

Planning program for small towns receives national honor

Main Street pocket parks. Roadside prairie plantings. Town entrance signs. Even a lighthouse. All along Iowa's roadways, improvements like these are testimonials to the success of the Living Roadways Community Visioning Program, a one-of-a-kind program that has helped 113 of Iowa's smallest communities.

What is community visioning?

The program provides planning and landscape design assistance to communities with populations of less than 10,000. It helps citizens and officials in rural communities identify issues, set goals, envision designs, develop conceptual plans, write grants, and raise private funds.

The program brings together teams of ISU design students, professional landscape architects, and town residents in a participatory planning process.

"The program is designed to empower local leaders through a planning process, which ends with an enhancement plan that reflects the values and identity of the community," says Julia Badenhope, associate professor of landscape architecture at ISU.

In general, the program addresses issues common to many small communities: entryway enhancements, visual transitions for towns with new highways or bypass highways, signage and billboards, trails for walkers and cyclists, and streetscapes to enhance access to vital community services. The program also emphasizes sustainable landscape development using native plants.

ISU manages the Living Roadways Community Visioning Program in partnership with Trees Forever, a nonprofit environmental organization based in Marion. The Iowa DOT funds the program.

National award

Now, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program is being recognized nationally. The program received the American Planning Association's 2006 Outstanding Planning Award for a Project, Program, or Tool at the association's national conference in San Antonio.

Apply to participate

Each year, 12 Iowa communities are selected to participate in the Community Visioning Program. Applications are due in mid-October. Application forms, along with more information about the program, are available online, www.communityvisioning.org. ■

Editor's note: This article was adapted from one by Teddi Barron, ISU News Service.



Gilbertville participated in the Living Roadways Community Visioning Program in 2005. The images depict the existing view of Cedar Creek and the same view with proposed enhancements in place.