2026 FALL EXTENSION CONFERENCE



CONFERENCE AGENDA

EAST LANSING | OCTOBER 20–22, 2026

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

CONTENTS

Welcome to the 2026 Fall Extension Conference 2
Fall Extension Conference Mobile App 4
MSU Extension Celebration 5
FEC Service Project 5
Recharge Room 6
FEC Video Room 6
Professional Headshots 7
Resource Room 7
MCEA Silent Auction 8
CNRDA Clothing Swap 8
Spartan Shout-Out 8
MSU Benefit Fair 9
Conference Schedule 10
Preconference: Tuesday, October 20 10
Conference Day 1: Wednesday, October 21 11
Conference Day 2: Thursday, October 22 16
Kellogg Center Map 18
MSU Campus Map 20
Key Partner Awards 24
Epsilon Sigma Phi State Friend of Extension Award 38

ALLERGY ALERT

Several attendees have severe airborne allergies related to mint, corn, nuts and latex. Please be mindful of these allergies by not bringing, using or consuming any of these items during Fall Extension Conference. Thank you for being considerate.

WELCOME TO THE 2026 FALL EXTENSION CONFERENCE

We are excited to welcome you to East Lansing for a week of learning, connection, and inspiration as we come together to celebrate the work of Michigan State University Extension. This year's theme, **Strategic Excellence: Our Story, Our Impact**, highlights the collective efforts, partnerships, and innovations that strengthen our organization and the communities we serve.

The FEC Planning Committee has designed a conference experience that encourages collaboration, sparks new ideas, and provides opportunities to learn from one another. As we continue to evolve and improve the conference, your feedback remains essential. We encourage you to complete the post-conference evaluation survey and share feedback on individual breakout sessions and Workshops on the Move through the FEC26 mobile app. Feedback may also be provided directly to the ANR Event Services team by phone at 517-884-7081 or by email at events@anr.msu.edu. Your input helps to shape future conferences and ensures they continue to meet the needs of Extension employees across the state.

As we gather in East Lansing, we invite you to take advantage of being at the heart of Michigan State University's campus and outreach network. Beyond the conference sessions, we encourage you to explore the campus and surrounding community. Our Workshops on the Move will showcase innovative programs, facilities, and partnerships that reflect Extension's impact throughout Michigan while offering opportunities to explore campus and connect with colleagues in new ways.

Thank you for being part of FEC26. We hope you leave with new ideas, stronger connections, and a renewed sense of purpose for the important work ahead. We look forward to learning, sharing, and growing together throughout the week.

Sincerely,



Quentin R. Tyler, PhD

Director, MSU Extension

Senior Associate Dean of Outreach and Engagement

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

FALL EXTENSION CONFERENCE MOBILE APP

The **FEC26 Mobile App**, powered by **Results@Hand**, will help you stay connected and provide convenient access to conference information throughout the week. The FEC26 Mobile App will be the primary communication method to conference attendees during our time together. Be sure to download the app to your smartphone or mobile device.

The app puts everything you need for FEC26 at your fingertips, including the conference agenda, session descriptions, speaker information, maps, announcements, and important event updates. You can build a personalized schedule, connect with colleagues, and submit feedback for breakout sessions and Workshops on the Move directly through the app.

To get the most out of your FEC26 experience:

- Download the **Results@Hand Events** app from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.
- Search for and select **Fall Extension Conference 2026 (FEC26)**.
- Log in using the email address you used to register for the conference.
- Enable notifications to receive important announcements and real-time updates throughout the event.

MSU EXTENSION CELEBRATION

Help celebrate our partnerships and accomplishments throughout the past year by attending the 2026 Extension Celebration. The Extension Celebration will be held in the Big Ten AB Room at Kellogg Center on Wednesday afternoon. The MSU Extension Celebration will begin at 5:45 p.m. with the presentation of the MSU Extension Key Partner awards and the ESP Friend of Extension award. Following the award presentations, a strolling dinner will be provided, allowing ample time to network, eat, and view this year's poster presentations. Take this opportunity to connect with one another and learn more about this year's interns.

Dress for the Extension Celebration is business casual.

FEC SERVICE PROJECT

This year's FEC service project focuses on supporting the MSU Food Bank and Basic Needs Program, an initiative that helps ensure Spartans have access to nutritious food, personal care items, and other essential resources. By participating in this donation drive, you can help make a meaningful difference for students, scholars, faculty, and staff experiencing food insecurity while contributing to a stronger, healthier, and more supportive MSU community.

Conference attendees are encouraged to donate high-need food, household, personal care, and culturally relevant pantry items. A complete list of requested items is available on the FEC website and in the conference app.

There are several ways to participate:

- **Donate Food and Essential Items:** Bring requested items to the conference and place them in the donation bin located in the FEC Resource Room.

- **Make an Online Gift:** Support the program through a financial contribution to the MSU Food Bank and Basic Needs Program via the MSU Development Fund.
- **Shop the Amazon Wishlist:** Purchase needed items directly from the program's Amazon Wishlist and have them shipped to support the food bank.

Every donation helps ensure that fellow Spartans have access to the resources they need to thrive. We encourage all attendees to participate as we work together to support the well-being and success of the MSU community.

RECHARGE ROOM

Although conferences and other gatherings can be exciting and inspirational, they can also be overwhelming and draining. If you need a moment to recharge your batteries or to just enjoy some quiet time, visit the Recharge Room. There you will find fidget toys, coloring pages, puzzles, and other mindfulness activities. You're also welcome to sit quietly to meditate, reflect, or just be. This quiet space is open at all times from the beginning of the conference until the close. Taking moments of reflection, no matter how you view your conference time, is refreshing and allows your body and brain to recharge.

The recharge room will be located in Room 102 of the Kellogg Center.

FEC PHOTO & VIDEO BOOTH

Share your Extension story -- and enter to win! Stop by the FEC video booth in the Galaxy Room to record a short video about what working at MSU Extension means to you. The booth will be staffed at designated times and available for more private/self-guided recording at others. Each staff member who records a video will receive one entry into a prize drawing!

PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOTS

Need to have a professional headshot taken? Perhaps it's been awhile or you just don't like how your current headshot turned out. Now is your chance to have an updated professional photo taken. Headshots can be taken during the following times on Wednesday and Thursday, October 21 and 22:

Wednesday:

- **10 a.m. - 1 p.m.** and **5:15-5:45 p.m.**

Thursday:

- **9-10:45 a.m**. and **11:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**

Headshots will be available in the North Lobby of the Kellogg Center.

