

2011 Virginia Cooperative Extension

Unit Extension Leadership Council Development Awards

Mission Statement

Virginia Cooperative Extension enables people to improve their lives through an educational process that uses scientific knowledge focused on issues and needs.

First Place Scott County

Relevance: While conducting the local Situation Analysis to address local programming needs, the Scott County Extension Leadership Council saw the need for families to be able to enjoy something together- as a whole family. They realized that no matter what part of the state you are from this issue is rising and they wanted to make a difference in the rising trend that, “my son is here, my daughter is there, and my husband and I will have to find something to do.” They also saw the need for people to understand their heritage and be able to take pleasure in it. Scott County’s ELC desired to make VCE visible in the community so that their citizens would understand all that VCE has to offer and to get the whole community involved in making this possible.

Response: The Scott County Extension Leadership Council decided the most effective way to respond to their concluded needs was to host a day of showcasing the Cultural heritage and natural beauty of Scott County that would benefit as well as interest the whole family. Scott County’s ELC hosted “Explore Scott County Virginia Outdoors, A-One-Day Celebration of Natural Scott County, Virginia” on September 18, 2010 at the Scott County Horse Park in Dungannon, Virginia. The event kicked off that Saturday morning at 9 a.m. and concluded at 5 p.m. The family event hosted a variety of educational and fun activities such as Trail Rides, Canoeing and Kayaking Trips on the Clinch River, a Civil War Encampment, Draft Horse Extravaganza, a Photography contest, Kid’s activities with the Boy Scouts, Friends Craft Storytelling, Cultural Heritage Exhibits, Pumpkin Contest, a variety of music, and last but not least educational workshops. Displays and demonstrations also provided information about agriculture and home-based businesses that contribute to the overall economy of the county. Youth exhibits highlighted current 4-H activities.

Results: As ELC members worked the gates, collected money, mingled with the crowds an overall consensus that the event was a success was concluded. The event brought about youth and adults interaction; one youth experienced hands-on entrepreneurship by selling ornaments with his Grandmother in a booth she had set up; and it brought together many “individual” ideas.

The ELC members worked hard before-hand in planning, during by running the event, and after with clean-up in hopes of the success of this event and was pleased that it appeared to make such an impact.

Collaborators: Scott County Extension Leadership Council; Scott County Tourism Committee; Scott County Board Of Supervisors; Scott County Regional Horse Association; Scott County Sheriff’s Department; Scott County Boy Scouts; Scott County Extension Staff; Virginia Department of Game Inland Fisheries; Appalachian White Tail Association; Scott County Soil and Water Conservation; as well as a large group of local businesses and individuals.

Runner-Up

Lancaster-Northumberland Counties

Relevance: On the Northern Neck, Lancaster (County) Primary School teacher Joan Gravatt wanted her students to experience real world math and science, not just study it in the classroom. In the late 90's, that vision led to the creation of Students Understanding Math and Science (SUMS), an afterschool program that got kids outside the classroom to put their newly found arithmetic and biology skills to work. Soon, the Northern Neck Master Gardeners offered their horticultural expertise and a full-fledged school garden, an "outdoor classroom" program was born that continues today. But the garden had a problem. It just kept washing out. There was a big runoff problem from the school rooftop, leaving standing water and soggy soil. The 2005 installation of a berm helped, but around the garden was an area of eroding, bare soil and a soggy entrance way.

Response: In 2010, the Lancaster-Northumberland Extension Leadership Council (ELC) went to work, and the Master Gardeners contacted Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District (NNSWCD) and Nonpoint Source Specialist Sam Johnson about a rain garden project. By the group pooling technical and funding resources together with Friends of the Rappahnnock (FOR) of Fredericksburg, a perfect partnership was born. A rain garden would be perfect answer to the problem, and a tool for demonstrating state-of-the-art methods for reducing the pollution that ails the region's rivers and the Chesapeake Bay: excess sediment and nutrient runoff. Rain gardens are areas where the existing soil is replaced with a highly permeable sand/compost mix and planted with a variety of native vegetation. Stormwater runoff from rooftops or parking lots is directed into the rain garden cells, which are depressed 6"-8" from the rest of the landscape. Water quickly percolates through the special soil, where pollutants are removed by filtering action and by plants, while groundwater is recharged. It was clear that this was an ideal site for demonstrating how effective and aesthetically appealing stormwater management, or low-impact development (LID) practices like rain gardens can be. A rain garden on the school site would simultaneously solve a flooding problem and get the children involved in learning. The garden grew from the original concept for one small rain garden by the outdoor classroom to four large gardens covering over 1,500 square feet and treating all the runoff from the school bus parking lot. Bill Smith of TSL, Inc., in Kilmarnock performed the construction and donated much of the materials. Sam Johnson and John Tippett of FOR oversaw the construction. Master Gardeners Linda McConahey of ELC and Sue Lindsey made the appropriate plant selections, and Master Gardeners and other community organizations' members donated plants to the project.

