WOODBURY COUNTY COUNCIL AND STAFF LEARN ABOUT LATINO BUSINESSES IN SIOUX CITY

By Sandra Oberbroeckling / Extension Program Specialist

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development (CED) has a number of programs that engage with immigrants and refugees from throughout the world. CED has reached out to the Spanish-speaking community with programs including Juntos—Together for a Better Education, a workshop series to teach Latino parents and middle school students how to prepare for high school and higher education; Shop Healthy Iowa, a program to help local Latino-owned grocery stores increase the sale of fresh produce; and energy efficiency and maintenance consulting for Latino homeowners, contractors, and small businesses.

Additionally, CED works with immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs and business owners, helping them navigate the processes and systems involved with starting and owning a small business. Sioux City is a microcosm of CED’s work with underserved populations throughout the state, particularly the Spanish-speaking population. Community development specialist Jill Sokness, who is based in Sioux City, decided to share her experience with Woodbury County Extension council members and other Extension and Outreach staff to provide them with insight into this growing demographic of Iowans.

“As I have worked with various Latino-owned businesses in Sioux City over the last two years, I am always impressed by how each place has its own style, flavor, and energy,” she said.

“I enjoy visiting them and thought it would be great to share these positive experiences with Woodbury County Extension council members and co-workers. I had the idea of leading a field trip of sorts to a handful of businesses so my colleagues and council could meet owners, try some new foods, see different products, and learn more about these businesses. It would open a door to some other cultures that make up our community.”

In late November 2017, Sokness and seven colleagues and Extension council members visited four businesses and a nonprofit organization in Sioux City.

“Eight of us set out in a rented van on a mild, late November day, ready to see new sites and try new things as part of an experiential outing,” said Sokness.

“First we stopped at La Piñata, a grocery store I had been working with all year as a part of the Shop Healthy Iowa (Compre Saludable) program sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Health.”

Through this program, store owner Marisela Trejo learned how to keep produce fresher longer and created a display for fruit and vegetable storage. She also received promotional material for the store to draw attention to healthy food options.
HOw We Work / CED KNowledge tEams

The Community and Economic Development program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is focused on addressing five critical issues facing Iowa’s communities: housing, changing demographics, local economies, the built environment, and civic engagement and leadership capacity. Our unit consists of six specialized knowledge teams that develop and deliver programs, develop networks and build coalitions, and provide professional development for team members.

Equity, Inclusion, and Respect

The Team for Promoting Equity, Inclusion, and Respect in Communities identifies and focuses on diverse communities to eliminate systemic barriers to success. Team members have expertise in capacity building, participatory processes, advocacy, facilitation, awareness, and support systems, which they apply to implement cultural competency training, build capacity for the underserved, strengthen coalitions and networks, and deepen diversity of thought and experience.

Local Economies

The Local Economies Team strengthens communities and their local economies by teaching best practices and providing hands-on assistance to retailers and entrepreneurs. Team members have expertise in small and minority-owned business financial planning, customer service, store design and layout, and entrepreneurship, which they apply to promote small-business development and expansion for retailers and entrepreneurs, with an emphasis on those in the tourism, agritourism, grocery, and local-foods sectors.

Civic Engagement and Leadership

The Civic Engagement and Leadership Team works with other knowledge teams to enhance community leadership structures and broaden community engagement. Its members have expertise in citizen engagement processes, coalition building, and leadership dynamics, which they apply to develop programs for identifying, training, and connecting established and aspiring organizations and people in both the public and private sectors.

Art and Design Applications

The Art and Design Applications Team harnesses the power of design thinking to address place-based issues facing Iowa’s communities. Team members have expertise in the disciplinary knowledge and processes of landscape architecture, architecture, interior design, community planning, art, and historic preservation, which they apply to promote energy efficiency, green building and design, community health and well-being, local food systems, and community building through art.

Local Governments

The Local Governments and Nonprofits Team collaborates with local governments and nonprofit organizations to develop the leadership skills and knowledge needed to generate policies, procedures, and planning for the betterment of Iowa’s communities and regions. The team has expertise in data collection and interpretation; local government budgeting, administration, and law; and board strategic planning, visioning, and facilitation, which it applies to foster professionalism, build capacity, improve efficiencies, and emphasize sustainable practices and outcomes in the public and nonprofit sectors.

