The Cascade County 4-H Horse Leaders along with Rose Malisani, Cascade County MSU Extension Agent, planned and organized the Montana State 4-H Horse Show in September 2016 at the Montana ExpoPark in Great Falls. The Horse Leaders logged over 1,500 hours of planning, organizing, and hosting the show.

“Hosting the Montana State Horse Shows pulled together a team of talented Cascade County 4-H Horse Leaders and volunteers,” said Brook Gerard, Cascade County 4-H Horse Leader President. “Our hard work paid off and it was really fun to see the end results. The State 4-H Horse Show showcased Montana's amazing 4-H parents and kids. I encourage other regions or counties to take this on and have as much fun as we did.”

One hundred and twenty two 4-H members and 142 horses competed at the State Horse Show. The 4-H members traveled from across the state to test their skills in an educational and enjoyable contest. Classes offered included nearly every aspect of the 4-H horse project as well as nearly every skill level of rider.

Youth, ages 9-19, entered and competed based on the qualifying guidelines of their county.

The Cascade County 4-H Horse Leaders secured $9,260 in sponsorships to offset the costs of the State Horse Show.

Fifty-four volunteers assisted with the three day show.

Abigail Lichliter, SNAP-Ed Program Manager, Receives Healthy Hero Award

The Eat Right Montana and Action for Healthy Kids’ Healthy Hero Award recognizes leaders who go over and beyond in their communities to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity.

Lichliter’s nominators stated: “Heroes are people we look up to and are generally mentors who are in the later years of their professional career. Abigail Lichliter is the exception.

She is the MSU Extension Cascade County SNAP-Ed Program Manager and just beginning her career. However, her contagious smile, endless energy, approachable personality and risk-taking nature can light up a room.”

As Cascade County’s SNAP-Ed Program Manager, Abigail teaches the Eating Smart and Being Active curriculum to low income families and children. She also assists community organizations in providing technical assistance for policy, system and environmental changes to make healthy choices easy choices in the Great Falls area.

Throughout her three and a half years in Great Falls, Abigail received her Bachelor’s in Nursing from MSU Great Falls College of Nursing, helped four Great Falls Public schools switch to Breakfast in the Classroom, worked on getting the Great Falls Public Schools Summer Feeding Trailer, established the Kids FRESH Food Forum, kicked off the Building Active Communities Davidson Plaza Event and much more.

Lichliter’s nominator summarized by stating, “She is extraordinary.” We couldn’t agree more.
Cascade County Master Gardeners Answer the Call

2016 proved to be a busy year for the Cascade County Master Gardeners with community gardens, farmer’s market, teaching, youth education, construction, diagnosing diseases, identifying insects, and answering horticulture questions.

The Master Gardener program is a three level course that covers soils, fruit, vegetables, trees, shrubs, irrigation, composting, lawns, pests, nutrient cycle, insect identification, diseases, plant growth, fruit trees, nomenclature, and other subjects.

Levels 1 and 2 are taught by Rose Malisani, MSU Cascade County Agriculture Extension Agent, and Level 3 Master Gardeners. Level 3 classes are taught on the campus of Montana State University by Toby Day, MSU Horticulture Specialist. The three-day training includes a horticulture tour with emphasis on horticulture and agriculture. Cascade County sent 12 Level 2 students to Bozeman for Level 3 training. Each level is completed with students volunteering in their communities.

Cascade county logged 13,579 volunteer hours in 2016.

The Cascade County Master Gardeners hosted the biannual Montana Master Gardener Celebration in September. Gardeners gathered from across the state to learn about local horticulture. Participants traveled to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Groundworks Farm, and Branch Brady’s garden. The first day featured a keynote talk from renowned horticulturist, Whitney Cranshaw. The second day of workshops included topics of herbs, hobby greenhouses, trees, tool keeping, water features, and the Western Ag Research Center.

Level 1 and 2 Master Gardner classes are offered annually at Cascade County MSU Extension. Level 2 classes will begin in February 2017 and Level 1 classes will begin in October 2017.

