

Behind the Scenes of a 4-H Fair Exhibit at North Haverhill Fair

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

Just imagine...you are 9 or 10 years old and making plans for the next few weeks. Here is what is going through your head as you get ready for the North Haverhill Fair.

July 28th is coming up fast...oh, wait! I need to get this ready by July 25th. My 4-H leader is collecting all the projects at her house so we can set up the exhibit to see what it will look like before we get to the Exhibit Hall.

Why didn't I fix that sleeve the week after the Textile Event in May? The judge told me how to do it and explained why it would make the whole dress look better. Now I've got to do it and get my biscuits baked for the fair.

It was really nice for Aunt Jean to teach me how to make potholders. I think these bright colors will jazz up the club's display. Gosh, I hope we win the blue ribbon for overall club display.

Hmmm...did my leader suggest that I enter this craft project in the fair or that one? I'll have to look it up on my entry form. ...I'm glad I kept a copy ... the July 1st deadline seems like a long time ago.

And the list goes on. ...

What goes into getting ready for a 4-H Fair Exhibit? First of all, planning. Clubs, leaders and 4-H members decide throughout the year what projects to do and make, according to 4-H guidelines.

At the UNH Cooperative Extension office, the 4-H exhibit hall book is edited and revised after input from 4-H leaders, judges, Fair Association members and review of project guidelines for any new project areas. For 2010, there are 28 different categories that 4-H'ers can enter in the fair...just in the exhibit hall!

Score sheets for each category are prepared. (4-H members and leaders can ask for copies of them ahead of time to see how their entries will be judged.)

Judges are called for each category (or two or three if there are a lot of entries) and scheduled for the judging day. The Fair Assistant coordinates volunteers to help the judges. Ribbons are organized. All the tools and supplies needed to help the judges are assembled and transported to the exhibit hall.

Club leaders contact the office to sign up for the amount of space they need for their educational and project exhibits. A floor plan is drawn up of where exhibits are going to be placed, who needs floor space for large items and who needs overhead space for backdrops. The tables are dressed and skirted after they are set up.

4-H'ers complete entry forms and get them to the office by the July 1st due date. The 4-H Administrative Assistant adds the entries to the computer system, creates lists of exhibitors and exhibits for the judges and leaders and prints the entry tags. Entry tags are then given to club leaders to be attached to each item entered.

Now it's time to set up the Exhibit Hall. For five hours, club leaders, 4-H'ers and parents bring items into the hall, arrange their exhibits and make sure entry tags are in place. They give their final list of exhibits to the Fair Assistant who then reconciles the master entry book. After everyone leaves, the first set of judges arrive to judge each club's educational or project exhibit. Judges write comments on each score

card and a blue, red or white ribbon is awarded. In 4-H, the Danish system of judging is used. Every entry earns a ribbon based on the standard of judging for that item.

The first day of the fair...and judging day! All day long, sets of judges and volunteer helpers arrive to judge the exhibits. The Fair Assistant gives each judge a clipboard, a folder with their information, and a list of items to be judged. Judges and helpers spread out in the exhibit hall. When the judge has completed their evaluation, the scorecard and ribbon are attached to the entry card by the volunteer. These papers will provide feedback to the 4-H'er on ways to improve their technique for next year.

Then the rest of the fair continues. Throughout the week of the fair, volunteers help in the exhibit hall to tidy up exhibits, water plants on display, and be sure that curious fairgoers don't handle any of the exhibits. 4-H'ers come in and present action exhibits or demonstrations. The public wanders through and gets an idea of the projects our clubs have completed throughout the year and learn from the educational exhibits set up in the hall.

On Thursday night at 4:00pm, the hall activity heightens as folks arrive to enter the Style Show. 4-H'ers get their garments out of their club exhibits, change into them and model for a panel of judges. They are given a score and later model in a Fashion Show for the public. The top three winners in each age group earn rosettes. Everyone gets a Danish ribbon for their efforts.

Every day, different 4-H members come in and present a demonstration on a topic they've learned in 4-H or an action exhibit to get the public involved in learning from a 4-H project.

Sometime during the fair, a representative from the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture visits each building at the fair. One exhibit will earn the coveted Department of Agriculture award for an exhibit depicting the best display of promoting New Hampshire Agriculture. Occasionally that honor is bestowed upon a 4-H club's display.

On Sunday, exhibits can go home after 7:00 p.m. Somehow, the tearing down of the exhibit hall seems to take a shorter time than the assembly. Items are packed away to go home, tables are disassembled, tablecloths are folded to put away and the floor is swept.

And that is just the exhibit hall...someday we'll talk about animal science projects and what happens when you get ready to show your animals.

4-H is the Youth Development program of UNH Cooperative Extension. For information about 4-H in Grafton County, New Hampshire, please contact Kathy Jablonski at 603-787-6944 or email her at Kathleen.jablonski@unh.edu.