A lot of questions has to be answered.

**RACHEL REABE:** Did you feel like you could answer those questions for these people? I can understand they would have all these questions. And certainly, they would feel comfortable asking them to you, yourself, a refugee who came to this country in this part of the world. And yet, how do you know how people are going to react? People at church could seem quite welcoming into a community, but that doesn't mean the other 1900 people there would be welcoming as well. Do you just have to step out and hope that things work to begin with?

**MINH TRAN:** That is correct. I don't have all the answers for them. Part of our work to help new refugees is to provide the orientation, cultural orientation, employment orientation, orientation about the culture, about the local community. And then we go from there. We go through-- we work with volunteers. And volunteers are there.

My personal experience is that the friendship, the emotional support that our American friends came to us and said, we are your friend, we are your new friends. You are here with us. We like to be your friend. I think that is very important for a new person coming to this country, also, a new refugees because refugees are survivors.

**BOB HULTEEN:** Rachel, I wanted to say, in regards to your question, I think the church, if it's really doing its obligation to hospitality, it wouldn't just prepare its own members for any people that they're planning to bring in. It would actually be involved in the community, trying to increase the level of discourse there so that it's not just the members of the congregation that would be changed, but it would be everyone in the community.

**RACHEL REABE:** And do you think that change happens by-- Diane, maybe you could explain if you feel this happened in Pelican Rapids, often, we'll see that change is precipitated by a strong personality who accepts the newcomers, a group of people who-- and then other people think, well, they're doing it. I think we'd better jump on the wagon with them. Did that happen in Pelican Rapids, where the momentum got going and suddenly, the people who were standoffish, they suddenly were in the minority instead of part of the majority? Do you feel that way?

**DIANE KIMM:** Yes, I believe that's exactly what happened in Pelican. We have a unique situation because we have a multicultural committee that was formed when community members felt that there was a need for some dialogue and learning about other cultures. And really, they did more than have dialogue. They actually got in and got involved by having different multicultural events in town.

We have an International Friendship Festival in June that's going into its second year now that's very successful in bringing all of the different cultures, not only the refugee cultures, but every culture that's available in Pelican Rapids comes together that day to celebrate. And we have ethnic food, ethnic art, and lots of different kinds of things that bring our community together. And the theme is many cultures, one community.

And one by one, the new people in the community have been taken under the wing of someone. When the Bosnians came, I just felt that there was so much left for me to do with the Vietnamese that I chose not to get involved with the Bosnians. But someone else took that up and started befriending different Bosnian families that came, found things for them to put in their houses or apartments, and helped them get their children enrolled in school, all the things that you have to do as a volunteer when a refugee family comes to town.

Then the Somalians came. Someone else took them. And as you get acquainted with families and individuals, that's where you find out that we aren't really all that different.

**RACHEL REABE:** And is it important for people to remember that they came from someplace else too. It wasn't me, but it was my grandmother, my grandfather that came from Germany. Do we need to remember in Minnesota, which has a rich tradition of all kinds of immigration? Does that help, Bob, to remind people, where did your ancestors come from? What did they face when they got to this country? How did it feel for them moving into this predominantly blank community?

**BOB HULTEEN:** I think since most of us who live in Minnesota, our roots are from somewhere else, and usually, there's not too many generations back that you can draw on that to help develop at least a sensitivity. I don't think it's a complete understanding, but it's at least a sensitivity to what people may be going through.

The difference is, again, are a lot of the people who are coming now, especially the refugees, have gone through trauma for a lot of the people who came when my family came in the late 1800s, were looking for some economic opportunities, but it wasn't because they were fleeing persecution in Sweden.

**RACHEL REABE:** Important distinction. We go to the phones. Matils from Minneapolis is on the phone with us. Good afternoon. And welcome to *Mainstreet*.

**AUDIENCE:** Good afternoon. Thank you for taking my call. I am a foreign myself. I'm from Brazil. And I've been in Minnesota for 6 and 1/2 years. And to tell you, I love Minnesota. I have been well-received here.

And the main point, I believe, in this issue is that your standards, you need to see how you behave, watch yourself. And if you come move to another culture and start behaving not the way the society standards have over here, then you're going to have a conflict.

One gentleman in your panel mentioned the DWB was quite interesting, Drive While Black. Well, if I were a police chief, I would stop every single car this guy is driving because they're scary. They drive with loudspeakers and they drive by shooting. It happens quite often. So I think that the policemen are right in doing that.

