Local Retailers Partner With Design Students to Create Branding

By Susan Erickson, Program Coordinator
Partnering Landscape and Community
Enhancement (PLaCE) Program

In order to be successful, any business—whether a national corporation such as Target or the locally owned bookstore on downtown Main Street—needs branding that accurately portrays its services and appeals to the intended clientele.

However, many smaller, independent businesses lack the resources needed to hire a marketing firm to update their image. That’s where senior graphic design students at Iowa State University come in. Since 2003, more than 200 design students have worked with small business owners in 11 different communities around the state and one in Wisconsin, putting into practice the skills they have developed in creating company brands.

“A small company’s needs are no different than those of a large corporation—be genuine and accurate with the message you convey about your company,” said Lisa Fontaine, ISU associate professor of graphic design.

Fontaine is the lead instructor for the studio class and has been involved with this collaboration between the design students and independent downtown businesses since its inception. During the first half of the semester, the students study corporate branding, and the importance of conveying the essence of a company through its brand. In the second half of the semester, they put that knowledge to work in a different way—applying the same concepts to small downtown retailers.

Prior to meeting with the client businesses, the graphic design students conduct background research on relevant topics, such as historical renovation and why it’s important in a Main Street district. They then visit the site for conducting interviews and working one-on-one with business owners.

“The students get really excited about working for a real client with real needs. They learn that a retail business they could have easily overlooked as a consumer has something of interest to offer them, but it is not being effectively communicated,”

Associate professor Lisa Fontaine led a group of students who designed signage for businesses in the Central Avenue District in Dubuque.
Dear Friends,

It's spring. The time of year the robins return and we at ISU Extension and Outreach begin developing our annual reports. It may sound a bit strange, but this is the time when staff and faculty review their work over the past 12 months. So please indulge me and let’s look back to last spring and the year that has occurred since.

The Year We Were Noticed
Wow. For the smallest program within Extension and Outreach, it was an exciting year for notoriety. First, we were highlighted in the ISU Exhibit at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. This exhibit was also featured at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, and then the Farm Progress Show near Boone. More than two million people attended these events.

In addition, our Latino business faculty member between ISU and the University of Wisconsin. Based in Dubuque, this shared faculty hire is one of the first of its kind in the nation. The City of Dubuque, the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation and the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque have all been helpful in creating this partnership. In part due to this partnership, the Community Development Society has decided to hold its 2014 national convention in Dubuque.

The Year of the Student
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The Year of Partnerships
What do the Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, the Iowa League of Cities; the University of Wisconsin Extension; the Iowa Department of Natural Resources; the cities of Perry, Waukon and Fairfield; and the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Michigan State University have in common? Us. The ISU Extension CED Development program continues to build relationships with these and other organizations to better serve Iowa’s communities.

The big news was the hiring of Dr. Deborah Tootle as a joint Extension faculty member between ISU and the University of Wisconsin. Based in Dubuque, this shared faculty hire is one of the first of its kind in the nation. The City of Dubuque, the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation and the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque have all been helpful in creating this partnership. In part due to this partnership, the Community Development Society has decided to hold its 2014 national convention in Dubuque.

The Year of the Student
I know you would never guess from my picture, but I’ve been involved with ISU Extension for more than 30 years. I can honestly say I continue to love my job and the opportunity to assist and promote Iowa’s communities. But I have to confess that my greatest joy is when we connect ISU students to work with Iowa’s communities for the benefit of both. Dozens of ISU students have been engaged in a numerous Iowa communities this past year, including: Sioux City, Dubuque, Des Moines, Mapleton, Ottumwa, Maquoketa, Fairfield, Perry, Shellsburg, Cedar Rapids, Fonda and Eldora. New programs such as the Community Design Lab and the K–12 Design Outreach are expected to engage even more. Students learn. Communities learn. Staff and faculty learn. When it comes together, everybody benefits.

So while Iowa looks forward to spring, in the world of ISU Extension and Outreach, spring is a time of reflection. So to the faculty, staff, students and communities who come together through ISU and its Extension and Outreach system, let me say thank you. It’s been a good year.

