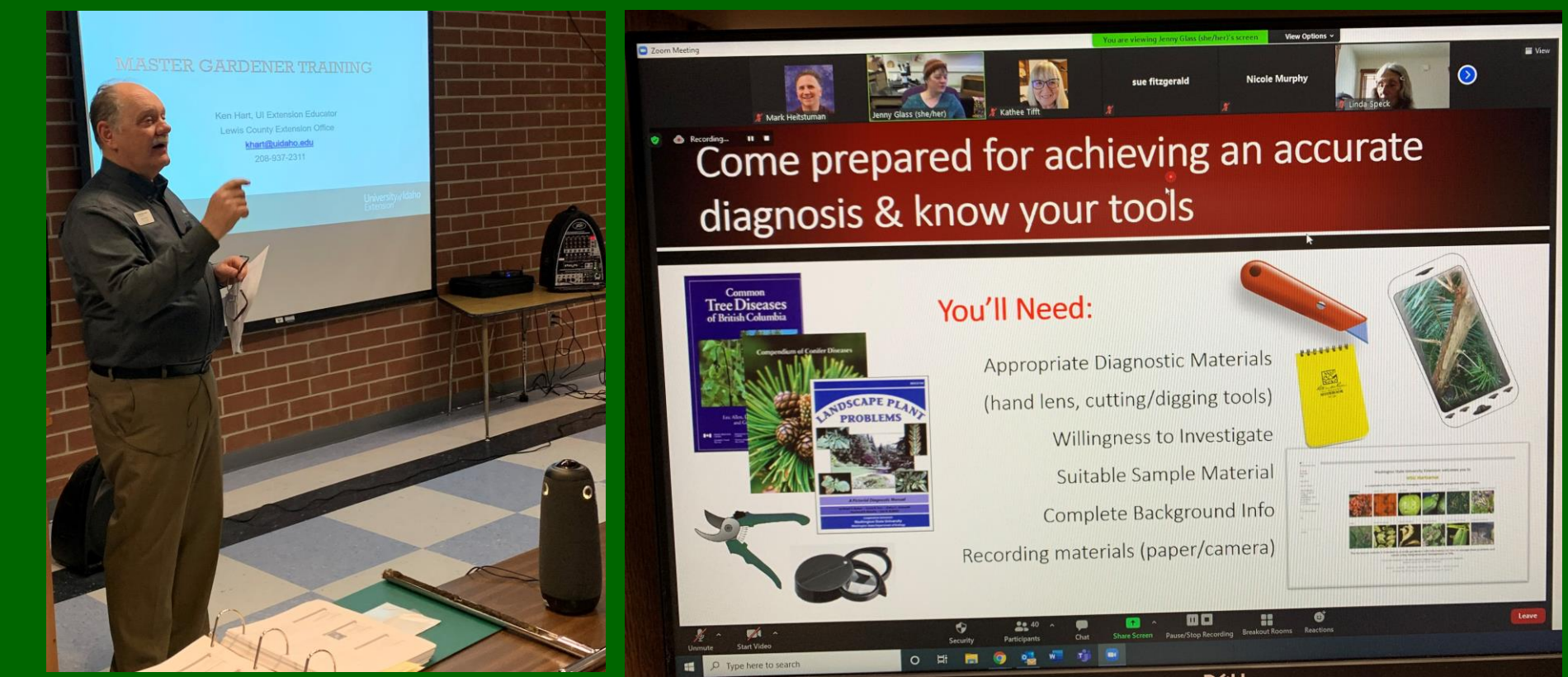


PIVOTING DURING A PANDEMIC: Transforming Master Gardener Training from an In-Person to Virtual Format.

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BACKGROUND

Washington State University and University of Idaho Extension have collaborated for 18 years to deliver regional Master Gardener (MG) Training in the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley. Surrounding counties do not have the staff resources to offer MG training, so residents in those counties are invited to participate in our regional training as well.

The two-hour one-way commute was a barrier for Whitman County residents interested in becoming certified WSU volunteers. Walla Walla County Master Gardeners (100-miles West of the L-C Valley), were interested in participating in the regional training to meet their Continuing Education Requirements.

In the fall of 2019, the Planning Team met with WSU Extension IT to explore possible technologies to connect the three physical sites via technology.