**RACHEL REABE:** And so you think that the people who are moving here need to examine their own actions as well?

**AUDIENCE:** Absolutely. That's right. In a situation, any society that has a large group of people with different backgrounds, you can always have a conflict. However, if you come from outside, you have to adapt yourself to the standards of the society you move into.

And I am a minority, as I said, but I've never had a problem. And I do believe the Black people, they have this attitude, not all of them, though. I have Black friends who very respectful people and intelligent people. But they need-- if they want to conquer what they're looking for, they really need to raise their standards a little bit and respect others also.

**RACHEL REABE:** Thank you for your comment today. We go now to Carolyn in Minneapolis. Good afternoon, Carolyn. Welcome to *Mainstreet*.

**AUDIENCE:** Hello?

**RACHEL REABE:** Hello.

**AUDIENCE:** Hi. I grew up in a rural community. And I think, maybe too much emphasis is being made on acceptance because people are different by color. I know that where I grew up, even if you moved into town and you looked like everyone else, you were still considered an outsider until you had lived in the community for a generation.

**RACHEL REABE:** So acceptance in small towns is a problem for anybody coming in.

**AUDIENCE:** I think so. And I think that by emphasizing that, maybe that makes it too much of a negative issue. I can't hear you.

**BOB HULTEEN:** There may be some truth to that. I do think, though, that in a culture that stratifies by race so much, when you move into a community and can never be anonymous, that really changes the way that you're in a community. You may be new, but I think you would still have opportunities, sometimes, to be anonymous and not feel like you're under public scrutiny all the time.

**RACHEL REABE:** We're talking today about rural refugees with our guest, Diane Kimm, Minh Tran, and Bob Hulteen. I'm Rachel Reabe. Our phone lines are open for your questions and comments at 1-800-537-5252. And we'll be back with more of *Mainstreet* and your phone calls after a look at news and weather.

**TIM PUGMIRE:** Good afternoon. I'm Tim Pugmire with a news update from *Minnesota Public Radio*. President Clinton says he's proud of the three US soldiers who were held captive in Yugoslavia. He visited them today in Germany.

Clinton also noted the deaths of two Apache helicopter crewmen, saying, we grieve with their families and pray for them. A humanitarian group says one of its relief convoys has been hit by a bomb in Kosovo. The Greek branch of doctors of the world says no one in the convoy was hurt. NATO denies its forces hit the convoy.

Some Oklahoma City residents are returning to their homes today to see what's left after Monday's tornado. Hundreds of cars lined up at a police checkpoint to get into the devastated neighborhood, which will be sealed off again tonight.

It could cost \$50 million to get Columbine High School back in shape after last month's shooting rampage. That estimate comes from a top administrator in the school district. Meanwhile, the *Denver Post* reports, witnesses have named someone who might have been a third gunman.

In regional news, police planned a news conference this afternoon on the first homicide at the Mall of America. A young woman was apparently stabbed to death at the mall just after the store's closed last night. A 23-year-old man was arrested in South Minneapolis. Police say the suspect and the victim knew each other.

The Minnesota House has approved paying three tobacco trial jurors almost \$30,000 to cover financial hardships. The money would pay foreclosure costs, lost overtime, and other fees the jurors suffered during the four month trial.

The Minnesota Zoo says it won't have to lay anybody off. The zoo rescinded 40 layoff notices after the legislature came through with enough money. A zoo spokeswoman says legislative approval came just in time to make the zoo's deadline.

And a bill that requires the board of medical practice to register midwives, 151 to 11 Senate approval. The board has not registered midwives for 61 years. The house needs to approve a final version of the bill, as agreed upon in conference committee.

Scattered showers and thunderstorms around Minnesota today, especially in the North highs, ranging in the mid 60s.

And that's the latest news from *Minnesota Public Radio*. I'm Tim Pugmire.

**RACHEL REABE:** You're listening to a special *Mainstreet* report from Saint Cloud State University. I'm Rachel Reabe. And we're talking about the refugees that have settled in towns across Minnesota. My guests are Minh Tran, area coordinator for Refugee and Immigration Services for Lutheran Social Services, Diane Kimm, a Pelican Rapids volunteer who's worked with refugee families, John Kimm, who came to Pelican Rapids from Vietnam when she was 16 years old, and Bob Hulteen, who supervises refugee services for the Minnesota Council of Churches and works with communities on racism issues.

Change has not come easily for some rural communities. We have Sue Pirsig on the phone with us from the West Central Minnesota town of Benson in Swift County. She works with Economic Development Organization in Swift County. Good afternoon, Sue.