RESOURCE ROOM

Make time to visit the Resource Room, your one-stop destination to explore resource tables hosted by colleagues and partners from across MSU Extension and beyond, including PEARS, PEARS Events, ANR IT, the MSU Libraries, the CYI LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Team, Extension Evaluation and Economic Impact, Culture, Access and Belonging resources the CNRDA Association, and more.

Whether you need technical assistance, want to learn more or ask questions, connect with affinity groups and professional organizations, discover new resources, or explore opportunities for involvement, the Resource Room offers something for everyone. Stop by between sessions, ask questions, gather materials, meet colleagues, and discover tools and connections that can support your work long after the conference ends.

You'll also find several special engagement opportunities in the Resource Room, including the Spartan Shout-Out Wall, MCEA Silent Auction, and CNRDA Clothing Swap, each highlighted below.

Michigan Council of Extension Agents (MCEA) Silent Auction

Support professional development across MSU Extension by participating in the MCEA Silent Auction benefiting the MSU Extension Professional Development Endowed Fund. The auction opens at 12:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 21, 2026, and remains available for bidding during conference breaks throughout Fall Extension Conference. The auction closes at 12:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 22, 2026, with item pickup and payment available from noon to 1:30 p.m. Discover unique experiences, handmade items, local products, gift baskets, and more while helping provide professional development opportunities for MSU Extension employees. Be sure to stop by the Red Cedar room, browse the offerings, and place your bids in support of this worthwhile cause!

CNRDA Clothing Swap

Visit the CNRDA **clothing swap** during Fall Extension Conference in the Red Cedar room. If you are bringing clothing items, please make sure that your items have been washed and are on a hanger. Hangers can be picked up on the last day of conference or will be disposed of after the conference ends. Please feel free to give and take as you need.

Spartan Shout-Out

Take a moment to recognize the colleagues who make a difference every day. Share notes of appreciation, words of gratitude, professional bragging, or a simple thank-you. Whether someone gave a helping hand, achieved a big milestone, demonstrated exceptional service, or made your day a little brighter, this is your space to celebrate the people who make our Spartan community strong. Add a note, celebrate a coworker, and help create a culture of appreciation that strengthens our MSU Extension community. Staff will have the opportunity to take their individual shout-outs on the last day of the conference following the closing. Go Green! Go White!

MSU BENEFITS FAIR

The MSU Benefits Fair will take place on the following date/time:

Thursday, October 22, 2026
11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Jack Breslin Student Events Center

MSU benefit providers and MSU HR staff will be available to answer questions and help employees and retirees enroll in or change their benefits on-site at the Jack Breslin Student Events Center. During the fair, Humana and Personify Health will be offering presentations about the 2027 health care plans for current and future MSU retirees and other eligible members. In addition, the MSU Health Care Pharmacy will be offering flu shots during the fair by **appointment only** from **11 a.m. to 6 p.m.**

The entrance for the fair will be the Gilbert Pavilion/Hall of History, which is at the south end of the Breslin Center.

Learn more: https://hr.msu.edu/open-enrollment/benefits-fair.htmlConference Schedule

PRE CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
9 a.m.-Noon	**District Director Meeting**	Kellogg Center Heritage Room
10 a.m.-Noon	**District Support Meeting**	MSUFCU Farm Lane Community Room
10 a.m.-5 p.m.	**Community, Food and Environment Institute (CFEI) Meeting**	MSUFCU Headquarters #2 Community Room
10 a.m.-5 p.m.	**Children and Youth Institute (CYI) Meeting**	Kellogg Center Lincoln Room
10 a.m.-2 p.m.	**EFNEP Meeting**	MSUFCU Headquarters #1 Community Room
12-5 p.m.	**Agriculture and Agribusiness Institute (AABI) Meeting** *Lunch will be from 12-1 p.m. at the Brody Cafeteria. The meeting will begin at 1 p.m. in the Kellogg Center Auditorium*	Kellogg Center Auditorium
12-5 p.m.	**District Director, District Staff and Support Staff Meeting**	MSUFCU Farm Lane Community Room
2-4 p.m.	**Health and Nutrition Institute (HNI) Meeting**	MSUFCU Headquarters #1 Community Room
5 p.m.	**MAE4-HYS Meeting and Awards Recognition**	Kellogg Center Lincoln Room
5:30-7:30 p.m.	**CNRDA Meeting**	Brody Cafeteria - – Small Private Dining Room
6 p.m.	**MEAFCS Meeting**	Brody Cafeteria – Large Private Dining Room
7 p.m.	**MAE4-HYS social time** at Lansing Shuffle *food court available to purchase dinner on own*	Lansing Shuffle (325 Riverfront Dr, Lansing, MI)

CONFERENCE DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
7 a.m.	**ESP Breakfast Meeting**	Corniche
7:45 a.m.	**General Breakfast**	Big Ten ABC
9-10 a.m.	**Welcome and Directors Update**	Big Ten ABC
10-10:15 a.m.	**Transition Time**	
10:15-11:45 a.m.	**Breakout Session #1**	*See individual breakout sessions that follow.*
	» AI Workshop	Auditorium
	» Core Skills for Resilience in Challenging Times	Room 106
	» Everyday Actions That Matter Bystander Intervention in Practice	Conference Room 62
	» LIVE, It's Into to PEARS Events!	Room 105AB
	» Navigating the Grant Process: A Conversation with Grant Experts	Michigamme Room
	» Out of Scope, Not Out of Mind: Navigating Multiple Priorities (and people) in a Positive Way	Lincoln Room
	» Preparedness by Design: Integrating Readiness into Your Extension Programs	Conference Room 61
	» Story Circles: A Method for Deep Connection	Heritage Room
	» Teaching Science when you Don't Know Diddly Squat	Room 103AB
	» What's Possible? Using the Community Change Hub to Amplify Impact	Room 104AB
11:45 a.m.-Noon	**Transition Time**	
Noon-1:30 p.m.	**Lunch and Fall Extension Conference Awards Presentation**	Big Ten ABC

