

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND SCHOLARSHIP

My educational programming and scholarship has focused on community and economic development, comprehensive planning and community-based leadership development.

1. COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Town of Mercer – Very early in my Extension career, I was contacted by the Town of Mercer regarding a large grant application. Prior to my arrival, the community was unsuccessful in its attempts to fund the construction of a business park. I agreed to assist the community with the grant application as I saw this as an opportunity to introduce myself to the community and to build a relationship with their leaders. Later in my career, I may have taken a different approach as I have since learned the value of encouraging communities to evaluate a number of community and economic development strategies, which may or may not include building a business park.

Nevertheless, this was an extremely critical step for me. As a direct result of my educational inputs and research related to grant writing, the town re-submitted their application and was awarded a U. S. Economic Development Administration grant in the amount of \$1,296,020. The town constructed a fully-served business park and is actively pursuing several strong prospects for private investment in the park. This was a critical step in the community's efforts to strengthen its local economy and provide well-paying jobs for its young people. This successful project quickly created a strong working relationship between me and the town's leaders.

While serving a variety of educational roles with the Town of Mercer, I focused my educational efforts on downtown development. I facilitated the creation of the "Mercer Downtown Action Plan", leading the group to identify its mission, purpose and goals ([Exhibit 1](#)). I coordinated an educational effort designed to obtain feedback on downtown Mercer from outside visitors. As a part of this "First Impressions" exchange, I authored the "Community Assessment and Improvement Report" for the Town of Cable, Mercer's partner community. I presented this successful program to a state-wide audience as part of UW-Extension's Center for Community Economic Development "Building Communities" WisLine series in 2003. I also coordinated and taught a "Downtown Development Workshop" focused on the unique needs of downtown Mercer. Program evaluations indicated that this programming effort was beneficial, with 100% of the respondents rating the workshop as "effective" or "very effective" ([Exhibit 2](#)).

These educational efforts resulted in a number of successful community development projects, including new downtown banners, new entry signage, new informational signage and the development of a very popular "pocket park" in a once vacant downtown lot. These successful outcomes provided a springboard of enthusiasm and confidence which has encouraged the community to prepare for additional improvements including a planned bike path and downtown beautification. Perhaps my work with the Town of Mercer can best be described in a testimonial given by an active community member who shared her thoughts with UW-Extension's Dean and Director Arlen Leholm on his visit to Iron County in 2004 ([Exhibit 3](#)).

City of Hurley – My relationship with the City of Hurley began in 2004 when city officials learned of a new Department of Commerce (DOC) program to re-define its relationship with communities. The old relationship forced communities to apply for projects having the best chance for funding, not necessarily the community's top priority projects. In this new approach,

the DOC selects communities with a demonstrated need and the capacity to address those needs and focuses funding on the community's top priority projects. The DOC announced that they would test this new relationship with three pilot communities from across the entire state through a highly competitive application process.

To compete for this pilot designation, I facilitated a forum where the public identified the city's top priorities ([Exhibit 4](#)). The top three priorities identified by the community were downtown improvements, infrastructure improvements and extension of a county roadway. Along with key community partners, I authored an extensive "Community Assessment Tool" report to document the city's community development needs, a critical step in this application process.

The end result of these educational efforts was that Governor Jim Doyle visited Hurley in 2006 to announce that the city was selected as one of the three pilot communities and to award the city \$2,588,330 in community development funds. Funding was made available for the community's top three priorities, including downtown improvements (\$1.4 million), infrastructure improvements (\$580,000) and extension of County Road D (\$520,000). This was a very significant award, positioning the city to create a stronger economy and higher paying jobs and to create an environment that will support continued public and private investment in the future.

The enthusiasm created by this process led to an additional very positive and unforeseen outcome. Program participants agreed that winning this pilot designation was not enough. They felt strongly that they should band together to enhance and better promote downtown Hurley. As a result, I was instrumental in the creation of the 23-member "Hurley Vision Committee" and facilitated its organizational development. This committee proposed the idea of making downtown Hurley a Main Street community and to pay for this program through the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID). I researched funding options and prepared educational materials regarding these programs that enabled the group to make key programming decisions.

