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Red Carpet curriculum rolls out small-town hospitality mat

Key players in small-town promotion could well be the cashiers at local gas stations or grocery stores.

Front-line, hourly employees are often overlooked resources in attracting tourism dollars, said Connie Francis, a University of Nebraska Rural Initiative Extension Educator based in North Platte. Front-line employees often are asked for directions, restaurant recommendations or entertainment that could result in more dollars spent more places in the community, Francis said. However, these employees — and their supervisors — often don't recognize their value for community promotion.

Enter Custer County NestBuilders, a local economic development organization, which sought extension's help in training front-line employees. In response, Francis and Cheryl Burkhardt-Kriesel, community development specialist based in Scottsbluff, developed the Red Carpet Service hospitality training curriculum in partnership with Rural Initiative.

"One of the keys to the project's success is that it wasn't just our project, it came from NestBuilders," Francis said. "They did all the recruiting."

Burkhardt-Kriesel said the hospitality curriculum and three-week training course is customized for each community.

"There are core elements, but we

develop the local resource piece as we teach the course," Burkhardt-Kriesel said. "That way the community can continue giving the training, which we recommend doing once or twice a year."

The first class of more than 30 participants included a tour of the community to point out local hidden treasures, such as the Olive Ranch and the Victoria Springs recreation area, and a sensitivity to travelers' needs. For example, different restaurant recommendations might be given to an elderly couple, a couple in their late 20s and a family with young children.

"We do activities and some of those activities focus on recognizing different groups needing different things. We talked about what those people could want," Burkhardt-Kriesel said.

The class also includes pointers on giving clear travel directions.

NestBuilders director David Green said the response has been good from local business owners and supervisors.

"They think it's going to be a very valuable tool for the community," Green said. "Having a good first impression with a real human being when you first visit the community — that's the key to the whole thing."

Francis said a post-training survey



Cheryl Burkhardt-Kriesel

Connie Francis, Rural Initiative Extension Educator based in North Platte, works with business people such as David Green, manager of the Grocery Kart in Broken Bow, to enhance hourly employees' role as a resource to promote their communities to tourists.

showed the greatest change occurred in participants' interest and ability to share information. In addition to area attractions, participants discussed other local tourism resources and the importance of tourism dollars to their hometown.

One participant said the training was "very fun and enlightening. Gave me new enthusiasm for my job." Another said, "I saw a 'buy-in' from all (participants). I certainly was hooked."

Future training sessions are planned in Broken Bow, Columbus and Hartington.

"We had the idea," Green said, "but the expertise of the extension educators was what we needed to present the ideas and teach the class."

— Barbara Rixstine

Francis can be contacted at (308) 696-6739; Burkhardt-Kriesel at (308) 632-1234.

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Dean's comments

For people unfamiliar with Cooperative Extension, understanding our program and support networks may seem rather complex.

For them, I describe extension as a unique partnership and a key component in the land-grant university mission of teaching, research and extension education. All three components are needed and are closely intertwined to make our land-grant university model work — so well that it has been copied in several other countries.

At its simplest level, extension education teaches research-based information from the university to people throughout the state to help improve their livelihoods and quality of life.

Extension programs center on issues of critical importance. Take, for example, our recent work in fulfilling the need of educating the public about methamphetamine, or about legal guardianship. These are just two programs that show how extension has grown and evolved to meet a myriad of challenges facing our constituents.

Just as extension's programming has evolved through the years, so has our funding.

Fifty years ago, each of extension's supporting entities — state, federal, local (county) — provided nearly equal funding for quality extension education that helped make this state great.

That changed in Nebraska in the 1990s. Amid property tax relief for local taxpayers, the state increased its support for extension education. County contributions lessened.

Over the past 10 years or so, there has been another funding shift for extension education, this time to competitive federal grants.

