

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

Oakland County

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Each bowl is unique to its designer.

MSU Extension continues to fill “Empty Bowls” in Oakland County

If asked, most people would describe Oakland County as a wonderful place to live, work and play. Most would say residents enjoy a quality of life higher than nearly any other place in Michigan. Average household income is, indeed, at a more than just adequate level for many.

At the same time, nearly 10 percent of people in the county live below the poverty level. This can mean that there are homes with pantries lacking an adequate supply of food to feed the families who live there.

For the past 11 years, MSU Extension has joined the “Empty Bowls” event, a community service project that works to ensure that no one ends a day hungry. This year’s event took place April 1 at Central United Methodist Church in Waterford.

The Empty Bowls community service project provides opportunities for artists, educators, students, and other residents to use their creativity to benefit the hungry. Youths decorate bowls that are then offered, in exchange for a small donation, to participants at the event. The participants are reminded that many people live every day with empty bowls.

The program gives youth and adults the opportunity to work together in environmental science, food and nutrition, art, global awareness and community service. Youths create and design the ceramic bowls to be given to participants who donate money. Each bowl has its own unique design.

This year more than 250 people attended the event hosted by MSU Extension in Oakland County. The project was done in collaboration with Susan’s Ceramics of Oxford, Central United Methodist Church in Waterford and Adler Elementary School in Southfield.

Youth and adults had a great experience, using teamwork and goal-setting skills to complete a project that benefits people in the community. Net proceeds of \$1,000 from “Empty Bowls” went to the Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan, an agency that provides food through donation and purchase to church pantries, shelters and soup kitchens.

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Young people experience helping others.

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.



Larry Falardeau, Principal Planner for Oakland County shares a unique historical perspective.

Commissioners and MSU Extension partner to preserve lakes

Oakland County has a wealth of natural resources. Boasting about 1,468 lakes and the headwaters of five major river systems, its

signature amenity is its water resources. Lakes add \$2.8 billion market value to adjacent residential real estate. Since state regulatory agencies lack the resources to manage each individual lake and its watershed, day-to-day stewardship is in the hands of individuals. It is critical that people have information in order to understand how activities that take place on or around their property can affect local water quality, wildlife and the health of the entire watershed.

County commissioners and MSU Extension understand the economic advantages of working to ensure the health of the lakes in the county. Given that shared understanding, four county commissioners partnered with extension staff in the county to develop and implement educational workshops titled “*Landscaping Lakefront Property.*”

Each two-hour workshop included the geological history of the county’s lakes, how lakefront property owners’ personal actions affect water quality, how surface water and groundwater supplies are interconnected, how to landscape for wildlife and water quality, create native plant buffers, use bioengineering techniques for shoreline stabilization, and use earth-friendly fertilizers for lawn care.

Workshop presenters included staff from MSU Extension, the County Drain Commissioner’s office, Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services, MSU’s Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Clinton River Watershed Council, the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority.

Workshops took place during spring 2006. More than 160 individuals participated. Based on written feedback, 54 participants said they will make changes in what they do on their lakefront properties. Examples included incorporating native plants in buffer zones, using slow-release, and low or no phosphorus fertilizers, creating no-mow zones, and developing sound landscaping plans for their lake lots.

MSU Extension staff members will follow up with workshop participants to find out the extent to which participants implemented the changes they planned to make. Additional educational programming will be planned using data from that follow-up survey and information participants provided during the workshops.

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Plant buffers contribute to the water quality of this lake.

For more information about any of MSU Extension’s innovative programs, visit our Web site at www.msue.msu.edu/oakland or call (248) 858-0880