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MES helped train leaders in state's newest city

Minnesota's 855th — and newest — city owes some of its leadership to Wright County extension programs. Otsego, in the northeast corner of that county, boasts graduates of extension leadership programs serving as mayor, deputy clerk and many positions on the Otsego Vision committee that helped the former township to achieve its five-month-old city status.

Wright County extension agents Dennis Moeller and Erva Hance credit the leadership of Norman Freske, newly elected mayor of Otsego, and Deputy Clerk Elaine Beatty for their work with the township board that finally resulted in city incorporation. Two years ago, Freske and Beatty helped organize the Family Community Leadership Project workshop called "Leaders 'R' Us," put on by the Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright county cluster.

Out of that workshop, about 10 Otsego residents began an Otsego Vision team to look at ways for their increasingly-suburban township to handle new demands for services. Beatty says, "The skills that Dennis and Erva helped bring to the group were tremendously helpful as we tackled long-range planning and incorporation for Otsego. Their guidance and interest were wonderful."

Extenovations photos courtesy of Wright County Extension

Wright County extension agents Dennis Moeller, left, and Erva Hance, second from the right, joined Elaine Beatty and Norman Freske at the Otsego "birthday" celebration. Beatty and Freske were Family Community Leader program participants before becoming involved in their community's push toward incorporation. Freske is now Otsego's mayor and Beatty is the deputy clerk.

It had been about 15 years since the last new city was officially added to the state's roster. Most towns considering incorporation eventually choose either annexation to a nearby city or they withdraw their petitions for other reasons. Otsego, however, was persistent and determined. In September the township of nearly 6,000 people got permission from the Minnesota Municipal Board to incorporate. The new status allows them to claim highway funds for additional road paving and set some policies for land use, building and sewer and water installation.

A number of those attending the "Leaders 'R' Us" workshop now hold volunteer or paid positions in Otsego, according to Moeller. Others have helped research and publish material about the city's history or have guided public relations efforts.

These have included selection and use of a logo, publishing a quarterly newsletter and organizing a festival in October to celebrate incorporation.

The Otsego Vision team is now considering becoming a Project Future community. Members met with Larry Granger of the Project Future staff to discuss the possibility. They will decide soon about their involvement with that community development program. Moeller says that the vision team members have already taken charge of their community's future in much the way that Project Future teaches. He predicts that the enthusiasm and spirit of the Otsego leaders will make the transition from township to city well planned and smooth. ■

- Deedee Nagy

Larry Granger, formerly with the MES Project Future staff, offered a coffee cup toast to the state's newest city at an October celebration of Otsego's incorporation.

MES, Humphrey Institute cooperate on Project Future

Extenovations photo by Don Breneman

Signing a memo of agreement between the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and MES are, seated at left, G. Edward Schuh, dean of the Humphrey Institute, and Pat Borich, dean and director of MES. Looking on, from left, are Beth Honadle, program leader for community economic development; Nancy Speer, associate program director at the Humphrey Institute, and Randy Cantrell, program coordinator for Project Future. Under the agreement, Project Future will be a joint effort of the two units of the University. Cantrell now holds his appointment with the Humphrey Institute and maintains his office there.

Computer fair draws 1,000+

Farm Computer Fairs held in Luverne, Mankato and Rochester in December drew more than 1,000 participants, according to Blue Earth County agent Kent Thiesse. Each day-long event included workshops and vendor displays to appeal to both novice and experienced farm computer users.

A similar computer fair was held last year in Mankato only, and Thiesse reported that the crowd of nearly 1,000 made it difficult to conduct small workshops. The size also limited the time that vendors had to answer questions for individuals.

"This year, we split the workshop into three sites — one in each of the extension districts in the southern part of the state," Thiesse said. "This was more manageable and offered a better learning situation for those attending."

Workshops on such topics as "Do I need a computer?" and "Software and hardware decisions" were taught by extension agents. About 35 vendors participated, most in two or more of the consecutive-day events. ■

- Deedee Nagy

Also in EXTENOVATIONS

Boehlje predicts falling farm incomes in 1991

The bubble is likely to burst on record high farm incomes by the end of this year, according to Mike Boehlje, extension economist.