JDC Wellness Program

The Cascade County MSU Extension nutrition education program works with Cascade County Juvenile Detention Center to deliver nutrition lessons once a month to the youth at the Center. Youth who are incarcerated come from a variety of backgrounds. One of the challenges youth face is coming from food insecure homes. One survey completed at the Center indicated that 85% of the youth did not have food at the end of the month.

During the nutrition classes, youth learn about nutrition, developing skills that promote self-sufficiency, stretching the money that they have for food, safely handling and preserving foods for later use, and different food preparation methods they can use to fix food for themselves and family members. The classes also include an exercise program geared toward exercises that assist youth in coping with incarceration. Exercises include dealing with sleeping on a hard surface and how to use their time in a productive and healthy manner.

The goal of this program is to help youth stay fit and learn how to provide a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their families when they return to society.

Cascade County 4-H Members Bring Warmth to Their Community

Service learning and community engagement are longstanding traditions in 4-H. Service learning is an opportunity for youth to learn about their community needs and work together to meet those needs through participation in structured opportunities for service and reflection.

For the fourteenth year, Cascade County 4-H Members sewed baby blankets over the course of two days to donate to the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in Cascade County. The blankets are distributed to local mothers the City-County Health Department. As the 4-Hers learn to sew the blankets and lovingly embroider the message “Sewn with love by Cascade County 4-H” on each one, they learn about the WIC program and the mothers and infants that are impacted by their contribution. In 2016, over 180 blankets were constructed and donated, with over 4,500 blankets donated since 2002. Cascade County 4-H’ers continue to learn and grow through service.

Cascade County 4-H’ers Conquer the Great Outdoors

Each year, an average of 80 4-H youth, ranging in ages 9-18, attend Cascade County 4-H Camp. For three days, youth participate in workshops, games, and traditional youth camp activities. This year, workshops included self-defense, arts and crafts, outdoor survival, jitterbug dance, teambuilding, and outdoor orienteering. Cascade County 4-H teens plan and facilitate the entire camp with the guidance of adult chaperones. Camp is the highlight for many Cascade County 4-H youth.
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
Cascade County MSU Extension facilitates the largest and most active Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support and Education groups in Montana. Recognized as the community resource for assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren, Cascade County MSU Extension offers resources to one in every four grandparents in Cascade County.

The monthly educational meeting offers grandparents a safe place to talk about challenges they face. Education this year focused on self-care. Grandparents learned that taking care of their own health is a necessity and not a luxury. Classes included discussion and acknowledgement of feelings both good and bad, and understanding and navigating emotions. Grandparents deal with stress and worry, anger, resentment, guilt, and grief.

One of the program goals is to offer support in many ways. Being an active member of the monthly group gives grandparents a chance to work through feelings and to accept their personal situations. Forging friendships with grandparents with similar aged children, the educational group offers camaraderie and helps navigate the issues facing children today.

Hobbies and relaxation are necessary to avoid burnout and depression. Cascade County MSU Extension, with the assistance of a Better Ways grant, facilitated two Make and Take programs for Christmas and Easter Holidays. The program allowed the grandparents to enjoy friendships and to realize that relaxation is beneficial when all senses are involved while creating gifts and food for the holidays. The workshop activities can be reproduced with the grandchildren at home.

Nitrate Quick Tests Serve Montana Ranchers
Cascade County MSU Extension conducted over 50 nitrate quick tests in 2016. Due to a mild fall, nitrate tests were conducted into November 2016 with regrowth of feed barley, oats, and other grains. Nitrates are tested in cereal grains that are intended to feed livestock because it can cause abortions or even death in livestock. Elevated nitrate levels are caused by drought, hail and other stressful factors. However, nitrates are important, as they are converted to plant protein, which is then utilized by livestock. USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service reports that Cascade County is home to 59,000 head of cattle in 2015. Nitrate tests are a cheap and effective test to prevent animal loss and increase ranch profit.

SNAP-Ed Begins Teaching Youth Understanding MyPlate (YUM)
Abigail Lichliter, the SNAP-Ed Program Manager for Cascade County MSU Extension, received the YUM Curriculum training in June 2016 and began implementing the curriculum at the Boys and Girls Club of Cascade County and Sunnyside Elementary.