A critical step was educating downtown business owners on the proposed Main Street Program and BID. I created a cover-letter, educational pieces and a survey instrument that were sent to all downtown property owners. The committee also conducted face-to-face meetings with downtown business owners using a "Talking Points" educational piece that I developed ([Exhibit 5](#)). As a result of these educational efforts, the city is actively pursuing an application to become a Main Street community.

Hurley's successful designation as a DOC pilot community enabled me to become a much stronger partner with the city. I am now working with the city and the DOC to develop and implement an evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of this 3-5 year pilot program before the DOC expands the program to additional communities across the state.

Grant Writing Education – Although Mercer and Hurley are the two largest communities in Iron County, I felt that it was important to provide educational programming in community and economic development for all interested communities and organizations in the county. Therefore, I facilitated discussions with several communities and organizations to identify their most critical needs and develop an implementation strategy to address those needs. I provided educational support through research, community presentations and preparation of educational materials which led to a number of successful grant-funded projects, as follows:

City of Montreal – Renovation of Gile Park (\$18,370)
City of Montreal – Construction of Public Boat Landing (\$22,700)
Town of Kimball – Renovation of Kimball Park (\$25,375)
Sherman Fire Department – Personal Protective Equipment (\$53,550)
Rice/Echo Lake Homeowner Associations – Lake Management Plan (\$10,000)
Resource Development Association – Market and Location Study (\$4,700) (Exhibit 6)

To further build the local capacity to research and obtain external funding, I conducted a “Grant Writing Workshop” for Iron County residents in 2003. The workshop was well-attended by a cross-section of the community and was well received, with 73% of the respondents rating the workshop “excellent” and the remaining 27% rating it “good” (Exhibit 7). I sent a follow-up survey to all workshop participants 18 months following my presentation. The evaluations demonstrated that this programming effort was highly successful, with new skills learned and applied. One-hundred percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following two statements: “My general understanding of the community development and grant-writing process improved” and “I learned how to better research available grant programs”. Importantly, respondents self-reported the successful awarding of \$112,000 in grant funding as a direct result of my programming (Exhibit 8).

Grant Writing Resource – Early in my Extension career, I was regularly asked to research external funding opportunities for community projects. I searched the literature for a resource listing available public and private sources of funding. I identified a gap in the literature and felt that this was an important gap to be filled. In response, I initiated and co-created two new web-sites. The first web-site links to 183 grant programs organized under 23 regional, state and federal agencies, while the second site links 37 sources of private foundation and corporate giving opportunities (Exhibit 9). As a link to this resource, I also authored an educational piece entitled “Grant Writing and ‘The Hare and the Tortoise’: Insights Into the Extension Educators Role” to explain the role of Extension educators in the grant writing process (Exhibit 10).

All three of these resources are housed on UW-Extension’s Center for Community Economic Development web-site and have received over 25,000 combined hits since their release in 2003. I felt that it was important to share this new resource as widely as possible. I presented this resource to the Iron County Board, the Iron County Unit of the Wisconsin Towns Association and other interested local parties. I also presented this resource to a variety of state-wide audiences, including the Northern and Northeastern District In-Services, the Wisconsin Community Leadership Summit and the Chippewa Falls School District Technology Fair.

These resources have benefited UW-Extension by enhancing its web-site and offering a useful tool for Extension educators as well as numerous users from across the state. E-mail responses that I have received from my colleagues after the release of this resource included: “A wonderful resource Will - Thank you”, “I think you did a nice job capturing a lot of good resources and wisdom. I have referred a few communities to this list. Thanks!” and “Thank you for compiling the list. It is a great resource for researching grant opportunities”.

The development of these resources has enhanced my knowledge of state and federal grant funding. And my authorship of the “Hare and the Tortoise” piece forced me to evaluate and better understand my appropriate educational role in the grant writing process. I believe that this reflection has enabled me to serve Iron County more appropriately and effectively. I now work

hard not to be a grant writer, but rather to help communities and organizations build their own grant writing and research skills and abilities.