Results: When the beds were ready for planting, on October 27 and 28, NNSWCD's Sam Johnson and Education Coordinator and ELC chair Faye Andrashko, with Sue Lindsey and a team of some 20 Master Gardener volunteers, presented SOL-based educational programs on the rain garden to all grades (Pre-K thru 3) at Lancaster Primary School. The idea was to involve the approximately 480 students in the completion of the gardens so they would feel a greater connection to the project and learn some of the science and environmental benefits behind the concept. Each student in the school had a hand in planting and mulching the garden and learned of the conservation value of this type of garden. Students have seen a practical demonstration of the wonders of the water cycle, and homeowners and builders and contractors, as well as, homeowners, can witness environmental beneficial methods to managing stormwater runoff at home and construction sites. The garden stands as a public model to the community, who can see the beauty and identify with this and other programs that will improve water quality in our rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.

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Runner-Up Virginia Beach

Relevance: Virginia Beach Extension Leadership Council (ELC) members understand the Virginia Cooperative Extension's (VCE) mission and wanted to ensure local elected officials grasped the true essence of the organization. ELC established objectives to increase local officials' participation in (VCE) programs and increase VCE's visibility throughout the City. ELC members also made the commitment to continue taking active roles in marketing and assisting in delivering VCE's educational programs and events.

Results: ELC members participated at the VA Beach Pungo Strawberry Festival by helping distribute marketing materials, assisting 4-H clubs staff their exhibits and recruiting new members. Seventy-nine 4-H youth participated in the 4-H Livestock Club's Show and Sale. ELC members also took the opportunity to network with elected officials and encouraged them to participate in 4-H activities. Virginia Senator Jeffrey McWaters and Virginia Beach Mayor William Sessoms, Jr. showed their marksmanship at the Top Shooters 4-H Educational Club Exhibit. Virginia House of Delegate Barry Knight served as the judge for the 4-H Livestock Club's Lamb Costume Contest. More than 30,000 residents toured the 4-H area during the three-day event, while 2,200 youth participated in the Agriculture "Fun Barn". Fun Barn provided youth opportunities to gain hands-on agricultural experiences. Ninety-five individuals participated in the Ham Curing project and display, five ELC members were among the participants and two others assisted judges. Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Extension Agent received the "2009 Friend of Agriculture Award" during the Virginia Beach Excellence in Agriculture annual banquet. ELC members and Extension Agents hosted City Officials during the banquet including Mayor William Sessoms, City Manager James Spore, Deputy City Manager Robert Herbert, City Council members Barbara Henley and Rosemary Wilson, and several City Department Directors. One hundred thirty-eight attendees heard about the excellent work conducted by the ANR Extension Agent throughout the years. The guest speaker spoke about the significant work conducted in the community through Agriculture as well as Virginia Cooperative Extension. Over 12,000 residents attended the annual Virginia Beach Harvest Fair; an additional 800 school children participated in the Farm Days. Residents had the opportunity gain firsthand knowledge regarding agriculture production and product usages. ELC members, Master Gardeners, 4-H volunteers, and Extension Agents assisted with the marketing, logistics, and conducting activities during the three-day event. Several local city officials participated in the interactive exhibits.

ELC members and Family and Consumer Sciences Agent hosted a Poverty Simulation to give local elected officials, city council members, community leaders and department directors an opportunity to see what a typical month would be like for residents with limited to no financial resources. ELC members assisted with planning and marketing the event, and staffing the booths during the simulation. Eighty-three individuals participated in the Poverty Simulation. Among the participants were three ELC members; Robert Morin, Department of Human Services Director and his executive staff; Andrew Friedman, Department of Housing Director; Susan Walston, Deputy City Manager and a Representative from US Senator Glenn Nye's office.

Response: ELC members assisted in marketing and delivering VCE programs to reach more than 45,300 residents. The events and interactive exhibits allowed local elected officials, community leaders and residents to gain a deeper awareness and understanding of the educational programs and materials provided through Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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