



# Portage County

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## 2008 County Highlights

### Strengthening Families and Communities

- Empowering Portage County residents, families, local organizations, and businesses through education was the primary focus of the Horticulture and Community Development community education programming efforts. The 2008 program introduced twelve new Master Gardener interns who will complete their training in December. In cooperation with the 4-H educator, fifteen Junior Master Gardeners received their certification. Community networking between the Master Gardener program, Portage County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the City of Kent provided for four workshops to meet the community education requirement of the EPA Phase II Stormwater Regulations. An additional ten community education workshops covering topics such as insects, plant health care, i-Tree Urban Forest Assessment Tools, sustainable landscaping, gardens with four season interest, and workshops specific to growing hydrangeas, heirlooms, and trees for the urban environment.
- As today's families rely more on technology and are traveling less to communicate with one another, the Family Storytelling program provides basic guidelines on developing family communication, continuing to build familial relationships, and recording heritages and significant memories. This year's project also included the Portage County Bicentennial Legacy Project. This unique project has been presented throughout the county and has reached over 200 participants. To date, 150 stories have been collected to be archived at the Portage County Historical Society. All of the "writers" have stated that they will also share their stories with younger family members to give them a clearer sense of their family heritage.
- Proactively equipped to meet the demands of a currently unstable economy and a growing food stamp eligible population, OSU Extension's Family Nutrition Program (FNP) rose to this challenge, reaching 3,514 underserved individuals and families in Portage County communities through both direct and indirect contact. Fifty-six FNP programs focused on Food Shopping, MyPyramid, and Food Safety. Eighty-eight percent of the program participants reported learning new information and that they would make lifestyle changes. Fact sheets, pamphlets, newsletters, and promotional materials with nutrition messages were also distributed.

- Interest in safe food preservation has increased during this past year. A total of 141 Portage County residents received new information concerning safe food preservation practices through workshops and presentations at local farm markets, garden centers, and as requested by local organizations. Hands-on canning workshops were held for 18 participants who learned how to make jam and to process fresh fruits and vegetables using a water bath canner and a pressure canner. They all later reported great success in using their new skills at home.
- Stress management workshops/presentations have been offered nine times in 2008, reaching 100 participants. New understanding of the nature of stress and positive skills concerning how to better manage the many stresses in daily life were presented and discussed, and included some experiential activities. 85% of the participants reported learning new information and planned to incorporate some of these skills into their lives.

### Preparing Youth for Success

- Building critical life skills and preparing youth for service in the workforce, the Portage County 4-H Program impacted more than 4,000 local youth through 171 diversified 4-H Youth Development programs in its 2008 program year. Of those youth, 1,116 participated in 53 community-based clubs or committees as 4-H members; 1,362 were reached through 43 special interest or short-term programs; 191 youth elected participation in three camping programs; and 2,264 youth received the positive elements of the 4-H experience through 72 school enrichment program efforts. None of these programs are possible without a strong foundation of 4-H volunteers. As a program, Portage County's more than 500 4-H volunteers teamed with an average service contribution of 52 hours annually at an estimated rate of \$19.51 per hour equals over \$500,000 (<http://independentsector.org>, 11/2008) in continuing "To make the Best Better" for many youth here in Portage County.
- Serving as the local leader in providing creative, research-based educational curriculum, Portage County 4-H School Enrichment Programming engaged local kindergarten through eight grade teachers in professional continuing educational opportunities coupled with unique instructional resources that reached more than 2,200 Portage County local school students. These educational curricula, such as Rockets Away, The In-

credible Egg, and Weather Together, focus on many different performance objectives and proficiency learning outcomes that combine hands-on learning, real-world activities, and fun. All curricula are research-based.

- Promoting “learning by doing,” the Portage County Master Gardener program in a cooperative effort with the City of Ravenna Parks and Recreation Department provided educational programming for 250 local school-aged children through the Ravenna Day Camp program. Youth participants were engaged in twelve various horticultural and natural resource based projects as part of the day-camp programming.
- The local 4-H Youth Development Program, supporting a student intern from Kent State University, collaborated with the staff of Carlin Elementary School to create a partnership aimed at fighting childhood obesity and improper nutrition. The joint effort, “Jump Into Foods and Fitness,” offered weekly sessions focused on regular, healthy physical activity and proper nutritional choices to support an active youth lifestyle for 20 fourth-grade students at Carlin Elementary School in Ravenna. Students participated in a field trip to the local Ravenna Athletic Center (RAC) and also had the opportunity to prepare healthy snacks to complement each session.

### **Enhancing Agriculture and the Environment**

- Contributions to the OSU Extension Signature Program, “Why Trees Matter” included working with team members to promote statewide efforts including the third annual Why Trees Matter Forum in October and Plant Health Care (specific to trees) in November in Wooster. In addition to participation in the team’s statewide efforts, Portage staff partnered with Davey Tree experts to offer adult education programs about the importance of the urban forest. Local efforts were also extended to 250 participants in the City of Ravenna’s Day Camp with school-aged children learning basics of tree I.D. and function. Master Gardeners also collaborated with the Portage County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to provide information on tree planting, site selection, and tree care for the annual three-day SWCD tree sale.
- As an increasing number of consumers shift their focus back to locally grown food and produce, the Portage County Farm Market Brochure allows the OSU Extension Horticulture and Community Development Program to work cooperatively with local farmers and growers to produce a financially responsible informational guide featuring locally grown and produced commodities, custom services and products, and that highlights local farm markets. This guide serves as a county-wide resource in providing and assisting local residents in finding fresh produce and specialty goods and services.
- Allowing Portage County residents to make greener choices in gardening, OSU Extension Master Gardeners in a partnership with the Portage County Solid Waste Recycling Center facilitated the continuance of a county-wide plastic pot recycle program. Dumpsters were again placed at local garden centers and farm markets, and Master Gardeners assisted residents by retrieving the containers from their vehicles. This year’s program improved Portage County’s green contributions by collecting over 100 cubic yards of post-consumer nursery containers. Prior to this effort, nursery stock containers were not recycled in Portage County.
- Tracking the pre- and post-emergence of bugs and blooms on native Ohio plants, the OSU Extension Portage County Master Gardeners continued their data collection for the Ohio Phenology Garden Research Project. This research project provides local residents, horticultural professionals, and green industry with a valuable tool in identifying the most opportune time to destroy plant pests, and develop pest control measures and methods based on the blooming of specific native plants and the emergence of different stages of common pests.

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