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| **Press Release - For Immediate Release**8/10/21Contact: Sandy Decker, telephone - (608) 882-5528; email – sandydecker74@gmail.com |

**Local Project Selected for Wisconsin Top Rural Development Initiative Honors**

The Cheq Bay Renewables Community Solar Project has been selected to receive the 2021 Wisconsin Top Rural Development Initiative award. One of three awards presented in 2021 by Wisconsin Rural Partners, Inc., the presentation will be made at a local ceremony in early fall.

The initiative included five diverse governmental entities, Bayfield County, City of Washburn, City of Bayfield, Pike’s Bay Sanitary Sewer District, and the Washburn School District, that collaborated to incorporate 528kW of solar PV at five municipal locations across Bayfield County. By leveraging combined funding, the collaborative endeavor increased the scope of the project and provided cost savings that could be used for other municipal services. Area trades workers participated during the project.

Project impacts include continuing intergovernmental collaboration, stewardship of the environment through the use of renewable energy, and introduction of new technology in area communities with installations throughout the county.

“Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP) applauds the Cheq Bay Renewables Community Solar Project as an outstanding example of the many local efforts across the state that improve the lives of citizens in rural Wisconsin,” said Sandy Decker, WRP president. “This is an excellent collaborative model for rural Wisconsin communities. Intergovernmental cooperation is essential to maximizing needed services in our rural areas.”

A second project receiving recognition as a 2021 Top Rural Development Initiative is the Green County Childcare Initiative. Green County is considered a childcare desert, with one childcare spot for every three young children. Lack of quality childcare access negatively impacts parental employment and overall economic growth. A collaboration of many partners, including the Green County Development Corporation, United Way of Green County, Southwest Community Action Program, Blackhawk Technical College, and MultiCultural Outreach Program, among others, initiated several programs to strengthen existing childcare businesses and help entrepreneurs start their own daycare businesses. A free eight-week virtual Childcare Boot Camp was developed to address all aspects of running a childcare business, and was provided in English and Spanish. Safety Saturday classes provide education needed for a worker in a childcare facility. Monthly parent workshops provide opportunities for strengthening collaborative relationships and offer tools related to early childhood social, emotional and mental well-being. The Initiative is actively addressing an issue that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The Cuba City Presidential Plaza is the third 2021 Top Rural Development Initiative receiving recognition. A collaboration of the Cuba City School District, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Cuba City Telephone, Downtown Task Force, AARP Community Challenge Grant Program, City of Presidents Committee, and private businesses was key to the successful Main Street project, completed in the midst of the pandemic. New landscaping, seating, ADA-compliant walkways, free Wi-Fi, outdoor sound system, games, and a unique 3D interactive ground mural of the Mississippi River were included in the project, accomplished without the use of city funds. The Plaza engages residents of all ages. Future events and activities are planned to increase downtown business traffic and draw visitors to Main Street.

Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP) is the state’s federally-designated rural development council. Committed to improving the quality of life in rural Wisconsin, WRP is a non-partisan forum for identifying, discussing, and addressing rural issues. Through collaborations with a wide array of partners, including local, county, state, tribal, and federal governments, as well as for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and rural citizens, WRP fosters and promotes locally-based solutions to rural needs and issues.

This is the twenty-first year that WRP has recognized Wisconsin’s Top Rural Development Initiatives. “The program is designed to identify, highlight, and share innovative models, practices and programs that have a positive impact on rural Wisconsin communities,” said Errin Welty, WRP past-president. “WRP created the program to provide a mechanism for rural communities to learn from each other and we are pleased to report that many of the award winners are still actively operating in their communities.”

Additional information about Wisconsin Rural Partners and the Top Rural Development Initiatives can be found at [www.wiruralpartners.org](http://www.wiruralpartners.org).