Data and Technology

The Data and Technology Team provides support to other knowledge teams. The team has expertise in demographic analysis; GIS; data collection, wrangling, repurposing, and education; needs analysis; indicators; evaluation; data systems; human-computer interaction (HCI); mobile technologies; data collection (quantitative, qualitative, non-traditional, survey analysis); data quality assessment; and the ability to repurpose data, which they apply to identify, discover, visualize, analyze and interpret community conditions and trends, and assess programmatic impacts.
CED SPECIALISTS BRING PLACE-BASED LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO COMMUNITIES

By Brian Perry / Community Development Specialist

Research has shown that “[i]f our communities are to adapt, prosper, and retain decision-making capabilities, it is essential that local leadership capacity be developed (Brennan, 2013).”

“Community leadership is a specific form of the general concept of leadership. It is frequently based in place and so is local, although it can also represent a community of common interest, purpose or practice....In many localities, it is provided by a combination of local volunteers, business, and government and is best served by what is called ‘place management,’ i.e., a combination within a region of government resources, professional and business skills and the energies of the local community. (Sorenson and Epps, 1996:115–117; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993).”

In response to such findings, Leading Communities: A Place-Based Leadership Program is being rolled out across Iowa to revive community engagement and participation.

Based on cutting-edge community leadership research, the program was developed by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the University of Wisconsin-Extension. This interactive program simultaneously provides participants with community-based skills and meets the specific needs of the places in which they live and work.

Field specialists and program specialists in the ISU Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development program are using Leading Communities to teach community members to develop, increase, and sustain the local leadership efforts that are necessary to address community issues. The instructional materials are organized so that participants will learn core competencies and skills associated with community leadership. The program also can be tailored to meet the particular needs of the community.

The objectives of Leading Communities are to help community members:

- Understand the importance of community leadership.
- Learn the core competencies and skill sets associated with community leadership.
- Learn how to use tools relating to those core competencies to address community issues and opportunities.

The program is premised on two basic beliefs about teaching place-based community leadership:

- That there are core competencies and skills associated with community or place-based leadership, and
- That all communities are different and have different needs.

The four core competencies taught in Leading Communities are based on social science research and include:

- Understanding Community Leadership and Your Community
- Identifying Issues and Framing Ideas
- Building Social Capital
- Mobilizing Resources for Community Action

Organizing a class will take at least six months. We provide tools for:

- Roles and responsibilities.
- Community assessments.
- Guidelines for organizing committees.
- Checklists.
- Marketing materials.

The program is taught in six sessions, each lasting 2.5–3 hours. Additional sessions are also available on request, on topics such as “Bonding Social Capital in Immigrant and Receiving Community Networks” or “Conflict Management.” Educational materials are learner-centered and structured to create a more collaborative learning environment that actively involves participants in the learning process.

Some communities opt to include a community project in the process. This “hybrid” approach utilizes an approved ISU educator delivering the program in combination with some form of local networking programming.

To date, Leading Communities has been taught in Buena Vista, Henry, Kossuth, and Lee Counties, and has been well received by attendees, some of whom are quoted here:

“[The most significant takeaway from this session was] the quantitative data portion because many, including myself, didn’t know it was readily available from ISU.”

“I liked the more in-depth task of asking ‘why’ and seeing where the root cause of an issue was.”

“It gives you a chance to actually make a change instead of dismissing problems as too big.”

“This will help you grow as an individual, and as an employee, and as a community member.”

“The discussion of social capital was great because of the pros, cons, and differences between bonding and bridging social capital. The social network exercise was eye opening.”

Below is an example from the first session of Leading Communities, “What are the Seven Types of Community Capitals?”

Natural: The environment and outdoor space.

Cultural: Stories and traditions.

Human: Leadership and access to resources.

Social: Networks in the community and the sense of belonging among community members.

Political: Connections to people in power and influence.

Financial: Money, charitable giving, access to funding.

Built: Buildings and infrastructure within the community. (Flora and Flora, 2008)

For further information on Leading Communities please contact Brian Perry at bmperry@iastate.edu or at 501-772-8988.
continued from P01

“Trejo has been enthusiastic and participatory throughout this project, and was happy to welcome our group to her store,” Sokness said. “She cut up some fresh limes (sweet limes) for us to try. We also tried persimmons (called caqui in Spanish), which are full of vitamins, fiber and antioxidants.”

The group spent time exploring the store, checking out the shelves, fresh meat counter, and other produce. County council member Don Wiese was especially pleased to see that La Piñata had pickled pigs feet stocked, something he hadn’t seen for many years.

