

News Release

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Evers recognizes 10 projects that enrich life in rural Wisconsin

'Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin' awards to be presented March 7 in Madison

MADISON — Projects that allow students to earn credit for high school and postsecondary studies, provide library services, and strengthen diversity in rural communities are among 10 that State Superintendent Tony Evers will recognize with his “Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities” awards March 7 in Madison.

“These projects share a common thread — people coming together to improve life in their communities,” Evers said. “Recognizing this commitment to enriching the quality of life in rural Wisconsin not only honors the talented individuals who are involved, but inspires others to invest in our rural communities, which are a vital part of Wisconsin’s culture and economic future.”

Information about each of the projects receiving “Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries and Communities” awards follows.

Bringing Community Library Service to Rural Wisconsin is a project of the Melrose-Mindoro Area School District and the communities in the three counties it serves. The partnership made possible a community section in the school libraries within the towns of Melrose and Mindoro, which are open year-around on Monday evenings. Through donations and community support, services have expanded to include author visits, scrapbooking, a Packer Trivia Night, local history, and Hmong cultural activities. Growth has led to plans for construction of a future community library. In addition to the school district and town boards, partners in the project include the La Crosse County Library, Friends of the Mindoro Community Library, and many local businesses. Accepting the award will be Gloria Beaser, Rita Cox, and Fred Marini.

Darlington Community Hispanic Outreach Project is a collaborative effort to provide resources and activities that raise the awareness of Hispanic culture and create an inclusive community. The project has sponsored the Cinco de Mayo observance since 2005; Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) since 2009; a bilingual community read of the book, “Charlotte’s Web”; English as a Second Language classes at the library; and ongoing Spanish language classes at both the library and public schools. The community supports two Mexican grocery stores, two Hispanic churches, a Mexican restaurant, and numerous resources housed at the Johnson Public Library and the Darlington Schools Library Media Center. The Darlington Community School District, city of Darlington, Johnson Public Library, Darlington Chamber and Main Street Project, and other individuals and businesses are involved in the project. Accepting the award will be Nita Burke, Tony Ruesga, and Denise Wellnitz.

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Goodman-Armstrong Creek School Forest and Community Learning Partnership creates an integrated PK-12 program focusing on the school forest and community. The partnership gives students a strong sense of place and helps them become literate about Wisconsin's forests. It supports teachers and the community in using the school forest and community as the setting and purpose for student learning and unites students, teachers, and local citizens in creating a healthy, vibrant community that includes a joint sense of ownership of the school forest. The LEAF Program at the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education in Stevens Point provides ongoing professional development. The center, along with the Goodman-Armstrong Creek School District, and businesses, agencies, organizations, and community members, collaborate on the project. Accepting the award will be Dave Majewski.

Marketplace for Kids is a partnership among two nonprofit organizations and four school districts. It engages the schools and their rural communities in supporting entrepreneurship education and development, beginning in grade four and extending through high school. The partnership provides classes and educational exhibits to help young people develop their business skills, enhance personal development, and build friendships with other future leaders. Participating are the Iowa-Grant, North Crawford, Richland, and Southwestern school districts, along with Cooperative Educational Service Agency 3 and the Southwest Wisconsin Small Business Development Center. Accepting the award will be Tom Martin and Gary Smith.

Northland Pines School District and YMCA of the Northwoods Eagle River Branch Partnership supports healthy living through classes and programs for the community serving the Northland Pines School District. The chartered YMCA branch employs two full-time and seven part-time employees and relies on many volunteers to provide services to youth, adults, senior citizens and the community for more than 15 hours per day. The partnership also fosters an inclusive attitude that welcomes everyone through scholarships for those who struggle with monthly fees. Accepting the award will be Nancy Ellis and Mike Richie.

Palmyra-Eagle Area School District's Prevention and Wellness Service (PAWS) is a collaborative effort to plan and coordinate activities, programs, and initiatives to encourage youth to choose and engage in healthy lifestyles. The PAWS Council works with the Jefferson County Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Abuse (ATODA) Partnership Council, Jefferson County Wraparound Project, Cooperative Educational Service Agency 2, Jefferson County Smoke-Free Coalition, and the Jefferson County Delinquency Prevention Council. Goals for the PAWS Council are to increase developmental assets that help children make good decisions about their health and behavior; reduce juvenile arrests and school suspensions and expulsions, especially related to ATODA issues; reduce the number of risk-taking behaviors among students; increase parent involvement in school; and support positive family communications. Accepting the award will be Ruth Hammiller, Pat Hoff, and Glenn Schlender.

RUSTIC Initiative: Rural Schools Training and Instruction Consortium impacts five rural school districts, allowing high school seniors to take courses through the Northcentral Technical College in Wausau in the areas of manufacturing, marketing, and child care. Through this one-year program, students receive dual credit from their high school and the technical college along with an industry-recognized certificate. Once they graduate from high school, students can enter the workforce or pursue further postsecondary studies at the technical college or a four-year institution. Because rural schools do not have the means to operate these programs individually, the collaboration needed to overcome scheduling conflicts, create a financial support model, and provide teachers, shows the possibilities available for students through cooperation. Participating are the Abbotsford, Colby, Loyal, Spencer, and Stratford school districts and Northcentral Technical College. Accepting the award will be Wendy Peterson, Reed Welsh, and Jerry Zanolli.

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Summer PACK: Positive Adventures Creating Knowledge is a five-week educational opportunity for students in the Tomah Area School District. Classes range from reading and mathematics skill development to enrichment in science, social studies, physical education, and the arts. The program offered transportation via bus to and from Tomah Middle School, breakfast and lunch through the Summer Food Service Program, and up to four classes a day for the 700-plus students who attended last year. Summer PACK has developed partnerships among the school district, Tomah City Park and Recreation Department, Boys and Girls Club, and the Tomah Public Library. Accepting the award will be Linda Barta and Michelle Clark.

We Are More than a Flesh Colored Crayon is a curriculum developed by first-grade teachers in the Berlin Area School District that reflects their changing community. Teachers infused social action into their curriculum; students were given an expanded outlook on issues of diversity and community; and students were exposed to relevant social issues at an appropriate level. Additionally, teachers involved in the project were able to model the curriculum and social action approach for other grade levels. The initiative has created mentorships and partnerships in the school, library, and community through enhanced educational opportunities, service-learning opportunities, and increased community awareness of bullying, diversity, and acceptance. Accepting the award will be Jamie Bartol, Penny Graham, Jen Kouba, and Kelley Thrasher.

Youth Sports Unlimited provides economic support for youth-based programs and activities in northern Polk County. The organization sponsors an annual fund-raising banquet with proceeds supporting groups such as Boy Scouts, 4-H, hunter safety courses, and community-based summer sports programs such as Little League, T-Ball, youth wrestling, softball, golf, soccer, bowling, and horseshoes. Funding through Youth Sports Unlimited has built outdoor basketball and volleyball courts and installed and maintained playground equipment. In the schools, Youth Sports Unlimited has supported music and drama programs as well as athletics. Last summer the organization purchased fishing equipment for Project New Hope, which supports the veterans and families of military personnel who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Partners in Youth Sports Unlimited include the villages of Balsam Lake, Centuria, Milltown, Luck and Frederic; local townships; and the school districts of Frederic, Luck, and Unity. Accepting the award will be Ralph Johansen and Jeff Moats.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2011_21.pdf. A photo gallery from the awards program will be available on the Department of Public Instruction website at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sprntdnt/photos.html>.