



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

Amy Boelk, 4-H Program Educator

- Planning for a multi-county Winter Leadership Camp experience for youth ages 13 and above.
- Onboarding and Supervision of a student intern that will be working with Portage County extension, focused in the area of 4-H, youth development and family engagement
- Development of study materials including several study sessions for 3 Portage county youth teams for the 2025 State Poultry Quiz Bowl taking place at the International Poultry Show at Portage, WI including attendance at the event where 2 junior teams placed in the top 3 and our senior team won the state championship title to qualify for nationals
- Preparation and logistics planning for the National Avian (Poultry) Quiz Bowl including securing travel grants and funding, providing study materials and sessions and assuring adult certification for chaperone status for our senior team to attend the event to represent the state of Wisconsin in Louisville, KY in November
- Facilitating transition training for the Portage County 4-H Leaders Association bylaw revision process, officer elections and financial procedures to create a new schedule & strategic plan
- Hosted an all-county 4-H virtual onboarding and info session for all current and new 4-H families to give an overview of the upcoming 2025-2026 4-H year, calendar, events, policies, changes, new incentive program and highlight state and national opportunities for youth
- Preparation and planning for the 4-H Leaders Association banquet and 4-H Youth Awards ceremony including awards, decorations, speech writing, acknowledgements and more youth public speaking training, and facility setup
- Launch of a virtual school-based 4-H club at the Tomorrow River Community Virtual Charter School where families will participate in a club-based, family focused activities that support experiential learning during open class periods for youth in PK-8th grade
- Launched an in-school, youth-led 4-H club at Central Sands High School including training of officers, meeting facilitation and ongoing support to build leadership capacity and career readiness in youth



- Hosted and taught a STEM-based polymer activity for Cloverbud Youth (PK-2nd grade) as part of the 'Cloverbud Halloween Night' where they made 'monster eyeball slime' and 'magic potions' to learn about chemical reactions and science-related topics
- Developed an ongoing incentive program for youth participation and engagement in local, county, state and national 4-H activities to further motivate youth to attend and learn about a wide-variety of experiential learning and career and college-based topics

Agriculture

Additional Agriculture work being conducted in Portage County



A 75-minute presentation/Q&A session to the members of the County Board advisory committee where I presented research-based information on the causes/impacts/frequency of manure spills statewide and in Portage County by CAFOs and non-CAFOs, research based information and strategies to reduce the damage to rural roads from heavy agricultural and non-agricultural loads, and discussed how the DNR handles CAFO and non-CAFO inspections and manure hauling audits. As a result of this presentation, committee members and the citizen audience have a strong basis of information as they discuss/debate creating an operating ordinance for livestock operations in the county. Total Reach: 8 committee members (6 in person, 2 on Zoom), 33 local elected officials, farmers, agricultural industry and citizens in person and online (zoom). - *Guolong Liang, Commercial Vegetable Agriculture Water Quality Outreach Specialist, Kevin Erb, Conservation Professional Training Program Manager*



A study to better understand nitrate occurrence in the streams of the central sands and link that occurrence to land use. Results of this study will help county and regional planners, academic researchers, and regulatory agencies in making informed decisions on groundwater quantity and quality. - *David Hart, Hydrogeologist*



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.

Community, Natural Resources & Economic Development

Katie Livernash, Community Development Educator

- Facilitated an action planning session for a local non-profit, Midwest Renewable Energy Association (MREA), staff and board members, where departments established one-year action planning



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projects. Through this effort, MREA board and staff members are aligned in their goals and initiatives to better serve their audiences. Total Reach: 22 staff and board members

- Basic grant writing workshop for local government, businesses, and organization members and staff. The goal of this effort is for people to learn how to find, write and apply for grants so that they can carry out the activities of their organization, business, or government unit. Total Reach: 236 Individuals from nonprofit organizations, businesses, and local governments
- Facilitating a series of meetings with the various public, private, and government service providers in Portage County that touch the continuum of housing services, where they explore what collaboration around housing efforts looks like. The purpose is to maximize communication and potential action between organizations, so that housing access and affordability is improved. Total Reach: 25 meeting attendees.
- Planning for a regional rural housing summit in Spring 2026, hosted in Stevens Point in collaboration with state and regional CDI educators, and local, regional, and state housing partners. The goal is to engage developers, local government, and housing practitioners around rural housing solutions and best practices in order to increase affordable workforce housing and local economies in their area.
- Serving as a member of the founding board for the Portage County Community Land Trust start-up, including meeting facilitation and providing educational presentations to local organizations. The goal is to establish a community land trust that ensures long-term housing affordability and stability in Portage County. Total Reach: 6 board members, 28 educational presentation attendees.
- Partnering on a Wisconsin Partnership Program - Community Impact Grant with CAP Services, Inc. and the UW Center for Community and Non-Profit Studies to grow and improve CAP Services' housing repairs programming. A goal of this project is to improve the accessibility and timeliness of their services in order to improve housing conditions for low to moderate income individuals and improve health equity in housing.

