

GazetteXtra



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WISCONSIN 4-H CLUBS CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF TRADITION AND CHARACTER BUILDING WITH LOCAL AND STATE EVENTS

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ANDREA ANDERSON
June 9, 2014

TOWN OF LINN—When Taylor Radtke was a baby hanging on her mom's back, she watched her mom help her brother clean dairy cows in preparation for the county fair.

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For several more years, she watched her older brothers participate in 4-H projects.

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She later joined the 4-H Cloverbuds, kids kindergarten to second grade, before joining older members--third grade to college freshmen--in the 4-H club.



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4-H clubs in Wisconsin are scheduled at the state, county and local municipality levels.

STATE EVENTS

March 2014: Representatives from Wisconsin's 4-H clubs spent a day at the state Capitol meeting with elected officials and talking about the benefits of being in a 4-H club. An exhibit on 4-H was on display in the rotunda.

April 2014: Community service month. 4-H Clubs across the state completed community service projects, from roadside clean-up to helping at nursing homes.

Aug. 5, 2014: For the first time, the Wisconsin State Fair designated Aug. 5 as 4-H Day at the fair. There will be special exhibits on 4-H and various activities related to 4-H.

Nov. 15, 2014: The State 4-H Conference will be held at the Wisconsin Dells. At

“I’ve been in 4-H, literally, since I was a baby,” Taylor, 16, of Lake Geneva said.

Taylor is among a long line who bleed green as members of the Linn 4-H Club, the oldest 4-H club in Wisconsin. Her great-grandmother joined the club in its early years.

Taylor is the club president, a Walworth County 4-H ambassador and go-getter helping plan events for the Wisconsin 4-H 100th anniversary.

“I feel very honored that I get the opportunity to help plan this,” Taylor said. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Just to be part of it is a huge honor.”

HISTORY

In 1895, Ransom Asa Moore, a man raised on a farm in Kewaunee County, decided to give students seeds to participate in county fair corn-growing contests. By 1920, 45 counties had contests.

After federal legislation passed in 1914 providing funding to create cooperative extensions, the UW Extension began disseminating agriculture and economic research and started youth club work with Wisconsin farm families.

On Oct. 1, 1914, Moore appointed Thomas L. Bewick, an agronomist, to be the first Wisconsin 4-H program leader to help manage youth clubs. On Oct. 30, 1914, Bewick traveled to the town of Linn and spoke with four boys and three girls at Mae Hatch's home.

the conference, 100 people will be inducted into the newly founded Wisconsin 4-H Hall of Fame. Seven or eight influential people in Wisconsin 4-H are inducted into the national 4-H Hall of Fame, Mary Kay Merwin said. They will be automatically inducted into Wisconsin's, along with each county's one automatic nomination. Anyone can nominate someone for the remaining slots online. Annually, a specific number will be inducted.

WALWORTH COUNTY EVENTS

May 2014: 4-H centennial exhibit focusing on the history of the Linn 4-H Club will be at the Geneva Lake Museum, 255 Mill St., Lake Geneva. It will be displayed through the end of 2014.

2014 Walworth County Fair: The fair runs Wednesday, Aug. 27, through Monday, Sept. 1. On Wednesday, a

That night, the first Wisconsin 4-H Club formed, and Mae Hatch became the first 4-H general leader.

Within a year, 4-H clubs had 20,000 members. Now, there are 349,473 members and 17,761 volunteers statewide.

Like membership in any organization, the number of 4-H members ebbs and flows, said Mary Kay Merwin, Wisconsin and Walworth County 4-H Centennial Committee co-chair.

Ginny Hall, 80, a Calumet County 4-H'er, is also co-chair.

The state's highest participation was in the 1960s, Merwin said.

There are 59 Linn 4-H Club members from about 33 families. That's a good number, said Donna Kundert, Linn 4-H Club general leader.

The county has 798 4-H members and about 300 leaders, according to UW Extension data.

The data shows Sugar Creek 4-H Club leads the county in membership with 87, Elkhorn follows with 77 members, then Spring Prairie with 69, and then Linn. There are 19 clubs in the county.