**SUE PIRSIG:** Hello.

**RACHEL REABE:** Hello. When you tried to expand the labor force in Swift County, you met with some resistance. Tell us about that.

**SUE PIRSIG:** Well, in one of our businesses, we're experiencing a difficulty in finding enough employees. And the owner of the business suggested, along with one of his contractors, that possibly, there was a population in the Metro area that may be interested in coming to work for him, and that was members of the Hmong community.

We did some community meetings with officials and leaders in the community. And it made it fairly public that this was being considered. And the reaction from the community was about 50/50 as far as being positive and negative toward the concept. It was enough of a concern for the people from the Hmong community that they determined this was not a good place for them to settle because they didn't feel welcomed. And they told us that upfront, that if they didn't feel welcome, that they would choose another community and not come here.

**RACHEL REABE:** So the opposition, how did it present itself? How did people express the fact that they were not open to having members of the Hmong community moved to Benson?

**SUE PIRSIG:** I had several phone calls in my office. There were letters to the editor in the paper. There was just a pulling back of the leadership of the community as far as organizing ourselves so we could have a community meeting to discuss the issue. Not just myself, but several people in the community were contacted about this.

**RACHEL REABE:** Bob, does it surprise you that a community might be 50/50 when you're thinking about doing something like this?

**BOB HULTEEN:** No, we do live in a pretty polarized time. And churches are no different in that. But with fragmentation and the kind of fragmentation and isolation we're really experiencing, it's not surprising. I also want to say, though, that it's not that there's nothing that we can do because I think there are things. Unfortunately, they, usually, are long term. And we're probably looking for quick fixes. And most of the quick fixes probably don't help very much.

**RACHEL REABE:** And Sue, actually, your community then, after the Hmong decided not to come to Benson, the issue didn't stop there. Then you started working on, perhaps, changing some attitudes, doing some of the more long term things. Tell us about that.

**SUE PIRSIG:** Right. Because of the reaction in the community and the fact that it happened with several people, not just myself, we got together and decided that maybe this was an issue that the churches in the community should be addressing because they are supposedly a welcoming to the community type of organization and have a great deal of say about what the social issues are that get discussed or that how people feel about things.

So we went to the Ministerium and asked for leadership guidance. What is it that we can do as a community and that they can help us do or they can recommend? And by accident, found that two people from Benson had been through a training called Understanding and Dismantling Racism, put on by two people from the Minnesota Council of Churches, Jim and Nadine Addington.

And they recommended that we look into that. And they joined our task force as well, which we organized, at that point in time, to find--

**RACHEL REABE:** Has that been successful? So you said that they came. And they were there actually for several days in the fall. Since then, have you seen attitudes change? Certainly, the way that you talk about it is different. I know, when I talked about changing people's minds and perhaps, making them more tolerant, you said that you were taught in your session, use the word, it's "Racism." Use the word "Racism." Do you think things have changed?

**SUE PIRSIG:** Well, I know they've changed for the 34 people that took part in the training. Not that we resolved any problems at that point, but it helped us to understand our own feelings and the fact that racism is a system and institutional-- well, I can't come up with the word here, but we are affected by our systems and institutions that basically keep promoting racism because that's how our history promoted them to be.

And by learning that and helping us to understand maybe where some of our attitudes come from, some of our mannerisms and our parts of speech, the way we talk are all just proliferating, just continuing the process of racism. So at least, we know each other is out there, and we have opportunities to plan for how to deal with this issue and how to bring more and more people into the fold of understanding racism.

**RACHEL REABE:** Is there a sense on the part of the leaders in your community that that group of Hmong will not be moving to Benson, but certainly, somebody else other than the current residents of Benson will be moving in at some point?

**SUE PIRSIG:** Well, I think, for some people, there's a fear of that, and for others, it's a reality. We know that will happen. It's happening at this time, probably, in smaller groups than the Hmong may have come here. But we are becoming multicultural in a very small way, even at this point. And it's not something we can prevent. We have no gates on this county or community, and we need to understand it and be able to deal with things in a positive way rather than to react to things negatively and make it difficult for others to come here.

**RACHEL REABE:** So you are not that far from Wilmer. Do you think that some of the challenges in that community just got people very frightened?

**SUE PIRSIG:** I do believe that that is the case. We've seen some very negative press on the community on Wilmer and the situation that has arisen there because of an influx of Hispanics into the community. And I think it has really made people fearful here that we can't have that going on in Benson. So let's put our blinders on and not even think about bringing people here of another culture, and we can avoid those situations.

