

The unbeatable power of university research, education and teamwork

For a century, Extension has connected university research with rural Minnesota. Today, Extension programs also thrive in urban settings like the Twin Cities metro, home to 60 percent of the state's population. "Extension is relevant in rural, suburban and urban areas," said Pat O'Connor, former Hennepin County auditor/treasurer. "Whether developing youth, teaching good nutrition, or managing urban landscapes and gardens, Extension works on issues that make a big difference." Robert Jones, U of M senior vice president adds, "Extension is a great example of the U's commitment to investing in communities to address real-world issues like education, economic development, employment, poverty and health."

Extension makes a difference in the Twin Cities metro

Urban 4-H helps strengthen youth organizations

On a sunny spring afternoon, a fourth-grade student at St. Paul's Jackson Preparatory Magnet School smacks the soccer ball one last time before heading back inside. It's 4 p.m., and an after-school photography class is about to begin.

The class is part of a 4-H after-school enrichment program held two days a week at Jackson Prep, an elementary school in the heart of St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood. The school is one of 27 organizations in Minneapolis and St. Paul partnering with Extension's Urban 4-H Youth Development. The relationship helps create, strengthen and advance youth programs that take place during non-school hours.

Patrick Bryan, principal at Jackson Prep, sees a strong correlation between students who consistently participate in after-school programs and better social and academic behavior.

"I'm seeing kids who are doing more writing," Bryan said. "I'm seeing kids who are happier about being a Jackson student. It gives them a well-lit, ordered, clean, safe place to extend their learning, whereas many of them, if they went straight home on the bus, would be home alone or with siblings until their parents got home from work."

Urban 4-H programs reached more than 2,000 metro-area youth last year.

"We try to not only stick with what the research says good programs need in order to

be successful, but we're also very responsive to what the community needs," said Jennifer Skuza, director of Extension's urban 4-H programs. "That's what keeps us relevant to the community."

Bryan agrees. "Extension helped us use assessment tools to ask the kids what has meant the most to them in these programs. Using that student-driven evaluation data helps us provide what kids need, and engages them in the process. When kids get asked, it can be a very empowering experience. It means they can help shape the world around them."

For more information, see www.fourh.umn.edu/urban

Students in 4-H's after school photography programs learn how to be both photographers and models.





University of Minnesota master gardeners work with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to help residents select grass seed and plants for their yards. Last year, master gardeners helped nine first-time homeowners.

Master gardeners lend helping hands in communities

Since 1977, master gardeners have combined horticulture training from University of Minnesota faculty with a passion for contributing to their communities. In the Twin Cities area, it's easier to ask where master gardeners aren't than where they are. Here's a quick sampling:

Converting houses to homes

Since 2000, master gardeners have partnered with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to provide first-time homeowners and low-income families with basic gardening education. Volunteers provide guidance on seeding lawns, selecting plants for general landscaping, and more.

Connecting communities with resources

North Minneapolis resident and master gardener Marcia Van Gorden has been working with the Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association (HAMAA)

since she helped 20 families secure community garden plots at Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis. What started out as gardening for food has evolved into a multi-year project that now includes landscape design education and connecting community elders and children.

Beautifying historical sites

The Minneapolis Armory was the recipient of a beautification and landscape redesign project, thanks to master gardener volunteers.

'Greening up' the city

Master gardener volunteers helped Tree Trust, a non-profit organization, distribute 1,000 trees to Minneapolis residents last spring. The trees were sold for \$15 each to help repair some of the damage done by storms and Dutch elm disease

For more information, see www.mg.umn.edu

For nutrition educator, small changes make a big difference

Thirty years ago, Velia Stodieck was a new immigrant to the United States, unfamiliar with the fresh produce found in Minnesota supermarkets. Where were the food items she knew and loved from her native Panama?

Today, the Extension nutrition education assistant (NEA) teaches Hennepin County residents the key components of healthy eating, visiting 10 sites on a regular basis—from Minneapolis public schools to churches in Richfield and Bloomington. One of 20 NEAs in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, she teaches a minimum of six, one-hour sessions at each location as part of Extension's Simply Good Eating programs.

"It's our role to help educate people on how to stretch their food dollars and eat healthy on a limited budget," said Fay McLain, community program specialist. "We're funded by USDA food stamp dollars to help limited income households, and we focus mainly on families with children."

Extension's nutrition programs touched more than 7,700 families in the metro area during fiscal year 2006. Stodieck alone reached 229 families.

For more information, see www.extension.umn.edu/nutrition



Nutrition educator Velia Stodieck teaches new immigrants how to eat healthy on a limited budget.