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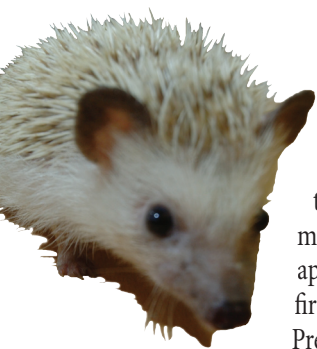


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Creatures help expand children's curiosity, knowledge

Chuck the hedgehog might seem an unlikely teacher, but the mammal with the prickly appearance is helping first-graders in Sue Guild's Prescott Elementary School classroom become

better learners.

Chuck is a classroom resident because of University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension's Our Zoo to You program, which uses animals to teach inquiry-based science and other subjects. More than 2,000 Lincoln-area students have participated in the program's first five years.

Tiffany Heng-Moss, extension plant-insect interactions specialist, said the children "love it. They are so excited when these animals come into their classroom."

Students involved in the program hone their science process skills, as well as improve their science vocabulary, Heng-Moss said.

Program sponsors include extension, the UNL Department of Entomology, the UNL College of Education and Human Sciences, and Lincoln's Children's Zoo. Grants have financed it.

The program was presented to kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers as an unusual

and effective method to teach inquiry science — a science process in which students develop their own investigations and determine the answers with hands-on activities.

The zoo loans small reptiles, birds and mammals such as geckos, doves and rabbits. The entomology department has provided arthropods such as hissing cockroaches and millipedes. A zookeeper regularly visits the classrooms to monitor conditions of the animals.

Up to two dozen teachers in Lincoln Public Schools and schools within a 50-mile radius of Lincoln participate each year, Heng-Moss said. Teachers are required to attend an animal-handling workshop before the animals enter the classroom. The children have the responsibility of caring for the animals and using them in classroom projects.

Guild has participated in Our Zoo to You since it started and has had a variety of animals in her classroom. Her students do research on the animals. They measure and weigh the animals to learn about dimensions during their math studies. They learn new verbs and adjectives to describe their animals in writing assignments. For their science lessons, students develop hypotheses about an animal's biology and behavior, then conduct experiments. For example, they discussed whether a millipede would crawl over a hand, then experimented to see that it did.

Because most children love animals, they are more focused on classroom projects than they would

be without them, Guild said.

"We really integrate science with the zoo animals into everything we do," Guild said. "Students just thrive on it."

Program evaluations have shown the majority of children exposed to the animals have mastered inquiry-based science, Heng-Moss said. That is, they aren't just being told answers, they are finding the answers themselves, she said.

— Lori McGinnis

Heng-Moss can be contacted at (402) 472-8708.



Brett Hampton

Sue Guild, a first-grade teacher at Prescott Elementary School in Lincoln, examines Chuck the hedgehog with students Anna Jungck, left, and Royla Bush. Guild uses the hedgehog to teach inquiry-based science in extension's Our Zoo to You program.

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Dean's comments

In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we're deeply committed to our land-grant mission of taking the resources of the university to the residents of this state. Research, teaching and extension education are closely intertwined to provide Nebraskans the most benefit possible.

We see ourselves as partners with Nebraska. Our partners help us identify needs and meet them; they provide insights and wisdom that can help us all, working together, grow, focus and apply the knowledge each of us brings as we work together for Nebraskans and Nebraska's future.

Often in extension we have the privilege of linking partners, of bringing people together for the good of individuals, our communities and our state.

Examples of partnerships abound in this issue of *Connect*. One is extension's work with Habitat for Humanity to help protect children from lead poisoning that can occur from lead in soil.

Not only are Habitat for Humanity and extension working together providing education to help protect children, others collaborate by providing grants to make this work possible. These include the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Famed coach Vince Lombardi put it well when he once said, "People who

work together will win, whether it be against complex football defenses, or the problems of modern society."

Extension has an exciting partnership with the UNL College of Fine and Performing Arts (FPA) that's benefiting Nebraska communities. You can read about that in this *Connect*, too.