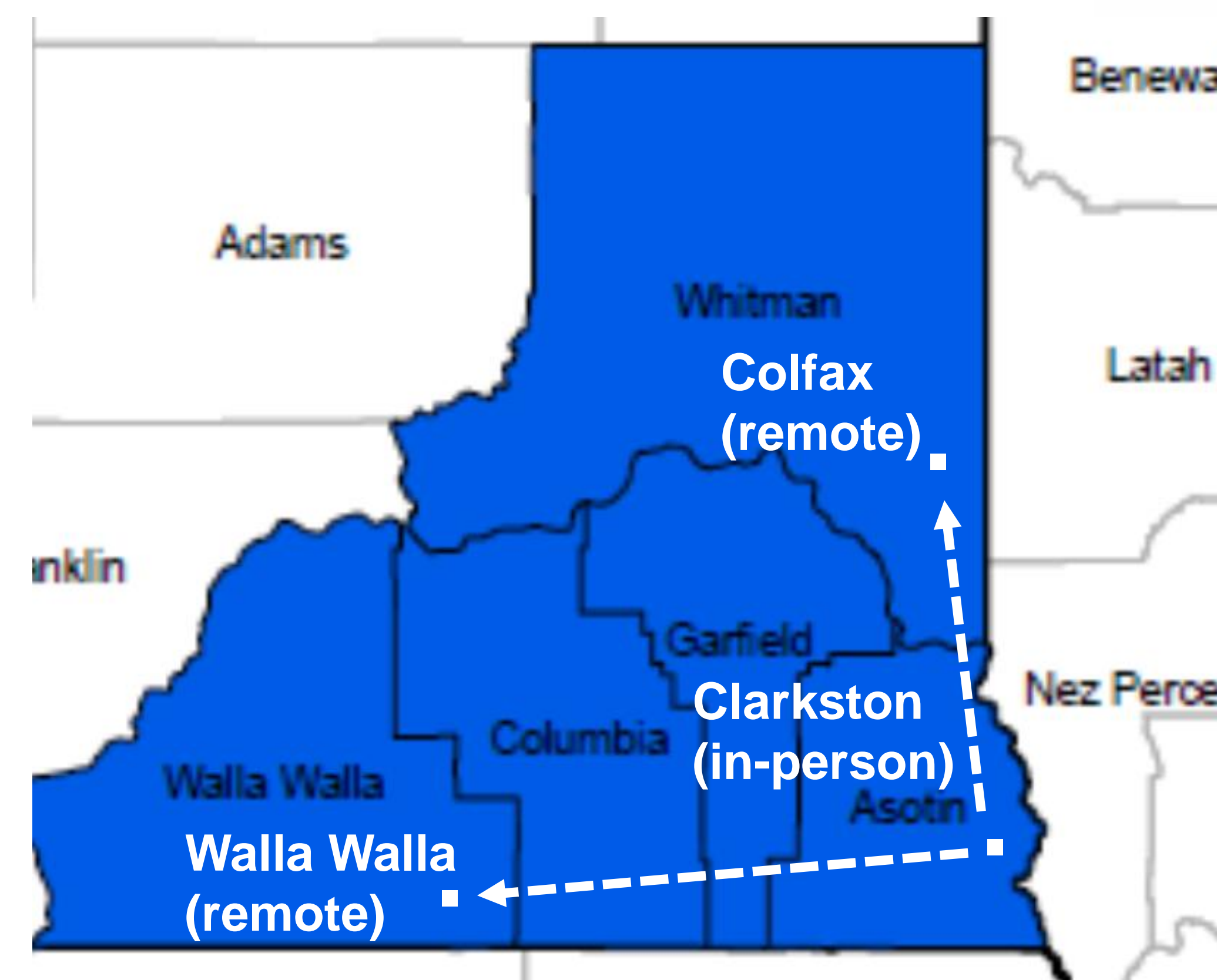
PROGRAM GOALS

- To deliver a robust Master Gardener Training Program that yields high quality Master Gardener volunteers for participating counties.
- To maximize the limited time & resources of Extension faculty and staff.
- To allow access to Master Gardener training to additional individuals that are located considerable distances from the Lewis-Clark Valley.
- To allow virtual completion of Master Gardener training for all participants following the declaration of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

WSU Extension Information Technology specialists recommended the purchase of 3 Meeting Owl Pro cameras to connect the 3 sites via technology. The Meeting Owl Pro integrates a 360-degree camera, microphone and speaker into one portable unit. The Meeting Owl also works well with Zoom, the cloud-based video conference service used to deliver the classes to the remote locations. When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March, in-person meetings ceased. After cancelling the March 17th training, classes pivoted to 100% virtual delivery via Zoom for the 5 remaining sessions. While the Meeting Owl camera was not needed once everyone participated via Zoom, the use of the Zoom platform and the lessons learned while delivering trainings remotely allowed for a smooth transition to totally virtual Master Gardener training beginning on March 24, 2020.

