HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

CELEBRATE 4-H

Have you been seeing green and white?! Any 4-H clovers cross your path? Have you noticed any youth accepting 4-H proclamations?

We are coming to the end of the National 4-H Week celebration! The annual National 4-H Week is a time to celebrate, promote and share the 4-H movement. What is 4-H? Four-H is a fun experience for boys and girls in elementary through high school.

Did you know that former Vice President Al Gore, country singing sensation Faith Hill, popcorn pioneer Orville Redenbacher and late-night talk show host David Letterman are all on the list of notable 4-H alumni? 4-H also includes youth who would become 14 governors, 33 university presidents and chancellors, 31 CEOs, four astronauts and 60 million others who are proud to call themselves 4-H alumni.

While most people associate 4-H with its agricultural roots, now less than half of the 4-H members live on farms. Today, 4-H has expanded to include youth in suburban and urban areas. Some think that 4-H is only cows and cooking, but 4-H now encompasses hundreds of ‘projects’ for young people to learn leadership, citizenship and life skills. Project choices vary, including rocketry, public speaking, GPS mapping, theatre arts, photography, nutrition, electricity, companion animals and community service. 4-H offers youth ages five to 18 “learn by doing” experiences encouraging experimentation, innovation and independent thinking.

4-H is in every community across America, including all 50 states, Washington, D.C. and U.S. territories and U.S. military installations worldwide. Four-H is part of Extension. Extension is a partnership between state, federal, and county governments to provide scientific knowledge and expertise to the public. In Florida, 4-H is the youth development program of the University of Florida, making 4-H the only youth development program with direct access to technological advances from university research.

4-H was organized in the late 1890’s and early 1900’s by public school educators who wanted to broaden the knowledge and experience of their students. In 1901 and 1902, A.B. Graham, a school principal in Ohio, began to promote vocational agriculture in rural schools in out-of-school clubs, with officers, projects, meetings, and record requirements. These clubs were first known as corn clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls. Graham sought assistance from the Ohio Agriculture Experiment Station and The Ohio State University. This is said to be the beginnings of 4-H.

Over time, most states organized clubs outside their schools, with rural parents serving as volunteer leaders for the youth clubs, and County Extension agents providing materials. In these clubs, young people would learn the new scientific agricultural techniques, model them in their demonstrations, and teach them to others. Farmers and rural families saw the practical benefits of 4-H, and support for the organization grew. 4-H in Florida began in 1909 in several counties in north Florida.

Throughout its long history, 4-H has constantly adapted to the ever-changing needs and interests of youth.

Today, 4-H is structured in much the same way as it was decades ago. County Extension Agents, along with volunteers and parents create a fun learning environment for youth in Osceola County.

Community clubs, camping, special interest groups, after school clubs and in-school activities are all ways that youth can participate in 4-H. In addition, youth may participate in leadership, citizenship and civic governance activities at the county, district and state level. By participating in 4-H, children will learn teamwork, communication and decision making skills to help them be valuable members in the communities in which we live, work and play.
Osceola County Extension and 4-H volunteers and members will be involved in Great Outdoor Days at Osceola Heritage Park between Kissimmee and St. Cloud on Saturday, October 27 and Sunday, October 28, from 10 am until 6 pm.

Youth and adults are invited to come to the Extension Services tent in the Conservation Village-E Zone area to play Farmer For A Day and make some cool fall crafts. Milk a cow, pick an orange, lay sod, build a scarecrow or plant a vegetable garden while you learn about some of the great things our 4-H youth are doing in the community. Community Vision is organizing this community event and has many activities for youth and adults. Youth can Trick-or-Treat on Sunday from 1:00 until 3:00 at select booths. In addition, there will be a costume contest for school aged youth from 1:00-2:00. More information on Great Outdoor Days is available by calling Community Vision at 407-933-0870.

If you are interested in finding out more information about Osceola County 4-H, please contact University of Florida IFAS Osceola County Extension at 321-697-3000 or visit our website at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu.

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