

MEET YOUR EDUCATORS

Professor Norm Barnhart

See the keynote page for bio or visit his website. sciencecmn.com

Noelle Beyer & SMSU Chemistry Club

The SMSU Chemistry Club has a rich history of outreach activities. We conduct demonstration shows and create ice cream using liquid nitrogen. We also engage with smaller groups visiting our campus through various hands-on activities. Occasionally, we take our programs on the road, traveling to local schools for reaction shows and interactive experiences. We love sharing our passion for science and inspiring future scientists!

Kirsten Brichler

I am a professor of agronomy and the greenhouse manager at SMSU. I enjoy my work caring for a diverse array of plants while teaching students how to grow them sustainably. I'm always eager to showcase some of the methods used to management the greenhouse, like introducing predatory insects to control pests! I also maintain a garden at home, where I apply the methods I teach, demonstrating how they can be effectively implemented in real life.

Toni Brouillet

I serve as the health careers navigator for Minnesota West Community & Technical College. My role involves educating individuals of all ages about the various healthcare fields we offer. I have been in this position for over two years and have presented at the last two conferences. mnwest.edu.

Kris Cleveland

Dr. Kris Cleveland, is a Professor of Exercise Science and a Doctor of Physical Therapy.

Stephanie DeJaeghere

Stephanie is an Environmental Technician and Education Coordinator for Lyon and Yellow Medicine County. She has proudly served as a Lyon County Master Gardener for over 30 years.

Bill Gordon

I am an avid outdoorsman and naturalist. I own several outdoor gear and fishing companies aimed at enhancing outdoor experiences. You can reach me at sales@crystaleyesfishing.com.

Jennifer Gross

My name is Jennifer Gross, and I work as an educator for an electric cooperative. I engage with students and the public, discussing how we provide safe, affordable, and reliable electricity to those living outside urban areas. I am married and have four daughters—two in college and two in high school—along with a dog. I enjoy exercising, golfing, and am currently training to scuba dive. Visit eastriver.coop for more information.

Jackson Hoemann

Jackson is a writer, performer, and educator based in the Twin Cities. A lifelong performer and theatre artist, he has conducted workshops on topics ranging from William Shakespeare to Stage Combat, and even science subjects through his collaboration with the Bakken. As an Autistic educator, he has a background in Special Education and champions those practices in his teachings. Explore more at thebakken.org/group-programs.

Sam Jens

Since 2016, Sam has been leading youth development initiatives with 4-H in Lyon County. He is dedicated to delivering STEM and natural sciences to youth through hands-on experiences in 4-H and community education programs. Visit extension.umn.edu/local/lyon.

Jackson Kasprzak

Jackson Kasprzak got his start in Interpretation working as a Naturalist Intern at Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve State Park in South Dakota in 2022. He began his position working with the Great Plains Zoo as an Education Specialist in the fall of 2024. He enjoys hiking, exploring national parks and canyon drives. Education Specialists travel around the tri-state area providing educational programs to people of all ages. They travel with reptiles, mammals, birds and even amphibians to help people learn more about animals and the natural world. greatzoo.org

Bridget Kelly

I am a professor in the Environmental Science Department at SMSU, specializing as a geologist and paleontologist. I have a keen interest in studying ancient reef ecosystems, particularly favoring invertebrates—the fascinating creatures without spines! I enjoy sharing my enthusiasm for rocks and fossils with students of all ages. Originally from Seattle, WA (go Seahawks!), I have lived in various places across the country. I relocated to Marshall, MN, nearly two years ago, marking my first experience in the Midwest, and I hope to make it my long-term home.

Jeff Madsen

Jeff has served as an engineer with MnDOT for seven years. He focuses on planning, building, operating, and maintaining a safe, accessible, efficient, and reliable multimodal transportation system that connects people to their destinations. Jeff enjoys educating the public about MnDOT's role in Minnesota and sharing career opportunities and growth potential. For more information, visit <https://dot.state.mn.us>.

MN DOT Engineer

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is committed to developing a robust workforce to realize our vision of a safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation system for the future. Our aim is to provide high-quality activities and initiatives that promote science, technology, engineering, and mathematics from kindergarten through 12th grade. For more details, visit <https://dot.state.mn.us>.