Timothy O. Borich
Director, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development
Research Spotlight

Seeger Earns National Planning Award for I-WALK Program

By Teddi L. Barron, Communications Specialist, University Relations

The American Planning Association is honoring an Iowa State University faculty member with a national award. Christopher J. Seeger, an associate professor of landscape architecture and extension specialist, will receive a 2013 National Planning Achievement Award for Transportation Planning at the APA annual conference in April.

The planning profession’s highest honor, APAs national awards program was established more than 50 years ago to recognize outstanding community plans, planning programs and initiatives, public education efforts, and individuals for their leadership on planning issues.

Seeger’s APA award is one of 12 for exemplary planning achievement and one of two for achievement in the area of transportation planning.

Seeger won for his development of the geospatial planning tools and processes that help communities identify and collect information to create a Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. The US Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School program. Seeger co-developed I-WALK (Iowans Walking Assessment Logistics Kit), and spearheaded creation of the innovative, participatory process that uses smartphones, global position system and geographic information systems technology. The I-WALK process provides detailed site data and public perception information that enable community coalitions to make decisions, which will result in the most impact with the limited funds available.

In partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health, Seeger co-developed I-WALK (Iowans Walking Assessment Logistics Kit), and spearheaded creation of the innovative, participatory process that uses smartphones, global position system and geographic information systems technology. The I-WALK process provides detailed site data and public perception information that enable community coalitions to make decisions, which will result in the most impact with the limited funds available.

In 2011, the program was piloted in 12 Iowa communities and the results documented. Hundreds of parents, students, teachers and community residents participated in surveys and GPS walkability assessments. A total of 3,300 midblocks, 2,080 intersections and 1,247 additional features were mapped during the pilot year. The program continues in 2012–13 at 17 additional elementary schools in Iowa. It has been expanded into a broader-based, community-wide walkability assessment, and the processes have been implemented in neighboring states. Tens of thousands of current and future students will be impacted. I-WALK is administered by the Iowa Department of Public Health and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

APA is an independent, not-for-profit educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in community planning, promoting education and citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to meet the challenges of growth and change.

Housing Needs Assessment Takes Holistic Approach in Ottumwa

By Sandra Oberbroeckling Community Relations Specialist

Ottumwa is the latest town to take advantage of Communities To Communities (C2C), a program recently launched by Iowa State University Extension Community and Economic Development (CED). C2C offers technical assistance to communities interested in long-range, strategic planning.

The primary goal of the Ottumwa C2C project, which was initiated at the request of the Ottumwa Regional Legacy Foundation, is a housing needs assessment. According to Himar Hernández, ISU community development specialist, the foundation approached ISU Extension CED because they liked C2C’s holistic approach, which not only includes housing, but economic, demographic, sociological, and other assessments that impact housing needs.

Focus groups are currently under way to gather local input regarding housing decisions. The groups interviewed include commuters; professionals and their spouses (both new and long-time residents); religious and nonprofit organizations; people who own/live in transitional housing; builders, realtors and bankers; and human resources representatives from the following area employers: Cargill, Tenco Industries, Indian Hills Community College, the Ottumwa Community School District, Ottumwa Regional Health Center, and River Hills Community Health Center.

“We tried to get as diverse a group as possible in terms of both economics and demographics,” said Hernández.

A survey of commuters will be used as a follow-up to the focus groups and to examine values and attitudes as they relate to local housing decisions.

Two components of the Ottumwa C2C project involve ISU College of Design...
Budget reduction strategies | Ages 25–34 | Ages 45–54
--- | --- | ---
Spending less overall | 41.8 | 52.4
Reducing dining out | 28.5 | 40.7
Watching for sales more often | 30.0 | 40.4
Using coupons more often | 29.3 | 35.8
Spending less on clothing | 22.4 | 34.2
Cutting back on vacation, travel plans | 21.3 | 31.8
Reducing entertainment plans | 21.9 | 31.6
Comparison shopping more often | 21.0 | 29.7
Shopping at discount stores more often | 16.1 | 28.9
Decreasing energy expenses | 15.7 | 28.2
Spending less on groceries | 14.6 | 24.3
Cutting back on technology services | 11.5 | 20.3

The table shows the responses to the question: As a result of the new “Fiscal Cliff” federal tax law, is your household doing any of the following to cope financially? (Check all that apply).

