

## EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER  
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# Compilation of Extension Snapshots June, July, and August 2020

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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## Chautauqua Refuge Gains Attention Through Master Naturalist's Writing Skills

Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, located north of Havana, may be unknown by many people, but for millions of waterfowl, migratory birds, and wildlife it is a very popular place. University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Carla Montez is helping to educate the public about the value of Chautauqua and the wildlife that live and feed there through educational articles.

Following her retirement as Communication Director at Bradley University, Montez took part in the Extension Master Naturalist training, Class of 2019, in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit. Having spent a lifetime enjoying the outdoors and making a career in communications, she knew that writing about nature topics would be a skill she could use to make a positive impact as a Master Naturalist.

"Even during the EMN training Carla began interviewing the presenters to begin collecting writing topic ideas," recalls Christine Belless, ag and natural resources program coordinator. "Carla approached her interviews in such a way that not only generated writing topics, it also gave us new programming ideas."

"What I learned from the presenters' responses exceeded my expectations," Montez explained. "Not only did their answers reveal some themes for future writing, but their comments also suggested some program planning opportunities for the Extension staff. For example, one idea that clearly emerged is that the presenters were unanimous that habitat loss was a serious concern. To me, this topic seemed like something both a writer and a program planner could pursue. It was more than I had hoped for."

Montez first official Extension Master Naturalist writing assignment came through a request for help from Mitchell Baalman with USFW Refuge, Chautauqua. He expressed the need for assistance in writing articles to promote attention to the Chautauqua Refuge.

Following a needs assessment, Montez began researching and writing her first article "In Search of the Illinois Chorus Frog" that was released through U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in early April.

"Biologists usually are not creative writers," stated Baalman. "We are more comfortable with technical reports and studies. However, delivering science to the public in an entertaining and skilled manner has become increasingly important. In fact, it is integral to our mission. Carla, with her years of experience and expertise, has been able to translate the sometimes mundane work we do into beautifully crafted conservation stories. She has given life and interest to the creatures of Illinois River National Wildlife Refuge and Fish Refuge Complex in a way that we could have never done alone."

Montez just completed her second article on the topic of Trumpeter Swans. Read more about Chautauqua and Montez's articles online at [www.fws.gov/refuge/Chautauqua/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Chautauqua/)

Extension Master Naturalists serve in a wide-variety of capacities with the overarching goal of connecting people to nature. To learn more about this program and others offered through University of Illinois Extension visit the website at [extension.illinois.edu/fmpt](http://extension.illinois.edu/fmpt).

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## Extension Programs Continue Through a Variety of Online Venues

When Illinois' stay at home order began in March, University of Illinois Extension, Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell (FMPT) Unit staff shifted to working remotely and modified their current programs to continue to meet the needs of our residents, businesses, and local governments. Illinois Extension recently announced plans to continue providing programs in formats that support public health and safety priorities throughout the summer months. Staff and volunteers have approached the shift head-on and have a well-curated line-up of programs and services readily available. A few examples include:

### 4-H Shows conducted online

Our 4-H shows will be conducted online using a digital exhibition platform. Members have the opportunity to prepare their 4-H projects for exhibit and submit photos or videos, along with a written report. Project judges will review the submitted materials and provide the youth feedback on their 4-H project.

### Gardening Helpline available

The Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs) have provided a free gardening helpline for the past 30 years. This year is no different. The local Gardening Helpline volunteers field questions such as general gardening advice, problems with a specific plant, how to deal with a pest, the general condition of a lawn, and a variety of other topics. During the 2020 shelter-in-place order, EMGs are receiving the questions via email and voicemail.

Everyone is welcome to send in questions to [uiemg-peoria@illinois.edu](mailto:uiemg-peoria@illinois.edu) or leave a message with their local Extension office.

### Online webinars

Extension educators from all units across the state have expanded the number of webinars and trainings available online. In addition to topics directly related to supporting people and businesses during COVID-19 pandemic, we have increased the number and variety of webinar topics related to horticulture, natural resources, nutrition, agriculture, local government, and family health.

