

We teach, learn, lead and serve, connecting people with the University of Wisconsin, and engaging with them in transforming lives and communities.

4-H – Positive Youth Development

Connie Creighton, 4-H Youth Development Agent

- The AmeriCorps mission is “to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.” The Wisconsin 4-H Program has received funding to implement a statewide 4-H AmeriCorps program. Wisconsin 4-H has AmeriCorps serving in 29 counties across Wisconsin. AmeriCorps members will support the development of new and expanded relationships in counties, serving in partnership with local organizations to build capacity in communities. The Portage County 4-H Leaders Association received a \$3500 grant that I applied for from the Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin. The 4-H Leaders contributed another \$500 making it \$4,000 to fund a half-time AmeriCorps Volunteer. As of January 2024, Brooklyn Butzin is serving as the AmeriCorps Volunteer in Portage County. She will clock in 900 hours from January 2024 through August 2024.



- Three teens volunteered on the Saturday of Easter weekend to work on an interactive 4-H station at the first annual Maple Syrup Festival held at the YMCA Glacier Hollow youth camp site. The AmeriCorps member developed a vermicomposting educational component for our station including a composting activity that adults and youth participated in. The Volunteer also developed three games that had environmental and 4-H questions. She recruited one of the teen leaders to develop a display and a handout explaining soil profiles using Dirt Cups and fun worm facts. We estimated that 74 youth participated in our hands-on stations.



- A series of monthly camp counselor trainings for summer 4-H camp for youth counselors, where they participated in welcoming activities, team building, picking the camp theme, and leadership exercises under the leadership of the county 4-H educators. The purpose of the training is to engage young people in leadership roles while learning about team building and mentoring strategies they can apply while being a camp counselor.



Additional 4-H – Positive Youth Development work being conducted in Portage County

- An interactive camp workday with 4-H educators from across the state. Through this effort we supported each other with ideas about camp and how to improve camp for the youth while also learning about new policies and procedures in relation to camp. - *Dan Brandt, Iowa County 4-H Youth Educator*

Agriculture

Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent



The Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council newsletter is a tool I use to expand my educational outreach to over 400 area farmers, agribusinesses, and other stakeholders within the Mill Creek watershed spanning western Portage County into eastern Wood County. I author articles and serve as editor and coordinator. The newsletter is published three times throughout the year focused on soil and water conservation opportunities for farmers.

- April 2024, spring edition of the Farmers of Mill Creek Council Newsletter published and sent out. Content included information on the 2024 cost-share opportunities for conservation practices, Paul J. Olson and the Wildlife Area in Portage County, Thirsty Cover Crops Lessons Learned, Consider No-Till and Reduced Tillage (Ken Schroeder), Grain Management Considerations in Low-Margin Years, Farmers of Mill Creek annual project update and field tours (Ken Schroeder), and Growing Season Resources.
- 2024 Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo, a Significant Planning/Development Activity

Abstract: Planning the April 24, 2024, Annual Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo. The goal of this event is to encourage profitable farming by building resiliency, diversifying farming operations, reducing inputs, and increasing return on investment.

- Farmers, Crop Consultants, and local stakeholders will learn about best-management practices they can use to take advantage of what nature has to offer and increase self-sufficiency on the farm. Topics include regenerative management, managed grazing, cover and companion crops and no-till farming. They will also explore specific barriers central Wisconsin farmers are experiencing when adopting best management practices through discussion with fellow farmers who have implemented these practices.

Additional Agriculture work being conducted in Portage County

- In coordination with the UW Agribusiness Club and Cranberry Learning Inc, a case study was developed for undergrad Ag Econ students to practice solving a real-world return on investment problem. Cranberry grower judges were identified to volunteer, and cranberry industry partners (excavator, drainage experts, irrigation experts, an engineering company, banks, and plant propagation experts) were recruited to provide pricing and support to the students. This will give students opportunities to interact with a variety of professions crucial to the cranberry



industry, to develop familiarity with the cranberry industry, and will encourage development of the skills needed to successfully run a small agricultural business. - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist UW-Madison Division of Extension*

- The existing Zoom footage of all past Cranberry Virtual Brown Bags is being chunked by content, transcribed, and uploaded to Youtube for on-demand viewing by cranberry growers. This will enable useful information from UW researchers and crop scouts to be shared as new employees are hired into the industry, when growers need to refresh their memories, or when weather conditions are similar to those remarked upon in prior years. - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist UW-Madison Division of Extension*
- Planning for a workshop for Hmong growers/farmers in collaboration with Women's Community, Hmong American Center and USDA-FSA/NRCS. The goal is to introduce Government farm programs and to introduce beginning recordkeeping/cash farmland leasing to Hmong farmers/growers, so that Hmong farmers are aware of farm programs and services and use them to strengthen their farm business. - *Gaonou Thao, Extension Farm Management Outreach Specialist & Janelle Wher, Wood & Marathon County Horticulture Educator*

