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Contact: Jim Flaherty, Communications Director

Office 608/ 286-6308 – Cell 608/ 698-0928, jflaherty@aarp.org

Proposal to expand snowshoeing opportunities in Jackson County wins AARP WI Small Dollar, Big Impact grant

BLACK RIVER FALLS, WI – A proposal submitted by the Jackson In Action Coalition to purchase nearly a dozen pairs of snowshoes and poles to launch a new snowshoe checkout program has been selected to receive this month's AARP Wisconsin "Small Dollar, Big Impact" grant.

The timing of the \$1,000 grant works perfect for the coalition – based in Black River Falls – because it is gearing up for a Snowshoe Winter Fest event this February, which will include a candlelight snowshoe event. In addition, the county has numerous parks and trails that can be used year-round for outdoor activities such as snowshoeing.

Dawn Jacobson, a Public Health Specialist for the Jackson County Department of Health & Human Services, said the grant "will allow us a great opportunity to get started. If successful, we will raise funds to purchase additional snowshoes next year to expand the checkout program to more communities in our county."

AARP Wisconsin is awarding one grant each month throughout 2022 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 after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over Wisconsin.

"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 Amber Miller, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin. "This project hits the nail right on the head."

The Jackson in Action Coalition was created to promote active living and healthy eating in Jackson County. “In recent years we have created several snowshoe events for our local residents,” Jacobson said. “We sponsor an annual Triple Snowshoe Challenge, with a snowshoe trail marked at a local park/trail over three different weekends.”

The coalition’s plan is to use the grant money to purchase 11 pairs of snowshoes (mix of adult and youth sizes) with matching poles that will be available for residents to checkout at no cost at the Lunda Community Center, 405 Hwy. 54, in Black River Falls. A membership to the Lunda Community Center is not needed. Any resident of Jackson County will be able to use the snowshoes for free, thanks to the partnership with AARP.

“This will help expand equity and access to snowshoeing to all members of our community, aiming at those who cannot afford snowshoes, as well as those who would like to try them out prior to purchasing their own,” Jacobson said.

“We initially would like to pilot this program in Black River Falls, the largest of our communities. If the pilot is successful, in the future we’d like to purchase snowshoes for check-out at the smaller municipalities of our county,” she said.

Jackson in Action is a community coalition with representatives from a wide array of organizations in the county. It was founded in 2011 after Jackson County ranked extremely low in the county health rankings for the state of Wisconsin.

“We have gradually expanded our efforts to promote physical activity and healthy living throughout our community. All of the events we host are free or very low-cost, to remove cost as a barrier to participation,” Jacobson said.

A few examples of their physical activity events include a Pace and Pedal Duathlon and 5K Color Fun Run/Walk each spring, a Laces to Leaders youth running and leadership program, a Fall Hike Series, the Gobbler Giveback Thanksgiving Day 5K, which raises money for local non-profit organizations, and the snowshoe events.

“A focus of our coalition is to make physical activity accessible to all by removing barriers to participation. A free snowshoe checkout program fits exactly into this mission, by allowing us to promote snowshoeing without any expense to everyone. We have many local trails to be explored. This is a chance for us to help our residents find a new way to be active in the cold winter months.”

Jacobson said she and the coalition are “extremely grateful that we were able to get this loan from AARP Wisconsin in order to get this project off the ground.” For more information on upcoming snowshoe events and other programs offered by the coalition, visit www.jacksoninaction.org

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

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

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