UW-Stout professional communication and emerging media students designed a new website - elcentrocv.org - for El Centro de Conexión de Chippewa Valley, a Hispanic organization. From left are some students who worked on the project: Rachel Krumenauer, Gary Schuster, Andrew Petrun, Andrew Straub, Andrew Schneider, Emily Larson, Austin Horness, Danielle Henning and Tonya Bridges. The organization's new logo was designed by UW-Stout art student Emily Larson.

Area Hispanic group gets new virtual home

Hispanics can connect in west-central Wisconsin via a new website created this spring by UW-Stout students.

The students generated the multilingual site, elcentrocv.org, for El Centro de Conexión de Chippewa Valley, an Eau Claire-based organization that brings together Hispanic residents and helps them develop a stronger connection to the region.

Wisconsin's Hispanic population grew 74 percent in the last decade, according to the 2010 U.S. census, and comprises 5.9 percent of state residents.

In the Chippewa Valley, more than 3,300 Hispanics - or Spanish-speaking people from Latin America - live in Chippewa, Eau Claire and Dunn counties.

"This website will add so much credibility to our mission," said Corban Gehler, president, board chairman and co-founder of El Centro de Conexión, which formed two years ago.
"I'm amazed at the possibilities we now have to create even more connections," said Gehler, of Eau Claire.

Students majoring in professional communication and emerging media, led by associate professor Matt Livesey, created the site. They researched El Centro's needs, designed the look of the site, wrote code and brought the site to life using a content management system.

Website users can click on 12 colorful topic modules, such as Events, Community Resources or Discussion Board, and choose a language with which to view the site. One feature expected to be popular is the Country Connection module, which provides Google Earth maps, weather and news feeds for 20 countries.

"This is one of the incredible aspects of this site," said Julie Keown-Bomar, family living educator for UW-Extension in Eau Claire County, an El Centro co-founder and board member. "For us, this brings it all together from around the globe."

When Alex Mazurek, an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer at UW-Stout who works with nonprofit groups in Dunn County, learned of El Centro's needs for a new website and logo, he put the group in touch with Livesey and his students.

Student Andrew Petrun of Menomonie was the project leader. Students divided the many duties involved in developing the site.

"We wanted the home page to be inviting and make it clear what was available. It took a lot of work but worked out very well," Petrun said.

Some students were taking Livesey's class online.

"It's a challenge to coordinate, but it reflects the way the global workplace functions," Livesey said. "This project expanded students' skills and allowed them to improve life in our region."

A second service-learning effort was part of the project.

An art student who was not in the others' class, Emily Larson of Lakeville, Minn., created a new logo for El Centro. El Centro chose her design, a "C" filled with colorful Latin-inspired textile patterns.

Initially, 22 students designed prototype logos as part of John Corrigan's "Graphic Design II" class.

"I wanted to focus on the connection and community, so I kept going back to the 'C,' " Larson said.

Keown-Bomar and Gehler plan to publicize the website and logo among Hispanics and in local communities.

"You've helped the Chippewa Valley get prepared for the wave of the future," Keown-Bomar told students as they presented the project to El Centro. "The Latino population is here, but we haven't acknowledged they're here. You've created this image that we can be neighbors."