Stepheney Marfechuk

Stepheney serves as a Naturalist at Wild Compass Environmental Education, where she enjoys teaching children about the wonders of nature. One of her passions includes caring for reptiles and sharing her knowledge with others. For more information, visit <https://wildcompass.org>.

SammyJo Miller

SammyJo Miller is a visual artist and educator based in southwest Minnesota and the founder of SJMiller Arts, a mobile art studio that brings creative, hands-on art experiences to children and communities. She designs engaging, inquiry-based workshops that foster curiosity, experimentation, and creative problem-solving. SammyJo enjoys helping kids explore big ideas using simple materials and learning through making. For more information, visit <https://sjmillerarts.com>.

Zachariah Miller

I reside in Minneapolis with my wife, two children, and our dog, Kiko. I work at Minnesota West, where I teach K-12 students about careers in energy. In my leisure time, I enjoy playing tennis, strumming the guitar, and learning new languages. Visit <http://energycareersminnesota.org>.

Jesika Mitchell

Jesika is a Naturalist with Wild Compass Environmental Education. She loves to share her passion for nature with others. Visits www.wildcompass.org



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Ken Murphy

Ken Murphy is a professor of physics and serves as the planetarium director at SMSU. One of his hobbies is learning astronomy and conducting observations of the night sky. He also enjoys computer modeling and animation. <https://smsu.edu/planetarium>

Jeff Opelia

Jeff Opelia is a retired middle school teacher with a deep love for the outdoors and nature!

Alex Rausch

Alex Rausch is a naturalist with Wild Compass Environmental Education. She delights in sharing her outdoor knowledge with both the young and the young at heart. wildcompass.org

Crystal Reith

Crystal Reith has dedicated the last 19 years as the Cottonwood County 4-H Extension Educator. She thrives on programming that incorporates hands-on application and exploration. Her passions include photography, livestock, and baking.

Jordana Runck & Heidi Tarus

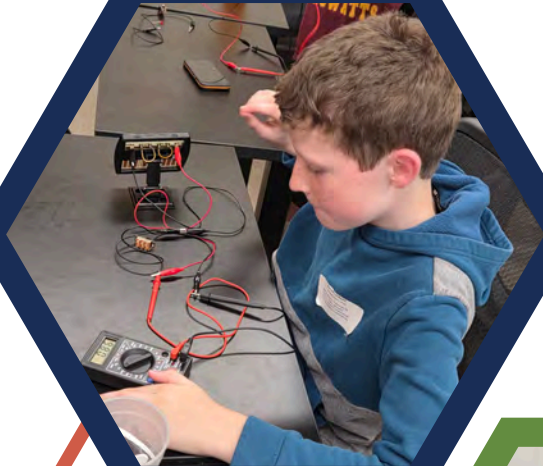
Jordana Runck and Heidi Tarus are biology instructors at Minnesota West Community & Technical College, boasting a combined 30 years of teaching experience in biology. Visit mnwest.edu

Jaime Stricker

Jaime is a CIG and has been a dedicated member of the Bramble Park Zoo (BPZ) team since January 2001. As Zoo Educator, she develops and delivers a wide range of educational programming, including on-site zoo tours and off-site outreach programs. Jaime holds a degree in biology with an emphasis in environmental science. Outside of the zoo, she enjoys spending time with her husband and two sons, traveling, and scuba diving. Jaime shares, "Every day is new and exciting. Working with animals and young people is especially rewarding, and I love helping others learn about and appreciate the remarkable living beings with whom we share our world." brambleparkzoo.com

Nicole Zempel

While born and raised in the Minnesota River Valley, it still wasn't until about ten years ago that curiosity led me deep into the wonders of nature. This incredible desire has grown and intensified in the years since. As an enthusiast, forager, artist and regular contributor to Pioneer PBS's Prairie Sportsman "Fast Forage" segments, I get to shine a light on the interconnectedness, intelligence, and often unseen or misunderstood aspects of nature. In addition to my passion pursuit, I am employed at Minnesota West Community and Technical College as a part of the marketing and enrollment department and am an active community advocate - volunteering my time to a variety of endeavors that help connect people and place.



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