The next stop was the Mary J. Treglia Community House. Started in 1921, Mary Treglia House is a nonprofit organization in the Sioux City area that works with immigrants, refugees, and newcomers to Siouxland. Most of the tour attendees knew about the Mary Treglia House, but didn’t know specifics. Director Amy Chabra showed the group the building and explained the many services the organization provides, including English and citizenship classes, immigration assistance, social services, and a multicultural preschool, which parents may utilize while taking classes there.

Mary Treglia House employs social workers, teachers, and an immigration attorney to provide assistance and education to immigrants and refugees from all over the world. ISU Extension and Outreach held the most recent Sioux City Juntos workshop series for Latino parents and middle school students at the Mary Treglia House.

The group also visited a local bakery, House of Cakes, owned by Sonia Pérez. Everyone was able to sample different Mexican baked goods, including sugar cookies and pan dulce (“sweet bread” that is between a cookie and bread in texture). Wiese recalled a family-owned bakery from his hometown of Holstein that was an important part of his childhood community; the owner, his wife, and their children worked together to make fresh baked goods every day. He was impressed that Pérez runs her business with the same daily, fresh-baked objective of all those years ago, bringing delicious options to her customers every day.

At a second grocery store, La Michoacana #2, owners Juan and Ivett Valdovinos made the group feel welcome by demonstrating what their store offers. They explained some of the different cuts of meat they feature in their meat market, and gave samples of queso fresco, a typical Latin American white cheese similar to feta in texture, but softer and less salty. The group also sampled a fruit called tuna (also known as prickly pear), that grows on cactus. Apple flavored soda pop in a glass bottle rounded off the visit and inspired a few to purchase some for their kids.

The last stop on the tour was Tacos El Güero, a popular taquería and Mexican food restaurant owned by Candace and Eduardo “Güero” Sanchez. Located on a corner, with tables and charming counter seating, Tacos El Güero serves up delicious street tacos filled with carne asada, pork al pastor and lengua (tongue), as well as burritos and sandwiches called tortas. The group was able to try some enjoyable foods, including a shrimp burrito and even a jumbo burrito. The restaurant also offers hamburgers on the menu, but everyone opted for Mexican food.

Visiting these businesses and organizations opened a window to part of the Sioux City community that some of the participants had not experienced previously and gave them an opportunity to try new things. Wiese was amazed at the grocery stores’ selection; despite their small size, he said, you could easily get all you need at the stores. Wiese also said he wants to keep doing these kinds of events and include other county council and community members.

“We need to see what is going on in the community. We see the big things, but not the small ones, the family-run businesses,” he said. “The families come here to make a better life, make a living, and provide for their families. We should do all we can to support them.”

Tour participants saw how Latino-owned businesses compare to other community businesses. They experienced new foods and conversed with business owners. Staff and council members were able to see how Latino-owned businesses connect to the growing Latino population in meaningful ways: they offer products and foods from home countries, as well as familiarity, warmth, and social spaces.

ISU Extension and Outreach Region 5 regional director Sherry McGill said, “It was a great experience and something we would like to do again. This tour helped us to improve our understanding of different cultures and learn more personally the stories of business owners.”

Renee Sweers, ISU Extension and Outreach human sciences specialist for nutrition and wellness, described the outing as “a great way to help build a bit of a bridge between council, staff, and the Latino business community. I wish all council and staff could take part in this and that multiple opportunities for council and staff to become more familiar with this community could happen every year.”

Not only are these businesses a part of the entire community’s economic growth, contributing to the tax base and employing workers, they provide a vibrancy to different neighborhoods and offer items not typically found at other grocery stores, bakeries, and restaurants. They are focal points for many in the neighborhoods and bring a high level of social capital to the community.

“Our field trip was a fun way to introduce all this, see some businesses we have worked with through CED, and add more connections that we hope will continue to expand and grow,” said Sokness.

“Maybe pickled pigs feet aren’t on your shopping list, but you can undoubtedly find interesting and enjoyable products at a Latino business,” she said. “You just have to open the door.”
FIVE STEPS TO EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

How can you add value to your business so customers will select you over others? What differentiates you from your competitors?

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development program offers customer service workshops that teach business owners five steps to help them answer these questions and more.

1. Make it YOUR OWN
2. Make it PERSONAL
3. Make it EFFICIENT
4. Make it SATISFYING
5. Make it MEMORABLE

We will highlight each of these steps in a series of articles in Community Matters, starting with step one in this issue.

The first step for any business is to make it YOUR OWN. Begin by defining your business's unique customer service culture.

