



Telling tales of big fish and other stories: Partnership brings important health message to Hmong community



A group of women at the Hmong American Friendship Association in Milwaukee are stitching together a brightly colored "story cloth" with an important health message for their community. Their seven by four foot blue tapestry, peopled with small, intricately realized characters who are fishing, cooking and picnicking, weaves a cautionary tale about eating contaminated fish.



The story cloth, a latter day take on an ancient Hmong needlework art called paj ntaub, often depicts scenes from everyday life. Posters based on the cloth will be displayed throughout the Hmong community, while the story cloth itself will be given to the federal government's Environmental Justice Communication Program which is funding a large-scale education project at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to get the word out about the risks of eating fish contaminated with PCB's or mercury. The risks are particularly high for pregnant women and young children since the chemicals are neurotoxins and affect nervous system development.



The project is led by the Milwaukee Idea's Institute for Environmental Health at UWM and brings the university together with the Hmong American Friendship Association and the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center. It draws on the research of UWM health sciences professor John Dellinger who has studied fish consumption risks among Native Americans and the work of former faculty member Karen Riggs on culturally sensitive communication.



At the heart of the project is a video produced in both English and Hmong that reflects the care the partnership is taking to create culturally relevant and effective ways to communicate. The idea for the video came from Riggs, who pointed out that the Hmong emphasize visual communication and that many families own VCRs.



A focus group of 13 Hmong community leaders provided input and helped guide the development of the video. Their comments were something of a revelation, said chemistry professor David Petering, who is

directing the project at UWM. He quickly learned, for example, that the idea of water pollution was foreign to many Hmong people, whose roots are agrarian and who viewed the waters of Laos, their home country, as clean. "We learned too," he said, that fishing isn't just for food, it's an important part of cultural life."



Seng V. Lo works on the Hmong story cloth depicting the hazards of eating contaminated fish.



Explained Lo Neng, director of the Hmong American Friendship Association: "I think this video will be eye opening for the Hmong community. Hmong people view fish as clean and good to eat. This will really help them understand that even though we don't see the chemicals, the fish may not be good to eat. We hope that this will be a piece the community will really utilize so that if they go fishing or eat fish they know what to do."





The video reinforces the nutritional benefits of eating fish while matter-of-factly outlining the risks of consuming contaminated fish. It also offers information on different species of fish, how and why they become contaminated and how to prepare fish to minimize exposure to contaminants. Give-aways like refrigerator magnets and laminated information cards for tackle boxes will summarize the message.



Mary Beth Driscoll, environmental projects coordinator for the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, credits UWM's Dellinger for helping to craft a message that is honest and understandable, but not frightening. "The fish contamination message gets really complicated, and the more complicated it gets the more scary it can be. Fishing is considered to be a very positive activity," she said. "We don't want to change that, because eating fish has a lot of health benefits."



The video will be available without charge in grocery stores and other public places and will be advertised on the radio. Viewers will be asked to complete surveys before and after watching the video to gauge how effectively its health risk message was communicated. Results will be compiled by UWM's Center for Urban Initiatives and Research.

 To learn more about the project or request informational materials, please call the Hmong American Friendship Association, 414-344-5.

Milwaukee Idea fellows named

Several former Peace Corps and other public service volunteers are bringing their unique backgrounds and talents to a variety of local organizations in a new program that helps boost the economic development efforts while training future community leaders.

A project of The Milwaukee Idea's Consortium for Economic opportunity, the Fellows program offers participants a chance to combine graduate study at UWM with hands-on community work, providing much-needed technical assistance at the grass roots level. It is supported by a \$270,000 grant from the Helen Bader Foundation.

"The primary aim of the Milwaukee Idea Economic Development Fellows Program is to apply the knowledge and skills gained by returned Peace Corps volunteers to the diverse challenges and capacity-building efforts of local community-based organizations," said Lauren McHargue, Communications Director for the Consortium.

"One of the most visible benefits of the program is the new perspective that the Fellows bring to the agencies where they work and to the university," she added. "Moreover, the program has opened the door for new collaborations between community partners and UWM."

This year's pool of applicants was extremely competitive, according to Lisa Heuler Williams, Program Coordinator. "They are an excellent addition to the student body and will move The Milwaukee Idea's goal of community engagement forward," she said.

The Fellows are:

Matt Melendes who is pursuing his Master's in UWM's Urban Studies Program. He is working with the Sherman Park



Community Association, a neighborhood organization on Milwaukee's northwest side where he is helping block clubs organize to resolve neighborhood issues. In addition, he is working with the Milwaukee Asset Building Coalition to assist residents with tax preparation and Earned Income Tax Credit questions. A Marquette University graduate, Melendes served in the Franciscan Capuchin Volunteer Corps, a faith-based AmeriCorps program in Baltimore, Maryland.

Helen Hermus who began her fellowship last year with a two-year placement at Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, where she focuses on commercial district revitalization on Lincoln Avenue. She is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a Peace Corps veteran who taught English in Poland. She is seeking a Masters in Urban Studies at UWM.

Elizabeth Moen who is working toward a Certificate in Nonprofit Management while pursuing her Masters Degree in Urban Studies. Her fellowship placement is at the Housing Authority of Milwaukee, where she is helping to start a HUD Neighborhood Networks wireless computer lab in the Carver Park development. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and served in AmeriCorp's National Civilian Community Corps.