Elbert Dickey

Soon after FPA Dean Giacomo Oliva arrived in 2001 he contacted me about the possibility of students teaching youth art and theater. This collaboration through summer camps has helped scores of children discover their own talents, find new ways of looking at things and become more confident.

These are just two examples — there are

many, many others.

Often faculty in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources have appointments that combine teaching, research and extension education. This helps their work dovetail seamlessly as faculty first discover new knowledge through research, then apply that knowledge in our classrooms and laboratories through on-campus teaching, and across Nebraska through extension education.

Yes. We highly value our partnerships. We work hard to be good partners with Nebraska.

Elbert Dickey

Dean and Director

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

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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.

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Diabetes workshops lead to attitude changes, healthier eating habits

Jeannette Geisler of Bancroft had difficulty accepting the fact that she was diagnosed with diabetes three years ago, at age 70. Attending satellite diabetes workshops through University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension helped her come to terms with it.

“I have a different attitude now,” she said. Rather than “Why me?” she now says “I just go with the punches. I’ve accepted it.”

Geisler is one of approximately 2,000 people who have attended the free workshops, called Control Diabetes for Life, over the last five years. They are taught via two-way interactive distance education by Debra Schroeder, extension educator based in West Point, and others in 16 locations in Nebraska and South Dakota.

The workshops, held in March, June and November, are taught from distance education rooms at Wisner-Pilger, Scribner-Snyder, Norfolk and Madison high schools. Programs then are sent via satellite to locations between Valentine and Fremont in Nebraska and to Burke, S.D.

The workshops address different topics during each monthly session, but primarily focus on nutrition and medical updates about diabetes, Schroeder said.

“It’s a great need everywhere,” Schroeder said. “There are 18 million people with diabetes in the nation and it’s estimated there are another 10 million to 18 million undiagnosed cases.”

The workshops focus primarily on Type II diabetes, the most common and slowest progressing form of the disease that strikes adults at any age. However they also address Type I diabetes, a faster progressing disease that more commonly is diagnosed in children and young adults.

Schroeder teaches the workshops along with registered dietitian Mary Clare Stalp, registered nurse Stacie Peterson, and registered nurse and certified diabetes educator Phyllis Heimann. Participants come eager to learn and ask a lot of questions, she said. About half have attended more than one workshop.

Results have shown participants make statistically significant changes in their eating

behaviors. Making changes learned in the workshops saves people an estimated \$900 each, which they would have spent in extra medical costs and lost income had they not made the changes, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has calculated.

Geisler has attended about six workshops, initially at the urging of her daughter, Nancy Novak. Novak, who works in food service at Bancroft-Rosalee High School, attends to support her mother but also gains continuing education credits she needs to remain certified.

Novak said that since her mother has attended the workshops, she now pays more attention to food portion sizes and reads labels on food packages.

“It’s made both of us more aware,” she said.

Geisler said she has cut out fried foods and eats only whole-grain breads. Changing her eating habits has made her feel more energetic, she said.

She said it has been reassuring to see that she is not alone, and she now helps others attend the workshops.

“Next time I am taking a whole carload,” she said.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Schroeder can be contacted at (402) 372-6006.



Courtesy photo

Debra Schroeder, extension educator based in West Point, teaches a distance education workshop called Control Diabetes for Life.



Debra Schroeder

People with diabetes still may enjoy festive treats such as this no-sugar breakfast tea ring, pinwheels and low-sugar candy.

New talents, confidence discovered at art, theater youth camps

Seattle native Melinda Yale taught art at University of Nebraska-Lincoln state 4-H camps at Halsey and Alma last year, and said she came away better educated herself. She learned about Nebraska and its people. In addition, she said the children's genuine, direct and enthusiastic approach helped her become freer with her own art.

The 2006 UNL Fine and Performing Arts (FPA) graduate is one of several interns who has taught at UNL extension 4-H camps throughout the state. Now in its fourth year, the FPA-extension collaboration offers student interns an opportunity to learn what it is like to work with children and be an artist in a rural community. Youth have an opportunity to explore and experience hands-on fine and performing arts activities that otherwise would not be available to them.