Nebraska extension educators and specialists compete very successfully in this arena, and I am proud of how they do so on behalf of Nebraska. Currently, 25 percent of total extension programming is funded through grants. I believe that University of

Nebraska Cooperative Extension is well positioned to continue providing educational programs of quality and integrity for Nebraskans in today's world.

You are the reason extension exists. You, your family members, your neighbors, your community and all the communities throughout Nebraska. Visit us at any of our 83 offices that are meeting Nebraskans' educational needs in each county in our state. See and hear what is familiar — and what is new and different, too.

Elbert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension



Elbert Dickey

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There is no charge for this newsletter. Each issue describes a few of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's ongoing, widely diverse programs. The newsletter is an informal report to interested taxpayers. Please send comments, questions and subscription requests to: Editor, *Cooperative Extension Connect*, 108 Agricultural Communications Building, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918.

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Partners with Nebraska

Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.



University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is part of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Acreage clinics offer basic education

City dwellers new to country acreages often find living away from paved roads and parking lots different than imagined. While country surroundings still support their choice, many find rural living a lot of work: digging wells, planning septic tanks, controlling wildlife damage; as well as learning lifestyle strategies for tractor traffic, environmental odors and pesticides.

"Many new acreage owners didn't grow up on a farm and don't really know what country living means," said Sarah Browning, a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educator based in Fremont.

Browning and Don Janssen, extension educator based in Lincoln, lead a team that presented annual Acreage Expos the last several years. Participant comments showed a need for more in-depth information, so in 2004 and 2005, the team conducted 17 Acreage Insights: Rural Living clinics in eastern Nebraska. Each clinic, attended by 10 to 60

participants, features a two-hour presentation on a single topic. Other clinics also are offered in central and western Nebraska.

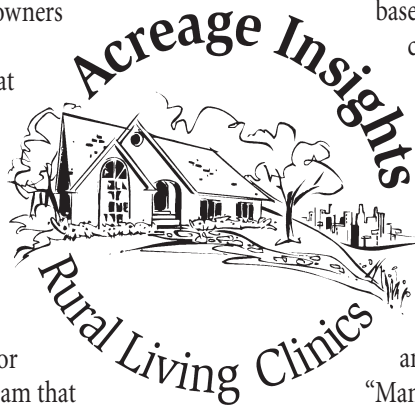
In addition, the Acreage and Small Farms Insights Web site, <http://acreage.unl.edu>, features research-based information on water and waste management, landscaping and other topics.

Tom Dorn, extension educator based in Lincoln, said he gets calls daily about acreage living. He estimates there are currently about 4,500 acreages in Lancaster County alone, with the number increasing statewide.

"I get a lot of questions about pastures, ponds and septic systems," Dorn said. "Many new acreage owners didn't grow up with any of that. ... This is basic education for them."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Browning can be contacted at (402) 727-2775.



Sandhills ranch a learning experience

Words and pictures help teach about agriculture and natural resources, but can't tell the whole story. Textbook science gets an educational boost at the annual University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Youth Field Day at the Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory near Whitman.

Each spring more than 100 students from area high schools participate in hands-on agricultural activities at the 12,800-acre working ranch and research facility.

Brent Plugge, who initiated the field day and now is an extension educator based in Kearney, said students get a real-world view of agriculture by participating in faculty-led presentations and observing applied laboratory research.

"They don't just see the water cycle on a

computer screen, they're at the well, making observations," Plugge said. Not only do students experience the agriculture first-hand, he added, high school instructors can show the research and science behind their classroom lessons.

During the day students also receive information about enrolling and studying at the university.

To date, 870 students have participated in the field days. More than half the 2004 participants reported in post-visit surveys that they received new information on biosecurity, the difference between groundwater and surface water, native plants, ultrasound testing, global positioning systems and other topics.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Plugge can be contacted at (308) 236-1235.

Survey pinpoints Nebraska City tourist attractions

Dollars with dividends. That's what tourism dollars mean to most communities.

