

## 'Stronger Community' contest finalists up for vote

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It's down to a final vote Oct. 6. Three dynamic, community-focused proposals have survived. So far, a more-than \$1,750 prize — seed money raised to support the winning project — is on the line.

One involves start-up of a community-owned grocery, or co-op, in downtown Oshkosh. Another, the creation of a new neighborhood revitalization initiative. The third: The planting of a new urban neighborhood community garden.

The Finals for the inaugural "Creating a Stronger Community Contest" will be held at Becket's Restaurant, 2 Jackson

St., Oshkosh, starting at 7:00 pm on Thursday, Oct. 6. The unconventional contest allows local community members and organizations to pitch homegrown projects that will positively affect the community. It also enables participants who join in the final stage of the event Thursday evening to cast a vote and help determine the winner.

The Creating a Stronger Community Contest was seeded by Oshkosh-based, community-building organization Square One and sponsored by the UW Oshkosh American Democracy Project, UW Oshkosh Foundation, UW Oshkosh Earth Charter Community Summit Committee, Oshkosh Area Community Foundation and Becket's.

"The mission is really focused on building community, encouraging civic engagement and community involvement in Oshkosh by promoting education beyond the boundaries of the classroom through service and creativity, and helping innovative community-building projects get their start by providing grassroots support," said Paul Van Auken, UW Oshkosh sociology professor and a co-founder of both Square One and the Stronger Community contest.

Van Auken said a strong field of 11 contest applications were received from various well-established local nonprofits, student groups and new partnerships. The entrants proposed projects related to sustainability, community-building, justice, volunteerism, increasing civic/political awareness and social entrepreneurship.

Applications were reviewed and scored by a committee comprised of representatives of the sponsors, which chose three finalists that will compete on Thursday evening for the more than \$1,750.

The finalists include:

- **Oshkosh Food Co-op:** Project participants propose a community-owned grocery co-op in central Oshkosh.
- **A Brush with Kindness:** Those behind the project propose a new neighborhood revitalization initiative of the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity.
- **Growing Seeds of Change:** The project involves creation of a new urban neighborhood community garden.

The finalists were announced during the Earth Charter Community Summit banquet at UW Oshkosh on Oct. 4. Each of the projects was previewed.

All 11 applicants have been invited to promote their projects once again at the Contest Finals with the goal of networking, building community and, potentially, getting a few more projects that didn't reach the final round off the ground.

The three Stronger Community finalists will also give five-minute pitches about their projects, and those in attendance will be able to vote for their favorite project by contributing a small amount towards the prize pool. The winner will be determined at the end of the night based upon these votes.

The event starts at 7 p.m. at Becket's. Free appetizers and a cash bar will be available.

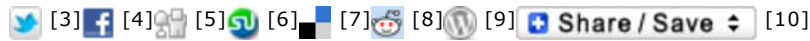
Shortly after 7:30 p.m., Sharon Adams of the groundbreaking neighborhood organization Walnut Way Conservation Corp. ([www.walnutway.org](http://www.walnutway.org)<sup>[1]</sup>) of Milwaukee will present some opening remarks. That will be followed by the contest finalists' five minute pitches, final questions from the audience and the invitation for guest-voters to make a small contribution (suggested donations of \$5 for students and \$10 for non-students) to the Creating Stronger Community Contest award fund.

At 8:30 p.m., voting will end, and members of the Stronger Community committee will tally the votes and announce the winner.

"We're incredibly pleased with the enthusiasm and creativity our first year of the contest has generated, and we're looking forward to seeing how this and future years' projects help our community flourish." Van Auken said.

Read more:

- [Earth Charter Community Summit to raise interest in sustainable future](#)<sup>[2]</sup>



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