Last year FPA interns taught at 4-H camps coordinated by Leanne Manning, extension educator based in Wilber, and Tammy Stuhr, extension associate based in Seward.

Besides the children discovering artistic talents and building confidence, the camps were a "really great connection to the university to show the kids there are creative majors," Stuhr said. "The kids absolutely loved it."

Manning agreed, saying children "learned different art forms, new ways of looking at things," and especially enjoyed instruction coming from college-age instructors.

The collaboration of FPA interns working with youth through 4-H came from Jack Oliva, dean of the Hixon-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts at UNL, and Elbert Dickey,

dean of UNL extension. The first camps were held in 2002, the year after Oliva arrived.

FPA interns in the community are "based in the spirit of outreach and engagement of the land-grant university," as is UNL, Oliva said, adding he wants to help make the arts a more significant part of outreach, and in the process help prepare artists and teachers for their futures.

"We have a responsibility to do more than just tell people the arts are important and worthy of study," he said.

Greg Parmeter is looking forward to teaching his love of theater to teens at the Big Red Summer Academic camps this summer, in between stints with the UNL Nebraska Repertory Theatre.

The FPA graduate student taught at the Seward camp last year and came away amazed by how quickly children became outgoing.

Parmeter grew up in a small South Dakota town and said he knows smaller communities don't always get the opportunity to bring in the arts, so he is glad to help make that happen in Nebraska.

Jeremie Memming, a Lincoln native and December FPA graduate, taught at the Wilber

camp, showing children artistic techniques and processes for various art mediums, such as pastels, still art, photographs, shadows and a soybean art project now in the town library.

One of Memming's students was Neil Emeigh, 12, of Wilber. Neil said he enjoyed learning art forms he didn't even know were art.

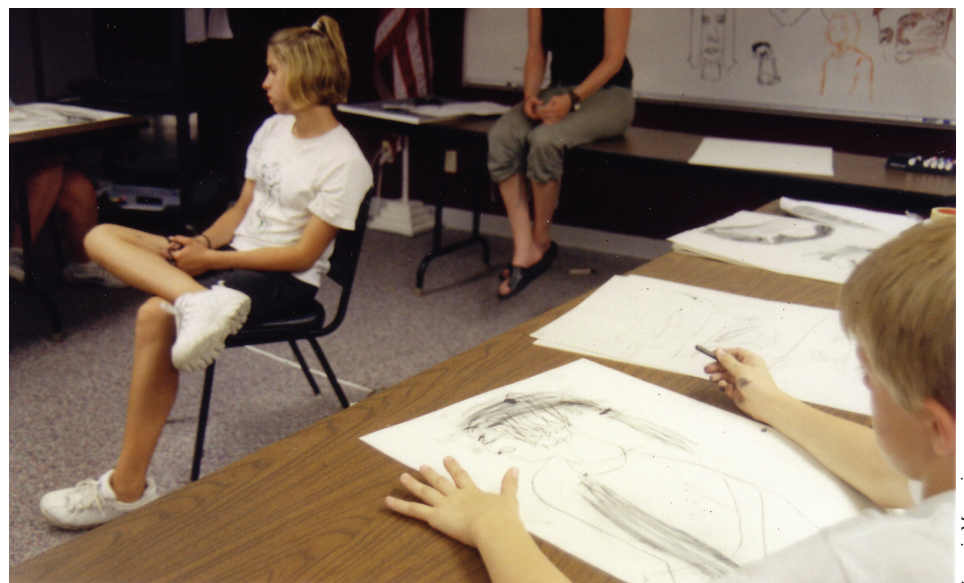
Lisa Emeigh said the camp was very good for her son.

"I was glad to see something that actually hits his talent," Emeigh said, adding that after attending camp her son received his own art table.

Yale, who just began a yearlong residency at a printmaking studio in Manhattan, N.Y., said she was privileged to learn about Nebraska by driving its roads, seeing and feeling its wide open spaces, and being involved in the energy and enthusiasm of the children who "seemed very hungry" for art. She said some children's art enjoyment became apparent at the camp free period when little boys chose art over activities such as water sports.