Community, Natural Resources & Economic Development


Katie Livernash, Community Development Educator

- Planning a Portage County Housing Summit for early summer 2024, in partnership with WISCAP, CAP Services, and UW-Stevens Point, aimed at educating attendees on diverse housing models and setting priorities for affordable homeownership and rental solutions. This collaborative effort seeks to unite stakeholders to formulate practical housing strategies and action plans to help address the shortage of workforce housing.

Additional Natural Resources & Community Development work being conducted in Portage County

- Providing technical support to Wisconsin businesses before and after they transition to worker owned cooperatives in order to retain jobs and businesses in our communities. - *Kristin Forde, Extension Cooperative Development Specialist*
- Planning for a series of nine regional 1-day, in-person workshops for community officials, leaders, and broadband committee volunteers in collaboration with the Wisconsin Counties Association, Public Service Commission/WI Broadband Office, WI Economic Development Corporation, and more. The goal of this effort is for the participants to gain knowledge and skills in broadband permitting requirements, engagement and endorsement, and engage in peer learning so they can build public-private partnerships that meet their community's needs, increasing economic opportunity and quality of life for all community members. - *Jessica Beckendorf, Extension Broadband Partnerships Specialist*



 Denotes educational or planning efforts that work toward improving water quality in Portage County, Central Wisconsin, and the State as whole. While these efforts are highlighted in this report, there is more work being done by Extension to address water quality concerns outside of what is here. For more information about these efforts, or other efforts Extension has undertaken regarding water quality, please reach out to our office.

FoodWise

Mallory McGivern, Nutrition Administrator; Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator; Penny Schmitt, FoodWise Nutrition Educator

- Shared leadership in the Giving Gardens committee of HPPP (Hunger & Poverty Prevention Partnership), where emphasis is placed on promoting and supporting efforts to maintain community gardens, improve food security, and provide educational programming in Portage County.
- A 5-week nutrition education series (Discover MyPlate) for 1st grade classrooms at McKinley Elementary School, where students will learn about MyPlate, the five food groups, and try new fruits and vegetables. The goal of the series is for students to learn about being physically active and help them make healthy choices in school and at home.
- A 5-week nutrition education series (Discover MyPlate) for 1st grade classrooms at Jefferson Elementary School, where students will learn about MyPlate, the five food groups, and try new fruits and vegetables. The goal of the series is for students to learn about being physically active and help them make healthy choices in school and at home.
- A 12-week series of StrongBodies strength training sessions in partnership with Berkshire (age-qualified housing), where older adults also receive nutrition and health education. Participants engage in regular strength training exercises to improve muscle strength, balance, and flexibility so they can stay healthy and socially connected.
- Collaborator in the Portage County CHIP process with the Healthy People Portage County and other community partners to determine county priorities related to social determinants of health with a focus on equity. Priorities chosen were: Equitable Opportunity to be Healthy, Mental Health & Social Wellbeing, and Building a Safe & Thriving Community by Supporting Social & Community Conditions.





Human Development and Relationships

Sherry Daniels, Human Development and Relationships Educator

- A 7-session course, Planning AHEAD that helps adults of all ages to make end-of-life financial, healthcare, and final wishes decisions in order to reduce the stress experienced by survivors and to ensure that their wishes are honored.
- A program for families and individuals, where participants learn how to create financial goals and gain money management skills. The goal of this program is to enable participants to prepare for and take charge of household financial situations that occur due to changes in income or unforeseen hardships.
- A course for renters where participants learn how to find and apply for rental housing, understand their responsibilities as a renter, how to communicate effectively with their landlords, and manage housing expenses. Through this, homeless populations and those who have negative rental records are able to increase their ability to find and keep safe affordable housing, thereby increasing their stability and decreasing their reliance on public support.
- Seminars and discussion groups for parents and caregivers of children aged 0-12 (Triple P) where they learn practical strategies to increase positive parenting skills and address child behavior challenges. The goal is to improve parenting satisfaction and efficacy, child social and emotional development and behavior, and parent-child relationships.
- An online 14-module program ("Money Matters") for adults, where they learn about credit scores and reports, making a spending plan, what to do when you can't pay your bills, and identifying financial strengths. The goal is for participants to set and achieve their financial goals, save for their future, build good credit and pay off debts, and maintain positive relationships with financial institutions. Required for CAP Services programs.