

# 2017 TOP RURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AWARD WINNERS



## Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit



The Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) is a three-county, commuter bus service in southwest Wisconsin sponsored by the City of Prairie du Chien. SMRT, which began service in December 2012, is the result of a collaborative effort among three counties, cities, villages, area businesses and institutions, and

the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

SMRT is a fixed-route service that operates daily, Monday through Friday, providing affordable, efficient, and accessible public transportation to area residents. SMRT benefits the residents in Crawford, Vernon, and La Crosse counties with inexpensive transportation that puts economic, educational, civic, and social opportunities within everyone's reach.

Those benefiting from SMRT include employees, elderly and disabled residents, students, and the general public. SMRT ridership grew from 13,013 in 2013 to 20,859 in 2016. SMRT travels almost 237,000 miles annually. Without SMRT, residents would not be served by regional public transportation.



## Village of Sister Bay Marketplace Redevelopment

The Sister Bay Marketplace Redevelopment site was formerly the site of a refrigerator manufacturer which was later repurposed into a shopping center. It had become

blighted by 2008. As a part of a downtown and WIS Hwy 42 Reconstruction Project, the Village partnered with the WI DNR, and WI DOT to acquire the 2 acre site in the heart of downtown Sister Bay. The development of the site was initially unilaterally envisioned by the Village as a site to be acquired and developed into a single, monolithic development. Citizens in the community wrote to express their concerns over the artist's depiction of this vision for the site's redevelopment.



Seizing the opportunity to engage the community, the Village advanced the project by asking citizens to engage in a community prototyping session. Those ideas were amalgamated into a consensus plan. The project now features a number of small business friendly redevelopment sites, open green space, a public parking lot to facilitate access to the adjacent Sister Bay Beach, and pedestrian/tourism amenities which tie the Waterfront Park to the Library/Community Botanical Garden.



#### **UW-Extension Community Vitality + Placemaking Team**

The Design Wisconsin Team program helps communities discover and pursue their shared vision of the future. The Team is comprised of planning and design professionals who donate their time and talents to facilitate several public participation activities over an extended weekend that result in hand-drawn illustrations of short-, medium-, and long-term strategies.

One notable example of the Team's impact is the small town of Baileys Harbor (population 1,003). The 20-plus team of volunteers who came to Baileys Harbor for three days included people from Minnesota and Wisconsin. The volunteers had backgrounds in planning, architecture, landscape architecture, photography, art, economics, political science, education, community marketing, and digital communication. On the last day of their visit, Design Team members created 20 posters depicting concepts as to how to address the issues facing the community using existing assets and resources. The Design Team also subsequently provides the community with a summary report regarding the weekend which explains the background behind many of the ideas depicted on the posters.



This process led local Baileys Harbor residents and business owners to create informal groups of volunteers to pursue the Design Team concepts. Within months of the Team

visit, community action teams transformed an existing community building into a community center, started their own community recycling station, and created community park space along the waterfront.



## Moving Platteville Outdoors: David Canny Rountree Branch Trail

The Moving Platteville Outdoors (MPO) David Canny Rountree Branch Trail (RBT) project is a remarkable community collaboration that was led by the Platteville Community Arboretum, Platteville Community Fund, Building Platteville, Inc, and the City of Platteville. It involved an estimated 1,500 community members. The initiative has inspired Platteville and can serve as a model for other communities.



The RBT is a pedestrian and bicycle trail that stretches from UW-Platteville to the Platteville-Belmont Trail, paralleling the Rountree Branch stream and Business Hwy 151 for most of its 3-mile length. While the trail has existed in some form since the late 1990s, the trail surface was inconsistent and in poor condition, there were several infrastructure problems that impacted accessibility, and there were gaps in connectivity. The MPO project completed all trail connections, fixed the infrastructure problems, and paved and lighted the entire 3-mile corridor.

The project not only built leadership and volunteerism in the community, but it also provides safe, accessible travel to more than 30 businesses, promotes physical activity, increases the value of nearby properties, and increases tourism opportunities.