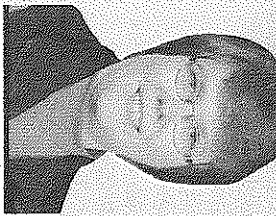


More 4-H'ers needed to tackle a changing world

TOP

Comment



By Heidi Clausen

Past, present wearers of the clover still rise to the top as some of our most influential citizens as National 4-H

Week in the centennial year of Wisconsin 4-H nears.

Without a doubt, Wisconsin's farms and rural communities have changed dramatically since those first few 4-H members gathered at Mae Hatch's farmhouse in 1914.

But a century later, 4-H is still alive and well in our state, and for good reason: Simply put, kids who wear the four-leaf clover grow up to be some of our most influential "movers and shakers."

While much has changed, the fact that 4-H works, cultivating new generations of leaders, and is relevant remains unchanged.

This National 4-H Week, Oct. 5-11, is special for 4-H members and supporters in Wisconsin, who have spent the past several months marking the 100th birthday of 4-H in our state.

Special events have included a 4-H Day at the State Fair, 4-H Day at the Capitol, a statewide service month, media coverage and a host of local celebrations.

Oct. 30 marks the 100th anniversary of the formation of the state's first 4-H club, the Linn 4-H in Walworth County.

4-H has grown into the largest youth organization in the U.S., with

more than 6 million members in more than 3,000 counties. 4-H serves every county and parish in the nation, with local clubs, as well as after-school/school enrichment programs.

Wisconsin has 35,000 4-H'ers in almost 1,400 clubs. Another almost 50,000 youths are involved through after-school and other opportunities.

While it grew out of agriculture, 4-H has adjusted to the times and doesn't discriminate: members not only live on or near farms but also in cities and the suburbs.

4-H also has a presence in more than 70 countries worldwide. More than 60 million people can call themselves 4-H alumni, and many of them give back as local club volunteers.

Among our most famous alumni are Julia Roberts, David Letterman, Walter Mondale and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and the list goes on.

What began as a way to develop new agricultural skills in farm kids has grown into a global organization that teaches a range of life skills — from public speaking to photography and from GPS map-

ping to nutrition.

But maybe more important than those skills is the effect 4-H'ers — past and present — have on the communities in which they live and work.

Research conducted over more than a decade by Tufts University shows that young people who have been in 4-H tend to excel beyond their peers, thanks to the structured learning, encouragement and adult mentoring they receive.

The study began in 2002 and was repeated annually for eight years, surveying more than 7,000 adolescents from diverse backgrounds across 42 states.

According to the report, compared to their peers, youths involved in 4-H are about four times more likely to contribute to their communities (Grades 7-12); two times more likely to be civically active (Grades 8-12); twice as likely to make healthier choices (Grade 7); and two times more likely to participate in science, engineering and computer technology programs during out-of-school time (Grades 10-12).

4-H girls are twice as likely

(Grade 10) and almost three times more likely (Grade 12) to take part in science programs, compared to girls in other out-of-school time activities.

This world needs more people whose lives have been touched by 4-H — a program that cultivates confidence in kids, teaching them not only how to show a calf, bake a cake or shoot a bow but how to become a catalyst for change.

Funding for 4-H programs at the local level has taken some severe hits in recent years as other county needs take precedence.

But money spent on giving our young people purpose, direction and confidence is money well spent. Financial decisions that affect 4-H shouldn't be taken lightly.

For more information about how you can get involved in 4-H as a member or volunteer and find your nearest 4-H club, visit www.4-h.org. More details about the centennial celebration of Wisconsin 4-H, along with 4-H remembrances including a piece by The Country Today Regional Editor Sara Bredesen, can be found at <http://blogs.ces.uwex.edu/4hcentennial>.