

idea corner

Certified Volunteers Aid Extension Efforts

An Extension home economist serving three northern Idaho counties has found a way to give herself extra hands and more time to meet local needs. The secret is a team of volunteer leaders certified in foods and nutrition and food preservation.

The idea was conceived by the Kootenai County Extension home economist. She realized her expanded responsibilities under area specialization would stretch her time and resources to the limit.

Kootenai County, with nearly 50,000 people and 14 communities, is spread over 1,300 square miles broken up by 10 lakes. As a result, the population is segmented, with communication between communities and the county Extension office hampered by distance. In addition, youths and adults are asking for more nutrition information, reflected by up to 300 telephone calls a month.

The certification program trains knowledgeable local experts who can help reach more people with accurate, useful information. The aim is to produce resource people who can answer routine telephone questions and teach 4-H, EFNEP, and other groups basic nutrition concepts with little or no supervision.

Many volunteers are experienced in traditional Extension leadership. They get credit for formal and informal

training already received. Certification in either foods and nutrition or food preservation requires 30 hours of training in subject and leadership training.

Training normally takes one to three years. To keep certification current, volunteers must complete at least five hours of additional training with the area home economist each year.

So far, five volunteers have been certified in Kootenai County, and others are completing the curriculum. As a result of their training, the certified volunteers not only gain subject-matter knowledge, but also develop greater self-worth and self-confidence.

They serve on Extension advisory boards, present programs to community groups, and teach nutrition lessons. One volunteer answered more than 150 telephone calls about food preservation in a season.

The success of the concept has encouraged two other home economists in the same area to develop similar programs in clothing and textiles and housing and home furnishings. Recently, the idea has been introduced across Idaho, and further adoption is expected.

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