Economic Development Banner Area Teams – My greatest intellectual challenge and professional growth has resulted from my state-wide programming efforts. This opportunity to work collaboratively with my colleagues has been extremely rewarding. I am happy to be an active member of three UW-Extension teams: The Community and Economic Development Preparedness (CEDP) Team, the Downtown Vitality and Community Placemaking Team, and the Tourism Research, Planning and Development Team. As co-leader of the CEDP Team, I helped facilitate an issues identification and goal-setting session with team members in early 2005 to focus our programming efforts. The team identified the need to create a new resource that would package together existing community and economic tools in a way that would be meaningful and useful to Extension educators.

I felt strongly that this was a priority action and committed the time to manage the creation and development of this resource. I conceptualized the initial design concept and introduced my conceptual model to team members. This initial design evolved into the “Community and Economic Development Tool Box” which is now housed on the Northern Center for Community and Economic Development’s web-site ([Exhibit 11](#)). We released this new web-based resource to all CNRED agents throughout the state in early 2006. I believe that this resource will prove to be very useful to my colleagues, helping them diagnose the needs of their respective communities and increasing their awareness of available community development tools. E-mail responses that I have received from my colleagues after the release of this resource have been very significant and positive, for example: “This site is very much needed and you and your fellow team members have done well putting it together” and “WOW!!! Thank YOU guys....GOOD job”.

Again, I felt it was important to share my work. In February of 2006, I presented this new resource to a national audience at the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals Conference in San Antonio, Texas ([Exhibit 12](#)). Conference participants provided feedback via written evaluations on both my presentation and the usefulness of the “Tool Box” resource. Comments on my presentation included “Great job”, “Presented well” and “Interesting Info”. Ninety percent of the respondents stated that this type of tool would be useful in their programming and 85% rated the effectiveness of the resource in helping to decide which type of tool to use as either “good” or “excellent” ([Exhibit 13](#)). I also presented the “Tool Box” to state audiences via poster sessions at a Joint Council of Extension Professionals Conference in March of 2006 and a Community Resource Development Symposium in May of 2006.

Creating this new resource has proved to be very rewarding for my professional growth. It has heightened my awareness of the importance of fully understanding the key steps of the community development process before jumping into an implementation action. The opportunity to present this resource for critique before a national audience was especially useful as I heard feedback on the use and effectiveness of this resource from numerous viewpoints.

2. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Iron County Comprehensive Plan – On my hire in the summer of 2002, Iron County was embarking on a county-wide comprehensive planning process. I understood that I was expected to be involved in this process, but did not want this to become my sole programming emphasis as I was aware of many other high priority community needs. Therefore, I strategically positioned myself as the educator and not the community planner in this process.

Nevertheless, I made substantial contributions to the planning process, providing educational support from beginning to end (Exhibit 14). Early in the process, I organized a county-wide information and education session to initiate the multi-year planning effort where I presented the purpose and process for the upcoming planning project (Exhibit 15). At appropriate stages of the planning process, I created, presented and distributed relevant and timely educational pieces (Exhibit 16). I facilitated the development of the Iron County Public Participation Plan which was ultimately adopted by the County Board. I prepared a comprehensive planning display board for the county fair and the county court house. At key steps in the planning process I submitted comprehensive planning related articles to the local media and county-wide newsletters, and submitted regular e-mail up-dates to interested parties.

I played a significant role in the development of the Iron County Comprehensive Planning Survey. In this effort I facilitated a county-wide public meeting to identify the issues to be surveyed. I then facilitated a second county-wide meeting to design the survey instrument (Exhibit 17). The survey was sent to all 6,624 property owners in the county with 2,278 returned surveys for a very solid 34.4% response rate. This was a very critical piece of the planning process, helping local officials better understand the wishes of community residents.

I also served as secretary of the Iron County Comprehensive Plan Ad-Hoc Steering Committee, a 16-member volunteer board appointed to draft the county's comprehensive plan. I attended all committee meetings and provided direct educational support to this group throughout the planning process. Ordinarily, I may have hesitated to sit on such a committee and to serve as its secretary. But I felt this was a good opportunity for me to become engaged in the community and that it would offer me many teachable moments. Plus, because of the inherent nature of such an ad-hoc group, the term of this commitment was limited. Through my personal observations, I recognize that such a direct role ensured that this multi-jurisdictional planning effort moved forward as cohesively and effectively as possible.

