

## Community Outreach in Cass County

Cass County is bordered by Arkansas and Louisiana on the east, and is located in northeastern Texas. Linden is the county seat. It was established in 1846, comprised of 937 square miles and a population of approximately 30 thousand - of the East Texas timberlands. The Cass County Extension office is located downtown Linden in the Cass County Office Building, 123 S. Kaufman. Our goal is to improve the lives of Cass County residents, businesses and communities through high quality, relevant educational programs.

The 4-H Community Outreach, has gained a greater focus since 2014, with the integration of the Junior Master Gardener program and the Healthy Living - Heroes 4-Health Youth Ambassadors program. Extension program plans should always include some level of marketing, so based on the issues: 4-H Awareness, Childhood Obesity and Food Security; this becomes a strategy (plan). The strategy (plan) is to create community partnership at all levels of the overall program such as: planning, designing, Implementation, measuring, and recognition. There may be one or more issues and outcome that will drive the program, but 4-H awareness and community mobilization should be the number one focus issue or outcome.

### Extension Education: Serving the State of Texas

4-H Awareness, Climate Change, Childhood Obesity and Food Security are some of the focus issues. The Cooperative Extension Program: Growing Ideas... Impacting Lives...to make the Best Better.

### Public Forum

Engaging and mobilizing county and multi county personnel and organizations such as Extension agents, Master Gardeners, Garden Clubs, Native Plant Society, 4-H Clubs, Churches, Schools, and Homeschool Families. Promoting and establishing partnerships with the local media and the above mentioned groups through verbal and written consents. This will motivate all participants in having a shared input and a sense of ownership in the responsibility of community building and youth development.

### Integrating Heroes 4-Health with Junior Master Gardener

A Junior Master Gardener expansion initiative was agreed upon by the 4-H Youth Advisory Board, 4-H Youth Council, Junior Master Gardener Task Force, and the Master Gardeners. The Heroes 4-Health – Youth Voice: Youth Choice Ambassadors Campaign (sponsored by Prairie View A&M – Cooperative Extension Program and the Walmart Foundation) was also launched in 2013. The agreement was to use the Junior Master Gardener as the lead program to reach 500 direct youth, and 5000 indirect youth and adults. With the flexibility of the 4-H project plan, both the school enrichment project groups and the 4-H Clubs gave allowances to an integrated program. Individual 4-H project plan and school enrichment curriculum map has been adjusted to accommodate this initiative.

### Heroes 4-Health Outreach Gardens

This is a collaborative effort among civic groups, the public parks, some schools, and public libraries, Nursing Homes, Master Gardeners, Garden Clubs, 4-H Clubs/ Junior Master Gardener Project Groups, and members of the community. Small



space, Backyard, and Raised Bed gardens are being setup throughout the county. The aim is to promote healthy eating habits, integrated pest management practices, therapeutic gardening, and a “eat what you grow” campaign. These are also demonstration gardens that are used to teach basic botany, and the origin and uses of various food and plant products.

### **Junior Master Gardener Task Force – Club Sharing**

Participating members are youths and adults who have signed an agreement form, or have volunteered as youth ambassadors and adult facilitators of the integrated Heroes 4-Health Junior Master Gardener program. The task force which also includes school administrators and Junior Master Gardener (JMG) project leaders is also part of the Junior Master Gardener expansion initiative. Members are constantly added, while master volunteers and Junior Master Gardeners are provided an opportunity to receive community service hours from duties performed. Leadership and educational presentation is an opportunity that is also provided as a project experience for 4-H/ JMG members.

### **County and Multi County Partnerships**

Educational presentations and contest opportunities were provided through Plant Shows and Science Research Contests. These events were done in partnership with the Garden Club's plant and flower show contest during the Wildflower Trail Festival, and also during the Bowie – Cass County Plant Show competitions. The events are usually open to both adults and youths with various plant categories, thus giving everyone a chance to enter. No entry fee is previously charged for this contest. Awards certificates, ribbons, and plaques are given to participants and winners, while judges are presented with incentive awards. Cooking school, Club sharing, Community garden and Agriculture awareness field trips were also some accomplishments. 4-H Camps were also used to address the issues, as we made great use of the expertise of volunteers and agents.

### **Heroes 4-Health – Seed Exchange Outreach**

Partnerships with the Public Libraries resulted in the implementation of a Seed Exchange Outreach project; JMG Task Force and Master Gardeners conducted a series of gardening classes; and Heroes 4-Health Youth Ambassadors conducted service learning at summer reading programs. Hands-on learning projects during club sharing and school enrichment programs, throughout the year allow for greater levels of participation. Learning responsibility, leadership and developing a spirit of community partnership are some desired outcomes.

### **Outdoor Learning Centers**

The City Parks Board and neighboring school districts are jointly collaborating, to enhance the recreational facilities in making them more educational appealing to the public. A Keyhole garden was established as part of a butterfly garden.

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