**RACHEL REABE:** Sue, thanks for joining us this afternoon on this *Mainstreet* special. Thank you.

**SUE PIRSIG:** Thank you.

**RACHEL REABE:** Bob Hulteen, you had a comment.

**BOB HULTEEN:** Sue really pointed to something very important, I think. And that's that the way white people and people of color look at what racism is even is quite different. White people tend to think that racism means personal acts of bad behavior addressed towards another person. And I think people of color tend to understand it more as systems being set up that undercut their ability to even be on a level playing field.

And so if that's the case, it takes some real intentional effort to dismantle the racism. It takes people saying that this is, in fact, what we want to do. We want to become anti-racist. And what the Minnesota Council of Churches anti-racism initiative does is to train teams within congregations who then work also within the community to try to look at their own congregations or their own institutions and to dismantle the racism, even within their own institutions and congregations.

**RACHEL REABE:** Minh, I wanted to ask you, do you think that when Sue was talking about what's happened in Benson, she was talking about a group of people coming to town? And I don't know how many families that might have been. But do you think it's been easier to move people, one family at a time, that if you had said to Pelican Rapids, now we have 30 Vietnamese refugees we'd like to move to town, that people might have said, whoa, wait a minute, let's take it slower than that? Did it help going slower?

**MIHN TRAN:** I don't know what happened to other community, but the answer to you is yes and no. Yes in the way that yes, if you move one family at a time, the transition is smooth and is easier. But on the other hand, back in August 1996, all of a sudden, we got over 30 Bosnian refugees coming from Memphis, Tennessee, Fargo, Sioux Falls, Texas, all at a time. Just at one time, all they came there.

And I got a call from a volunteer saying that, Minh, you better come here. There are a number of refugees who need help. They came there because they heard about job. They heard about the community. They came there.

So in that way, the community response real quick. The response from the community was so quick. The local cultural community began to organize and gather donations and things that maybe, you could talk more about that.

**RACHEL REABE:** But this was a community, too, that had already had very positive interactions with refugees moving to town.

**MIHN TRAN:** That is correct. That is correct.

**DIANE KIMM:** There are a couple of things that happened before that to more or less get the community ready to appreciate people from another culture coming, the newspaper has been excellent in profiling families who've come to town. And the reporter will come to the house and interview the family. John family had a couple of nice interviews in the paper, telling about their background, telling about why they came to Pelican.

**RACHEL REABE:** Helping the community get to know them then.

**DIANE KIMM:** Yes, absolutely. And the multicultural committee has had potluck suppers, where various ethnic foods of all different kinds have been brought in. And people have a chance to meet people who are new to the community and sample some of the different foods.

It probably was our biggest challenge when all of the Bosnians came at once, because we are a small community and we just weren't marshaled enough to meet their needs. But they filled the school cafeteria with donated goods, where the new families could go and pick out things that they needed. And we had more than we needed to supply the needs of these new families.

**RACHEL REABE:** We're going to go back now to our very patient phone caller, standing by, waiting to participate in this conversation. Good afternoon, Jill. Welcome to *Mainstreet*.

**AUDIENCE:** Thank you. My name is Jill. And I was born and raised in Pelican Rapids. I now teach refugees at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. And I just want to commend the town of Pelican Rapids and all of the people who've really gone out of their way to help make these refugees feel more at home in Pelican.

The refugees that I interacted with when I was in high school, most of them were just teenagers who came and lived with different families. And I think they had a harder time getting adjusted to life in Pelican than a lot of the incoming families that are coming now.

**RACHEL REABE:** Thank you so much for your comment. Thank you, Jill. We go now to Sherborne, where Chandra is standing by. Good afternoon. Welcome to *Mainstreet*.

**AUDIENCE:** Hello. I went to high school in Pelican Rapids from 1982 to 1986. And during that time, most of the refugees who there were children from Vietnamese, Vietnam, and Laos, and Cambodia.

[BABY CRYING]

Excuse me. And they had been brought in and were fostered. A large group was fostered by the Catholic priest. And another large group was fostered by a high school teacher. And I think that kind of acceptance from community leaders and the fact that it was children who were then interacting with other children in the town, helped to open up the door within that community for making it easier for those who followed to come in.

**RACHEL REABE:** And how was it for you as a young person yourself in those days? Was it surprising to you? Was it exciting to have somebody else in town?

