



TRADE DAYS
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Women In Ag Score Big In Grant Funds

Looking For Partners, Organizers Hope Monday Meeting Draws A Crowd.

By Kathleen McFadden

Diane Price had heard unofficially that the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation had awarded Women in Agriculture (WIA) a \$30,000 grant, but she was at her post at the Watauga County Farmer's Market when she opened the letter containing the official notification. The news put an even broader smile on Price's face as she greeted customers asking about the products — such as nasturtiums, hostas and inoculated shiitake logs — she was selling on behalf of her 4-H group.



Diane Price opens the grant notification letter from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in between talking to customers at the Watauga County Farmer's Market. Photo by Kathleen McFadden

but also anyone interested in purchasing homegrown products for both the supper table and the craft room and who wants to contribute to the economic impact of buying locally. With an age range from twentysomethings to seniors, the group reflects not only a diversity of interests and focus, but also of life stages and perspectives. The group is still in its formative stages and gives local women and men from all over the area the opportunity to jump in on the ground floor of a new venture.

WIA sponsored an Opportunities in Agriculture conference in March, a one-day seminar that wrapped a local focus around information, networking and brainstorming intended to inspire women with ideas for value-added production. Held in Boone, the conference venue was convenient to agricultural entrepreneurs in Ashe, Alleghany, Avery, Watauga, Wilkes and Caldwell counties. Another of WIA's key initiatives is the pursuit of grant funds, and the recent win from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, established in 1936 as a memorial to the youngest son of the founder of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, puts the organization on a strong economic footing.

Grant monies will be used to carry out five specific tasks: Establish working partnerships with similarly minded organizations to collaborate on planning and expedite action.

Hold workshops for women focusing on business skills and sustainable, environmentally friendly methods of farming and gardening.

Create a supportive environment for women to develop their potential by helping them

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Price, who operates the Farm at Mollie's Branch in Todd in addition to being a 4-H leader, is one of the founding members of WIA, a grassroots organization working in partnership with Appalachian State University through the Center for Appalachian Studies and the Watauga County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension.

The group came together last fall with three people and has grown steadily since its inception. Meetings now draw up to 25 members — not just growers and livestock producers,



Roaring With Color

If ever there was a perfect weekend for the Roan Mountain Rhododendron Festival, last weekend was it with clear skies and distant views. Thousands of people wandered through the flowering gardens at 6,200 feet atop Roan Mountain and attended the events lower down in Roan Mountain State Park. The bloom should last through late week. Photo by Randy Johnson

Children's Council Assists Watauga Kids In Several

By Mike Shands

High Country kids have a valuable friend in the Children's Council of Watauga County.

The council has advocated for Watauga County children and families for more than 25 years. About five or six years ago it became the county's partnership for Smart Start, a state-funded initiative that supports childcare-related, health and family support services on behalf of children age 5-and-under.

"The main goal of Smart Start is helping bring kids from 0 to 5 to kind of an equal playing field so that all kids entering kindergarten are ready to start to learn," said Jennifer Wilson-Kearse, the children's council's executive director.

"Therefore some of our initiatives are really aimed at kids who might not have the opportunity that all kids would because of economics or other life situations."

A High Country United Way agency, the children's council helps, either directly or indirectly, the county's more than 1,000 youngsters who participate in half-day or full-day daycare programs.

"They are receiving benefits in some way, whether their providers that are teaching them are getting subsidies from us to help their paycheck or whether the centers have gotten materials from us," Wilson-Kearse said.

The children's council features a resource area where daycare centers can come and check things out such as books, sand and water tables and other interactive toys that facilitate learning.

"We don't do any programming in-house," Wilson-Kearse said. "It's all supporting what's already happening in Watauga County."

That support comes in a wide variety of ways, ranging from financial and technical support to partnerships with several area organizations. One

Women In Ag

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overcome barriers, find financing and connect with other women and resources.

Continue the development of a replicable permaculture farm model that will give people hands-on opportunities to learn organic, permaculture and sustainable agriculture practices.

Enhance the annual Organic Growers' Directory, create a frequently updated Web site and develop and distribute a quarterly WIA newsletter.

Judy Scharns, another WIA founding member, says that the group sees the grant "as a good beginning to try to make agriculture happen in this area in a way that hasn't been done before. It's a local economic development strategy."

Scharns recently received a specialty crop grant to produce cut flowers and edible plants on her previously undeveloped 16-acre farm. "That's the kind of thing we're promoting," Scharns explained, "finding a niche. It's probably not going

to make a lot of money, but will provide another income stream."

Both Scharns and Price emphasize that WIA is committed to joining with other organizations on economic and community development projects so that the groups can combine their resources rather than dilute their efforts — and their effectiveness — by pursuing projects and undertaking initiatives on their own. "There's great stuff going on in this community," Scharns said, "and we need to keep in contact."

To that end, WIA is holding a planning meeting on Monday, June 30, at 5:00 p.m. in the Agricultural Conference Center on Poplar Grove Road. County Extension director Sue Counts invites all individuals and organization representatives throughout the High Country who are interested in economic and community development and/or environmental and farmland preservation to attend. The focus of the meeting will be on potential WIA partnerships, and refreshments will be served. To RSVP, call (828) 264-3061.