In 2013 the Community Foundation Education program was founded. The program is a three-year collaboration fund with Montana State University Extension, Montana Community Foundation and Anaconda Local Development Corporation. Its goal is to build the capacity of Montana’s communities by establishing or building up existing community foundations.

Liberty County Extension became involved in the project when an invitation was extended to representatives of the Montana Community Foundation and the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance to speak to interested Liberty County residents. One attendee later said, “The presenters were great and had knowledge way beyond my expectation. I appreciate that Montana invests so much in their people and their financial safety. I was able to make a call the very next day to help someone that has been a victim of insurance fraud.” From that meeting, interest was gauged as to whether or not there was sufficient need and interest in Liberty County to begin its own community foundation. Subsequent meetings were held and a community foundation was formally organized in February 2014, as the Golden Prairie Community Foundation. The foundation’s roles are to develop assets, fund local projects through grant making and to provide leadership along the Hi-Line through partnerships with local partners.

The Golden Prairie Community Foundation continued to meet throughout 2014, establishing an advisory board of 10 members, writing and adopting bylaws and preparing a brochure that will go out to Hi-Line residents in the fall of 2014. Additionally the board has begun to implement community involvement in their programming. A tax luncheon was conducted to help area tax professionals become more familiar with the Montana Endowment Tax Credit. The foundation also chose to be affiliated with the Montana Community Foundation, allowing the local foundation access to advice and investments while remaining a volunteer board.

While the Golden Prairie Community Foundation is new to the area it has the potential to enrich the lives of generations of Liberty County area residents through the capture of intergenerational wealth.

Many of Liberty County’s shelterbelts were originally planted 50-60 years ago. Over the course of time these shelterbelts have become overgrown or have died back. Dr. Peter Kolb, Extension Forestry Specialist, spoke to a group of 40 concerned landowners about how to renovate existing shelterbelts as well as measures to take when planning new shelterbelts.

In order to understand what corrective measures to take on their shelterbelts, Dr. Kolb discussed basic tree care, explaining tree physiology. He also covered proper pruning techniques to keep those trees healthy, and what tools work best when pruning on a yearly basis.

For those considering a new shelterbelt, Dr. Kolb shared information on which trees to select as well as effective placement in reference to existing buildings and also allowing space for trees to grow.

Participants learned that understanding basic tree care in regards to moisture, light and nutrient requirements will help them make better use of their resources and time.

From this workshop, attendees came away feeling better prepared to maintain existing shelterbelts as well as more knowledgeable about how to plan a new one.
Obstacles to Production Practices
In the past several years, area growers have had to make some difficult decisions regarding whether to remove or re-enroll lands in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Liberty County Extension, in conjunction with other Extension offices throughout the Golden Triangle, hosted a CRP workshop to help growers answer some of those decisions. Dr. Kent McVay, Extension Cropping System Specialist, and Cecil Tharp, Extension Pesticide Specialist, discussed obstacles growers face putting land back into crop production, such as moisture, fertility and weed and pest control. Additionally, growers learned about the fate of herbicides that are commonly used in cropping systems.

Discussions from these topics allowed growers to leave the meeting prepared to make decisions that will not only affect potential production costs on their farms but will also help conserve environmentally vulnerable lands from further degradation.

The Fruits of Their Labors
Home food preservation has been a part of Americana for decades. This was evident in a food preservation workshop that was put on by Liberty County Extension. (Photo courtesy of Janice Hendrickson).

Participants in the food preservation workshop learn up-to-date practices about how to preserve foods using hot water and pressure canner methods.

Participants that brought pressure canner gauges from home also had the opportunity to have those gauges tested for safety. Several gauges were determined to be outside of safe practice zones and recommendations were given to discard those gauges. By attending the class and learning about Extension approved practices and recommended use of safe instruments, participants gained knowledge and experience that will allow them to utilize home gardens better and more economically.

4-Health and Strength and Family
Liberty County Extension collaborated with the Chester-Joplin-Inverness School District Adult Education program to teach a program about healthy lifestyles in the fall of 2013. The program, titled 4-Health, consisted of 10 lessons dealing with nutrition and fitness issues at hand in many homes with youth. Lessons on parenting styles, nutrition basics, child development, family communication, physical activity and enhancing healthy food choices were all part of the programming. Parents of pre-teens were targeted for the class as they can more effectively guide children’s health habits during those years.

Parents who attended the classes were encouraged to take the lessons from the class sessions and apply them in their individual homes. One mother began noticing how she was trying to be more diligent in providing healthy snacks for her children after school. Additionally, all parents involved became more aware that the choices they make in living healthy lives directly contributes to health and nutrition choices made by their children.

Setting Their Sights on Safety
Learning by doing is the motto of 4-H. Liberty County 4-H took that motto to heart as they began a 4-H shooting sports air rifle program in the fall of 2013. With persistent persuasion, a 4-H youth convinced his grandmother to take the necessary training to become certified and with that the air rifle program was off and running!

Nine 4-H’ers enrolled in the project. Grants totaling over $3000 were written and received from the National Rifle Association Foundation and the Montana 4-H Foundation. Funds from these grants were used to buy much needed supplies such as air rifles, targets, and pellets. Monetary contributions totaling over $2500 were also received from community members, including many who had no previous relationship to the 4-H program.

Emphasis in the project has been placed on producing championship youth, not championship shooters. Focus during project meetings is concentrated on how to safely handle and shoot firearms and have fun doing it. Champions shooters have resulted in a short time thanks to this method of training. Awareness of the vitality of the program has led to an increase in 4-H enrollment overall with an emphasis being placed on new members joining specifically to be involved in the air rifle program. The influx of new adult volunteers combined with previous leaders returning after a break in service, allows the responsibility of running project meetings to rest on multiple shoulders.

So, what about the original volunteer? She is now certified to teach air rifle safety throughout the state of Montana and serves on the state’s Shooting Sports Committee. All of this proves that one should never underestimate the power of one very persuasive 4-H’er!

Sprucing Up the Landscape
Teaching youth about taking advantage of service opportunities is an important part of Liberty County 4-H. In downtown Chester a garden plot exists between the Post Office and a business. Throughout the years, time and weather have taken their toll on the area. A 4-H’er with extensive horticulture experience decided to change that. Working with area businesses to spruce up the plot and recreate a spot of quiet beauty, he began making plans. Efforts were made possible by a People Partner grant from the Montana 4-H Foundation as well as local businesses donating of their time, money and resources.

Excess blow dirt was removed, trees and bushes trimmed, rotting wooden timber borders were removed and replaced with new stone blocks creating a weather proof, more permanent border for the plot. Efforts to renovate flora and add mulch will continue early next spring.

Montana State University Extension

Agriculture and Consumer Sciences

4-H Focuses on Learning and Service Opportunities

Members of the Clover Hotshots meet with local donors whose contributions made possible the purchase of several 4-H air rifles.

Liberty County 4-H members practice shooting for safety and accuracy in the prone position with air rifles purchased through local and state donations.

Liberty County 4-H member with a local businessman who provided landscaping advice to improve the garden plot.

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