Each tourist dollar spent in Nebraska is respent in the state to create an overall impact of \$2.70, according to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

To cash in on tourism spending, the Nebraska City Tourism and Events staff turned to University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension to learn what visitors like about its community.

The result was a professional, 25-question survey designed to discover who was visiting, from where and why. The survey was developed by Randy Cantrell, community development specialist, and Carol Ringenberg, extension educator based in Nebraska City. Survey data like this helps pinpoint the city's tourism needs and opportunities, Cantrell said.

About 200 surveys were given to visitors in 2003 in July and during the famed Applejack Festival in September. About 80 percent were returned, which Cantrell said represented about 600 visitors.

Responses from visitors in nine states showed, among other information, that they viewed Nebraska City as a weekend day trip or a romantic getaway, citing the area's scenic beauty and small-town feel as important or very important to the enjoyment of their experience. About 70 percent of the respondents were repeat visitors; a small percentage had been there almost 50 times. Approximately one-third of the visitors used the city's Web site to plan their trips and another third used it to find Nebraska City's offerings, such as Arbor Lodge State Park, the Lied Center and Kimmel Orchard.

"Now Nebraska City can more effectively market the community based on an improved understanding of the community's image, as seen through the eyes of visitors," Cantrell said.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Cantrell can be contacted at (402) 472-1772.

Crop, irrigation management focus of Pumpkin Creek watershed

In the semi-arid climate just shy of the Wyoming border, Alton Lerwick's two center pivots sit on sandy-loam soil, waiting to irrigate his crops. Because of the region's declining groundwater levels and sixth year of drought, however, only one pivot can operate at a time.

Lerwick handles the situation by planting sunflowers under one pivot and wheat under another, because their prime irrigation times are different.

Like scores of other Panhandle producers, today Lerwick, of Lyman, farms with less water. Kirk Laux of Bridgeport does too. Both participate in a new University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension demonstration project to conserve groundwater in the Pumpkin Creek watershed.

Gary Hergert, soil specialist at Scottsbluff, heads up the project, which emphasizes no-till, crop rotations and careful irrigation management. Using less irrigation water here is a better option than fully irrigating some land and returning some to dryland, Hergert said.

University studies in southwest Nebraska showed when irrigation water was reduced by half, crop income was reduced by 20 percent, Hergert said. However, he said going to dryland from irrigated farming in the Panhandle would reduce income by more than half.

In the Pumpkin Creek watershed, 40,000 acres are irrigated with groundwater. In 2004 and 2005, groundwater irrigators are allowed 14 inches of water. Lerwick gets only 7 inches or less because the groundwater is depleted midway through the season and takes the rest of the year to recover.

"We would have had problems even without a drought," Lerwick said, adding for cow/calf feed he now plants oats instead of alfalfa to save water.

The critical situation has been years in the making. More than 20 years ago, surface



David Ostdieck

Gary Hergert, Cooperative Extension soil specialist, leads an educational demonstration project to conserve groundwater in the Pumpkin Creek watershed using soil moisture probes, no-till farming and other techniques. From left are Lane Darnall of Harrisburg, Kirk Laux of Bridgeport, Hergert and Dean Yonts, irrigation specialist.

water rights closed in the Pumpkin Creek region; four years ago, new irrigation well drilling ceased.

Recently one surface water user contended groundwater irrigation infringed on its water supply: the Nebraska Supreme Court agreed in January, Hergert said, adding the meaning of the decision is unclear, as the case was sent back to district court and similar cases are pending.

Both Lerwick and Laux seek ways to stretch what little water there is. Laux purchased a farm in the Pumpkin Creek basin before water allocation was even discussed.

"We would like to find solutions to allow some of us to stay producing," said Laux, who is involved with the family's farming, certified seed and feedlot operations. "We're all in this together."