In collaboration with colleagues from two neighboring counties, I organized two regional workshops related to comprehensive planning. The first was conducted early in the planning process and was entitled "Natural Resource Considerations in Community Planning" (Exhibit 18). The second workshop was entitled "Comprehensive Plan Implementation" and was offered near the end of the planning process to teach planning commissioners how to prepare the implementation elements of their comprehensive plans (Exhibit 19). These collaborative efforts were critical educational strategies that complemented my local programming and also forged a stronger relationship between myself and my neighboring colleagues.

I felt strongly that it was very important to involve youth in any effort that looked 20 years into the future. Therefore, I organized an initiative involving high school students in the county's comprehensive planning process. High school students took pictures and prepared poster boards

showing how they would like their community to look in 20 years. I facilitated a dinner meeting where the students presented their findings to adult leaders in 2003. The program was a success, with positive comments received from both the youth and adult participants: “It was good because it gave us, the youth, a chance to express our opinion” and “Without taking the voice of our youth into account, the area will fail to move in a positive direction in the future”. One-hundred percent of those completing evaluations agreed that the event was worth their “investment of time” (Exhibit 20). I presented the poster boards to several comprehensive planning meetings throughout the county to ensure that the visions of the county’s youth were shared with as many local leaders as possible. I felt that this was such an important strategy that I shared this program and my rationale for conducting the program with my Northern District colleagues in 2004 (Exhibit 21).

The result of these educational efforts has been a planning process that included all ten towns and the county itself working collaboratively to develop a county-wide comprehensive plan. In late 2005 and early 2006, all ten towns adopted their respective plans and the Iron County Board unanimously adopted the “Iron County Comprehensive Plan 2025” in May of 2006. This was the culmination of a multi-year, grass-roots planning process that created a vital document to shape future land use decisions in Iron County for the next 20 years.

Already, the adopted plans have supported local land use decisions. For example, the Saxon Town Board used their plan to support a zoning and subdivision decision regarding a proposed housing project over-looking Lake Superior. And the Iron County Board is currently pursuing a comprehensive update of their zoning ordinance to help implement the comprehensive plan.

On-Line Course – In 2002, UW-Extension announced a Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century program to fund the innovative use of new teaching technologies. I recognized this as an excellent opportunity to work with my colleagues in the development of teaching materials related to comprehensive planning. I wrote a proposal for funding under this program and received \$4,695 to create an on-line comprehensive planning course. I recruited state specialists and county educators and managed a two-year process that led to the development of an on-line course entitled “Balancing Private Property Rights With The Public Interest” (Exhibit 22). I shared this new course with my colleagues, including presentations at the Northeastern District In-service in 2004 and the Northern District In-service in 2005.

This was one of my first educational initiatives with UW-Extension which helped me to understand key educational programming concepts such as identifying the intended audience and developing curriculum. This experience has enhanced my own expertise with new teaching technologies and provided me an opportunity to work collaboratively with my colleagues. This timely educational resource will benefit both UW-Extension and the state as a whole by offering a new tool to assist communities address the controversial challenges related to private property rights and community planning. Comments received from educators who used this course and responded to an on-line evaluation included: “I think that you have built a wonderful course”, “I can see many ways to use this course” and “The information on this course is fantastic”.

3. COMMUNITY-BASED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Gogebic Range Leadership Academy – Prior to my employment with UW-Extension, I was a participant in the Gogebic Range Leadership Academy (GRLA), an eight-month leadership

development program. This leadership experience strengthened my own leadership skills and abilities, enabling me to become a much more effective community leader. Unfortunately, the academy was discontinued the following year. After my hire, I felt that offering this experience to more emerging leaders in Iron County was critical to supporting a strong and sustainable community development program.

A large part of my programming effort, therefore, has been devoted to re-creating the leadership academy and managing the highly successful program over the past four years. The leadership academy is a cooperative effort between UW-Extension, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension and the Iron County Development Zone Council. I am a very active and visible member of this partnership, designing program curriculum, developing evaluation tools and serving on the academy's Steering Committee and Executive Committee (Exhibit 23).