"Grain farmers will probably see a 10 percent or more drop in net farm income in 1991. And income for livestock farmers may drop 5 to 10 percent," Boehlje adds. "But we will not have a return to the farm crisis days of the early 1980s."

In addition, Boehlje says that farmers currently have more capacity to service debt loads.

"Farm debt is almost 30 percent less than it was in 1982-84. So, farm income may be down, but there will be fewer credit demands on that income," Boehlje says.

The debt-to-income ratio is less than half what it was a decade ago. In 1981, farm debt averaged $5.50 for every dollar of income. The figure was $2.25 in 1990, and it could go up to about $2.50 in 1991.

Boehlje says three factors will play a large role in how much farm income drops: severity of the recession, energy costs and the new farm bill.

He says, "I expect a relatively short, shallow recession. It could be over by the third quarter of this year. But if oil prices go up substantially or the war in the Persian Gulf is prolonged, the recession could be deeper."

He says a general recession will reduce demand for higher-priced cuts of red meats and for fruits and vegetables. A short recession won't have much of an impact on grain prices.

A short recession may also cause interest rates to be reduced from 0.5 to 1 percent. A longer and deeper world recession will cause reduced exports because middle-income countries will be pinched for income.

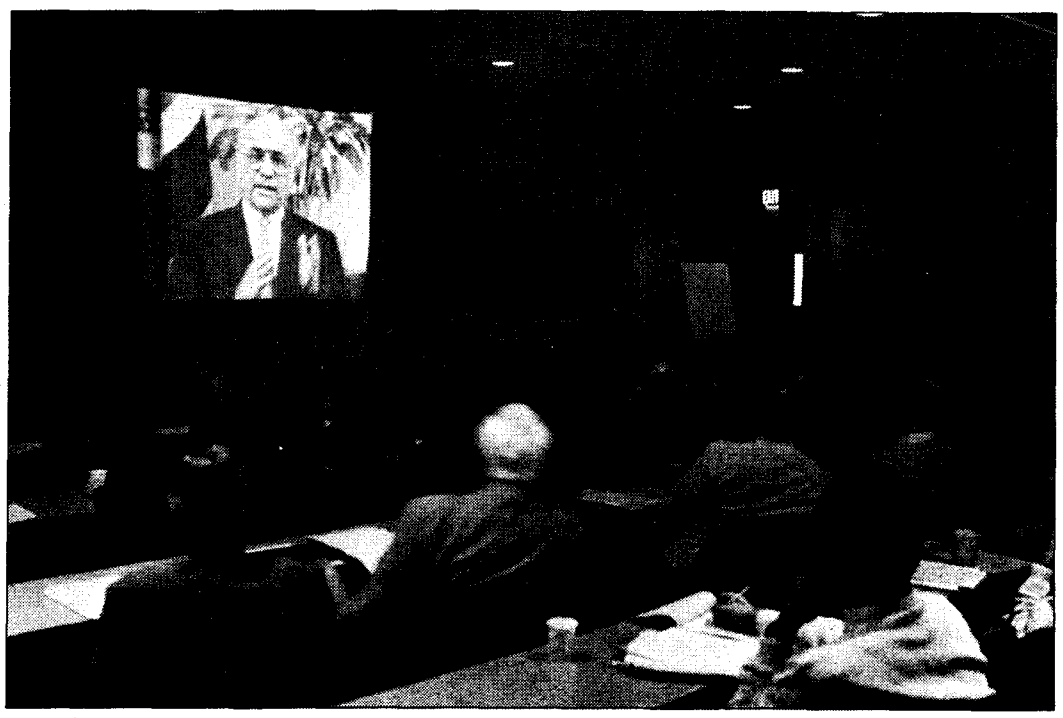
Higher energy costs mean higher costs for fertilizer, fuel and chemicals. "I've seen figures predicting a $15 increase in per acre costs for raising corn," Boehlje says. In addition to higher input costs, expensive energy will also cause a reduction in exports.