Laux said he put meters on his irrigation wells before it was required, and removed the end guns from his eight pivots to save water. He added no-till has "huge" benefits to save

water and maintain crop viability.

No-till leaves crop residue on the ground to trap moisture. However, dry beans, in which Nebraska ranks third nationally, is one Panhandle crop that cannot now be no-tilled, Hergert said, adding that will be one aspect of his upcoming research.

Extension's three-year demonstration project, funded through a Natural Resources Conservation Service grant, builds on irrigation management studies from other parts of the state while focusing on western Nebraska climate, soil and crops.

The project includes field day demonstrations and economic analysis of various water management scenarios.

"In Pumpkin Creek we'll never be back to the glory days of full irrigation," Hergert said, "but our goal is to provide some stability with the limited amount of water that can be used."

— Cheryl Alberts

Hergert can be contacted at (308) 632-1372.

Legal guardian responsibilities now can be better understood

Mary Evans knew a 30-minute videotape intended to explain her duties as a legal guardian fell far short of what people need to know. Even as an experienced guardian, she had questions the video didn't answer.

Evans, her husband York County Judge Curtis Evans, and others sought help from University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension to develop a guardians' training curriculum.

"It has turned out to be wonderful," Judge Evans said.

Extension's involvement has provided a college-like class that helps guardians become much better prepared to know their responsibilities and limitations, he added.

When people have no previous arrangements, county court judges assign guardians to the elderly, people with mental or physical disabilities, or children who cannot make deci-

sions for themselves, or can make only limited decisions.

About 2,000 guardians and conservators, or people who handle finances for others, are appointed annually in Nebraska, said Eileen Krumbach, extension educator based in York and one of the guardianship curriculum writers.

Well-intended people willing to take on guardianship responsibilities may not fully understand or know how to complete them, Krumbach said. While the guardians' first responsibility is to seek their ward's best interests, guardians also must complete and file legal documents, and make medical, financial and housing decisions for their charges.

Formerly court-appointed guardians received the videotape as training. Now, in a yearlong pilot project, court-appointed guard-

ians in eight of the state's 12 judicial districts attend a three-hour training session taught by extension educators. Attorneys volunteer their time at the training to answer legal questions.

As of early March, 75 guardians and professionals interested in this area have taken the training, offered every 90 days.

Extension also developed six short publications to inform people about various aspects of guardianship.

Charles Campbell, former York County attorney and one attorney volunteer for the program, promoted extension as a partner in the training and curriculum development.

"Extension is a good resource in a number of areas in providing services to the public," Campbell said. "It has really worked out."

Mary Evans said the guardian's role in Nebraska is to provide as much freedom as possible for the ward, not to totally control him or her.

In addition to the writing of the curriculum, LB 469 was introduced in the Nebraska Legislature to create the Office of Public Guardian. This office would provide professional staff to be appointed when no other person is available. The bill remains in committee.

Krumbach said in October the guardianship curriculum will be reviewed by entities which helped develop it, including the Nebraska Supreme Court, with one possibility of it expanding into all 12 judicial districts.

— Cheryl Alberts

Krumbach can be contacted at (402) 362-5508.



York County Judge Curtis Evans and his wife Mary sought help from Cooperative Extension educator Eileen Krumbach, left, to develop a guardians' training curriculum.

Would you like to treat a friend?

Do you know someone who would like to receive *Cooperative Extension Connect* who isn't currently receiving a copy? Please send the name and address to: Editor, *Cooperative Extension Connect*, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918. We'll do the rest. Thanks.

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Field pea livestock rations high in energy and protein

When Gordon Poss left the oil business in Scotland and returned to farming in the Midwest, he bought a place near Kimball. Adding to the farm's attraction was the nearby University of Nebraska Panhandle Research and Extension Center at Scottsbluff.

Cooperative Extension specialists there are a ready resource in answering Poss' questions about cropping practices.