— Cheryl Alberts

Manning can be contacted at (402) 821-2151; Stuhr at (402) 643-2981.



Jeremie Memming

Youth in various communities have had the opportunity to learn about art and theater, thanks to a collaboration between the UNL Hixon-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts and UNL Extension. Neil Emeigh of Wilber sketches his subject, Shelby Hajek of Clatonia, at a 2005 camp in Wilber.

Annie's Project helps sort out the 'challenging business' of agriculture

Jan Spurgin spent some indoor time this spring making a special wall hanging for her kitchen near Paxton.

An embroidered piece attached to barn wood with the family brand shows her family's farm and livestock operation mission statement: "We strive to maximize profits, take care of our gifts and enjoy the journey." It is, Spurgin said, a good reminder of priorities when things don't go as planned.

The value of a mission statement is just one idea Spurgin and nearly 100 other women have gained as participants in University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension's Annie's Project.

Annie's Project provides knowledge for women involved in agriculture and agribusiness, said Beth Eberspacher, extension administrative coordinator. The program began in Illinois and now is offered in Iowa, Ohio, Wisconsin, Missouri and Indiana, as well as Nebraska. It aims to empower participants with the confidence, knowledge and support to manage information systems used in critical decision-making processes.

An estimated 16,000 Nebraska women have a role in agriculture and agribusiness day-to-day decision-making, Eberspacher said, and many want to grow their practical management skills and financial expertise.

"A lot of times women want information and don't know where to start," Eberspacher said.

Since early 2005, Annie's Project in Nebraska has taught business plans, communications, spreadsheets, finances and records, leases, retirement and estate planning, risk management, insurance and more.

Eberspacher and UNL extension educators coordinate the courses, which are led by UNL extension specialists and others. Three-hour sessions are weekly for six weeks.

Sometimes participants have homework, such as pulling together all documents and records to which they've signed their name. They learn the importance of ensuring their names are on the right documents to provide a solid credit history. This is especially important for participants who have never paid the bills or even written checks, Eberspacher said.

"Agriculture is a very challenging business," she said. "Anything we can do to help people be more successful and sustainable, we need to be doing."

In 2006 Annie's Project workshops were held at Seward, Loup City, Burwell, North Platte and Lexington. Spurgin said she was somewhat noncommittal when she decided to attend the first session. Her attitude changed.

"I didn't miss a night and didn't want to miss a night," said Spurgin, who called the North Platte workshop "vast in its scope." Even the three-hour topic of crop insurance flew by, she said.

Equally important as the workshop content, Spurgin said, is the refreshing, comfortable networking with other people with the same interests.

Molly Dixon of Pleasanton attended the Lexington Annie's Project courses with her mother-in-law, Judy Dixon, who keeps the family operation's books in addition to being an employment counselor for Vocational Rehabilitation at the Nebraska Department of Education.

Judy Dixon said it was important to give Molly some perspective of what farm management is like. She said she appreciated the number of younger women who attended.

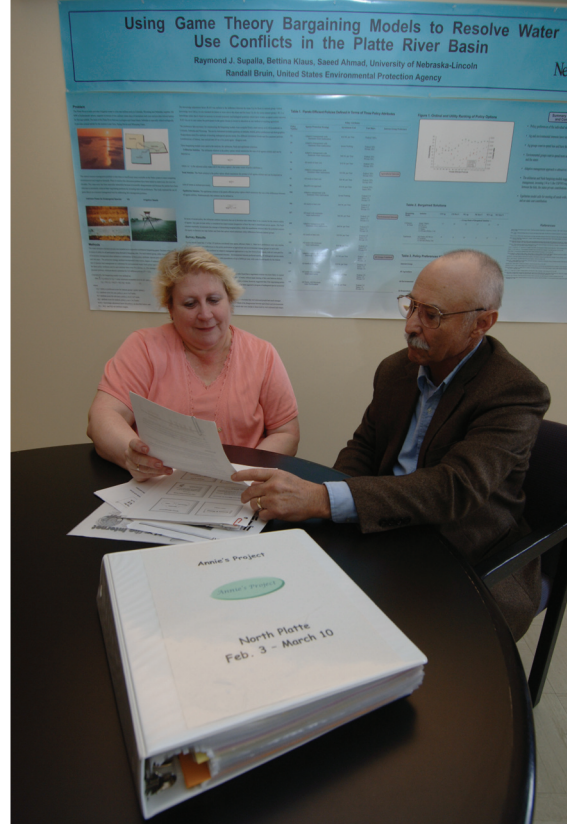
"People were coming from lots of different perspectives — we learned a lot from each other," she said. In addition, Judy Dixon said she became motivated to work on getting the farm records caught up.