Every day we hear about impacts from the recent “Fiscal Cliff” federal tax laws. A recent survey conducted by the National Retail Federation provides some insights as to if/how Americans may spend their consumer dollars. The Midwestern portion of the survey completed Feb 13 reported that 17.1% of our consumers felt greatly impacted and 41.5% somewhat impacted by the recent change in tax laws. With more than half of the consumers surveyed feeling the pinch of less disposable income, retailers may see sales relatively flat for the first quarter of 2013, according to Ron Prescott, small business and retail specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

When broken down by age groups, the survey data reveal that the younger age groups clearly feel their spending will be impacted this year more than other generation groups surveyed. However, the generation representing ages 45–54 are actually the ones taking greater action to reduce their expenditures.

The results to the question: “As a result of the new “Fiscal Cliff” federal tax law, is your household doing any of the following to cope financially? (Check all that apply)” are interesting because they show that even though younger consumers felt the need to reduce their budget, a larger percentage of the older consumers chose to spend less overall. This may be due to the fact that one generation has more disposable income available to allow for various budget reduction strategies or a greater sensitivity to react due to past experiences.

The survey points out strategies that Americans typically engage in when there is a reduction in disposable income regardless of the reason for that reduction. The table does highlight some current national trends of which retailers should make note:

- Cutting back on vacations and travel plans may result in more Iowans vacationing in Iowa rather than spending vacation dollars out of state.
- Spending less overall may prompt record sales for “dollar” type stores that have seen substantial growth in 2012.
- A number of studies have indicated that Americans are least willing to give up technology services such as cable, cell phone and Internet services. The fact consumers surveyed are more willing to spend less on groceries is a pretty strong indicator of how consumers feel about their technology services.

With more than 65% of consumers surveyed expecting a tax refund this year and with more than 58% of those tax returns filed at the time of this press release; there still remain opportunities for increased retail sales by many Iowa retailers this quarter.
Beyond Simple Mapping: Planners Explore Communities with GIS

by Shannon Thol
GIS Analyst and Graduate Student

Planners have access to a wealth of information about their communities—from demographic census data to municipal zoning codes and county tax maps. Most of these data are accompanied by spatial information that can be studied using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). However, many planners do not have the skills needed to take full advantage of this information.

That’s where Professor Mônica Haddad comes in. Haddad, associate professor in the Iowa State University Department of Community and Regional Planning, uses her complementary experience with GIS and planning to help planners gain practical skills in spatial analysis and unlock the full potential of geographic data. In 2012, she offered two hands-on GIS workshops that covered spatial exploration of the 2010 census. Participants came from across the state of Iowa, and a few traveled from as far away as Wisconsin and Nebraska.

The 2012 workshops were deemed an overall success and most participants expressed an interested in additional similar workshops. Participants reported in a written evaluation that the hands-on experience using GIS to spatially analyze census data for Iowa communities increased their knowledge in a number of core content areas. Samples of comments submitted include the following.

“Overall it was a good program—good mix of introductory and advanced concepts.”

“Great program! Excellent instructor and great assistants.”

Due to the success of and strong interest in the 2012 workshops, Haddad plans to offer similar workshops starting in May 2013. These workshops are sponsored by the Iowa Chapter of the American Planning Association and ISU Extension and Outreach. The upcoming workshop, called “Beyond Simple Mapping with GIS,” will include new activities that follow current planning trends and spatial analysis needs. The workshop will focus on physical planning/the built environment, land use and zoning, and smart growth/urban sprawl.

Planner's attending the 2013 workshop will be eligible for 6.5 professional Certificate Maintenance (CM) credits with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). Haddad is coordinating the 2013 workshop, which she developed with the aid of student assistants Joshua Hellyer and Aaron Bartling, and GIS analyst Shannon Thol.

