

AARP Wisconsin: Plans to expand native plant garden exhibit in Cumberland wins AARP WI 'Small Dollar, Big Impact' grant

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CUMBERLAND, WI – A proposal to double or possibly even triple the size of a small native plant garden exhibit on the grounds of the Thomas St. Angelo Public Library, 1305 2 nd Ave., has been selected to receive an AARP Wisconsin “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant.

AARP Wisconsin is awarding grants each month throughout 2023 to projects across the state that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. Judges selected this project for a \$1,000 grant after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state.

“These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have a remarkable impact on the shaping of local communities,” said Darrin Wasniewski, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin. “This project hits the nail right on the head.”

The \$1,000 will be used to expand the garden and include a walking path that dissects the space into three sections, creating a peace symbol design. The funds would also help the library develop materials that communicate how people can create and care for their own native plant gardens.

“We really appreciate the grant from AARP and look forward to putting the money to good use by helping our patrons and area residents enjoy our expanded garden and learn how to create their own at home,” said Jeanette Rydberg, the Youth & Adult Services librarian who submitted the grant application.

“Our library budget has been reduced for 2023. We have already used grant money from the Cumberland Federal United Bank to begin our garden. We need the new revenue to expand our garden and communicate with our community about how they can duplicate this practice on their own,” she said.

Rydberg, who implements all the library’s programs, said the expanded garden would include plants purchased from a nursery that specializes in native plants. The different plants would each be labeled with metal markers.

“We would also like to host a speaker from the UW-Badger Talks series about Native gardening. The speaker event would explain what and how we are planting in our garden and help our community replicate it in their lawns, lakefronts, and some additional public spaces,” Rydberg said. “We hope to use this event to disseminate information as well as to highlight the benefits of native plants to pollinators.”

Initial funding for the garden was secured from the local Cumberland United Fund grant. The local Friends of the Library have supported funding for mulch, and a library volunteer has helped weed and water the garden. Rydberg said she tries to involve experiential learning for all ages at the library.

“One of our strategic goals is to provide experiences for our patrons and community that they would otherwise not be able to access,” she said.

AARP Wisconsin’s launched its “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant program in 2020 and is now in its fourth year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state.

“We appreciate how the library utilized AARP’s “Creating Parks and Public Spaces for all Ages” guide as a resource in developing this initiative,” Wasniewski said. “Our goal is to support communities as they make positive changes that inspire long-term progress on livable issues. Expanding this native plant garden and helping library patrons create their own at home achieves this goal, and then some.”



The Small Dollar, Big Impact grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit www.aarp.org/WIsdbi