Examples of summer webinar series include:

- Teacher Tuesdays STEM, presented by FMPT Youth Educators
- Understanding Alzheimer's, presented by Family Life Educators
- Fill Your Pantry - Food Preservation, presented by Nutrition & Wellness Educators
- Four Seasons Summer Series, presented by Horticulture Educators
- Everyday Environment, presented by Energy & Environment Educators

More details on all of our upcoming webinars, along with links to recorded webinars, are available at [go.illinois.edu/ExtWebinars](https://go.illinois.edu/ExtWebinars)

### STEAM videos

Our unit's 4-H STEAM summer assistant Kate Mueller has been working with several agencies via video to provide them with a great line up of kids activities. We have created a video playlist to share with everyone. She teaches kids about making observations, binary code bracelets, fingerprinting, and design.

Forms and supplemental resources are online at - [go.illinois.edu/STEAMactivities](https://go.illinois.edu/STEAMactivities)



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### Judy Schmidt

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*Even while following social distancing guidelines 4-H members continued to service others. They sewed over 150 masks for medical facilities and made special efforts to connect with and encourage residents in supported living centers by sending cards, writing pen pal letters, and creating decorations.*

## 4-H Members Continue to Serve Others Even During Shelter-in-Place and Social Distancing

"I pledge my hands to larger service..." is part of a pledge that 4-H members have said for many generations. Service to others is one of the main pillars of the 4-H program. 4-H members participate in service projects year-round through their clubs, county, and state-wide opportunities. Typically service projects include face-to-face interactions with others in their communities. Throughout March, April, and May, 4-H leaders and club members in University of Illinois Extension, Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit found creative ways to meet the needs of their communities while following the social distancing guidelines.

One of the first calls-to-action 4-H members received was the request to sew masks for local essential workers. 4-H members and 4-H staff responded and sewed over 150 masks for local hospitals, senior centers, and first responders. According to Bri Bohnnan, these masks came at a critical time for Grand Regency supported living center, and their staff were overjoyed to receive them.

Many 4-H clubs in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit have ongoing connections with local assisted living centers and senior groups and have made extra efforts to stay connected with the residents so they don't feel socially isolated. Alicia Arabje, internal medicine and geriatrics specialist at John Hopkins states that "Social distancing doesn't have to mean isolation or loneliness. We need to keep older adults safe, but also keep in mind that social isolation can have a negative impact on older people's immunity and mental health." (Hopkinsmedicine.org, 2020)

Twelve members of the Tazewell County 4-H Federation group made cards and wrote letters to the 69 residents of Apostolic Christian LifePoints in Morton. 4-H volunteer and mom, Pam Chism works at LifePoints and delivered the cards. She said the cards and notes instantly brought smiles to the residents.



The Peoria Clovers 4-H Club had been meeting with the seniors at the Grand Regency supported living center since fall of 2019. The 4-Hers and residents usually enjoy bingo together and the 4-Hers make a point to share about their 4-H projects with the seniors. However, since they are no longer able to meet in person, 4-H members started a pen pal program with 15 residents. They exchanged notes and letters, drew encouraging chalk drawings on their driveway for residents and staff, and made encouraging posters to hang in their hallways.

Especially during these challenging times, it is inspiring to see 4-H members reaching out to others to pledge their hands to larger service for their club, their community, their country and their world.

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*A long standing 4-H classroom outreach program in Tazewell County continues to grow and has quadrupled in classroom participation from 2016-2019. The Embryology in the Classroom program enables teachers and students to conduct classroom incubation and embryonic development projects.*

## 4-H Embryology in the Classroom Continues to Grow with New and Returning Classrooms

Embryology in the Classroom has been a long standing part of University of Illinois Extension's 4-H program and it continues to grow in classroom participation across Tazewell County. From 2010 to 2019, the number of classrooms participating in the program quadrupled from 8 to 32 classrooms. Approximately 5,000 youth were impacted.