**AUDIENCE:** Well, I had moved through several different rural towns throughout the Midwest and arrived there when I was 12. And it was nice for me. I have older sisters who are Hispanic. And to be in a town where there wasn't that kind of prejudice that my older sisters had seen or there was less of it because there were more people who were not white, who had black hair, it was nice to see the difference.

**RACHEL REABE:** Thank you for your comment this afternoon, Chandra. We're going now near Owatonna, where Pauline is waiting to join us. Good afternoon, Pauline. Welcome to *Mainstreet*. Thank you.

**AUDIENCE:** First, I want to really thank MPR for doing both the urban rural dialogues between Crookston and North Minneapolis, and also, this one, because as you might guess, in outstate Minnesota, it gets pretty isolated when you're dealing with issues like this. So this has been a wonderful forum.

In Owatonna, about three years ago, a large number of Somali refugees came because there's a good job base here. And in addition to the racism that has been here and is throughout Minnesota because it's been so homogeneous, the challenge here, I think, also includes the Muslim faith and Christian dialogues.

So I'm wondering, in Pelican Rapids-- and by the way, some of us have been reading about Pelican Rapids and want to come to your International Friendship Festival. And I think the date is June 26 this year.

**DIANE KIMM:** That's right.

**AUDIENCE:** But our Cultural Diversity Network that was formed three years ago when the Somalis started coming is trying lots of different things, but we really need the kind of networking and ideas from other communities to share. But if the panel could deal with the Muslim-Christian dialogue, that would be very helpful.

**RACHEL REABE:** And your specific question, Pauline?

**AUDIENCE:** Well, are there ways that Christian churches are finding to be welcoming and inclusive with the Muslim families? And how they're finding ways to break down those barriers of both-- because the schools, all the communities who are dealing with the Muslims now are having to scramble in terms of dietary things, prayer practices. And it's a big leap for Northern European Christians.

**RACHEL REABE:** Yes. Let's have Bob Hulteen from the Minnesota Council of Churches address that.

What do you think, Bob? What are some of your ideas?

**BOB HULTEEN:** The council has been a little behind on this, I would say. We have been involved in resettlement for a while and have also had Muslim-Christian dialogues going on for 20 years. And yet, we haven't used the resources that have been involved in the Muslim-Christian dialogues to help with the spiritual needs of incoming refugees.

The kinds of needs could include finding space for public worship. And I know that in some communities, there has been discussion of using churches or using spaces the churches do have that they're willing to allow to be used by the small Muslim community that might exist there. But it is on our radar screen to try to be talking with people. So I'd encourage people who are in communities that are experiencing this and would like to see some sort of dialogue like this take place in their communities to give a call to the Minnesota Council of Churches.

**RACHEL REABE:** Do you think this is one of the real difficult issues, that it would be easier to move into a small town? I know, one of the families you talked about, they were baptists, the Vietnamese that moved to Pelican Rapids. Is that somehow easier for the community to embrace a family or members from different ethnicity, but they share a common religious background? Are they more open? I mean, you talk about working with churches to sponsor people. Do they want to know what the faith system is, what their beliefs are before they say, come on, we'd like to help you? Are they open to helping people of all faiths?

**BOB HULTEEN:** Yes. Yes. We ask churches, the congregation to help a refugee family. That's not the question. But we always provide the congregation with the background information of the family that's coming, including their faith. OK.

And in Pelican Rapids, we have a number of refugees who are Muslim. And we provide the information about whether there is a mosque that's for them, so they can come and worship. And 45 miles away from Pelican Rapids, there's a mosque in Fargo. Many of them worship at home. They do it at home. They gather together. They pray.

Local employers also are very friendly. They are aware of their faith. And part of the orientation to the work is that, if they wish to worship, if they want to pray at a certain time, that's something that could be discussed too.

**RACHEL REABE:** Try to work those things out ahead of time. Let's go back to the calls. Tim from Moorhead is on the phone. Good afternoon, Tim. Welcome to *Mainstreet*.

**AUDIENCE:** Thank you. In Moorhead, through the first congregational church, we have sponsored three Vietnamese families. And we worked with Minh Tran very closely. So I know Minh well.

And my comment is that I encourage churches and I encourage individuals to find out about how they can become involved. Because for my family, and I think, our church, it has been and still is one of the most rewarding, enriching, positive things we've been involved in.

The first family came nine years ago. The parents of that family now live in Pelican Rapids. And the three sons live in Moorhead. We are good friends with that family. We still do things with them. We tutored them. And then they came over and tutored our kids in math.