When Poss started raising self-sufficient, long-haired, long-horned Scottish Highland cattle, he sought help from extension beef specialist Ivan Rush at Scottsbluff. Rush worked with Poss on formulating a feed ration containing field peas, a relatively new

crop in western Nebraska.

"The cattle do really well on it," Poss said, adding that unlike some other high-protein sources of energy, field peas don't cause gassy bloat.

Dried peas are yellow or green, and average three-eighths inch in diameter.

Through Rush, Nebraska is a partner with North Dakota and South Dakota in a pea production and feeding study funded by a federal grant. Rush estimates field peas grow on about 20,000 Nebraska acres in western Nebraska's semi-arid climate.

The peas fit well into a wheat/summer fallow rotation, help break crop disease cycles and

add nitrogen to the soil, Rush said.

Peas sold for human consumption can reach \$10 per bushel, Rush said, but food-grade peas cannot be cracked or shriveled. For that reason, and because they are nutrient-dense, Rush and others see field peas as a viable livestock feed.

Rush's cattle feeding trials have found field pea energy value is 90 percent, as much as corn. Pea protein value averages 24 percent, similar to soybean meal on a per pound of protein basis.

Rush also found cattle easily digest field peas without processing. He said peas would work well in range cubes because of their binding qualities.

Vernon Anderson, animal scientist at North Dakota State University (NDSU), which is part of the three-state study, said North Dakota ranchers now ask for calf feed with peas. Anderson also said planting wheat into pea stubble can increase wheat yields by 10 or 15 bushels.

Greg Lardy, an NDSU beef cattle specialist who earned his doctorate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1997, said peas fit well into small-grain rotations, and are becoming more common in cattle, sheep, swine and poultry rations.

Forage peas are another possibility. Rush plans to study their value as hay, and Poss plans to grow them this year for his 150 Scottish cattle.

Poss, whose own field pea yields have been low because of weather and weed factors, said his wheat yields improved as much as 50 percent when planted into pea stubble. He also said peas could be a factor why his cattle's meat is lean and tender, a selling point for his direct-buy customers.

Extension, Poss said, has been "vital" to his operation.

"Farming is a dynamic industry," Poss said. "It changes all the time. I rely on the university and extension to keep up on that kind of thing."

— Cheryl Alberts

Rush can be contacted at (308) 632-1245.



Ivan Rush, Cooperative Extension beef specialist, formulates cattle rations containing field peas and studies their effects.

Cow-calf producers find new ways to save money

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's meetings on low-cost cow/calf production go on the road, and people come.

"Over the years I think we've made a connection with the real producer," said Terry Gompert, extension educator based in Center. Often the three-hour meetings attract producers who would not attend larger, regional extension meetings, he added.

Northeast Nebraska is home to an estimated 30 percent of the state's total cow/calf inventory, Gompert said. By providing 20- to 30-minute presentations on topics such as consumer preferences, direct marketing, pasture weed control, grazing strategies, bull selection and more, extension educators and specialists enhance producer profitability.

"They're looking for new ways to save money," and the extension meeting topics combine data and common sense, Gompert said. Each meeting offers three to five topics.



Terry Gompert

Cooperative Extension's meetings on low-cost cow/calf production help producers such as Brad Young of Wausa learn valuable resource-saving tips for his herd.

Brad Young of Wausa has participated in at least five cow/calf production meetings. Young said he always learns something new from fellow producers as well as presenters. One of the more valuable tips from the meetings was how to make better use of feeding cornstalks for his 140-cow herd to reduce the expense of feeding hay, he said.

Gompert said 1,450 producers have attended 79 meetings in Northeast Nebraska

during the past seven years. Their average herd size is 197 cows, for an estimated total of 33,000. The meetings help people directly involved with the state's largest industry know extension is in the community and cares about their economic well-being, he said.

— Cheryl Alberts

Gompert can be contacted at (402) 288-5611.