In 2020, 43 classrooms were scheduled to participate in two separate sessions. In the early spring session, eight of the fourteen classrooms were first-time participants, and four of those eight classrooms pursued the program per the recommendation of others. This year's late spring session was transitioned to a virtual format due to schools transitioning to e-learning.

"Teachers keep coming back and are willingly to promote this program with their colleagues. Even with our marketing, the greatest advocates and promoters of Embryology in the Classroom are the personal testimonies," Katharine Girone, Tazewell 4-H program coordinator stated.

As new classrooms and schools continue to join the program, almost 50 percent of teachers participating since 2016 have returned to the program for at least a second time. Twenty-seven percent have taught Embryology three or more times.

Kathy Schlack, a third grade teacher at St. Patrick Catholic School in Washington, has been teaching Embryology to her students for the past 21 years. When she began teaching Embryology to her students, she saw it as a way to bring the farm into her classroom of city youth.

"I love this program and how it lets the city kids [better] understand rural life! It also teaches them the concept of life and lifecycles as a whole," Kathy shared. "I keep coming back to share that with my next batch of students."

While participating classrooms come from a mix of school settings (public, private, and homeschool), all the youth are introduced to the 4-H program through the lifecycle of chickens. Upon completing an introductory training, teachers are provided with an incubator, automatic egg turner, fertilized chicken eggs, curriculum materials for their classrooms, and technical support. Over the next three weeks, teachers and students learn through observation and hands-on incubation and embryonic development projects.

Embryology in the Classroom has been able to provide materials to more



Photo by Katharine Girone | Illinois Extension

classrooms by acquiring new incubators and turners in the past few years. A single program session has the potential to impact at least 20 classrooms. In order to provide this opportunity to as many youth as possible, Tazewell hosts two sessions annually and also supports educators who own their own equipment. Planning for more growth and outreach has already begun for the 2021 sessions.

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*Restaurants are a foundation of the Illinois economy. Illinois Extension community and economic development staff partnered with campus staff, Illinois Restaurant Association and local restaurant owners to provide valuable information to help restaurants re-open under new requirements and supply chain challenges.*

## Extension Staff and Partners Provide Critical Support to Assist Restaurants to Reopen

Local eateries, restaurants, cafes, pubs, and coffee shops are the social and economic lifeblood of many Illinois communities. Following the stretch of statewide shutdowns that began in late March, [University of Illinois Extension](#), [U of I Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition](#) (FSHN), and [Illinois Restaurant Association](#) are helping restaurants adjust operations as they face supply shortages, safety restrictions, and labor challenges.

More than 550 people from throughout Illinois participated in the webinar series, Scaling Up Restaurant Operations, that featured suppliers, food safety experts, and two local restaurants, [Edge by Chef Dustin Allen](#) in Peoria Heights and [\[C&T\] Roasting Company](#) in Peoria. According to Illinois Restaurant Association, “As the state's largest private-sector employer, restaurants are the foundation of Illinois' economy. Industry suppliers and their team members – such as farmers, packers, beverage distributors, and delivery people – all depend on a thriving restaurant and hospitality sector to stay in business. Setting restaurants up for success as they reopen is critical to ensure the long-term vitality of the restaurant industry and their supply chains.”

Due to this critical need, additional outreach efforts expanded the audience-reach through social media and numerous media outlets. “Based on our experiences in other programs, we know that many more participants view the program recordings at their convenience,” explained Kathie Brown, Extension community economic development educator serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. The archived presentations continue to be accessed online:

Scaling Up Restaurant Operations: Financial Considerations:

[go.illinois.edu/ScalingUpOperations](https://go.illinois.edu/ScalingUpOperations)

Scaling Up Restaurant Operations: Safety Considerations:

[go.illinois.edu/ScalingUpSafety](https://go.illinois.edu/ScalingUpSafety)

The recordings allow participants to access the original presentation along with resource materials on menu analysis and recipe costing (provided by faculty) which are critically important to the long-term survival of restaurants.