Regardless of where they work, planners need concrete tools that they can apply in their own communities. That’s why this year’s workshop will be designed to be as practical and hands-on as possible. Several tutorials based on hypothetical but realistic planning scenarios will be used to introduce planners to a series of spatial and analytical tools that they can use in their planning tasks.

Haddad’s ultimate goal is to equip planners through the workshops with tools to analyze the geographic dimension of their community data. Because for planners who know how to analyze spatial data, space is not the final frontier—it is the beginning of a well-informed plan.

Planners interested in the 2013 workshop “Beyond Simple Mapping with GIS” should contact Haddad at 515-294-8979 or haddad@iastate.edu for more information. Two separate sessions of the workshop are scheduled for May 20 and May 28, 2013 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the ISU campus. The registration fee is $250 per participant, and participants will be eligible for 6.5 AICP certification maintenance credits.

New Geospatial Technology Program Website

The Iowa State University Geospatial Technology Training Program has a new website: www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/gis.

Visit our website to find information regarding upcoming GIS workshops, download quick task sheets, learn about our projects, and much more!
Fontaine said, “The students use their skills to help the businesses communicate their offerings.”

This project is a win-win for both the business owners and the students. Store owners benefit by receiving design ideas from the students, which is often difficult to access through their normal business channels. In return, they help students learn about the ins and outs of running a small business. Students learn about the value of their graphic design skills to a small business owner who has never had the opportunity to engage with these resources.

Fontaine said that mutual respect is fostered in the class—the students learn to respect the business owners for their knowledge and capabilities in certain areas, and the business owners learn respect for the graphic design skills of the students. During the 2009 fall semester, the class worked with businesses in the city of Grinnell. One reason this college town wanted to work with ISU students was to learn about what is appealing to a college-age audience. In many college towns, the students are an untapped market for local retailers, and Grinnell wanted to work to build bridges to the resident students at Grinnell College.

During the 2012 fall semester, three groups of students worked with community businesses. Fontaine led a section of students working in Dubuque, while Paula Curran, associate professor of graphic design, led a section of students working in Ottumwa, and Beverly Krumm, graphic design lecturer, led a section working in Maquoketa. Each of these towns had their own set of needs, desires and issues.

In Dubuque the class partnered with Dubuque Main Street Dubuque, which asked them to work in the Central Avenue district. Instead of working directly with business owners, some students were asked to propose their own ideas for businesses in spaces that were currently vacant. Fontaine indicated that an unexpected result of this situation was that students took a wider look at the entire neighborhood and considered what would be beneficial for its residents. The local contact for this project was Dan LoBianco, executive director of Dubuque Main Street. He enjoyed working with the ISU class and indicated that this project has spurred lots of interest in the neighborhood. Plans are in the works for a coffee shop as suggested by the students, and another business has begun to implement the student design for their storefront.

“The students’ work acted as a neighborhood catalyst. We have a new storefront grant program ready to go to help improve the neighborhood,” said LoBianco.

Beverly Krumm led a team of students working in Maquoketa. Twenty students were paired one-on-one with business owners. This project was part of a larger effort being carried out by ISU Extension Community and Economic Development called Communities to Community (C2C). Through C2C, communities enter two-year partnerships with ISU Extension CED for a bundle of design, educational, business and leadership development services. These services are customized to promote the positive changes and outcomes client communities desire and contracts range between $20,000 and $40,000.
Local retailers from page 6

Tom Devine, executive director of the Maquoketa Chamber of Commerce, said the store owners were “very impressed with the students’ work,” and that this project coincides nicely with the C2C program, Vision 2020. Krumm said that this project is great for her students because when they visit the town they can see in practice what they have learned in the classroom. Krumm said her students were particularly excited about their projects; one student even went the extra distance by presenting three different ways that his design might be implemented, with various levels of cost. He wanted to be sure the store owner would be financially able to implement the design he proposed.