Many businesses skip this step—but it is the most important! Everything you do for your customers should result from the business culture you strategically decide to create. This is not your mission statement, nor your marketing plan, but it influences both of those. Your customer service culture is the impression you want in a customer's mind the instant they hear your business name. What three words do you want your customers to say about their experience with you?

After closing their long-time family antique business, Virl and Kathy Banowetz purchased a historic home in Maquoketa and now operate the Squiers Manor B&B. Staying true to their passion for historical architecture and furniture, they now host overnight guests in an original 1882 Victorian mansion, decorated in antique decor.

My stay at this B&B was not what I expected. I was tired from a long day of teaching workshops when I arrived after dark, wanting only a comfortable bed. However, the innkeepers invited me to join the other guests for homemade desserts by candlelight, and their elegant dining room lured me inside. I found myself laughing with the other guests at stories of local history, suddenly feeling relaxed and re-energized.

Lively conversations continued the next morning, as guests salted their eggs and peppered our hosts with questions about local history. As I reluctantly returned to the road, the three business culture terms imprinted into my mind for this B&B were “historical knowledge,” “Maquoketa ambassadors,” and “elegance.” These innkeepers provided an experience not available at any chain hotel, and I still smile when I reflect upon my stay.

How does your customer service culture affect your business bottom line?

It increases or decreases your customer base. Social media lodging reviews usually focus on physical amenities. However, Squiers Manor B&B reviews focus on the intangibles. Guests consistently praise the Banowetz’s customer service culture as their reason why they keep coming back, with comments such as:

“We enjoyed the architectural tour of the home and the history lesson.”

“They know everything about the local history and fun things to do.”

“They have a sign on the back door that reads ‘Come as strangers, leave as friends’ and they couldn’t live out this motto more perfectly. Their hospitality is unmatched and unequaled.”

Virl and Kathy Banowetz participated in a customer service workshop in Maquoketa, and guest reviews indicate they are effectively applying the five steps. Watch for the next steps in future newsletter issues.

See more information about our Customer Service Workshops at www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/customer-service.

What innovative customer service ideas do you offer to your customers, or have you personally experienced? Let us know. We may use your example in an upcoming workshop or article. Contact Diane Van Wyngarden at dwv@iastate.edu.

COUNTY HEALTH DATA FOR DECISION MAKERS

REPORTS NOW AVAILABLE

The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Indicators Program has released its latest publication in the Data for Decision Makers publication series. County health profile reports are now available at http://indicators.extension.iastate.edu/county-health-data-decision-makers.

A wide range of health data and information at the county level are included to help residents, health providers, and policy makers understand the health situations and health needs of residents. The reports provide a starting point for discussions on health issues and a guide for health needs, and may help shape future programming and policies. The reports are updated annually to provide the most current set of indicators and can be used to compare across counties, regions, and the state.

The County Health Data for Decision Makers reports were created in partnership with Iowa State University’s Translational Research Network (U-TuRN). U-TuRN’s goal is to facilitate the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of evidence-based programming in community settings. The network is working to build partnerships across the state to help to promote more effective, team-based approaches to community health issues and needs.

U-TuRN is currently enrolling community-based partners in pilot projects to understand how to best support community organizations in their efforts to address critical health issues across Iowa. One of these county partnership opportunities is to develop a customized County Health Data for Decision Makers report that includes additional localized health data, customized layout, contact information, and an opportunity to pilot new technologies allowing for continual data integration.

To receive information about the free resources U-TuRN provides contact uturn@iastate.edu or visit https://research.hs.iastate.edu/uturn/.

By Diane van Wyngarden / Community Development Specialist

By Bailey Hanson / CED Systems Analyst
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is all about making connections. In the case of the PLACE (Partnering Learning And Community Engagement) program, that means connecting client communities with ISU College of Design faculty, staff, and students. Although these connections are brief—typically a semester at most—the effects can continue for years.

Two projects that illustrate the long-term impact of collaborations between ISU faculty and students and client communities are in the towns of Manning and Newton, which both participated in the PLACE program during fall semester of 2016.

In fall 2016, Reinaldo Correa, lecturer in the College of Design, was teaching a Design Studies course, “Digital Design Communication.” He was teaching part-time for ISU and also working professionally in designing, building, and installing public art projects.

Correa was interested in providing a real-world opportunity to his students to use digital design skills in a practical and applied way. Twenty-eight students all needed to learn how to use several new software programs, but Correa thought they could do more than just learn new software; he thought they could create something beautiful and useful for an Iowa community.

