

October 2020

Extension Council Elections to Be Held October 13

It is once again time to elect representatives to the Shawnee County Extension Council. Voting will take place on Tuesday, October 13, at the Shawnee County Extension Office, 1740 SW Western, from 8am - 6pm. Enter the upstairs meeting room from the upper west door.

The Extension Council election gives all Shawnee County residents, 18 years or older, the opportunity to elect Extension Council members for a two-year term. Twenty-four elected volunteers make up the Extension Council, which is charged with the responsibility of working with Extension agents to develop and conduct educational programs in the areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development, and Family and Consumer Sciences.

Six members serve on the program development committees (PDC) for each of those areas. Extension staff and council members appreciate your support and hope you will take time to vote in the upcoming election.

Extension Council Election Candidates

**Agriculture & Natural Resources**

**David Bartels** – Dave has recently retired as Horticulture Supervisor for 31 years with Shawnee County Parks and Recreation. He also worked as a Forester for 8 years and as a horticulture supervisor for 23 years. In the past he has served on Agriculture and Natural Resources PDC and the Shawnee County Extension Board. Dave has enjoyed working with the Master Gardeners to produce on educational landscape for the annual Kansas Garden Show. He has also enjoyed working with the Boy Scout troops who are learning about woody plants. He notes he was able to work with R.O. Brown “Brownie” showing Master Gardeners the proper pruning methods at the Arboretum at Lake Shawnee. Dave has worked with Master Gardeners to construct the greenhouse and hardscapes around the Extension Office.

Dave thinks the goal is really a continuous process of giving relevant knowledge about living in our environment, growing our community gardens, making our communities stronger and protecting our land, water and resources. Dave feels working and relating well with others is a product of the goal.

**Linda Croucher** - Linda is a retired professor from Washburn University in the Radiologic Technology Program. She grew up in Valley Falls, where she was a member of the Jefferson County 4-H Club. Linda has a BS degree in Vocational-Technical Education from Pittsburgh State University and an MS degree in Adult Education from Kansas State University. Linda spent 10 years working as a Radiologic Technologist at Stormont-Vail and then over 30 years as a professor in the Radiologic Technology Program at Washburn University. In addition to classroom teaching she also spent a considerable amount of time assisting (instructing) students at clinical sites in Topeka and northeast Kansas.

Linda has been a member of Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners for 8 years and served two terms as President. She has served on several garden committees and is the past chair of Sick Plant Clinic Committee. She has also served as the President of the Kansas Society of Radiologic Technologists (KSRT), served on their Board of Directors for approximately 25 years, and was appointed to serve as the Senior Delegate for Kansas at the National House of Delegates meeting.
She is a member of the Special Needs Gardening committee working with children and adults in the gardens (most rewarding experience). Linda has assisted with the From Farm To You program and finds it rewarding to show the youth something new and see the excitement in their eyes.

Linda feels the current pandemic has increased the need for extension assistance. Residents need information on how to grow produce and how to can and prepare food safely. Additionally residents, both children and adults, are in need of social interaction. The agents are doing a good job of providing information and interaction through Zoom meetings. We should also look at methods to continue increasing our presence in the community. Linda is willing to help the agents in any way possible.

Bryce Cripps - Bryce has been an owner/operator of Lawns By Bryce for 35 years. He has spoken to Vo-Tech Horticulture classes and customer relations.

Bryce has previously served on the Extension Council.

Community Development PDC

Alan Stahl – Alan is a Public Education Officer for the Topeka Fire Department. He is also a lifelong Shawnee County 4-H’er. He has two children that are current 4-H members. Alan has extensive experience with extension programs, including agriculture, 4-H, and community development. He worked for K-State Research and Extension in the early 2000’s as the State Rural Coordinator for the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project.

Alan has experienced 4-H on all levels from beginning, to Key Award recipient, to being a parent volunteer. He has also worked with extension programs across the state when he was with the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project. Alan currently manages all the youth and adult education programs for First Responders, Industry, and Government Agencies across a four state region for the EPA, and subsequently, a private company.

Alan notices our community is changing so we have to design and operate programs that address that need. He sees the need to build programs that work with how technology is integrating with our everyday lives and how to use it to better operate our businesses, farms and homes.

Christi McKenzie – Christi grew up in Rossville and wanted to give her children the unique opportunities of a small town so she became involved in school, church and community activities and programs. She is the Director for the past two years at the Rossville Community Library. Christi is serving her second term on the Rossville City Council and as the Park Commissioner. She is President of Rossville PRIDE and a Rossville Community Foundation board member. Her family has hosted five exchange students through the Academic Year in America. Christi has also served six years as a Shawnee County Planning Commissioner.

Christi serves as the site coordinator for VITA services. With Rossville PRIDE and Kansas PRIDE, she has witnessed what community action can achieve from Main Street, playground builds, landscaping, disc golf, celebrations and so much more. Through the Kansas Leadership Center and Kansas Health Foundation, she received training for leadership programs. For the last 12 years, Christi has been a facilitator for the school student leadership team TASMAD. She was the At-Risk Coordinator for Rossville Jr./Sr. High School and organized the after school tutoring and a member of the Student Intervention Team.