In addition to my organizational leadership, I also provided direct content education for a number of leadership programs (Exhibit 24). Each year I taught a Public Board Simulation to introduce participants to the many fiscal challenges facing local communities and to teach an approach to public body decision-making. To share this simulation with my colleagues and to obtain feedback on its usefulness, I presented the exercise to a state-wide audience at the Wisconsin Community Leadership Summit in 2006 (Exhibit 25). All program evaluations rated the workshop as either "good" or "excellent". Importantly, 71% of the participants reported that there was an "excellent" chance that they would use the materials presented in the program. At least one of the program participants applied this exercise in their own leadership academy. Evaluations from this program are also included in Exhibit 25.

Academy graduates have had a tremendous and positive impact on the community, as evidenced by their numerous contributions, such as creating new events, improving community facilities and serving on various community boards and commissions. The community recognized these contributions and awarded the leadership academy with the Gogebic Range Partnership Award in 2003. Starting in the 2004-05 academic year, the academy required program participants to conduct a community service project. As a result, the academy has made an even more significant impact on the community. Three new community projects have directly resulted from this effort, including a downtown ice-sculpture competition, a winter "family fun" day and improvements to a local arboretum.

As a two-state model, the GRLA has also caught the attention at the state levels, in both Wisconsin and Michigan. In 2006, the leadership academy's successful service-learning component was recognized as one of Wisconsin's Top Rural Development Initiatives by the Wisconsin Rural Partners. And in 2005, the academy was highlighted in MSU Extension's Developing Community Leadership guidebook as a model leadership development program.

I have evaluated the effectiveness of the leadership academy in a number of ways. At the conclusion of each academic year, participants self-assessed their level of competence before and after their academy experience on 25 learning objectives. Consistently, this self-assessment has shown that academy participants improved their leadership knowledge and skills by a significant 22% on a ten point scale. In fact, the clear majority of graduates noted some improvement on each of the 25 objectives as a result of their learning experience (Exhibit 26).

Several months following graduation, I sent participants a post-graduate evaluation to determine if the lessons learned in the academy were actually applied in the community. Participants consistently reported their application of the skills and knowledge learned. For example, 91% of the respondents agreed with the statement “The skills, techniques and knowledge that I learned in the academy have helped me improve my leadership abilities” and 100% of the respondents agreed that “The academy has given me a better understanding of my community which has enabled me to become a better leader” (Exhibit 27).

I also surveyed all academy participants and alumni specifically regarding my role in their leadership academy experience. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents rated my teaching and facilitating roles as “effective” or “very effective”. Equally high marks were given for my communication roles (98%) and my management and organizational roles (95%). A sample of comments from this evaluation tool include: “Will is very knowledgeable in business and leadership roles. He also helped me gain an understanding of how to apply my skills to become a better leader” and “I have found Will to be a great communicator and therefore teacher with his involvement in the academy” (Exhibit 28).

After the most recent leadership class, I organized a focus group comprised of two graduates from each academic year. I facilitated a focused discussion regarding several key programming issues. As a result of this feedback, we are currently in the process of refining the leadership academy. For example, we will be offering additional training in leadership skills and project management skills and will accent the program with additional two-way communication opportunities and interactive exercises. These changes will enhance the academy and enable us to offer new and emerging leaders with the best leadership training experience possible.

“Bridging the Borders” Joint Programming Initiative – As part of the “Bridging the Borders” joint programming effort between UW-Extension and MSU Extension, I am collaborating with colleagues from both states in the crafting of curriculum and resources to create leadership development “modules” for use by new leadership programs or to enhance existing programs. I believe that this will be an important effort that will create even more leadership development resources for educators in both states and will strengthen our relationship with neighboring Michigan that will result in further joint programming opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Upon reflection, I realize that I have matured professionally. Much of my early teachings were based on my prior professional experiences. As time went on, more of my educational work focused on University-level research, thereby broadening my programming beyond anecdotal messages to proven, tested and defensible positions. I have also enhanced my appreciation for programming evaluation. I more fully realize their impact not just on my own programming efforts, but on the efforts of others who choose to build upon my contributions to the profession.

I continue to enjoy my educational programming at the local level. I enjoy the people and groups that I work with and the positive outcomes that result. What I enjoy most, however, is working with my colleagues to develop new educational resources, sharing those resources with others and testing their effectiveness. This combination of local and state-wide programming ensures that I remain effective and intellectually challenged, and I believe, will benefit UW-Extension, my colleagues and the residents of Wisconsin for years to come.