Molly Dixon, who grew up in Ashland, said she found it helpful to learn some marketing terms, and to discover the unbiased extension resources and support available.

"Extension has a lot of resources people don't know about — I wish they did," she said.

— Cheryl Alberts

Eberspacher can be contacted at (402) 472-2039.



Brett Hampton

Beth Eberspacher coordinates extension's Annie's Project, which features speakers such as Al Prosch, coordinator of Pork Central, based at UNL. Annie's Project enhances women's knowledge about the business aspects of farming and ranching.



Jeremy Spurgin

Jan Spurgin of Sutherland made this wall hanging that shows the mission statement for her family's operation after participating in Annie's Project.

Check out Extension's Web site at:

<http://extension.unl.edu>

Landscaping helps prevent lead poison

Some metropolitan children are living safer from soils containing lead, thanks to a collaborative program between Habitat for Humanity and University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension.

Lead poisoning can lower children's IQs, requiring special education instruction; cause hyperactivity; even contribute to juvenile delinquency. Many east Omaha soils are contaminated from former lead refinery smokestack emissions and deteriorating lead-based paint, said Trenton Erickson, extension assistant based in Omaha.

Proper landscaping stabilizes and covers the lead in soils so it isn't inhaled or ingested by children, Erickson added. Lead poison-prevention landscaping techniques taught by extension also prevent soil erosion and improve water quality.

Habitat for Humanity provides extension with contact names for prospective clients for extension's educational classes on landscaping that is best for soils containing lead. Grants help fund plants and labor, Erickson said, adding he and the homeowners do some of the work themselves.

Since August 2004, eight east Omaha homes have been landscaped through the program. In addition, extension education workshops teach participants about the dangers of lead, as well as mulching, weed control, and selection and care of plants and turf.

"I've been impressed with how people take care of their plants," Erickson said.

Follow-up evaluations show all participants learned more about lead and how to conserve water in their landscapes, Erickson said, adding participants take on added pride and responsibility through their yards.

So far extension's seven visual, hands-on workshops have been attended by an average of 15 people each, Erickson said.

"One fellow came to all of them and (said he) learned something from each one," Erickson said.

— **Cheryl Alberts**

Erickson can be contacted at (402) 444-7836.

Addiction treatment includes nutrition, exercise

People who struggle with drug and alcohol addictions often ignore their nutritional needs. University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is helping to correct that for one group of people.

Extension personnel spend one hour a week for six weeks at the Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition (UIHC) in Omaha, a 45-day inpatient substance abuse treatment center.

Extension's Nutrition Education Program helps people in treatment learn how to take better care of themselves through proper nutrition and exercise, said Carrie Schneider-Miller, extension educator based in Omaha.

"When people are addicted to drugs or alcohol, they've gone away from normal nutrition," Schneider-Miller said. When adequate nutrition is lacking, she said, so is energy needed to recover from addictions.

In the last five years, extension has taught nutrition education to about 250 Native Americans at UIHC. They are taught about the

MyPyramid nutrition guide, how to read food labels, fat and cholesterol risks, food safety, food budgeting, meal preparation and more.

The class is taught in a fun and interactive way, with a variety of hands-on activities and games, Schneider-Miller said.

