



CURIOUS MINNESOTA

Why is it that Minnesotans will 'give you directions to anywhere but their home'?

Some say the state's Minnesota Nice reputation is offset by a reluctance to form deep relationships with newcomers.



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By [ZOË JACKSON](#), STAR TRIBUNE
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Minnesota's social scene is notoriously difficult to crack.

Some transplants say the state's "Minnesota Nice" reputation is offset by a frostiness among locals to forming deeper personal connections with newcomers. This has spawned a joke in certain circles that Minnesotans will "give you directions to anywhere but their home." (Or, that "the best way to make friends in Minnesota is go to kindergarten here.")

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A reader who requested to remain anonymous — for fear of offending the Minnesotans they do know — found this phenomenon to be true after moving here from the East Coast.

"We have many friends who will meet up [around town]," they wrote in an e-mail to **Curious Minnesota**, the Star Tribune's reader-driven community reporting project. "And they gladly come over if we invite them. But they just don't ever invite us over. Why?"

There is no exact answer to this question. But two factors probably contribute to the phenomenon: Minnesotans are more likely to remain in their home state, and we have long, dark winters.

'Feels like high school all over again'

Nationally, making friends has only gotten harder. Earlier this year, the U.S. surgeon general wrote an op-ed for the New York

Times declaring an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, which can threaten both mental and physical health.

A welcome sign at Minnesota's border.



Newcomers want to feel a sense of belonging in Minnesota, and local economic development groups have hosted events for years to try to connect people, as companies grapple with recruiting and retaining workers.

Alison Urnis moved to Minneapolis in 2016 and loves the opportunities and lifestyle in the state. But of all the places she's lived, Urnis said, she's never felt more socially isolated.

"My only gripe with Minnesota is the coldness of trying to break into a circle here," said Urnis, who moved from Nashville. "It feels like high school all over again."

A co-worker told her that some Minnesotans worry about making others feel obligated to attend dinners or other gatherings. But it can be hurtful, she said, when others seem friendly and say things like "we should hang out" and never follow up.

"It's like, OK, are you my friend? Do you like me? Or is it just like this cultural thing that I'm not used to?" Urnis said.

Very recently, dueling posts in Minnesota Reddit groups debated whether locals are as bad at making new friends as people say, or if transplants aren't doing enough to put themselves out there. One Redditor's advice: "Don't be a dud." Another said that people here can be neurotic, such as scheduling a gathering far in advance when their home will be sparkling clean.

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Is it true that Minnesotans
will 'give you directions to
anywhere but their home'?

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Anshul Bhardwaj lived all over the country before moving to Minnesota seven years ago. He said he's found truth in the expression about Minnesotans and their homes. In other places, longtime residents are the ones to invite a new person in. Here, he said, it's often the transplant's responsibility to reach out.

"I don't even blame them ... They are already so preoccupied with their existing group that they cannot make time for a new person to come in," Bhardwaj said.

Deep roots, brutal cold

Making friends in adulthood is challenging everywhere, said University of Minnesota Ph.D. candidate Grace Vieth, who is

researching adult friendship at the university's Social Interaction Lab.

The deep roots that many Minnesotans have in the state could contribute to the difficulties that some newcomers experience, she said. Nearly 70% of people born in Minnesota stay in Minnesota, the 12th highest of any state, according to U.S. census data.

Abby Rue recently returned to her home state of Minnesota after stints in other states. Most recently, Rue lived in Washington, D.C., where she joined a Facebook group for young professionals to meet new people. Rue has tried to put herself out there since coming home earlier this year, but she's found fewer groups online dedicated to fostering friendships in Minnesota.

Many of the people she's connected with since returning are fellow Minnesotans, said Rue, who recently attended a wedding reception of a friend from middle school.



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"I think Minnesotans have this mindset where they like to make long-term friendships," Rue said. "And I guess if they're getting what they need from those, they don't branch out as much."

That is then likely compounded by Minnesota's winters, said Vieth, who is from Minnesota.

"We might be willing to bundle up and go out to meet a friend we've known for 10 years," Vieth said. "But it might be a tougher sell to meet someone new for coffee if you've got some social

anxiety about it too."

We turned to our newsroom at the Star Tribune for some additional insight into this phenomenon. Several staff members born in the state said they had never even heard the expression. Some said the Scandinavians and northern Europeans who settled here brought their tendencies to keep to themselves. Others said it's hard to make friends as a transplant anywhere you go.

How to break the ice

But there is hope. The first part of the saying shows that Minnesotans will go out of their way to help you, Bhardwaj noted, recalling how he befriended a neighbor who helped him when stuck in a snowstorm.

Inviting himself into circles or groups centered on a particular hobby has been helpful, he said. Bhardwaj volunteered at a nonprofit and asked a co-worker to take him along cross-country skiing.

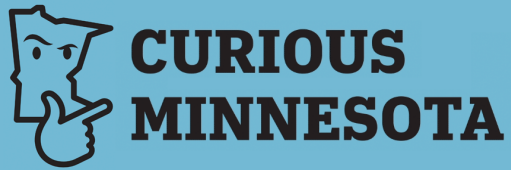
Since returning to Minnesota, Rue joined a roller derby group, where she's bonded with new people over the difficulties of the sport. "That's definitely gotten me an entire friend group right off the bat. ... Everybody's been really welcoming," she said.

Vieth said it's important to connect with people who have similar interests and to form deeper bonds with people in your day-to-day life.

"See if you can befriend a neighbor, too," Vieth said. She suggested trying to make friends with a neighbor during the summer months, when more Minnesotans are outside.

"Maybe you'll be lucky enough to get an invite to their home come Christmas."

If you'd like to submit a Curious Minnesota question, fill out the form below:



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Enter up to 180 characters. 0

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Zoë Jackson is a race and immigration reporter for the Star Tribune. She previously covered St. Paul neighborhoods and young voters on the politics team, supported by Report for America and the Minneapolis Foundation.

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