CONFERENCE DAY 1 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
1:30-1:45 p.m.	**Transition Time**	
1:45-5:15 p.m.	**Workshops on the Move** » Building Bridges: Extension's Role in Public Engagement and Policy » Cultivating Relationships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Communities » From Farm to Market: Exploring Michigan's Local Food Journey » Growing the Future: Experiencing MSU's New Dairy, Greenhouse and Pollinator Centers » One Health in Action: Connecting Human, Animal, and Environmental Health at MSU	All Workshops on the Move participants will meet at the front entrance at the Kellogg Center. From there, groups will board buses. Please plan to board the bus no later than 1:35 p.m.
1:45-2:45 p.m.	**Breakout Session #2**	*See individual breakout sessions that follow.*
	» Fast & Furious: PEARS Events Features	Room 105AB
	» Flip the Script: Tackling Rumors and Gossip with Confidence	Room 103AB
	» Food on the Table: U.S. Nutrition Programs and the Cost of Eating Well	Michigamme Room
	» Get Ready, Get Set, Build Wealth	Lincoln Room
	» Let's Get Social: Simple Ways To Share Your Work	Auditorium
	» Listening with Presence (*Part 1*)	Heritage Room
	» Race to Learn: Interactive 4-H Programming	Room 104 AB

CONFERENCE DAY 1 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
	» Rooted in Community: Strategies for Supporting School and Community Gardens	Conference Room 62
2:45-3 p.m..	**Transition Time**	
3-4 p.m.	**Breakout Sessions #3**	*See individual breakout sessions that follow.*
	» Beyond the Table: Strategies for Meaningful Engagement at Community Events & Resource Fairs	Auditorium
	» Climate Adaptation in Action: Tools, Communication, and Extension Strategies	Lincoln Room
	» Everything DiSC Workplace Profile (*Part 1*)	Michigamme
	» Finding Common Ground: Building Trust with Urban Farmers Workshop	Conference Room 62
	» Listening with Presence (*Part 2*)	Heritage Room
	» PEARS Events: Expert Mode	Room 105AB
	» The Art of Organized Chaos: 4-H Clinics and Workshops	Room 104AB
	» Walking Alongside A Volunteer's Unique Journey	Room 103AB
4-4:15 p.m.	**Transition Time**	

CONFERENCE DAY 1 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
4:15-5:15 p.m.	**Breakout Sessions #4**	*See individual breakout sessions that follow.*
	» 4-H Tech Changemakers in Chippewa County: Building Digital Skills and Introducing AI Across Extension Programs	Room 104AB
	» A Completely Reasonable Professional Development Session	Lincoln Room
	» Best Waze to Use PEARS Events: Getting Right to the Point	105AB
	» Building Our Own Table: A Toolkit for Transformative Cooperative Extension Food Sovereignty Partnerships that Center Black Women Leadership	Conference Room 62
	» Coaching Without the Title: Influencing Up and Across	Auditorium
	» Conflict to Collaboration: Leading Strong Personalities in Volunteer Programs	Room 103AB
	» Everything DiSC Workplace Profile (*Part 2*)	Michigamme
	» How Hosting a Foreign Exchange Student Taught Me to Be a Better MSU Extension Educator	Heritage Room
5:15-5:45 p.m.	**Transition Time**	

CONFERENCE DAY 1 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
5:45-8 p.m.	**MSU Extension Celebration and Networking Reception** **Intern Poster Displays** *Presentation of the Key Partner and ESP Friend of Extension Awards*	Big Ten ABC
8-10 p.m.	**Evening Social Activities (Optional)**	
	» Music Bingo & Trivia Challenge • *Join fellow attendees for some friendly competition and prizes.*	Big Ten ABC
	» Games and Socializing • *Play cards or board games, connect with colleagues, or simply relax and enjoy informal conversation.*	Lincoln

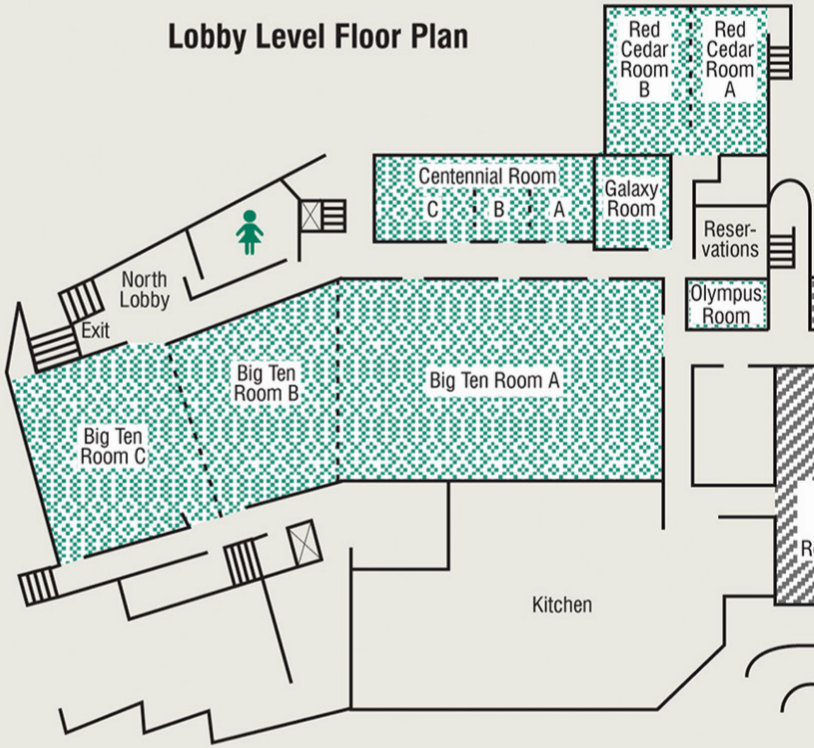
CONFERENCE DAY 2: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
7:30-9 a.m.	**General Breakfast**	Big Ten ABC
9-10:30 a.m.	**Strategic Direction in Motion: Turning Vision into Impact**	Big Ten ABC
10:30-10:45 a.m.	**Transition Time**	
10:45-11:45 a.m.	**Breakout Session #5**	*See individual breakout sessions that follow.*
	» 1 Year, 4 Quarters, 52 Weeks, 365 Days: Planning for Success in 2027	Room 106
	» Creativity Isn't Just for "Creative People"	Lincoln Room
	» Elements of Effective Feedback: Praise, Criticism, and Self-Esteem	Room 104AB
	» Gray for a Day: Experiencing Aging through a New Lens	Conference Room 62
	» Learning from the Field: Extension Needs Assessment Approaches, Challenges, and Lessons Learned	Michigamme
	» Place-Based Education: Informing our MSUE Mission and Work	Conference Room 61
	» Planning Full Day Events: Strategies for Success	Room 105AB
	» Presenting the Conservation Stewards and Michigan Naturalist Programs!	Heritage Room
	» Teaching for Learner Variability: Supporting Neurodiverse Learners in Extension Settings	Room 103AB
	» Yes, Extension Does That! Becoming a Strong Ambassador for MSU Extension	Auditorium

