



Extension Connection

Monthly Highlights – January 2015

Mexican holiday traditions – Posadas and Piñatas

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Community, Natural Resource, and Economic Development Educator - Special Assignment: 2014 in Review

ENERGY – Fond du Lac County set a goal four years ago to reduce its energy consumption by 10% by 2015, but most county employees are not aware of this goal. In 2014 Noreen O'Brien recruited employees to join an Energy Communications Team. The team has met four times and initiated a short newsletter to educate co-workers about energy issues at work and at home.

WATER – O'Brien began work on a county-wide survey to administer to well owners. O'Brien developed a four-page questionnaire to determine the effectiveness of our well water educational efforts, which include coordinating testing and making presentations in different towns each year. Having used this model for 25 years, the department is curious whether it has prompted change among rural residents. Results will improve and better target the educational efforts of UW-Extension, Land and Water Conservation, Health Department, and Code Enforcement. O'Brien collaborated with the UW-River Falls Survey Research Center staff on the questionnaire, the mailings and data analysis. She spoke at several town meetings and wrote to town councils about supporting the project financially. She applied for a corporate grant, which was not awarded. Tscheschlok will apply for another grant in February 2015.

RADON – O'Brien educated the public about radon in multiple ways. She tailored news releases with data specific to readers' zip codes (Fond du Lac, Ripon, and Campbellsport). She set up a table display at the Parade of Homes (a tour of new houses), spoke at the Ripon Home Show, and was interviewed on the radio. In addition to using a grant for print and radio ads about radon, she ran a Facebook ad at Halloween, using a "spooky" theme and generating more than 30,000 "impressions" among Facebook users. After she found out that Mercury Marine was holding a health fair for its employees, she offered to staff a table there. Sixty employees stopped at the table for conversation and/or materials and 11 of them purchased radon test kits.

CLEAN SWEEP – Ten tons of hazardous waste were diverted from landfills and groundwater when more than 150 households, farms and businesses participated in Clean Sweep for Fond du Lac County in May. O'Brien had promoted the event with flyers in English and Spanish, as well as one for low-literacy audiences such as immigrants. Besides speaking on the radio and sending press releases to print media, she e-mailed information to town clerks to inform their residents and encouraged Facebook users to share a post. One hundred and seven participants said they had not been involved in the collection before. After the event, O'Brien reported the results to the provider of the grant and to the general public. The 2015 Clean Sweep will be held at the Fond du Lac County Fairgrounds on Saturday, May 2, from 9 am – 12 pm.

Newly Organized Food Pantry

Amanda Miller, Nutrition Coordinator and Family Living Educator, is providing ongoing assistance to the Holyland Food Pantry, a newly organized food pantry in Fond du Lac County. The food pantry is located at St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Malone.

With UW-Extension and WISCAP resources, Miller provided guidance in the following areas: food safety and food storage of donated foods, donation of prepared and perishable foods, food drives, preparing food packages for families of various sizes using current food costs, using food banks (such as Feeding America and/or the Commodities Program), fundraising, publicity, and connecting families to community resources (such as FoodShare, formerly known as Food Stamps).

Holyland Food Pantry members have recently attended the Food Providers Resource Group meeting. At the meeting, they had the opportunity to make partnerships with other, more experienced, food pantry directors and to promote their food pantry. The Food Providers Group's purpose is to serve as a networking and resource group for food pantries and hot meal programs in Fond du Lac and Green Lake Counties. Meetings are facilitated by Miller and take place quarterly. As a result of this meeting, the Holyland Food Pantry has toured 4 food pantries in the area and met with the contact for Feeding America.

The food pantry's first distribution took place in December and provided food to 18 families and 65 individuals. The next distribution will take place on January 23rd.

Mexican Holiday Traditions

Araceli Oswald, 4-H Youth Development Assistant; the North Fond du Lac School District and the Friendship Learning Center joined efforts to bring a special holiday celebration to the Latino families. Mrs. Melanie Cowling, Principal of the Friendship Learning Center, and five other staff members reached out to the Latino families to invite them to this event. They also provided food and drinks for everyone and distributed informational material for parents.

Araceli Oswald welcomed everyone and gave a presentation about Mexican holiday traditions, including "Posadas," a series of 9 days of festivities; and "Piñatas," origins and symbolisms were explained. She also prepared a craft for the children and made a piñata to break at the end of the celebration.

More than 70 people participated in this event. Parents and grandparents were engaged in the celebration, helped with the activities and taught their children traditional songs. Some of them expressed their gratitude, not only for the party but, for keeping this traditions alive. They also expressed their interest in participating in similar events in the future.

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