Elizabeth Bruck-Upton, extension assistant and registered dietitian, teaches the class and hears positive comments from participants. One man told Bruck-Upton that "you may have saved my life" as a result of the information learned, she said.

Numerous other participants expressed after the sessions that they planned to eat more low-fat foods, and more fruits and vegetables.

"In the beginning they don't know why they're learning this, but at the end they're very thankful," Bruck-Upton said.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Schneider-Miller can be contacted at (402) 444-7804.

Collaboration drives road plan ahead of the times

Drivers on Nebraska's rural roads see road signs that are part of an identification system for emergency responders.

Its forerunner, the first known system for identifying Nebraska's county roads, was developed close to 30 years ago in rural Adams County.

In 1978 a medical emergency there involved misdirections for an ambulance, and unfamiliar territory that resulted in death, said Susan Brown, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educator based in Hastings.

By the next year, Brown was campaigning with local extension clubs, law enforcement, civil defense, fire departments, hospital and others to build support and funds for a rural residential emergency identification system.

"There was a need and we filled the need," Brown said.

"We drove every mile of this county and assigned numbers," she added. North and south roads were assigned letters; east and west roads, numbers. Maps using these identifications were made for emergency use.

Rural homes had numbers corresponding with the road identifications. Each household received a sign for the end of its driveway and a sticker for the household telephone.

Signs were reflective white with red letters, made by state inmates who also made license plates. Personnel from the fire department and civil defense put in steel posts for the signs — more than 2,000 of them, Brown said.

"We were 15 to 20 years ahead of the times," she said.

Within the last 10 years, Brown said most major rural roads throughout the state have been named and identified by counties, and Adams County has the new system in place.

Today Brown educates people to another danger in the state, that of methamphetamine. As an extension educator, she continues to work with others to meet communities' needs.

— **Cheryl Alberts**

Brown can be contacted at (402) 461-7209.

Auto-guidance among technologies taken to the field

As the technological winds of change continue to sweep into production agriculture, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is helping producers and agribusiness learn more about the technology.

Extension in 2001 helped form the Nebraska Agricultural Technologies Association (NeATA), which annually co-sponsors an educational conference, clinics and www.neata.org.

Dave Varner, extension educator based in Fremont and NeATA secretary, said the non-profit association's conferences are so successful that last summer Farm Journal magazine ranked it as one of the 10 best agricultural conferences in America.

NeATA brings together a broad range of expertise and networking, including extension's academic, science-based knowledge, said Brandon Hunnicutt of Giltner, NeATA president.

"It's hard to learn all of the (technology) on your own," Hunnicutt said. "We're so grateful for the partnership. Without the benefit of the cooperation we wouldn't be where we are."

Membership is around 160 individuals, Varner said.

One precision agriculture technology NeATA has demonstrated is auto-guidance, which has "really taken off quickly," Varner said. Auto-guidance advantages include reduced compaction outside of the regular traffic pattern, reduced driver fatigue and



As production agriculture becomes more and more technologically advanced, the Nebraska Agricultural Technologies Association (NeATA) helps bring knowledge to the forefront at field days and other events.

stress, and the fact it can be helpful for less experienced drivers, Varner said.

Auto-guidance is especially useful for repeat traffic patterns involving planting, fertilizing and spraying, Varner said. For example, if a traffic pattern in an 80-acre field has a 10 percent overlap, that means an added expense of working or treating eight extra acres in just that field.

People are eager to know more about auto-guidance because as agricultural equipment continues to get larger, it can become more difficult to visually gauge distances, Varner said. Producers interested in expanding the number of row-crop acres they farm will use auto-guidance technologies to improve machinery efficiencies, reduce input costs and save time.

Depending on the type of product, auto-guidance systems can reduce overlap to as little as an inch, he said.

— Cheryl Alberts

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

Sophomores urged to think college

More than 500 high school sophomores in northeast Nebraska have already had the opportunity to think about what they want to do in their future careers, and how to get there.

The students were from 16 high schools and attended the first University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension Northeast Nebraska Career Day last October.

