

News Release

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‘Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin’ awards go to seven projects

Projects that strengthen schools and communities to be recognized Nov. 11 in Stevens Point

MADISON — Programs serving seven communities will receive the 2015 Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities Award during a program and reception Nov. 11 in Stevens Point.

Presented each year to nominated projects that “demonstrate the great potential and collaborative spirit of rural Wisconsin,” this year’s recipients join 88 exemplary programs recognized since 2005.

“The individuals and organizations that we recognize for Rural Awards are the spirit of rural Wisconsin,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. He noted that more than 40 percent of Wisconsin’s 870,000 public school students attend school in our small towns and rural communities. “Our Rural Award recipients are what makes our state so special.”

Nominated by education and library professionals, the 2015 award winning programs will be recognized during the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance conference (Nov. 11-12). The programs are:

- Hunger Initiative Feeds People, Empowers Youth — Unity School District, Balsam Lake
- Early Learning and Language Project — Bloomer School District
- The Food Court — Galesville-Ettrick-Trempealeau School District
- Sharing Supper Feed and Read — Endeavor Elementary School, Portage Community School District
- Ecovim Digester Project — Sparta Area School District
- Agriculture Food for All — Stratford School District
- Three Lakes School Fab Lab — Three Lakes School District

The awards program begins at 11:15 a.m. Wednesday at the Holiday Inn and Convention Center in Stevens Point. Additional information about each project follows.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2015_111.pdf.

2015 Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities Awards

November 11, 2015 — Stevens Point

The Unity FFA's **Hunger Initiative Feeds People, Empowers Youth** provides produce for the school lunch program; supports the ag food processing, summer school garden, and seventh-grade Agriscience classes; and has grown in the community to provide raised vegetable beds in Milltown and Centuria with further expansion to include the Round Lake Native American community. In addition to raised vegetable beds, the sustainable hunger initiative includes an orchard, sharing nutrition information, and a Shanty Town activity that allowed youth to experience hunger and poverty by sleeping outside overnight in a box and sharing a "soup kitchen" meal. The Unity FFA has had representation at both national Hunger Boot Camps and Farm to School workshops that included area producers, greenhouses, school lunch supervisors, and FFA chapters. Partnerships for the Hunger Initiative project include the Milltown Lutheran Church, Village of Centuria, Habitat for Humanity, VFW, Round Lake Council, UW-Extension, Polk County Master Gardeners, Polk County Public Health Department, Polk County Food Insecurity Committee, National FFA-Hunger Boot Camp, National FFA-Living to Serve Committee, Farm to School Initiative, Endeavors Greenhouse, Baldwin Greenhouse, and Pro-Lawn Landscapers. Funding to support the initiative was from the National FFA Food For All Grant, Cooperative Educational Service Agency mini grant program, and Ag Star equipment grants.

The **Early Learning and Language Project** is a collaborative effort of the G.E. Bleskacek Library and area schools to provide comprehensive early literacy intervention, including speech therapy and language support through library-sponsored story time. By partnering with the library for literature and speech and language classes, schools move speech instruction out of the confines of school and involve parents as guides in the process. Theme-based story times at the library are for children 3 years of age or older, along with parents. Various forms of literature, songs, and activities engage young children and families and help grow a love of reading while developing speech and language of young children. The library staff, alongside school staff, interact with children and model strategies for parents to enrich their child's development. The library sends home sound bags, which help parents target specific speech and language skills to prepare children for school success. In addition, youngsters find the library a place of joy and friendship. The love of literature as well as school readiness has increased across the community. In addition to the early literacy project, Public Librarian Kathleen Larson shares book talks at local schools and hosts activities such as Teen Night, Lego Club, and Arts and Crafts to spark involvement at the library. Computer nights teach seniors and others technical skills. In addition, the library serves seniors at local nursing homes and brings books to residents for their enjoyment. As a result, library use has expanded.

