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Three Favorite Things

**Agriculture &
FFA Programs Return;
Tech Ed Expands
in Fall River**

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By Dorothy Bliskey



Fall River grant check presentation

When a support group backs a cause, miracles can happen. That was the case when a group of agriculturalists and FFA (Future Farmers of America) Alumni members stepped up to help an area high school reinstate their agriculture education and FFA program – one that had been dormant for 25 years.

Spearheading the effort to, once again, offer agriculture courses and FFA at Fall River High School was Christine (Lepple) Lindner -- a former Beaver Dam High School FFA member who went on to earn a degree in agriculture journalism from UW-Madison and who in 2010 traveled the state to promote agriculture as Alice in Dairyland. Currently, she works as the marketing manager for Alsum Farms & Produce headquartered in Friesland, an area agri-business that grows 3,000 acres of Wisconsin potatoes for grocery stores like Costco, Woodman's, Aldi's, Piggly Wiggly, Meijer's and Whole Foods.

Lindner, a Fall River resident, was key to getting the agriculture program reinstated. She recruited and worked closely with eight other dedicated agricultural-minded community enthusiasts. Together, they were a small but mighty group that motivated district voters to pass a referendum and make it happen. Lindner also worked in tandem with Ryan Seichter,

a family friend who had been hired as the Agriculture and Technical Education instructor at the school.

“My husband and I moved to Fall River in 2009 after we got married,” Lindner said, noting their two daughters attend school there. “When we arrived in Fall River the high school had no agricultural education program or FFA chapter,” Lindner said. “But, from my experience as a State FFA Officer, I knew one existed in the early 2000s. I always kept it a goal to help bring back the Fall River FFA chapter. We just needed the right support and the right timing.”

Lindner said the spark that got the program “fired up” and re-launched was the 2022 hiring of Ryan Seichter, a veteran Agricultural and Technology Education instructor and FFA Advisor who had previously been in the same role at Waupun Area High School.

“When I started at Fall River High School, I reached out to Christine for support,” Seichter said. “This has allowed us to gain support for the Fall River FFA and Agriculture classes. Being part of the community, she has been instrumental in starting our Fall River Career and Technical Education (CTE) Support Group in addition to the Fall River FFA Alumni and Supporters.

"I knew I needed help in developing our new spaces, creating new scholarships for graduating seniors, as well as creating and updating equipment and facilities," Seichter said. "She was able to put a group together that resulted in supporting our student memberships and scholarships -- as well as our major project which is fundraising for our new greenhouse. Christine has spent countless hours in grant writing and presentations to secure funds for our greenhouse."

While the district already had a technical education program in place which was taught by Seichter, it was expanded at the same time the ag program was brought back. Making it possible was the hiring of an additional tech ed and ag instructor, Ryan Christian who had previously worked alongside Ryan Seichter in the same roles at Waupun Area High School.

"Together, the two teachers re-chartered the Fall River FFA Chapter to serve the district's students," Lindner said. "With a two-person Ag and Tech Ed Department -- and with roughly 60% of Fall River graduates entering the workforce or technical colleges -- strong science and technology courses were essential."

"With 1 in 10 people working in Wisconsin agriculture today, the need is great to attract and retain young, skilled, well-trained agriculturists," Lindner said, noting there are more than 300 career pathways in agriculture.

Challenges were many when the support group began their mission at Fall River. They faced outdated facilities and a growing need for career readiness. In 2024, the Fall River Support Group played a key role in passing a \$9.85 million referendum to build a new



Teacher Ryan Christian oversees woodworking project

animal science lab, tech ed space, and the foundation for a greenhouse. (Additionally, the referendum included funding for important building safety upgrades, indoor pool renovations and more.)

The current focus is raising funds for a state-of-the-art greenhouse, set to open in August 2026. It will enhance student learning in plant science and local food systems.

Course offerings now span from ag science and natural resources to engineering, welding, and woodworking. They even connect to the culinary program for farm-to-table projects.

"The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) emphasis in the coursework at Fall River High School focuses on developing hard skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation within these specific disciplines. The goal is to prepare students for careers in these technical fields," Seichter said. "With the acronym STEAM, we just added the A to indicate agriculture was added as a part of the career cluster to give students even more opportunities."

While instructors Ryan Seichter and Ryan Christian both teach ag and tech ed classes, Seichter takes the lead role on FFA events. Christian leads students in robotics. Both teachers work with Skills USA events.

Christian notes that tech ed courses will lead to jobs such as welder, fabricator, carpenter, electrician, mason, plumber, graphic designer, mechanic, diesel or gas tech, robotic programmer, robotic tech, automation tech, CNC operator and more. "With students



School sign made by tech ed students

participating in Skills USA, FFA, and Robotics the opportunities will only grow," Christian said.

Ag-related coursework can lead to careers as a vet, vet tech, wildlife management, landscaping design, agronomist, soil tech, horticulturist, floral designer, golf course and greenhouse manager to name a few. "Ag classes are new to these students, so they are just learning about these opportunities," Christian said.

Seichter notes that, within the new program, a student-run business has formed that creates products for the community. It helps raise funds for student projects and activities as well as for updating equipment.

Students make custom signs, banners, plaques and different products using 3D printers, Laser engravers, CNC Plasma and Routers. "We can do custom cutting and fabricating as well, Seichter said, noting funds for the CTE program and equipment were generated by grant money Christine Lindner was able to generate.

Administrators Impressed

"The combination of the two Ryan's is clearly a blueprint for success," said Tari Costello, a retired high school agriculture instructor who is the current Executive Director of the Wisconsin FFA Alumni & Supporters organization. "The Fall River District is so lucky to have these hard working visionaries and dedicated instructors lead this program. I have no doubt that this program will continue to grow with the combination of dynamic instructors, an outstanding FFA Alumni and Supporters and a supportive administration!"

Dr. Jennifer Treptow, Fall River Middle and High School Principal who will transition into the role of District Superintendent in 2026, is impressed with the outcome.

"The support our community has shown for the education of our students is astounding," Treptow said. "This is not only evidenced in their support for our operation referendum to continue with our current programming, but also the support for our capital referendum to, among other things, build a Career and Technical Education (CTE) addition to our school."

"What has impressed me the most about our CTE supporter group and our Fall River community is the unwavering support they continue to provide for our students, our school, and our community."

Student demand for the new coursework is high and is proof of its popularity.

"Our CTE courses are always maxed out with students," Treptow concludes. "As a result of our increased programming within our Ag and CTE areas, we have been able to provide our students with course offerings similar to those offered in larger schools." *

Fall River High School FFA students Clara Mickelson and Ellie Lueder participated in an FFA competition sponsored by the Wisconsin Ag Tourism Association. The artistic sign features peep hole art and was created in a student-run business in the school's Tech Ed Department.