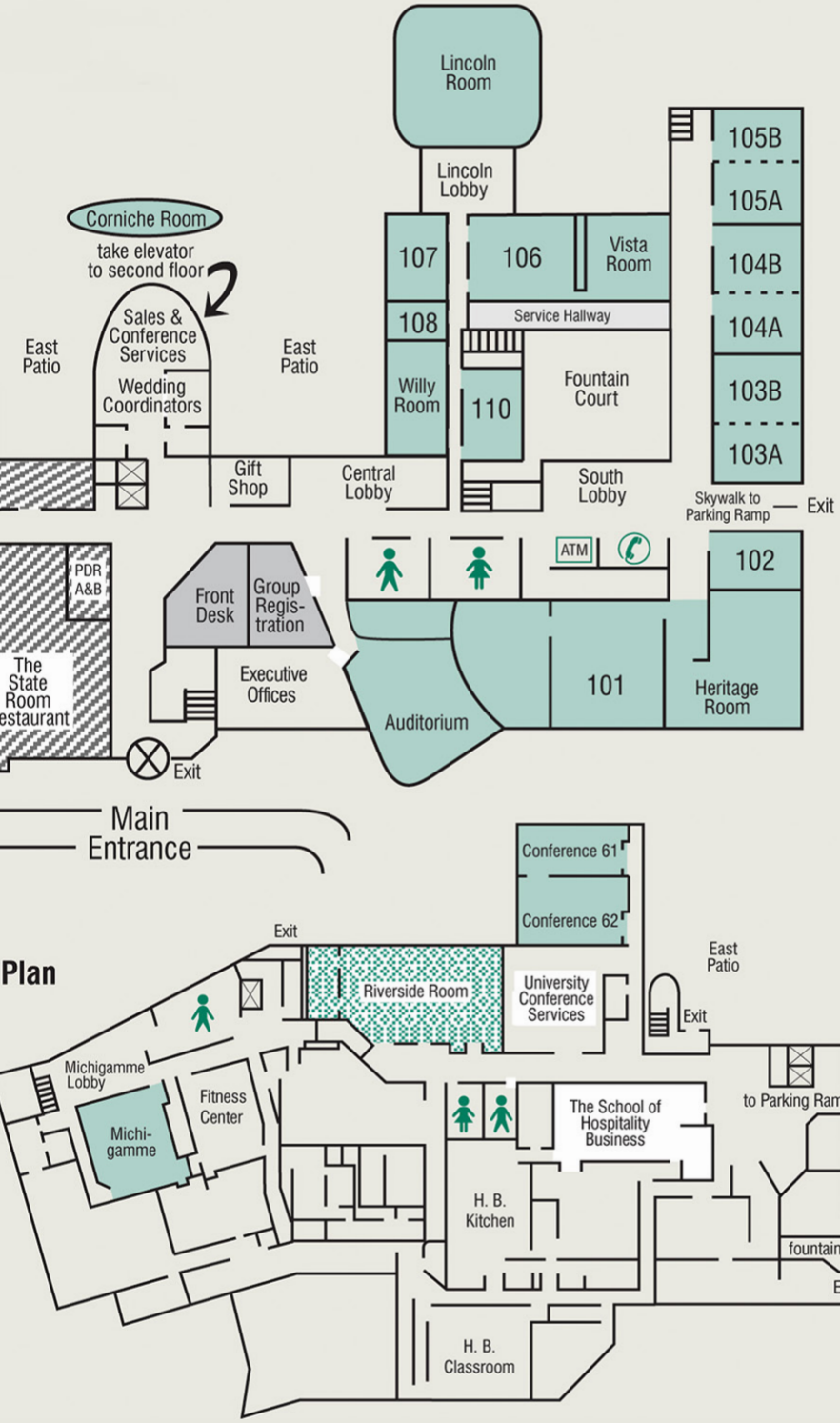
CONFERENCE DAY 2 (CONTINUED)

