

News Release

Education Information Services ■ 125 South Webster Street ■ P.O. Box 7841 ■ Madison, WI 53707-7841 ■ (608) 266-3559

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Contact: Tom McCarthy, DPI Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

Seven projects to receive ‘Standing up for Rural Wisconsin’ awards

MADISON — Seven projects that strengthen rural communities will receive Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities Awards from State Superintendent Tony Evers on Nov. 12 in Stevens Point.

Among the projects receiving awards are those that grow and provide food, preserve the environment, and extend Internet access to students while in route to school. Nominated by education and library professionals, the award winning programs are:

- A Little Dirt Never Hurt — Brodhead School District;
- Wi-Fi on Rural Bus Routes — Webster School District;
- CDM Manufacturing Pathways — Durand and Mondovi school districts, Chippewa Valley Technical College;
- Florence County Library Community Upgrade Collaboration — Florence County Library and Florence School District;
- Green School Strategic Planning Action Team — Hurley School District;
- It Takes a Village: Learning and Loving to Read — Northern Waters Literacy, Saint Croix Falls Elementary Library, and Reading Friends; and
- Eleva-Strum Community Support Network — Eleva-Strum School District.

“The creativity and collaboration shown in these projects is one of the strengths of our rural communities,” Evers said. “When we pull together for kids, great things happen.”

The Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities Awards will be presented at 11 a.m. Nov. 12 during the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance conference at the Holiday Inn and Convention Center in Stevens Point. Additional information on each of the projects follows.

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NOTES: More information about rural issues is available on the Advancing Rural Wisconsin website, <http://rural.dpi.wi.gov/>. This news release is available electronically at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/eis/pdf/dpinr2014_120.pdf.

Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities Awards

November 12, 2014 — Stevens Point

A grant to the Brodhead FFA provided the seed for a school garden that blossomed into a summer school course for first- through sixth-grade students, with seventh- through 12th-grade students as classroom helpers. **A Little Dirt Never Hurt** enrolled 101 students who learned about different vegetables and fruits that can be grown in a garden. During the 18-day course, students learned about traditional planting and about alternative gardening, such as planting blueberries in bales of peat moss. The alternatives show students different methods and environments for gardening, which may include a city lot where space is limited. A community member, who is a master gardener, shared knowledge on how to extend the growing season. Students learned where their food comes from and the life skill of growing food. Additionally, they had the opportunity to fight hunger in their rural community. Produce during the summer months was donated to the local food pantry and during the school year is being shared with the school's food service. Partners in "A Little Dirt Never Hurt" include the Wisconsin Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom, Kids Dig Potatoes, National FFA Organization, and Brodhead FFA Alumni. Accepting the award will be Becky Wellnitz, Brodhead FFA adviser and high school agriculture teacher, and Lisa Semrow, Brodhead Middle School principal and curriculum director.

Wi-Fi on Rural Bus Routes makes the extended time students in rural districts spend on the school bus each day more valuable. The Webster School District, the Webster Board of Education, and community members worked with the local Verizon representative to place receivers in the most remote areas of the bus routes for connectivity and to add Wi-Fi in the buses driving the three longest routes. With students riding on the bus for up to three hours a day, the availability of wireless Internet provides an opportunity to complete schoolwork, do research, and collaborate on projects. With students completing school work before coming home, families have more time to spend together. The Wi-Fi buses also are used to transport students involved in after school co-curricular activities to allow those students involved in athletics or other off campus activities to complete schoolwork while in route. Webster School District has an enrollment of 710 students with 72 percent of them eligible for free and reduced-price school meals based on family income. Many homes in the area do not have Internet access, thus this project provides an additional benefit for the community. Accepting the award will be Webster School District Administrator Jim Erickson; Cooperative Educational Service Agency 11 Administrator Jerry Walters; Brian Sears, district building and grounds and transportation director; LeAnn Christensen, district technology coordinator; and Carissa Kammeyer, district media specialist.

CDM Manufacturing Pathways is a collaborative effort by the Mondovi and Durand school districts to create a Manufacturing Academy. Working with Chippewa Valley Technical College, students take classes like Technical Math, Critical Core Manufacturing, and Blueprint Reading at their respective schools. With that foundation, students then take classes at either Mondovi High School or Durand High School in areas such as CAD Basics, Solid Works, Electronics, and Welding through Youth Options. Once completed, the students will have between 18 and 21 college credits and an industry recognized certificate in manufacturing. The technical college has been an integral partner in the success of the academy. It has made faculty accessible to school staff to assist in gathering materials and writing curriculum. The college has also made its manufacturing lab available to high school students at given times throughout the year. Accepting the award will be Jeff Sullivan, dean of Industry, Ag, and Technology at Chippewa Valley Technical College; Durand District Administrator Greg Doverspike; Roger Stanford, vice president at Chippewa Valley Technical College; and Mondovi District Administrator Cheryl Gullicksrud.

