

2021 TOP RURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AWARD WINNERS



CheqBay Renewables

Chequamegon Bay Renewables (CBR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to local sustainable initiatives, primarily, but not limited to, renewable energy. Our mission is to work with multiple entities, in the spirit of cooperation and community building, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels while promoting clean water, clean air, organic foods, and healthy living. Their focus is to initiate projects, develop resources, and educate to make renewable energy more accessible to our community.

In April 2017, CBR was selected to participate in the U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative's Solar in Your Community Challenge to expand solar electricity access. The CBR Team developed multiple innovative projects including the Bayfield County Microgrid Project.

The Bayfield County Microgrid Project formed a commercial group buy, driving down costs due to the size and scope of the initiative. It was a collaborative effort that brought together five different governmental entities, coordinated the work of local and regional contractors/trade workers, and engaged community-wide populace to increase the solar capacity of the region. The large-scale support created favorable solar pricing that fueled a positive attitude by government, business and the general population toward solar energy.

The result of the Project was solar installations across Bayfield County. This project generates over 633,000 kWh annually with \$50,000 saving a year. In 2020, for Bayfield County alone, the solar arrays on the jail roof and grounds generated 117,245 kWh saving over \$10,000 that year in utilities. Local government savings means scarce resources

The long-term impacts of this project include:

- Improving connectivity between units of government enhancing relationships and providing another level of knowledge and support.
- Introducing new technology to both the participating entities and the community.
- Implementing and using renewable energy demonstrates the region's concern for the environment.
- Community Resiliency: Local governments provide essential services. These facilities are relied upon by the public. Local energy generation can provide
- Increasing local energy generation to ensure that public services can continue even during community blackouts.

CBR was able to bring communities around a topic they were passionate about and created a model, that other organizations can replicate. Over a three-year period, through sound planning and conceptualization, focused multiple meetings, and the use of grant applications/awards for project construction this project succeeded in bringing cost saving alternate energy to the region. For more information about Bayfield County Microgrid Project and other efforts of Chequamegon Bay Renewables visit their [website](#).



Cuba City Presidential Plaza

Dating back to 2009, the residents of Cuba City have clearly stated a desire for a community gathering space downtown. This focus was included in the City's Comprehensive Plan Updates in 2009 and again in 2020, the 2014 Economic Development Strategic Plan, and the 2018 and 2019 high school student surveys.

In 2020, spurred by the high school participation in the Downtown Task Force, the city opted to delve deeper into how this might be accomplished at the Presidential Caboose area on main street. The primary goal was to provide the gathering space that residents had requested along with activities and art. A key secondary goal was to bring additional traffic to the city's award-winning main street.

A partnership was formed that included a partnership included UW-P (both engineering and art departments) the Cuba City Schools, the City of Presidents Committee, AARP, Cuba City Telephone, the Downtown Task Force, several private business entities, and the engineering and art departments from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW-P).

The scope of the project included free Wi-Fi and Bluetooth sound system; new green space including new trees, seating, games and a storage shed; and a 3D 4,200 square foot, interactive ground mural of the Mississippi River. The mural also includes a Presidential Hopscotch area. A salute to the Covid-19 frontline heroes and three new ADA compliant sidewalk ramps were also included in the project.

A large portion of the funding for the project came from the AARP Community Challenge Grant Program. Their generosity and understanding cannot be understated, although they did impose a tight schedule to complete the work. While we could not announce the grant award until August 20th, the work had to be completed by December 18th.

The pandemic, weather and the unexpected increase in demand for construction services and materials all factored in the timely completion of this project. The high school class that constructed the storage shed dealt with delays on materials as well as concerns for the school cancelling in person classes.



WRP President Sandy Decker presents the TRDI plaque to Cuba City Mayor Van De Wiel in Cuba City.



People Enjoying the Presidential Plaza in Cuba City.



Sign at City Limits Recognizing Cuba City as a Top Rural Development Award Winner.

One aspect of the project though that progressed well was the mural itself. Both high school and college students, as well as residents participated in the actual outdoor painting while meeting the required social distancing necessary during the pandemic.

The [mural](#) will add to the community's tourism activities and will help to coax more people out of their cars and into the heart of the community, and its business district. Cuba City sees 5,200 vehicles daily on its main street and the mural is sure to induce more of these

visitors to stop.

The benefits of the project have been felt immediately. Just weeks after the completion of the Plaza, the city held its annual Christmas Glow Parade at the plaza. The turnout for the event in the winter clearly depicted the long-term potential for the new space and facilities. The Cuba City Community Market will now be held in the Plaza and the school and several community groups are hoping to host events there as the weather improves and Covid restrictions are eased.

The success of the project is very evident. Notably, no City funds were used in the Plaza project. The community has seen young people "hanging out" in the space, children playing hopscotch and other games, and it is anticipated that older residents will see this as their place to have a cup of coffee and perhaps play a game of cards. The unique ground mural will help Cuba City entice more tourists to stop and stay awhile. Many businesses on main street have already reported a noticeable increase in traffic.

This project can be replicated by other communities. The people of Cuba City would be happy to share their experiences. Go to <https://cubacity.org/community/custom-contact-page/community-contact-information> for more information.



Green County Child Care Initiative

Green County is considered a childcare desert, having one childcare spot available for every three young children. When parents have problems finding childcare, they must scramble to find alternatives or miss work to care for their children.

Recognizing the importance of addressing childcare needs and growing childcare businesses, United Way of Green County, Green County Development Corporation teamed up with the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Southwest Community Action Program (SWCAP), Extension Green County, MultiCultural Outreach Program (MCOP), Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C), Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC), Green County Childcare Network (GCCCN), Avenues Counseling, Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Blackhawk Technical College (BTC) to:

- Support licensed childcare providers to help them stay in business and strengthen their businesses.

- Provide support and resources to help providers become licensed.
- Increase the number of licensed childcare facilities by helping providers build a strong, sustainable business.
- Increase the quality of services by providing resources and support for existing childcares.
- Provide funding for technology needs, protective and sanitization materials, and other classroom supplies.

The partners initiated several exciting programs to strengthen existing childcare businesses and help entrepreneurs start their own daycare in Green County. Two notable programs included:

- Childcare Business Boot Camp was eight weekly classes to provide a solid foundation in all aspects of running a childcare business. These free virtual classes (also provided in Spanish) began in March 2021. One-on-one planning with professional business consultants and networking with presenters and classmates was integral. Fourteen participants graduated.
- Safety Saturday classes to provide education needed for a person to work in a childcare facility. Training (also in Spanish) included: CPR, Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect, Preventing Abusive Head Trauma and Mandated Reporter Training. Twelve people completed the training.
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation to childcare businesses was provided through a grant received by United Way of Green County. This initiative provides one-on-one consulting pairing highly trained professionals with childcare providers to help meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of the children served. Twelve childcare providers are received these weekly services.

To increase family engagement, the group began free monthly workshops for parents intended to provide opportunities to collaborate, build relationships, and strengthen skills. These workshops provide tools to help families ensure the social and emotional well-being of their children.

The importance and success of these initiatives has spurred SBDC to fund similar efforts in five additional counties.

To learn more about the Green County Childcare Initiatives contact the Green County Development Corporation at (608) 328-9452 or visit their [website](#).