Classes began in-person on February 4th in Clarkston, WA. Accessed via Zoom by participants in Colfax and Walla Walla, WA.



Meeting Owl Camera increased interactivity between locations.

PROGRAM IMPACTS

- Seventeen of 48 participants responded to the survey (35% response rate).
- 82% of the respondents indicated their knowledge of gardening increased either a lot or very much.
- 59% said their knowledge of environmental stewardship increased a lot/very much.
- 65% of respondents said they were confident in finding answers to most gardening questions.
- Comments included "I would recommend a Zoom component even after the pandemic ends".

What We Learned

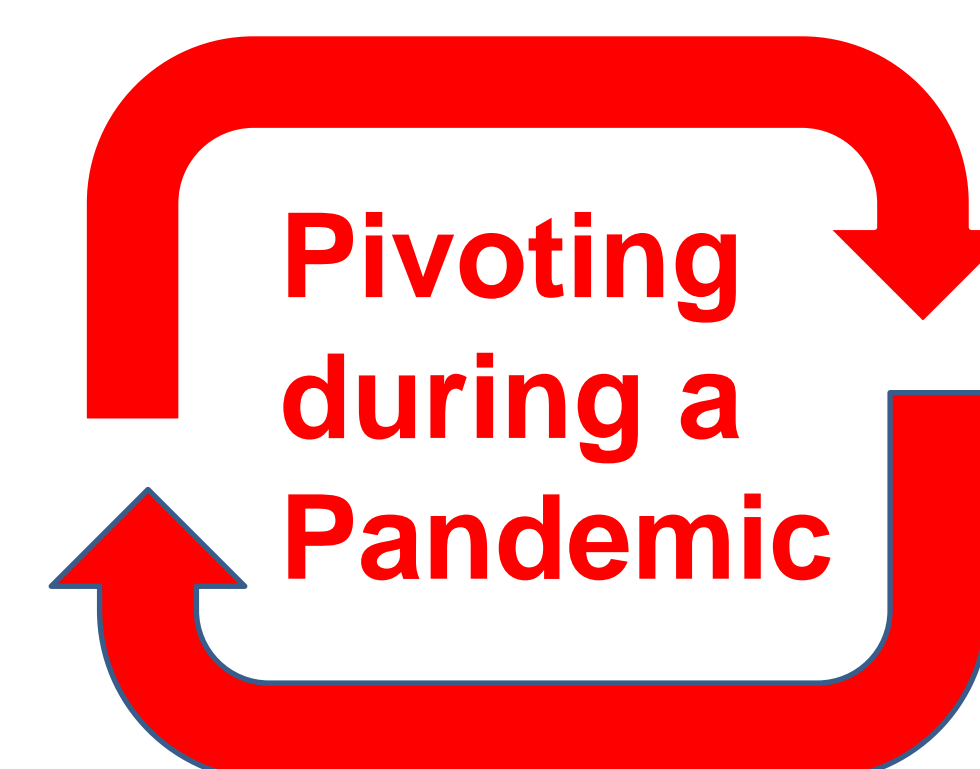
- "Practice" small group Zoom sessions were very helpful before transitioning to on-line only classes.
- Master Gardeners prefer a Hybrid model for future trainings.
- Bandwidth issues can limit access in rural areas.
- Lessons learned from on-line MG training were applied to many other Extension program areas.

QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS

"I would recommend a Zoom component even after the pandemic (hopefully) ends. I loved the training and being able to now call myself a Master Gardener. Such a fun, educational, community-minded program."

"I like presentations from WSU/UI. Appreciate speakers who present useful information for our region; information that we need as Master Gardeners for our plant clinics."

48 participants, In-Person and Virtual Delivery Model



COVID-19 March 2020

Final 5 Weeks of Classes Taught Virtually