There is a positive side to higher energy costs, according to Boehlje. They encourage conservation, increase the potential for ethanol products and reduce chemical and fertilizer use. However, unless oil goes to $50-$60 a barrel, ethanol requires tax subsidies to be economically viable.

Although the new farm bill will reduce subsidy payments by about 25 percent, it does give farmers more flexibility to plant alternative crops, Boehlje adds.

- Jack Sperbeck

Minnesota Extension Service hosts farm bill teleconference



Extenovations photos by Don Breneman and Diane Peltz

Major changes in the new farm bill and their implications for state and federal agencies were the emphasis of a recent satellite teleconference held on the St. Paul campus. Right, Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter spoke to the group on some of the changes in the bill. He stressed the need for cooperation between state and federal agencies as the bill goes into effect. Above, extension economist Mike Boehlje helped facilitate the local segment. Audience members were from extension as well as ASCS, SCS and FmHA. Each state had one downlink site for the two-hour conference, which originated in Washington, D.C.

Sibley County leadership program brings change to community

Working with county residents to bring about community change continues to be the role of the Sibley County Leadership Development Committee into 1991.

The catalysts who spearheaded the development committee are Sibley's extension staff members Sue Engelmann and Deb Noll together with Theresa Pesch, county public health nursing service director. (Engelmann is completing an 18-month Bush Fellowship on the university's St. Paul campus. She returns to the county later this year.)

"Sibley's program is custom designed by and for the people of the county," Noll explains. A January county wide leadership conference at Gaylord brought together professionals to discuss taking leadership to affect policy regarding families and youth. In October the committee hosted an educational breakfast meeting where the discussion was policy pertaining to recycling issues in the county. Among the current facilitators for the committee are Thomas McCarthy, district court judge; Pesch and Noll.

This is the Sibley county committee that received a meritorious award from the National Association of County Commissioners meeting in St. Louis last year. Its success has also meant a $40,000 grant from the Southeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund in 1989.

The uncertain rural agricultural economy of the 1980s led to the formation of Sibley County STAND (Standing Together As Neighbors Do). It was a 1985 coalition of representatives from human services, religious, educational and lay people. With reduced support from federal and state government, STAND, now called the Sibley County Human Development Commission, is seen as a way of solidifying efforts to meet local service needs more effectively. Commission members are appointed by the Sibley board of commissioners. The Leadership Development Committee (begun in 1988) and the Family and Youth Issues Advisory Board are among the committees of the overall county human development commission.

Membership encompasses: extension, community health service, mental health center, ministers, veterans' service, job services, county board of commissioners, area community education, school counselors, county sheriff, county attorneys, state senator, local public schools, social services and area chambers of commerce. ■

- Mary Kay O'Hearn

In brief . . . In brief . .

Larry Jacobson, extension agricultural engineer, has received the Nolan Mitchell Young Extension Worker Award at the international winter meeting of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. He was cited for his work in applying research to educational and training programs for the livestock industry, extension agents, equipment suppliers and the rural construction industry. He was recognized specifically for his expertise in swine housing.

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Wabasha County supermarket sticker program educates consumers about recycling

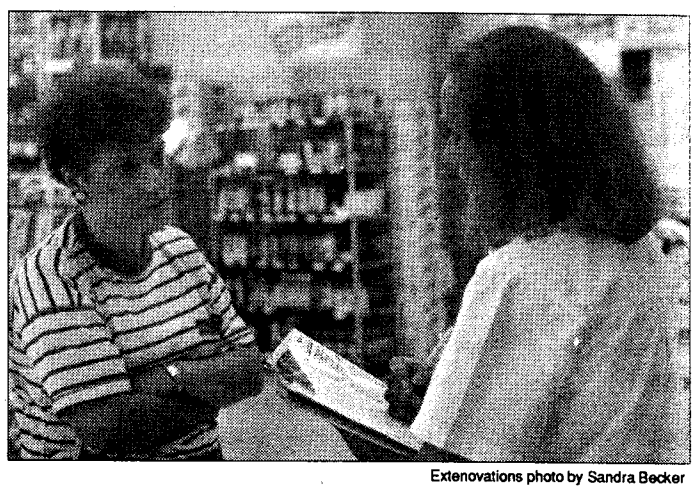
Wabasha County home economics agent Toni Smith jokes, "My life has been garbage lately."