Restaurants have been required to develop new business plans, literally overnight. One of the webinar's guest speakers Dustin Allen, executive chef at [Edge](#), says his company has “learned how to do carryout,” including family-style menu options that have been well received. Sixty family farms provide the restaurant's food inputs, so Allen now incorporates new menu items to take advantage of what is seasonally available.

From meat to cleaning supplies, shortages affect a restaurant's ability to offer full menus at profitable prices. “With the supply chain and cost of products being so volatile right now, we're seeing success in a smaller, tighter core menu,” says Gretchen Ernst, [Gordon Food Service](#) customer support manager and webinar presenter. The webinar series provided restaurants with tools needed to analyze menus for profitability, popularity, and the ability to travel as a carryout item. Two U of I FSHN instructional videos related to [menu analysis](#) and [recipe costing](#) provide tools to allow operators to make informed decisions about menu choices.

Extension staff and partners are currently in conversations for follow-up programming, as the collaboration proved valuable for all involved.

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*Master Gardeners from University of Illinois Extension serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties answer gardening questions from the public through a dedicated Helpline. They share research-based practices and information with hundreds each season.*

## The Gardening Helpline: An Extension Tradition Going Strong

The nationwide Extension Master Gardener (EMG) program began in 1972 when the Washington State Horticulturist recruited and trained volunteers to help him answer the high volume of calls from the public about gardening. From there the program expanded in scope and grew across the country, but answering the public's gardening questions is still at the heart of what EMGs do.

Yearly, hundreds of calls and emails come into the "Gardening Helpline" in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit. In 2019, Master Gardeners recorded 160 questions, with tree and shrub problems being the most popular topics. "We know we miss some questions in our tracking system. This year's number of questions are tracking higher than at the same time last year," reported Larry Stratton, EMG Helpline project co-leader. During 2020, the Helpline has been handled remotely.

Handling that many inquiries is a large job and could not be successful without the volunteers. Last year, 23 volunteers logged hours handling research, communicating with clients, and sharing information with teammates. EMG Patricia Middleton, co-leads the project with Stratton. A few other EMGs who contributed a substantial number of hours supporting the Helpline included May Bach, Bill Johnson, Rod Skewes, Marth Willi, and Vicki Phillips. New EMG interns are introduced to the Helpline and encouraged to join the team.

Questions about turfgrass, annuals and perennials, garden pests, invasive species, and many other topics pour in. Beyond our four-county unit, Stratton reported questions from 2019 came from 12 additional Illinois counties with a concentration in the Chicago area. With so many non-native plants on the market and now grown in Illinois, answering callers' questions often becomes an enjoyable challenge for the volunteers. Curiously, calls do come in from far away as well. The most surprising has been calls from California (bananas), Florida (bougainvillea), and Texas (citrus). Local volunteers are able either to answer their questions or direct them to the caller's local Extension office for help.

Volunteer training is critical to the success of the Helpline. Stratton says "we start by giving an overview of the function and purpose of the Helpline, the kinds of questions we get, how to research for an answer and, a very important part, communication skills with the client." The Helpline volunteers make use of numerous publications and stay current with emerging horticulture issues.

The Helpline volunteers take a keen interest in the gardening challenges they hear about. Sometimes they chat with callers at length. Stratton recalls that one time a person called about a specific problem, one they solved fairly quickly. The caller went on with the statement "while I have you on the phone..." Stratton said, "Over two hours later and still, on the phone, I felt I had just taken a grand tour of her

entire garden. But she was absolutely delightful and it really was one of the happiest calls I had."

This continuous learning and commitment to gardening of the volunteers, combined with the growing public demand for gardening help, means a great Extension tradition is still going strong.

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## Virtual Book Study Group Keeps Master Volunteers Connected and Learning

One of the less mentioned benefits of being an Extension Master Gardener or Master Naturalist is the time you get to spend with other volunteers learning together and from each other. While shelter-in-place and social distancing protocols are being followed, University of Illinois Extension staff created virtual book study groups for our master volunteers that began in late March with the book *Nature's Best Hope* and have continued to a second book.