Christi feels at this time of social distancing, (not just six feet, but gathering with our families, friends and community) the Extension Office can lead the way to innovative ways to connect organizations and people. Christi asks, “How can we address isolation and loneliness?” She suggests that we can be the connectors and gather groups to work together in new ways and cooperatively. “We must expand our thinking as never before, some of the old ideas may work with a twist or may need a whole new approach. Extension and 4-H are trusted programs in communities that really could be the change agent for so many.”

Amber George – Amber is a mother of three and has been married to Ryan George for over 10 years. Amber is a nurse and has a huge passion for caring for others and education. She states that “learning should never end.”

Amber works in nursing management and has a lot of experience in educating other nurses. She continues to seek additional education for herself such as on COVID and tries to learn more about issues that can affect her job and the people she cares for. Amber was a cheer and gymnastics coach.
for about five years.

Amber feels Extension can help by continuing to be a resource to Dover PRIDE. There are a lot of new residents in Dover, but they are not very integrated with the community. COVID has not helped the situation. Amber would like to see more events that pull people together. She states that we are a community, but don’t know each other like a close knit community should. Perhaps PRIDE can address and build those opportunities.

Family & Consumer Sciences PDC

Laura Moore – Laura is the state Coordinator of a teen traffic safety program (SAFE) with the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office. She has been on the Extension Board and with Family and Consumer Sciences PDC for two years. She enjoys helping her family and community find healthy resources available to them in the Topeka area.

Laura was a 4-H member for over 10 years. She currently works with Kansas teens in over 170 schools focusing on traffic safety education.

Laura feels that in the Shawnee County area, healthy eating and active lifestyles are both important issues that Extension can continue to address. This touches agriculture, 4-H, youth development and healthy families. It can extend to school, both high school and college, and even careers.

Erma Forbes – Erma is a nurse, chef, founder and director of the Gil Carter Initiative. The Gil Carter Initiative was formed to make new opportunities available to children and young adults and thus facilitate pathways to a better life. The program was created to honor the memory of baseball star and Topeka native Gil Carter, who was most known for hitting the longest home run in organized baseball at 733 feet.

Erma has partnered with EFNEP to provide nutrition education programs for children.

Erma is interested in bringing different cultures together and engaging youth in the culinary arts and sustainable food systems.

Lori J. Thompson – Lori works at the Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging as the Older Americans Act Program Manager. She is new in this position, and comes from a state government and post secondary education background. In the past she was a committee member of the Jefferson County Alliance of Service Councils, Inc. In this community activity, she worked as part of a team to survey businesses and county residents regarding their concerns about the well-being within their county, and worked to determine ways to make improvements within the various towns and communities for improved health and well-being.

Lori worked as the Regional Coordinator/Campus Director for the Southeast Regional Campus of Highland Community College in Perry, Kansas. She worked with concurrent (high school age) students, traditional students, as well as non-traditional students, in their college and career goals. She also worked at Allen Community College as the International Student Services Coordinator and Academic Advisor for one year, doing similar work as at Highland. Lori has worked within the state government, approving educational programs and compliance work for the GI Bill. She assisted college students and teachers in obtaining their education licensure; as well as worked with students with disabilities in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Voc Rehab), to help them develop skills and training necessary to gain employment and sustainable living. Lori obtained her graduate degree in Health Promotion Management and taught four years at the college level in health education and wellness.

Lori feels that the health and well-being is an area of constant change in our lives, meaning as we grow older, our needs change and our focus on continued well-being should be a priority. Helping our community to understand various sources of healthy ways to make small changes for an improved well-being is critical to overall improved health within the community. Particularly in 2020, with many students learning from home, some students may be struggling to obtain healthy meals and get adequate physical activity to continue or improve good health, in all aspects of health. She is also concerned about the older population in terms of their physical as well as mental well-being, especially during this pandemic.

4-H Youth Development PDC

Karen Brantingham – Karen is beginning her 26th years as a reading specialist this school year. She loves to inspire students to find joy in books and stories. She has been married for 32 years. Karen has two sons that are also married. She notes that they are all avid K-State fans.

Karen has been an educator at Topeka Public Schools as well as Shawnee Heights for 26 years. This occupation has provided multiple opportunities to support literacy development and love for reading via curricular development and training. She has
also hosted professional book club opportunities in her home for the Berryton Elementary School staff. Karen believes it is important to teach students the importance of monitoring personal screen time and purposefully developing multiple interests away from screens.

**Renae Hansen** – Renae has been employed by the Kansas Legislature since 2002. She is a school board member of USD 450, Faith Lutheran Church and a former 4-H’er. Renae is married with two adult children. She is a K-State and Baker University graduate.

Renae is a community and project leader for Riverside 4-H. She is on the Board of Directors for Ballet Midwest. Renae is also a youth group counselor for Prince of Peace. She has served on the county extension council as secretary.

Renae believes helping families and community members apprised of current practices and research to further their growth as individuals and make wise decisions.

**Brian Bayless** – Brian is a superintendent for KBS Constructors, a construction company here in Topeka. He is a 4-H alumni of Shawnee County and was a member of the Wakarusa 4-H Club.

Brian is a 4-H parent and is the project leader for the beef project at the Auburn 4-H Club. Brian also helps with the Livestock Sale for the Shawnee County fair. He has served one two-year term on the 4-H PDC committee and helped draft the new processes for health and safety at the 2020 County Fair. He has also served on the Shawnee County Extension executive board. Brian supports 4-H as an alumni, parent, and volunteer. Brian wants to do what he can to make 4-H better in Shawnee County.