Florence County Library Community Upgrade Collaboration was a total make-over of the community library on a limited budget. Gently-used shelving from the Cedarburg Library was part of the project. The company hired to move the furniture from Cedarburg to Florence donated a full day of their labor. Funds from a memorial donation allowed the installation of a theater system complete with surround sound and gaming capabilities. Labor to install the theater system and the projection screen were donated. With the library transformed into a state-of-the-art facility, staff make it a top priority to bring the community into the library. Library staff have organized book clubs to engage adults, teachers and further strengthen community connections. Events include a book verses movie

program. All ages are encouraged to read a series of novels and then see the movie on the new theater system with free popcorn and a drink provided. The library's friends group assists with programming throughout the year. Partners in this project are the Florence School District, Florence County Library, Florence County Library Board, and the Friends of the Florence County Library. Accepting the award will be Florence County Library Director Stephanie Weber and Florence School District Administrator Ben Neihaus.

The goal to educate students about choosing healthy lifestyles and to reduce waste, energy consumption, and the Hurley School District's carbon footprint brought together the **Green School Strategic Planning Action Team**. Community members, parents, and civic officials numbering more than 50 gathered for the initial brainstorming session. Despite limited resources, the team implemented a comprehensive plan that installed bottle fillers to reduce the use of plastic bottles and started a recycling program which reduced waste by 46 percent. The district's overall energy bill went down by 30 percent. Students are learning lifelong activities to maintain their health through physical education classes. A partnership with the Iron County Health Department and University of Wisconsin Extension created a school garden that flows into the food service program to provide healthy options in the lunch line. Staff made it a priority to use project-based lessons for the environmental and sustainable energy curriculum, earning the school a Green Ribbon School Award from the U.S. Department of Education. Partners for the project include the Ottawa National Forest, City of Hurley, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the Iron County Health Department. Accepting the award will be Ronda Olkonen, chair of the Green Schools Team; Hurley District Administrator Christopher Patritto; Monica Kolpin, fourth-grade teacher, Hurley Elementary School; Mae Moderson, school district special education secretary; and Diane O'Krongly, biology and science teacher, Hurley High School.

It Takes a Village: Learning and Loving to Read is a collaborative effort by the Saint Croix Falls Elementary School Library; a group of retirees and concerned community members, called Reading Friends; and the nonprofit organization, Northern Waters Literacy. The trio has worked together for seven years to help youth in Saint Croix and Dresser learn to and love to read. During the school year, the school library and classroom teachers pair students who struggle with reading with a Reading Friend for a weekly one-on-one session to enjoy books. Additionally, each week, 45 volunteers come to school to read and listen to each youngster in a class. To keep the momentum through summer, Northern Waters Literacy trains volunteer tutors to work with students. The content of the lessons dovetail with the school methods and curriculum to provide continuity. There is crossover in both programs as well, Reading Friends are often tutors in the summer and Northern Waters Literacy personnel, including the directors, serve as Reading Friends during the school year. By connecting teachers, volunteers, and parents of students, the programs demonstrate how it takes a village to lovingly raise children. Another benefit is the generational connection between the youngest community members (students) and some of the community's oldest retirees who serve as Reading Friends and Northern Waters Literacy tutors. Accepting the award will be Marilyn Brissett-Kruger, Al Kruger, and Barb and Mark Boyken, Reading Friends; Jill Leahy, executive director of Northern Waters Literacy; and Rita Platt, librarian for Saint Croix Falls Elementary School.

When primary school staff noticed that several children came to school on Monday mornings very hungry from not having much to eat on the weekends, they collaborated with school and community leaders to initiate a Weekend Meals for Kids Program. The larger, **Eleva-Strum Community Support Network**, is a nonprofit organization that works with area churches, businesses, organizations, and individuals to meet the needs of children and adults in the community. Weekend Meals provides backpacks with healthy, easy-to-prepare food that goes home with elementary students for the weekend. The nonprofit also worked with Feed My People and the Strum Food Pantry to help provide meals to entire families. Weekend Meals also provided service-learning opportunities for middle and high school students who filled and delivered backpacks to as many as 39 students. The network is helping with Cardinal Pride Mentors, the school's new mentoring program, and programs for senior citizens. Accepting the award will be Ann Kisor, community member; Talitha Kempf, elementary guidance counselor for the Eleva-Strum School District; Marty Kempf, principal, Eleva-Strum Elementary School; and Eleva-Strum District Administrator Craig Semingson.