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

- A nine-month program (Local Government Leadership Academy) offered statewide for elected officials, department heads, directors, managers, and other local government leaders where they develop effective leadership skills, including relationship-building, communication, decision-making, and vision. The purpose of this program is to help local government leaders develop professionally while also improving the overall function of their local government, thus increasing their capacity to provide quality services. Total Reach: 18 participants working in 10 different counties or communities. *Elizabeth Mccrank, Community Leadership Specialist, Amber Wichowsky, Extension Specialist, Organizational & Leadership Development, Annie Jones, Organizational Development & Tribal Nations Specialist, Daniel Foth, Senior Outreach Specialist, Eric Olson, Director, Extension Lakes, Lake Specialist, Jessica Beckendorf, Extension Broadband Partnerships Specialist, Michelle Grimm, Senior Community Development Extension Educator.*



Human Development and Relationships

Additional Human Development and Relationships work being conducted in Portage County

- A professional development training for childcare providers, where participants explored the importance of play-based approaches and learned strategies to implement them in their classrooms. Through this effort, educators reported increased confidence in planning meaningful play experiences and supporting children's growth. Total Reach: 12 childcare providers- *Alicia Utke-Becher, Waupaca County Human Development & Relationships Educator*

FoodWise / Health & Well-Being

Mallory McGivern, Nutrition Administrator; Penny Schmitt, FoodWise Nutrition Educator

- FoodWise programming will conclude in Portage County due to the congressional budget reconciliation bill signed into law on July 4 eliminating all SNAP-Ed funding effective September 30, 2025. FoodWise Educator Penny Schmitt will be wrapping up programming, partnerships, and community engagement efforts, ensuring a smooth transition and providing closure to longstanding collaborations with local agencies and participants.
- Shared leadership in the Giving Gardens committee of Partners HP, where emphasis is placed on promoting and supporting efforts to maintain community gardens, improve food security, and provide educational programming in Portage County.
- A series of StrongBodies strength training sessions in partnership with Berkshire At The Grove, 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.

Additional Health & Well-Being work being conducted in Portage County

- Over the past year, Covering Wisconsin has coordinated and overseen 12 regional- and population-focused coalitions in which Wisconsin professionals interested or directly involved in health insurance enrollment gather to discuss changes to health coverage policy, share outreach and educational strategies, receive free professional trainings, and offer ideas for relevant consumer resource messaging and design. Through our efforts, a total of 88 coalition meetings were held, attracting 1,649 attendees, to focus on the health coverage issues affecting Wisconsin residents, especially immigrants, Spanish-speaking residents, Hmong residents, and those located in Central, East Central, Milwaukee, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Western regions. Total Reach: Total Reach over previous 12 months: 12 enrollment network coalitions facilitated 88 coalition meetings held 1,649 people attended 2,325 people were reached through coalition informational emails sent. - *Caroline Gomez-Tom, Enrollment Network & Accessibility Manager Milwaukee County, Allison Espeseth, Outreach Program Director*



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- Navigator enrollment assistance provided to anyone in Wisconsin, where 97,013 consumers were assisted with health insurance questions or enrollment. Through this effort, our Navigators completed 4,041 qualified health plan enrollments through the federal Health Insurance Marketplace and assisted 5,615 consumers with Medicaid, resulting in widespread access to health care and improved health outcomes. - *Adam Vanspankeren, Outreach Program Manager, Allison Espeseth, Outreach Program Director & Elizabeth Rothe, Outreach Program Coordinator*

Upcoming Events

- November 1st- 4-H Volunteer Enrollment Closes Online
- November 7th at 5:30pm- 4-H Leaders Banquet at Lettie Jensen Center in Amherst, WI
- November 9th at 1:00pm- 4-H Youth Awards Ceremony at Lettie Jensen Center in Amherst
- November 9th at 6:00pm - Portage County Community Land Trust presentation at Frame Memorial Presbyterian Church. More information [available here](#).
- November 17th- PoCo 4-H'ers represent WI at Poultry National Quiz Bowl in Louisville, KY
- November 18th at 2:00pm - Webinar – BEAD 2025: What Changed, What's Next, and What Communities Can Do. [Registration link](#).
- November 19th- 4-H Grow and Glow Terrarium Making Workshop at Portage Co Annex
- November 23rd at 1pm - 4-H Physics and Astronomy Event at UWSP Planetarium