

News Release

O'Connell completes Community Sustainability Outreach Coordinator Appointment

Elizabeth Tollefson

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A group of well-wishers recently attended a reception at University of Minnesota Crookston to thank DeAndra O'Connell for her many efforts in community sustainability. At the end of August, O'Connell completed a 6-month position as a sustainable community outreach coordinator. The cooperative position was co-sponsored by the U of M Crookston Center for Sustainability and with primary funding provided by the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (NWRSDP) and the City of Crookston. One of the major objectives of the position was to assist Crookston being designated a "GreenStep City."

The GreenStep City program is sponsored by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and has a set of 28 best practices which contribute to a community's health, energy savings, and long-term economic vitality. Categories include; building and lighting, transportation, land use, environmental management, and economic and community development. Crookston joins Warren and Bemidji as the only GreenStep cities in Northwest Minnesota.

O'Connell began the part-time outreach position in January 2015 and became a familiar face in the community and media as she promoted the various dimensions of the GreenSteps program. Notable projects included; coordinated an assessment of a number of Crookston buildings for solar energy retrofiting, provided support to expand the trail development in the community and campus, led the effort to establish a community garden project on flood-zone land along Riverside Avenue, and helped energize the Sustainability Destiny Driver of the Crookston In-Motion planning initiative.

O'Connell's organizational efforts have been popular with Crookston city officials. According to City Administrator, Shannon Stassen, "DeAndra has provided leadership, vision and determination in her outreach position. We are thrilled to have achieved GreenStep One status as a city and DeAndra has us positioned well to accomplish GreenStep Two status in 2016. Her efforts have made Crookston an even better place to live, learn, work and play."

Stassen's sentiments were echoed by Crookston Mayor Gary Willhite. "The City of Crookston will be forever grateful to DeAndra for her many efforts in sustainability for our community. Though her presentations to Council members, she had the entire council on board to become more concerned about sustainability issues. The future is bright for this young lady and we wish her the best--- as she will contribute much to communities-- for our children and grandchildren's' future."

O'Connell graduated from the U of M Crookston at the end of fall semester 2014 with a degree in applied studies and a focus on environmental science and sustainability.

The University of Minnesota Crookston now delivers 33 bachelor's degree programs, 22 minors, and 36 concentrations on campus as well as 14 degree programs entirely online. These degrees are offered in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of 1,800 undergraduates from more than 20 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photo, at top, DeAndra O'Connell in the community gardens.

In the photo, at bottom, Chancellor Wood visits with DeAndra O'Connell at farewell reception in August 2015.

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