Curran’s students worked in Ottumwa, which is just beginning a C2C project. The studio project served as an initial step at building community interest. Himar Hernández, ISU community development specialist, said “the timing of this project was just right. Our business owners have been excited about seeing the students’ designs.”

Curran said that her students discovered the value of the skills they have learned in the classroom. “The students had the opportunities to put into practice what they’ve learned, and to understand why their skills are needed.”

For example, one of her students could not find the store with which she was assigned to work, learning firsthand that signage was an issue. In addition, Curran said that a major benefit for her students is that they learned about how their graphic design skills can have an impact on economic development in the community.

All three instructors agree that involving studio classes in communities is beneficial to the students’ education, while providing benefits to local store owners. This involvement in communities enhances the communication skills of the graphic design students, who are above all trained as problem solvers. After completing the project, the students are ready to begin their professional careers as graphic designers and problem solvers.

These graphic design projects were created through the Partnering Landscape and Community Enhancement (PLaCE) program. PLaCE is designed to engage communities in collaborative efforts to understand, envision and promote a fundamental enhancement of their physical environment, while at the same time providing quality learning experiences for ISU College of Design students.

The next graphic design senior studio will be held in fall 2013. Communities interested in participating in this project should have 20 independent businesses in their core downtown area that are interested in working with students. The cost to the communities is approximately $2,000, which covers transportation and printing.

For more information, contact Susan Erickson, PLaCE program coordinator, at 515-294-1790 or susaneri@iastate.edu. Details about the PLaCE program are available at http://home.design.iastate.edu/ResearchOutreach/placeprogram.php.

Communities interested in learning more about the C2C program can contact Tim Borich, program director, ISU Extension CED, at 515-294-8397 or borich@iastate.edu.
By Chrissy Amaya  
Undergraduate Student, Greenlee School of Journalism

Deborah Tootle made history on February 1, 2013, when she started work as a leadership specialist for Iowa State University Extension Community and Economic Development (CED). Tootle is also a tenured faculty member in the ISU Department of Sociology. What makes her position unique is that she has an appointment as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Wisconsin. Her position, which is the first of its kind in Extension, is based in Dubuque and was born of a partnership between ISU Extension CED, University of Wisconsin Extension, and the City of Dubuque.

Tootle reports to ISU but will collaborate with the University of Wisconsin and the City of Dubuque. She will assist the two universities and the city in leadership programming related to community planning as part of the University Extension Community Development Collaborative. This initiative is designed to focus on issues relevant to the greater Dubuque regional economy and successful strategies that can be replicated in other communities in both Iowa and Wisconsin.

The partnership among ISU, University of Wisconsin, and Dubuque creates a unique opportunity for sharing resources across state lines. In addition to access to the wealth of information available from the two land-grant universities, Tootle will have first-hand knowledge of community development and civic engagement strategies employed by the City of Dubuque.

“They are doing some things right in Dubuque in terms of community development and civic engagement, and I want to learn what they are doing and how they are doing it. They could really be a model for other communities. I want to know how they addressed the social and economic difficulties they were experiencing,” said Tootle.

Tootle wants to create a bridge of knowledge between Iowa and Wisconsin to provide field agents and specialists from both states with good curricula and training materials with which to effectively teach community engagement.

“It’s not just leadership development but its leadership and civic engagement … getting people and communities involved and learning to make decisions and taking part in the decision-making process in their community,” she said.

Although getting people involved can be more easily said than done, Tootle is up for the challenge. Another advantage of the University Extension Community Development project is the ability to conduct research as part of curriculum development and to evaluate said curriculum.

“We don’t want to have it be solely a tool-driven process. We want to link [the teaching materials] back to the process because Extension is responsible for taking research-based information and getting it out to the public,” Tootle said.

Using research-based information, she and her team will teach community members how to get to know people, how to work with organizations, how to take a leadership position and how to work with people to effectively get things done. In other words, building social capital.

“Social capital is inherent in the relationships people and organizations have. So what we’re going to be doing is helping people understand the need to be engaged, the need to take some responsibility for what’s going on in their communities—not just letting them know that it’s important, but teaching them how to do it,” said Tootle.