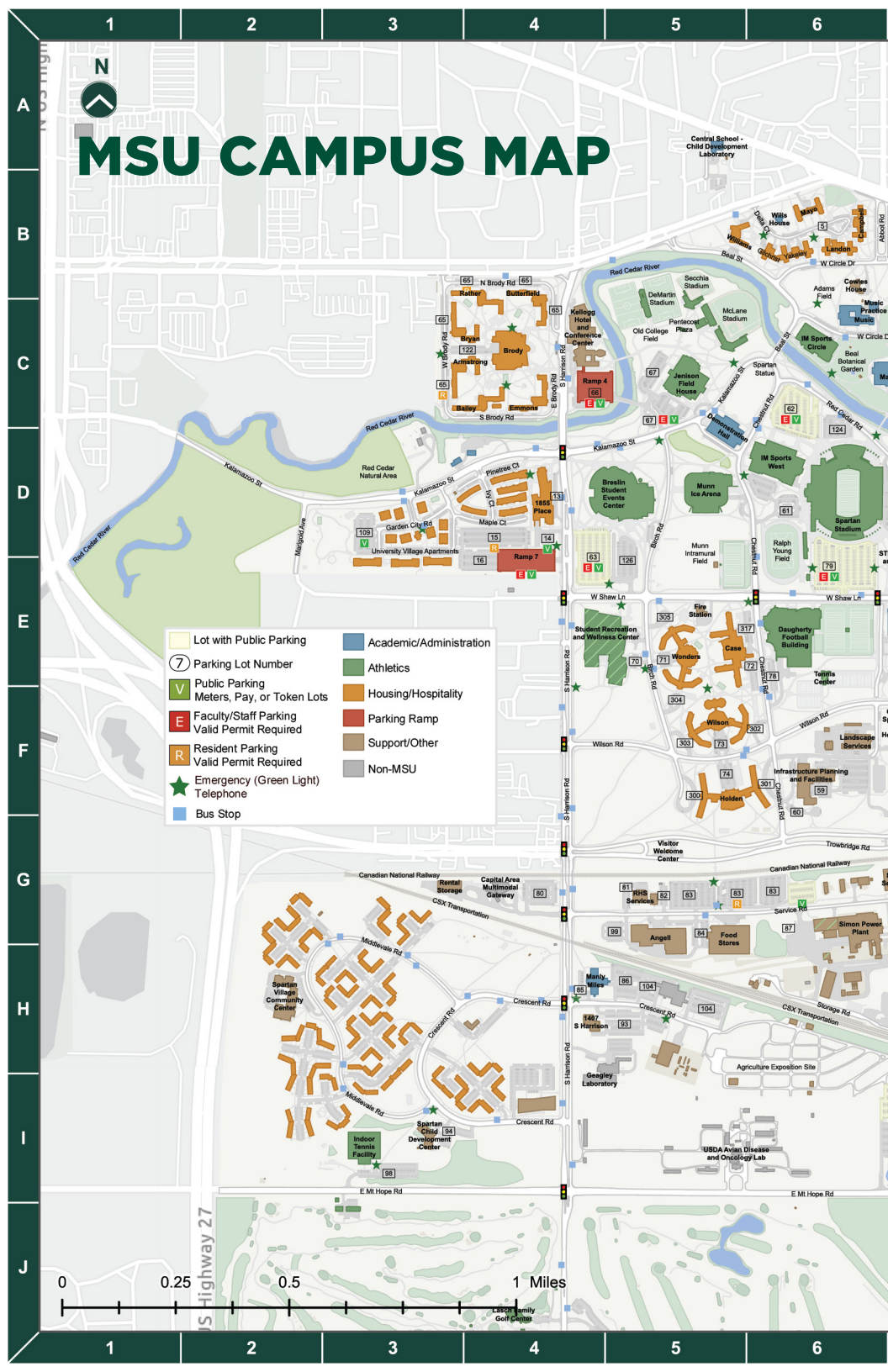
TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
11:45 a.m.-Noon	**Transition Time**	
Noon-1:30 p.m.	**Lunch and Fall Extension Conference Awards Presentation**	Big Ten ABC
1:30-2:30 p.m.	**Keynote Presentation** » The Hope of Change Agents » *Speaker: Kiyaana Cox Jones*	Big Ten ABC
2:30-2:45 p.m	**Closing Remarks**	
2:45 p.m.	**Conference Concludes** » *Safe travels to everyone!*	On the road again...

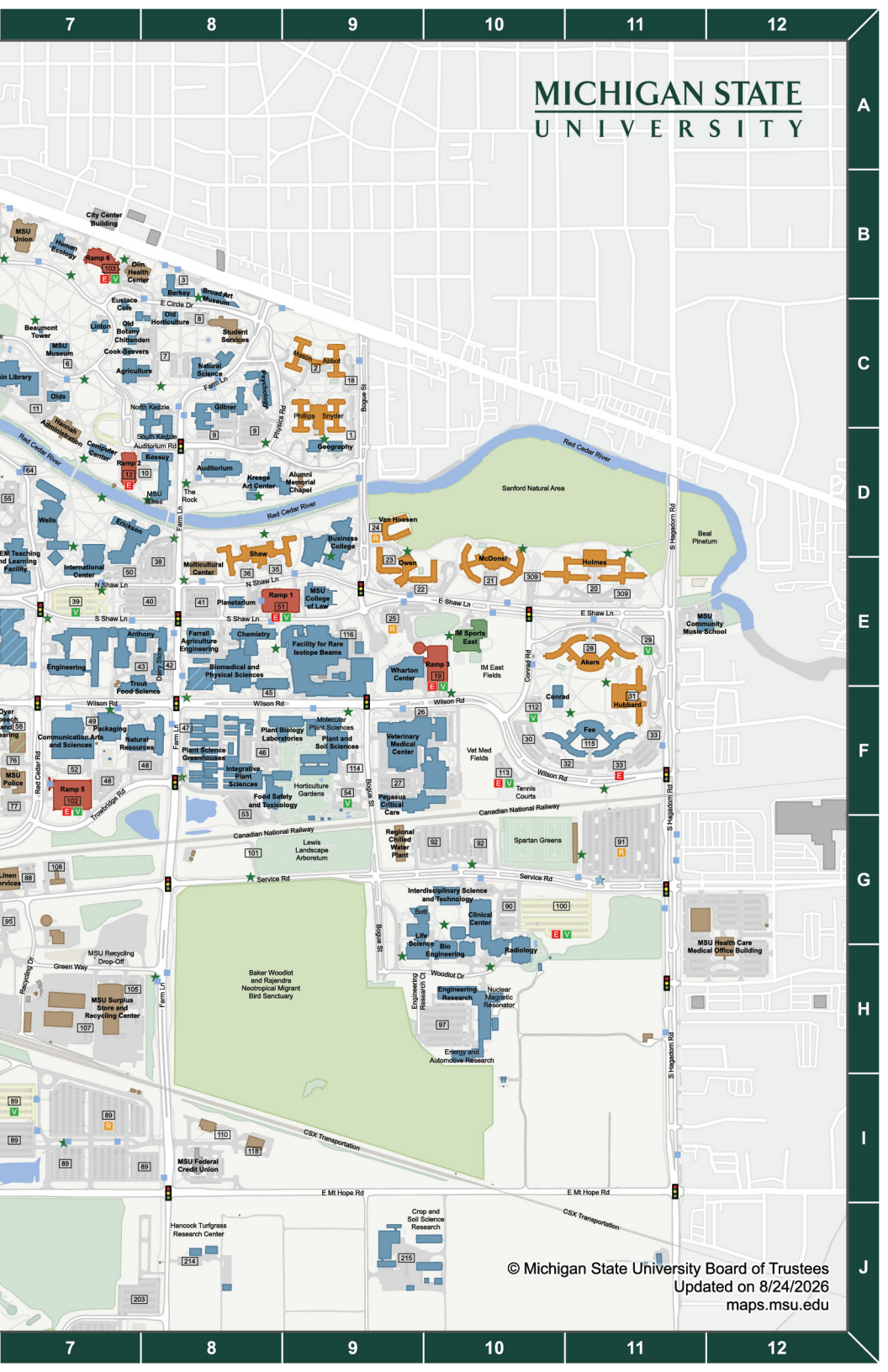
KELLOGG HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTER MAP



- Meeting Rooms
- Banquet Areas
- Eating Areas
- Front Desk
- Elevators
- Men's Room
- Women's Room
- Telephones