PLACE program coordinator Susan Erickson organized a project for Correa’s class with Manning. Correa’s students visited Manning, talked with residents and decision makers, and designed several proposals for works of public art. This project was featured in Volume 9, Issue 2 of this newsletter. Manning has continued to work with Correa and they have implemented some of the students’ design ideas. They hope to install several more pieces of public art in the future, all based on students’ ideas.

At the same time, assistant professor of landscape architecture Caroline Westort was looking for a real-world project for her “Advanced Landscape Architectural Design” class. Her 11 students were nearing graduation and she wanted them to have the opportunity to put their skills into action. The PLACE program facilitated a connection between Westort and the Jasper County Keep Iowa Beautiful Hometown Pride Program.

The Newton hometown Pride committee was looking for fresh new ideas about how to develop green space-driven revitalization schemes for the buildings and grounds of the former Maytag campus, while also tying to DMACC (Des Moines Area Community College) buildings and grounds and downtown Newton. The Newton committee asked the class to create green space-driven designs to serve economic, utility, and aesthetic functions, as well as to offer a new identity for Newton’s residents, both current and future.

In working through this project during fall 2016, Westort’s students drew on the past and present to project a future character for Newton that included its former prominence as an industrial center for Maytag Corporation, its current presence as an education hub for DMACC, and its...
evolving and aspiring demographic as a desirable community in which to live, work, and play.

After the fall semester, some interesting things began to happen. Jeff Davidson, Jasper County's Hometown Pride coordinator, sent the student project reports to different community organizations in Newton. One thing led to another, and soon Newton was seeking a private design firm to help it move forward on community development projects. They specifically asked that the student design ideas be considered in proposals they received from design firms.

Correa’s name was becoming well known in public art circles, and he was invited to join in on one of the design firm’s proposals to Newton. Correa and this design firm were awarded the contract and he is now working professionally in Newton, carrying forward the work begun by Westort and her students.

The impacts of these projects are not felt in the communities alone. In addition to offering real-world experience to design students, the PLACE program also provided learning and collaboration opportunities for the faculty members involved.

Correa and Westort both say they made amazing discoveries through their classes and through the work with Iowa communities. Westort’s work laid a foundation for the work Correa is now doing in Newton. They are both inspired by the opportunity for interdisciplinary work in the College of Design and report that most universities do not have this type of enriching opportunity. They both agree that “the existence of an Extension connection drawing us together right in our own building [the College of Design] was critical to the success of these projects.”

Westort has worked on several PLACE outreach projects during the past few years. As a non-native Iowan, she believes that the outreach projects have been a good way for her to see new sights and connect with people she would otherwise not meet. But even more importantly, as a result of the outreach projects, she “learned that my students were capable of much more than I thought.”

She learned how to merge her research interests in an applied way to benefit her students and Iowa community groups, and her early experiences have inspired her to work in partnerships with other Iowa entities. In fall semester 2017, she and her classes worked with several Iowa farmers to analyze specifically how they could adapt their agricultural practices to improve water quality.

Correa is eager to bring his students out to work in creating public art again as well. As a result of his project in Manning and other community partnerships, he has seen advances in interdisciplinary knowledge and collaborative opportunities. One goal he has for the future is to be part of a design-build project with evaluative data embedded in the project.

Westort and Correa met each other through the course of the Newton project and found out they have some things in common. They are both interested in future projects for their students that involve interactions with Iowa communities. They also found out they both have family connections in Puerto Rico. They hope to find a way to collaborate in the future with hurricane recovery efforts after the 2017 hurricane Maria disaster.
CED FACULTY AND STAFF RECOGNIZED DURING EXTENSION AND OUTREACH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

By Susan Erickson, Program Coordinator / Partnering Learning And Community Engagement

Each year in March, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach gathers for our annual conference. We receive professional development training, find inspiration, and network with our Extension and Outreach colleagues. This year’s speaker was Michelle Book from the Food Bank of Iowa. We learned more about food insecurity in Iowa and joined together to package 20,000 meals for the hungry.

Another part of the annual conference celebrates the “best of the best” work being done by ISU Extension and Outreach. The Community and Economic Development unit received several awards.

The team of Biswa Das, Extension specialist and assistant professor of community and regional planning, and community development specialists Abbie Gaffey and Jon Wolseth received the award for Outstanding Practice in Community Engagement for the great work they have done as a Housing Needs Assessment team. As a team, they
• Produce housing needs assessments and research for communities facing complex issues,
• Collaborate with local stakeholder groups, creating an accountable infrastructure, and
• Educate and empower communities to make their own choices and decisions based on data the community understands, helps to collect, discusses, disseminates, and evaluates.