We socialize, help each other out. And it's really been the most positive thing, I think, I've been involved in the last 10 years. And I thank Minh for that opportunity, and encourage people to get involved. You'll get more out of it than you put in.

**RACHEL REABE:** Thank you, sir. We go to Yur now, who is standing on the line from Saint Paul. Good afternoon, sir. Welcome to *Mainstreet*.

**AUDIENCE:** Thank you for taking my call. I'm Hmong. And I live in Saint Paul. And I just want to have a comment to share that as an immigrant experience in this country, it's hard, sometimes, but when you get in here longer and you just get along with the people. But I would like to say that myself as an immigrant and when somebody tells me such as, like, you not belong here or you go back to your country, I just want to say that that's really hurt. And I'm not mad at that person, but it just makes me really hurt that you don't know what to do.

And I would like to share that I do have lots of American friends that are very nice. And I thought maybe, those people that are saying that, maybe they don't understand and there are still time that we could be neighbor and explain. But I think communication is the best part, that talk to the people and be friend with them. Maybe it's not so bad. And maybe it's not the way every other people think how bad it is. But if you have communication with them, that's the best way to solve the discrimination and the way that the different kind of people being together. Thank you.

**RACHEL REABE:** Thank you so much. Do you think, Minh, that it's a lot of the attitude of the people moving in as well? Is that as important as the attitude of the community? Does it work both ways? Do both need to be open?

**MIHN TRAN:** Yes. I think that racism, even in us, too, sometimes, we say things, we think things, we do things that, unwittingly, that show that we are kind of biased. So I think that.

But the caller said something that I agree. People need to know that it hurts. It hurts to hear those things. So it really hurt.

**RACHEL REABE:** We go back to the phone. One more phone call. Hank from New York Mills, who is standing by. Good afternoon.

**AUDIENCE:** Hi. So I was just going to talk about the point about you talked about the different groups we had that settled in Minnesota, like the Irish, and the German, and Norwegian, and the conflicts that they had years ago, and how we have the new conflicts now.

I think the difference is across the last 20 years, that we've all been lumped together into one group by ourselves and by every other ethnic group. We are now all considered white. It doesn't matter which background we have. And I think that has done some good and bad things. Hello?

**RACHEL REABE:** And so you're--

**AUDIENCE:** As far as like a bad thing, I think we've lost some of our cultural identity. But in a good way, if we can get past our ethnic differences and backgrounds, maybe we can get past the color thing, too. And maybe eventually, that won't matter either.

**RACHEL REABE:** Comments about that? Diane, what do you think about that when we talk about ethnicity and we talk about the Norwegian community of Pelican Rapids?

**DIANE KIMM:** Well, the Norwegians felt comfortable staying with other Norwegians. And I think when the Vietnamese came, they felt very comfortable because there were other Vietnamese there. But going back to the idea of the melting pot, the new thought is that it's now a salad bowl. And the appreciation of they don't have to meld in, they can be part of without being completely identified with. We can appreciate each other's individual.

And I want to echo back to what Tim was saying for myself. Personally, this was probably the most rewarding thing I've ever done, was to be able to be involved with the refugee community. And I would recommend it to anyone.

**RACHEL REABE:** And does Pelican Rapids a better community today because of this?

**DIANE KIMM:** Absolutely. Anytime we have something coming our way, whether it involves some kind of a change, we have a number of ways that we can look at it. We can either look at it as an opportunity or we can wring our hands and wish we could go back to things the way they used to be. We can't do that.

**RACHEL REABE:** Diane Kimm, Bob Hulteen, John Kimm, and Minh Tran, thank you for being with us today. This special *Mainstreet Radio* broadcast is a production of *Minnesota Public Radio*. Our engineers are Rick Hebzynski in Saint Cloud and Randy Johnson in Saint Paul. Our producer is Sarah Meier. Executive producer, Mel Sommer. Site producer, Cari Dwyer.

We'd also like to thank Marsha Shoemaker and Ed Bouffard for making this broadcast from Saint Cloud State University possible. We invite you to visit the *Mainstreet* website, go to [www.mpr.org](http://www.mpr.org). You'll be able to hear this broadcast as well as other *Mainstreet* reports. The address again, [www.mpr.org](http://www.mpr.org).

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

On the next *All Things Considered*. In recent years, minorities in Rochester have endured taunts and violence. Those crimes are down lately, but the fear lingers. It's *All Things Considered*, weekdays at 3:00 on *Minnesota Public Radio*, KNOW FM 91.1.

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