Lincoln Room
Lincoln Lobby
105B
105A
104B
104A
103B
103A
Corniche Room
take elevator to second floor
Sales & Conference Services
Wedding Coordinators
East Patio
East Patio
107
106
Vista Room
108
Service Hallway
Willy Room
110
Fountain Court
Gift Shop
Central Lobby
South Lobby
Skywalk to Parking Ramp
Exit
PDR A&B
Front Desk
Group Regis-tration
ATM
102
The State Room estaurant
Executive Offices
Auditorium
101
Heritage Room
Exit
Main Entrance
Conference 61
Conference 62
Exit
Plan
Riverside Room
University Conference Services
East Patio
Exit
Michigamme Lobby
Fitness Center
Michi-gamme
The School of Hospitality Business
to Parking Ramp
Exit
H. B. Kitchen
fountain
Exit
H. B. Classroom


MSU CAMPUS MAP
N
Lot with Public Parking
Parking Lot Number
Public Parking Meters, Pay, or Token Lots
Faculty/Staff Parking Valid Permit Required
Resident Parking Valid Permit Required
Emergency (Green Light) Telephone
Bus Stop
Academic/Administration
Athletics
Housing/Hospitality
Parking Ramp
Support/Other
Non-MSU
0
0.25
0.5
1 Miles
Red Cedar River
Kalamazoo St
N Brody Rd
S Brody Rd
W Brody Rd
E Brody Rd
S Harrison Rd
Mary Ct
Pinetree Ct
Maple Ct
Garden City Rd
Marigold Ave
Red Cedar Natural Area
University Village Apartments
1855 Place
Ramp 4
Ramp 7
Rather
Butterfield
Bryan
Brody
Armstrong
Bailey
Emmons
Central School - Child Development Laboratory
Wills House
Williams
Gilchrist
Yakeley
Landon
Chittenden
Abbot Rd
W Circle Dr
Beal St
Secchia Stadium
DeMartin Stadium
McLane Stadium
Old College Field
Pentecost Plaza
Adams Field
Centies House
Music Practice Music
IM Sports Circle
Beal Botanical Garden
Jenison Field House
Spartan Statue
Demonstration Hall
Chestnut Rd
Red Cedar Rd
IM Sports West
Breslin Student Events Center
Munn Ice Arena
Spartan Stadium
Munn Intramural Field
Ralph Young Field
Birch Rd
W Shaw Ln
Fire Station
Student Recreation and Wellness Center
Wonders
Case
Daugherty Football Building
Tennis Center
Wilson
Wilson Rd
Landscape Services
Infrastructure Planning and Facilities
Holden
Visitor Welcome Center
Trowbridge Rd
Canadian National Railway
Rental Storage
Capital Area Multimodal Gateway
CSX Transportation
RHS Services
Service Rd
Angell
Food Stores
Simon Power Plant
Spartan Village Community Center
Middlevale Rd
Crescent Rd
Monty Miles
1407 S Harrison
Storage Rd
Geagley Laboratory
Agriculture Exposition Site
Spartan Child Development Center
Indoor Tennis Facility
USDA Avian Disease and Oncology Lab
E Mt Hope Rd
US Highway 27
Lasch Family Golf Center



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Updated on 8/24/2026
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KEY PARTNER AWARDS

The Michigan State University Extension Key Partner award recognizes those who have made significant contributions to creating, improving, supporting, or promoting MSU Extension programs. This award is open to individuals, organizations, businesses, media, special MSU programs, and government officials. Nominees must possess the highest standards of integrity and character to positively reflect and enhance the reputation of MSU Extension.

LAUREN SLADE

Lauren Slade reflects the values of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award through her commitment to creating opportunities that improve the health, well-being, and long-term success of underserved families in Detroit. As founder and president of Arukah Restores, Lauren has built a meaningful alliance with the Detroit Partnership for Food, Learning and Innovation (DPFLI) and Extension that expands access to nutrition education, gardening, fitness, and family-centered wellness programming.

Since launching the collaboration in 2025, Lauren has worked closely with Extension staff to create a comprehensive program that helps families improve their physical and mental health while developing lifelong skills related to healthy living and food production. Through the Arukah Restores program, participating families gain access to DPFLI's raised beds, learning spaces, and outdoor facilities, where they learn gardening techniques, nutrition principles, cooking skills, and fitness practices that support healthier lifestyles.

What distinguishes Lauren's partnership is her vision for connecting families with a broad network of educational resources and support systems. Working alongside MSU

Extension educators and community nutrition instructors, she has created an environment where participants feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to take charge of their health and well-being. Her leadership has also helped strengthen connections between participants and other MSU programs, including cooking classes, 4-H activities, youth camps, and the Organic Farmer Training Program.

The impact of this recent collaboration is already evident. Arukah Restores participants reported improvements in physical, mental, and emotional health, including lower blood pressure and improved blood sugar levels. Families have also translated their learning into action by establishing home gardens, joining community gardens, and pursuing additional educational opportunities. One program participant ultimately enrolled in MSU's Organic Farmer Training Program, demonstrating the lasting influence of Lauren's work.

Through her compassion, leadership, and commitment to building stronger communities, Lauren Slade has expanded the reach and visibility of MSU Extension in Detroit while helping families develop the skills, confidence, and support networks needed to thrive. Her dedication to partnership and community empowerment makes her a truly deserving recipient of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award.

MICHIGAN OFFICE OF RURAL PROSPERITY

The Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) exemplifies the spirit of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award through its commitment to strengthening rural communities by investing in leadership development, local capacity, and collaborative problem-solving. As a trusted statewide partner, ORP has made significant contributions to the MSU Extension programming that helps rural communities thrive.

Recognizing that many rural challenges are rooted in leadership capacity, community engagement, and relationship-building, ORP has worked closely with MSU Extension to equip local leaders with the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to address complex community issues. This partnership is grounded in shared values, mutual trust, and a commitment to building strong, resilient rural communities across Michigan.

A cornerstone of this collaboration is Leading Rural Michigan, a leadership development initiative designed and delivered by MSU Extension with support from a $154,000 ORP grant. Developed in response to identified leadership gaps in rural communities, the program helps emerging leaders strengthen their leadership abilities, expand professional networks, and connect with resources that support long-term community success. ORP has been an active partner throughout the process, helping shape priorities, guide program development, and connect the work to broader statewide rural development efforts.