Jane Armstrong, extension educator based in Hartington, coordinated the event at Wayne State College, which had accommodations for that number of people.

Students need to be thinking early about their plans after high school, she said.

"It's important at the sophomore level because they need to start making decisions as a junior about where they are going to college," as well as what they want in a career, Armstrong said.

The day opened with a keynote address from state Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk, who addressed the importance of setting goals and studying hard.

Each student attended three preselected career sessions on what an average day might be like on the job as described by professionals working in those areas, Armstrong said.

Students also chose two of 16 breakout sessions on preparing for a career. They heard from representatives of UNL and other Nebraska colleges on how to write a resume, how to apply to college, how to maintain their health once in college, the importance of networking and more.

The day helped participating students understand the importance of career planning, Armstrong said, adding, "It really had an impact on them."

Armstrong plans to make the career day an annual event. Several northeast Nebraska schools, including those that didn't participate in the first event, are interested in attending the next career day scheduled for Oct. 16.

"I thought it was excellent," said Susan Von Minden, a counselor at Allen High School. She said it helped the 23 students from her school who attended "realize there's a lot more out there than they thought."

— Lori McGinnis

Armstrong can be contacted at (402) 254-6821.

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Community vision plan brings focus to Bennet as it expands

When the growing Lancaster County village of Bennet realized a need to update its 10-year-old comprehensive plan, community leaders wanted input from citizens. To do so, they sought help from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension.

Extension helps communities with a new program called Community Visioning. Now, following extension-led community meetings, residents of Bennet are having a say in the overhauling of the village's comprehensive plan, determining future development and infrastructure needs, even voting on a new village slogan.

"It's brought some focus to our community," said Bruce Dahlberg, chairman of the Bennet Planning Commission.

Extension started the visioning process last September at a village hall meeting, said Yelena Mitrofanova, community development extension educator based in Lincoln. About 75 people who attended were eager to get involved.

"They signed up for committees and committed a lot of time and energy to the project," Mitrofanova said.

Residents formed three committees and went to work to get citizens involved in planning the future of Bennet. Flyers were posted on bulletin boards. Listening sessions were held. Postcards were mailed to residents.

Extension assisted by organizing the meetings and putting information about the visioning process on its Lancaster County Web site.

Bennet residents are responding. They formed a citizens advisory committee and developed a vision statement. The committee also created four potential town slogans to be voted on by citizens this spring, the options being: "Bennet – a small town with a big heart," "Live, love, learn – grow with us in Bennet," "Bennet – a home for families not addresses," and "Remember yesterday's values; Live today's dreams; Invest in tomorrow's families."

The visioning process, Mitrofanova said, is "giving people a voice and ownership of the process — an opportunity to control the future."

Residents saw the need because more and more Lincoln residents are choosing to move

to the community 18 miles to the south-east. The U.S. Census Bureau reports the population grew from 570 to 696 between 2000 and 2006, and population in 2016 has the potential to nearly double that. Developers, seeing this trend and realizing the lower-cost land in Bennet, want to build houses.

Bennet, however, lacks the infrastructure and the design plans to accommodate smooth and planned growth, Mitrofanova said. The visioning process gives residents input into development decisions, rather than town board members making the decisions for them, she said.

"It has pulled the community together," she said. The residents, she said, "like to give their opinions and they like to get involved. It puts them in charge of their community."

Dahlberg said opinions have differed in the community about water and sewer issues, but the visioning process "is getting everybody on the same page." The result will be a new comprehensive plan finalized this summer, he said.

The Lancaster County community of Firth is next in line to start the visioning process, Mitrofanova said. Firth leaders saw



Phyllis Schoenholz

Yelena Mitrofanova, community development extension educator, has helped the village of Bennet on a community visioning process in light of expected growth. The process involves residents making community decisions, such as choosing a village slogan.

what was happening in Bennet and wanted it to come there.

"I think it's great," Mitrofanova said. "It's done in a lot of communities across the country and finally Nebraska has started it."

— **Lori McGinnis**

Mitrofanova can be contacted at (402) 441-7180.

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