Welcome to Park County

Park County spans nearly 85 miles from north to south and encompasses almost 1.7 million acres of land. Nearly 16,000 residents live here and enjoy the expanse of scenic beauty the landscape offers. Agriculture, healthcare and social services, and tourism are major economic drivers.

County Tri-Funded Support

Funded jointly by the City of Livingston, Park County, and Montana State University, Park County Extension maximizes taxpayer investment by leveraging funds and resources to improve lives, landscapes, and livelihoods. For every $53 dollars invested by Park County taxpayers, MSU invests $47—an 89% return on investment.

Excellence in Extension: Working to Build Community Capacity

Education, leadership development, and capacity building are at the foundation of Extension work. Knowledgeable and engaged citizens are critical in building strong, healthy, vibrant communities. Research shows that successful communities invest in the development of their people. This is why all three Park County Extension agents incorporate this work across their discipline areas.

From the Leadership 49 program, to hosting educational events with Temple Grandin and the Redevelopment Symposium that drew hundreds of people from the county and state, to building capacity for service providers and Livingston Graduation Matters, to the many youth leadership development programs, we recognize that by empowering the youth, adults, and communities in Park County, we are increasing the number of engaged citizens and effective leaders.

Participants who step into leadership roles in their school, home, business, or community contribute positive impacts across Park County. These impacts affect all communities and are establishing a strong foundation for a culture of positive change.
Master Gardeners Give Back

Sixteen Park County Master Gardeners attended eight, two-hour classes to learn how to improve home gardening skills to grow their own food, improve landscape and irrigation efficiency to conserve water, and best practices for using Integrated Pest Management to reduce pesticides in the environment. Additionally, eight of these students contributed 160 hours of volunteer time to improve the lives of Montanans.

Over half of volunteer hours were spent with youth. Research shows that early exposure to gardening fosters a lasting positive relationship with gardening, bonding experiences with parents and other adults, and healthy eating habits. Two volunteers developed a Garden Therapy curriculum for 53 special needs children in a Life Skills class. Students learned how to plant and grow seedlings, wash and cut fruits and vegetables, and use technology to plan a garden. Nearly 80% of students tasted and approved of novel fruits and vegetables. Three volunteers taught youth about general gardening principles, harvesting techniques, and how to winterize garden tools.

Nearly 25 hours of volunteer pruning occurred in Montana’s Heritage Orchards in Park County, which were planted by homesteaders and are up to 100 years old. This program works to preserve heritage orchards and tree cultivars in Montana, as well as to contribute to rural economies through agro-tourism where orchards exist. Other volunteers pruned in the Livingston Community Garden, cleaned medians to beautify Livingston, propagated geraniums at Eagle Mount, and worked with Yellowstone National Park officials to plant native shrubs and grasses and collect native seed.

Temple Grandin Engages All Ages Across a Wide Demographic

Nearly 400 people packed the gymnasium at Park High in September to listen to Temple Grandin, a world renowned speaker and expert on autism, animal behavior, and low-stress livestock handling. Grandin’s hour-long presentation focused on animal behavior and livestock handling. However, people from all walks of life attended the presentation due to Grandin’s reputation.

Grandin specifically requested that there be a strong youth component in the crowd. The youth represented 4-H clubs in nine counties and FFA chapters in five counties. These students increased their knowledge of animal behavior and how those principles apply to sound livestock management, which results in healthier livestock that generate greater revenue. Impressively, nearly 75% of the questions asked of Grandin came from youth inquiring about how to improve their livestock projects.

Adults in the crowd represented nine counties from diverse professions, representing agriculture, non-profits, interior design, accounting, mental health, hospitality, local government, insurance, news media, education, real estate, and more. One individual stated, “I don’t have livestock or 4-H kids, but knew the information Temple provided would be valuable to hear.” The sentiment regarding the value of the program was repeated by many in attendance.
4-H: More Than $229,000 in Gross Sales

The community believes that 4-H can help youth learn a great deal about financial management. Why? Before the auction, every market livestock exhibitor, 86 in total, completed a financial inventory of their project including fixed and variable costs, income earned, expenses incurred, and the cost of feed per pound of gain. At fair, these 4-Hers interviewed with an industry professional about their project and their records. One 4-H’er commented, “Now I know how much feed I need. I can shop for it in bulk and save at least 20%.” Another 4-H’er said, “I paid $50 to have my lamb shorn before the fair. Next year, I am going to learn how to clip and do it myself.” The end results: better future businessmen and women to help build this community.

Learning by Doing: A Success Story

Forty 6-10 year olds attended and completed a week long, day camp learning basic food preparation and food safety skills. Why? Because as of July 2016, a USDA ERS report on Where Households Get Food in a Typical Week: Findings From USDA’s FoodAPS, stated that 85 percent of American households reported eating out on average 5.4 times per week. One third of all food expenses were away from home. Kid’s Cooking Camp, a partnership between MSU Extension and the Livingston Food Resource Center hopes to change that. At the camp, children learn the skills to turn cooking from a parent-only activity to a family activity.

One participant remarked his favorite part was “the independence I had while making the food. I used a knife, a stove, and mixed ingredients all by myself!” Six months after camp, half of parents reported that their child or children made one meal per week. One parent commented, “I spend time and money making sure my kids get to participate in team sports. Because of this camp, I realized I should be focusing on life-long skill development. They will always need to eat! Thank you!”

4-H: More Than Youth Development

A letter from the outgoing Park County 4-H Council President and Yellowstone Helitack Crew Foreman, Wendy Hafer, to the Park County 4-H Council:

I wanted to just drop you all a note on what would be my last meeting as President of the Park County 4-H Council. I wanted to thank all of you for helping me. For helping me grow as a leader, a teacher, a mentor, and a parent, and even a human. These years as president have taught me more patience, diplomacy, and the ability to look at the big picture with professionalism and integrity than any paying job could have ever done. This is definitely not goodbye, but just a heartfelt thank you. My favorite thing about living in Montana is the people. And you are those people.
Growing Businesses, Communities, and Leaders

The challenges and opportunities for communities across Park County are as varied as the landscape. While the strategic direction is clearly outlined for the economic and community development program, the ability to work with communities in areas of need is the real strength.

Business assistance and training through one-on-one counseling/consultations, Business Expansion and Retention program, and the Entrepreneur fwd Business Series continues to help grow strong businesses to create and retain jobs in communities across Park County. To date, Extension programs have assisted in retaining 43 jobs with an estimated $1.3 million in wages and creating 11 jobs with an estimated $330,000 in wages. Extension has also assisted 12 successful business startups, strengthening and diversifying Park County’s economy.

Leadership 49 successfully graduated 14 participants in its second year, increasing the number of leaders engaged in our communities. In June, the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals awarded Leadership 49 the Excellence in Community Development Team Award for the Western region.

Housing and workforce challenges continue to impact many across Park County. Gardiner continues to work on housing solutions identified in the 2015 Housing Report and allocated resort tax funds for dedicated assistance. The old hospital in Livingston is currently in the process of adaptive reuse to become affordable housing using tax credits. Extension-supported workforce development projects have created connections between industry and local high schools. Park High will pilot a series of manufacturing modules in early 2017.

Ignite presentation at the Business & Entrepreneur Spark event.

Leadership 49 participants tour Gardiner.

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