4-H CHANGES

As a 4-H member, Taylor learned respect and responsibility and time and money management.

When younger, she had a stutter, but after giving several presentations, having

representative from each county 4-H club will carry a banner indicating the year the club started during an opening ceremony. The ceremony will continue at the fairground's park. At the park, a ribbon cutting ceremony for a replica of the state historical marker will take place. The original historical marker is across from Mae Hatch's home on the south side of Geneva Lake.

On Wednesday, elected officials, 4-H alumni, staff and members are welcome back to participate in activities to celebrate the centennial.

During the fair, buttons and stickers will be passed out indicating members, alumni or supporters.

On Sunday, the county and state centennial committees and banker's association will recognize 4-H'ers listed as the

projects judged and speaking to elected officials about the benefits of 4-H, she grew more confident.

She can't picture herself not in 4-H.

"One of the things I define myself as is a 4-H member," Taylor said. "Everyone is nice and modest ... I know how to be a leader because of 4-H."

While the club transforms people and expanded numerically, it has adapted to cultural changes.

The club, based on the four H's--head, heart, hands and health--is about reaching your full potential, becoming independent and civic-minded and caring for others.

Through the years, the club has changed from only rural families to encompassing urban residents.

Urban 4-H clubs, such as those in Janesville and Beloit, started in the 1960s, Merwin said.

"It was a wonderful transition because the value systems that all these families represent have helped to bring about a much more diverse and accepted community no matter where you're from," Merwin said.

Taylor lives in Lake Geneva, right next to a Starbucks. She agreed that 4-H is for anybody. Everyone becomes part of the clover family, she said.

4-H also has adapted to technology and an influx in Spanish speakers.

county's outstanding boys and girls from 1943-1996.

"It's remarkable seeing the names and knowing the good those 4-H youngsters have done," Ginny Hall, said.

LINN 4-H CLUB EVENTS

2013/2014: Raised funds to landscape the area where the historical marker replica will be placed in August.

June 28, 2014: Car wash at Woodhill Farms Nursery, N1445 Highway 120, Lake Geneva, to raise money for the time capsule, ice cream social and landscaping.

Aug. 8, 2014: The club will gather photos, newspaper clippings and other items to place in a time capsule. The capsule will be buried next to the original historical marker after an ice cream social that day.

For more information, visit www.blogs.ces.uwe.edu/4hcentennial

From 2000 to 2010, the Fon du Lac Hispanic population more than doubled, according to a UW Extension 4-H Centennial document. The demographic change prompted the hiring of a bilingual 4-H youth development assistant who then created a Hispanic 4-H group. It has about 20 members. The members will eventually join one of the other county 4-H clubs.

Clubs across the nation have expanded projects to include more research, science, and technology, such as photography and rockets, Merwin said.

Women have grown into leadership roles.

In 1967, Merwin was hired as the Rock County 4-H director. She was the first woman in the state to lead a group of men and women independently. She worked in 4-H at local, state and national levels for more than 30 years.

"They were having trouble seeing that a woman could lead a program that had both men and women, but that broke very quickly," Merwin said. "Within 10 years, I bet 25 percent of positions in the state were filled by women. And today, I'd say that's closer to 50 or 60 percent."

Merwin, 72, was in the Linn 4-H Club from age 9 to 21. She lived on a town of Linn dairy farm. Her father was a Linn 4-H Club member in the 1930s. He joined so he could play softball and eventually go to the state fair, a trip that today is equivalent to traveling to Washington D.C. or Europe, Merwin said.

Taylor, a successful teenager who wants to

and www.linn4-hclub.com.

pursue a medical career, looks forward to using the skills learned.

"There's no limit. You can do whatever it is that you think you can do," Taylor said about 4-H.

Until medical school, she'll show chickens, knitting, photography and crocheting at the county fair and continue working with the Linn 4-H Cloverbud member, including Chesney Bankenbush, 8, of East Troy.

Chesney is showing a duck, cow and artwork at the county fair this year.

"I'm excited that I get help through the year and that I'm going to show," Chesney said enthusiastically at a Linn 4-H Club meeting in May.



Comments



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