

More than four decades ago, Hubert Humphrey declared, "I believe that each of us can make a difference. That what is wrong can be made right. That people possess the basic wisdom and goodness to govern themselves without conflict." Those words continue to ring true today as people from all walks of life work together to tackle complex issues such as globalization, access to technology and changing demographics. As issues hit close to home, Extension's U-Lead participants are stepping up to make a difference.



Extension's leadership programs emphasize that everyone can play an important role in strengthening communities.

Extension's adult leadership programs have thrived for more than two decades. In that time, some 700 Emerging Leadership and U-Lead program graduates have boosted their skills in leadership, citizen involvement and the legislative process. These University programs act on the belief that anyone who cares about a community issue can learn how to lead.

Brenda Knable grew up poor in rural Minnesota, and she said her family was "a touch on the hermit side." So, when she joined Emerging Leadership with her husband in 2002, Knable felt miles away from her comfort zone. "I was terrified," she said. "We had to go up and present a slide show to the group, and I remember my legs just shook."

Knable came out of her shell during the program, and fellow classmates appointed the Knables as ambassadors to the next class. Even more remarkable, after 12 years as an office clerk for the Clearwater County courthouse, Knable ran for and was elected county recorder last year.

Leaders for today

With the help of Extension's U-Lead programs, Minnesotans are facing and changing their futures.



Graduates from Extension's leadership programs, like Brenda Knable, often become more active in local, state and national leadership roles. Knable was elected county recorder in Clearwater County last year.

She said the program's three-day tour of the state capitol inspired her to throw her hat in the ring. "I was surprised by how common the senators and representatives were....Emerging Leadership helped me to see that anyone can take a leadership role."

According to a 2006 survey, U-Lead grads took on 80 new roles, and 42 percent of those were at a state or national level. More than 40 percent of respondents changed their level of involvement in organizations from "inactive" to "active" or "leader."

Extension also helps develop leadership projects. Minnesota County Futures, an advanced leadership effort by the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), works to tear down silos in county systems. With the Blandin Foundation, Extension introduced new leadership tools, provided access to University resources, and fostered an environment for honest discussion among county leaders statewide.

"What we're seeing now, largely because of Extension's help, is a shift in the culture," said Jim Mulder, executive director of AMC. "County officials are beginning to rethink how to provide services."

*For more information, see
www.extension.umn.edu/U-Lead*

Leadership, anyone?

In this age of hectic schedules, finding people to lead can be as tough as leadership itself. Here are some solid ways to grow leadership potential within yourself and in your community.

- **Make it a priority.** The first step to growing leadership is deciding that an issue is worth your time investment.
- **Share.** Break down barriers between organizations by sharing resources.
- **Build a network.** Meet regularly with others to define what you care about and what your skills and resources are.
- **Discuss your leadership situations.** By giving and taking insights, everyone will be better prepared to go out and make things happen.
- **Just ask.** People often decide to make a difference simply because someone asked. Recognize leadership potential in others and invite them to join community efforts.
- **Start a U-Lead program!** Whatever your circumstances, Extension can customize a leadership development program that works for your community or group.

*For more information, see
www.extension.umn.edu/U-Lead*

Minnesota agricultural and rural leadership

While Brenda Knable went into Emerging Leadership with a lack of confidence (see main story), Dan Moore went into his U-Lead program—Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL)—with a surplus.

"I was the top regional sales agronomist for a large seed company," said Moore. "My frame of mind was, 'I know it all and people are supposed to listen to me,' but I quickly learned how much I needed to grow."

The two-year MARL program features educational sessions in nine Minnesota cities, a study tour in Washington, D.C., and an international study tour to destinations such as Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica and China. Prompted by a MARL tour of wind farms, Moore decided to build two wind turbines for the city of Blue Earth. Two turbines turned into 42, and Moore left his sales career to launch the first wind farm—ethanol plant combo at the Corn Plus co-op in Winnebago, and a 36-megawatt wind farm in western Faribault County.

"Developing wind farms is 90 percent political," Moore said. "Without MARL, I never would have been able to get in the doors I did, especially in D.C."



Dan Moore, visionary leader and entrepreneur, honed his leadership skills in the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership program.

Whether motivated by altruism, economics or both, U-Lead participants promote the common good. "People help themselves through the act of helping others, but we also support these programs because there's a big return on the investment," said Donna Rae Scheffert, Extension leadership development specialist. "It makes democracy work."

*For more information, see
www.southwest.msus.edu/marl*