

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

August 2025



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Elmwood gears up for increased tourism with Illinois Extension

Elmwood is a small town in west central Peoria County, with a population close to 2,000 people. It has a wealth of cultural arts and natural assets that attract tourists. Students in the Sustainability and Rural Tourism course in the University of Illinois Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism worked with Elmwood city officials and University of Illinois Extension on a mutually beneficial project.

Amy Davis, Elmwood economic development director, and Richard Proffer, Illinois Extension community and economic development educator, have started on a project to aid in growing the city's tourism efforts and the overall economy. They partnered with [Dr Sharon Zou](#) and her University of Illinois rural tourism class to catalog current tourism assets, gather key informant information, and propose new tourism ideas.

Elmwood is a city of many opportunities. It is the home of the American sculptor [Lorado Taft](#). Thanks to its many trails that wander through green spaces, water areas, and urban areas, it has a strong running culture. The town will soon be home to a cultural center offering classes, exhibits, and productions for attendees' enjoyment. Plus, the city has many festivals like the [Strawberry Festival and the Fall Festival](#).

"As part of the class project, students participated in a day-long session in Elmwood," explained Proffer. "I worked with Amy, Dr. Zou, and several city leaders to help the students better understand the community assets. The day included a tour of the city and tourism planning activities."

The student team compiled the data and presented their findings and new ideas to city leaders. The City of Elmwood is now working on implementing tourism ideas generated from this project.

The town's Economic Development Committee meets monthly to plan ways to increase economic activity. They are now focused on the tourism report and efforts to use tourism as an economic driver and attract new residents. They are considering ways to build on the Taft connection and make Elmwood the "hot spot" for Taft enthusiasts. Another area of focus is to further develop their outdoor active culture, by hosting track & field events and sports clinics. Another area of interest is to expand the current festivals through additions of music, event merchandise, and new activities.

The group is also considering new marketing strategies suggested by the students including more social media outlets, traditional media, and stronger cooperative media events with local organizations. Also, by using a recommended slogan, they want to build on the "pioneer" tradition of the town by having new related events.

Proffer, a member of [National Extension Tourism Network](#), continues to work with Elmwood Economic Development Committee on further idea development and execution. His role is to connect Elmwood to the resources of the university system, other Extension tourism programs, and local, regional, and state resources.



Students in University of Illinois' Sustainability and Rural Tourism course worked with City of Elmwood Economic Development Director Amy Davis and Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development Educator Richard Proffer on an iRural Tourism project.

### Richard Proffer

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