"We read the book on our own and then use Google Groups and Zoom to discuss the book virtually," explained Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, horticulture educator. "There were about 10 participants in each group and we each read the newly released book, *Nature's Best Hope* by Douglas Tallamy."

While both groups read the same book, there were interesting differences in the perspective of the various participants. However, both groups concluded that working to make positive changes for the environment was a matter of importance.

In the book, Tallamy discusses ways to bring conservation to our home landscapes. He discusses the importance of native plants to create areas that provide ecological benefits and ways a homeowner can make small changes that have a huge impact on the environment.

"The study group participants were invited to complete a survey about their experience and what they learned," Nicole stated. "The completed surveys showed they increased their knowledge of native plants, biodiversity, and supporting food webs from low to high or very high."

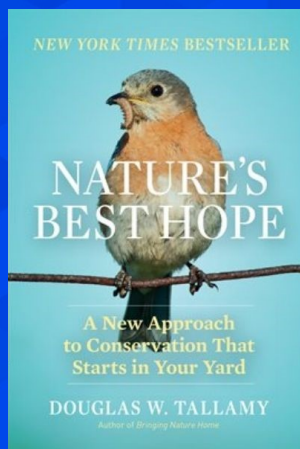
"In addition to knowledge change, the book study also inspired behavior changes. Some participants noted changes in their yards," Nicole continued.

"I am thinking of planting a redbud and dogwood as understory trees and adding a different oak to our yard," said Extension Master Gardener Janine Donahue. Others in the groups noted plans to add native plants to their yards also. All participants surveyed reported that they are very likely to plant native plants in their yard to support ecological food webs and biodiversity after participating in the book study.

Both groups are planning ways that they can use what they have learned from *Nature's Best Hope* to create educational programs that can be shared with others to help inspire them to make changes in their yards also.

The participants noted that leading by example and making changes to their yards is a way of showing the importance of using private land to support conservation efforts. Extension Master Gardener Ellen Denler stated, "When neighbors see that we are doing things differently, they will adjust and maybe try some other way too."

Both groups have moved on to their second book and welcomed new study group participants. "Our book studies have been a good way to offer continuing education in an alternative form to more traditional in-person meetings that still gives our volunteers a way to connect and learn from each other," concluded Nicole.





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*4-H Cloverbud member Caleb, from Mason County, is one of 327 youth who participated in the 4-H Virtual Shows. Thanks to a lot of hard work, creative thinking, and ingenuity our 4-Hers were able to continue their positive youth development experiences despite the cancelation of the face-to-face events.*

## Positive Youth Development Continues Through 4-H Virtual Shows

Local 4-Hers did not let the cancelation of the regular 4-H Shows stop them from exhibiting their 4-H projects with the same pride and skill development as they have shown in the past. Thanks to the hard work, creative thinking, and ingenuity of the University of Illinois Extension staff, 327 youth recently participated in the 4-H Virtual Shows held in Fulton, Mason, Peoria and Tazewell counties.

"I appreciate the patience and diligence our 4-H families and leaders have displayed during this 4-H virtual show process. It was a new effort for everyone involved, including State and local 4-H staff, as well as project judges," stated Joli Pierson, Mason County 4-H Program Coordinator. "I want to thank the youth and families who were resilient, chose to complete their 4-H projects, and worked through this new exhibition method."

As 4-H staff worked to transition to an online 4-H Show, their priority remained to provide youth with positive youth development experiences. The online exhibit platform provided youth the opportunity and encouragement to prepare their 4-H exhibits and work with their animals to get them "show-ready."

In exchange for face-to-face exhibiting and conference judging, 4-Hers photographed or recorded videos of their projects and wrote answers to typical conference judging questions. Unit-wide, 88 volunteer judges evaluated 1,090 projects online, provided feedback to the exhibitors. In doing so, they selected 187 State Fair winners, 110 State Fair alternates, and 192 additional award winners, such as class champions and best of show.