Cindy Kendall, Extension program specialist, was honored with the Excellence in Partnership to Iowans award. This award focused on her long-time work with the Office of State and Local Government Programs. In partnership with the Iowa League of Cities, OSLGP:
• Provides access to year-round education for staff and elected officials from cities, counties, and townships;
• Partners with state agencies and associations to strengthen local governance and community sustainability; and
• Shares resources and coordinates programming to avoid duplication and cut costs.

The team of Bailey Hanson, systems analyst, and Christopher Seeger, Extension specialist and professor of landscape architecture, were honored for Excellence in Research-Based Programming, for their work in developing the Iowans Walking Assessment Logistics Kit (I-WALK). This toolkit:
• Uses crowdsourcing to help local leaders and citizens assess community walkability,
• Has been conducted at more than 55 locations and helps Iowans understand the relationship between the built environment and physical activity, and
• Helps communities develop safe walking routes for all ages.

The Powerful Partnerships award was given to community development specialists Victor Oyervides, Jill Sokness, and Jon Wolseth for their work as the Shop Healthy Iowa team. In partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health and the University of Iowa, this team:
• Works with Latino and Latina retailers to increase sales of produce and other healthy foods to Iowans, and
• Helps store owners to improve store layout, energy efficiency, marketing, food labeling, ordering and displaying produce, and pricing strategies.

Bailey Hanson was also recognized for her 2017 ISU Award for Early Achievement in Extension. In her work as a systems analyst for CED, Hanson
• Translates complex data into graphics and text that Iowans can use;
• Teaches GIS short courses, and has increased enrollment and revenue for the classes;
• Helped develop and implement the Indicators Portal, made the Data for Decision Makers reports accessible, and contributed significantly to the Land Grant Legacy project; and
• Collaborates across disciplines and with external partners.

Extension employees were also recognized for their years of service. CED staff who received awards include:
• Biswa Das, 5 years
• Jane Goeken, 15 years
• Carl Rogers, 15 years
• Nora Ladjahasan, 20 years
• Christopher Seeger, 20 years
• Cindy Stuve, 30 years

We are proud of all the great work being done through Community and Economic Development Extension and Outreach. It was a pleasure to be recognized by the Extension and Outreach awards committee and by John Lawrence, vice president for Extension and Outreach, during our meeting on March 26, 2018.
NEW CED SPECIALIST WORKS WITH AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN SMALL BUSINESSES AND NONPROFITS

By Sandra Oberbroeckling / Extension Program Specialist

On May 2, Kameron Middlebrooks joined Iowa State University Extension and Outreach’s Community and Economic Development (CED) unit as a community development specialist focusing primarily on African and African-American small businesses and nonprofits, working to build strategic partnerships to help identify areas of collaboration that can help businesses and organizations thrive in Iowa’s urban communities.

Middlebrooks comes to ISU from the Evelyn K. Davis Center in Des Moines, where he was an asset development associate working on economic and community development for small businesses and nonprofits.

Middlebrooks became involved with the NAACP during high school, serving as a youth representative to NAACP National Board of Directors for four years. In 2012, at the age of 24, he became the Midwestern regional field director of the NAACP, the youngest to ever serve in that position. As regional director, he organized a voter registration campaign that registered more than 15,000 people of color across the Midwest. He actively engaged the Iowa-Nebraska state conference in talks with the Governor Terry Branstad to streamline the process for felons to regain their right to vote.

Middlebrooks left the NAACP in 2014 to start his own business venture. From 2014–2016 he operated a marketing and managerial firm, Equalizer Management Inc, which focused on integrated communication solutions for residential and business clients.

“Initially, I will be continuing some of the work I started at Evelyn K. Davis Center,” said Middlebrooks. “This work will include recruitment and facilitation of the Master Business Boot Camp. This boot camp is designed for small business owners who have been in operation for at least six months.”

The boot camp focuses on branding or rebranding the business as well as understanding accounting principles.

Middlebrooks is also working on the One Economy project, which addresses the results of the One Economy report on the disparities of the African and African American communities in Polk County in the areas of housing, employment, education, health, small business, and financial inclusion. He is coordinating six working groups of representatives from community organizations, business leaders, and affected community members to devise strategies that could affect some of the data provided in the report.

Middlebrooks is officed at the Evelyn K. Davis Center in Des Moines and can be reached at 515-231-5055 or kameronm@iastate.edu.

GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM HIRES NEW SYSTEMS ANALYST

By Sandra Oberbroeckling / Extension Program Specialist

Rakesh Shah joined the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development unit on May 7, shortly after completing a master’s degree in computer science at ISU. Shah will be working as a systems analyst focusing on general IT and project development for the Geospatial Technology Program.

“I will be mostly working as a full stack developer where I will be building web tools to meet the growing needs of the Extension and Outreach Indicators Portal,” said Shah. “I will be working on data visualization and data dissemination and related tools.”

Specifically, he will be “working with the data team to improve access and delivery of the Indicators Portal and implementing new interactive features that will allow users to better explore data about their community,” according to Chris Seeger, Extension specialist and professor of landscape architecture.

In addition, Shah will be tasked with redeveloping how maps are included in future Data for Decision Makers reports.

Prior to studying computer science at ISU, Shah earned a bachelor’s degree in information technology from the Indian Institute of Information Technology in Allahabad, India. He chose to come to Iowa because ISU’s computer science program is one of the top programs in the United States, and some of his friends strongly recommended the graduate program.

Shah was attracted to the systems analyst position because for the past three years he had worked primarily with “front-end” applications, whereas in his new position he will have the opportunity to work on both front-end and back-end applications, growing his skill set.

(A “front-end” application is one that users interact with directly. The “back-end” refers to everything the user can’t see in the browser, such as databases and servers.)
ISU EXTENSION CED SUPPORTS REVITALIZATION OF IOWA RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development program is playing a role in re-energizing the Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC).

Since 1992, IRDC has been engaging partners and assisting small towns. And there are steps being taken to boost the work of the council and expand its impact.

The IRDC was created as part of an Executive Order and ensuing Farm Bill in 1992. It received federal funding for many years and was later housed in the Iowa Department of Economic Development. But both state and federal funding dissolved and the group has operated informally without paid staff since 2005.

In 2016, the IRDC hosted the first-ever Iowa Rural Summit, bringing together 300 individuals from more than 60 rural communities. That event sparked a resurgence in interest among rural advocates and convinced IRDC partners, who include federal and state agencies, Regents’ institutions and community colleges, utilities, nonprofits and statewide associations, to revitalize the Council’s ability to support rural development. Gary Taylor, CED program director, serves on the IRDC leadership team.

The second Iowa Rural Summit was held April 5-6 in Grinnell, attracting 331 individuals from 70 communities. Held at the Hotel Grinnell, which opened last year in the 1920s-era former Grinnell Junior High, the summit sought to assist small towns and rural places identify their priorities, plan for their futures, and build their capacity to address their needs. ISU Extension CED was a sponsor and an exhibitor at the event.

IRDC executive director Bill Menner, who served as the USDA director of rural development for Iowa from 2009 to 2017, was previously economic development director in Poweshiek County. He is helping the IRDC connect with new partners, resource providers, and innovative rural communities who can provide successful case studies for other places.

“Rural Iowa has so much, from engaged residents to committed leaders and forward-thinking businesses,” Menner said. “But many times, they start from scratch when they work to develop new ideas or address community needs. Instead they could be just looking down the road for direction and I think the IRDC can compile and share those best practices.”

The financial resources created through sponsors and engaged members will position the IRDC to launch new programs that address rural issues, build capacity with small towns, and capitalize on opportunities that exist to enhance the viability of rural communities.

Those opportunities may revolve around issues the IRDC sees as central to rural development, from housing to workforce to broadband to entrepreneurship.

For more information about the Iowa Rural Development Council or the 2018 Iowa Rural Summit, contact Bill Menner at iowaruralcouncil@gmail.com or 641-990-4757.

COMMUNITIES LEARN TO DEAL WITH NUISANCE PROPERTIES

By Eric Christianson / Community Development Specialist

Overgrown weeds, junk vehicles, and abandoned properties may start out as minor issues in communities, but they can soon grow to be a major concern. Nuisances of all kinds can have a massive effect on quality of life for residents, economic development, and property values. Dealing with these issues can be complex and potentially expensive.

To provide communities in Iowa with the tools they need to deal with these problems, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach partnered with the Iowa League of Cities to host a one-day conference at the Gateway Hotel and Conference Center in Ames on May 16, 2018.

The demand for this training in Iowa is strong. One hundred sixty-five local officials attended with dozens more on the waiting list.

The conference included general information on state and local nuisance-property codes and several breakout sessions providing guidance on practical enforcement methods, dealing with dangerous and dilapidated buildings, and how to set a strong foundation for nuisance abatement locally. Attendees learned effective ways to rebuild homes and buildings, return dormant properties to an active use, and restore community pride.

