

Scholarship Spotlight with

Audrey Tappenden

The Scholarship Spotlight Series was developed in order to highlight the successes of individuals who received some form of scholarship through the Branch County Community Foundation and now live Branch County. Our current spotlight is Audrey Tappenden, a Coldwater graduate and alumni of Grand Valley State University.

What the scholarship process did for you

"I remember the scholarship process feeling tedious- you can edit your personal statement until the cows come home and there are a lot of documents to keep track of. But teachers reminded us that the amount of work we put in to applications was a small hurdle to jump compared to what could be gained from it. And they were right. With the help of local scholarships my first semester of college was paid for! I was able to use the money I saved from that semester to study abroad in France the following summer."

After high school

After high school I went to Grand Valley State University to study Political Science and minor in French (because why not?!). 3 ½ years later I left with a Summa Cum Laude designation, a core group of friends, a new interest in agriculture and food systems, an upcoming date for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), and a growing list of ideas about what I might do next. I finally decided to join the AmeriCorps VISTA program to serve for a year in Fairbanks, Alaska. In Fairbanks, I helped build community gardens, encouraged residents to support local farmers, prepared a successful federal grant application, and coordinated a regional study that aimed to increase locally grown food in the long run. In 2018



Audrey Tappenden

I returned to Branch County and started working for the Chamber of Commerce before accepting a position with the City of Coldwater. My work with the city mostly relates to revitalizing downtown Coldwater and assisting with county-wide economic development issues.

How did you choose your career path?

I didn't choose my career path in the way that you would expect--I majored in Political Science and took advantage of every opportunity that related to my field of study whether it was an internship with a law firm, a volunteer position at the Legal Assistance Center, or a leadership role in a student run organization. But I also made sure to take classes that seemed interesting, even if completely unrelated to my major, and spoke directly with many professionals in my intended career field. The result? I not only developed more diverse interests and skills, but came away with key career information that seriously impacted how I chose to move forward. I decided to take a year off after undergrad and move to Fairbanks, Alaska, where I worked to increase food security locally and regionally. Thanks to my degree,

internships, service learning experiences, volunteer projects, and work history, I had a flexible skill set that allowed me to go after such a unique position. Through my AmeriCorps service in Fairbanks, I learned how much I enjoy working on complex projects and how important it was for me to be involved with improving a community's quality of life.

What Audrey is doing today

I work for the City of Coldwater with a focus on developing our beloved downtown. We all agree it needs some TLC at the moment! Much of my time is spent finding resources, developing programs, providing information, and putting strategic plans into action that will help building and business owners in the long run. I work as part of a team, and I am looking forward to seeing positive changes from the groundwork we are laying right now. I also assist the Branch County Economic Growth Alliance with county-wide economic development.

Why did you return to the area where you grew up?

I am part of a generation who has always had an abundance of choice and the ability to customize almost anything. We believe things need to be the right fit for us to be happy, and that includes the places we choose to live. Instead of scouring the country for a community that checks every box on my wish list, I came back to Branch County so I could be involved with creating better and better versions of our community, a community that strives to meet the needs of its residents on an ongoing basis. We have an awesome foundation here-- great

"I came back to Branch County so I could be involved in creating better versions of our community."

athletic facilities, many parks and trails, lakes, camp grounds, theater, youth development programs, a children's museum, historic library, community college and technical education resources, the list goes on. It's already a great place to be, but there's room to make it even better for our residents and their diverse interests. My position with the City of Coldwater lets me do that.

More about Audrey...

I have a stunning 14 year-old Australian Shepherd and I'm hoping to find out that she's immortal. I'm also house hunting! Myself and 5 other volunteers manage and run our local 4 Corners Farmers Market and I'd love for people to stop by and see us this summer! I also volunteer with the Schools of Hope program at Jefferson Elementary, serve on the Chamber of Commerce's Ambassador Committee, and am part of a small group who is working to start a young professional's group in our county. Last but not least, consider this a shameless plug for the sport of Ultimate Frisbee- I am eager to play pick-up games locally.



Do you know a Community Foundation scholarship recipient now living and working in Branch County? We'd love to feature them in an upcoming spotlight. Please contact us at 517.278.4517 or info@BrCoFoundation.org