But don't take that as an admission of despair. Rather, she is talking about the attention and impact that extension's recycling education effort has had in her county, where the local landfill is closed and mandatory recycling affects everyone.

Thanks to Smith and local extension-trained volunteer recycling advisors, Wabasha County grocery shoppers know at a glance if the items in their carts are among those packaged in materials required to be recycled. Small green stickers on the unit price label for each product alert shoppers to foods and household items packaged in glass, aluminum, tin and #1 and #2 plastic. These, plus newspaper, are the materials that must be recycled under the Wabasha County recycling law.

Photo courtesy of Rochester Post-Bulletin and photographer Jerry McCullough

Wabasha County recycling advisor Elaine Miller and her daughter Andrea applied recycling stickers to the unit price labels of the local supermarket. More than 3,000 items packaged in recyclable containers were labeled that way to make consumers aware of which packages fall under the county's mandatory recycling law.



Extenovations photo by Sandra Becker

Before beginning the recycling sticker program in Wabasha, volunteer Elaine Miller and others surveyed shoppers about their awareness of recycling and their need for information at the time they buy food and other household products.

Extenovations photo by Don Breneman

Wabasha County agent Toni Smith explained the recycling advisor volunteer program in her county to legislators and other elected officials at a meeting in Owatonna just before the sticker program went into effect. Once a follow-up survey is completed, Smith expects to share findings with other counties interested in a similar supermarket labeling effort.

Smith credits Elaine Miller, a recycling advisor, with the idea of placing stickers on supermarket shelves to help guide consumers. Smith, Miller and the county's recycling coordinator approached Norm Scheel, owner of Norm's Super Valu, the biggest food store in Wabasha.

With his approval, the one-year pilot program began with volunteers conducting surveys with shoppers. Tom Halbach, extension waste management specialist, helped develop the survey, according to Smith.

Of the 46 consumers interviewed, 43 said that recycling stickers on the shelves would help them recognize what items could and should be recycled. Nearly the same number said that recycling stickers on the shelves would make a difference in what they bought.

With those encouraging survey results, Miller and other volunteers went through Norm's Super Valu in October adhering the stickers to the unit price labels for more than 3,000 items in recyclable containers. They also worked closely with an employee at Norm's who changes the price labels and makes certain that new labels carry the recycling sticker when appropriate.

Scheel promoted the sticker program in his Super Valu newspaper ads. Wabasha and Rochester newspapers carried articles about the program, and two Twin Cities television stations came to town to tape features about the program, believed to be the only one of its kind in the state.

Now that stickers have been in place for several months, Miller and other volunteers are again surveying shoppers to gauge their effectiveness. "Recyclable containers are definitely a factor in consumers' decisions," Miller said. "It's probably natural that price and brand names are bigger factors in what people buy, but it's encouraging to know that many people consider how recyclable an item is before either buying or rejecting it."

Smith is pleased with how the sticker project has gone because it has been such a cooperative educational effort between extension and various county officials and the supermarket. The Southeast Minnesota Initiative Board also provided funds to the Southeast Minnesota Recyclers Exchange to help train recycling advisors.

She adds, "extension's skill with volunteers and public policy make it a prime candidate to run a program such as this. I don't think the sticker program would have been possible without that expertise."

Recently, Smith has begun working with the elementary school teachers in Wabasha and Kellogg to incorporate recycling into their lesson plans on the environment. Next school year she expects that students from Wabasha, Olmsted, Goodhue and Dodge counties who attend an environmental camp will visit area schools to perform programs dealing with recycling and other aspects of environmental education.

- Deedee Nagy

Grant to help Minnesota small towns attract tourists

Hundreds of small towns in Minnesota have a common problem: they have abundant natural and historic attractions but residents don't know how to use them to attract tourists.

A new project to revitalize rural economies through tourism will help community leaders develop their towns' natural attractions. The $96,500 grant was given to the University of Minnesota Tourism Center by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration. The Tourism Center will use the money to train rural leaders in the art of building a solid tourism economy.