At the end, participants heard from a diverse panel of city officials who have used innovative methods in successfully addressing nuisance properties. In this session, representatives from Centerville, Keokuk, and Columbus Junction shared lessons that can be applied in any community, responded to questions from the audience, and offered advice on how to handle local challenges.

From urban roosters to impromptu junkyards, the nuisance issues that communities face can be as unique as the communities themselves.

Because of the positive response from attendees, this conference will be the first in a series of collaborations between the Iowa League of Cities and ISU Extension and Outreach on this issue. In addition, ISU Extension and Outreach offers nuisance-abatement workshops on demand to communities. This is especially useful for communities that wish to expand their current enforcement or to adopt a local nuisance code.

Those interested in scheduling a nuisance-abatement workshop in their community can contact Eric Christianson 515-231-6513 or ejchr@iastate.edu.
LOCAL BUSINESSES BENEFIT FROM ISU EXTENSION COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROAD SCHOLAR PROGRAMS

Iowa tourism is a growing and competitive business. According to 2016 research released by the Iowa Legislature, state tourism revenues exceeded $8 billion, with communities and businesses across the state trying to carve out a piece of the pie for themselves.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is ready to help. Community and Economic Development specialist Diane Van Wyngarden serves Iowa with the Road Scholar program. Van Wyngarden researches group travel trends, develops tools to help businesses thrive in the group travel industry, and share this information with Iowa businesses.

Van Wyngarden offers on-site consultations on her schedule through July 2018 for any business or nonprofit interested in initiating, improving or expanding services for group travelers. For a limited time, the cost is only $50 for a two-hour consultation, because the Road Scholar group travel study currently is subsidizing the consultations. The cost will rise to $800 when the funding program ends.

“Our niche is working with small businesses,” said Van Wyngarden. “I work very closely with businesses wanting to use group travel—restaurants, attractions, agritourism, and places that are not normally included on tours or trails but want to initiate or expand group travel services. It provides another product option for business profitability.”

The consultations have made an impact for communities across Iowa.

“The consultations also have been popular and there’s still time to get involved. “It’s been growing by word-of-mouth,” Van Wyngarden said. “If it’s working for a business they will tell a neighbor about it. We have limited space, but this has been very popular and I’m taking applications to fill my final spots.”

ISU Extension and Outreach’s Community and Economic Development program has offered the Road Scholar program since Van Wyngarden joined the unit in 2006. The program provides a road map and toolkit of practical techniques that help businesses and communities experience group travel success.

“Group travel is the great tourism equalizer,” said Van Wyngarden. “Groups will travel to any Iowa location, rural or urban, if a business knows how to generate a strong pull.” Van Wyngarden said her research has identified the key components a business must have to become an effective group travel magnet, and she is eager to help Iowa businesses better position themselves in the tourism economy.

Van Wyngarden also tests the products she consults on by leading paid travel groups on weeklong journeys that serve as intensive studies on a focused subject, such as the Upper Mississippi River, the Missouri River valley, central Iowa, Iowa’s old-order Amish population, the Amana Colonies, or Iowa’s early settlers.

The program has been very successful. The national Road Scholar organization used Net Promoter Score surveys to rank more than 1,000 programs, and named the Road Scholar’s educational experiences through ISU Extension and Outreach as “The Best Travel Program in North America.”

There are a few seats remaining for the Best of the Upper Mississippi River program in September 2018. Get more information at www.IowaRoadScholar.com.
Iowa State University Foundation Gift/Pledge Form

Please consider making a gift to support our work. Gifts of any size are welcome and may be sent to:
Iowa State University Foundation   2505 University Blvd.   Ames, IA 50010–2230   (515) 294–4607
If you prefer, please make your gift online at: www.foundation.iastate.edu/give

Name ____________________________________________________________
Address 1 ____________________________________________________________________________
Address 2 ____________________________________________________________________________
City, State Zip _________________________________________________________________________

Gift Designation
☐ I/We wish my/our gift to be designated to: ☐ Extension Communities and Economic Development Program (2701585)
☐ Other ________________________________________________________________ 07 CD9:03

Outright Contribution
Gift Amount: $ ________________________________________________________________________
☐ Please bill my credit card: ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA ☐ Discover ☐ Discover Card Number: ____________________________
Exp. Date: __________ Signature: __________________________

Corporate Matching Gifts
☐ My/My spouse/partner’s company offers a match for charitable contributions.
Employer Name(s) ________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your support!