Kristin Stieger who served as both a Peace Corps volunteer and volunteer coordinator for the Agriculture and Beekeeping Sector in the South American country of Paraguay. She worked on a number of private and non-profit community development projects nationally and internationally. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, she is currently working with the Menomonee Valley Partners while pursuing a Masters in Urban Studies. ■

Milwaukee Idea initiatives drive economic development

The following is adapted from a recent speech given by UWM Interim Chancellor Bob Greenstreet to the Greater Milwaukee Committee.

Let me briefly outline my vision of UWM as a premier urban research institution, in the context of our connections to economic development, through what I believe to be the three driving forces of any urban university: **Responsiveness, Relevance and Reflection.**

Today's Urban Research University must respond to its context, not be removed from it. UWM is an important force in finding the professional workforce, the key to economic growth in this region

- 136,000 degrees granted since 1956,
- More than 4,000 graduates produced each year
- And over 85% staying right here in Wisconsin, most in southeast Wisconsin.



Interim Chancellor Bob Greenstreet

With demographic projections forecasting a gloomy reduction in young professionals across the rest of the state, I'd like to believe it is no coincidence that Milwaukee stands alone as growing in its degree-holding younger population. The brain gain starts at UWM.

Let me briefly enumerate a couple of key initiatives in economic development that show UWM's commitment and responsiveness to the region through The Milwaukee Idea.

TechStar, a partnership of all the colleges represented here today, is working to nurture fast-growing technology companies offering high-paying jobs.

The Helen Bader Institute for Non-Profit Management works with area non-profit organizations and major foundations to support, among other things, credit and non-credit courses for their leaders and staff.

The Consortium for Economic Opportunity has worked on 32 major economic development projects in the past year alone.

And, *The Milwaukee Center for Workplace Diversity*, our newest and most exciting initiative, is designed to help Milwaukee area businesses in getting the creative edge in diversifying its workforce – a workforce that by 2010 will see new employees comprised of 80% women and minorities.

All of these are solid examples of UWM's responsiveness to economic development in Milwaukee.

In addition to being responsive though, we need to be relevant – to make a difference. Let me give you an example, chosen purely at random – the UWM School of Architecture and Urban Planning.

That skyline is shaped by UWM, whether in the planning of the city, the selection of architects, or the design and construction of buildings – billions of dollars worth of investment in our future. UWM's alumni, faculty and students have had a hand in every part of improving the built environment.

The Calatrava extension, the removal of the freeway, the new towers rising just to the east of us – scratch the surface and you will find a UWM grad somewhere doing their damndest to improve the quality of life in this city.

And that's the same story across all our disciplines – in Engineering, Business, the Arts, Letters & Science. Everyone in this room has seen how UWM's progress has affected your businesses, your hospitals, your schools and your environment.

So: relevant, making a difference, being a player – call it what you will, UWM strives to be a part of our community through tangible, productive change.

The third leg of the stool – remember I said there were 3 R's – “reflective” is what differentiates us from many other of the great organizations focusing on the future of the Milwaukee Community.

That skyline is shaped by UWM, whether in the planning of the city, the selection of architects, or the design and construction of buildings – billions of dollars worth of investment in our future.

We are, first and foremost, a University, a place where knowledge is created and shared. Our future quality, our reputation will be determined by academic excellence.

That is not to say that the quality of our programs should be divorced from real-world issues.

Far from it – the quality is derived from engagement with the community, through applied research that filters back into the educational process, through reflection on what we've learned, to shape and inform the citizens of tomorrow.

Is it working? You bet it is. We are already reaching higher ranking in the US News & World Report Best Colleges Guide and already 16 of our programs are nationally ranked for distinction.

Responsive, Relevant, and Reflective – the words that describe UWM's powerful partnership with the community – and build towards the economic health of our city. ■

New certificate program stresses multicultural awareness

UWM is offering undergraduates a new way to complete their general education requirement (GER) and at the same time deepen their understanding and knowledge of other lives and cultures.

The 15 credit Cultures and Communities (CC) certificate program was officially launched last spring and has enrolled 26 students. One of the original Milwaukee Idea initiatives, Cultures and Communities has built a long list of partnerships and worked collaboratively with neighborhood and community groups, schools and museums.

“Students recognize that the ability to make cross-cultural connections, locally and globally, is critical to their success in an increasingly diverse, interconnected, and interdependent world,” said Karen Thorne, student services coordinator. “They are attracted to the certificate because of the opportunities for bridging what they are learning in the classroom to real world experiences.”

Thorne joined the Cultures and Communities Program in August after serving as an advisor for five years at University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Her responsibilities focus on implementation of the undergraduate certificate program, including advising certificate students and acting as liaison to faculty teaching affiliated courses.

The CC certificate provides distinct preparation for a variety of careers. According to Thorne, students in the program are majors in the School of Business Administration, School of Education, College of Engineering & Applied Science, College of Health Sciences, College of Letters and Science, College of Nursing, and the Peck School of the Arts.

For more information or to schedule a presentation about the Cultures and Communities certificate, call Karen Thorne at (414) 229-3872 or kthorne@uwm.edu. To learn more about Cultures and Communities check the Web at <http://www.cc.uwm.edu> ■



The Milwaukee Idea
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
PO Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MILWAUKEE, WI
PERMIT NO. 864



STEPHEN PERCY,
Chancellor's Deputy for The
Milwaukee Idea

DEBORAH FAGAN,
Communication Director

GINA JOHNSON,
Graphic Designer

Questions, concerns and
comments to 414-229-6913 or
mke-idea@uwm.edu

Learn **more**

Visit our website,
www.milwaukeeidea.org