

Wheatland County



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Crazy Mountains in the snow, by Mandie Reed.

Wheatland County, located in Central Montana, is home to just over 2,100 people. Located near the center of the county, Harlowton is the largest community and the county seat. Judith Gap is situated to the north, Shawmut to the east, and Two Dot to the west. Wheatland County has a strong agricultural base and a rich ranching history. In addition to agriculture, Wheatland County has developed a diverse economy supported by various small businesses and alternative energy. MSU Extension in Wheatland County works to deliver non-formal, research-based educational opportunities to meet the community's needs.

4-H Day Camp

COVID-19 restrictions led to the cancellation of in-person 4-H activities, and the multi-county 4-H camp was no exception, despite it being a highlight for many members. Wheatland County MSU Extension got creative and found a safe way to offer in-person 4-H day camp. With the leadership and help of older 4-H members, we provided a 4-H experience for 25 youth.

We intentionally designed camp to be experimental and like a workshop they might experience at traditional 4-H camp. Messy science experiment day turned out to be one of the most exciting days. Youth determined the most effective

way to blow up balloons with baking soda and vinegar and the best method for maximizing the height that Diet Coke would foam when Mentos were added. Youth also discovered how limiting re-agents control reactions while making lava lamps with food coloring and oil.

The campers took part in community service projects as Kindness Superheroes. Wearing their capes decorated with unique symbols to represent their skills and superpowers, youth picked up litter around Chief Joseph Park and the Smoking Boomer Rail Trail. They painted and then hid kindness rocks all over the park and along the trail for people to find. They really were Kindness Superheroes; their excitement and pure joy for their work was an inspiration.

Other workshops included watercolor painting, launching stomp rockets, building marshmallow catapults, and constructing wooden toolboxes.

Although it was not a traditional camp experience, 4-H Day Camp was an opportunity to engage youth who have not traditionally been involved in 4-H, and 4-H members who had missed the chance to attend traditional camp. We knew it was a success when campers asked on the last day when the next 4-H activity was.

Strong People

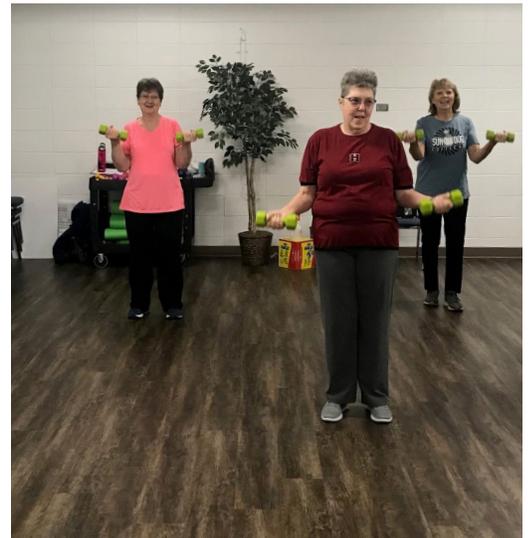
Wheatland County MSU Extension offers physical activity classes four days per week, beginning in September and ending in May. In March, when we had to stop meeting due to COVID-19, Extension Agent Mandie Reed adapted the class, and the group met virtually via Webex. This unexpected change resulted in two positive changes.

The first is that participants became familiar and comfortable with the online format and technology. We hosted one-on-one meetings and calls to make sure that everyone knew how to log in, use Webex features, and felt confident. Hosting each class live gave participants a sense of purpose; they had someplace to be and someone who was expecting them. It was also an opportunity for them to connect with each other and check-in during uncertain times. Participants commented that they could use similar technologies to communicate with friends and family while they could not visit in person.

The second positive change is that participants incorporated daily physical activity into their routine and continued to improve fitness during the stay-at-home orders. One participant shared, “Thank you so much for getting me in a routine and (for offering) a great class.” When the stay-at-home orders were removed, they and several other participants felt confident enough to join the Armory Fitness Center and continue to work out most days. The participants also encouraged their spouses to become active as well.

Wheatland County Unified Incident Command

In March 2020, the Wheatland County (Disaster and Emergency Services) DES coordinator quickly realized that the COVID-19 pandemic was different from most emergencies. The pandemic has been a prolonged incident. The Unified Incident Command team asked Wheatland County MSU Extension agent Mandie Reed to serve as the team’s information officer, coordinate virtual team meetings, disseminate information on social media, and serve as a community contact. This partnership has allowed the other team members to address the emergency and keep the community safe and informed. Wheatland County MSU Extension created a Facebook page for UIC to serve as a community resource. We also began hosting community updates via Webex with Wheatland Memorial Healthcare, the Central Montana Health District, and other agencies as needed to allow community members the opportunity to ask questions and access to information.



Top: Youth at 4-H Day Camp painting kindness rocks, by Mandie Reed; **Bottom:** People doing arm curls during Strong People class, by Mandie Reed

Wheatland County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran’s Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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