"We're using the grant to teach people how to chart a course for their communities," said Glenn Kreag, Sea Grant tourism extension agent and partner in the Tourism Center. "Leaders will learn how to identify and devleop valuable resources, such as highways, parks, scenic areas, historic sites, and other attractions."

To build tourism, rural communities must market their attractions with as much sophistication as do their urban counterparts, said Kreag.

However, a good marketing plan may not be enough. Small towns may lack basic tourism-oriented businesses — hotels, gas stations, restaurants, and shops — so visitors pass through town without spending any money. Communities must find the right balance of attractions, services and marketing, he added.

The Tourism Center project will end with a national teleconference in November. The broadcast will originate from the Twin Cities and Washington, D.C. Interactive sites around the nation will bring together experts and educators in rural tourism development to improve training for community leaders.

- Mike McLean

Mentor Moms program offers help for young mothers

(Editor's note: The following story is excerpted from an article that appeared in the winter issue of The Area Woman, a magazine distributed in the Fargo-Moorhead region. We reprint portions of it with permission from the writer, Holly Hunt. Clay County agent Nancy Frosaker-Johnson says that the Mentor Moms program featured in this article is not unique to her county. Barb Oseth of West Polk County began a similar program at the same time that Frosaker-Johnson's effort began, and other counties including Cass and Lyon have begun programs more recently as part of Project 4 Teens.)

When he enters the room, people turn to look at him. He has beautiful blonde hair and cornflower blue eyes. His name is Matthew and he's 11 months old.

Matthew is a lucky little boy. His mother Brenda is doing everything she can to be a fantastic parent, and seeing how happy Matthew is, Brenda is succeeding. She is an adolescent mother who has sought out the support of a very unique program in the FM area, Mentor Moms.

Mentor Moms is a program that matches single moms with a "mentor mom" — someone to help, and to be a friend. It began in 1989, and is run by Nancy Frosaker-Johnson at the Clay County Extension office and several of the local agencies who all donate their time.

As Frosaker-Johnson explains, "Mentor Moms is a non-traditional program of the extension office, but we feel the extension office focuses on family issues, and this program works to improve the family by helping the young moms with parenting. However, this program is not intended to create 'replacements' for the support of grandparents, parents or siblings."

When asked about her feelings on the program, Brenda (one of the young moms) responded with, "It's great. Leslie (her mentor mom) and I get along really well. It's so nice to have someone to just talk with and to help with Matthew," Brenda describes her mentor mom as "a friend, not another mother, someone who loves kids and truly cares about us."

Brenda found the Mentor Mom program through another area program, The Bridge. Young moms are normally referred to Mentor Moms through one of the area agencies or by word of mouth. Johnson indicated that although it's currently a "moms" program, they wouldn't hesitate in helping a single father either. And, although the program was created to help teen mothers, there are also some older single moms who just need some support. The young moms range in age from 16-23.

Leslie is one of 14 mentor moms "placed" with an adolescent mom. She is an accountant, but even with a busy schedule she loves being a mentor mom. She is the only mentor mom who currently doesn't have children, but that didn't stop her from getting involved.

Extenovations photo courtesy of Nancy Frosaker-Johnson

Brenda, left, and her young son, Matthew, regularly spend time with Mentor Mom Leslie, right. They are participants in the Clay County program to teach parenting skills that originated with the Project 4 Teens program.

Frosaker-Johnson said, "There aren't any hard, fast rules right now, although we do a thorough screening to be sure of good matches." The mentor moms come from several areas of the community — nurses, accountants, counselors, teachers, at-home moms and empty nesters. They range in age from 26-56.

Last year the FM Women's League took on the responsibility of being mentor moms, but this year it was opened up to anyone interested. Being a mentor does mean some commitment. The extension office requests one year minimum commitment. Also two nights of extensive training are required focusing on building relationships and confidence, the developmental stages of young women and working with a counselor. Agencies from the area have volunteered to help with the training sessions. During the training, mentor moms fill out questionnaires concerning their interests, what situations they feel comfortable with, and those they'd prefer to avoid. Each relationship is different.

