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### **Six exemplary projects selected for Wisconsin Top Rural Development Initiative honors**

HOLLANDALE - Wisconsin Rural Partners, Inc., a statewide non-profit corporation, will award the Top Rural Development Initiatives for 2016 at a ceremony at the Potawatomi Carter Casino and Conference Center in Wabeno Wisconsin on Thursday, April 21 at 12:45 PM. The awards will be presented by Wisconsin Rural Partners president Don Sidlowski, awards committee chairperson Coreen Fallat and Wisconsin Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch.

“Rural Partners received 31 nominations this year for these prestigious awards, and there were very many wonderful projects,” said Rural Partners Executive Director Rick Rolfsmeyer. “The six initiatives selected by the judges are truly the cream of the crop, exemplifying the best of all the great things rural Wisconsin has to offer.”

The six efforts receiving *Top Rural Development Initiative* awards are:

- The Flambeau River Community Growing Center, Park Falls
- Milk Source Hunting Land Auction, Kaukauna
- The Pop-Up Shop Initiative, Viroqua Chamber Main Street
- Town Square – Green Lake Renewal
- Forest County Potawatomi Insurance Department, Crandon
- Reedsburg ArtsLink – Ruminant/Harvest Park Initiative

Wisconsin Rural Partners is a statewide non-profit organization that develops rural networks and leaders, and provides a voice for rural Wisconsin. WRP is the federally-recognized State Rural Development Council for Wisconsin.

This is the sixteenth year that Wisconsin Rural Partners has recognized Wisconsin’s Top Rural Development Initiatives. The program is designed to identify, highlight, and share innovative models, practices and programs that have a positive impact on rural Wisconsin communities. Wisconsin Rural Partners created the program to provide a mechanism for rural communities to learn from each other.

For more information on the Wisconsin Rural Summit visit <http://wirural.org/summit2015>.

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Descriptions of the top 6 award winners and a list of nominees is attached.

# 2016 Top Rural Development Initiatives

## **Flambeau River Community Growing Center, Park Falls**

It started in 2012 with the idea of using waste heat from the Flambeau Mill to heat a greenhouse which could provide higher educational classes, a food source for the food pantry, and community gardens. Through a collaboration with UW- Madison, the Flambeau Mill, UWEX - Price County, and the Flambeau River Community Growing Center committee, a nonprofit 510(c)3 organization was established. Today, the vision has been realized and the growing center provides educational classes, and community support through the availability of raised beds for community members and through the provision of fresh foods for the local food pantries.

## **Forest County Potawatomi Insurance Department, Crandon**

The Forest County Potawatomi Insurance Department is a progressive tribal organization that provides clients with the guidance and support needed to successfully navigate the perplexing world of health insurance. The innovative decision to become one of the only Tribally-owned and operated Third Party Administrators has successfully laid the foundation for FCPID to provide many noteworthy services to FCPC members, other Native American tribes, and non-Tribal community members, as well as realize many significant accomplishments.

## **Milk Source Hunting Land Auction, Kaukauna**

Since 2011, Milk Source's philanthropic Hunting Land Auction program has raised thousands of dollars for small, rural food pantries while benefitting outdoorsmen statewide. Through this collaboration, sportsmen make bids for the right to lease portions of the natural habitats under the management of Milk Source, LLC. Those financial commitments are paid by the hunters directly to the food pantries in the home communities of the farms. Simply put, the organization operates as a facilitator and conduit, linking donors to local charities — to the benefit of both.

## **Pop-Up Shop Initiative, Viroqua Chamber Main Street**

The Viroqua Chamber Main Street Pop-Up Shop initiative was a response to increasing vacancies in an otherwise active downtown. The program allowed people in the community with good ideas for lasting business models to occupy vacant store fronts free of charge for a three month period during either the holidays or peak tourism season. During that period the new businesses received press coverage, education and support for their effort. The addition of these new businesses keeps the retail and service industry in the downtown vibrant and alive.

## **Ruminant/Harvest Park Project, Reedsburg**

"Ruminant" is a 6600 John Deere combine clad in 34 agriculturally-themed back lit stained glass panels. A tribute to agriculture, farming and food, it was first featured as a temporary installation in a field of corn stubble along the October 2013 Farm/Art DTour, an annual 50-mile back roads art tour organized by the Wormfarm Institute, a local arts non-profit. In collaboration with the City, a citizen group identified a grassy lot located downtown just opposite the Reedsburg Chamber and near the head of the 400 Trail as a site for Ruminant. The group convinced the city to designate the long vacant lot as a new city park with Ruminant as its focal point. The park helps distinguish the community and celebrate its rural heritage, while providing a tourist destination and gathering place.

## **Town Square – Green Lake Renewal**

Town Square is a vibrant community center that—in less than four years--has become the heart and soul of the Green Lake area, a hub of activity where people come to work, play, learn and share ideas. The center focuses programming and tenancy on what is important to the community: arts, wellness, education and environment. The center was created through collaboration and by applying urban philosophies to our rural community. In an era when rural areas are struggling to compete with cities, when we are losing our best and brightest young people to the cities, Town Square is based on taking what makes cities successful—vibrancy, variety, ideas and action all in close proximity to one another—and applying that formula to our rural area. Indeed, Town Square is like a little city in itself.

Other nominees submitted for consideration included:

- A Thriving Rural Downtown, Edgerton
- Arts Alliance of Greater Lake Mills
- Ashland/Bayfield Broadband Coalition
- Blue Rock Quarry Project, Osceola
- Bringing World Diplomacy to Juneau County, UW Extension, Juneau County
- Central WI Healthcare Partnership, Health and Economic Development Summit, Friendship
- Clark County Workforce Council, Loyal
- Dairy Modernization for Wisconsin Family Dairy Farms
- Forest County Economic Development Partnership, Crandon
- Franklin School Apartments, Rice Lake
- Friends of Wabeno
- Hillsboro Branding Project
- Historic Civic Center Foundation, Washburn
- Hudson YMCA
- Inga Witscher, Eau Claire
- Omro Old City Hall Clock Tower and Masonic Temple Window Projects
- Palen Park Renovation, Ontario
- Redbird Touchdown Club, Darlington
- Rural Arts Roadtrip, New Holstein
- Sokaogon Chippewa Community, Crandon
- The Darlington Solar Education Project
- The Vinery: An Outdoor Space that Celebrates Creativity and Learning, School District of Winter
- Town of Rome and Sand Valley, Town of Rome, Wood County
- UW-Extension Farm Succession Programs, UW Extension and Center for Dairy Profitability, Madison
- We're Open, Fox Valley Technical College, Appleton