'In the Cattle Markets' recaps beef market analysis

Cattle producers and beef marketers have the latest market analysis — in simplified form — available at the tip of their fingers.

"In the Cattle Markets," an electronic newsletter, provides concise cattle market updates and trends each week. Written by three agricultural economists, including two from University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, it is available without cost at <http://lmic.info>.

Darrell Mark, livestock marketing specialist based in Lincoln and one of the writers, said the site gets 800 to 1,500 direct hits a week and its information is reprinted in several other media outlets.

"There's a barrage of information coming at you" from other sources, Mark said. "To pick up one page and get a clear, quick synopsis of what's going on is very helpful to decision makers."

The newsletter was the first such publication in the nation to provide a university economist's market analysis of the impacts of BSE and on government efforts to halt obesity in the United States.

The newsletter primarily aims to help livestock producers make better-informed marketing decisions. It also provides timely

trends and price information to meat processors, lenders, educators and journalists, Mark said.

"In the Cattle Markets" is distributed by the Livestock Marketing Information Center in Denver, a data distribution office that grew out of extension at the national level. Co-writers are Dillon Feuz, agricultural marketing specialist based in Scottsbluff, and James Mintert, a livestock marketing specialist at Kansas State University.

— Lori McGinnis

Mark can be contacted at (402) 472-1796.

**Check out Cooperative Extension's
Web site at: <http://extension.unl.edu>**

EDGE education boosts business savvy

More than two decades of assisting weight lifters at the Fire House Gym in North Platte made owners of the popular gym realize they needed a lift of their own.

Bunny Hinde found it in 2003, through a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension business training course called EDGE — Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs.

“I felt our business was stale after 23 years and needed new direction,” said Hinde, who owns the gym with her husband Pat and brother-in-law Tim. “The EDGE class helped us look at our business from a different perspective, research options and learn new marketing skills, which all provided positive results.”

Gym owners saw increased revenues of 7.4 percent the first year after taking EDGE and 15.3 percent the second year, Hinde said.

EDGE “provided a road map and a direction for us. I am honestly astonished by the knowledge I gained,” said Hinde, who also analyzed the needs of members, earned an international certification in fitness and started a personal training business.

More than 2,000 people have participated in this entrepreneurial education course since it began in 1993, said Marilyn Schlake, program associate director. The course consists of 40 to 50 hours of classroom instruction and is held throughout Nebraska. Participants are interested in starting their own business, are already in business, or want to sell or transfer their business.

Past participants recently evaluated EDGE through surveys and gave glowing reports, Schlake said.

Survey responses show 71 percent of the businesses participating in the training increased their sales and 55 percent increased the types of products and services sold. At least 90 percent of businesses responding reported increased business skills, self-confidence, dedication and networking opportunities.

“It’s very hands-on, very practical information they can use immediately in their business,” Schlake said, adding “the education is directly improving the businesses and the individuals themselves.”

Jennifer Leefers of Otoe expanded her

marketing communications firm after taking EDGE three years ago. Before then, WriteTime Communications simply provided writing and marketing consulting services.

“EDGE helped me envision a more comprehensive approach that would better meet the needs of my business clients,” Leefer said.

She now has expanded her offerings to include graphic design, printing, apparel and promotional items. She also hired an employee and added a 600-square-foot home office.

“EDGE gave me the insight and confidence to turn my little side job into a growing marketing communications firm,” she said.

Tim Parr had no experience owning a business when he opened Sigsbee’s Bar-B-Que in Lincoln. He took the EDGE course at the recommendation of his loan officer.

“It helped me a great deal,” Parr said. “It helped me better manage what I have. The course is excellent.”

— **Lori McGinnis**

*Schlake can be contacted at
(402) 472-4138.*



Chris Beckner

Bunny Hinde, back, an owner of Fire House Gym in North Platte, assists Tyann Nansel at the gym. Hinde says the gym increased revenues after she took Cooperative Extension’s EDGE program.

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