Because the relationships differ, the amount of time the moms spend together varies. The extension office requests one to three visits per month, or whatever works best for those involved.

With a full year behind them, the Clay County Extension Office is preparing an evaluation with the help of the Rural Sociology Department at the University of Minnesota. But even without the formal evaluation, the program seems to be a success. Rather than waiting until next June for their annual training session, Frosaker-Johnson said, "as soon as we have ten people ready to make that commitment, we will run another session. There's just a need for that support."

Mentor Moms is a spin-off of another successful, non-traditional program of the Clay County Extension Office, Project 4 Teens. The program originated with the help of the Minnesota Extension Service's Youth at Risk effort along with a Blandin Grant.

Project 4 Teens is a program that deals with teen sexuality. Last year students from Glyndon, Barnesville and Hawley spent three days training on decisionmaking, analysis of values and goals. They worked with the home economics department and administration of their schools in presenting three sessions to seventh and eighth graders. The sessions create greater awareness on issues like pregnancy, sexuality and choices so that the young teens can make conscious decisions regarding their futures.

Clay County is currently one of several counties in Minnesota that has Project 4 Teens, and several other counties have expressed an interest.

Mentor Moms and Project 4 Teens are non-traditional, but isn't it wonderful that they exist to help and protect the family?

Holly Hunt

4-H youth seek service on public boards as part of 'youth connectedness'

The ideal school board member knows what's going on in the classroom. He or she is tuned into what works and doesn't work with today's kids, and what the schools need to be successful.

Using these criteria, many high school students would be excellent school board members. They are, after all, the consumers of the board's services. Yet, although the State Board of Education has a youth member, few local Minnesota school boards do.

The topic came up at last summer's 4-H Youth Leadership Conference. One of the state 4-H issue areas is "youth connectedness." As 4-H youth talked about connecting with their communities, they felt they could be most effective by making their voices heard on policy-making bodies, such as school boards and county boards.

When three conference participants from Litchfield returned home, they wrote a letter to the editor of the Litchfield Independent Review. Young people are expected to be the leaders of tomorrow, they wrote, but "If this is so, when is tomorrow? Can we not be the leaders of today?" They suggested that if youth could serve on the school board, they could work with adults on issues that affect both.

Extenovations photo courtesy of Nobles County Extension Service

Nobles County 4-H members sponsor a plastic and glass recycling program, which grew out of a "Community Pride" project.

The editor of the Independent Review wrote an editorial in support of the 4-H'ers' proposal.

The Litchfield school board supported the idea, but because students are too young to run for election as full voting members, the board established youth slots on its advisory committees.

A similar story took place in southwestern Minnesota. Youth from Nobles and Murray Counties met Nobles County Commissioner Marv Tripp at a Youth Lead conference sponsored by 4-H. He told them he believes leadership experiences are the best way to build self-esteem in young people. And the teens told him one way they could get that experience: serving on public boards.

As in Litchfield, local adult leaders agreed it was worth a try. As a followup, Worthington County set aside two slots for youth on the cunty etension cmmittee—one of the first counties to do so—and added youth positions on the county fair board. They're taking applications now and expect to have the positions filled by summer. The county board also is receptive to having youth representation, though some administrative hurdles need to be overcome first.

Carol Shields, 4-H extension educator who coordinates youth connectedness activities, says the Worthington and Litchfield events are "definitely a step in the right direction. We're hoping other counties across the state will do this, too."

Youth connectedness is an umbrella for many ongoing and new 4-H activities. Shields believes that youth want to connect with their communities, their families, and their peers...and that their contributions often surprise adults.

Not only are teens gaining access to decision-making groups, Shields says, but they also are changing public policy through some of their "Community Pride" service projects.

An example: the Norseland 4-H Club in Nicollet County developed a recycling program and worked with the township board to create a policy on recycling and on development of a landfill. And the Worthington Diamonds began a glass and plastic recycling program that eventually was adopted by all 4-H clubs in Nobles County. They also worked to change the voluntary recycling program to one that is established countywide.

- Evelyn Anderson