

UNL Extension’s Sandhills Leadership Impacts Local Communities

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For over twenty years, students from Valentine, Cody/Kilgore, Dunning, Thedford, Mullen and Hyannis have been hand-selected by school staff to participate in the capstone Sandhills Leadership experience hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. This program is open for youth in grades 10-12. The experience kicks off with a retreat day in the fall where youth are immersed in self-discovery and team-building. Traditionally, this retreat was held at the 4-H Camp in Halsey, but due to the Bovee Fire, it was re-located to the scenic Niobrara Valley in Valentine for 2023 and beyond. Following the retreat, youth meet regularly with Extension Staff to develop leadership philosophies and real-world skills.

As part of the experience, youth meet with local leaders on real-time issues, are coached on how to become involved with community decision-making processes, receive training on advocacy, are introduced to entrepreneurial thinking, are assessed on Clifton’s strengths-based leadership, and more. Youth have a chance to develop a community solution as part of the program, which can take a variety of forms (a community service project, a presentation to a local group, a media campaign encouraging youth involvement in an issue, etc.).

Most groups were able to see a local project through to completion. The Dunning students met with a city representative after considering the need for increased involvement with the upkeep of the local community center. This building is used for a variety of functions, including school activities. The students were able to assist in a clean-up/set-up time that helped prepare the facility for a major community event.

Both Thedford and Cody/Kilgore landed on a

“Free Little Food Pantry” project as funding came available through UNL Extension to build and stock the project. The youth shared that community members would often drive at least an hour to obtain needed staples at food pantries in other communities. The Thedford group was able to launch their food pantry over the summer and Cody/Kilgore will finish their project this fall.

The Valentine students explored the need for family-friendly community activities. After meeting with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Board, and local service organizations, this group decided to coordinate an outdoor movie night that culminated as part of a Family Fun Day in Valentine at the end of July. The Valentine students hope to host similar events in the future and are interested in establishing a regular volunteer-run movie venue. The Hyannis group also identified community movie nights as a project of interest, utilizing their newly-remodeled auditorium. Due to weather delays, this group was unable to move to the next step of the planning process, but the concept will be revisited with the 2023-2024 cohort.

Sometimes community involvement doesn’t emerge as an event or a tangible item, but can be just as critical to the future of a rural town. The students in Mullen unpacked the issues surrounding the closing of the local nursing home, and explored how it is a continuing nation-wide crisis. They visited with local Board members and employees and developed a deeper understanding for the complex economic issues contributing to this troubling phenomenon. The youth walked away with a more empathetic viewpoint and were inspired to become advocates for elder care in rural America.

Sandhills Leadership is currently re-organizing for the 2023-2024 school year. There are many adults living in the Sandhills who are alumni of this program and Extension would LOVE to involve these individuals in this year’s program! If you would like to contribute as a panelist or community project mentor, please contact Michelle Garwood, Extension Educator, at mgarwood3@unl.edu or 402-376-1850. Michelle is also looking for alumni to serve as a planning group to continue improving the program and launch more in-depth research on youth leadership and community involvement in the rural Sandhills.

Something that is fairly new to Sandhills Leadership is the addition of a 6th grade program entitled “Leadership Summit,” which plants the seed at an early age that all youth have leadership potential. Please let Michelle know if you would like her to bring this one-day event to your school!



COURTESY PHOTO

Sandhills students helping to set up the community center for an upcoming community event.



COURTESY PHOTO

Aidan Bryant and Brady Haake are pictured with their Sandhills Leadership project they helped complete.

Celebrating Hereford Crossroads #9

Story By
Linda Teahon

Hereford Crossroads #9 will take place Saturday, October 7th in the Chicoine Atrium at the historic Sandoz Center on the Chadron State College campus in Chadron.

This annual event will focus on the Hereford cattle history of Northwest Nebraska by induction into the HC Hall of Fame, a herd bull from Sioux County and an event held many years ago in Chadron.

Nebraskans for Hereford Heritage, Inc. was founded in 2015 by a group of both former and current Hereford breeders. Every year a reception is held in October at a location selected somewhere in western or central Nebraska. Since 2017 the Hereford Crossroads exhibit has been housed in The Sandhills Heritage Museum at Dunning. October 7th will also be Homecoming at Chadron

State College with a morning parade and afternoon football game as well as many other activities throughout the day. The popular Harvest Moon vendor fair is also planned at the Dawes County Fairgrounds.

Hereford attendees are invited to tour the Sandoz Center along with the Coffee Gallery, featuring the 150-year-old Coffee Ranch, prior to the reception/dinner.

Doors open at 3 p.m. with social at 5 p.m. and dinner at 6 p.m. Sitting is limited. Reservation must be made to Dixie Hoffman at 406-425-0477 by October 1st. Tickets are \$30 per person or \$50 per couple. No tickets will be sold at the door.

For lodging call the Chadron West Hills Inn at 308-225-6094 and ask for Hereford Crossroads rates.

This event is sponsored in part by the Dawes County Travel Board.

Hereford Crossroads

Celebrating the Hereford Heritage of Northwest Nebraska

#9

Saturday, October 7th
Chicoine Atrium