"As much as I miss the kids and judging in-person, I feel like I was able to take more time to give more advice and praise in my comments this year," mentioned Tori Smith, Tazewell photography judge.

Two judges in Tazewell and Peoria counties also piloted a virtual conference judging experience with one photography class and one communication class. After the regular evaluation process was completed, youth were invited to meet with the judge via Zoom to have a conversation about their project and specific project skills. Six youth took advantage of the optional opportunity.

In a post-show survey, 91% of respondents indicated that, in the absence of an in-person event, the virtual show was a good option. An additional 4% even preferred this to the typical in-person event. "I'm glad we still have the opportunity to learn and show new skills and receive feedback from experts," noted one participant.

Peoria County 4-H Federation members did not want to miss out on the leadership activities they normally take on during the 4-H show. They came up with several new ways to provide leadership virtually. They wrote and produced a Virtual 4-H Project Tour video that has reached 2,386 people on Facebook and YouTube. They also reached out to every Peoria 4-H member with encouragement and support to exhibit in the virtual show. Additionally, they turned the traditional Spirit Contest into a virtual contest and received two video entries created by 4-H clubs.

A variety of families shared stories with 4-H staff about new things they learned and experienced this summer.

A Fulton 4-H family shared how they had fun taking pictures of their animals, something they would not have normally done.



Tazewell 4-H mom Kristy Boecker wrote a thank you note to the staff and mentioned, "The [written] question about how they would 'apply what they've learned to their life' was the hardest question most of the time. We laughed about some of the ideas they came up with. Not all of them were put into print!"

In response to a survey question about their favorite thing about the 4-H Virtual Show one 4-H family shared, "When the chicken attacked Dad as he was filming."

The 4-H Virtual Shows provided an avenue for mastery of skills, leadership development, problem-solving, and some memorable family time.

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## Stethoscope Aids SNAP-Ed Lessons in a Unique Way

At the beginning of the 2019–2020 school year Julie Dantone, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education instructor was presented with a unique challenge as she was kicking off the Organ Wise Guys curriculum at Dirksen Primary School in Pekin. How do you teach a child to check their pulse when the child does not have any arms?

“In Organ Wise Guys we teach the students how to make healthy food choices, the importance of exercise, and drinking plenty of water,” mentioned Julie. “One of the favorite stories is about ‘Hearty Heart.’ After exercising we learn how to find our pulse and see how much faster our heart is beating.”

Among the six different classrooms in which Julie teaches at Dirksen, one student was born without limbs. From Julie’s perspective that didn’t slow him down or deter him from participating in the lessons. His perseverance and positive attitude drove Julie to go the extra mile to come up with an alternative way to teach the hands-on activity of taking your pulse.

“This was a unique situation for me and all of my colleagues I spoke with about it,” continued Julie. “I came up with the idea of using a stethoscope and worked my way through the process to have this new approach approved to supplement my lessons. It has been more successful than I ever imagined.”

By the second monthly visit to Dirksen, Julie had a stethoscope in her Organ Wise Guys kit and was excited to help her happy, little guy try it out. His classmates got excited and asked to try it too. Now the tool has become an added feature to all of Julie’s Organ Wise Guys exercise lessons, and students throughout Tazewell County have doubled their hands-on learning about their pulse rates by both feeling it and hearing it.

The stethoscope has been a huge hit for all the students no matter what their abilities are. This is a wonderful example of the special efforts our SNAP-Ed instructors make to help all of their students learn more about healthy foods and healthy living.

According to the Organ Wise Guys website, participants are shown to have statistically significant improvements in body mass index percentile, blood

pressure, as well as higher standardized test scores, compared to children that don’t have this curriculum. The children learn about nutrition and health in fun and creative ways that helps them retain the information. This helps the children take better care of their bodies and reduce obesity and other related diseases.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

*Julie Dantone, SNAP-Ed instructor implemented a new approach to her Organ Wise Guys curriculum in order to meet the needs of a student born without limbs. She now uses a stethoscope as one way to help students learn about their pulse rate after exercising.*