

# Gogebic Range Leadership Academy Service Learning Initiative

Iron County UW-Extension

## ◆Education◆

One of the many issues facing Iron County is the lack of volunteers willing to engage themselves in community events and projects. Recruiting volunteers was one of the key economic development strategies identified in the Iron County Strategic Plan (2003).

In response, the Gogebic Range Leadership Academy (GRLA), a community-based leadership development program in existence since 2001, introduced a service learning component into their regular educational curriculum. Starting in the 2004-05 academic year, all academy participants were required to become involved in a community project in order to graduate from the academy.

Significant outcomes have resulted from this initiative. In addition to providing service learning experience to 20 future community leaders, two new community events were created and an existing cultural facility will be enhanced and better promoted. In the 2004-05 academy class, participants created two new events: an ice-sculpture competition and a family snow-shoe day. In the 2005-06 class, one group agreed to improve and expand on the snow-shoe day to create a day-long "family fun" day and the second group adopted a local arboretum to improve both its and promotional efforts.



All of the service-learning projects exhibited very high levels of community partnership by involving numerous community partners including the Hurley and Mercer Chambers of Commerce, the Iron County Development Zone Council, Iron County UW-Extension, MSU Extension, Hurley School District, the local Master Gardeners Club and many other partners.

The spirit of collaboration was extremely high, with shared membership on the various committees and cooperation with event planning and promotion. For example, both of the new events created by the leadership academy participants were designed to support and enhance an existing local event: the Stormy Kromer Pursuit Cross-country Ski Race.

The impact on the community is tremendous. There are now 20 newly trained and motivated local volunteers who are willing and able to become engaged in local community events and projects. Plus, there are now two new community events in place, attracting scores of area youth and families in a variety of fun and healthy activities that support a local economic development initiative.

These new events helped the Stormy Kromer Pursuit race attract 164 skiers and bring an estimated \$21,500 into the local economy. Importantly, mechanisms are already in place to ensure that these events continue for years to come.

This initiative can certainly be modeled by other leadership training programs. Participants go through an issues identification process to help identify projects, speakers are invited to discuss their successful community projects and project management lessons, class time is set aside for participants to work on their projects, and the groups are given an opportunity to present their projects to the public.

This type of curriculum modification can be replicated by any leadership development program that wants to better train its participants and make an immediate and long-lasting impact on their community.

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