

It's National 4-H Alumni Month

By Kathleen Jablonski, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development

Out there in our communities there are some folks who pledged their heads to clearer thinking, their hearts to greater loyalty, their hands to larger service, and their health to better living, for their club, their community, their country and their world.

They're our 4-H alumni. September has been declared "4-H Alumni Month" by the National 4-H Council.

I'd like to tell you about a few of these folks. They are hidden gems, sparkling with talent, the backbone of community serving organizations and all around good folk.

You'll find them in all walks of life: storekeepers, teachers, carpenters, nurses, woodworkers, newspaper editors, farmers, salesmen, seamstresses, to name a few.

Take one of my friends, for instance. When we were introduced it was through our husbands and another organization we work with to serve youth. One day she asked what I did for a living. She told me she was a 4-H sheep project alum. A few days later she called and asked if there was a "deserving 4-H'er who needed sheep shearing equipment". A week or so later, the still working equipment in pristine condition was passed on to our sheep club for the members to use.

There's the anonymous donor who funded supplies for a weeklong special project group because she "wanted to give back to an organization that taught me how to work with people". Then she volunteered her time as well to work with a 4-H'er one on one.

Then there was the question put to me one day "Do you have any kids keeping bees?" A few phone calls, an e-mail introduction, and an "old" beekeeper passed on his equipment to a family with three new beekeepers. The "new" beekeeper sisters said "We have so much honey..."

One year, a local carpenter volunteered to work with the members of a 4-H club to design and build horse show jumps to take to the fair. Yep, you guessed it. He is an alumna. The club continues to use the jumps in lessons and events.

There is a family with three adult sisters who are actively involved leaders with a longstanding 4-H club. Often times throughout the year, everyone in their family has to schedule family time around 4-H time because they're all so busy helping current 4-H'ers finish projects for county events. As 4-H alumni who went into three different career areas, they all attribute their 4-H experiences with giving them the skills they needed to succeed. They remain involved with planning and advisory committees to see to it that current 4-H'ers are availed the same opportunities they had in their youth in our county, in our state and in our region.

One gentleman voluntarily maintains the milking equipment at the fair. He showed dairy cattle as a youth, taught at an out-of-state university and has helped numerous dairy judging teams throughout the years. He is also a key player, no pun intended, in our annual fundraising golf tournament because he believes in the skills and leadership development he learned as a 4-H'er and wants to see those skills in our youth of today.

There's the engineer that became a screened leader so he could work with the 4-H'ers in his children's club on science activities. They meet on a regular basis and do hands on science that relates to real life engineering situations. "4-H taught me responsibility. If I can just teach a little bit of that to these kids..."

Then there is the North Haverhill Fair. Did you know the fair originated as a way for 4-H members to showcase their projects? The current Fair Association continues to honor that tradition, making it one of the best places for

4-H'ers to showcase their talents in livestock shows and general 4-H project work. 4-H'ers can do demonstrations or action exhibits or a style show, show off their livestock and other projects. Almost all of the current Board members were 4-H members, or are currently 4-H leaders, helping out with various 4-H programs during the year or are the parents (or grandparents) of a current 4-H'er.

There are so many more stories. My heart grows every time I hear a story, see a smile, read a note from these folks who received so much from the 4-H program that they continue to give back to it today. They believe in the power of youth and that all youth need to learn life skills, after all, 4-H helped to make them who they are today. They are adults who exemplify the life skills we hope all 4-H'ers learn: independence, mastery, generosity, and belonging. They are who they are, in part, to the community of caring called 4-H that was a part of their formative years. They are our alumni and I thank them for continuing to "Make the Best Better."

For more about 4-H Youth Development, visit our website at: <http://extension.unh.edu/>. Friend us on Facebook, check out the Grafton County page, ask to be placed on our events calendar mailing.

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