Youth Understanding MyPlate or YUM, promotes healthy lifestyles for youth and their families. Each of the six lessons reinforce MyPlate messages, including eating whole grains, choosing low-fat dairy, making half of your plate fruits and vegetables, food safety, and other practices that encourage healthy eating habits. The six part lesson series is grade-specific for first, third and fifth grade students and incorporates “hands-on” learning activities as well as physical activity within each of the 45-60 minutes lessons.

The Boys and Girls Club Members had the extra benefit of visiting the Westside Orchard Garden where they learned how to grow their own gardens and reinforce healthy eating concepts learned during YUM.

County Wellness Program
The Cascade County Employee Wellness program completed its fourth year. Escalating health care costs continue to remain an issue of great concern for Cascade County. Employees with more risk factors, including being overweight, smoking and having diabetes not only cost more to insure, they also pay more for health care than individuals with less risk factors. To help make a positive impact, Cascade County Safety Department and Cascade County MSU Extension offer a workplace wellness program to offset the rising costs of health care.

Wellness classes deal with topics that go beyond diet and exercise, include dealing with stress, caring for aging parents, and winter safety at work and at home. After a suicide in one of the departments, a class on suicide was reported as one of the most impactful. Thirty-four percent of the people attending the class either had considered suicide or had a family member who had committed suicide.

Wellness class impacts include creation of a list of counselors and suicide prevention trainers employed in Cascade County that was delivered to each department, improved the health of already at-risk employees, raised awareness so employees with fewer risk factors can receive a reduction in their health insurance rates, and maintained and improved employee relations and morale.

Employees report that receiving a check for completing the Wellness program is an incentive to attend the classes. Bottom line, a healthy, motivated workforce is vitally important to Cascade County.
Cascade County Shelterbelts Growing to New Heights

Establishing shelterbelts has been a longtime program for MSU Extension. Farmers and ranchers began planning shelterbelts when they homesteaded to decrease wind erosion. Shelterbelts also decrease home heating and cooling costs, improve homestead quality of life, defer snow from piling along structures, and create ecosystems for both birds and wildlife.

Shelterbelt education in Cascade County is year-round. Rose Malisani, Cascade County MSU Extension Agriculture Agent, made over 40 house calls to help residents establish new shelterbelts and prune existing, neglected shelterbelts. Along with home visits, Peter Kolb, MSU Extension Forestry Specialist, presented a free seminar on Arbor Day to 60 Cascade County residents on how to properly select trees, plant, maintain, and prune trees.

Thirty-eight Cascade County residents ordered trees and shrubs through the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation’s (DNRC) tree nursery in 2015-2016 with Cascade County residents planting 11,547 shrubs and trees. Tree orders are choreographed through Cascade County MSU Extension and Montana DNRC for an April delivery date. Due to the success of the shelterbelt program in Cascade County, the Cascade Conservation District requested to combine their program with Cascade County MSU Extension. Since 2014, tree orders have been a combined effort between the two entities.

Cascade County 4-H’ers On Interstate Exchange Adventures

The 4-H Interstate Exchange program gives youth an opportunity to travel, learn firsthand about distant 4-H programs, meet other 4-H youth in different parts of the country, gain skills and confidence in traveling, and experience things beyond the borders of their own State. This summer concluded the two-year Interstate Exchange for a group of Cascade County 4-H’ers. Beginning in the 2014-2015 4-H year, this group began fundraising and partnered with a group of 4-H’ers from Sullivan County, New Hampshire.

In Summer 2015, youth from New Hampshire traveled to Cascade County to learn more about Montana culture, geography, and agricultural industry. The same group of Cascade County 4-H’ers that hosted the New Hampshire youth traveled in 2016 to New York and then to New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

Their adventures in New England included sightseeing in New York City, attending a Broadway play, exploring the Flume State Park, building team work and confidence at the Sunapee Adventure Park, visiting Saint Guaden National Park, touring Newport, building a parade float and participating in the parade, visiting the Seacoast Science Center and much more.

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