

News Release

October 2, 2009

## Shawano County Rural Health Initiative Receives Wisconsin Idea Award

*“Model for the nation” says UW-Extension & UW Colleges Chancellor David Wilson*

MADISON, Wis.—Oct. 2, 2009 — The Shawano County Rural Health Initiative received the prestigious Wisconsin Idea Award Thursday, Oct. 1, for improving and sustaining the health and safety of rural Wisconsin communities. The award is given by University of Wisconsin Colleges and University of Wisconsin-Extension Chancellor David Wilson. “This initiative is a model for rural health care for the entire nation, not just for Wisconsin,” Wilson said. “It shows how people and organizations can solve our toughest problems if we work together with common purpose.”

Since 2004, the non-profit Shawano County Rural Health Initiative has provided free preventative screening for disease and risk assessments for physical, emotional and financial health and farm safety to 300 farm families, or 40 percent of the county’s farm families. The initiative is facilitated by educators with the University of Wisconsin-Extension and includes local health-care providers, agribusinesses and community leaders.

“No segment of Americans stands in greater need of improved health care than our farm families,” said Rhonda Strebel, executive director of the initiative. She said approximately 18 percent of Wisconsin dairy farm families have no health insurance and 80 percent do not have insurance that covers preventative care.

As a result, Strebel said, farm families often avoid medical treatment for chronic conditions or don’t seek preventative care such as blood pressure screenings or annual physicals that could catch illness at an earlier, more treatable stage. In presenting the award, Wilson recognized ThedaCare, Inc., the Appleton-based health care provider, for initiating a community outreach effort that helped identify the need of farm families for access to affordable health care. “ThedaCare deserves credit for bringing this problem to the attention of the whole community,” he said.

“I am also very proud of the way UW-Extension’s Cooperative Extension Agricultural Agent Tom Anderson and Cooperative Extension Family Living Educator Linda Olson have helped to guide this initiative,” Wilson said. UW-Extension created networks to bring community groups together, provided a point of connection to farm families, and helped communicate the purpose of the health initiative.

“I also commend the many community businesses and organizations that have made this initiative possible through their funding and volunteer involvement.”

A [video](#) about the Shawano County Rural Health Initiative produced by Wisconsin Public Television brings the initiative to life.

Each year University of Wisconsin Colleges and University of Wisconsin Extension serve approximately 1.5 million Wisconsin residents with both credit and noncredit programs delivered through the 26 University of Wisconsin campuses, all 72 county offices, and the statewide networks of Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television. For more information, visit <http://www.uwex.uwc.edu>.



Photo by Jim Gill/Wisconsin Public Television

*Front row: Rita Simon, Shawano School District; Larry Romuald, Cooperative Resources International; Rhonda Strebel; Chancellor Wilson; Sandy Cihlar, Cihlar Farms, Mosinee; Sheila Raddant, Mid-County Cooperative.*

*Back row: State Representative Gary Tauchen (Bonduel); Lisa Schiller, ThedaCare and UW-Eau Claire; Dr. John Mielke, ThedaCare and Mielke Family Foundation; Paula Morgen, ThedaCare; Linda Olson, Shawano County Cooperative Extension, Ron Hillmann, Mid-County Cooperative.*