This upcoming week of October 6-12 is National 4-H week. Osceola County 4-H members are involved in various club community service projects and are busy promoting 4-H and the National Celebration. In recognition of the week, 4-H members will be setting out yard signs at local businesses and homes. Over the road banners will be displayed in Kissimmee this year and teens representing the Osceola County 4-H Council will be visiting local governments where proclamations are being presented.

During 2002, the 4-H youth development movement is celebrating its Centennial as America's premier youth development organization. After a century of inclusion and collaboration, 4-H spans the nation from family farms to urban environments. 4-H brings together youth and adults to build a nation of stronger communities.

4-H programs began in response to young people and their need for a better agricultural education. In 1902, a large percent of Americans lived on farms. The community club model engaged youth through "learning by doing." Organized outside of school, parents served as volunteer leaders partnering with educators to provide appropriate curriculum and materials. No one individual is credited with originating the 4-H program, rather it was founded through collective efforts over the course of a few years. However, it was in 1902, that A.B. Graham, Superintendent of Schools in Clark County, Ohio, organized a boys' and girls' agriculture club. In 1907, the first boys' and girls' demonstration clubs under USDA sponsorship were begun in Holmes County, Mississippi.

In 1907 or 1908, the first emblem was used nationally, designed by O.H. Benson. It was the three leaf clover representing- head, heart, and hands. In 1911, Benson suggested a fourth leaf and H be added. Originally, the fourth H was to stand for hustle, but it was later changed to health.

By 1912, 96,000 youth were enrolled in 4-H club work and in 1914, the passage of the Smith-Lever Act established the Cooperative Extension Service of which 4-H is a part. In 1918, the first use of the term "4-H Club" appeared in a federal document.

Today more than 6.8 million youth, ages 5 to 19, are involved in 4-H programs from aerospace to zoology. 4-H is coed and family friendly. 4-H members are still rooted in the historic base of rural America but, to the surprise of many, more than 35% of today's 4-H youth live in our major urban centers and suburbs. In Osceola county, there are over 700 youth involved in 4-H.

4-H in Florida is based at our land-grant university, The University of Florida and administered through the Cooperative Extension office in each county. This long-standing relationship brings academic excellence to youth development as strategies and curriculum are created for the coming century. The unique capacity of 4-H to embrace both youth development experts and thousands of youth in our state makes possible the promise of youth who are confident, capable, and caring citizens. Many prominent elected officials and community business leaders are 4-H alumni.

Some states have traditionally had 4-H Club meetings in school. Osceola County has a strong community club base where members meet in groups after school, at night or on weekends, sometimes in members' homes or at a local community center. Osceola 4-H projects and activities are also a valuable resource for teachers providing a variety of hands-on activities to facilitate learning.

For a century, 4-H has been reinvesting in our youth. We have a strong commitment to community roots, and to strengthening young people's skills and experiences in teamwork, leadership, and citizenship. Over 45 million 4-H alumni and 4-H members are celebrating the Centennial of the 4-H youth development movement.
4-H provides a positive environment, a relationship with caring adults, and exciting educational experiences for today's youth. The program depends on the generous support of numerous volunteers to organize clubs, sponsor events and activities, share special interests and hobbies and judge competitive events.

To find out more about 4-H for youth or to get involved as an adult volunteer, call 407-846-4181 or e-mail Joy Borgman, Osceola County Extension 4-H Agent at jbor@osceola.org.

If you have been involved in 4-H, won't you share your experience and life skills with our local youth?

4-H… prepared for the future by a century of service.

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