“What I always find most satisfying about my job is working with the people and seeing the lightbulbs going off when they start to understand some of the processes. It’s satisfying to know that your actually helping people meet some of their goals and objectives,” she said.

Tootle’s short-term goals have mostly involved getting the new Dubuque offices up and running and becoming acquainted with different foundations and community organizations in Dubuque that are interested in the collaborative. In the long term, she would like to get the faculty and staff at both universities to collaborate more.

Tootle has a PhD in sociology from the University of Georgia, an MA in sociology from Tulane University and a BS in animal science from Louisiana State University. She worked as an associate professor for the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. She has worked on issues now facing Iowa, such as disaster preparedness and recovery. She lived in Louisiana and was involved with disaster recovery following the Gulf Coast storms in 2005. While in Arkansas, she dealt with drought issues in terms of community planning. Her experience gives her rare insight into how disaster planning needs to work.

“We are seeing now with these drought issues that communities need to be planning because it’s probably not going to go away in the spring. They need to be planning for this—if the drought doesn’t happen again this spring, some other spring it’s going to happen so they need to be ready for it. That’s what we as community developers can help with,” she said.

The University Extension Community Development Collaborative project is housed in the historic Roshek building in downtown Dubuque. Tootle’s husband, Brian Perry, a community development specialist working with nonprofit organizations, will work in the same offices.
By Chrissy Amaya, Undergraduate Student, Greenlee School of Journalism

Brian Perry wasn’t expecting a job offer when his wife, Deborah Tootle, was in the process of being hired by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development (CED). However, it just so happened that the CED program needed an expert to work with nonprofit organizations, and coincidentally, Perry fit the bill perfectly. Before he knew it, he and his wife were on their way from Arkansas to the new office for the University Extension Community Development Collaborative in Dubuque.

Ever since college, Perry has been interested in working with nonprofit organizations and has worked with a number of them, ranging from religious organizations to professional societies to railroads. As a community development specialist for ISU Extension and Outreach, he will be working with other ISU Extension specialists across the state, but most of his work will be done in the Dubuque area. He will also work with nonprofit experts at the University of Iowa.

Perry said that other universities produce information about and know how to produce nonprofits, but don’t have an effective way of making their efforts known to many nonprofit organization.

That’s where Perry and ISU Extension and Outreach come in. One of ISU Extension and Outreach’s key goals is right in the name: outreach. Perry believes that Extension CED is the natural means of getting the word out to the public.

Although Perry does not have an appointment with the University of Wisconsin Extension, his outreach to nonprofits will benefit from the partnership between Wisconsin and ISU.

“I think you have all of this expertise but you don’t have 100% knowledge so you increase your knowledge base by adding a university and then you spread that information between both campuses and their specialists who are out in the field. It’s fantastic,” said Perry.

Perry started at ISU on March 5. His work days will be spent defining areas in which nonprofits are weak, helping them to improve board development, leading classes at an academy and solving accounting and technology issues. However, his job is wide open when it comes to working with nonprofits of all stripes and sizes.

According to Perry, different nonprofits have needs ranging from relatively basic to very particular situations.

“It’s all over the place and that’s what makes it so interesting. When nonprofits call, you don’t know what question will be on the other end of the phone,” said Perry. “I think what’s most interesting about nonprofits is not only the wide variety, but all the people constantly moving from one nonprofit to another.”

Such a situation might be intimidating to most people. However, Perry thrives on it. “Everythings always in flux and that’s interesting,” he said.

Perry’s qualifications make him an ideal evaluator of nonprofit programs. Before moving to ISU, Perry worked working in the governing body of the Presbyterian Church in Arkansas. Prior to that he spent 14 years as a consultant in Louisiana and Washington, DC. He holds a master’s degree in sociology and studied statistics, research methods, and business. His thesis was an evaluation of a nonprofit.

One of his long-term goals at ISU Extension CED is to build the capacity of nonprofits in Iowa to enable them to increase their funding. This in turn will help the state accomplish more in many areas—social services on one hand and building trade on the other. According to Perry, the more capable trade associations become in areas such as advertising and lobbying, the more likely is that their target industry will locate in Iowa.