The impact of this partnership is already evident. The inaugural Leading Rural Michigan cohort in 2025-2026 included 36[CP1.1] participants representing 27 counties across the state, from the western Upper Peninsula to the Thumb and southwest Michigan. Participants consistently report increased confidence in leadership and decision-making roles, a stronger understanding of local systems,

and an enhanced ability to contribute to their communities. Equally important, they have developed valuable peer networks that provide ongoing support and collaboration.

Beyond leadership development, ORP has partnered with MSU Extension to advance good governance education and strengthen local decision-making capacity. Through its advocacy and strategic vision, ORP has elevated Extension's role in statewide conversations about rural leadership and community development. By connecting people, resources, and opportunities, the ORP continues to strengthen communities and advance the shared mission of helping rural Michigan prosper.

MICHIGAN POTATO INDUSTRY COMMISSION

The Michigan Potato Industry Commission (MPIC) has made extraordinary contributions to creating, improving, supporting, and promoting MSU Extension programs, making it a highly deserving recipient of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award. Established in 1970 as Michigan's official potato research, promotion, and education organization, MPIC has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to advancing agricultural innovation, sustainability, and grower success.

Under the leadership of Kelly Turner, Ph.D., MPIC has served as a trusted collaborator and strategic advisor, helping Extension identify industry needs and develop practical, science-based solutions for Michigan agriculture. The Commission's support extends far beyond advocacy. Since 2001, MPIC has funded 50% of an Extension academic specialist position, providing critical resources for potato research, outreach, and education that help Michigan maintain its position as the nation's leading producer of chipping potatoes.

MPIC's engagement with MSU Extension is both broad and impactful. Commission representatives actively participate in advisory committees, Project GREEEN proposal review panels, the Integrated Pest Management Alliance, and numerous educational initiatives. MPIC is also an equal partner in planning and supporting the annual Potato Field Day, Michigan's premier potato research and Extension event. Through these efforts, growers gain access to the latest information on integrated pest management, water stewardship, irrigation efficiency, soil health, digital agriculture, and emerging production technologies.

MPIC has also championed Extension's water-use efficiency efforts. Through Kelly's leadership, the Commission helped secure support for two Extension educator positions and an MSU Mobile Irrigation Lab. These investments have significantly increased Extension's capacity to deliver irrigation education and technical assistance, reaching thousands of producers annually while generating measurable economic and environmental benefits through improved water conservation and irrigation performance.

Through sustained financial support, active engagement, and collaborative leadership, MPIC continues to strengthen MSU Extension's ability to serve Michigan agriculture while advancing the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the state's potato industry and broader agricultural community.

MSU EXTENSION AND AGBIORESEARCH STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The MSU Extension and AgBioResearch State Advisory Council has embodied the spirit of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award through nearly three decades of dedicated service, advocacy, and leadership in advancing MSU's land-grant mission. Since its establishment in 1998, the 26-member volunteer council has played a vital role in creating, improving, supporting, and promoting MSU Extension and AgBioResearch programs across the state.

Representing diverse geographic regions, industries, and stakeholder groups, council members serve as trusted ambassadors who connect university research and Extension expertise with communities, businesses, policymakers, and residents. Through its ongoing engagement with MSU Extension and AgBioResearch leadership, the council helps identify emerging issues, strengthen partnerships, increase program visibility, and ensure that research-based education remains responsive to the needs of Michigan's individuals, families, industries, and communities.

The council's impact is both significant and measurable. Members have voluntarily participated in hundreds of meetings with legislators, community leaders, industry representatives, and stakeholders to communicate the value and impact of MSU Extension and AgBioResearch programs. Their advocacy has helped secure critical investments that strengthen Michigan's agricultural, environmental, economic, and community sectors. Most notably, council members were instrumental in raising $53 million in state capital improvement funding for the new MSU Dairy Cattle Teaching and Research Facility and Plant Sciences Greenhouse Complex. These investments

will enhance research capacity, workforce development, innovation, and student learning opportunities for years to come.

The council has also championed long-term support for Project GREEEN, the Michigan Alliance for Animal Agriculture, and the Agricultural Climate Resiliency Program, helping generate awareness and sustain funding that benefits Michigan residents and industries statewide. Beyond these accomplishments, the council's greatest contribution lies in the trust and credibility it has built statewide. By sharing authentic stories, local perspectives, and professional expertise, members demonstrate the real-world value of research and Extension programs while strengthening public understanding and support. Their unwavering commitment, volunteer leadership, and advocacy have made an enduring difference in advancing the mission and impact of MSU Extension and AgBioResearch.

SAGINAW BAY WATERSHED INITIATIVE NETWORK

The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) has made significant contributions to supporting and promoting MSU Extension programs through its exceptional leadership, collaborative approach, and enduring commitment to environmental stewardship. By bringing together businesses, conservation organizations, local governments, educators, and community members, WIN has built a powerful regional partnership dedicated to enhancing sustainability throughout Michigan's largest watershed.

Managed by Michael Kelly and administered through a partnership involving the Conservation Fund, Dow Chemical Company Foundation, and numerous regional stakeholders, WIN is built on the principle of supporting local priorities while generating meaningful regional benefits. Rather than creating a new bureaucracy, WIN strengthens existing efforts by fostering communication, providing technical and financial support, and leveraging the diverse expertise of its extensive network of partners. This collaborative model has made WIN an invaluable partner to MSU Extension and Michigan Sea Grant[CP2.1].

One of WIN's most impactful partnerships with MSU Extension has been its leadership and support of the Saginaw Bay lake sturgeon restoration initiative. WIN has played a critical role in advancing habitat restoration efforts, supporting research, funding tracking technologies, and helping coordinate public engagement activities that reconnect communities with one of Michigan's most iconic native fish species. Since 2017, nearly 7,900 juvenile lake sturgeon have been stocked throughout the Saginaw Bay watershed through more than 50 community release events. These celebrations have engaged thousands

of residents and helped cultivate a strong culture of conservation and stewardship.

WIN's support extends beyond restoration projects. The organization also partners with MSU Extension's educational initiatives, including the Saginaw Bay 4-H Fish Camp, where youth gain hands-on experience in fishing, aquatic ecology, invasive species prevention, and outdoor recreation. Through these efforts, WIN fosters environmental literacy and inspires future conservation leaders.

By supporting research, education, community engagement, and habitat restoration, WIN has strengthened MSU Extension's ability to deliver impactful programs that benefit both people and natural resources. . Its collaborative leadership, long-term vision, and dedication to community-driven solutions make WIN a truly deserving recipient of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award.