The collaboration among Community GroundWorks, city officials, school administrators, parents, students, and community volunteers has sustained the **Food Court** garden initiative at Galesville Elementary School since 2009. Under the direction of School Nutrition Professional and Master Gardener Jean Wallner, an unused tennis court on school grounds has been repurposed into a school garden. Affectionately called the "Food Court," the garden also relies on hours of coordination and assistance by the Food Service Director Cheryl Stoner and the Community GroundWorks organization. The Galesville school garden depends heavily on a strong volunteer base and materials and supplies donated from various community organizations. Mulch from the city comes from the collection of resident Christmas trees and other yard waste. The Lion's Club donates funds for the purchase of soil. The Food Court's bounty makes its way to Galesville elementary students as part of the school lunch program as fresh options in the salad bar, in cooked form on the line, or in recipes such as pizza and spaghetti sauce. A favorite Ratatouille recipe is produced and frozen by community volunteers. In addition, students use the garden as a learning lab, and there is a student garden club that meets twice a month during the growing season. Other areas of student learning include art projects, cooking classes, and nutrition curriculums.

As a way to break down social and economic barriers and build community relationships, Endeavor Elementary School hosts a monthly **Sharing Supper Feed and Read**. The events are planned by a committee of community volunteers and average 150+ people each month. Businesses, organizations, and individuals have the opportunity to share their time, talents, money, and food with the community. In addition to a healthy meal and conversations, Sharing Suppers provide access to resources and an opportunity to network with individuals, groups, and agencies that those attending might not be aware of. Each Sharing Supper includes a monthly-themed craft activity for children. Additionally, a recent grant funded the purchase of books for children at each Sharing Supper for the 2015-2016 school year. Children select a new book at both their reading and interest level every time they attend a Sharing Supper, giving them access to their own books which, in turn, will enhance their reading achievement and build connections between the joy of reading and lifelong learning.

Students in the Sparta High School Earth Club are national leaders in turning lunchroom food waste into usable products. In just 12 hours, the **Ecovim Digester Project** can turn 250 pounds of leftover food into 20 gallons of water and 30 pounds of compost, which can be used in the school's garden or sold in the community. Students presented the compost idea first to the school board which gave \$10,000 toward the cost of the \$25,000 digester. The student club members then secured the remaining funding through presentations to local civic organizations and letters to friends and family asking for donations. Partners in the project include Century Foods International and the Sparta Kiwanis, Rotary, and Lions clubs. According to Joe Cook, the teacher who provided leadership for the project, students had the opportunity to employ communication skills, work as a team, and pursue a project that improves the community. The digester is expected to cut the school's landfill waste by 50 percent.

The Stratford Agriscience Department and FFA formed a committee to plan and implement **Stratford Agriculture Food For All**, a three-tier project that benefits the community, the food pantry, the school, and students. The committee installed raised beds for student lessons and donations to the local food pantry, constructed a high tunnel for lunch line production, and built community gardens for community members to lease. Throughout this student-led process, hundreds of pounds of food have been donated to the local food pantry. Additionally, food has gone into the school lunch line and provided hands-on lessons for agricultural students. High school students mentor elementary students in a variety of horticulture lessons throughout the year. The Agriscience Department also hosted a Farm-to-School event that taught students throughout the district about the importance of proper nutrition and food production. Student leadership expanded impact of the project through a back pack program that allows students to take produce home on the weekends. Student participants also will be hosting gardening classes throughout the year so that community members who lease beds in the community garden can maximize production and nutritional value of their harvest. Funding for the project came from Growing Rural America and FFA Food For All grants with additional support from the the National FFA Organization, Marathon County Health Department, the Village of Stratford, and Stueber Farms.

The **Three Lakes School Fab Lab**, the first digital fab lab facility in the Wisconsin K-12 system, provides 3D modeling and 3D printing technology, as well as training to the citizens and youth of northern Wisconsin. The district is located in an economically distressed, rural area of Wisconsin, so this project provides tremendous opportunities for both students and the community. Both students and citizens can design and make new products that develop business startups and expand job growth. The Fab Lab is chartered by MIT. While housed in the Three Lakes School, the lab has partnerships with the University of Wisconsin-Stout, the Three Lakes Edward U. Demmer Memorial Library, the Three Lakes Town Board (Planning Commission), and the Three Lakes Model Railroad Club. Railroad Club members make buildings and rolling stock unique to individual modelers. The Demmer Library reading program rewards children who read a certain number of books with a 3D scan and print of their head, or an object of their choosing. The planning commission works with the lab to promote the community as a destination for new and expanding businesses, which will help with local and regional economic development, as well as community and school district sustainability. A number of business partners meet quarterly and work with the school to identify skills desired in their next generation of employees. In order to remain a cutting edge school, the lab partners with the University of Wisconsin-Stout to develop curriculum, work as a feeder school, provide a site for student teachers in digital fabrication, and offer dual-enrollment to Three Lakes students.