

4-H builds future for county youth

By ROGER MEISSEN
The Fulton Sun

Youth have been benefiting for generations from the activities Callaway County's seven 4-H chapters offer.

Thanks to \$14,000 of Callaway County United Way support, the robust and active network of chapters continues to foster skills and provide opportunities.

"If we didn't have this money this county would not be able to have a full time coordinator to help support the leaders of each club and help them organize what they need whether it's literature, planning events or getting training," said Pam Heimericks, Callaway County Youth Program Associate. "Many counties have the same position, but can only afford to make it a quarter-time or half-time position, and that causes the whole program to hurt if there's no one to contact more than a couple days a week."

From the Hardin Hustlers, New Bloomfield Cruisers and Williamsburg Pioneers to the Ebenezer Pleasers, Fulton Rising Sun and chapters in Hatton and Guthrie, all chapters also benefit from UW support in more direct ways.

"We try to have scholarships available to youth who would like to but can't afford to attend camp or teen leadership events," Heimericks said. "We have quite a few workshops and sometimes they just aren't affordable to some kids, so we like to have this money available to offer the opportunity to attend."

Heimericks noted that being full time has allowed her to coordinate the changing focus that takes place over time in the club's offerings.

"For example, shooting sports are becoming very popular and we only had two leaders certified to teach up until last year, and I've been able to get training for all of those positions except for one," she said.

The myriad offerings 4-H is able to give children makes the club something for more than farm kids.

"4-H isn't just about agriculture; many kids show livestock, but there are many aspects that just build life skills, leadership qualities and good citizenship," Heimericks said. "It helps with their self-confidence, and we hear teachers comment how this really helps them in their classroom work

as well.

"I have three children who, when they were eight and nine, could barely speak in front of people, and as I watched them grow up I've seen how those 4-H skills helped kids like my daughter who can now speak in front of full groups of people."

She noted that the United Way's support makes it possible to do more in the county.

"The United Way is such a worthy organization to support and you're not giving to the organization, you're giving through them," Heimericks said. "It's amazing how each dollar really touches lives in the community and they just help spread it out to get more for each dollar."

More about the local 4-H clubs can be found at www.callawayunitedway.com/4HSpotlight.htm or www.extension.missouri.edu/Callaway/4h.

(Editor's note: This story begins a monthly series highlighting each of the 13 agencies who receive funding through the Callaway County United Way.)