SARAH MILLS

Sarah Mills, Ph.D., embodies the values of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award through her sustained commitment to creating, improving, and promoting MSU Extension programs. The programs she works on help communities navigate the opportunities and challenges associated with renewable energy development. Since first approaching MSU Extension in 2017, Sarah has been a trusted collaborator, sharing her expertise, advancing applied research, and helping local governments make informed decisions about renewable energy planning and policy.

As director of the University of Michigan's Center for EmPowering Communities and an internationally recognized researcher in energy policy and land use planning, Sarah has consistently bridged academic research and community application. Her partnership with MSU Extension has strengthened statewide educational efforts focused on renewable energy siting, planning, zoning, and community engagement. Through her willingness to share resources, review educational materials, and co-develop programming, she has significantly expanded Extension's ability to serve local officials, community leaders, and residents throughout Michigan.

Sarah has played a leading role in developing and updating some of Michigan's most widely used renewable energy planning resources, including "Planning and Zoning for Solar Energy Systems: A Guidebook for Michigan Local Governments." Released in 2022, this publication was distributed to every local government in Michigan and became a foundational resource for local decision-makers. She has also partnered with Extension educators to update renewable energy guidebooks, develop new resources related to wind energy regulation, and deliver educational

programs through statewide professional associations and local government training events.

Beyond Michigan, she has elevated Extension's national impact by convening multi-state collaborations and establishing a continuing community of practice focused on public engagement around renewable energy. Her partnership has also helped secure nearly $500,000 in grant funding to support renewable energy education and technical assistance.

Through her collaborative leadership, applied scholarship, and unwavering commitment to rural prosperity, Sarah Mills has empowered communities to make informed, locally-driven decisions while significantly advancing the reach, credibility, and impact of MSU Extension programs.

SHERIFF MIKE BITNAR

Sheriff Mike Bitnar is highly deserving of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award, for his extraordinary commitment to prevention education, strengthening community partnerships, and improving the well-being of youth and families throughout Michigan's eastern Upper Peninsula. Through his longstanding collaboration with MSU Extension, Mike has made significant contributions to educational programs that help families address emerging substance use challenges and build safer communities.

For the past five years, Mike has partnered closely with MSU Extension to expand awareness, prevention, and education efforts related to youth substance misuse. A cornerstone of this collaboration is the highly successful Hidden in Plain Sight mobile drug prevention initiative. The trailer offers an interactive educational exhibit designed as a realistic teen bedroom to help parents, caregivers, educators, and community members identify signs of substance use and understand evolving drug trends. Through hands-on learning experiences, participants gain practical skills for recognizing warning signs, identifying concealed paraphernalia, and engaging in meaningful conversations with youth.

Mike's contributions have been exceptional. Over the past five years, he has provided more than $32,350 of support to ensure the trailer remains current, relevant, and responsive to emerging issues affecting youth, including vaping, fentanyl awareness, and other substance use trends. Beyond financial support, he dedicates more than 52 hours annually to maintaining, transporting, and presenting the exhibit at schools, community events, tribal programs, and educational workshops.

The impact of this partnership has been significant and measurable. Evaluation data show that 98% of participants report learning new skills and strategies they could immediately apply with their families. Participants consistently report increased confidence in recognizing warning signs, understanding risks, and supporting youth through prevention-focused conversations. The initiative has also strengthened partnerships among MSU Extension, local schools, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and numerous community organizations, expanding access to prevention education across the region.

Through his leadership, generosity, and unwavering dedication to youth safety, Mike Bitnar has helped create a sustainable, community-centered prevention program that equips families with knowledge, promotes early intervention, and strengthens community resilience. His commitment to education and partnership has made a lasting difference in the lives of countless families and exemplifies the highest ideals of the MSU Extension Key Partner Award.

EPSILON SIGMA PHI STATE FRIEND OF EXTENSION AWARD

The Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP) State Friend of Extension Award recognizes individuals who have been true friends of MSU Extension. They may have helped promote programs, represented MSU Extension as lay leaders, served as key program developers or collaborators, or supported MSU Extension in other ways. This award is open to individuals from nonprofit organizations, businesses, government agencies, media outlets, MSU units, and elsewhere. Nominees must possess the highest standards of integrity and character to positively reflect and enhance the reputation of MSU Extension. The award is presented by ESP and MSU Extension, though nominees are not required to be ESP members.

MEAG SCHWARTZ

Meag Schwartz embodies the spirit of the Epsilon Sigma Phi State Friend of Extension Award through her unwavering commitment to advancing MSU Extension's mission of education, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. Throughout her tenure as network coordinator for the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (NEMIGLSI), Meag has been a trusted collaborator, innovative leader, and passionate advocate for place-based stewardship education, helping connect thousands of young people and educators to meaningful Great Lakes learning experiences.

Since joining NEMIGLSI in 2018, Meag has worked closely with MSU Extension educators, Michigan Sea Grant, schools, and community organizations to strengthen partnerships that bring real-world environmental issues into the classroom and community. Her collaborative approach has helped build and sustain a regional network that empowers youth to become active stewards of their local natural resources

while supporting educators through professional learning opportunities, project development, and evaluation efforts.

Meag's contributions have had a measurable and lasting impact. Through her leadership, NEMIGLSI has continued to expand educational opportunities that connect students with authentic stewardship projects addressing local environmental challenges. Since the network's founding, more than 30,000 students have participated in place-based stewardship education initiatives, many of which were strengthened through Meag's coordination and support. These experiences have enabled young people to collect and analyze environmental data, engage with the community, and develop a deeper understanding of the Great Lakes and the role they can play in protecting them.

Beyond program implementation, Meag has helped MSU Extension demonstrate the value and impact of stewardship education through data collection, evaluation, grant management, and stakeholder reporting. Her ability to foster collaboration among schools, agencies, nonprofits, and natural resource organizations has expanded the reach and visibility of Extension-supported programs throughout northeast Michigan.

Meag's impact extends even further through Great Lakes Great Responsibility, a nonprofit organization she founded in 2020. Through programs such as the Great Lakes 1 Million Challenge, she has mobilized volunteers, educators, and communities to address marine debris and promote environmental stewardship across the region. As she transitions into the executive director role of her nonprofit, Meag continues to be involved with NEMIGLSI and champion the values of service, education, and collaboration that define MSU Extension. Her leadership, dedication, and enduring partnership make her a true friend of Extension and a highly deserving recipient of this recognition.

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