Nonprofit organizations in need of assistance can contact Perry at 515-772-8988 or bmperry@iastate.edu.

Did You Know?

By Madeline Wilhelm, Undergraduate Student, Greenlee School of Journalism

The city of Dubuque has been selected to host the 2014 National Annual Conference of the Community Development Society. Scheduled for July 19–23, 2014, the conference draws about 250–350 community development practitioners, academicians, researchers, and government and nonprofit officials from across the country.

This national exposure is a great opportunity for Dubuque, especially in the wake of the University Extension Community Development Collaborative involving Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and University of Wisconsin-Extension. This partnership will focus on providing learning opportunities and improving the quality of life for Dubuque citizens while also encouraging sustainable growth and supporting the economy and environment.

According to the Community Development Society website, the national conference aims to “showcase effective approaches that are creating [positive] situations for local communities as a result of reaching beyond their traditional geographic boundaries.” The conference offers tours of nearby locations that highlight local development efforts.

Illinois, Wisconsin, and ISU Extension Systems offered to co-host the conference during the bidding process. The event will be an excellent showcase of the work and sustainability efforts of faculty and students from Clarke College and Loras College in Dubuque, the University of Wisconsin – Platteville, University of Iowa, and ISU.

This year’s conference will be in Charleston, SC, from July 20–24, 2013. Planning for the 2014 conference in Dubuque began in late March. More information about the national Annual Conference of the Community Development Society can be found at http://www.comm-dev.org.
Extension CED Hires CPA to Manage Growing Number of Grants

By Sandra Oberbroeckling
Community Relations Specialist

Nearly half of the Iowa State University Extension Community and Economic Development program is funded by sources external to the university. As a result, the program has survived a series of budget cuts relatively unscathed. However, as program funding became more diversified, financial management of the CED program became much more complex, requiring a full-time staff person. Enter Clare Polking.

Polking joined the CED staff on March 1 as an administrative specialist. Her primary duties will involve managing CED’s multiple grants and accounts and assisting program staff in obtaining additional external funding.

Polking’s career is almost as diverse as the CED program funding sources. She earned a nursing degree and a master’s degree in anatomy from the University of Iowa and spent several years as a practicing nurse. She also taught anatomy, pathophysiology and nursing skills at Mercy College of Health Sciences in Des Moines. She has also held several positions within Iowa State University at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital and the Department of Computer Science. Most recently, she worked in the Department of Mechanical Engineering as a grant coordinator of a K–12 outreach program on energy education and course development. While working at ISU, Polking took classes and became a certified public accountant.

We-Lead Helps Bring Skilled Iowa Initiative to West Liberty High School Students

By Sandra Oberbroeckling
Community Relations Specialist

Juniors in West Liberty will have an easier time deciding on a career and quite possibly finding a job after graduation thanks to West Liberty Economic Area Development (We Lead), Iowa Workforce Development and the West Liberty High School.

Through the efforts of school superintendent Steven Hanson and Karen Lathrop, ISU Extension and Outreach advancement specialist and former We Lead director, 79 West Liberty juniors were able to take ACT’s National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) exam in December 2012. The purpose of the NCRC exam is to measure “real world” skills that employers deem critical.

“This project was initiated through We Lead over the past year to help students better understand the workforce skills they possess and help [West Liberty] as a community determine a skills baseline to identify what gaps might remain in our workforce’s skills,” said Lathrop.

“The project aligns with both ISU Extension and Outreach signature K–12 outreach initiatives and economic development,” Lathrop said. “The state of Iowa launched the Skilled Iowa program that … all Iowans are able to take the exam for free.”

We Lead president Lee Geertz noted that the project also fits well with We Leads economic development goals by encouraging young residents to think about their future college and workforce pursuits. “Economic development means educating the future workforce,” Geertz said.

West Liberty’s successful launch of NCRC program did not go unnoticed. The Governor’s Office made a video about the Skilled Iowa program that features West Liberty students. The video can be viewed on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeCkG3XkB.

Any Iowan is eligible to participate in the Career Readiness Certificate testing program. To learn more, visit the Iowa Workforce Development website: http://www.iowaworkforce.org/region14/ncrc.htm.
Marketplace Fairness Act Would Benefit Brick-&-Mortar Businesses
By Ron Prescott
Small Business and Retail Specialist, and Sandra Oberbroeckling,
Community Relations Specialist

How many times have you heard the phrase, “It’s cheaper on Amazon”?

Part of the reason that some goods are less expensive when purchased on Amazon.com is the fact that the company does not collect state sales tax, along with many other online retailers. And, according to the US Supreme Court, it’s perfectly legal not to, because it is too much of a burden on businesses to comply with complex processes for multi-state sales tax collections.

According to the US Census Bureau, 2012 retail sales totaled $4.2 trillion, of which 5.4% were transacted online. E-commerce, as a percentage of retail sales, has steadily increased over the past twelve years. Today, 65% of retail shoppers own either a smartphone or tablet, which provides a pretty positive growth projection into the future.

Since the 1967 US Supreme Court ruling (National Bellas Hess v. Illinois Department of Revenue), states have been aware of the need to simplify the process of multi-state sales tax collection. Even though sales tax collections are required for purchases within those states that have sales tax, the US Supreme Court ruled that the process of collection would be too difficult for any vendor to comply with. The 1967 case involved a mail order house. That decision was upheld by the court in a 1992 ruling, (Quill v. State of North Dakota) which also involved a mail order house.

Then online shopping was born, and the Supreme Court rulings still stand because of the difficulty of collecting multi-state sales tax. As a result, online retailers have a marked advantage over brick-and-mortar businesses, which in turn hurts the local economy. However, 20 years later, technology has provided the means to create a streamlined sales and use tax system.

In light of these changes and as the national retail sales return to pre-recession levels, the time has arrived to bring multi-state sales tax collection into the 21st Century, according to Ron Prescott, ISU, Extension & Outreach, Small Business and Retail Specialist.

The “Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement” refers to the multi-state agreement with that title adopted on November 12, 2002, as in effect on the date of its enactment and as further amended from time to time.

On November 12, 2002, 44 states, the District of Columbia, local governments and the business community created the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement to simplify sales and use tax collection and administration by retailers and states. On July 1, 2005, Iowa was granted full membership within the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement, and will be prepared to enact the sales tax collection process within 90 days of President Obama's signature of the Market Fairness Act of 2013. Currently, approximately 300 Iowa retailers are voluntarily collecting taxes from online sales, and transmitting funds to the Iowa Department of Revenue because they believe it is the right thing to do.

Senator Tom Harkin and 18 of his colleagues introduced the Marketplace Fairness Act of 2013, Senate Bill 336, to the Senate on Valentine’s Day. The bill is designed to restore states’ sovereign rights to enforce state and local sales and use tax laws, and currently favors bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. The legislation may be signed as soon as July of 2013.

Prescott has identified some components of the current bill that may be of interest to Iowa retailers, including:

- Free of charge software for remote sellers, which calculates sales and use taxes due on each transaction at the time the transaction is completed, files sales and use tax returns, and is updated to reflect rate changes. This component of the bill was added to reduce the seller's cost of implementing the multi-state tax collection process.
- Small seller exemption – Collection is required if the remote seller has gross annual receipts in total remote sales in the US exceeding $1,000,000 per year.
- No new tax has been imposed, but only the enforcement of an existing tax law.

For more information with regard to Iowa’s Streamlined Sales Tax Project visit: http://www.iowa.gov/tax/educate/SLST.html.

According to Prescott, many online shoppers are not aware that sales tax is due on most of our online purchases, and that there is an option for the purchaser to manually submit those taxes that are due to the Iowa Department of Revenue. Estimations of revenue that Iowa is not currently collecting from online sales are more than $30 million. He concludes that with minimal administrative costs to implement this program, the passage of the Marketplace Fairness Act of 2013 is seen as a positive move by most governors in the United States.
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